

Tips, tricks can help keep riders enjoying the outdoors

Ann Wessel, awessel@stcloudtimes.com 3:26 p.m. CDT May 17, 2014

A bike ride, especially a first-of-the-season outing, should start with a through look-over



(Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)



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Jeff Bias worked a skinny inner tube back onto a silver bicycle rim — an action he's repeated more times than he can count.

The day before, he had finished fixing five of the approximately 350 bikes Outdoor Endeavors' shop will repair in an average year. Tires and tuneups are the top two reasons people bring their bikes to Outdoor Endeavors mechanics at St. Cloud State University. Earlier on this Saturday morning, he ran a batch of inner tubes through a bucket of water, checking for leaks. If no bubbles appeared, he tossed the tube onto a pile to

be sold.

But Bias, 23, a graphic design major and football player who works at Outdoor Endeavors during his sport's offseason, said the biggest problem he sees with bikes is easily avoided.

"The biggest thing we see when people come in in the springtime is they've left their bike out all winter," Bias said. Ivan Bartha, Outdoor Endeavors' coordinator of experiential education and outdoor programming, nodded in agreement. He's seen his share of rusted chains and cracked tires.

With a recent warm-up sending fair-weather bicyclists back onto trails and roads, business has picked up at Outdoor Endeavors and other St. Cloud-area shops such as Erik's Bikes & Boards, where Josh Underland has been the service manager for the past four years.

Mechanics suggested what to look for in a start-of-the-season once-over, what everyone should know how to fix or adjust — along with one trick that might help track a stolen bike and another that might temporarily fix a flat.

Fixing flats

Fixing a flat is the No. 1 skill every bicyclist should know, the mechanics agreed. With a small bike tire iron and a patch kit, Bias said, extracting and patching an inner tube is relatively simple.

"The trick is letting the glue dry and making sure it's sealed on the edges," Bias said. After he deflates the inner tube, applies the patch and pumps the tube back up with air, he seals the patch's edges with more glue.

Without the benefit of a bucket of water to help find the leak, Underland holds the inner tube alongside his face to feel the stream of leaking air. Listening for the hiss also may work.

Plenty of online videos provide instructions. But two sites on the St. Cloud State campus provide instructions at bicycle repair stations. With a smartphone's QR reader and bicycle mounted on the station, cyclists can watch a video as they use the tools tethered to the post. Stations are near Outdoor Endeavors and Atwood Memorial Center.

Similar stations will be installed at Lake George off Seventh Street South and at the Beaver Island Trail kiosk at 33rd Street South and Clearwater Road. Scott Zlotnik, St. Cloud's park and recreation director, said installation likely would occur in June. Pedal Minnesota and HealthPartners are funding the pilot project.

For a temporary fix when a repair kit or station or shop isn't available, Underland has used a dollar bill on larger punctures. The method, which requires an air pump, involves putting the bill between tire and tube.

"It would act as a tire boot to get you back into town," Underland said. "It's very temporary."

SCSU's Outdoor Endeavors works on hundreds of bikes each season. St. Cloud Times

Basic adjustments

Knowing how to lower the bicycle seat is the No. 1 adjustment every bicyclist should know. Most of the time, all it takes is an Allen wrench. Outdoor Endeavors staff get questions about seat adjustments on a regular basis.

Tire pressure is something that's often adjusted — but improperly. Because bikes' tire pressure is much higher, Underland said, the air tends to escape faster. He suggested checking the pressure before every ride.

Buying a new bike doesn't guarantee it will be ready for the road. Bartha said that's especially true if it comes from a retailer that doesn't specialize in bikes. Bolts may need tightening. Brakes may require adjustment.

Bartha said few of the Outdoor Endeavors clients give much thought to bike security. Some municipalities register bikes.

Claiming a stolen bike can be simple. One suggestion Bartha passes along: Laminate a business card and deposit it in the seat post.

Outdoor Endeavors

COMMUNITY OPTION: St. Cloud State University's Outdoor Endeavors extends its bike repair, parts and rental services to community members. OE restores donated bikes for free use by students. Find details on the Outdoor Endeavors link at www.stcloudstate.edu/campusrec (<http://www.stcloudstate.edu/campusrec>).

SCRAP TO ART: Eighteen donated bikes deemed beyond repair may be destined for a second life as public art. The St. Cloud Downtown Council this spring put out the call for artists to do their work on the bikes. The council's president, Pegg A.K. Gustafson, said a painter, a knitter and a sculptor were among those at work. Sponsors will have the option of displaying a bike; all will be rounded up for display during St. Cloud's July 12 Walk About.

What to carry

Mechanics suggest a basic bicycle repair kit might include the following: air pump, tire-repair kit, plastic and/or metal tire iron, spare inner tube and Allen wrench.

Back on the road

Erik's Bikes & Boards is among the St. Cloud-area bike shops that host weekly rides. Josh Underland, Erik's service manager in St. Cloud, recommends the following nobody-left-

behind rides for beginners (all start at 6 p.m.): Monday's 20- to 25-mile road ride around rural St. Cloud; Tuesday's 20-mile road ride; Monday's 10-mile mountain bike ride from the shop to trails near the Minnesota Correctional Facility-St. Cloud.

Bike check

Mechanics recommend giving your bike the once-over at least at the start of the season, preferably before every ride. Here are the basics.

TIRES: Look for wear. Look for cracking on the tire walls. Check the tire pressure. The PSI is stamped on the tire.

BRAKES: "There shouldn't be any give in the brakes. You never should be able to pull the brake lever all the way to the handles," said Outdoor Endeavors student mechanic Jeff Bias. Brake pads should be even and placed so they hit the steel rim, with the thickest part of the wedge-shaped pads on the bottom. Calipers should be even.

GEARS: Check to ensure they're shifting correctly. With the bike mounted on a stand or turned upside-down, rotate the pedals and shift. The chain should not skip a gear.

BEARINGS: If the gears seem wobbly or the handlebars seem to pull in one direction, bearings may be to blame. "If it feels wobbly or won't turn, there's the problem," said Ivan Bartha, Outdoor Endeavors' coordinator of experiential education.

CHAIN: "Cleaning your chain is probably something underrated," Bartha said. Outdoor Endeavors staff uses mineral spirits and a cleaning tool, and then lets the chain dry before lubricating it with silicone or something similar. At Erik's Bikes & Boards in St. Cloud, Service Manager Josh Underland said staff uses a Teflon product that dries and then repels grime.

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