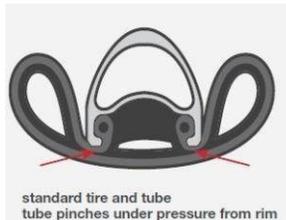


Tiresome Advice

Quick, what's the most important part of your bicycle? Most people respond with "the frame," which is not a bad answer, especially if you are riding an ultra-light carbon model or an exotic hickory Renovo. But, my answer every time is "**the tires.**" Too often, tires are an afterthought; *they just don't get no respect*. Remember that first stereo system you bought back when you had dark hair and you shopped at an actual store? You blew all your cash on the receiver and turntable, with only enough left for a pair of crappy speakers. Big mistake. You're making the same blunder if you are ignoring what tires you use and how you treat them.

First, let's discuss how you should treat your tires. You should check the air pressure and pump them up to the proper psi [or bars if you prefer metric units, 1 bar =14.5 psi, 2 bars =DUI] before **every ride**. The pressurized air inside your tire doesn't want to be there, it wants to be outside with the rest of the air. Every tire/tube leaks and some leak faster than others; latex tubes leak ten times faster than butyl tubes. If the pressure is too low, the tire is susceptible to "snakebite" flats when you hit a bump and the rim bottoms out on the tire casing.



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We'll talk more on *proper* tire pressure later but as a starting point, work within the pressure range stamped on the sidewall. Another thing you should do before **every ride** is inspect the tires for cuts, bulges, or embedded materials that could pose a problem down the road [pun intended].

Carry patch kit and learn how to use it. Carry a spare tube dusted with baby powder in a baggie. The powder will help the tube seat itself in the tire and you can use the baggie over your hand as you fiddle with the chain and greasy rear derailleur. Pack a small hand pump and/or CO₂ cartridges, and 1-3 tire

levers. Greg LeMond, USA's only true Tour de France winner, can remove a flat tire from the rim with no tools but I can't. And, lastly, carry a set of fine tweezers to dig the elusive offending foreign materials out of your tire before you install the new tube. If I can stress one point: **thoroughly inspect the tire before you install the new tube**. There are lots of videos on changing a tire; here's one I like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6T06beumcl>

What about tire selection, itself? There are various factors you can consider, some of which are mutually exclusive. So tire selection, like life, is a series of trade-offs. Your riding conditions and purpose [road racing or club rides or off-road, for example] have to be weighed against criteria such as rolling resistance, durability and puncture resistance, wear rate, traction, comfort, and overall cost of running. A Conti Gatorskin, for example, has high puncture resistance and good traction but is relatively low on comfort and high on rolling resistance while a Vittoria Open Corsa has the opposite characteristics. The Gatorskin is machine-vulcanized while the Open Corsa is hand-glued. FYI, this is not a commercial; I use neither of the above at the moment. Both tires, as well as the tires most of us use, are called clinchers or wired-on tires.

Another type of tire is the tubular or sew-up, so-called because the tire is hand-sewn around a latex tube. Tubulars, or "tubs," generally gives the fastest ride but are more fragile. These tires are glued onto special tubular rims so if you flat, you glue on your spare tire. Tubs are expensive and I can attest it is an absolute bear to repair one. No, you do not want to try tubs unless your retirement account is exceptionally robust.

A relatively new alternative is the tubeless road tire, using the same technology as your automobile tires. These tires can be run at lower pressures [no tube to pinch], giving a more comfortable ride and are reportedly more puncture-resistant and have lower rolling resistance, to boot. But your rims have to be tubeless-ready; they won't work on every rim. You also need a special tubeless valve and a liquid sealant that is injected into the tire to seal *small* leaks.

If a piece of glass slashes open your clincher tire, chances are it will slice open the tubeless tire, too. In other words, you should still carry a spare tire or an inner tube you can install inside the [formerly] tubeless tire. Lastly, you should practice changing the tire at home as it is a bit trickier than changing a clincher tube.

Here's a video on the technique; Colin has offered to translate:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=113&v=yLXYFxyIVHU

That's enough for now. Next time, we'll talk more about tire width, tire pressure science vs. conventional wisdom, and rolling resistance in the lab vs. the real world.

Dave Landsperger

