



BMX / Parkour

New York City

United States of America

# RIDE THE RHYTHM

NEW YORK CITY INSPIRES FREERUNNERS AND BIKE LIFE RIDERS TO CREATE ART IN MOTION

New York City moves to its own beat. Traffic bustles and flows. Sidewalks teem with people heading to work, school, or play. Above, buildings stack up like peaks in a mountain range, each higher than the next, while roads cut through the deep canyons they create. It's easy to feel insignificant in a landscape like this, but across the five boroughs, New York's urban athletes fearlessly make their mark on the city.

Ostensibly, New York City is an improbable place to ride a bike. Yet Bike Life—a loose community of riders—thrives. Ride-outs draw anywhere from 10 to 100 riders, often even more. Word passes through social media and neighborhood grapevines. The bike brings all kinds of people who find common ground in the joy of riding together.

"Bikes unify everyone," says Jae Milez. "I've seen gang members come together all for the love of riding." Young Latino and Black men form most of the

Bike Life community, but ride-outs welcome everyone. "This is not just a guy's sport," says Curly, a female rider from the Lower East Side.

Bike Life prizes style and creativity. Holding their front wheels high in the air, some riders can wheelie an entire city block or more. Milez has become so proficient at riding a wheelie, he will sometimes not bother with a front wheel at all. Other riders dodge and weave through traffic, swerving at the last possible moment to avoid collisions with cars and pedestrians. The skills required to ride in New York City, never mind the wheelies and tricks, take practice to master. Curly started riding in 2017. "At first, I was embarrassed," she says. "I practiced alone in the parking lot before deciding to step out of my comfort zone."

While the Bike Life riders move through the city streets, freerunners test their bodies in unexpected spaces: curved railings in Battery Park City

invite jumps and flips. At the Heckscher Playground in Central Park, natural rock features connect seamlessly with play structures. The possibilities for flow lines are infinite. In Times Square, neon signs wink, cars honk, and tourists snap photos. Amid the chaos, a parkour athlete finds focus and adapts his body to the unique shapes and forms of the city. A train passes over Williamsburg Bridge. High above hangs a freerunner, dwarfed by the bridge's massive structures. Using their bodies, they create art on a human scale.

With their Bike Life crew, riders such as Curly and Milez roll to the city's rhythms. For them, the bike offers a vehicle for self-expression and freedom: "It was like destiny," Curly says. "You know when something is just meant for you." Freerunners find that same self-expression in shaping their bodies to fit the city's landscape. Out on the bike or climbing high, they make New York City their own.