

# Mountain Bike Riding Tips

Do you remember your first bike? I do, it was a little red bike with no training wheels. My grandfather taught me to ride it in the front yard. I was hooked on cycling instantly. I rode my bike everywhere as a kid. That's how most boys learned to ride a bike, the hard way. You fall and learn not to do that again, and then fall again, and again, till you learned the skills needed to not fall. I started riding BMX, then progressed to mtn. bikes, and then started riding a road bike. Learning to ride by the trial and error method can be hard on your body and equipment. I want to help you learn the necessary skills needed to ride your mtn. bike without falling all the time and to make the ride a little more enjoyable. Remember that safety is always number one. Wear a helmet, gloves, and proper clothing and if you can't make an obstacle, get off and walk over it. No shame in knowing your limits. Most of all have fun!

Your mtn. bike can overcome any number of obstacles that you encounter on the trail. You just need a little help in maneuvering the bike in the right manner. Timing, balance, adapting, and anticipation are important skills to learn for mtn. biking. I know it sounds a little new age, but be one with your bike. Ride and think of your bike as an extension of your body. Keeping momentum and staying fluid on your bike will help you ride over the ever changing terrain. In order to accomplish this, you need to stay calm, relaxed and ride with confidence. Use these next few tips to help you.

Here are a few general riding tips. Looking ahead and reading the trail is key to a smooth ride. Riding over rocks that don't move is at times better than riding over ones that may be small, but are loose and that roll under your wheel. Remember that momentum is your friend. The slower your wheel rolls the easier it is to get stopped by an obstacle. Riding in sandy areas can be difficult. Try to distribute your weight evenly over the bike and use an easy gear and spin fast. Look for the line with the least amount of sand and the most packed so you don't sink in as much. For more advanced technique, shimmy your front wheel back and forth really fast to create a channel and help it float on the sand.

Going uphill is usually a chore, however the reward is that fast downhill. Anticipating the gear you need before you reach the hill is important for a

smooth shift. Switching gears while under load or pressure is hard on your drive train and can account for a rough gear change. You want a low enough gear to be able to pedal up the hill, but not so low that you are spinning too fast. Fast cadence, the number of times your pedals turn around, will also help to keep your balance as you are moving slower than normal. Keep your upper body relaxed and learn to breathe with your belly, giving you more oxygen movement. On really steep sections you may need to reposition yourself forward on your saddle to keep your weight even on the bike. This will help keep the nose down and help the rear wheel with traction. When encountering technical sections on an uphill, try to pick the smoothest line with the best traction. If you come to an obstacle, you may need to switch to a lower gear, put in a little power surge, and pick up the front wheel a little to help it over. Balance, technique, and practice will make climbing more enjoyable, as much as it can be. Practice, practice and then practice some more.

Proper braking is an essential skill needed and can be tricky to learn and master. Most braking takes place while going downhill or cornering to control your speed so you don't crash. Begin with the set-up of your brakes. Your levers should be somewhere around a 45 degree angle on your handle bars, so you don't have to move your wrists to grab the levers, just reach out your fingers to brake. Next you want to set-up the "feel" or "modulation" of your brakes, how hard or easy it is to pull the levers and how early or late the brake pads hit the braking surface on your wheels. Experiment with this feeling, as each person is different. Pulling too much front brake will shift your weight forward and maybe over the front handlebar. Too much rear brake and you'll just skid or slide instead of slowing down. Try pulling the front and rear brake about equally till you find that perfect balance need for braking in different situations. You'll want to shift your weight back and use more rear brake when braking downhill. When coming upon a corner, brake to control your speed before you reach the corner. Braking too much can cause your wheels to lose traction and slide on you. This can be especially dangerous if your front wheel slides out from under you. Practice when to brake, when not to brake, how much brake to use, and shifting your body weight when braking to give your bike optimal traction and stopping power. Of course practice, practice, and then practice some more.

Looking ahead, controlling your speed, and looking to where you want your front wheel to go are just a start of helpful cornering and down hilling

tips. When cornering, keep your inside pedal up and look for the apex of the corner. Enter the corner wide, giving you the most amount of room to maneuver and exit the corner. Try not to turn the front wheel too sharp, this could cause you to lose your balance and throw you off the bike. Riding downhill can be very intimidating and scary. Learn to let the bike do the work for you; you just need to guide it. Look for the smoothest line, learn to shift your weight and feather the brakes for control. Remember, momentum is your friend for riding over obstacles. Keep your arms, upper body, and knees relaxed to absorb the shock of bumps. Keep a couple fingers on the brakes levers for quick and easier braking to stay in control. Learn how to shift your body weight back and forth as needed. I know it's a broken record, but practice, practice, and then practice some more.

I hope these helpful riding tips will make you a better rider and make your mtn. biking experience a little more enjoyable. These are just a few basic riding tips to get you started. Practicing these skills while out on the trail is the only way to get better. Pick a few tips and work on them, then add a few more tips until you have them mastered. You'll be riding over obstacles before you know it. Remember your riding over an ever changing terrain, and adapt. Mountain biking is such a fun sport and every ride is an adventure to someplace new. "Where ever you go, there you are."

Paul Walton

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