

Five simple maintenance checks whenever you ride.

For your own safety and to keep your bike in top working order, it's really important that you get into the habit of performing five simple maintenance checks whenever you ride.

These inspections are quick and easy, taking no more than 30 seconds total. And, by checking your bike for the most common mechanical failures that can lead to a crash, you'll be taking some very effective steps to ensure your own safety each time you go out.

1. Tires and Wheels

Before you get on your bike, check your tires to make sure they are properly inflated. Take a quick look all the way around for places where the rubber might be cracked, gouged or worn.

Also, check the nuts or quick release mechanisms that hold your wheels in place. Verify that your wheels are securely fastened so they don't come out while riding. You don't really want to play stuntman, and fly over the handlebars, right?

2. Brakes

Squeeze your brake levers to make sure that they apply enough pressure to stop your bike and that you don't have any problems with fraying or stretched cables.

Also eyeball the brake pads in the front and back to be sure they are hitting only the rims and not the tires. If your brake pads are squeezing the tires when applied, not only can it wear or damage your sidewalls, but can also result in you being bucked over the handlebars. You only want the brake pads on the rims, because that allows a gentler, more consistent stop.

3. Seat Post & Handlebar Stem

Next, check to make sure that your handlebar is set at the right height, that the stem is fastened tightly and that your seat is at the correct height. You want to be sure that both are secure, as there are fewer things more exciting (and not in a good way) than realizing that you can't control your bike as you go zipping down the street because the handlebars are loose in your hands.

4. Helmet

As you get ready to put on your helmet, look it over once to make sure there are no cracks on the outer shell or inner surface. Check too, that the straps are adjusted so that the helmet fits snugly, and sits down on your forehead, hitting somewhere above your eyebrows. A common mistake is to wear a helmet that rides up too high, which won't protect your forehead in the event of a wipeout.

5. Chain and Gears

The last thing to check is that your chain turns cleanly through your front and rear sprockets and doesn't rub against the derailleurs. You can do this as you pedal when you first set off. At the same time, quickly run your bike through its range of gears to make sure there are no problems with rough shifting, chain slippage etc., and that the drive train is free from excessive grime and doesn't need lubrication.

Quick, Easy, and Very, Very Important

All told, these checks should take you less than 30 seconds, and really just require a visual inspection of your bike's main components. This is smart and easy way to make sure you stay as safe as possible when you're out on your bike.