



Greater Dallas Bicyclists Club
Guide for New Bicyclers

<http://www.greaterdallasbicyclists.com>

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Volume I – Preparing for your first ride.

Okay, so you joined the club, you want to ride fast, go places you haven't been before, or maybe you just want to take a leisurely spin around White Rock Lake with some friends. Whatever level rider you are or want to be, you will have an easier time of it if you are properly prepared for your ride.

In the next few pages we have tried to cover all of the basics of preparing for and selecting a ride. In later papers we will try to cover the basics of riding techniques, road safety, bicycle maintenance and even more advanced topics such as hydration, training and nutrition. But for now, if you read this material, pay attention to it, and take the suggestions, you have a reasonably good chance of showing up for your first ride with the club adequately prepared. Don't be afraid to tell the other riders you are new to cycling; they will coach you through the ride and look out for you.

The Greater Dallas Bicyclists Club has a tremendous amount of "accumulated tribal knowledge" from many years of cycling experience. We have tried to capture some of that here, both the serious and the funny.

Unfortunately, biking is an equipment and apparel intensive activity, much like skiing or scuba diving. So, until the point that one can memorize that cycling shoes, helmets, gloves, water bottles, and so on and so forth,

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

"Showing up for that big rally and realizing that the only shoes you brought are your Teva sandals will result in no miles on your odometer for the day."

are required for riding, use a checklist before driving off to that next cycling activity. The following sections give you a laundry list of what you need to help make sure you show up to your first club ride with everything you need:

Clothing

The club rides in all weather and all temperatures with the possible exception of ice and snow. We don't deliberately ride in lightening storms but sometimes get caught in them.

Bike clothing is expensive, but it does make a difference to have the right stuff. Most important are the new microfibers designed to wick water away from your body. It can be 100 degrees and you can still be comfortable riding because the wicking accelerates the evaporative cooling caused by the air flow across your body as you ride.

Summer

- **Bicycle shorts.** Getting some good bicycle shorts is important. The padding in the seat really helps on long rides. Bicycle shorts are designed to be worn without underwear. First, the seams can chafe. Second, cotton underwear soaks up sweat that the bicycle shorts would otherwise wick away. You will be cooler and drier with out the underwear.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

“Underpants lines (especially on guys) are not cool.”

“I love this! Panty lines!!!

Even worse is showing up for a ride and forgetting you wore your leather "death metal" codpiece with steel studs and center tassel under your cycling pants. Come on... I can't be the ONLY one that's happened too....”

“You are a wild one at that! I knew you had it in you!”

“Undies under cycling shorts...what's worse is women wearing thong underwear...OUCH! How much chamois butter do you need for that chaffing?”

- **Short sleeve Jersey.** Almost all biking jerseys are coolmax or some other microfibre to help keep you cool and dry by wicking the sweat away from your body. A cotton t-shirt won't cool you as well. It is worth the investment.
- **Gloves.** Well padded gloves really help on a long ride. Fingerless gloves work for about 8 months of the year.

- **Cycling shoes.** You really should get yourself a good pair of cycling shoes and clipless pedals. The term is confusing since they really do clip your shoe to the pedal, but that is done by means of a cleat

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge: *“My #1 revelatory experience had to be clipless pedals... some people seem to think they're just for "pros" or speed demons, but nothing beats that "connected" feeling. Especially if you hop off of curbs, and during speedy turns.”*

mounted on the bottom of your shoe that clips into the locking mechanism on the pedal as opposed to the older toe clips or straps that were prevalent before clipless pedals were invented. Clipless pedals will help you cycle more efficiently since you can work both legs simultaneously where without them you only use one leg at a time on the down-stroke. Work with your bike store to get them properly adjusted, poorly adjusted clips can be a source of knee trouble. Also make sure they adjust the tension so you can easily “clip out” when you have to.

- **Socks** (preferably coolmax)

Optional Summer Clothing

- **A bandana.** All you reading this who are follically challenged pay close attention. You will look really funny with the top of your head sunburned in a pattern that matches the vents in your helmet. And if you don't put it on your head you can use it to wipe the sweat off your face.
- **Sweat bands.** Some people like them. Not everyone.

- **A change of dry clothes.** Think about when you get back to the car hot and sweaty and dusty after a 50 mile ride in west Texas somewhere. Would you want to ride in the car with you on the way home?
- **Rain gear.** Forget about rain gear. Just get wet if it rains. In the summer it is so hot that if you try to wear a waterproof shell you will be just as wet from sweat as you would be from the rain, and the rain smells better.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge: "Raingear? Real bikers don't wear raingear!"

Spring/Fall

Anyone who has lived in Texas for any length of time knows how unpredictable the weather can be. Some days you will ride in summer clothes and other days it will feel like winter. There are lots of different clothing options, and everyone has different preferences.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge: "Layer? I don't even know her!!"

You will have to experiment a little to see what works best for you but here are some of the more prevalent choices. Just remember the three rules of dressing for cool weather cycling; Layer, Layer, Layer. To the summer list you may want to add:

- **Leg and arm warmers.** These are good when it is cool in the morning. Wear them with your summer bike clothes and take them off when it warms up.
- **Long-legged tights.** Most long-legged biking tights are now designed to go over your bike shorts. That is why they are usually not padded. Like the leg and arm warmers, you peel them off when it begins to warm up (at least if you remembered to put your shorts on).
- **A waterproof nylon shell.** You are more likely to hit rain in the spring and fall. So it is good to have one of these. The shells with removable sleeves are particularly useful because you will be comfortable wearing them in a wider range of temperatures. Some also have hoods that roll up into the collar.
- **Long-fingered gloves.** They don't have to be insulated yet, but when the temperature drops below 60 degrees, you will begin to feel the wind chill on your fingers, and they will be downright uncomfortable when it gets below 50 if you don't have long-fingered gloves.
- **Long-sleeved jersey.** Once the temperature forces you to go to a nylon shell, you will want to wear a long-sleeved jersey under it

Winter

The club rides year-round, and some of the rides in winter can be pretty cold, particularly the ones that start in the morning. It is actually a good idea to dress so you are a little cold starting out because you generate a lot of heat when you are cycling, and will quickly warm up. The thing you have to watch out for are you extremities; fingers, toes, and ears. Wind chill is a problem, even if it is a calm day, because you generate your own wind chill with your speed. You can get frostbite even when it is not below freezing because of windchill. On a forty degree day, exposed skin can get frostbite in 30 minutes if the wind speed is 20 mph. So the trick is not too much extra is needed on your body, but take care of those fingers and toes.

To the fall list you may want to add:

- **Neckgator.** Neckgators are very useful. Depending on how you stretch them over your head, they can be just a hat, they can cover your head and neck, or maybe your chin as well. Tuck it down into your jacket so there aren't any gaps. If you tape some of the vents in your helmet to cut down air flow, the neckgator should be all you need.
- **Another insulation layer.** You can buy insulated biking tights, but ski underwear used with regular tights works just as well and is more versatile.
- **Insulated gloves.** You can buy insulated biking gloves if you want, but ski gloves (with fingers, not mittens) will work as well, as long as they are not too bulky.
- **Ski socks (optional).** Thermal ski socks work well with biking shoes and give your toes considerably more warmth.
- **Shoe covers (optional).** Shoe covers also help keep your feet warm, these are insulated "bras" that go on the outside of your shoes and have a hole in the bottom for your cleats. If you don't like heavy socks, you may want to try the shoe covers instead.

Stuff to put in your pockets:

- **A snack.** Cycling at 15mph for a normal sized rider burns about 700 calories and hour so on a 45 mile ride you can burn 2100 calories. A snack can help keep your energy up. Many GDB rides will plan one of their breaks at a convenience store, but you can't plan when you will need a snack to keep you going, and many rides don't have anyplace convenient to stop. There are lots of specialty foods formulated to boost energy and help endurance. Some good choices are Clif bars and Power bars. Then again some of us prefer more traditional snacks like chocolate chip cookies and trail mix.
- **Tums.** Tums are very effective at controlling leg cramps.

- **Cell Phone.** Good in case of emergencies, break-downs, or if you get lost. Wrap your phone in a baggy, particularly if you sweat a lot. The salt from your sweat can get into keys and corrode the contacts. That will also protect it if you get caught in the rain.
- **Sun glasses.** Even if you are not particularly light sensitive, sunglasses help keep the dust and bugs out of your eyes.
- **Sun block.** Get waterproof sunblock with a rating of at least SPF 35.
- **Cash/credit card.** You may want a snack or a drink at a rest stop.
- **ID/Insurance card.** Just in case.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

Cell phone tip: even cell phones that are no longer tied to accounts can be used to call 911.

Equipment to bring

- **Bike.** The club primarily does road rides, so except for the Level 1 or 2 rides if you don't have a road bike you will have a hard time keeping up. We won't get into the Carbon vs. Aluminum vs. Titanium vs. Steel argument here. Or the Champy vs. Shimano argument either. Everyone has an opinion they will be most happy to share with you. The best advice is, if you haven't already bought a bike or are thinking about buying a new one, go to a bike store work with them. Ride all the types and find the one most comfortable for you that fits your budget.
- **Helmet.** Helmets are required on all GDB rides. Given the heat we ride in here in Texas get one with plenty of vents. In winter you can tape the vents with duct tape to cut down the airflow. Make sure it is properly fitted and that the chin strap is snug but not uncomfortable. Always fasten your chin strap. Your helmet does you no good if it comes off in a fall.
- **Mirror.** A mirror is a good thing to have because you can track cars and other riders behind you. There are several variations; helmet mounted, sunglass mounted or handlebar mounted. Once again everyone will be willing to share their point of view with you. The helmet or sunglass mounted mirrors have a big advantage in that you have a much wider field of vision

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

"If you are not comfortable on your bike work with an experienced person or shop to make the adjustments to get a good fit so you don't needlessly hurt your knees, back, etc. Don't give up until you are satisfied that the adjustments or bike is right for you."

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

"It never fails. Every time I venture out, I will see someone with their helmet on backwards. Note: the big bulbous end goes at the back, it is not a visor. You will find that the vents work more efficiently when it gets really hot".

"Big bulbous end? Are you talking about the helmet or the rider? :)"

"Both"

because you can turn your head to scan a wide area behind you where the field of vision on a handlebar mounted mirror is limited by the direction of your handlebars. The disadvantage to a helmet or sunglass mounted mirror is that it creates a blind spot in your forward field of vision.

- **Water bottles or hydration backpack.** You should carry at least 2 quarts of either water or a mixture of water and sports drinks. You will find people that prefer bottles and others prefer backpacks. Either works. If you want to use a water bottle have two racks mounted on your bike. One is not enough. Backpacks are better insulated so drinks will stay cold longer, but many people don't like the feel of them on their backs.
- **Repair Kit.** You need to have a repair kit on your bike. The most convenient way is to hang a saddle bag under your seat. Some riders prefer to stuff things in their shirt pockets, but you probably won't be able to carry everything you need if you do.
 1. **An inflation device.** You should either bring a hand pump that mounts on the frame or a CO² cartridge system. If you use CO² cartridges bring a couple of spare cartridges in case the first doesn't work. Make sure you have the right size cartridge for the type of tire you are using. Mountain bikes, hybrids and road bikes all use different size cartridges.
 2. **A spare tube.** Keep a new tube in your kit. Patched tubes are not as reliable as a new tube. The patches may degrade over time sitting in your saddlebag. It's just not worth the extra hassles for the few dollars you would save.
 3. **A tire patch kit.** A patch kit is not enough by itself because there are things the patch kit can't fix such as a stem that fails. By the same token a tube is not enough by itself, because you might hit broken glass and puncture both tires. Unlikely, maybe, but it has happened. By having both the patch kit and the spare tube you increase the number of scenarios you can handle dramatically.
 4. **A combination tool.** The bike store has tools the size and shape of Swiss army knives that have most if not all of the hand tools you would need for a bike. It usually has two or three Allen wrenches, a Phillips head and a flat head screwdriver.
 5. **A small monkey-head wrench.** If you have a bike that does not have a quick release lever for the seat post you may want to keep one of these in your saddlebag in case the seat slips. You can buy these as small as 3 inches in length at any hardware store so it is not a big addition to your kit.

6. **Tire levers.** There is some debate about whether you should use tire levers or pry the tire off by hand because if improperly used the levers could pinch the tube (not a problem if it is already flat). That is kind of esoteric and we won't go into it here. However two things are certain; if you don't have strong enough hands you need them or if you have the wrong kind of tires you need them because some tires are much harder to get off. They don't weigh much, they don't take up a lot of room, bring them.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

"The best way to remove tires is to use nothing but your fingers and thumbs. I've never carried a tire iron in my life. And I have never seen a tire I could not dismount with just my hands. "

"--Okay, I might try this, but I'm sending you the manicure bill when I break a finger nail! ;-)"

"So... am I doing something wrong when I grasp the tire firmly with my teeth, and just shake my head violently??"

7. **A pen knife.** There are all sorts of uses for this.

8. **A chain tool.** This is a little beyond the basics, but you can buy small chain repair tools that are not hard to use and just leave it in your kit in case you need it. There is nothing else you can use to fix a broken chain, so if you don't have one and your chain breaks you are out of luck. Better to be prepared.

Preparing your Bicycle

Not everyone is going to become an expert bicycle mechanic. Not everyone has the time, the aptitude, or the place to work. If you can't maintain your own bike take it to a bike store for a tune up every six months. It will cost about \$75 dollars, but is worth the investment to keep your bike in shape.

If you do want to invest the time to maintain your own bike, there are plenty of good sources of information on the subject listed at the end of this section to help you get started.

However there are a few things that everyone must be able to do, because they need to be done before each ride. Well maintained bikes are more efficient and go faster, that alone is a pretty good reason to take the time.

Here are the things you should do before each ride:

1. Check that the tires are inflated to their proper pressure.

Tires lose air on every ride. Everyone needs a good floor standing tire pump. A good model has a built in pressure gauge so you can see the pressure as you are pumping up the tire. If your bike has Presta (the thin valves with a little scored head on top of the stem) valves, you have to unscrew the stem counter clockwise and then press down on the stem head to break the seal. If you don't do this you will be unable to inflate the tire. Schram valves (the wider ones with the recessed stem)

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

“When I first bought a road bike I had never used a Presta valve before and didn't know you had to unscrew the stem to get air into the tube. So when I thought I was pumping up the tube I was really pressurizing the hose. So for the first few weeks, my tires kept getting softer and softer until it was really noticeable. Was I embarrassed when I realized what was wrong!”

- 2. Check that the wheels spin freely and are firmly mounted.** If the wheel is rubbing on the brake pad or the frame there are three possible causes. Two you can easily fix and one is more difficult. First, check to make sure the wheel is properly seated in the fork and that the clamp is tight. Also make sure you have the wheel facing properly so your sensor will work. If not seated properly the wheel could be rotating at an angle. If you regularly have to take your front wheel off to transport your bike you are particularly susceptible to this type of problem. Second, check that the brake pad assembly is properly aligned. It can easily be knocked out of alignment and one side will be rubbing. To straighten it, simply clamp your hand over the wheel so that your thumb is in contact with one pad and your fingers are pressing on the other pad, and then gradually apply pressure to the side that is not rubbing to rotate the assembly so the pads are evenly spaced on both sides of the wheel. Spin the wheel and see if it now turns freely. If it does you are good to go. If it rubs at the same point in the revolution you have now hit the third and more difficult problem; the wheel is not trued properly and you probably have one or more loose or broken spokes. Have someone on the ride look at it for you. If it is loose they may be able to adjust it. If it is broken you are done for the day.

GDB Accumulated Tribal Knowledge:

“Having your computer read zero miles an hour when you swear you're going twenty is not a good thing.

“Unfortunately, on several group rides and rallies, I've had the misfortune to see the big zero on the speedometer, only to realize that my front wheel sensor magnet was on the wrong side. When reattaching your front wheel before that big ride, ensure that the spoke magnet is on the correct side of the sensor. I typically do this by making sure that my wheel lever is on the "left" side of the bike. When I'm confused as to what side is left, I just make sure that the lever is on the same side of the bike as the one on the attached back wheel (the back wheel can only be attached in one way; front wheels can be attached in either direction).”

3. **Check that the brakes are working properly.** On some bikes you have to disengage the cable from the brake assembly to take a wheel off. On other bikes there is a lever that spreads the pads apart to enable you to take the wheel off. If you have to do this, always remember to return the pads to their proper position when you put the wheel back on and always double-check that you have done so the next time you go to ride. So first make sure the brake assemblies are fully connected and that the pads are rotated in close to but not touching the wheel (an eighth of an inch is about right). Lift the bike so the front wheel is off the ground. Spin the wheel and then squeeze your brake. The left hand brake lever operates the front brake and the right hand lever operates the rear brake. The brake pads should grab the wheel firmly and the wheel should stop immediately. If it does not, have someone either a club member or your bike store look at it before you ride.

Accumulated GDB Tribal Knowledge:

"I drove to a TEBR ride. I had to take my front wheel off to put my bike in the car and when I re-mounted it I forgot to reconnect the brake cable before starting down the bike trail. I had a scare when I got to Royal Lane. Fortunately I was able to stop the bike using the rear brake only before I went into the street."

4. **Clean and lubricate the chain.** Chains should be kept clean and well lubricated, but it doesn't have to be lubricated before every ride. Once every four or five rides should be enough or after any ride where you hit a lot of water or mud. Chains are magnets for dust and dirt because of the lubricant. So you will have to periodically clean and re-lubricate the chain to keep it functioning properly. An easy way to clean the chain is to buy a can of chain degreaser at your bike store. Spray the degreaser on the chain and let it sit a few minutes. Then wipe the chain with a rag. If you have a bike stand, turn the pedals to run the chain thru the rag. Then lightly lubricate the chain and wipe off the excess lubricant.

Why is this important?

Poorly oiled chains are harder to pedal and increase wear and tear on the gear set.

5. **Bounce your bike.** A final test that everything is as it should be is to pick your bike up and bounce it lightly on the wheels to see if it makes any unusual noises. Any unusual rattle is an indication that something is loose that shouldn't be. Get some help locating the source of the rattle if you need it.

Picking a good first ride

It seems like the most frequent problem that new riders with the club encounter is picking a ride that is over their ability level with the result that they get worn out and may not even be able to finish the ride. This isn't good. Riders that have a discouraging first ride with the club sometimes don't come back. We don't want that to happen. We want you to stick around. So this section gives you some tips to help you get started with the right ride.

The ride calendar in the Spokesman provides information to help you pick the ride that is right for your ability level. GDB has riders of all ability levels and rides scheduled all over the Metroplex, so the schedule encompasses a wide variety of speed, distance and terrain options. The Spokesman provides basic information about each ride; how far, how fast, how hilly, how many rest stops, etc. It also provides a summary classification which is based on the subjective judgment of the ride leaders of the overall difficulty of the ride, Pay careful attention to the classification scheme. If you are a new or slow rider then you should start with rides that are identified as Level 1 or Level 2 rides. Level 3 are intermediate rides. Level 4 and Level 5 rides are for advanced riders.

You first need to understand your current ability level. If you are not sure how fast you ride, the first step is to find out. The average speed you can maintain over a distance is the most important determinant in how well you will do on a ride, because that is a good indicator of your level of aerobic conditioning and endurance. If you don't have a trip computer get one. Decent trip computers with basic odometer and speedometer functions are available for \$25 or less. More sophisticated ones cost more, but you don't need that right now. Ride at least 10 miles on relatively easy terrain on a day when conditions are good, and check your average on the computer. One loop around White Rock Lake is just about 10 miles and classifies as easy terrain. This is important because variables such as wind, hills, road hazards and route congestion influence your speed at various times in the ride and you may be making an overoptimistic assessment if you only measure your speed for a short distance.

If your average speed (from the reading on your cyclometer) is less than 14 mph we strongly suggest you start with some of the Level 1 and Level 2 rides to develop your riding skills before trying something tougher. GDB has training rides on Sunday afternoons specifically to help inexperienced riders develop better riding skills. There are also other Level 1 and Level 2 rides that cater to riders that want a slower more relaxed pace.

If your speed is greater than 14 mph you could probably safely start with a Level 3 ride. If you are an experienced bicyclist, meaning that you have ridden with a club before, are used to fast rides, in groups, in hilly terrain, on roads, you could probably start with a Level 4 ride. Everyone else really should start with a level 3 ride first and be sure you are comfortable with that level before moving up to something more challenging.

For those of you who think you could start with a Level 4 ride but may not be sure, let us suggest one more test; do the same ride around White Rock Lake and this time hit four or five of the hills around the lake such as flagpole hill. See if your average is still above 14 mph. If it is not, stick to Level 3 for now. There is not a major difference between the pace of Level 3 and Level 4/5 rides. The big difference is that Level 4 and 5 rides tend to be for longer distances and in more hilly terrain. There is a big difference between averaging 14 mph on relatively flat terrain for 20 miles and averaging 14 mph in hilly terrain for 50 miles.

Some rides split into a faster group and a slower group. For those rides the level of the two groups will be indicated, for example Level 2/3 or 4/5. As long as one of the levels shown matches your level you should be able to ride the ride, just be sure you pick the appropriate group to ride with.

Information Sources

Web Sites:

The State of Pennsylvania has an excellent “drivers manual” for bicyclers. <http://www.dot.state.pa.us/Internet/hwyIntHS.nsf/frmBikeManual>

John Allen’s website <http://www.bikexprt.com/> also has an excellent explanation of safe riding techniques.

Bicycling Life has good articles on bicycling techniques, maintenance tips and lots of other useful information. <http://www.bicyclinglife.com/>

The Harris Cyclery in West Newton Massachusetts has an excellent collection of articles on-line about bicycle technology, maintenance and riding techniques. <http://www.sheldonbrown.com/harris/index.html#articles>.

WFAA has color weather radar available on the web at <http://www.wfaa.com/>. It is always good to look at this before you go out for a ride.

The Adventure Cycling Association (<http://www.adventurecycling.org/>) will give you some interesting ideas about more advanced riding experiences.

Chainguard is a national bicyclers’ advocacy group. <http://probicycle.com/>

The Texas Bicycle Coalition deals with state and local bicycle issues. <http://www.biketexas.org/>

Books:

“Effective Cycling” by John Forester and “Bicycling Street Smarts” by John Allen for the techniques. “Bicycling Street Smarts” is also viewable on John Allen’s web site.

“It’s not about the bike” by Lance Armstrong for the inspiration.

“Bicycling Magazine’s Complete Guide to Bicycle Maintenance and Repair, 20th edition” by Jim Langley for the nuts and bolts.