

## GIMME A BRAKE

Some would say your tires are the most important part of your bicycle and they're probably right. Without your tires you couldn't very easily start or stop your bike. Speaking of starting and stopping, which is more critical in that it happens reliably and effectively? My vote is stopping every time. Unless you ride a fixie and have cantaloupe calves plus a burning desire for knee replacements in five years, you are going to need good brakes to stop you. Sounds intuitively obvious, right? The key is *good* brakes and the ability to use them properly. The focus of these articles is selection and maintenance rather than proper riding technique but having seen many instances of incorrect braking, I felt it worthwhile to provide this link on technique. If you don't want to read the link, here's the synopsis: USE YOUR FRONT BRAKE.

<https://janheine.wordpress.com/2013/08/23/how-to-brake-on-a-bicycle/>

Now we get to the fun part of adjusting your brakes. Call me lazy but if a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth a gazillion words. So, we'll both be better off if you watch this video rather than endure my tortured prose on the topic of brake adjustment. Sorry that the language is not proper Amurrikin but it is close enough that you'll get the idea.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO77mbB8w7I>

While this video dealt with modern dual pivot sidepull caliper brakes, you may have V-brakes or cantilever brakes. The same general logic holds, although these brakes can sometimes be maddening to balance. Try turning the tiny setscrew clockwise on the arm that "sticks" to the rim and/or turning the screw on the other arm counter-clockwise. If tweaking the tiny setscrews doesn't help, you should check the arms to see if the return spring is in the same hole on both arms and adjust as necessary after disassembling the arm(s). You see, I told you a video was better. If you're riding a retro steel "racer" with single pivot sidepulls, do yourself a favor and replace the front caliper, at least, with a dual pivot model. It really *will* stop you better.

If you have disc brakes, the industry's latest marketing ploy to make you think your three-year-old featherweight carbon bike is obsolete, there's a video out there for you, as well. But you'll have to find it for yourself as Bud is limiting me to two videos in this article. If you watch a decent video, you'll see that in the case of disc brakes you do *not* center your disc between the pads.

Qualifications and recommendations:

1. There is one case where it is better to use your rear brake to slow down. If you are in a paceline and are too close to the person in front of you, you should feather the rear brake, not the front brake.

2. Always make sure your wheel is centered in the fork or stays before adjusting your brakes.

3. While disc brakes offer a more controlled braking action [and actually work when wet], you will likely not be able take advantage of this when descending the mighty peaks of Sarasota County. But, disc brakes will allow you to use wider tires at lower pressures for a more comfortable ride, as noted in my column on tires and tire pressure. I retrofitted a front disc brake on my Pittsburgh touring bike and it absolutely works better. And it is noisier at times.

4. If your brakes squeak, don't sand your rims.