

# Exercise Bikes for Home Gym

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Ride along with me, as I consider the purchase of an indoor exercise bike. As we go, consider your immediate goals, possible goals, and how much help you may need to achieve them. We'll look at systems with moderate and high prices. If the cost of a high-end system is out of reach, you still need to know about them, so you can decide which compromises will be acceptable. Indoor exercise bikes come in these main styles:

**Indoor cycling bike.** The sport of [indoor cycling](#) is often called spinning™, after the flywheel that all these machines have. An adjustable braking mechanism provides the resistance against which the cyclist works. The drive on an indoor cycling bike must support pumping hard while standing, without a hint of slippage, just as on a road bike. Indoor cycling classes provide a group experience derived from riding on a road, with the advantages of having an instructor and being indoors. Participants can gain a psychological boost from each other. The indoor cycling bikes that I list for consideration range in cost from \$799 to \$2,495, plus the cost of accessories and services.

**Upright and other seated bikes.** An *upright* bike has a similar but less-costly drive and resistance mechanism; it is designed to be ridden only while seated. If the rider puts full weight on a pedal, it is likely slip to the bottom. A recumbent bike will generally use such a less-costly mechanism, as the rider cannot stand. Seated bikes also include under-desk and desk-attached bikes. A bike in this class can be useful for a less aggressive workout plan, physical therapy or rehab. An [Exerpeutic](#) bike with a 4.6 rating on over 22,000 reviews costs only \$149 on Amazon. On the high end is the possibly-discontinued [NordicTrack Grand Tour Pro](#), \$999 at Walmart. I'll leave further investigation of such seated bikes to the interested reader.

**Air bikes.** Most air bikes make no pretense of being a road bike. The air bike has a fan that both smooths the ride and provides the resistance. The faster the rider pedals, the more the resistance. Better air bikes have handlebars that move in alternation, as on an elliptical machine, for a full body workout. Air bikes are not advertised for standing, but reportedly some wild riders do stand on them. A larger fan will be quieter and can provide a killer workout. An air bike could be best for anybody considering a seated bike, but I have yet to do a workout on one. The air bikes that I list for consideration range in cost from \$699 to \$1,299.

## Indoor Cycling Bikes

Selected Indoor Cycling Bikes	Peloton Bike/Bike+	Nordic Track S22i	Keiser M3i	Bowflex C6
Base Price	\$1,445/2,495	\$1,899	\$2,460	\$799
Included extras	BT, speakers, shipping, setup	weights, shipping	mat, HR monitor, BT, media tray, shipping	BT, arm HR, weights, shipping
Warranty (yr)	1	10 frame 2 parts 1 labor	10 frame 2-3 most ¼ some	10 frame 3 parts 1 labor
Return (days)	30 RT	30	30	42
Max weight (lb)	297	350	350	330
Can ride standing	yes	yes	yes	yes
Toe cages & clips	yes	yes	yes	yes
Seat adjust	4	6	4	4
Handlebar adjust	2	2	4	4
Resistance levels	100	24	24	100
Calibration	screen	screen by incline -10 – +20	screen	screen
Display Size (in)	22 / 24	22	5+yours	5+yours
Touch Screen	yes	yes	no**	no**
Apps (\$/mo, paid annually)	Peloton member (44)	iFit (33)	Peloton (13), others	JRNY (13*), Peloton (13*), others
App required	yes, else few classes		no	no
Built-in Workouts	0	0	0	0
Flywheel (lb)	front	front	7.5 rear	40 front
Drive	belt	belt	belt	belt
Resistance	magnetic	magnetic	magnetic	magnetic
Weight (lb)	135 / 140		92	106
LxWxH (in)	59 x 23 x 53 / 59 x 22 x 59	55 x 22 x 57	51 x 26 x 49	48 x 21 x 52
5-year cost	\$4,285/5,335	\$3,879	\$3,240	\$1,423

\* After 1<sup>st</sup> year with JRNY.

\*\* Has console, supports phone or tablet.

The 5-year cost shown includes the base price with shipping, plus the best available service from Peloton or iFit. The Peloton total cost assumes the starter package for one, including the required shoes; the web site conceals the cost of the app behind a 30-day trial at purchase. The 5-year cost for other bikes assumes that you ride in your sneakers or have shoes. If you are going to pay the 5-year cost for a Peloton, consider the Bike+, with its better computer, connectivity, speakers, and “Auto Follow.” Find out more at <https://www.onepeloton.com/bikes/compare>.

Better indoor cycling bikes use magnetic resistance, which is quieter and needs less maintenance. The best of these bikes have calibrated magnetic resistance, a feature that I consider essential for serious use. Calibration means a digital resistance level is displayed on the console. The point is to be able to accurately and repeatedly vary sections of the workout, as well as to plan and compare workout intensity. Without calibration, all you can do is guess at how hard you are working.

Less expensive bikes provide resistance through mechanical brakes with felt pads. The resistance cannot be calibrated accurately, because the pads wear down. Pads may wear out and need replacement.

In most indoor cycling bikes, the flywheel is in front of the rider. The heavier the flywheel, the smoother the ride. The rider is more likely to drip sweat on the front flywheel or braking mechanism. A front flywheel bike needs an emergency stop for the flywheel, partly because the rotation is in the same direction as seat over handle bars!

The [Keiser M3i](#) uses a rear flywheel. There is less space for it, so the flywheel is smaller. To smooth the ride, the flywheel turns faster. Stopping is smooth, with no stop button necessary. I took classes on Keiser M3-series bikes at two gyms over a two or three year period; they were super studio bikes. Back then, however, if you wanted to do this on a Keiser at home, it was BYO instructor. When classes ended at my gym, I eventually stopped using the two bikes they left behind – I got bored all alone.

[Peloton](#) has made their name with a very good bike and outstanding web-based workout services. The features, which include live classes, come with the monthly \$44 Peloton membership. At these prices, you need to try before you buy. Peloton makes that easy with a 30-day free trial (setup, removal and two-way shipping included).

The [NordicTrack S22i](#) bike is now sold with an equivalent plan, with a monthly \$33 subscription to iFit. These bikes can incline up 20 degrees or decline down

10 degrees; the resistance changes accordingly, as on a road; screen images show incline but not resistance. The iFit instructor makes the road, changing your settings for you. Beyond those interesting features, reviewers note that iFit may be harder to use than Peloton; for example, it can be hard to find a specific workout on iFit. The NordicTrack S15i has a 14" display and only 22 resistance levels for less money. iFit has also partnered with a few other vendors.

Peloton and NordicTrack are service-oriented, and do not bother to provide full details about the hardware. If you buy one of these bikes, you are buying the service. If the company goes out of business, your machine may be a brick.

Many exercise bikes can be used with web apps, a lower tier of service. Do you really need to be taught live, by a remote stranger? The Peloton app costs \$13 monthly. Some bikes come with workouts built-in, likely another step down. Workout videos on the web are another option.

The Peloton requires bike shoes with Delta-compatible cleats, but all other listed indoor cycling bikes have dual pedals for both safety and performance: one side of the pedal has a toe cage for riding in sneakers, while the other side has a toe clip (usually the more common SPD, or both) for a bike shoe. As a youth, I used to depend on the heels of my shoes to keep my feet on my bike pedals when I stood up. Modern mechanisms are safer than heels, and better, since they let you pull up as well as push down. (No, I'm no longer a road rider.)

Some models use proprietary seat and pedal mounts, while others let you use any standard bike saddle or pedals.

A serious contender is the [Schwinn IC4](#), which works with numerous apps, including Peloton's. Because the page for the IC4 also includes reviews for the IC2 and IC3, the Amazon reviews can be difficult to mine for value. The same bike as the IC4 is sold as the [Bowflex C6](#), often with a different price. It appears that the IC4 is sold at retail, while the C6 is only sold directly over the web. On 11 Jan 2023, I saved \$100 compared to the IC4, getting my C6 online for \$699.

All the companies seem to have significant sales in December or January, the best time to buy.

### **Resistance Display Required**

In the Dec 2020 version of this article, I suggested that a lower-cost Sunny Health SF-B1709 might be an acceptable compromise. It does not have a digital display of resistance, but the resistance adjustment clicks into position. Speaking from experience, when I get working on the bike, I can barely

remember my name, let alone how many clicks I'm at on the resistance. As far as I can tell, Sunny does not have any bike that displays resistance level.

The Sole SB900 suffers from the same defect. This bike and better Sunny models claim to report calories burned, but they cannot do that accurately without a gauge of resistance – they are either fibbing or should display it.

## **Air Bikes**

A good air bike appears appropriate for all levels of workout intensity. Athletes use air bikes for CrossFit training & competitions, and to warm up for other athletic events. Most serious models allow operation with arms alone, placing your feet on the axle handles.

Schwinn came out with the first Airdyne bike in 1978. It was solidly built, but as time went on, sturdiness declined. The Assault AirBike first appeared around 2000, designed with and to meet the needs of Crossfit enthusiasts and competitions. Some air bikes may be used with an app, but that is not the norm. In a CrossFit context, it's you against that bike. If you want an idea of what CrossFit is about, see [Greatist](#).

"Our original [Assault AirBike Classic](#) is best known for creating love-hate relationships with those that have been bold enough to give it a try. ... This old favorite will leave you burning for days." On their page, they show a firefighter in full gear on an Airbike: "That Bike has saved my life. It helps me warm up, it helps push me to my limits and beyond. Also has helped me with mobility. But most of all it prepares me for the unknown in my business which could be the difference in saving someones life." It is possible to break the chain on an Assault bike, especially when attempting a quick stop; the owner can change the chain; the chain requires ongoing maintenance. If you are counting calories competitively, you can collect "ghost calories" at the end of the ride, as the machine coasts to a stop. Being lighter than its competition, the Assault Classic may rock more. There are knockoffs with lower prices.

The [Assault AirBike Elite](#) claims improvements: commercial durability, designed for interval training, comfortable large seat (which a reviewer reported as being slippery), the inclusion of the removable windscreen that is optional on the Classic, and an improved LCD console (apparently a touch screen). It can also be pedaled backward. It costs almost double, and it still has a chain drive. This may be appropriate for CrossFit abuse; a drive belt is clearly superior until the belt stretches, requiring a service call to replace it. A Pro model has been added to the line.

Selected Air Bikes	Assault AirBike Elite	Assault AirBike Classic	Schwinn Airdyne AD7	Rogue Echo Bike
Price	\$1,299	\$699	\$1,099	\$845
Included extras	better display & seat, BT		shipping	assembly tools
Warranty (yr)	10 frame 2 most 1 labor	5 frame 2 most parts	10 frame 2 parts ½ labor	2
Return (days)	0	0	42	0
Max weight (lb)	350	300	350	350
Can ride standing	no	no	no	no
Toe cages & clips	no	no	no	no
Seat adjust	4	4	6	4
Grip – each hand	1	1	2	1
Resistance levels	1 (faster = higher)			
Calibration	revolutions or calories (by time)			
Display Size (in)	yes	yes	multi	6x6
Touch Screen		no	no	no
Apps (\$/mo)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Built-in Workouts	yes	yes	yes	yes
Drive	chain	chain	belt	belt
Resistance	fan	fan	fan	fan
Weight (lb)	139	96	113	127
Dimensions (LWH")	55 x 26 x 55	51 x 23 x 50	53 x 27 x 53	59 x 30 x 53

The [Schwinn AD7](#) has a much better return policy, but may only have free shipping for a while. Its belt drive should be quieter and reduce “ghost calories.” Its multiple handlebar grips make it more adaptable to both short and tall riders. It has an oversized, padded seat for greater comfort, and you can easily swap in a standard bike seat. The AD7 is sold to gyms with a different warranty and price, as the AD Pro.

[The Best Air Bike for 2023](#) picks the [Rogue Echo Bike](#) as best overall. See also [Assault Bike vs. Rogue Echo Bike](#).

## Conclusions

Any of the listed exercise bikes could be the best choice for you. It depends on your budget, intent and what help (services) you need.

If you have seen my other fitness articles, you know I have a Sole E95 Elliptical machine. I took to the elliptical as a safe way of running, once my knees and hips started to go (arthritis in all now). On the elliptical, I can no longer do 5 MPH (8 KPH, high revs at low resistance) without paying for it with a week or so of hip pain. Accordingly, I have increased my standard resistance to 12.

While I took my first elliptical ride almost 20 years ago, I had never really worked my arms. Prompted by the idea of a serious air bike, I started working my arms with an aggressive but stabilizing push with one arm, while pulling with the other. This lets me go faster (harder), yet stress my hips and knees less.

My choice in Dec 2020 was to not buy an exercise bike. By Jan 2023, my workout week had devolved into three days of swimming and three of elliptical plus weights – and I was getting bored. I got a great deal on a Bowflex C6 bike, and jumped on it. Now I go two, two and two days – and 30 minutes on the machine is all it takes on bike days. With 57°F out there today, I have started to mix in walking in the woods.

It's worth noting that the direct competition for the Bowflex C6 (Schwinn IC4) is not Peloton or NordicTrack, with their extensive but costly services. The competition is the commercial-quality Keiser M3i, which I consider to be the best indoor cycling *hardware* available. My C6 falls short of the M3i, but it's definitely a fine bike for home use, for much less money.

Look for my forthcoming review of the Bowflex C6 at

<https://3nt.xyz> > Ideas > Health & Fitness