

TTIPS VOL. 10/22 Bike Frame Size

*A cyclist was on his deathbed when he asked his best friend to do a favor after he was gone.
"Anything" replied the friend.*

"Just don't let my wife sell my bikes for what I told her I paid for them."

INTRODUCTION

When I was in the Navy, I returned from a nine-month deployment to the Indian Ocean with lots of cash in my wallet. We had spent only five days in port during the entire deployment, and I had nowhere to spend my money while I was at sea. With all that cash, I decided I should treat myself and buy a bicycle. I went to the nearest Schwinn dealer and decided that the red Schwinn Traveler was the bike for me. The sales rep pulled the bike down and told me to straddle it. I swung my right leg over the seat and straddled the top tube. The sales rep looked at my feet, which were flat on the ground, even though the top tube was tight against me (I mean really tight!). He said, "that looks just right, you don't want it too low." I handed him \$175.00 cash and was the proud new owner of a bike that didn't fit me. I still have the bike – I'm waiting to grow into it.

Back then, "stand over height" was the primary attribute that determined fit as far as I could tell. Thankfully the science of fit has evolved.

In a previous article I told you that it is nearly impossible to get a good fit if you don't first have the correct frame size. So how do you know? Recall that most dealers have a reference document that will help you with a few key measurements to determine the best frame for your body, and of course they will measure you. Since you are reading this article, you are a KABC member and already have a bike. Without measuring or going to a shop to make sure your bike fits, here are some easy clues that you can use to determine if you have the right size road bike for you. Let's go.

The Superman Position

Are your arms stretched way out in front of you, and your torso is extended, as if you are reaching? This is known as the Superman position, and it is a clue that your bike might be too big. Clearly your seat position and the size of the stem (the part of the bike that connects the handlebars to the bike) may be adjusted to shorten your reach. But if those adjustments don't alleviate the problem, your bike might be too big.

The Front Hub Test

This is the opposite problem. When your hands are on the brake hoods, can you easily see the hub on your front wheel? Does it feel like your head is above or nearly above the handlebars? If so, again you might need a longer stem. But if a slightly longer stem does not fix the problem, your frame might be too small.

Excessively High Handlebars

Are the tops of your handlebars higher than the top of your saddle? Some riders prefer that setup because it's just the most comfortable position for them. If so, that's fine. Or, they may have a physical issue that requires a higher handlebar set up. If so, that's fine too. But otherwise, if your handlebars are that high, and there is no more room to lower them, your bike might not be the right size for you.

Too Much Seat Post

This is somewhat the opposite issue as high handlebars. Do you need an excessively high seat post to achieve proper leg extension in your pedal stroke? If so, your bike might be too small for you, especially if you are tall.

Shoe/Front Wheel Overlap

When your shoes are on your pedals and your bike is in motion, when you turn the front wheel, do the toes of your shoes bump, or rub the front tire? If so, and assuming your foot is properly positioned on the pedal, your bike is likely too small for you. This is not only uncomfortable and annoying, but also dangerous.

Excessively Long Stem

If you exchanged the original stem for a much longer stem so that you didn't feel cramped in the cockpit, your bike might be too small. Now, some riders have longer-than-average torsos, and need a longer stem while retaining a smaller frame size. If a fitter helped you to make that determination, you're good to go.

Knees Hitting Handlebars

Do your knees often bump your handlebars while you are seated and pedaling? When you are out of the saddle and pedaling, do your knees hit the bars? If so, you probably need a larger frame.

Saddle Set Back

In most cases, the seat post is straight at the point where it is connected to the saddle. That configuration, however, sometimes won't allow the rider to achieve proper knee position relative to the pedal. In that case, the rider can use a seat post that has "set back," which means the top of the seat post curves toward the back of the bike. This allows the saddle rails to be adjusted further back compared to a straight seat post. If, however, using a seat post with a set back seat post still does not allow the rider to adjust to the proper position (too far forward or too far back) the bike likely is not the right size.

Conclusion

So, what does all of that mean? I wanted to provide to you some insights regarding the fit of your bike frame. If you suspect that any of these issues may be evident in your fit, don't sell your current bike and run out and get a new one. If it is of sufficient concern, take your bike to a bike shop or better yet a fitter, and ask their opinion first.

OK riders, that's a wrap for this week.

Make Every Ride Epic
Darryl