
LUTON & DUNSTABLE CYCLING FORUM

Luton and Dunstable Cycling Forum Guide to basic bike maintenance

Bikes are simple machines – the basic design hasn't changed too much in over 100 years. And with a little care and some simple tools and equipment, your bike has a chance of lasting almost as long.

Essential items

- 1) Puncture repair kit. As sure as rain on a bank holiday, at some point you'll get a puncture.
- 2) Tyre levers – to be used with the above, in order to remove the tyre, so you can fix it.
- 3) Spare inner tube – in case you can't fix the puncture. Make sure you have the correct size.
- 4) Pump – after all, you'll need to pump up the tyre.
- 5) Multi-tool. A Swiss knife type device with Allen keys and various screwdrivers, useful when out on the road for dealing with emergencies.
- 6) Spanners. Either a range of 10mm to 15 mm spanners or an adjustable spanner.
- 7) Oil – doesn't have to be fancy hi-tech lube – car engine oil will do, just don't let your chain go rusty.

All of the above can be obtained from any of the local bike shops (see over for details).

Regular checks

When checking over your bike, it's always best to clean it first. There are many specialist cleaning products available, but a bucket of warm water, some washing up liquid and an old tooth brush will also do the job. Wash off all mud and dirt from the frame, wheels, around the brakes and the chain. Let the bike dry.

Tyres

Check they're not excessively worn or cracked and that there are no splits or bulges. Replace immediately if any damage found. Take time to prise out any flints or bits of glass, as over time these can work their way further into the tyre to cause a puncture. Keep the tyres inflated. Cycling with under inflated tyres not only wears out the tyres but is also much harder work, and can be dangerous. Make sure the valve is at 90° to the wheel. If it's slanting, deflate the tyre fully, and then move the tyre around a bit to get the valve in the right position. Normally around the side of each tyre will be markings which confirm the pressure (usually around 40-65 psi for hybrid bikes, up to 120 psi for road bikes). Ideally you want a floor/track pump with a built in pressure gauge to inflate a tyre accurately. However, if you don't have one, then instead of pushing down on the tread of the tyre to try and see how hard it is, squeeze the sides. Ideally you shouldn't be able to compress the tyre much.

Wheels

Check the wheels spin straight, and that all spokes feel tight. Rock the wheel from side to side, to check there's no wear in the bearings. Make sure the rim isn't damaged. If you have quick release levers on the wheels, these should be done up securely.

Brakes

Make sure your brakes, both front and rear, work effectively by lifting up one wheel and spinning it, then applying the brake. For conventional, non-disc type brakes, ensure both brake pads are not damaged, and aren't excessively worn. Both pads should move and touch the wheel rim together to stop the wheel, whilst the brake lever should not move all the way towards the handlebar. If the pads don't move evenly, rub on the tyre or there's too much movement on the brake lever before the brakes start to work, then look online for tips how to adjust them, or get your local bike shop to fix them if you don't feel confident fixing them yourself.

Nuts & bolts

Ensure all the bolts on your bike are kept tight.

Cables

Check all exposed cables to make sure they're not rusty and/or frayed. If they are, they will need replacing.

Pedals

Make sure the pedals turn smoothly and that there's no side to side movement. Generally modern pedals can't be overhauled, so if there are problems then replacement pedals will be needed.

Chain

Keep the chain clean. If wet, wipe it dry with an old cloth, then on the lower section of chain, drip some oil on the top edge, so that all the links are lightly coated, then wipe with a clean cloth. Don't let it go rusty.

Gears (if fitted)

Go for a test ride to make sure all gears can be selected and they change smoothly. If not, search on the internet for tips on how to adjust gears, or take the bike into a bike shop for a service.

Handlebars & steering

Make sure there's no play in the steering by standing in front of the bike, holding the front wheel firmly between your legs and try to rock the handlebars from side to side. There shouldn't be any movement. If there is, then the bolt(s) at the top needs tightening.

Saddle & seatpost

Check the saddle for any splits and that it's firmly attached to the seat post and can't turn or move. Make sure the seat post isn't extended beyond the safe limit marked on it. Adjust the saddle to the correct height by sitting on the bike with one foot on a pedal, so that when that pedal is at its lowest point, your leg is almost straight. When you've got both feet on the ground, your feet should be bent, so that only the sole/toes are on the ground. If you can put both feet down flat on the ground, the saddle is too low.

Local bike shops

Dysons – 97 High Street South, Dunstable LU6 3SF Tel. 01582 665533

Halfords – Unit 8a White Lion Park, Boscombe Road, Dunstable LU5 4WL Tel. 01582 609841

Pedalworks – 7 West Street Dunstable LU6 1SI Tel. 01582 478070

Bloomfield Cycles – 21 Bloomfield Avenue, Luton LU2 0PT Tel. 01582 454477

Cycle King – 56-66 Dunstable Road, Luton LU1 1EH Tel. 01582 723333

My Bike Shop – 253 Birdsfoot Lane, Luton LU3 2LX Tel. 01582 493 636



The Luton and Dunstable Cycling Forum are a group of local cyclists whose aim is to promote cycling in the local area. We hold meetings every 2 months to discuss any issues with the local councils, and also run regular bikes rides to encourage people to get out and about by bike.

For more details see our Facebook page at
www.Facebook.com/LutonandDunstableCyclingForum

www.LutonDunstableCycling.co.uk

