

Getting Started

Believe it or not everyone was a beginner once. Often in sports new to us we enter them as if we are the only ones starting from scratch. The reality is that even the most seasoned mountain biker started somewhere. The difference with many of us who have been riding for a long time is that we relied on various resources (both good and bad at times) for our information on just "how" to get better. The aim with this beginners guide is to guide you the beginner through some of the early stages of riding and/or racing and get you on the trails enjoying them safely. In the process we hope to lay a sound foundation for you to build on as you develop.

Topics Covered

- Equipment Choice
- Trail Ethics
- Bike Maintenance & Setup Tips
- Training & Racing

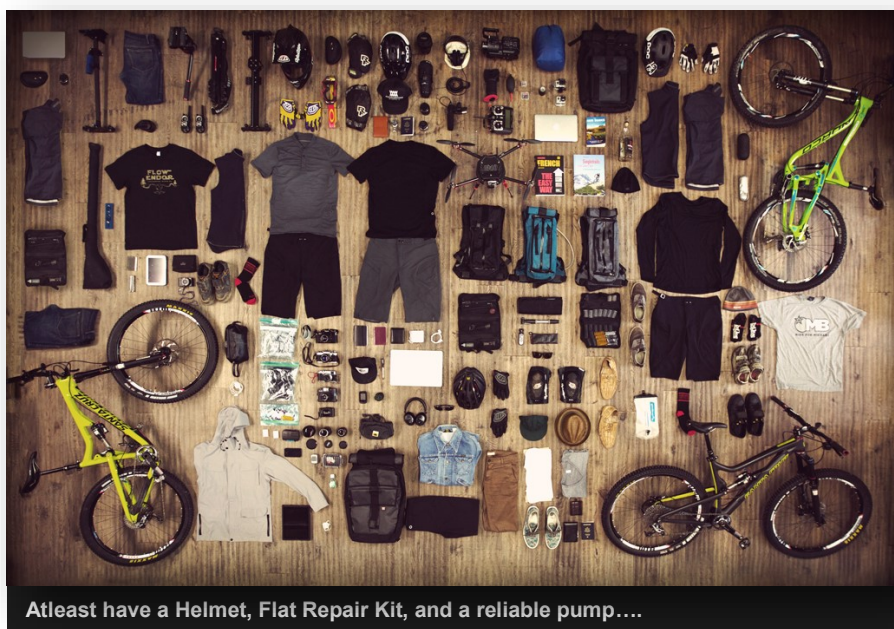
"Mountain biking helps people become environmentalists. A mountain bike is a vehicle to appreciate the backcountry..."

*-Ned Overend
(Mtb World Champion 1990)*



Photo Credit: CFSORBA

Location: Bicycle Post Trail



Wheelsize– Go Big!

When looking for your new bike you will no doubt get bombarded with the various wheel sizes (26, 27.5 or 650, and 29er). Given we are seeking MAX fun factor as a beginner without compromising safety and handling. I would advise to go with 29er. This size handles securely and with ease at varying speeds but more importantly rolls over terrain easier! **smaller riders may benefit from 27.5/650**.

The various array of manufacturers out there have different systems for determining ideal wheel size. My advice spend the time at your local bike shop and try them all, noting which you feel best on!

ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET!

My First Mountain Bike

Picking out your first mountain bike can be a daunting task. There's so many options out there that it can be dizzying walking into your local bicycle shop for the first time. Note I said "your local bicycle shop" and not your global department store. Now, I will admit many riders start on a dept. store bicycle due to the shiny allure that you're getting "the same thing" for a couple hundred dollars vs. the full-suspension at the bike shop for a couple thousand.....you aren't the first to think this nor the last. I assure you though they're not the same.

Many local bike shops accept trade-ins and if you look around often you can save a lot of money and get a higher quality bicycle in the process buying used for your first mountain bike. This is a great option, as you will most likely getting bitten by the gear bug and be upgrading in no time. This is the other fun part of the sport! For our purposes let's stick with "beginner level" anything above that due to larger budget or otherwise is just bonus. My recommendation is that you go with a front suspension only bike (aka "hardtail") that is sound mechanically.

Suspension (Full or Fork Only?)

Having coached all levels of riders over the years this is an ongoing decision and may or may not change as you advance your skills and trail exploring. There are advantages to both, however if you aren't ready to dish out well over \$1000 I would recommend sticking with just hardtail mountain bikes. As a beginner you don't need to spend much over the \$400-600 range to get going and have plenty of fun learning new skills. So look for a quality used hardtail and don't be afraid to test ride it in the parking lot, ask questions and don't buy the first thing you see.



Let me tell you something.....

Sunny day...temps ideal and the day had finally come....MY FIRST RACE!- Daunting to say the least but I had been riding for sometime recreationally and like many competitive thrill seekers I wanted to try my hand at cross-country racing (XC). Being new to the race environment I entered beginner class and waited for our start.

The start was furious and even as a beginner I remember having the mindset, "don't get caught in traffic". What I didn't think about was potentially holding up traffic. I was cussed at by a fellow rider for holding them up from getting near last place.....don't be that guy or girl that verbally abuses their way through the line to get into their position in the race.

The correct way to let a rider know you are coming up on them and wish to overtake them is to simply say...

- "Rider up"
- "on your left/right"

Let the person know that you are coming and which side you wish to pass on based on what the trail allows. Simple communication can be the difference in everyone having fun.



Photo Credit: Brandon Davis

Location: Blue Clay Park

Trail Ethics (on and off)

Often we think of trail ethics as merely rider ethics and although this is very important we can lose sight of the fact that we are advocates for our sport on and off the trail. If you wish for our sport to be taken seriously then you need to represent it respectfully even when not on the trails riding. By that I mean be a good person, there's a phrase..."do unto others as you would like done unto you". If you practice this you will be the kind of rider that beginners look to later when you advance in your riding.

Another trail ethic that we should all hold onto and practice is that of respecting trail conditions. Imagine this.....you and your friends spend all weekend building the most amazing dirt jump and then on Monday you see a bulldozer level it. This is how it feels for those putting in thousands (yes thousands) of man hours building the trails that we get to enjoy. They do this without pay and solely for the passion that we all share as mountain bike enthusiasts. So when it rains don't ride the trails if the sign says closed or the trail conditions (posted on SORBA website blog.capefearsorba.com). If you disregard this you are prematurely ruining the trails by advancing erosion and ruts. Now I know....it's mountain biking right? Well back country trails are not maintained and you can ride those rain, snow, sleet, shine but managed and maintained trails like the ones we enjoy in the Cape Fear region are maintained and you wouldn't want to ride them if they weren't. So respect your fellow riders and SORBA Trail Crew members and check trail conditions before hitting the trails.



Suspension Maintenance recommended routinely: Consult your mechanic!

Bike Setup

So you have bought your first mountain bike and are ready to hit the trails.... Or are you? There are a lot of things that you and your mechanic can do to make your riding instantly more enjoyable. Some of the biggest overlooked items when we all start are saddle height, bar width, brake lever position, shifter position....the list goes on. Now, I'm not saying you need to spend money to get a high quality fitting out the gate but you should at least have your local professional mechanic help you with the basics.

SADDLE HEIGHT

By far one of the most important things to get right. Regardless of skill level we all have a range (as little as +/-1cm) in saddle height. The reason this is important as your saddle height can determine efficiency, climbing power, traction, and even steering! Consult your local professional mechanic before buying a bike because if the frame size is wrong that cannot be corrected with even the most advanced fitting. Also your body can determine saddle type/width and should be addressed as well at time of purchase.

CLIPLESS (clipped in) or FLATS?

Let me explain something that confused me as a beginner. "Clipless" means you are clipped in to the pedal, the term "clipless" refers to no "cages" which preceded the current style of "binding" like pedal interfaces. That said, as a beginner start with just flat "bmx" style pedals with good grip. Work on your cornering and just riding the trails before getting pedals and shoes. Once you can ride with flats, being clipped-in just adds power and speed. Both of which are not a concern when you start out, confidence is the name of the game. We have to crawl before we can walk right?

BIKE WASH 101

You just finished riding with friends, you're tired and the thought of washing your bike is the last thing on your mind. Well us mechanics love you, because you are wearing out parts a lot faster than most!

Many people get intimidated with washing their bike. It's easy though. Grab a bucket, some Dawn dish soap, hot water, and a sponge! In a separate container (old cup is fine) put some degreaser in it with a small paint brush.

- Wet bike down with water and a gentle stream.
- Paint the chain, derailleur(s), chainring(s), Cassette with degreaser thoroughly. Clean debris from pulleys etc.
- Grab hot soapy sponge and go over the whole bike re-wetting sponge frequently.
- Hose off bike taking care to not use high pressure
especially at bearing points
- Take an old t-shirt and hold the chain while pedaling backwards.
- Dry bike & re-lube! DONE!
Consult local shop for lubes



Basics

There are many things that comprise the “complete” cyclist. Foundationally though we all need one thing.... and that is endurance. If your goal is to finish two laps at your local trail in under an hour. You must first be able to complete two laps right? This is one component that gets overlooked with beginners because if you are like many beginners the allure of going long and hard on the trails is what motivates you.

When starting out I would recommend working on developing your aerobic base (also know as endurance). To do this you don't need any fancy gadgets but can instead use your perceived effort as a gauge. If you have the luxury of a heart rate monitor then bonus! Basically though you want to ride at a “conversational” pace or once that you can speak the majority of the ride in full sentences before needing to take a breath.

This type of training is great for your first few weeks to months as it will allow your body to adapt to the workload. Eventually you will be able to go faster at the same perceived effort or heart rate as a result.

Remember we have to crawl before we can walk!



Training & Racing

If you like many riders get the itch to go faster, longer, harder you will no doubt run into the two terms listed above. Depending on the level of those two words you seek to obtain will depend on two major items.

Intensity & Volume

At the very basic level training and the resulting fitness is dictated by these two “control knobs” if you will. If you are building up to your first season of racing or want to be fit enough to jump into races casually from time to time then you will need to pay attention to these “control knobs” and respect them. A general rule is you can't increase one without decreasing the other.

Intensity: This “knob” controls how hard of an effort you are riding perceived or measured. If you increase this too rapidly by riding either too hard too soon or too hard for too long you can compromise your immune system or worse overtrain. You want to step up intensity from week to week and as a beginner one or two rides a week is about max you want to do and keep them short, which leads us to the other “knob”.

Volume: This “knob” controls how long and often you ride and is typically spoken of in terms of hours per week. Much like intensity you can push volume only so far before your body needs rest.

My recommendation to beginners is start with 2-3 rides a week and keep intensity low at first until you are able to ride 3-4 times a week for at least an hour each ride. If you need help getting started contact me (Brandon@wattagecottage.cc) for a beginner training plan, Cape Fear SORBA members get a discount!

About me...

As a USA Cycling Level 2 Certified coach I can guide those with the desire to push themselves along the path to finding their true potential. As racers or serious enthusiasts alike, I provide full coaching and/or consulting utilizing my B.S. in Exercise Science and first hand experience in periodization training for both the heart rate and/or power based athlete. Having coached myself, and others, to the podium in disciplines ranging from cyclocross, long/short course triathlons (including Ironman), marathons and ultramarathons (trail/road), road racing, and mountain biking (xc/marathon/ultradistance) I know what it takes from marginal to exponential...from amateur to professional.

In addition to coaching I provide personalized professional mechanic support, be it via pickup/delivery or on location. If you already have a relationship with your local bike shop mechanic and are happy that's great! If you struggle to get to the local shop due to schedule or just location. I can come to you and provide the same mechanic support that professional teams I've worked with have enjoyed. All in the comfort of your home or with pickup/drop off option as well in the greater Wilmington area and surrounding vicinities.

I have the experience, have gone through and seen a lot of what works and doesn't work. Together we can streamline your training, optimizing your time in an effort to attain your goals be it beginner or seasoned pro. If you want to perform near or at peak form, or just want to ride stronger in your local group rides... Wattage Cottage can help, and I look forward to doing so! Let me manage the science, after all..." what gets measured gets managed"!

Contact Info

For personalized coaching and/or World Cup level service of your bicycle get in touch.

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