

## Cycle instructor

# PROFESSOR BALANCE

*Cycling UK member **Donald Macdonald** has taught thousands of children to ride using his alter ego, Professor Balance*

**L**earning to ride a bike is a life skill on a par with swimming and... well, that's it. Only swimming and riding a bike are considered the two practical skills that every child should learn. So, when I was teaching a child how to cycle back in 2014 and they started to hyperventilate, I knew there must be a better way to overcome the fears some children have of setting off on two wheels.

That's when I created my alter-ego, Professor Balance, and with help from Cycling UK I have turned him into a very successful character who is about to teach his 2,500th child how to cycle.

I used to be a primary school teacher, then worked for Sustrans as an I Bike officer in East Dunbartonshire, outside Glasgow. My background in education taught me how to engage children with learning. I delivered Level 2 Bikeability and led rides for the whole class, linked to the curriculum. My work spanned early years, primary and secondary, using cycling as a fun way of delivering outdoor education.

Back in 2018, a local community group I was the chair of applied for Cycling UK funding to run some learn-to-cycle classes at a disused red ash football pitch. Tickets sold out quickly, and the feedback from parents was very positive. Without the funding, the Professor would have just stayed in his laboratory and not been able to share the science of how to ride a bike.

Now, please don't think that you need to be a professor to teach someone to ride a bike. Day in and week out, children learn to cycle despite their parents' assistance. Holding saddles and pushing kids down hills is a rite of passage for children and the source of lower back pain for parents. The Professor tends to end up working with families who are at the end of their tether. Maybe their first two children have learned no bother but child number three is another situation



Professor Balance balances – but what's he forgotten?  
**Below:** No stabilisers here

altogether. Some parents have tried for months (sometimes years) to get their child riding a bike, and they turn to the Professor for his skills, hundreds of five-star reviews on Facebook and a money-back guarantee.

The Professor is unique not only with his hard-to-identify German (or is it Dutch?) accent, but by guaranteeing your money back if your child does not learn to cycle. But, as he says, "No one comes for the refund!" So those children that don't quite get it can come back for as many free return visits as required. The Professor might give them homework such as playing on a two-wheeled scooter, which makes the return visit 99% successful.

The technique he teaches also works for adults and children with additional support needs. ASN children might need a return visit but despairing parents often have a wee tear in their eye as they see their child being able to ride a bike, just like their friends and classmates.

Part of the appeal of being dressed up to deliver classes is that parents can be quickly and humorously told to change their behaviour without being upset. Being told to "shut the gegg" for parents who insist on bombarding their child with instructions is helpful – especially when the instructions are usually wrong!

So, what is the secret for teaching a child how to ride a bike if they are not getting it? "What's that, Professor? The class is about to start?" Well, I might get him to tell you about that some other time!

[professorbalance.co.uk](http://professorbalance.co.uk) ●

## Ditch the stabilisers

If you want to teach your child to ride a bike – which will involve removing stabilisers or avoiding them altogether – Cycling UK has some advice online: [cyclinguk.org/article/ditching-your-childs-stabilisers](http://cyclinguk.org/article/ditching-your-childs-stabilisers). This mostly boils down to starting off with a balance bike because balance, not pedalling, is the key cycling skill. We'll be reviewing four balance bikes next issue. In the meantime, check out our video guide on teaching your child to ride: [cyclinguk.org/guide/teach-child-ride-bike](http://cyclinguk.org/guide/teach-child-ride-bike).