



## The Unbearable Lightness of Cleaning

BY NICK LEGAN

It's that time of year when you air out the house, get the carpets cleaned, and wash the windows. Perhaps you spruce up your surroundings with a fresh coat of paint, some new lawn furniture, or just get the gunk out of the all the nooks and crannies. Spring cleaning has powerful cultural, religious, and even biological roots, and for many of us it's a welcome time to hit the reset button before heading out on summer adventures.

For adventure cyclists, spring is also an ideal time to have a look at the gear we'll be using in the coming months. I know, I'm a broken record when it comes to bike maintenance. But it's because I care about the safety of cyclists and I feel that a bike that functions well allows us to more fully connect with our surroundings. So here is your spring-cleaning checklist for your bike and gear.

### BIKE

Even if you had a trouble-free year of cycling, regular bolt checks are an easy way to ensure that your bicycle is safe. Properly tightened bolts, sometimes assisted by threadlock compounds, and well-designed components don't typically loosen over time. But it's better safe than sorry. Thankfully a bolt check doesn't take much time though it does require a bit of knowledge. It's important to not continually tighten

bolts. This will lead to failures. Instead you're looking to ensure that a bolt isn't loose. So don't overdo it, but put a wrench on each fastener in a methodical fashion. I like to do it by hex key size, moving front to back, on a bike. Then I'll move to the next larger size and start again at the front of the bike and move rearward.

Another great annual (or hopefully more frequent) safety check is a thorough inspection of your frame, fork, handlebar, rims, tires, saddle, seatpost, and stem. A bike wash is a great way to clean while you go, getting your eyes and hands on the various parts of your bicycle. Sometimes a crack in a frame is more easily felt than seen.

### DRIVETRAIN

Give a minute's thought to your drivetrain. On an average one-hour ride, assuming 80 RPM and that you pedal for 75 percent of the time, your crank revolves 3,600 times. Now let's assume that you ride 150 days a year. If you only ride for an hour each time, that's over half a million revolutions annually for your bottom bracket. That's a lot of turning.

Thinking along these lines, it impresses me that many bottom brackets will last for years with zero maintenance and far more riding. But that's no excuse to ignore it, or the rest

of your drivetrain for that matter. It's good to annually tear down your bike, or have a professional do it for you.

This process will ensure that seatposts don't seize inside your frame, headset bearings are clean and lubricated, and your bottom bracket continues to spin freely. While you're at it, throw on some new cables and bartape. This will get your braking and shifting feeling much crisper and your bike looking better in the process. Go ahead and replace your chain, even if it isn't entirely worn out. Why? Because a chain is a far sight less expensive than most cassettes.

Have a gander at your derailleur pulleys. Are the bearings or bushings still rotating freely? Are the teeth still squared off and retaining your chain well? Look at the cage of your front derailleur. Is it wearing thin after years of service? What about your chainrings? Now is the time to replace heavily worn items so that they don't fail out on the road later in the year.

## **BRAKES**

Brake pads are cheap. At least they are a lot cheaper than new brakes, rims, or disc rotors. So take the time to inspect your pads for wear and contamination. On rim brakes, remove your wheels and have a look for any embedded aluminum flecks or debris. If the pads still have a lot of life left in them, remove the foreign objects with a pick and sand them clean. If they're on their last legs, go ahead and replace them.

You can also spruce up disc brake pads with some emery cloth. Remove them from the caliper, wipe them with a clean rag, and then give them a light sanding. While you have them out, clean your brake caliper with a rag and some isopropyl alcohol. Clean your rotors with a clean rag and a splash of the alcohol as well. You may get a bit of squeal when you first use the brakes again, but perform a series of hard stops until you burn off any residue.

## **INNER TUBES**

Most of us carry a spare inner tube or two on every ride as a form of insurance. But how frequently do we check those spare tubes for wear or holes? Not often in my case. So now is a great time to look through your saddle bag (or wherever you carry your spares kit) and give your inner tubes a check. Inflate them and listen and feel for leaks. If they're still good, be sure to carefully pack them up again, perhaps apply some talcum powder, and put them in a plastic bag away from sharp tools or seams that can rub holes in them.

## **TUBELESS TIRES**

If you use a tubeless tire setup, spring is a good time to check the sealant level. Over time sealant can dry out and solidify inside your tire. This means that it won't flow to any puncture you experience, defeating the purpose of a tubeless tire arrangement. In arid climates this can happen more quickly than you might realize.

To check the sealant, you can obviously remove the bead on half your tire. Another option is to remove the core of your valve and use a dipstick. This can take the form of a small hex key or a toothpick.

## **LEATHER SADDLE**

If you've found success with a leather saddle, it's worth a few minutes of care for something so important to your comfort. Leather is very durable, but it's best to keep it clean and dry. So wash your saddle (any saddle) frequently.

Brooks recommends its own Proofide as the only treatment that should be applied to Brooks saddles. It can aid in the break-in process but also protects the saddle from moisture. Apply it every three to six months on the top (finished) side of the saddle, let it dry, then polish it off. You can also apply a layer to the underside of the saddle to help waterproof it.

Selle Anatomica sells its Saddle Sauce and a waterproof cover to maintain its saddles. Instead of softening the leather, Saddle Sauce is a protective, waterproofing treatment, suitable (Selle Anatomica claims) for all leather saddles.

## **RAIN GEAR AND SHELTER**

Rain gear and your tent, tarp, or bivy all require maintenance. We ask a lot of them. It's not easy to keep you warm and dry in a downpour. So consider using a waterproof fabric treatment at least annually, more if you use it frequently. Products from Nikwax are very effective and can save you the cost of new gear. They include sprays as well as wash-in treatments.

## **ELECTRONICS**

Few things will frustrate you more than electronics that are glitchy or that ask for an update while you're out of cell reception or away from a computer. So take a few minutes to perform updates on any applications on your smartphone that you use while touring. For me, that's Bicycle Route Navigator, Wunderground, Gaia GPS, Ride with GPS, MTB Project, Trailforks, Google Maps, and Windy.

It's also a good idea to update the firmware on your GPS devices, your phone, and any other electronics that you carry. With few exceptions, keeping them running on current firmware will help them function properly and perform the tasks we ask of them.

## **YOUR HEADSPACE**

Lastly, it's never a bad idea to clean house intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. I know that I'm veering off the normal bike-related advice this column typically covers, but cycling is therapeutic for many of us. A spring cleaning or refurbishment of your bicycle will help you roll off on your next ride knowing that you cared for the machine that allows you to get out in the world. And there is nothing like the lightness of carrying less baggage, literally and metaphorically.

## **PARTING THOUGHTS**

This is my final contribution to the Cyclesense legacy as I've taken a new role in the cycling industry. It has been a pleasure exploring technology new and old with you all and I wish each and every one of you pleasant journeys. Look out for each other and maintain your bike! 

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*Nick Legan is the technical editor of Adventure Cyclist*