

KEEPING YOUR BICYCLE SINGING

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Now that you've put some mileage on your bicycle this summer, it is time to talk maintenance! Taking proper care of your two wheeled friend will not only lengthen its life, but will also substantially enhance rider enjoyment.

Your bicycle is a machine, just as your car is. No one enjoys driving a car with rotten windshield wipers, squeaky belts, and feeble brakes. Just as your car requires regular maintenance and fluid changes, so does your bicycle.

The first step in ensuring your bicycle is in great riding condition is keeping it clean. After enjoying a particularly muddy ride, or after every few rides, be sure to treat your bicycle to a bath. Using a garden hose with a regular spray attachment will do the trick. Never use a pressure washer, as the added force will blow grease from bearings and seals.

While bathing your bicycle be sure to pay particular attention to your drive train (crank, chain, chain rings, and rear cassette), as well as the rims of your wheels, where brake pad dust often collects. You'll be surprised by how the performance of your bicycle is improved, simply by keeping it clean!

Keeping your chain well lubricated is also key. Once your chain is free of any dirt and residue, oil your chain. Use bicycle specific lubricants only. Regular old household or motor oil just doesn't cut it and makes an extraordinary mess. There are different types of lubricants available for different riding conditions and for different types of riders (just like cross country ski wax or motor engine oil). Lubes can be oil, teflon, or wax based, some lubes are even self cleaning and/or environmentally friendly.

When oiling your chain, avoid putting on too much. Excess oil simply collects extra dirt, it is recommended that you gently wipe your chain after application to remove excess lube. Your chain should be lubricated frequently. Depending on the lube you utilize, you should lubricate your chain as often as every ride, to every few rides. Generally speaking, after bathing your bicycle, it also deserves a little lube.

In addition to keeping your bicycle clean and lubricated, ensure that all major "nuts and bolts" are tight before heading out onto the trail or road. Be sure to check that your seat is firmly attached, the headset and stem (the parts that hold the handle bar on the main bicycle frame) are snug, and that your wheels are well secured and round with tight spokes.

A simple test to ensure you're ready to ride is the "drop test". Simply raise the front wheel a few inches off of the ground, and let the bicycle fall. Repeat this exercise with the rear wheel. You should hear no extraneous noises if you are ready to roll. Clunking noises usually indicate loose parts, often the wheels.

Prior to heading out on each ride, be sure to check your tire pressure. Keeping your tires inflated to optimal pressures will not only decrease your chances of flatting, it will also make your riding easier and thus much more enjoyable.

Mountain bike style tires should not be inflated beyond 60 psi (pounds per square inch). If you are riding your mountain bike primarily on the road, I suggest keeping your tires at approximately 60 psi or the maximum rating. If you are riding in the trails, dropping the tire pressure to approximately 40 psi will give you much more traction in mud and over rocks and roots.

Road bicycle tires should be inflated to about 100 psi. If you have any questions regarding the appropriate tire pressure for your bicycle, refer to the side walls of your tires. Maximum tire pressures are usually imprinted in the side walls of bicycle tires.

The bicycle market place is filled with products and tools that can help keep your bicycle in top riding condition. From portable tools, to shop bench tools, to lubricating and cleaning care kits, there is something for every type of bicycle.

There are a handful of items I recommend every cyclist, or family of cyclist should possess. These simple items will help increase the life span of your bicycle, and improve your bicycle's performance.

1. Metric Allen Key Set (which will tighten the various nuts and bolts)
2. Tire Pump (preferably with gauge)
3. Bicycle Specific De-Greaser (to get all that gunge and old lube off)
4. Chain Lubricant

I hope I've inspired you to clean and maintain your bicycle. Bikes truly are wonderful machines, for transportation and for pure enjoyment. This summer remember to bathe your bicycle frequently, and take a little extra care with your man powered machine.

Keeping your bicycle tuned will keep it singing and you spinning all season long. Should you have any questions regarding bicycle maintenance, the crew at Ecclestone Cycle would be happy to field any of your questions. Until next time...Happy Spins!