

Frequently Asked Questions for Cycling Beginners

I started cycling seriously in 2007, so I thought I would record some of the things I asked and learned about in this FAQ. Please click the links in the sidebar to get FAQ specific RSS feeds or a PDF of the FAQ. Please [send me some feedback](#) about this page, or [subscribe](#) to this site. **Enjoy!**

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How do I get started?

I would say that if you are not sure you want to cycle regularly, then borrow a bicycle, and try it for a while. Or, buy an inexpensive one that you can try for several months, while you decide if it's for you.

I researched local bike shops near my home in Japan, and found one I liked. Then I went and explained my situation, not knowing whether I want to do this seriously or not, and not wanting to spend that much money. The LBS owner recommended me to buy an older-model Centurion with good componentry for the price. I got it with the 2005 Shimano Deore XT components, and bought a number of things to go with it:

Helmet – I tried on Trek, Giro, Bell and Specialized. I got the Specialized because it fit well. Try several on, and if you like to wear head-cover like a bandanna underneath, wear it when

Visibility – you need sufficient lighting. I got a main "beam" LED light, which is really bright, because one purpose of buying the bike was to commute to and from the station every day. Also, I got a blinking red LED light for the rear, to increase visibility.

Pants Protectors – if you commute on your bike, you need these to keep your trouser cuffs out of the chain. I got velcro'ed jobs that wrap around, and have a reflective strip to help with visibility.

Hydration – I got a bottle cage which bolts onto the frame, and an insulated water bottle. I recommend mounting the cage first, so you can try several bottles and get the biggest one that you can fit in. Also, your bottle cage might also fit drink bottles as well. Mine does, and this is good in a pinch if I am somewhere and just want a quick place to stick my drink.

Fenders – I knew I'd be riding in the rain sometimes, so I got some fenders to stop mud splashing.

Kickstand – the LBS has all its bikes up on these stands that make maintenance easy, so I did not realize I needed a kickstand until I got away from the LBS. Then I went back and bought a center-mounted one.

Security – get a bike lock or two to protect your investment. They even have saddle locks to try to fight the wankers going around stealing saddles.

Tools – the valves on the bike I got are different from your typical el-cheapo bike's, so I got a multipurpose pump that could handle the valves. Also, I got a set of hex wrenches to be able to maintain the various hex bolts on the bike.

Later, after riding for a while and really liking it, I got some more items:

Platform Pedals – I got pedals with little hollow bolts in the platforms, that grab your shoes for good traction.

Saddle – my gel-filled Specialized one has been a God-send. I tried a loaner model of a racing saddle, but it hurt after a while in normal shorts, I imagine because those racing saddles are used with the spandex pants with the padded seat. The gel-filled Specialized has been good cost-performance, for me.

Gloves – my hands were continually slipping on the grips, so I bought padded fingerless gloves.

Grips – after riding for a few weeks with just my padded gloves, I got grips with better padding. These are just normal grips, and you should note that if they are not radially symmetrical, and have a pad or bump in them, you'll need to rotate them to be in the right position. Or, you can get locking type grips.

Cyclometer – I got a CatEye wireless, which gives me much of the data I would like to have. Other more expensive models have more data. Maybe some day.

This is more than enough to get you started, but there is a myriad of options to choose from.

Do I need "clip-in" pedals?

The terminology for pedals is confusing, but the pedals with "bindings" or "clips" that you clip into with cleated shoes are called "clipless" pedals, whereas normal ones are "platform" pedals.

Advantages are that you get more power via the upstrokes of each revolution.

Disadvantages are that they can be hard on knees due to

being clipped in.

There are also convertible clip pedals, from Shimano, that have a platform side for commuters and a clip side for longer weekend rides.

Why do my gears go "CRUNCH" when I shift into low gear when going up a hill?

This is a common problem in derailleurs, when you downshift while applying full power to the pedals. Shimano has developed their "Rapid Rise" derailleurs to deal with this problem.

Why is my chain making a clicking noise when I pedal?

A clicking noise can be a result of the chain rubbing against the front gear-changer bracket, or "gate". It is normal for the chain to do this when you have your chain going diagonally between the largest, outer front chain cog, and the largest, inner, rear cassette gear, or, the reverse: the inner front and outer back. Actually, drive train makers don't expect you to use these combinations much, and it is "common knowledge" that you might lose certain gear combinations as a rule.

Which gear is "low" gear?

Looking at your rear derailleur "cassette" or "freewheel", the lowest gear is the largest one closest to the wheel. With the chain on your large front cog, the lowest gear makes it the easiest to pedal uphill. To remember which is high and which is low, I think of low gear as needing low power from my legs; whereas the small back cog needs "high" power from me.

Check out **Sheldon Brown's** excellent site, for lots of information:

<http://www.sheldonbrown.com>

How often should I lube the drive train and what's the best lube?

If you are riding every weekend, then every weekend is a good plan. I ride approximately 50 to 70 km on Saturday, and my bike gets filthy by the end of the ride. I use dish soap to wash the body and get mud off, with one of those hoses with a brush at the end, and apply some light teflon-based oil from Dupont before the work week. On Saturday AM before the ride, I degrease the drive train with Orange "eco" degreaser (nicer than kerosene and some alternatives), then use Dupont wax grease on days with good weather, and heavier grease on rainy days.

How can I tell if the chain is worn?

If you bend the chain laterally against the links and it bends into almost a U shape, it's well overdue for replacement. It should be fairly stiff laterally. Bike mechanics have a sort of measuring tool that checks the bend radius so they can make recommendations. Because the chain is the least expensive part of the drivechain, replace it early. Rear gear cassettes and front sprockets are much more expensive. I read somewhere that Lance Armstrong changes his a couple times a day during a race, but he's putting an entirely different kind of pressure on the bike compared to the average rider!

Why are my brakes squealing?

It's possible the brakes are just cheap ones, or improperly installed. Mechanics adjust the brake pads of typical V or Caliper brakes so their leading edges are tilted slightly in. When you inspect your brake pads, make sure they are not too worn, and that the brakes are never touching tire since this is a very dangerous condition.