

Getting Your Bike (and You) Back in Shape



he sun is shining, the birds are singing, the outdoors are calling and you're staring at the same dusty bike that has been sitting in your garage since President Bush (the *first* one) was in office. Good news... despite the dust, it's probably easier than you think to get your bicycle back in safe working order. Assuming the bike was set aside due to lack of riding and not a cartwheeling crash into your neighbor's mailbox, you should be able to do it without special tools or being a superstar bike mechanic.

First, take a look at the bike for any obvious signs of problems: rust, cracked rubber, loose bolts, etc. Any part of the bike that has more than a very light patina of surface rust should be replaced. The same goes for any cracked or badly worn rubber items such as: tires, tubes, or brake pads—the last thing you need is a tire or brake pad failure! Also, make sure all components of the bike (brakes, wheels, cranks, handlebar etc.) are firmly attached to the bike and have no signs of instability.

Second, check the function of the bicycle:

- Do the wheels, cranks, and pedals spin freely without wobbling or rubbing? Do the tires hold pressure?
- Will the brakes stop the bike quickly and solidly with a pull on the lever?
- If the bicycle is equipped with multiple gears, does the bike shift from lowest gear to highest gear smoothly without significant hesitation, skipped gears, or the chain falling off the largest or smallest cogs?

If you answered "No" or "Well, sort of..." to any of those questions, you need to address that issue. A little fine-tuning to the built-in adjusters can often solve these problems. Simple to use screw and barrel adjusters are often located on the brakes, levers, and derailleurs. If you feel like you're getting in over your head or that there is a serious safety issue, don't hesitate to call (or bring your bike in to) your friendly local bicycle shop.

Consult the web resources below for specific bike repair topics:
<http://www.bicycling.com/maintenance/repair-maintenance>
<http://www.parktool.com/blog/repair-help>
<http://www.sheldonbrown.com/repair/index.html>

Before



After



*"Despite the dust, it's probably easier than you think to get your bicycle back in safe working order."
—Graydon N.*