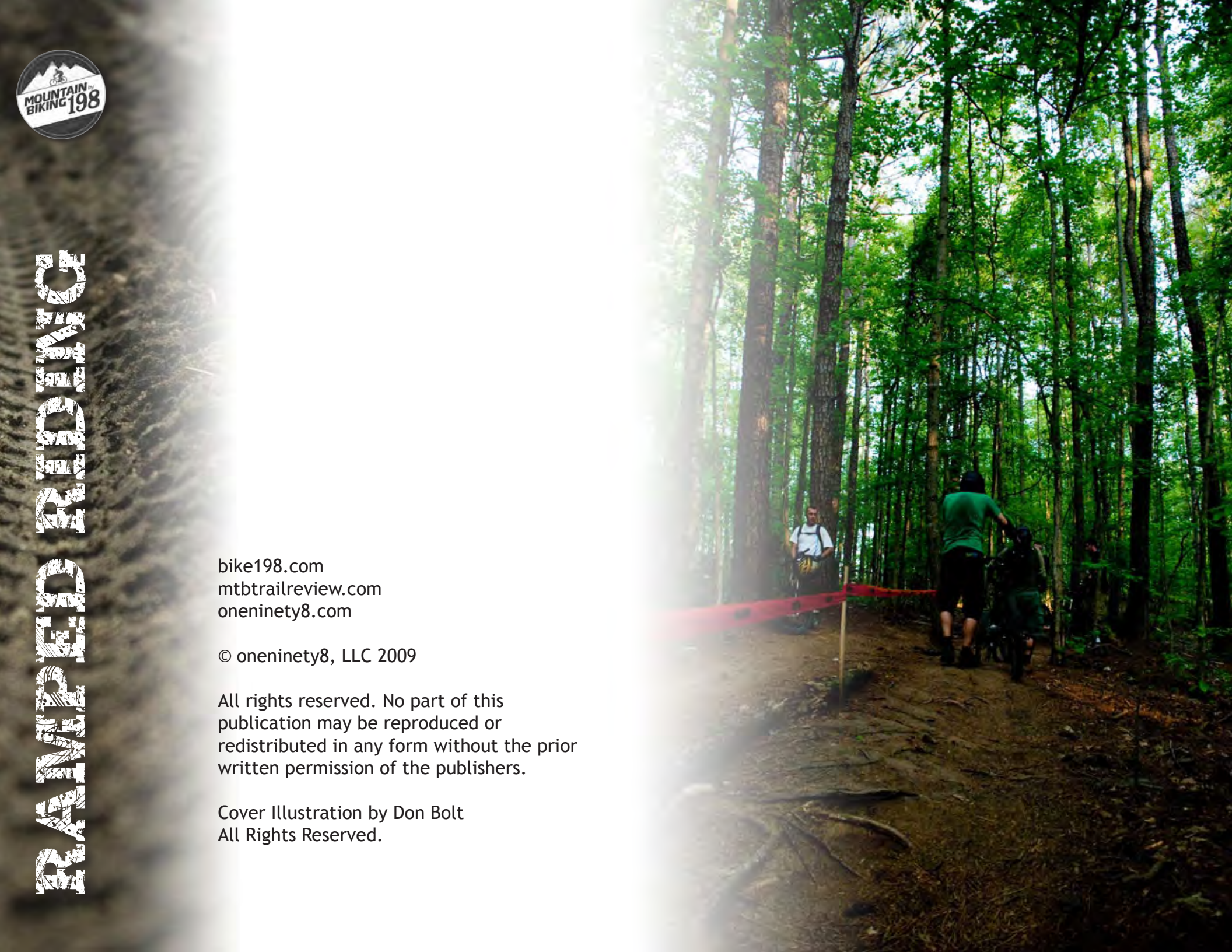
RAMPED RIDING

ROBB SUTTON

COVER ILLUSTRATION
BY DON BOLT

MOUNTAIN BIKING 198

RAMPED RIDING



bike198.com
mtbtrailreview.com
oneninety8.com

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Ramped Riding. Whether you are an experienced veteran or a new mountain biker just starting out, Ramped Riding is going to help you get over that next hurdle in your biking ability. As mountain bikers, we all have different goals when it comes to riding those sections of dirt and part of the diversity of riders and styles is what makes the sport so great.

When you set out for that next ride, if you could just improve one aspect of your riding, you will be able to see progression and start to enjoy your trail experience even more. As each of our overall mountain biking goals are different, the improvement of our abilities as a mountain biker still have the same result...a better overall mountain biking experience.

The following eBook is going to take you through the processes that we go through to improve our mountain biking. Each of these steps will make your experience on the trail a better one as you continue to hone in your skills. We realize that every ride is not out to conquer the biggest drop or be the fastest rider on the race course, and that is why each and every one of these tips will help your riding...no matter what skill level or end riding goal you may have at this point in time.

Thanks for checking out Ramped Riding and here is to becoming a better mountain biker.

- Robb Sutton (198)

***Note**: The next 2 pages contain a click-able Table of Contents and at the bottom of each page...you will find a "Return to Table of Contents" link to make things easy to navigate.*

INSIDE RAMPED RIDING

INTRODUCTION

INSIDE RAMPED RIDING

BEFORE THE RIDE

The Perfect Mountain Bike 7
What Kind of Rider are You? 10
14 Must Have Items for Every Ride 12
Tips to Keep Your Bike Running Smoothly 16
Getting the Right Fit 20
Finding Your Ideal Tire Pressure 22

RIDING TECHNIQUE

Beginner Mountain Biking Tips 27
Keeping Your Grip Loose 29
Where Are Your Shoulders Are Pointed? 32
How To Turn At Speed - Keep Momentum 34
Improving Your Balance for Better Riding 38
Staying Light on the Bike 41
Looking Down the Trail 43
How to Attack a Rock Garden 44
Rocky Mountain Bike Trail Techniques 48
#1 Way To Get Over Descending Fears 55
Mountain Biking Downhill 58
Biking Skills You Should Know 60
Technical Trail Obstacles and Features 68
How to Wreck Your Mountain Bike 71

THE TRAIL AND THE RIDE

Riding On Loose Trail Conditions 74
Tips for Mountain Biking by Yourself 77
Preparing for Long MTB Rides 80
Miles, Miles and More Miles 84
Ride Different Trails 87

THE RIDER

Pacing Yourself as a Rider 91
Hydrating While Mountain Biking 94
The Importance of Challenging Yourself 98
The First 30 Days in the Saddle 101
1 Tip That Will Save Your Life 103

CROSS TRAINING

Different Cross Training Methods 107
How to Run and Walk the Next Day 110
Diversify Your Riding 113
Heavy Bike Training 118
Road Biking 121

WRAPPING IT UP

Top 5 Ways to Get Back on the Horse 125
What Happens When You Stick With It 127

Final Thoughts from 198

BEFORE THE RIDE

The Perfect Mountain Bike

You are on your favorite mountain biking forum or local mountain bike trailhead. You hear a friend or fellow rider start talking about a new bike purchase, and like any obsessed cycling fan…they ask the opinions of other riders in search of their perfect mountain bike that will carry their riding to new extreme levels. The first rider to pipe up and offer their intense information for this fortunate rider is normally the mountain biker that is going to tell the potential mountain bike purchaser why the mountain bike they ride is the best thing ever. Not only is it the best mountain bike on the market, it is going to be the perfect mountain bike for them too! You'll see…just go buy it…

The Perfect Mountain Bike – The Myth and the Truth

I am going to dispel the myth right now. There is no such thing as the perfect mountain bike for everyone and I am sick and tired of hearing riders trying to prove others that there is one. Every rider has a different structure, style, ability and specific taste. When other riders try to justify their purchase by pushing it on others…it is bad for the sport. You can give your objective opinion on why you picked your mountain bike and why it works best for your needs…but it is not going to be for everyone…and that is a good thing!

When the mountain bike community has a wide variety of different riders, that brings a multitude of bikes, parts and trails that gives the community more options than ever. If we all had one perfect mountain bike that was the same…life as a mountain biker would be pretty boring.

While you read mountain bike reviews and editorials…

The information I am about to give you applies to Bike198.com as much as it does to any print mag or casual rider. You HAVE TO treat every review an opinion objectively in your search for YOUR perfect mountain bike for YOUR needs. Most of the time, they only way to truly find out if a mountain bike is going to work for you is to narrow down your list and start test riding. Just because Joe Mountain Biker said his bike is the best thing on the market and you should not even consider anything else…that does not mean that it will be the correct bike for you.

On Bike198, we try to provide you with as much information as possible to help you in your search for your next mountain bike or component part purchase. We try to answer the questions that you will ask during the purchasing process in an attempt to spell out who is the "perfect" rider for that particular bike, part or piece of apparel. When you read our reviews and others on the net, you should try to look at them objectively to figure out if it will be perfect for you as a rider.

When you hear the self proclaimed experts that just have to give their opinion every time a mountain biking question is presented, I would discount their voice the most. Typically, the loudest rider is the one that you should listen to the least. If you really want an honest opinion, search out a skilled rider who rides with a similar style on similar trails. Talk to this mountain biker about what they like and don't like about their current mountain bike and what bike they would like to try next. Through calm dialogue, you are able to get a truer

since of how that particular bike rides and…just maybe…that rider will let you take a spin on a trail to get a feel of the bike's ride characteristics (given that it is your size).

198 and Self Proclaimed Experts

As you can probably tell…I am holding back from completely ranting a little bit. Just about every trailhead I visit lately has a self proclaimed expert that is always telling other riders to buy bikes and components. I know…a little ironic given that you are reading this ebook and a site that just happens to review products for mountain bikers, but I do have a point. How many times have you heard "you have to go get a 29er", "you have to buy this bike", "you have to switch to Shimano (or SRAM)"? The truth is…you DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING other than enjoy riding your mountain bike.

So…next time you hear the self proclaimed expert that gives opinions without questions… smile, clip in and go ride. When you really want some advice, ask the skilled rider that is not getting a high off of sharing what he thinks with every rider that he comes in contact with. That information will be far more credible in the long run.

In the end, you want the best equipment that fits your budget and your needs. As your needs and abilities change over time...so will your equipment, but - in the end - it is all about the ride.

What Kind of Rider are You?

There are many mountain biking styles out there. While some like to sit and spin, others like to stand and hammer. I have done a lot of looking at how I ride a bike lately in my quest to become a better mountain biker. Through searching through my own mountain biking technique…I have come to several conclusions.

- I tend to pick harder gears and hammer it out.
- I ride heavier bikes than most of my fellow cycling addicts.
- My legs are perfect until mile 25 in the woods or 65 on the road…then things head south.
- I am more comfortable in higher heart-rates.
- I put a lot of trust into my large tires and suspension.

Ideally, to be a well rounded mountain biker, you would want to be comfortable in all riding styles…using them when needed.

My need to mash the harder gears really came to light during my first rides on the road bike. I found that I rarely ever left the big ring…at all. This directly correlates with my need to push bigger gears in mountain biking to power over instead of efficiently spin.

The characteristics of my riding style is a by-product of the type of riding that I enjoy the

most…all mountain, super tech. It is also a necessity with higher rolling resistance of larger, more aggressive tires (2.4 even for xc riding) and extra weight I decide to carry around. There is a flip side to this that is self destructive in some ways. To truly increase my skill level to be better at the trails I enjoy the most, I also need to be proficient at the other styles.

Is the way I ride wrong? No…it is just the way I ride, but it does not work for all conditions… hence my quest at becoming better at all riding styles.

As you look at your own riding, what kind of rider are you? As you continue through this ebook looking for ways to improve your riding, it will be essential to know what kind of rider you are now.

- Do you sit and spin?
- Are you really comfortable on smooth but want to be better at technical?
- Maybe you want to get faster on the rolling sections as you are always riding rocky terrain!

All of this is valuable information as you start to dissect your riding style and where you want to specifically improve. Ideally, you want to start mixing in other riding styles to have a more well rounded technical set. Used to granny gear? Try out a ride staying in the middle ring.

14 Must Have Items for Every Ride

The following list contains items that you must have with you during every ride. Many riders find it unnecessary to carry all of these items on their local rides, but I have found that it is these rides where I end up needing most of the items on this list the most.

- **Hydration Pack** – There are several companies on the market that offer hydration packs. The most common is probably CamelBak. They have a ton of options, so make sure you pick the one that best suits your needs. I use a Dakine Nomad because of its unique ability to carry full face and conventional helmets. A hydration pack serves two very important purposes. 1) It carries your water. Most packs these days range around 70 oz to 100 oz with the 100 oz models being most popular because of their versatility. If you are planning on doing any mountain rides, opt for the 100 oz. 2) It carries all of the items that I am about to list.
- **Spare Tube** – There is nothing worse than being on the side of the trail with a flat tire and a long way to walk. Bring a spare tube with you on every ride. Even if you are running UST tires, a spare tube will get you home when you blow a sidewall.
- **Tire Levers** – Changing out a flat is much easier with the aid of some good tire levers. I have used Park Tools levers for years, but recently switched to the Maxxis brand. They are stronger than the Park's.
- **CO2 Cartridge** – A CO2 cartridge will make filling up an empty tire/tube much faster on the side of the trail.
- **Mini-Pump** – You can pick these pumps up at any local bike shop or retail outlet.

They are light and small enough to fit in your pack and some even offer a pressure gauge as an option. I would recommend buying one that has the pressure gauge so that you can be absolutely sure that your tire is pumped up correctly.

- **SRAM PowerLink** - A SRAM PowerLink is a single connecting link that SRAM provides with almost all of their new chains to connect one end to the other. This item could possibly be one of the most important things to carry while riding. If you break a chain on the trail, this is going to be your best friend. It allows you to remove the bad link with your multi-tool and then reconnect the chain without having to press in the pins. You can find these at almost any LBS on a red card for 4-5 dollars.
- **Nutrition** – While you ride, you are burning a lot of calories. You need to replenish these calories and nutrients during the ride. I use the Cliff Shot Bloks for short rides. They are light enough where they are not heavy on your stomach, but they include the necessary electrolytes to keep me going. Another good alternative are gels. This goo contains similar substances as the bars/bloks, but in a gel form. Many also include caffeine. On longer rides, I normally bring a peanut butter and honey sandwich.
- **Spare Derailleur Hanger** - Every recent bike in memory has the feature of a replaceable derailleur hanger. In the event that your rear derailleur hits a rock or other foreign object, the hanger is normally the first to give. These hangers bolt in to the rear triangle of your frame and can be easily replaced on the side of the trail. Carrying on of these will save your ride. You can have your LBS order you an extra or

go by derailleurhanger.com and order one up.

- **ID Card** – Yes, that little card that allows you to drive on public roads may also save your life. If you get in a serious wreck on the trail, people need to know who you are and where you live. This information is also vital for hospital personnel. A company called RoadID also makes a wrist band that contains all of your necessary information.
- **Multi-Tool** - This "do-it-all" tool has almost everything you need for a trail side repair in a convenient and small package. I use the Multi-19 Tool from Crank Brothers. Be sure to pick up one that fits your needs, but I would recommend that it has a chain tool built in.
- **Shock Pump** – Most of today's suspensions (rear and front) use air shocks. I carry a shock pump with me on the ride to make adjustments as needed. This may be considered optional by most riders, but I bring it on all rides.
- **First Aid Kit** – This one is pretty self explanatory. It is not if…it's when you or someone you are riding with wrecks, it is good to have a small first aid kit available to clean everything up.
- **Toilet Paper/Paper Towel** – This multi-use item can be a life saver during a trail side restroom break, but it can also be used to wipe off anything. It is always a great idea to have a couple extra in your pack.
- **Electrolyte Pills** – Companies like Hammer Nutrition make electrolyte pills that can

help prevent cramping and fatigue. These all natural pills are great on long rides to try to keep your legs fresh.

That is my comprehensive list. I consider everything on this list a must bring to make sure my rides go off without a hitch. It looks like a lot on paper, but the overall weight really isn't a lot once you get loaded up.

One thing to remember…

You are going to run into riders on the trail that do not have the equipment necessary to make their repairs. As a mountain biker, we need to pay it forward by offering up a tube, tool or PowerLink to get the rider going again. When they offer to pay you for the help, tell them to carry one next time and give it to another rider if needed. This pay it forward attitude has saved countless rides over the years, and we need to do our part to make sure that everyone enjoys the sport as much as possible. It is pretty simple…treat others as you wish to be treated and as always…enjoy the ride.

Tips to Keep Your Bike Running Smoothly

Nothing is more annoying on the trail than equipment that is not cooperating with you. An ill-functioning bike can ruin even the best of rides. It is extremely important to keep your bike a well oiled machine so your rides are focused on fun rather than repair.

- **Make Sure the Bike's Drivetrain is Properly Lubed** – Before every ride, you need to check the chain to make sure it has the proper lubrication. This is especially important during the drier months when dust eats away at components and lube. I have tried numerous products over the years but White Lightning seems to work the best. It is wax based so it is not as messy during application. It also seems to fair better in dry conditions because the dirt and dust flakes off instead of gumming up.
- **Check Your Cables** – Do a once over of all of you cable driven components. This may include brakes, derailleur or adjustable seat post cables. Make sure they are not frayed or binding. If you find a frayed cable, replace it right away. A frayed cable will cause numerous shifting and braking issues that can become dangerous or ride ending.
- **Check Chain Ring and Cassette Teeth** – Bent or excessively worn (shark toothed) teeth on your chain ring and cassette can degrade components and break chains. Bent or worn components should be replaced. In this case, it is recommended that you replace all drivetrain components at once to insure proper operation. This includes the cassette, chain and chain rings. Over time, these components "wear into" each other, so when you add a new component into the mix without replacing the others…it is likely that it will not play nice causing shifting/drivetrain issues.

- **Adjust Derailleur Cables** – The newer the cables, the more you will have to perform this before rides. New cables stretch with time. Slight adjustments will be required after the first couple of rides to get things running smoothly. Both Shimano and SRAM components can be fine adjusted using the barrel adjusters. Tighten the cables one click at a time and test the shifting on the stand. Once you get it dialed in, ride the bike and shift under load to make sure you have found the sweet spot. If you can not get the shifting correct through the barrel adjusters, you need to reset the cables. Shift the derailleur to the smallest gear (loosest cable setting), set the barrel adjusters to one full turn from fully closed and set the cable tension so that it is just barely tight. After you have done that, continue adjusting with the barrel adjusters until shifting is correct. All of this is assuming that you have the limit screws set correctly. Refer to your owners manual for more information.
- **Check Tire Pressure** – Make sure you have your tire pressure correct before every ride. I leave a floor pump in my truck for this reason. Over inflated tires are going to make for a rough and bouncy ride and under inflation increases the chances of pinch flatting.
- **Double Check Other Grease Locations** – Take a good once over of the entire bike. Areas like your seatpost, pivots, etc. require lubrication to function properly and quietly. Make sure you have properly greased these areas so that you do not have to listen to constant squeaking throughout the ride. The most common areas for squeaking are the bottom bracket, pivots and seatpost. These little annoyances can really ruin a ride.

- **Check Shock Pressure** – Most of today's rigs utilize air suspension components for their weight and tune-ability benefits. Ideally, you should be running around 25% sag on the rear shock. This is measured using the black ring provided on the shaft. When you are sitting still on the bike, you should be using 25% of the stroke of the shock. Measure this out as best you can and fine tune it as needed. Each shock manufacturer has a starting point for rider weight. Keep in mind that rider weight refers to fully geared weight. This includes a loaded hydration system and clothes, so set the sag as if you were about to ride. Front shock pressures are a little bit harder to dial in. During the ride, watch your travel (usually seen by dirt lines) and make sure you are using most (if not all) of your travel during the ride. You should only bottom out the shock under extremely hard hits.
- **Inspect the Tires** – The tires on your bike are your only contact with the ground. That makes them one of the most important components on the bike. Check the tires to make sure there is no cracking, dry rotting or excessive wear. Old tires can cause your bike to wash out and not handle correctly. Excessively worn tires can also rip and come off the rim while riding.
- **Check Every Bolt** – I know this sound cumbersome, but in reality…there aren't that many bolts on a bike to check. Every bolt on your bike has a torque specification, but if you do not have a torque wrench…make sure that every bolt is secure and snug. You do not want components moving or falling off during a ride.
- **Look Over the Frame** – Every frame has stress points. Take a look over the entire

frame and make sure there are no cracks or stress marks in the tubing or rockers. If you find any, do not ride the bike.

- **Clean Your Bike!** – Dirt is like sandpaper to everything it touches…especially moving components. It will cause premature wear and damages components. Clean your bike on a regular basis to make sure it continues to run smoothly. It is also a great time to go over everything I have mentioned previously in this list. I use Suzuki Motorcycle Wash and that makes the bike almost too clean. After cleaning…re-lube all components and get ready to make it dirty again!

Obviously, there are other tips that could be added to this list. These are the ones that I find to be the most important and if they are not handled…can really ruin a great ride. Next time you are getting ready, even for small rides, take the extra 15 minutes to complete this checklist. It might make the difference between the ride of the year and most annoying one yet.

Getting the Right Fit

Bike fitment is possibly one of the most important things to get right the first time. What does a properly fitted bike do for you?

- Generates the greatest amount of power to the wheels.
- Keeps you comfortable on the bike for short and long rides.
- Helps you with technique and riding ability.
- And a lot more that really goes unmeasured…

When you purchase a bike, you really need to make sure that you get the right size. Any competent local bike shop should be able to size out the correct bike. However, what most shops do not have is a fitting service. If you are new to biking or have been riding for a long time, but the fit or efficiency never really felt right…then it is time for a professional fitting. Most of us are completely unaware of what a correct fitting is or what it will do for our riding. Most of the time we figure that we are close enough and continue riding. Professional fitters do much more than adjust stem length and post height.

From 55nine Performance:

> There is no such thing as a position on the bike. Cycling is not a static movement, it's dynamic. So why would you obtain a bike fit that measures you while you are holding still?

By the end of the appointment, you will have a bike that is perfectly tailored to your needs. From the feedback I have received from other riders, your bike comes alive after a professional fitting…especially when climbing. Even areas that normal riders take for granted like cleat placement greatly affect how we ride our bikes. If you are unsure or new to riding, I would highly recommend one of these fittings to get you started on the right track.

Finding Your Ideal Tire Pressure

The amount of air pressure that you put in your tires greatly affects the riding characteristics of your bike.

When MTB Tire Pressure Is Too High

- Bike bounces off of obstacles
- Poor cornering performance
- Tires break loose easily

When Tire Pressure Is Too Low

- Greater chance of pinch flatting
- Efficiency loss while pedaling
- Roll over can cause unpredictable handling

So How Do I Find My Ideal Pressure?

One thing to remember is that your tires are also part of your bike's suspension (especially if you are riding a hard tail or rigid bike). Your tires are also your only contact with the trail, so it is very important to figure out your pressure range to get the best performance and

comfort. There are generally a couple of rules to consider.

- Heavier riders need higher pressures (the opposite is true for lighter riders).
- Lower volume tires (1.8-2.1) need higher pressures while high volume tires (2.2+) need lower.
- Thicker sidewall (heavier) tires ride better with lower pressures than higher.
- Tubeless setups run lower pressures than tubed.
- While these “rules” create a great starting point, it is always important to remember that results vary based on riding style, tire brand and trail conditions. Once you find your optimal + 5 psi range, you can adjust to the trail conditions easily and quickly.

Ideally, you want to run the lowest pressures that you can get away with without pinch flatting. Using the list above as a gauge, start with a high pressure (around 40 psi) using a floor pump. Use this same floor pump throughout the test. Ride at this tire pressure for awhile on the trail and observe the results. Now, go back to the car and lower the pressure 5 psi. Repeat the same process observing the results.

At lower pressures, you are going to notice more grip and a softer ride. You want to run the pressures low enough that you get these benefits but not so low that you experience pinch flats. Pinch flats occur when the tire bottoms out on the rim pinching the tube between the

ground and the rim. These contacts puncture the tube and cause a flat. You can normally feel the hard bottom out when you are riding over a rock or root.

Keep repeating this process until you find the pressure that fits your riding style and tires the best.

For tubeless systems (UST or Converted), you do not have to worry about pinch flats, but you can experience roll over due to lower pressures. It is ok to contact the rim occasionally under hard hits, but make sure that you are not damaging the rim. Too low of pressures can cause the tire to roll over on itself and this creates an unpredictable cornering ability. Generally, tubeless systems are going to run 5 – 7 psi lower than comparable tubed tires.

How Much Pressure Do I Run In My Tires?

I run a lot of different tires on a lot of different bikes, but surprisingly…my pressures are pretty close to each other in all conditions. I have a 190 lbs. riding weight for reference.

- Larger Tires Tubed (2.3+) = 28 – 30 psi
- Smaller Tires Tubed (2.25) = 30 – 32 psi
- Larger Tires Tubeless (2.3+) = 26 – 28 psi
- Smaller Tires Tubeless (2.25) = 27 – 28 psi

As you are probably noticing from the list, I do not run a tire under 2.25 in size. I do not see any benefit from running a tire any smaller. With today's mountain bike tires, you are able to get more volume and control at a weight that used to only be available to the small tire lines. More riders are getting converted to larger volume tires on a daily basis because the weight has become acceptable to more xc oriented riders.

I ran into a tire recently, Maxxis Ardent 29 x 2.25, that ended up running the best at 25 – 26 psi tubed, so be sure to remember that results can vary depending on tread design.

P.S. – One last thing…everyone has their own opinion about how much pressure you should be running in your tires. They are probably wrong (especially the guys that claim that 50 psi is the only way to go!). Do your own testing and get your own results. Tire pressure is heavily dependent on numerous factors that change as you change…keep on testing!

RIDING TECHNIQUE

Beginner Mountain Biking Tips

I have been mountain biking for almost 13 years and seriously for the last 5 years. I began leading a beginners mountain bike group from work, and knowing that I was them a few years back which really put things in perspective for me. I wouldn't even attempt a creek crossing, and if I did, my heart would be in my throat just waiting on my front wheel to buckle. Logs, forget it, I would push over them. Even bridges would make me pause, and I see this in my beginner group.

I try to be encouraging to build up their confidence. That is what it took for me to improve, to hear the words, "you can do it", "just lift your front wheel when you start over the log." I mean, I didn't grow up riding dirt bikes like my husband did, so any little tip definitely helped me. I try to think about what would help them the most, and here are a few of the tips I know helped me when I was trying to gain my confidence on my bike.

- Shift gears in advance to prepare for the obstacle.
- Learn that you can lean with the bike in a turn, but with care on gravel.
- Lift your front wheel when trying to go over an obstacle like a log.
- Watch the trail 10-20 feet ahead of your front wheel.
- Don't look at what you want to avoid on the trail, you WILL hit it.
- Instead look at where you want to go.
- Don't forget to hydrate.

Note: Beginner MTB tips was a guest post on Bike198 that I found to be very relevant to this ebook and that is why it is included.

Submitted by: Angela Brown

- Take a map
- Don’t ride alone
- Always apply the back brake first!

To some of you, these tips may seem elementary, but I know that in my group that I lead they were helpful. Most of my mountain bike beginner group are women that are trying mountain biking for the first time. The more I bike the more I love the sport and the over all feeling I get when I am out there on the trails. Any encouragement that I can give anyone to help them improve their riding ability is worth the time.

So try to get out on the trails, even if it is for a short spin, and try something new, cross that log or creek with confidence. You will be surprised how tackling a new obstacle like that will set you up for a great feeling the rest of the day!

Keeping Your Grip Loose

One of the best things you can do on a mountain bike while riding is keep a loose grip on your handlebars. For a lot of beginning mountain bikers, the temptation is to keep a death grip on the handlebars for fear of loosing your grip and going down. However, this is terrible for your riding and will hurt you worse in the long run. The best thing you can do for your riding is to keep a loose grip on the handlebars to increase your mountain biking efficiency and keep better control of your mountain bike.

Negative Side Effects – The Handlebar Death Grip

So what happens when you hold on tight so you won't let go?

- **You expend much needed energy on an action that does not help you move forward.** – When you keep that death grip on the handlebars and watch your knuckles turn white, you are using constant energy towards an action that does not improve your riding or help your bike move forward. Your body has to constantly exert more effort to to keep your grip and wastes that energy that could be used elsewhere…like your legs. Often times, you can not feel how much energy you are wasting while on the bike because your mind is focused on so many other things while you ride…like the rocks, roots, tight turns in between trees…so for a quick test, do the following. Go out into your garage (or wherever else you store your mountain bike) and grab the grip as hard as you can for 30 seconds straight. By isolating this situation without any outside influences, you can see exactly how hard it really is to keep that kind of grip at all times. Is that really what you want to be

doing while you ride?

- **You have less control of your mountain bike.** – Yes…it is true. While you may think that you have more control by keeping a strong grip on the handlebars, the exact opposite is actually true. When you keep a really tight grip on the handlebars it is harder to react to the ever changing conditions of mountain biking. Almost all of your suspension action is actually in your arms and legs. By stiffening up your arms, you are missing out on your greatest asset as a mountain biker…your body's natural ability to react quickly and soak up the trail. When you keep a looser grip on the handlebars, you are able to soak up the trail much easier and react to unexpected twists and turns that the bars may take while you ride. If your arms are stiff, they can not bend and react to sudden movements.
- **You will have increased wear and tear on your hands.** – Do you like blisters and calluses? Well…if you keep that handlebar death grip for too long…your hands will eventually take all of the abuse. By keeping a softer grip on the handlebars, you are decreasing the amount of pressure and friction that gets transferred to your palms and fingers. Due to this decreased pressure and friction, you will notice that your hands see a lot less abuse after a ride.

So…how do I keep a softer grip on the handlebars?

For those of you that are used to white knuckling it all the way down the trial, this can be a hard switch to get through your head and to your hands. At first, it will feel like the bike can just leave you at any minute and you will want to grab on tight at the first sign of a rock or root. When I am running through technical sections and fast downhills, my hands barely even touch each other around the bars. The idea is to keep fluid, relaxed motion over the rough stuff to keep your body and the bike working together but moving independently.

Practice keeping a loose grip on the handlebars on sections of trail that you know really well. Once you have gained this confidence on familiar dirt, you will be able to translate that same technique to other areas as you continue to loosen up that grip that you used to hold so tight. Eventually, you will notice that technical trail is easier and you have more energy for that steep climb ahead.

Where Are Your Shoulders Are Pointed?

Have you ever noticed that you tend to ride straight where you are looking? It never fails…a riding buddy tells you not to look over the left side because there is a steep drop off and when you get to that section of trail…you look over the side and you almost ride straight off the mountain. Or…there is that one tree that you just always seem to hit at your local trail and…when you come up on it…you stare right at it to make sure you don't slam straight into it…but you do…again!

Why do you continually ride where you are looking? Because your shoulders are moving with your head. 99.9% of the time, you are going to ride wherever your shoulders are pointed no matter where you actually want to end up after pedaling. When dirt jumpers are learning those crazy whips and 360's, the first thing they learn is to point their shoulders in the direction they want to go…not where they are right at that moment. By looking in that direction, you force your upper body to move with your neck in the pursuit of alternative direction.

How Can I Translate This To My Trail Riding

Most of you are not trying to do a 360, you are just trying to not hit the obstacles that continually give you trouble, so how do you relate this back to your riding on your trails? When you find yourself in a situation that you need to pinpoint your direction, look where you want to go…not at what you don't want to hit. By looking in the direction that you want your mountain bike to ride, you are pointing your mass towards this plane and forcing your forward motion in that direction. If you stare at that rock you don't want to run over, all of your

forward motion is going to be concentrated in that direction and you are going to hit…fall of off…or crash into whatever it is you were trying to avoid in the first place. Like most riding mishaps…it is not the trail or your bike…it is in your head.

How To Turn At Speed - Keep Momentum

A reader asked a question that I think can help out everyone…so we will address it here.

> I was recently in my first race (a 6hr) and the one thing that really caught me off guard was how it didn't matter how fast I flew into a corner the good riders seemed to flow out of the corner with so much more momentum than I did, that I was easily left behind. I had six hours to watch this happen about a thousand times, so I started to observe that I was effectively stopping and starting a lot. That is, I was on my brakes more into corners and this of course meant that I was wasting energy that these other guys were somehow conserving. The problem is that I could see not real difference in how we cornered, save for the fact that they came out much faster than I did. I'd love to hear some advice on maintaining that momentum.

This is a common problem among mountain bikers. This rider is braking too late into the corner, stopping all forward momentum at the apex and then having to use burst speed (that robs energy) to get out of the turn at speed. The other riders are using a more fluid technique in and out of the turns that keeps momentum and energy throughout the turn. So…to fix this issue…let's take a close look at how you should be taking corners while you ride your mountain bike.

How To Turn On A Mountain Bike At Speed

In an effort to squeeze every second of time and ounce of momentum out of our mountain bikes, we need to make every action as fluid as possible. Here are some tips on how you can

take turns on your mountain bike at speed and keep your momentum on the trail.

- **Keep Your Eyes Focused On Where You Want To Go** – When taking a turn at speed on your mountain bike, you need to keep your eyes focused on where you want to go and not on the front tire. The most common mistake among mountain bikers is the want to look at what you are running over and not where you are pointed. I think it is in our human nature to do this (I know I have…and every time I do…my turn is choppy and inefficient), so we have to train ourselves to look forward at our exit instead of 2 inches in front. By looking forward through the turn, your body gets pointed in the right direction and you don't make unnecessary adjustments in your steering throughout the turn.
- **Brake Earlier…Not In The Turn** – As you approach a turn on your mountain bike, you want to adjust your speed before you hit the turn and accelerate through it. The second most common mistake in taking turns at speed on your mountain bike is braking too late so that your hardest braking force is being applied at the apex of the turn. At the apex of the turn, you want to be carry momentum not killing all of it, so by adjusting your speed beforehand…you are able to concentrate on capitalizing on the momentum you are keeping by increasing speed instead of slamming the power to the ground in an attempt to get going again. Ideally, you want to be off the brakes throughout the entire turn and in the pedals exploding out with your forward motion as soon as you get pointed straight.
- **It's All About The Line** – Especially in tight turns on the trail, you want to straighten

your line out as much as possible. When I take turns on my mountain bike, I imagine myself as a race car on the track. By coming in wide and not on the inside line, you are able to keep your speed much better than if you try to cut the turn short. In turns that have a natural berm, it is important to stay in that berm and let it carry you around the turn. With tight switchbacks and off camber corners, I will come in wide…meet the turn at the apex and use that straight shot out of the turn as a way to increase my momentum and speed.

- **You And Your Bike Are Not One** – When you are taking turns at speed, you and your bike need to move independently of each other as you navigate the turn. The more you can adjust your body weight on the bike to compensate for traction…the better. If you stiffen up and keep your body moving on the exact same plane as your bike, you are going to run into trouble as you try to keep speed but end up with a choppy mess. With high speed downhill runs, I always try to imagine a triangle as I keep my head and hands as the points and lean the bike inward independently of my body applying force downward (pushing the bike against the trail for speed and traction). It is also a great idea – especially on downhill turns – to keep your weight back and let the fork pull you through the turn. If you have your weight forward, you are going to kill momentum and make the front end twitchy to the point you are going to want to hit your front brake.
- **Speed And Your Tires Are Your Friend** – There is a fine line between too little and too much speed, but if you take the turn with planning…speed should be your friend as you explode out the other end. You need to have trust in your tires and suspension

that they are going to grab the trail and keep you upright. By going to slow without that trust, you are killing all chance of speed out of the turn without the aid of your forward momentum.

- **If You Get Into Trouble…Use The Rear Brake And Wheel** – If you feel yourself coming in too hot or getting off line, do your best to stay off the front brake if possible. You can use the rear brake and a little tire skid to turn the bike into the right direction and not kill the speed you are so desperately trying to keep. The trail builders out there will hate this tip…but it works. Your rear brake and tire are going to be your savior in keeping the bike pointed in the right direction. The front brake is just going to bring you to a straight stop.

So there you have it! My tips on keeping speed and momentum on your mountain bike as you take turns on your favorite trail. Hopefully it helps you keep the speed you are looking for without wasting that precious energy that gets us to the end of our rides.

Improving Your Balance for Better Riding

Balance can be one of the most important skills to improve on your bike. Have you ever seen a rider on the road or trail come to a complete stop without getting off the bike? While this may look like a cool trick, it is actually a very useful tool on the trail, and it is a great way to hone your balancing skills on the bike.

On iBikeRide.com, there is a video and instructions on how to practice your track standing skills.

Step 1
Find a slight hill incline where you are out of the way of other people and the visual noise associated. Ride up to the hill very slowly and allow the bike to come to a stop. At this stop you will slowly have brought your front wheel into a right angle turn.

Step 2
There are now three body weight positions to achieve at the same time (or near enough). Firstly as you have brought your handlebar turned to the right you will be standing crouched over the bike with your upper body weight forward. Your upper body weight will pivot on your left arm and left handlebar side.

Secondly (at the same time) your right foot will be flat on the pedal and pushing force into it. The pedal does not need to be pushed right down just weight distributed forcibly on it

Thirdly your back weight will pivot to the very left of the bike. In simple terms move your

bum to the left over the saddle and feel your back weight pivot here. Check out the video and rest of the instructions on iBikeRide.com.

Track Standing got it's name by being a technique that track racers used.

Track Standing According to Wikipedia

> The track stand is a technique that bicycle riders can use to stay balanced on their bicycles by holding their weight equally on both feet and while moving only minimal distances. The term originated from use of the technique by track cyclists prior to starting, or as a tactic in track sprinting whereby riders will initially ride very slowly and maneuver across the track in an effort to get their rival to take the lead so that they can then draft or slipstream behind, conserving energy for the final sprint.
>
> Other cyclists also use the technique: road cyclists use it to stop in traffic, mountain bikers use it in terrain to determine a path and BMX cyclists use it in preparation for tricks.

How does this help you on the trail?

When you learn how to balance your body with your bike, you are improving the way you ride. This connection between the bike and the rider is crucial in technical riding.

Improved balance will help you in all areas…Including:

- Climbing
- Riding over obstacles
- Fast descents
- Crowded group rides
- Overall riding

The goal is to have a better overall feel on the bike, and nothing helps that better than better balance. When you feel more at one with the bike, you ride with more confidence and exert less energy. Better balance will also give you the ability to pick better lines and recover from mistakes. Practicing your balance techniques will make you a better rider, no matter what skill level. Find a place near your house and try it. Each time, try to go longer than the last. You will notice the benefit on the trail almost instantly if you work on this simple technique. Now go out there and track stand!

Staying Light on the Bike

One of the things that greatly improves my riding is to constantly remind myself to stay like on the bike. The general premise of staying light is remembering that you are supposed to be working with the bike on the trail…not against it.

I am sure everyone has seen a "heavy rider". This has nothing to do with the rider's weight, but how they handle the bike. Every hit is taken sitting down, they are getting bounced around all over the place on the trail and they normally complain about rocks and trail features. The reason they are having such a bad time is because they are expecting the bike to do all of the work for them.

Today, we have numerous suspension designs that not only smooth out the trail, but they also allow us to ride with more control and speed than ever before. Dual suspension bikes were never designed with full time seating in mind. When you ride heavy, you ride slower and more out of control by fully relying on the bike.

"Staying light on the bike" is a concept that is pretty easy to understand. While riding the trail, I am looking ahead of me for obstacles, descents, flats and climbs. As these approach, experiment with the bike and your weight to manipulate the bike and suspension and see what makes the ride harder or easier.

Here are some examples from my own riding experience.

- **Flowy Sections** – I am constantly loading and unloading the suspension to smooth out the ride. This creates better grip and faster cornering while still under control. During these sections, you should almost never be seated on the bike.
- **Climbs** – Seated climbing is not a time to forget about staying light. Get used to lofting the front end over roots and rocks. Sometimes you will even lift out of the saddle to make the rear tire clear objects easier.
- **Downhills** – Arm/leg pump…you should be compressing the suspension a lot during these runs. Bring the bike down when you need ultimate traction and unload it for obstacles to take the edge off. Your tires will engage the soil much better and your ride will be a lot less bumpy than before.

I know what you are thinking (beginner riders), this sounds like a lot more work. In reality, it isn't. Keeping your body on the bike while "riding heavy" requires much more energy than "riding light." You will also increase your skill level faster by keeping these things in mind. This is something that all riders are working on and never perfect.

Looking Down the Trail

Unless you are in a very technical section, the best strategy is to focus on the trail farther ahead of you instead of what is right in front of your tire. When you only focus on the section of trail that you are about to hit, you end up making unnecessary corrections that throw the bike off line. The result is slower, harsher riding.

When you are riding down the trail, try to focus farther ahead. This will smooth out your line and let you prepare for corrections on the bigger obstacles. Often, you will find that most of the objects you corrected for in the past aren't even felt under the bike. Even the ones you do feel, were better handled by keeping the bike straight.

I have found far off trail focus is essential during really fast runs where you have to plan ahead more than you would for climbing, flats and slower downhills. If you get caught with your eyes following the front tire, fast turns, rocks and roots can catch you by surprise and cause serious mistakes.

Next time you are riding really focus on which section of the trail you are watching. Try to adjust this vision closer and farther away depending on the trail conditions. As you get tired when you ride, the tenancy is going to be to keep your head and eyes down. During this time it is even more important to keep your head and eyes up to plan ahead.

How to Attack a Rock Garden

Rock gardens provide an incredible rush and a challenge. There is something about blasting over a section of trail that you never thought you would be able to ride. The feel of the suspension soaking up every bump as you wonder if that next rock is going to throw you OTB or off your line is exhilarating. How do we tame these beasts on the trail?

What Is A Rock Garden?

A rock garden is a technical trail feature that is more rock than it is trail. These can be man made or natural to the landscape. Known by some to only be on downhill trails, rock gardens are becoming increasingly popular among xc trial builders as our definition of the xc bike changes. With the introduction of the light trail bike, riders are able to successfully ride more features due to the aid of technology. Rock gardens not only increase your technical riding ability, but they add excitement to the ride.

How Do You Ride A Rock Garden?

Now that you know what a rock garden is…how do you ride one? Conditions will vary depending on the trail, but there are certain rules that you can carry with you on just about every set.

- **Speed Is Your Friend** – When you ride through a rock garden, momentum is who you cuddle up to late at night. Carry as much speed as you are comfortable with straight into the rocks. Most rock gardens require you to be on your toes, so pedaling to gain

back speed and momentum may not be an option. Your beginning speed will have to carry you through the entire run.

- **Pick A Line And Stick With It** - When approaching a rock garden…especially for the first time…pick a line and stick with it. It might not be the perfect line, but if you keep the front wheel straight and let the bike do it's job, you will probably make it through.
- **Double Clutch** - If you do have to pedal to make it through to the end, double clutch the pedals where possible. What is double clutching? It is producing forward motion by short, explosive pedal strokes instead of full revolutions. In many cases, you are only moving the pedals up and down several degrees. In really long gardens, you will have to use full pedal revolutions to get all the way through. Plan this carefully so you do not strike a rock during your spin.
- **Trust The Bike** – You have to trust that the bike's suspension will do it's job. Today's rides are built to handle much more abuse than the average rider will deliver. Hit the garden at speed, keep the bike straight and let it soak up the hits.
- **Keep Your Weight Back** – No one wants to go over the bars into a bunch of rocks. To prevent this and have better success accomplishing your goal, keep your weight back and centered over the rear suspension. This allows the front fork to soak up the hits, but it also keeps the bike straight while keeping you from flying through the air.
- **Keep Your Arms And Legs Bent** - Your best suspension is your body. While riding

any feature, you should keep your body limber and use your arms and legs as your secondary suspension. If you stiffen up, the bike will bounce off its line and you'll go down.

- **Hit The Garden Straight On!** - There are some exceptions to this rule, but in most cases you are going to want to hit a rock garden straight on. If you try to pick the "cleanest" line through, you are probably not going to make it.
- **Turning** - If the garden is long or around a turn, use slow gradual movements to turn the bike. Do not make sudden quick adjustments where possible.

9 times out of 10…rock gardens never ride as rough as they look. If you are one of those riders with a 5.5" travel bike and really want to see what it is capable of, hit that rock garden you have always passed with these tips. The results are going to surprise you.

***Note**: The same tips that apply to riding rock gardens generally apply to riding really technical sections of trail that include roots, rocks and other trail features that want to throw you off your line.*

Need More Confidence? Get Some Extra Protection

For some riders (me included), you might want some extra, lightweight protection while trying new features. I use the Kyle Straight knee pads from 661 with their Chicken Wing elbow

pads. I needed something that would add protection for my knees but be comfortable enough for all day epics. The Kyle Strait's from 661 fit the bill perfectly, and they are now part of my "for every ride" gear. As an added bonus, they keep your knees warmer during the winter months but aren't so warm that they are too hot in the summer.

Rocky Mountain Bike Trail Techniques

Whatever goes up, must come down, so now that we have climbed that rocky section of trail on our mountain bikes, it is time to blast down the other side and descend this rocky section of singletrack with confidence and ease. When I started drafting up the article on how to climb rocky mountain bike trails, the original thought was to talk about going down and coming up in the same article. After I realized the subject was too large for one post, I split it into two…so here we are.

How To Descend Rocky Mountain Bike Trails

For many, getting up is the easy part of rocky singletrack. You can pick your way up, the speed is slower and the technical aspect of the riding keeps your attention as you head up the hill. When you start to head down, gravity and momentum want to keep pushing your bike forward, so descending rocky mountain bike trails can be nerve racking for some mountain bikers. The following tips are not only going to help you with your rocky descent fears, but help you keep control as you head down the hill. With time, this will get much easier and you will be blasting down the mountain before you know it.

Loose Body and Loose Grip Is Key – You are going to want your mountain bike to float underneath you. If you are stiff with a white knuckle grab on the bars, whenever an unexpected hit comes from a rock, you are going to get thrown from your line and – sometimes – thrown from the bike. By keeping your elbows bent, legs bent and grip loose on the bars (you won't let go…I promise), the bike is more fluid under your body and is able to take unexpected trail events without throwing you off like you are in a rodeo.

Let The Bike Do The Work – This really goes hand in hand with the tip above. You want the bike to move left, right, front and back as you head down the rocky hill. As you keep your body upright, the bike should be taking the hits and moving independently of where your body is situated. The idea is to have the bike take the misdirection and you bring it back on line. If you are taking every single hit exactly like the bike is…it is going to be a long bumpy ride down the hill.

Keep Your Weight Centered – Again…if you and your bike are in a death grip, things are going to go badly. Keep your weight centered on the mountain bike and slightly rearward. The last thing you want to be is caught in a situation where the front tire hits a rock and your weight is caught too far forward. We have all been there once before…you end up flying up and over the bars. When you are laying down seeing nothing but nice blue sky…you wonder…what the hell just happened?! I can tell you what happened…you had your weight too far forward. Especially when things get really steep, continue to move your body backwards and centered. By doing that, you will keep the bike much more stable in the rough stuff.

Speed Is Your Friend – What most riders do not know is that having some speed through the rocks actually helps you tremendously. If you are trying to pick your way through the rocks slowly, your wheels are going to want to jump into every crack and crevice they can find to stop your momentum. If you keep some speed, you actually end up rolling up and over these gaps instead of straight into them. Let loose a little bit and try it out. You will be very surprised with the results.

When In Doubt…Hit It Straight - Just as you do with climbing rocky sections of mountain bike trail, you need to attack sections. When you are not sure of the line, get your weight back, centered and hit it will some speed straight on. Do not worry about the perfect line or what is going to happen, just hit it straight with confidence. You will be very surprised what your your bike will pull you through in the end. Far too often, we do way too much thinking about the "perfect line" when we could just hit something straight on with fantastic results.

Let Some Air Out Of Your Tires – The #1 mistake I see mountain bikers do when tackling rocky sections of mountain bike trail is pumping up their tires. Bad idea! I know what you are trying to do and I am telling you now that you are working against yourself. The fear of pinch flatting is going to make you bounce off of every single rock on that trail and it is going to ruin rocky, technical riding for you. Let some air out of those tires so that the ride is not only softer, but now you have a TON of grip to help you down the hill. As a reference, I run 26 psi on 26″ tires and 24psi on 29″ tires in the rocks at 185-190 lbs. I know some of you are thinking – right now – holy s@!t…I don't even run that on groomed trails! Well…guess what…the old school way of thinking with narrow, thin walled tires is gone. Today's mountain bike tires are wider and can handle a lot more abuse. That increased volume – unlike the 1.8's we used to run in the old days – allows you to run a lot lower pressures than previously. Start using that to your advantage.

Wear Pads – I wear 661 Kyle Strait knee pads on almost every ride. If you are nervous about going down and hitting a knee or elbow, invest in some good, comfortable pads to help with your confidence. There is nothing wrong with throwing on some extra protection.

Ride Light…Not Heavy – This has been causally mentioned in some of the other tips, but make a conscious effort to "ride light" on your bike. Visualize yourself floating above and around your rig instead having all of your weight on the suspension at all times. The easiest and best way to do this is to weight and un-weight during sections of the trail. Really use the suspension to dig into areas you need traction and lift up on rougher areas to help the bike skip over the top. This constant push and pull you do with your mountain bike will help you down the hill much smoother and faster.

As you can see from these mountain biking riding tips, there is a lot you can do to make riding rocky, technical downhills a lot more fun than they used to be. You – basically – just have to go against what your mind wants you to do and do what the bike really wants you to do. For this rider, there is nothing better than a good, technical, rocky section of trail. You can go ride the groomed highway all you want…but if you want to be a better mountain biker, you are going to have to challenge what you consider normal from time to time. You never know… it could become your favorite style of riding like it has for me. At the very least, you will be able to ride these sections a lot better at your favorite trail.

Climbing Rocky, Technical Trails

When the trail takes a turn and gets full of rocks to the point you have forgotten what dirt looks like, you riding style has to change as you climb that technical trail on your mountain bike. For many riders – if your typical mountain bike trails are not rock filled – there can be a steep learning curve as you bounce around trying to find your comfort zone. In the past, I

have discussed tackling rock gardens, but how do we settle in for the long haul and navigate long climbs that are filled with rocks that are primed and ready to throw us off our line and eventually off our mountain bikes?

Just a side note: In my opinion, rocks and technical lines are what make mountain biking better than any other cycling discipline. The better you get at riding this kind of terrain, the more you are going to search it out looking for more. Riding technical, rock filled trails can be one of the most rewarding rides at the end of the day. For this rider…it doesn't get much better. Don't get me wrong…I like fast and flowy as much as the next rider, but nothing beats the rocks.

Climbing Your Mountain Bike on Rocky Trails

Climbing on really rocky mountain biking trails can prove to be even more difficult than blasting down them. This slow speed, high level of technical difficulty climb can be defeating for even the best of mountain bikers. As you pick your way up the hill just begging for the end, here are some tips that will help you try to keep your climb dab free.

Make the climb a contest with yourself - Technical climbing on your mountain bike is completely a head game. Typically, you will give into temptation and get thrown off your line from not paying attention or by simply giving up. As you pick your way up that rocky climb, play a mental game with yourself (or the other riders with you) by seeing if you can keep the

climb dab free. You will actually be surprised how a simple change of attitude can drastically improve your results.

Stay out of granny! – If you can – stay out of your easiest gears as much as possible. As you climb rocky, technical terrain, you are going to need the occasional power boost to get up and over larger roots and rocks. If you are in granny and the biggest ring in your cassette, you are going to find that the front end will want to rise and you will lose control. You will also not have enough speed or torque to muscle over the larger obstacle, so – instead – you will sway back and forth throwing you off your line. Unless the climb is just stupid steep and I have no other choice, I try to stay in the middle ring as long as possible.

Pick a line and power through – Through most of the climb, you are going to be picking every inch of your line carefully, but – sometimes – it is better to pick a straight line and power through small sections. If you are coming up on a section of the rocky, technical climb that does not seem to have a defined line, hit it straight and hard. You are going to be surprised what a little bit of momentum and drive will carry you over. Be sure to gear down and recover after bursts like this so you can be ready for the next.

Plan your climb – The temptation during long rocky climbs is to look 2 inches in front of your tire at all times. The problem with this method is that you might get yourself on the wrong side of the trail for future obstacles. Every technical climb is a balance between navigating what is directly in front of you and planning for what is ahead. As much as you can, look up and see what lays before you as you continue to pick your way through the rocks.

Constantly shift your weight and the bike – Keep your grip loose and concentrate on staying light on the bike. If you try to take on these climbs with a death grip on the bar and a rigid stance on the bike, you are just going to fail over and over again. Make sure to keep your body and the bike moving independently of each other as you will need to use some body english to keep the bike on track.

Don't be afraid to stand up – Standing up and shifting your weight can get you up and over larger rocks and roots easily. Just be careful not to throw your weight too far forward to the point you lose traction on the rear wheel. The occasional bunny hop up and over larger rocks to avoid washed out, looser sections of trail can keep your line straighter and get you up the hill faster.

For this rider, I find climbing technical, rocky, rooty, debris filled climbs a lot more fun than your typical groomed, boring climb. They not only improve your technical riding skills dramatically, but they keep your attention all the way up the climb as you navigate the mess in route to your destination. You will actually be surprised how much these types of mountain biking climbs actually improve your downhilling ability as you learn to move the bike up and around obstacles independently of your body. This fluid motion between bike and rider is what will make you smooth and fast once things get pointed down and gravity takes over.

#1 Way To Get Over Descending Fears

Downhill mountain biking on dedicated DH runs and the singletrack stretch on your favorite trail can be nerve racking for many riders. The bike wants to naturally carry speed down the hill so – when you see technical trail features or obstacles – the first reaction for those that are not comfortable is to grab the brakes and slowly roll over. I am here to give you some great news. There is 1 way you can drastically improve your downhill abilities and tackle that technical trail feature (TTF) starting on your next ride.

Follow Another Mountain Bikers Rear Wheel

This mountain biking riding tip works for all kinds of downhill mountain biking. Whether you are at Windrock ready to take on a ladder drop or your cross country trail trying to get through a technical section, following another mountain biker's rear wheel is the #1 way to conquer the descending fears and tackle the obstacle.

Following the rear wheel of another mountain biker actually goes against everything the fear in your brain wants to do when looking at this section of trail or obstacle. Naturally, you want as much room around you so you can see everything and the last thing you want is another rider directly in front of you.

But…by following another rider…you are accomplishing several things for yourself that you can not do alone.

- **You can visually see the results directly before you attempt** – A lot of mountain

biking is seeing the ride in your head before it happens. Have you ever had one of those rides where you knew you were going to wreck that day and you did? Same thing. Now…you are physically visualizing the success before you hit, so your brain is already turned on.

- **You take all of the calculation out of the run** – When you sit there and stare at a drop, rock garden or technical section of trail, your mind is going through a thousand calculations on where to pedal, where to brake, how much speed you need, etc. By following someone else that already knows how to ride that section successfully, you are taking all of that calculation out and focusing on what you should be – riding. After you complete that section successfully, you will remember what it took and apply that to the next run.
- **You are riding instead of starring** – You can stare any trail feature in the face for hours before you finally get that lump out of your throat and hit it. By following another mountain biker, you are taking action instead of delaying to the point you just turn around and go home. The longer you stare at something, the harder it is going to look even if it ends up being the easiest drop you have ever done in your life. Stop starring and ride.

It is really that easy. In your quest to become a better mountain biker and tackle trail obstacles and features that you used to deem impossible, find a rider who has successfully ridden that section of trail and hold on to that rear wheel. Who knows…you just might end

up being that rider that others are latching onto over time. 99% of riding is all in our heads so we have to find ways of getting around our own thinking. The rest will be taken care of by our bike and our helmets.

Mountain Biking Downhill

Conquering a steep hill on your mountain bike can be extremely dangerous if you do not know what you are doing. If you come across a hill that appears to have a larger incline than 45-percent, you will need to use special riding positions to stay upright. Here are a few tips for making it down safely, learning from my bruises and damaged skin.

Riding The Decline

As you approach the incline, you should aim for a fall line. Simply put, you should be headed straight down the hill instead of at an angle. This will make it easier for you to center your balance on your mountain bike while attacking the incline. Heading straight downhill will also help keep your tires from slipping.

Relax, stay calm, and stay focused. You need to relax and not stiffen up when you are headed down a steep hill. You want your arms and legs to be loose, actually as loose as possible — without losing grip for the fact you are conquering the greatest incline you have likely attempted. Remember to say loose! This will help you absorb bumps and impacts your suspension does not take on for you. You will need to focus on your intended path and keep your eyes about thirty feet in front of you front tire. This is to make sure you find the best path around rocks, bumps, dips, logs and other unexpected obstacles. You should avoid fixating on any specific objects, because you will increase your chances of running into them.

As you approach the edge of your newly found hill, use your arms to push the handlebars away from your body. This will assist in preventing your momentum from throwing you over

the bars and into the dirt. You want to keep your teeth remember. You should place your butt over the rear tire and chest directly above your seat.

Braking On The Decline

You will also need to know how to effectively brake when mountain biking down a steep incline. If you ride the front brake too hard, you will likely go over the handlebars. It is best to apply more force to your rear brake and allow your front tire and fork to do all the tracking. In steeper spots, you may want to flutter your front and rear brakes, this refers to the oscillating increased pressure on the brake versus slamming them forcefully.
Your front brake is definitely your greatest ally in stopping or slowing down, but keep the bike neutral; your arms and legs loose; body and chest aligned properly; and stay focused on your mental track down the hill and you will realize it is easier than people make it look.

As you make your approach to ground level after the hill, you should return to your normal riding position. You should pull the bike back under you as you level out. You may also want to pull up on the handlebars as you approach the bottom of the hill. This will help prevent an accident caused by your front tire slamming into the change in incline, forcing your face to the hardened substrate below you.. trust me.. it hurts!

Biking Skills You Should Know

If you know how to ride a bicycle, then you can join in on the exciting experience of mountain biking: conquering steep hills, jumping cliffs and scratching up your skin. Mountain biking is a little more risky than regular bike riding. Before you decided to hit the trails, you should have some basic mountain bike riding skills mastered.

You can practice your basic skills anywhere. I suggest a nearby park, a modest bike path, a nearby school, or around your own neighborhood. Mainly, you are looking for a practice location that has some of the elements of a scaled down mountain bike ride.

Practice Your Footwork on the Pedals

Once you find an ideal location, you are going to want to focus on your footwork. You are going to practice moving your foot off the pedal. Initially, you are going to want to do this while sitting on the bike and have the other foot place on the ground. After you get a good feel for this, pedal around and practice taking your foot off the pedal, then putting it back on again. This skill may take you longer to master if your bike is equipped with toe clips or clip shoe and foot pedals.

Make Sure You are Properly Aligned

Next, you are going to want to insure you are in the best possible position on your mountain bike. Your position will give you maximum performance and ultimately a bit more comfortable experience. Ride around on your mountain bike and take note of your

positioning. Your arms should be slightly bent and loose. The seat height needs to be properly adjusted, if it is not already. You know the seat is at the right height when you have 70-90 percent extension of your leg and the end of every pedal stroke. You should always keep your body relaxed, do not lock your knees or stiffen your elbows. If you discover that you have to lock your knees or elbows, you need to adjust your position or seat height.

Gear Shifting

The next mountain bike skill you need to master is shifting gears. The higher the gear, the harder it will be to push the pedals, but higher gears allow for better acceleration. The lower the gear, the easier it is to pedal. The lower gears will assist you when you need to climb an incline. As you approach a steep hill, it is best to shift into a lower gear before you get to the hill, versus waiting until you are on the hill.

Learning to Coast/Ride Neutral

You will also want to learn how to coast on your mountain bike. You can master this skill by standing up on your pedals, with your butt off the seat and weight slightly adjusted for comfort and performance. Remember to keep your arms bent, knees loose, and elbows unlocked. Once you are comfortable doing this, you want to practice shifting your weight toward the rear of the mountain bike. Shifting your weight forward while climbing a hill and moving it over the rear tire while in a downhill position.

Learning to Pedal While Standing

Pedaling, while standing up, is an essential mountain biking skill. First, lift yourself off the seat. Next, stand up on the pedals. Last, you are going to just crank them around full revolutions. The best way to practice this skill is to use higher gears on flat ground and lower gears while conquering an incline.

Using Curbs

When mountain biking, you will constantly be going from one level of terrain to another. The best way to learn how to make a smooth transition between these terrains is to practice with obstacles of varying height in your practice location. Often, curbs are available at different heights. While going a reasonable speed; stand up and coast from the upper level of the curb to the lower level. Once you are comfortable doing this, keep repeating it at different speeds and different heights, if available. You want to keep practicing until it becomes an automatic, effortless, and comfortable motion.

After you practice these skills, you will be able to hit the mountain bike trails with a bit more knowledge and skill. You will not be quite an expert, so use your discretion when faced with obstacles and challenges you might not be familiar with. You will be confident over time in your riding and less likely to injure yourself. These skills take time to perfect, so be patient. However, once you perfect them, they will become second nature to you. Remember,

whether just practicing, or on the trails, you should always wear a helmet and protective gear.

Don’t be a dork, protect yourself!

Clean Up Pedal Stroke

There is one common goal among all aspects of cycling that will make you a better rider almost instantly…cleaning up your pedal stroke will apply more power to the wheels no matter what discipline of riding you call your own. The fact is that every rider should focus on how they can more efficiently transfer the power from their legs to the cranks -> chain -> rear wheel -> tire -> ground.

What does a more efficient pedal stroke do for you?

- Faster over longer rides
- Strengthens muscles in the legs that improve balance and technical riding ability
- Faster with less effort
- And a whole host of other immeasurable benefits…

The Typical Beginner Pedal Stoke

The typical beginner pedal stroke is best explained by looking at a square. After a little bit of ride time on their new, shiny clipless pedals (and some personal interaction with the ground!), the rider starts to realize that they can get more

power to the rear wheel by pulling up on the backside of their pedal stroke as they push down on the front. This creates a pull/mash technique as you can see by my archaic illustration below. Many seasoned mountain bikers are still using this pull/mash technique to this day because they haven't taken a serious look at how to create more power using their current fitness level and energy. That is why making a conscious effort to increase certain aspects of your cycling is so important.

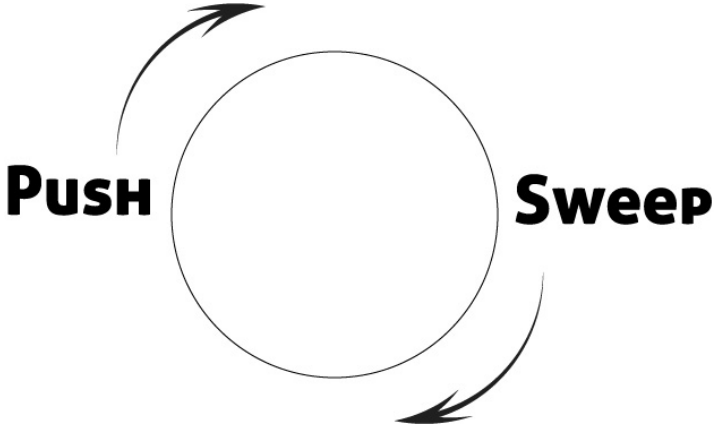
What is wrong with the pull/mash square stroke technique?

While the pull/mash stroke is more efficient than and mash/mash (only ever pushing down), you still have tons of dead space in between motions that you could be transferring power to the rear wheel. This waste is time and energy that you can never get back during your ride. The key is figuring out how to use all of your pedal stroke to generate energy to the rear wheel to create a more enjoyable ride on the trail or road.

So what should I be doing while pedaling?

As you start to analyse how you are pedaling on the trail, you need to picture, in your mind, circular movements. Makes sense right? Your already pedaling in circles…you just didn't actually realize that you were pedaling squares. Some of the best advice I was given while improving my pedal stroke was to imagine sweeping the bottom of your stroke with your feet.

By sweeping the bottom of your stroke (pulling backwards immediately following pushing



down in a smooth motion), you are getting rid of one of the corners of the square…the bottom, right corner and turning the bottom dead space into power. In turn, by getting rid of the bottom, right corner…you are effectively removing the top, left corner in the process. Your concentration is on creating power at all stages of the stroke and you are now sweeping the bottom and pushing the top. While I am pedaling…I mentally visualize small circles as I sweep and push. The mash/pull comes naturally already as it should for you because your body is already trained to create power in that direction. You are now training your body to create power in the dead areas of your stroke to become more efficient.

198's Pedaling Confession

I do have a confession to make. I have been riding mountain bikes…seriously…for 12+ years. It took getting on a road bike over the past couple of months to fully realize how badly I needed to clean up my pedal stroke on my fat tire rides. I had a ton of dead space in my pedal stroke, and this became painfully obvious as I started to throw my leg over that 16 lbs, skinny tired machine. Through my work on the road bike, I have drastically improved my mountain bike pedaling technique.

Now…the good news is that you can improve your pedaling technique without having to get

on a road bike. Next time you settle in for a long, extended climb, make the effort to focus on your pedal stroke under load. As you start to visualize moving in circles instead of squares, you will start to notice that you are climbing much more efficiently. In the beginning, you might be a little sore after the ride as you start to condition different leg muscles, but the more you get used to it…the more it will transfer into all aspects of your riding (its just as important in dh) and you will become a better overall rider that can ride for longer distances.

Technical Trail Obstacles and Features

You are riding along on your favorite trail. You come past that same technical trail feature or obstacle that you pass every time with the same thought…"I'll try that next time". Only… next time never comes. You are always passing that same obstacle and you are always waiting for next time. It is a proven fact that stretching your comfort zone on your mountain bike improves your bike handling and riding skills, but more importantly, it improves your confidence on the bike and raises the bar of what you think is difficult to ride.

I think we can all agree that we want to become better mountain bikers over time. Each of our goals and riding styles can be completely different, but to get better you have to stretch your limits of what you consider comfortable riding. So…when you come across that technical trail feature, how can you overcome your mind and conquer the beast within? Check out these tips that will help you get over the hump…

Tips to Conquer that Trail Obstacle or Feature

- **Just do it** – The old Nike cliché really does work. The fact is that our brains are 99% of the problem. Our bike has far more capabilities than we do and we have more ability that we care to admit. The #1 thing that gets in the way is ourselves. The easiest way to get over the constant beating of your mind keeping you from mountain biking super stardom is to visualize the entire sequence. Stare at the obstacle or trail section and literally visualize a perfect run. Once you have this image cemented into your head…hit it! You will be pleasantly surprised with the results.

- **Follow a fellow mountain biker** – Have a friend with riding abilities close to yours that seems to have zero issue with this fantastic section of mountain biking trail bliss? Next time you guys are riding together, follow his rear tire through the section. This will show you first hand the exact speed and line you need to take to make it through safely. Sometimes the easiest way is to follow the leader.
- **Do not stare at it!** – This goes hand in hand with #1. The more you stare at something, the more you give your mind a chance to talk you out of it. If you need to take a quick look to find the line or see what you are dropping into…that is fine. If you sit there and stare at it for 10 minutes, you might as well just ride on because you are just finding a way to talk yourself out of it.
- **Pad up!** – There are companies like 661 that make comfortable padding or armor that you can wear on lighter bikes without it hindering your day. They can be easily packed up in you favorite hydration pack or worn all day. Wearing some sort of padding may give your the comfort level necessary to hit that technical trail feature with ease.
- **Session** – If at first you don't succeed…try, try again. The art of sessioning will make you a considerably better rider over time. Do not be happy with failure, but instead…use it as motivation to do better! Practice harder sections of trail to make them easier…then, when you come across sections of trail that are harder that the last, it won't be as big of a deal. Sessioning is also an incredible way to enjoy mountain biking with friends as you all try to conquer that last "un-rideable"

technical trail feature.

Technical trail features and obstacles can really bring your riding enjoyment and stoke to a whole new level. The feeling of accomplishment and the desire to try it again brings a happiness and satisfaction to trail riding that can only be found by pushing the limits of what we consider “normal riding” as a mountain biker. Do you have a section of trail that you consider a must-do next time and next time never really comes? It is time to give it a try…

How to Wreck Your Mountain Bike

A wreck in mountain biking is not an "if" it's a when. We are involved in a sport that we know the risks going into the action. How far we decide to push ourselves past their limits is up to us, but even under the most conservative circumstances, wrecks still happen. There are certain tips that can keep the injuries at a minimum when you start to go down.

- **Do not put your hands straight out in front of you to brace the fall.** This is a sure way to break both wrists.
- **Kick the mountain bike away from you whenever possible.** The last thing you want tangled up with you while you are going down is a huge hunk of metal. The quicker you get the bike away from you…the better.
- **Roll with the fall as much as possible away from your mountain bike.** The more you roll, the less blunt force you have against your body. Less hard hits = less injury.
- **Wear protective gear while mountain biking in extreme conditions.** I go a little overboard in this area because of previous incidents. I have numerous scars and torn ligaments, and I have seen more open wounds than I can count. Wearing knee pads on a cross country ride has become my normal mode of operation. It just isn't worth using a weeks vacation from work anymore to nurse an injury. Also, make sure that all of your protective gear fits correctly.
- **Do not start riding again until you are sure that you are not seriously injured.** A lot of times your body gets such a rush over the fall that you can become numb to the pain. Give yourself a second before you get back on the bike to make sure that

you don't cause further injury.

- **Carry basic first aid supplies in your hydration pack.** Carry any lightweight supplies that you can get away with. Band-aids, gauze, Neosporin, etc. These can help you when you go down, but more importantly, they can help fellow riders on the trail.

Like I said before, wrecking is part of mountain biking. In most cases, I actually end up learning more from my wrecks than my accomplishments. Success is nothing but a bunch of failures strung together, so next time you wreck…take a really close look at why and how to do it differently next time. After each bad wreck, I always return to the scene of the crime. Get rid of those demons as fast as possible and enjoy the feeling of clearing the section that gave you such as issue.

THE TRAIL AND THE RIDE

Image by regularjoe

Riding On Loose Trail Conditions

Depending on where you mountain bike, the fall period can be an interesting riding time. For those of us in the southeast United States, it is a riding season of negotiating all of the leaves that have fallen from our lush trees and onto our singletrack. For those of you in the desert…you do not have this worry…but anyone around a massive amount of trees knows…this time of year is like riding on ice skates! You can't see the trail, so negotiating obstacles is a combination of trail knowledge and 99% guess work. Couple that with the slide out effect of the leaf ground cover and you are left with treacherous riding conditions.

How To Ride Leaf Covered Trails & Keep Rubber Side Down

So how do we ride our mountain bikes in the ice skating conditions of fall in tree covered singletrack? The following tips will help you keep the rubber side up as you blast your mountain bike down that next section of singletrack bliss.

- **Keep Your Legs and Arms Bent** – You are going to hit unexpected rocks, roots and other objects that want to throw you off your line simply because you can not see them. By keeping your legs and arms bent, you can soak up these unexpected events much easier than if you are all stiffened up on the bike. The idea is to keep all of your motion fluid and work with the changing conditions under your tires. The more fluid your motions…the smoother the ride will be. You will be surprised…little rocks and roots that would be nothing on a normal day will flip the bike up in a split second because you were not ready for it.

- **Keep A Loose Grip On The Bars** – This really goes hand in hand with the tip above, but by keeping a loose grip on the bar…you keep your arms unclenched and ready for changing conditions. This is actually a tip you should take with you during every mountain bike ride. Keeping a loose grip on the handle bar also insures that you do not waste valuable energy on an activity that actually takes away from your riding ability. You exert a lot of fuel white knuckling down the trail.
- **Lean The Bike…Not Your Body** – By leaning the bike independently of your body, you are able to keep your weight centered for optimal traction. This is not a motorcycle where you have a motor to pull you through the turn at mach 5. You require pedal power to get yourself going again and you need to have your body ready to drop the hammer, but still provide grip through the turns. Again, legs and arms bent and search out that line that has traction. If other riders have already been on the trail, you might get lucky and find dirt within the turns.
- **Use The Rear Wheel To Guide You** – In the leaves, you are not going to have the added benefit of a massive amount of front wheel traction when you really dig into corners. In conditions that are overly slippery (like a large amount of leaf cover), I use the rear end of the bike through controlled braking and skidding to turn the bike in the direction I want it to go. If you are going to rely on that front tire to pull you through…get ready to eat dirt.
- **Keep The Bike Straight In "Oh S%$t" Situations** – There is no turning to bail out of mistakes. Your best bet is to ride through it as best you can…straight…and then slow

down. If you try to make abrupt changes in direction in the leaves…be ready to hit the ground. Even if it means riding off the trail (none of you ever do that right?!)…

I actually enjoy riding in the leaves. It adds another unexpected technical aspect that you have to adjust for and – in the end – it makes you a better overall mountain biker. When the leaves hit the ground in the fall, it even makes my local mountain bike trails exciting again. I hear a lot of complaining about them…but I like the added challenge.

Tips for Mountain Biking by Yourself

There will be times that you want to go hit the trail solo and go on a mountain bike ride all by yourself. Typically, we like to ride with at least one other person so that we have help in the rare event that something disastrous happens, but the reality is that we are going to mountain bike by ourselves from time to time. As you start to get ready for your next solo ride on fresh singletrack, take a look at this list to make sure you have all of the basis covered before you hit the trail. This list becomes increasingly important on less trafficked, more remote trail locations.

- **Do you have everything with you?** – Take a look over this post – 14 Must Have Items for Every Ride – Make sure you have everything you need before you hit the trail. Once you are miles away from your car, you are your only support with every spin of your cranks, so it is a long way back if something happens and you are stuck without supplies.
- **Have working knowledge of simple maintenance** – You do not need to know how to completely assemble your mountain bike, but you should know the necessities that will get you home safely. You should know how to change a flat, fix a broken chain, adjust the derailleurs, tighten bolts, etc. If a chain breaks on a technical climb, you are the only one that is there to fix the chain, so it needs to not be your first attempt.
- **Eat before you are hungry and drink before you are thirsty** – On a solo mountain bike ride, you need to stay on top of your hydration and nutrition. By drinking before you are thirsty and eating before you are hungry, you keep your body fueled up for

the ride and prevent crawls back to the car. In all reality, if you start to feel hungry or thirsty, your body is already depleted and it is almost too late. Make a conscience effort to really watch your intake as you ride to prevent dehydration and lack of fuel related cramping or fatigue.

- **Bring extra water and food** - This tip goes hand and hand with the riding tip above. When you go on mountain bike rides by yourself, bring extra water and food just in case. You will be carrying a little bit of extra weight, but the necessary food and water will be there in case something bad happens. If you wreck or get lost, this little bit of extra weight can be a lifesaver.
- **Map or Garmin** – If you are not 100% completely sure where the trail system leads, you need to have a map or GPS device like the Garmin Edge 705. A great day out on the trail can be ruined by getting lost out in the woods.
- **Take it easy** – As much as we all want to hit every obstacle and sweet section of singletrack at full tilt, when you are riding by yourself you need to dial it back and take it easy. This does not mean that you can't ride hard and you might as well get out the cruiser bike, it is just smart not to hit that huge tabletop top on the downhill run. Do you really want to be stuck in the middle of no where with a broken ankle and no help? It is worth enjoying the ride but keeping your ego in check to make it back to the car safely.
- **Bring your cell phone** – Ride in an area that has cell coverage and bring your cell phone. If you wreck and can not move, it is your lifeline to the outside world.

Riding your mountain bike on the trail by yourself can be one of the best rides you have ever had, or the worst day of your life. By keeping these things in mind as you head out on your next solo mountain bike ride, you will be able to keep it enjoyable. When I am out on my solo rides, I find that I get some of my best thinking done as I enjoy the fresh air and the sound of my tread ripping up the dirt. There is something that is completely surreal and calming about getting out and putting some solo miles in, so enjoy the experience and keep it safe.

Bonus Tip: Double and triple check that you have your keys in your pack and secure before you lock your vehicle. It is always a good idea to have a hide-a-key available as well.

Preparing for Long MTB Rides

Over the course of your mountain biking and cycling career, you might get the itch to try to accomplish something unique. You have seen these rides organized before and…in the past… you have glanced by them with the notion that it just isn't for you. Who would want to sign themselves up for that amount of mileage and abuse? It just does not even sound like any fun! Then it hits you…all of the sudden you want to accomplish the feat. Not to show everyone else you can do it, but to prove to yourself that you can complete a mountain or road biking related goal that you have set for yourself. That's right…you are going to get ready for a long ass ride.

Long rides take several forms but these are my two most common abuse filled pedal fests.

There are your typical road centuries that just beg you to find out how many revolutions your legs can really turn.

Ever see those mountain bike ride stats that just make you want to throw up by looking at them? That is because some wacko thought it would be a great idea to do 57 miles of riding in the mountains with 6,500 feet of climbing in one day. Fantastic!

For some…these rides are normal as they prepare for their endurance xc races. For us mere mortals, it is a feat that is conquered only once or twice a year, and to complete it successfully…some preparation needs to be done the weeks prior.

How To Prepare for a Really Long Ride

The following tips are what I do to prepare for these really long suffer-fests in the attempt to finish with my legs and ego still in tact. I try to start this process about 6 weeks before the actual event to get my body used to what is about to happen. If you try to start a week before the event, you are doing yourself no good at all.

- **Start Tweaking the Diet** – I am the king of eating terribly. Ever seen those Toquitos in the gas station that are filled with cheese, bacon and chicken? I love those, but 6 weeks before these long rides…it is time to cut those out of my horrible eating habits. Your body expends a lot of energy breaking down fat and grease filled foods only to find that there is very little nutrition to extract. Yes…I know they taste like heaven but they do little to beef up your bodies reserves. About 6 weeks before these long rides, I start to tweak my diet to include a lot healthier food that my body can actually process and turn into energy. Basically…I follow what my mom used to tell me growing up along with that stupid food pyramid. There are multiple different "programs" out there that will tell you what to eat, but I have found that if you just eat healthy and regularly…that is normally the best bet.
- **Get in More Miles** - There is no substitute for putting in the miles as you prepare for a really long ride. You have to get your legs and lungs used to being in the saddle for an extended period of time. On the weekends, I either ride with other riders that are preparing for the same ride, or I come early and stay late on our regular

weekend outings to get in the extra miles. You need to keep hammering out the miles, but start slow and build up…adding more miles each weekend. I normally don't ever get up to the mileage or elevation change of the actual ride as I want to keep my legs in shape, but I do put on an extra 25-50% at least to get that extra endurance. Have a regular ride on the weekend that does a 17 mile loop? Come an hour or two early and get in a loop before everyone arrives. Now you have turned a 17 mile Saturday ride into a 34 mile ride and you still get to enjoy your weekend stoke.

- **Those Dreaded Hill Repeats** – One thing that will help your finishing ability for those long rides that are just waiting to throw you to the side is building up leg strength. I have found that by having stronger legs before the event, I have a deeper base to pull from during the hard times of the ride. Every now and then, strength can overcome endurance to bring you to the end. Find a hill (we have one in our local freeride area) and start to just climb…descend…climb…descend…rinse and repeat. By doing these hill repeats, you are not only going to be gaining the necessary leg strength, but you will also be gaining endurance. I tend to do these rides on week nights as they are easier to get in a full workout in a shorter period of time.
- **Mentally Prepare for the Ride** – Now…this might sound new age and stupid, but I visualize the ride before it happens to mentally prepare myself. I visualize clearing the hardest climb, spinning while I am tired and I strongly visualize rolling across the finish at the end. In my head, I have already completed the ride successfully and this helps with any pre-ride jitters that want to throw you off. Mentally preparing for

riding is something that I do pretty regularly (especially when it comes to technical riding and stunts) and it really helps my preparation for something out of the ordinary in my riding. Get your head right…and the ride will go great…

Like I mentioned earlier, I tend to start these about 6 weeks prior to my long ride experience. Do I do them perfectly every time? Of course not…I am a recreational rider that likes to challenge what he considers normal from time to time and not a seasoned, trained endurance racer, so I am not going to do this perfectly. The harder I try to stick to this plan, the better my long ride will end up at the end of the period, and I will have another accomplishment that I can put behind me.

Long rides can do a lot for your riding and your confidence on the road or trail. I suggest that everyone does a least one "accomplishment ride" a year to keep things fresh. You will be glad you did…

Miles, Miles and More Miles

You can not expect to be better at any discipline of cycling if you do not log some serious miles. A reoccurring theme throughout this series has been that “practice makes perfect”, so logically…getting a lot of miles under your belt is essential to honing in your mountain biking skills. So now it is time…whether it is a lot of short mileage rides or several long mileage rides…to start racking up the mile count and become a better mountain biker!

What Are We Looking To Accomplish With More Miles?

- **Endurance** – This is a pretty logical conclusion. As you put in more miles, your endurance will increase with time and pedal strokes. Hopefully, you build up a great endurance base that, as a rider, you can build on. This does require regular riding and can be lost with increased time out of the saddle. The good news is that you can get back endurance quicker than you lose it, as long as you don’t wait too long.
- **Experience** – With more saddle time comes more riding experience. With this experience, whether you realize it or not, your brain is recording different encounters and you are learning how to deal with different trail conditions. Ever look back on when you were younger and think, “wow…if I knew then what I knew now?” That is the exact same thing that will happen with your quest to become a better mountain biker.

How Do I Get In The Miles?

Unfortunately, many riders do not have the luxury of getting out on long weekend rides. Even worse, some riders are able to put in serious mountain rides during the week (I hate you guys!). So how does a regular Joe get in the mileage to become a better mountain biker?

- **Road Miles** – Yes, I said it, but it is true. Road bikes can help you become a better mountain biker. Riding a road bike will get your endurance up and improve your pedal stroke technique. The best part about road biking is the ability to leave from your garage and get a serious amount of miles in a short period of time. For those of you with family obligations, this will be a very attractive alternative to improve your mountain biking skills. The bad part (or good depending on how you look at it)…you have to buy another bike and more gear.
- **More Rides At Shorter Distances** – If time is a constraint, try to get in as many rides as possible…even if they are shorter in distance. On the shorter rides, try to keep your heart rate up for longer periods of time. Basically…give yourself a lot less rests. Think of these rides as conditioning bursts that are probably better off done alone. Less talking equals more riding your mountain bike.
- **Get In On a LONG Ride** – Do you have friends that are doing an epic this weekend? It is time to tag along and see if the legs can handle the abuse. For this ride, bring plenty of nutrition and water…even a little bit more than you think you really need.

It is always better to have a little too much than not enough. Pay close attention to pacing yourself throughout the ride so you don't blow it in the first couple of miles. If you are already conditioned to 20+ mile rides…start pushing that envelope…30+ to 40+ to 50+.

Increasing mileage helps with all riding styles as it builds up endurance and experience for different muscle groups to help you become a better mountain biker. Mileage and saddle time will always be your friend! Any rider…from world cup downhill racer to weekend warrior cross country rider…will agree…putting in the miles makes you a become a better mountain biker.

Ride Different Trails

Everyone has their local trail that they have grown to love and know like the back of their hand. Here in lies the major flaw with becoming a better rider on your local trails…YOU KNOW IT LIKE THE BACK OF YOUR HAND! This is great when you are looking for a quick ride or one where you don't have to think. You can put it on autopilot and go through the same routine you are used to doing every Tuesday.

Becoming a better rider is best accomplished by going outside of your comfort zone and away from the norm. Many times, riders will even ride the same trails on the same trail system over and over again.

It is time to step out of that comfort zone…but the real question is why? When you encounter a new trail for the first time, you do not know what to expect. You are on your "A Game" to anticipate your next move. If this trail has different soil conditions, features, elevation, etc… you compensate for these differences. This requires you to use different muscles, techniques and thought patterns to get through and enjoy the ride.

After trying new trails, you will notice that you not only ride your favorite local trail better, but you ride it differently. Without knowing it…you apply the techniques and new found talent to the trail that you know like the back of your hand. You have become a better rider by expanding what your body and mind are comfortable accomplishing.

How Do I Do This?

- **Never Ride A New Trail Alone** - If you are riding a completely new trail system for the first time…never ride it alone. If something happens, you have no idea where you are or how long it takes to get back. More importantly, it is hard to enjoy a ride when you are constantly looking for your next turn. Ride with someone who knows the trail so you can actually enjoy the ride and hit it at speed.
- **Ride Different Trails Within Your Favorite Trail System** – As I said before, sometimes this is as simple as riding new trails within your favorite system. The added advantage to this technique is that you may already know where this trail starts, ends and how long it will take to finish. This allows you to take more liberties than if it was a completely new trail system. It also gives you a completely new view of the trail you know and love.
- **Join Group Rides** – Check your local forum boards or talk to other riding friends. Riding in group rides can get you on trails that you never even knew existed. Add the community aspect and you will get advice and help from fellow riders regarding that trail and your abilities. I have yet to come across a rider that is the best at every aspect of mountain biking. There are pros that can leave you in the dust but are not "pros" at downhilling. There are pro downhillers that learn skills every ride with experienced cross country racers. There are also beginners that learn loads from experienced veterans. Just remember…there is never a best or a worst in group rides…only riders with different talents.

- **Keep An Open Mind** – This is the most important thing to remember. Your misconceptions or fears can hold you back from accomplishing something great. Try to keep an open mind and try new trails that you didn't think you would ever ride. The amount of knowledge and confidence that you can pick up by doing this is fantastic.

Get out and ride something new. It doesn't have to be a long epic. Start small and see how you do, or you can really push yourself and try something long over the weekend. Either way… get out there and ride a new trail. After you ride that trail, go back to your local trail head and see if you feel a difference. The results are going to surprise you.

THE RIDER

Photo by Mon Solo

Pacing Yourself as a Rider

I was reminded yesterday how important it really is to pace yourself. Luckily, nothing bad happened, at least to me, and I got through the ride clean. When you don't pace yourself over the course of the ride, there are several things that are bound to happen.

- You start to ride with your head down.
- You ride seated more often that you should.
- Your mind is not concentrating correctly.
- Reaction time goes down significantly.
- You get into that dreaded "red zone" of beats per minute.

When all of these things add together, bad things happen. Almost all of my bad wrecks are caused by one of two things…getting in over my head or stupid mistakes from overexerting myself. When you get tired on a ride, you make more mistakes than you ever will. This mistakes lead to wrecks that can keep you off the bike for an extended period of time and will probably "bleed" over into your personal life with work and family.

Tips that will help you pace yourself during a ride

- **Stay properly hydrated.** Water is your best friend in the summer and winter. As you sweat, you need to replenish your body with it's natural nutrients to keep going.

- **EAT!** I am the worst about this one, and for no good reason. Food and nutrition will keep you going through rides that you thought you would never be able to finish. You need to bring bars, gels, blocks or anything else that you can comfortably eat while on the ride. I have some friends that bring a 4 course meal, which I think is crazy, but it works for them. Personally, I like using the blocks from Cliff. They are just enough to feel like you ate something, but they are light enough that they don't weigh heavy on your stomach. For long rides, I bring along a honey and peanut butter sandwich.
- **Don't start too fast out of the gate.** I have a bad tendency of wanting to blast off at the trail head. This gets your muscles working extremely hard before they are even warmed up. This can cause "blowing up" for the rest of the ride because of an improper warming up technique. Build up with the ride and you will end up being a lot happier at the end.
- **Keep the ego at home.** When a strong rider is in front, you have nothing to prove by trying to hang with them. Let the other ego riders have climbing contests, you want to enjoy the entire ride…not just one little portion of it. Everyone just needs to ride at their own pace. Even strong racers will tell you to race your race…not someone else's. That is great advise.

Remember, we are all out there for the same reason…to enjoy the ride. How are you supposed to enjoy the ride if you get hurt or can't keep your heart rate at an regular level?

Pace yourself on your rides and you will be a lot better off.

Hydrating While Mountain Biking

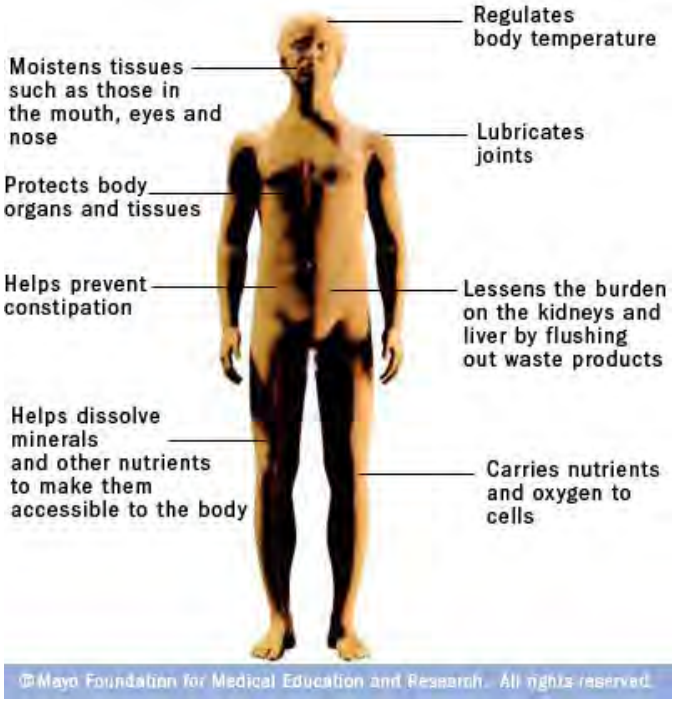
Hydrating is quite possibly the most important thing to do while riding. Most of us do not drink nearly enough water during a normal day…much less when we ride.

What happens when you become dehydrated?

According to MayoClinic.com:

Mild to moderate dehydration is likely to cause:

- Dry, sticky mouth
- Sleepiness or tiredness — children are likely to be less active than usual
- Thirst
- Decreased urine output — fewer than six wet diapers a day for infants and eight hours or more without urination for older children and teens
- Few or no tears when crying
- Muscle weakness
- Headache



- Dizziness or lightheadedness

Severe dehydration, a medical emergency, can cause:

- Extreme thirst
- Extreme fussiness or sleepiness in infants and children; irritability and confusion in adults
- Very dry mouth, skin and mucous membranes
- Lack of sweating
- Little or no urination — any urine that is produced will be dark yellow or amber
- Sunken eyes
- Shriveled and dry skin that lacks elasticity and doesn't "bounce back" when pinched into a fold
- In infants, sunken fontanels — the soft spots on the top of a baby's head
- Low blood pressure
- Rapid heartbeat
- Fever

- In the most serious cases, delirium or unconsciousness

As you can see, there are serious side affects to not properly hydrating before, during and after your ride. This is why I see hydrating as the most important thing to keep in mind while on the trail. Most times, when you feel like you are dehydrated, your body is telling you that you are already behind the eight ball. It is time to start drinking more water…and quickly.

The Eight and Eight Rule

Although there is no scientific basis for this rule, many people have adopted it as truth. They say that you are supposed to drink eight 8 oz glasses of water per day. If you are planning on exercising during that day, you need to increase that amount. Now, there are many factors that contribute to how much water a person should consume throughout the day and while exercising, but this is a great jumping off point.

What do I do while on a mountain bike ride?

I try to drink a lot of water throughout the day. I make a conscious effort on riding days to drink more than I normally would before the ride. During the ride, I make sure that I am always drinking. I am one of those riders that sweats a lot, so I get a constant reminder to replenish.

We are in the time of the year where keeping properly hydrated is especially important. When you are riding in 90+ degree heat, your body generates the symptoms of dehydration much faster than in the cooler months. During these summer months, I always carry 100 oz of water (sometimes half water/half Gatoraide) on every ride. It is always better to have more water than you need rather than not enough.

The Importance of Challenging Yourself

With every ride, you need to challenge yourself in at least one aspect of your riding. This does not always have to be some huge accomplishment and actually it is better if they are not. As you start to ride more (or are an experienced rider) achieving these accomplishments does several things:

- **Improves Confidence** – As with anything in life as we accomplish set goals are confidence and moral increases. With biking, these goals improve our overall feelings on our riding abilities. This will lead to even better rides in the future.
- **Improves Riding Skill Sets** – When you challenge yourself in your riding and accomplish the goals that you set out for yourself, you tend to raise the bar a little bit more the next time. Each time this bar raises, your riding ability and skills raise with it.
- **Creates Excitement** – I don't know about you guys…but I get pretty excited when I achieve goals I set for myself. This gets me even more encouraged to try the next challenge and better my skill sets even further.
- **Prevents Top Out** – Beginner riders will find that they see huge gains in the beginning, but as they ride more their skills and abilities seem to flatten out. In this post I explain how important the first 30 days of riding is for this exact reason. To prevent your riding from becoming stagnant, set small goals for yourself when you ride.

I am not trying to say that every rider is going to be the next World Cup downhill champion,

top endurance racer or cross country machine by setting little goals while you ride. Each riders goals and challenges are different. Here are some examples of ways you can challenge yourself during your rides.

- Try to clear that trail feature that you haven't tried before.
- Climb in a harder gear.
- Take one less break.
- Ride a harder section of trail than you are used to.
- Go on that mountain group ride.
- Session a section of trail until you clear it.
- Try to keep up with a faster rider (within reason…don't want to blow up and ruin the day!).
- Try a singlespeed.
- Ride longer distances than you are used to.

As with any goal…you need to be very specific. This is extremely important because you need to know the exact point in time that you achieved the goal you set for yourself. This sense of achievement while riding is very rewarding. Most of the time these are goals that I set in my head and no one riding around me even knows the difference. It is complete self fulfilment

and I am normally just smiling to myself. We are out on the trail to have a good time and make our lives more enjoyable. I never want to get the feeling that I am just going through the motions while I ride.

The First 30 Days in the Saddle

The time periods vary depending on the rider, but in generally the first 30 days on the bike are the most critical. During this time period, you are going to notice the fastest improvements in endurance and bike handling. I have talked with riders on this subject before, and most of us agree that new riders are much like the graph shown above, you see great improvements at the beginning. Over time, your riding will start to plato as you get into a grove with your bike and riding abilities.

What happens during these crucial first rides?

- You get used to using muscles that you are not used to using.
- Your body starts to adjust to the unpredictable nature of mountain biking.
- You start to become more comfortable on the bike.
- Your overall riding experience becomes better with each ride as these things improve.

It is my theory that many riders quit the sport at the early stages from throwing in the towel too early. If they would just tough through the first 30 days, they might have found that they really liked the sport of mountain biking.

I encourage every new rider to push themselves through the first rides. Many of them find riding to be a lot of fun, but they just need to get over that first hump in endurance and bike

handling to really let loose. As with anything, the beginning stages are always the hardest. To keep these beginning rides fun, try some of the following tips.

- Go to new trails.
- Take breaks when needed.
- Wear the proper clothing.
- Stay hydrated.
- Ride with someone more experienced than you are.
- Encourage the new riders by congratulating accomplishments.

We go through the same routine on first rides back from sickness or injury, but in most cases, those recovery times are normally shorter. It is great to see new riders on the trail and I really hope that the sport continues to grow. We need to always encourage new riders and attempt to bring back riders who might have taken a long vacation. As long as they get through the first rides, everything else should fall into place.

1 Tip That Will Save Your Life

Save your life? Maybe.
Keep you from falling over on the side of the trail? Yes.
A good thing to have on long rides? Absolutely.

So what am I referring to? It is a great idea to carry an extra full water bottle with you on your longer rides. This little tip has helped me through some of the most brutal rides I can remember. On a normal ride, I will carry my 100oz bladder full of water. This is normally perfect on any ride that I have done previously or I know will not end in a do or die feeling.

On rides that I know I will be pushing my limits, I bring an extra water bottle with me for that last push.

What Do I Put In This Extra Bottle?

Almost always…not water. During these long rides your body is depleted of necessary nutrients that plain water can not replenish. I normally fill this bottle with Gatorade or a recovery type drink like Fluid. These drinks provide the elements that water alone can not.

One of the most important is salt. As all of you already know, you secrete massive amounts of your bodies salt content through perspiration…especially on long rides in the heat of summer. This salt needs to be replaced and can be done so through energy drinks or tablets. I prefer to go through the drink routine.

Why Not Carry This In Your Bladder?

I find that water quenches my thirst better than a flavored drink. By carrying water in the pack and the energy drink separate, I get the best of both worlds. It also keeps your bladder cleaner. If I do add any flavored drink to my packs bladder, it is heavily diluted.

When I carry flavored sports drinks in the bottle, they are full strength to have the best impact, and then I always have pure water on hand.

Where Do I Carry This Extra Bottle?

I have seen most riders carry their bottles on water bottle cages mounted to the frame. Several of my bottles have made it to unknown places on the sides of singletrack by coming loose and flying off the bike. For this reason, I like to keep my reserve fuel in my pack. This also keeps the bottle clean and clear of any dirt or debris from the trail. No one likes to get a mouth full of dirt when they are dying for a cold drink.

So How Will This Tip Save Your Life?

Saving your life might be an extreme…but it is possible. This extra fuel for the ride has really helped me out over the years with pushing my perceived limits. It also helps you out with the unexpected. On a ride last year, I stepped on a trail side bee hive and received six fast stings

to multiple places on my body. Since this was a shuttle run, we had no choice but to push forward. Between the extra fluids and food, we were able to get to the car without issue. For more on what happens to your body when you do not stay hydrated…check out this post on staying properly hydrated.

When Do I Need To Carry An Extra Water Bottle?

- Long rides
- Extra hot or humid days
- Rides where you start off feeling a little off

Obviously, you do not need to pack everything but the kitchen sink on all of your rides. I normally carry the water bottle on rides where I know there is a chance I might need it. A little extra weight for some piece of mind is a great trade off in my book.

So next time you go ride one of your weekend epics, try this tip out. You will probably be surprised with the results. If nothing else…you'll finish stronger.

CROSS TRAINING

Different Cross Training Methods

This is shocking but true…there are other things that you can do OTHER THAN RIDE A BIKE that will make you a better mountain biker. I know this is shocking and appalling, but it is time to warm up to the fact that other fitness conscience, like minded individuals have found ways to improve their life and health by finding happiness in other forms. Here are some other ways, other than saddle time, that will make you a better mountain biker.

Yoga

Yoga cleanses the mind and soul. Ok…enough b.s…it really can help you with your mountain biking and your quest to becoming a better mountain biker. There is actually a yoga instructor (I haven't gone yet) locally that offers a cyclist specific yoga course that is supposed to help flexibility and balance in key cycling areas. Does it work? I don't know yet…but yoga is proven to help in these areas. Yoga has also been used in other sports to improve these key areas. With better balance, focus and flexibility, any rider would have a better experience on the trail.

The Gym – Working Out

Yes…that place where you drive up, park, walk inside and do a bunch of repetitive exercises that will drive you crazy! There are specific routines and workouts that are designed around cyclists. These workouts tone specific regions of the body that mountain bikers use the most and strengthen areas that we do not use often at all. The gym is also an excellent resource for two very important things.

Core Workouts – Strengthening your core will improve your balance, posture and endurance.
Spinning Classes – Just another way to get in that precious saddle time.

I am not telling you to become one of those gym rats that becomes completely obsessed, but the right amount of cross training in this area can bring huge returns.
Running

Trail Running

A great way to increase endurance and leg strength is by running. Trail running also brings excitement to what may seem like a boring past time to many bikers. You also get to enjoy the outdoors and atmosphere that is so appealing with mountain biking. Trail running can also improve trail memory by taking a different look at that trail you have ridden a thousand times.

A Healthy Diet

This may surprise you, but that Double Quarter Pounder from McDonald's does not help your riding at all. In fact, it can do more damage than the benefit you get from that great taste. I have to admit…this is the area of cross training that I fail at the most, but eating a healthy diet is essential to your mountain biking. You will see greater strides and improvements by eating better than you will out of anything on this list.

What is a healthy diet for you? Well…we all know that McDonald's is not on the list, but for specifics contact a health professional. If you clearly describe what you are looking to accomplish, they will be able to formulate a diet that will fit your needs. The time is now! You are already engaging in a healthy lifestyle by taking on a sport that improves your overall health and well being. Just carry that into other areas of your life! (My guess is the cheesecake I am eating while writing this is probably not on the approved list…)

How to Run and Walk the Next Day

For those of use with bad knees, ankles or anything else attached to our legs, cycling provides an incredible way to exercise that is low impact so we can actually walk (most times!) the next day after a long ride. Running for exercise…for many of us…equals great aerobic exercise, but comes at the expense of some extreme pain the following days. The fact is… running can improve your endurance and strengthen up muscle groups that we don't typically use in cycling. Running is actually one of the better cross training techniques that can make us better mountain bikers and overall cyclists. How can we put running into our regiment but still be able to endure the days following?

To get an answer to this question, I hit up a friend of mine that owns the runtowin.com.

198

> My main reason for cycling as a way to stay in shape (outside of doing it because I love it) is because my knees have an incredibly hard time with running. Ideally, I would like to strengthen up for cycling by getting in some run time as well, but if I can't walk the next day because of knee issues and shin splints…it doesn't do much good. Any ideas on how to curb that?

Blaine Moore from Run To Win

> There's 2 suggestions I can make.

Go to a specialty running shop that can actually fit you into the right shoes.
Don't be afraid to go slow and try throwing some short 10-30 second walk breaks in every few minutes at first and see how that feels.

Having somebody fit you into the right shoes is probably the most important thing. I need to have fairly neutral and minimalistic shoes or my knees will ache; too much cushioning and I have trouble walking for a few days. Some of the folks I coach are just the opposite. Hope that's helpful.

What Blaine explains about shoes makes perfect sense. After I read his response, I realized that if I took as much time picking out running shoes as I did frames and components, I would get rid of most of my running pain. In the past, when I go to pick up a pair of running shoes, I pick out a pair from a brand I like or a style that fits my needs…forgetting that fit is the most important factor in a pair of shoes that are going to be used for a specific activity. I take a lot of time picking out my mountain biking shoes…so it is time to take that same care and research into a correct pair of running shoes.

After that…I need to start with small runs and work my way up. I was talking to a friend about this yesterday and we came to a very real conclusion. As serious cyclists, we have built up an endurance that can handle several miles worth of running out of the gate. What we haven't built up yet…is the strength in the correct muscle groups and bones to handle that kind of distance. We need to start at ground zero and work our way up…being patient as our running stamina catches up with our endurance.

My goal is to live a happier and healthier life by doing what I love. The more diversification I bring to my physical health, the healthier I will be in the long run and the result will be better riding on the road and trail.

Diversify Your Riding

It is true, if you diversify your riding…you will become a better rider. This is a well known fact among many different disciplines in many sports. Why do you think there are stories of football players taking dance lessons? The more your body gets used to being out of its normal atmosphere, the more skills you pick up and apply to your favorite kind of riding style. In the end, you become a better mountain biker.

Quick Story…

As I started progressing through my cross country riding journey, I noticed one distinct problem in my progress. I would make huge gains over a short period of time, and then my progression would come to a screeching halt. It was almost as though I had hit a plateau and I was not going to ever increase my skill level or endurance. As a recreational rider and occasional racer, this may not be a big deal, but my need to get better kept the drive going.

I started to look for ways that I could get past that hump. The next logical step was to try out single speeding. I built up a single speed and hit the trails. I noticed right away that my sit and spin style on the full squish was not appropriate, so I instantly changed to stand and hammer. The next day I got out of bed sore and this was the first time…in a long time…that riding a bike had caused that sensation!

After weeks on the ss, I took the full suspension mountain bike out on a long group ride. I noticed several instant changes.

- My upper body endurance had increased.
- I carried more momentum into the climbs and turns.
- I had better burst speed.
- None of this would have happened as quickly if I hadn't journeyed outside of my riding comfort zone into the land of single speeding.

How Can I Diversify?

Once I figured out this sure fire way to increase my skills as a mountain biker, I searched for other ways to get similar results. As a side affect, I also found other disciplines of mountain biking that I thoroughly enjoy. There is never one way to ride a bike and some people even do it with skinny tires on the road! So here is a list of ways to ride a bike. If you are looking to increase your skill level in the brand of riding that you have grown to love…try out one of these to make the experience even better.

Single Speed

As I said in my little story, single speeding requires a different kind of riding style that will challenge you in a new way on the trails that you currently ride if you are a cross country buff. Even better, an old hard tail bike frame can convert into a single speed on a low budget. There are even fully built ss's on the market around the 500 – 600 dollar range.

How is single speeding different?

With only one gear, you have to carry the momentum you have into everything. This equals less braking (makes you better in high speed turns).
You will also use your leverage on the bars to power through climbs that results in more upper body strength and endurance.
Both of those together are going to increase leg strength and explosive power for faster sprints.

Downhill

There many riders that look at downhilling and think…"I will never be able to do that." There are some that do not have the desire to even try, but let me remind you of one true fact… riding is a progression. None of those riders started off on a huge jump or drop on their first day. They got to that ability by riding…a lot! Just like with cross country riding…you didn't go out for a 20+ mile ride on your first time out!

Downhilling will teach you how to control the bike, at speed over obstacles and get you more comfortable in the air. I have noticed the biggest increase in my cross country riding skills through my increase in downhilling. The one major drawback is the cost of entry, but borrow a bike if you can. Even a little time out on a course will bring you huge returns. That little jump on your typical cross country trail that was giving you issues before won't even be a blip on the radar.

Dirt Jumping

Another low cost of entry alternative, but increased difficulty on finding a local spot to try it out. Dirt jumping at your local bmx track or on the bigger 26" wheel designed jumps will teach you unbelievable bike control. It also increases your explosive sprinting capabilities. Dirt jumping endurance can be best described by this…resting heart rate -> PEAK HEART RATE -> resting heart rate -> PEAK HEART RATE!

If you are looking at becoming a smoother rider on the trail…this is one to try out.
Ride Length and Difficulty

Are you a local rider that does your local loops? How about a weekend warrior that is into the long ride? It is time to mix it up. Go on some longer, paced rides or shorter sprint rides if that is not your norm. The more you diversify the kind of ride you are doing…even if it is on the same bike…the better. The idea is to step outside of what you are used to doing.

I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE THINKING!

Since I already know what you are thinking…I thought I would beat you to the punch. You are looking at everything I have spelled out above and you are thinking…"that is not me, that is not my riding style, I don't ever see myself doing something like, etc." THAT IS THE POINT! The more you step out of your comfort zone into another area of cycling, the better you

become at biking in general. Get out there and try something new. At the very least, you will pick up some extra skills along the way.

Heavy Bike Training

Heavy bike training is the #1 way that I have become a better mountain biker in recent memory. The theory here is pretty simple. Have you ever seen a batter warming up in the on deck circle that is using a weight or second bat to get ready? This batter is warming up with heavier weight so when his time comes to step up to the plate…the bat feels lighter in his hands.

This is the same in practice with mountain biking. Can you imagine how your 30 lbs. 5.5″ travel bike would feel after riding a 35 lbs. 6″ travel bike all of the time? How about if you step down to a 26 lbs. cross country rig?

You will see these results:

- Bike will feel much lighter under your body (naturally)
- Increased Endurance

You body is adapting and learning how to deal with the increased resistance. Once you feel that your riding has increased to the level that it once was on the lighter mountain bike, you will notice that you are much faster on your regular, lighter rig.

This method is also extremely helpful with getting over those plateaus in our riding. Have you noticed lately that your riding has not progressed like you have wanted it to or you seem to not be seeing the gains that you are used to? Jump on a heavy bike for several weeks and

watch your progress back to the lighter bike. The results will amaze you!
How Can I Get This Same Effect With My Current Ride?

Mountain Bike Heavy Travel Riding Tips

Not everyone has the ability to go out and purchase a new bike, so how can we get these same results out of your current rig?

- **Training Wheels** – No…these do not bolt over your rear axle to keep you from falling over. Many endurance athletes actually use a heavier set of wheels to train on and use the lighter set on race day. With this simple swap out…you get a similar affect to riding a heavy bike and then switching to a lighter one. The good news for you is that normally heavier wheels are also much cheaper than their lighter counterparts… all things created equal.
- **Heavier Tires** – Heavier tires create a similar affect to the heavier wheels. Heavier tires also tend to have greater rolling resistance which will even further help your cause. Heavier tires are also the cheapest way to create the consistent resistance that you are looking for.
- **Carry A Heavier Pack** – I would not recommend practicing this method too frequently, but carrying a heavier pack on your rides will also increase your endurance. A bad side effect to carrying a heavier pack is running the risk of back problems in the future.

For this mountain biking tip, do not just take my word for it. Go out and try it for two weeks…I guarantee that you will see major gains in a very short amount of time.

Road Biking

I thought it was about time that I just came out and said it. Road riding has improved my mountain biking.

This past weekend, I got to see how much my recent road riding has really improved my mountain biking. Over the past couple of road rides, I have really concentrated on smooth circular pedal strokes under load. During these constant spins…I make sure that I am using as much upward pulling strokes as I am downward hammers. The result is a much more efficient spin that produces forward propulsion like I have never felt. The overall goal was to create more power by exerting less energy.

While I am on the mountain bike, it is harder to concentrate on pedal strokes as I am negotiating the trail. The road bike provides the perfect outlet to practice these skills and transfer them to my mountain biking. I started to notice that my road rides were less tiring than before, and I was able to pull/lead much easier than in the past.

So what were the trail results?

Climbing at Rich Mountain

Rich Mountain…Stanley Gap, Flat Creek and Green Mountain…is known for technical climbing and descending. Even the best riders come to Rich knowing they are going to walk some climbing sections. This brutal epic in north Georgia really taxes every ounce of your body as you attempt to conquer the beast.

I brought up the Niner Jet 9 for a good thrashing in the mountains. My goal was to have my best ride to date at Rich and really test my training on the road bike. From the start of the ride, I concentrated on pedals strokes and form as we started the several mile, out of the gate ascent. By the top of the first long climb, all seemed well and my heart rate was more controlled than previous attempts. We continued down the first blazing downhill and I was able to really let the Jet 9 loose. To my surprise, this 80mm travel frame really rails on long, technical downhills. It rides like a longer travel bike.

The cross country setup of the Jet 9 allowed me to really get into a technical spin groove. The rest of the day went pretty much the same…great technical downhills followed by long climbs. Even with the group's season high amount of flats, the day was going along flawlessly.

The last climb back over Rich Mountain is the worst. This technical climb is where you find most of the walking around Rich Mountain. From the start of this final climb, I made a mental goal for myself. I was not going to dab or walk at all through the first summit. This is something that I have only accomplished once in the past, and it came at the expense of my fitness for the last downhill. This time around, I wanted to have a dab free ride, but still be fresh for the final descent to the cars.

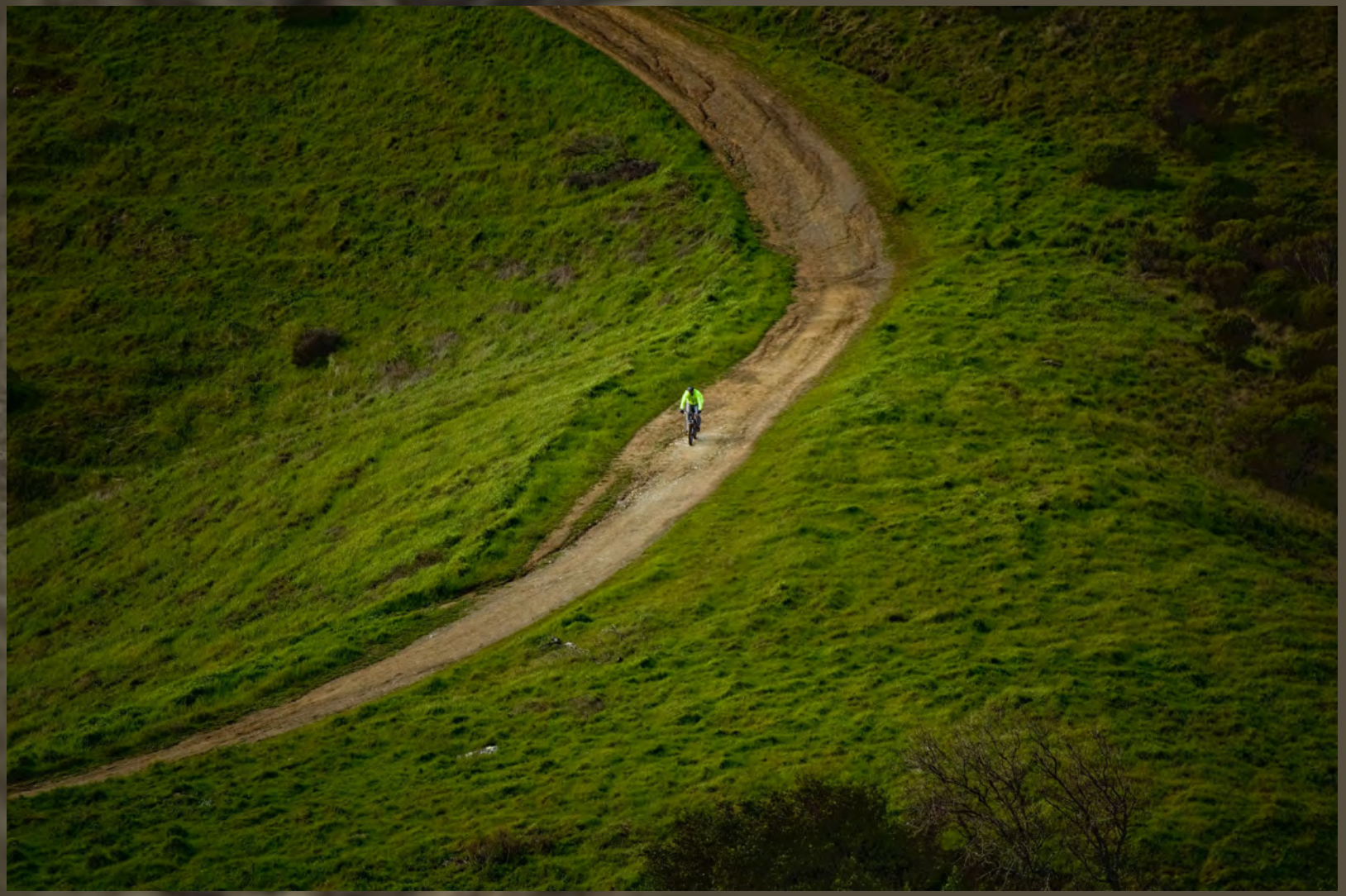
Incredibly…everything went very well…and by the end…I accomplished my goal. There was still a little bit of walking during the final section of climbing (there always is for everyone that rides this place) but I made it through all of the first hike-a-bike sections with ease. For the first time at Rich Mountain, I still had plenty of juice left for the final descent.

What did road biking do?

Road biking increased my cross country efficiency and endurance. By concentrating on form and miles on the road bike, I was able to have the best trip to Rich Mountain to date. I could actually feel the mountain bike pulling forward faster with each pedal stroke. This increased efficiency allowed me to keep more in the reserve tank for the rest of the ride without having to slow the pace down to a crawl. Road biking has also increased my awareness of pacing the ride to make sure I do not blow up before the end.

This trip to Rich Mountain solidified that road biking can increase your mountain biking skills if done correctly. However, your mountain biking skills do not…at this point…transfer to the road bike. About the only thing you can really transfer back over is some endurance and overall comfortable feeling on the bike.

I am going to continue to use these road miles to up my endurance and awareness on the mountain bike. Hopefully, over time…these same skills will continue to grow and my mountain biking will excel in this areas. Stay tuned to find out…



WRAPPING IT UP

Photo by r.i.c.h.

Top 5 Ways to Get Back on the Horse

For 99% of mountain bikers, it is a “when” not “if” situation when it comes to going down on the bike. It is the risk that we take as mountain bikers for the payoff we receive.

The long term mental affects of a wreck can keep you off the bike or riding well below your ability level. The sooner you tackle the mental obstacles, the faster you will be riding the bike like nothing ever happened. As mountain bikers, it is important to learn from your mistakes, but also compartmentalize them so that they do not scar your riding to the point it is not fun anymore.

Tips to “get back on the horse”

- **Try to seclude the accident as a single unrelated incident.** – This may be difficult to do at first, but find that one thing and make it the reason the wreck happened. “Well if that one stick wasn’t there…” It sounds simplistic, but these little, simple mind games can push you just far enough over the edge to get past the incident.
- **Re-ride that section as soon as possible.** – The sooner the better. When you clear the section that caused you so much grief in the past, it solidifies in your mind that it is not going to be a normal occurrence.
- **Ride something harder!** – If you clear a section of trail that is harder than what you wrecked on…the other section will look like nothing in comparison. This, of course, assumes that you should not ride too far above your abilities…

- **Blame a part on the bike and replace it.** – "It was the tires that made me wreck!" In reality…most of the time this is not the case, but it can help those little mental games. The is also a great excuse for UGI (I am guilty of this one).
- **Listen to your fellow riders instead of the voices in your head.** – Chances are…the people that you ride with probably know your abilities better than you do. If they are telling you that you are able to do it…they are probably right. No one wants to take a friend to the emergency room, so most of the time it is in their best interest to see you succeed.

There are many other little tricks that I use to get over the crashing fears, but these are the main 5 that work every time. I also find that I use these tricks to help me in other areas of my life besides biking. Every single one of us are capable of things that we never thought were possible. We just have to stay out of our own way to get them done.

What Happens When You Stick With It

During a discussion about our ride over the weekend at Rich Mountain, Joe wrote a post that will inspire beginner riders. He gave me the permission to publish his post word for word here.

Post by regularJoe:

> Sometimes it's hard to remember that I am a newer rider. Yesterday reminded me. For lack of a better place to put this, I'm going to put my thoughts here. Just to have them in writing. I may cross-post them to SORBA as well…
>
> The first time I was there (in March) we only did Stanley Gap and Flat Creek. The only thing I remember from that ride was that I walked a bit going over Stanley Gap, walked some of the steeps climbing out of Flat Creek and walked almost the entire 2-3 mile climb coming back over Stanley Gap. The ride was 14 miles. it was pure hell. That ride was pretty depressing, but it drove me to realize that if I want to ride in the mountains, I better start learning and riding and pushing myself. I'll never forget that ride. After that ride, I remember sitting at El Agave in Ellijay and Chocolate Girl asking me about my ride experience that day and gently encouraging me by recalling her experience with that trail some 20 years ago. I also remember saying to Tweety that I thought I could never get stronger riding at Big Creek all the time. He told me to that was B.S. and to do intervals in the freeride area. So I did.
>
> Fast forward to yesterday. We did the whole deal out there. Stanley Gap, Green Mountain

and Flat Creek. Almost 28 miles. Going into the the ride, I had delusions of being right with my sherpas the entire time. Not quite, but I held my own. Climbing up Stanley, I dabbed a handful of times, ran Concrete Blonde off the trail, and only walked to get in a good position after dabbing. I wasn't too far behind the sherpas when I got to the top. This pattern would hold for much of the ride. I'd fall back a minute or two, then that gap would hold pretty steady. I was satisfied with that.

We crossed over to Green Mountain and had a load of fun going down to the lake. Coming back up out of there was tough and I started to get really nervous. I was tiring fast and I was starving. When I tried to eat I felt like I wanted to puke. I was afraid I was on the verge of bonking and I couldn't stop thinking that we still had to go back over Stanley. The part that killed me last time. Dammit. Again, I was encouraged by a by chocolate girl's gentle brand of tough love, Tweety's no nonsense coaching, RSutton's positivity and Concrete Blonde gently giving me tips from behind as we climbed Aska Road on the way back from Green Mountain to tackle Flat Creek. I had nibbled on a power bar (to keep from puking) on the climb out of Green and when we got to the Aska Trail parking lot, my sherpas gave me some time to collect myself.

Flat Creek was much better. I slowed some to control my heart rate, and I was still entering in to muscle fatigue zone as well as getting dehydrated, but on the slow gentle climb I could still see everyone from time to time. I was doing okay. Down the fun, rocky descent, I got a flat. Filled it up and it held. Rode the entire climb out of flat creek with a similar gap to the front that I had kept most of the day. My flat tire was back at the top and I was

gassed again. I asked Raja if he could help with my flat, and of course he was right on it. What a great guy to ride with. Raja is so talented, so strong, so experienced yet so patient and humble. The aren't many people like that, and it's always a breath of fresh air.

At this point, I wanted to quit and I was scared of the climb back over Stanley. I had a gel, some salt caps, and got a snack to nibble on as well. This is where I would lose my sherpas as they did their thing and I did mine. They waited to give me back a bottle I had lost and I saw chocolate girl, giving a little check after she had taken some photos. I began to feel bad, as I did not want to make them wait on me. I didn't see them again until the top of the false summit. I started to get that feeling of never getting off the mountain. I wanted to get off my bike and sleep. I could no longer climb at 90% or more heart rate, so I had to stop a couple times and I walked 4 or 5 steep sections. I was walking as I could see Concrete Blond's blue shirt and pink helmet. This was the false summit. Holy ***! I made it and rode most of it! Much better than last time. I walked probably about a half-mile. Last time I walked about 3. I went from being discouraged to encouraged. One more climbing section to go. Watched the sherpas have some fun a clean a wicked steep section and walked a couple times and knew we were essentially finished. All downhill to the end. I had struggled, but I had made it up the section I had been scared of all day long.

I was so lucky to have five perfect people to share the day with who were nothing but encouraging. If they ever had any regrets for inviting me along, I never knew it. I'm glad I went. It was a challenge for sure, but I made it.

I'll be thinking about every part of that ride and what I can do different. I've feel like I've come a long way since March and I can't wait to do more. I'm looking forward to going back. Thanks for such a great day.

This is social proof that if you stick with it…you will see results. Many times in life, we give up right before we are about to really see results. This post reminds me to stick with it because you never know when you are going to get that proof that all of your hard work paid off. These moments often come at times you don't expect them to, but when they do…the overwhelming feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment make it all worth it. In a case like this, you get to share the experience with the people that helped you get there. Just remember…when things seem to get the hardest and you don't think you can make it another step of the way…you are on the verge of making it. Hard work pays off in the most unexpected ways. Stick with it and you'll make it too.

Final Thoughts from 198

Riding is a way of life...and much like most things in life...that means it is largely a mental sport. I have always held true to the belief that it is your own mind that is in the way of becoming a better mountain biker. By strengthening your confidence through small, incremental improvements...you can really go a long way in improving your mountain biking.

I put together Ramped Riding with the goal of helping other mountain bikers get better at the sport they love. With each ride, those moments where everything works together perfectly are what memories are made of. With each day...mountain biking and cycling in general bring more into my life than I could every give back. Through thick and thin, my bike is always there ready for any abuse I can throw its way and that will never change.

I hope you are able to use these tips contained in Ramped Riding to improve you riding and find your own style on the bike. Afterall...it is all about the ride.

Keep the rubber side down,
Robb Sutton (198)
Bike198.com