

TTIPS VOL. 27/22 – INSIGHTS Cleaning Your Bike



Introduction

When you ride your bike, your bike gets dirty. When you ride your bike in the rain your bike gets very dirty. When you ride a mountain bike in the woods, your bike gets filthy. Though your bike is fairly resilient, its performance is degraded when it's dirty, and it certainly doesn't look good.

I am frequently asked, "what is the best way to clean my bike?" Well, last week we covered the art of chain maintenance. This week let's talk about cleaning the whole bike.

Please read the entire article. At the end I add my own comments that are drawn from my experience with road bikes and mountain bikes. My comments offer a few viewpoints that are slightly different from those in the article. I think you'll find them useful, and they may help you avoid costly errors and save a few buck on cleaning materials.

Step-by-Step Guide on How to Clean a Bike

THE SLIGHTLY OBSESSIVE (BUT TOTALLY DOABLE) GUIDE TO MAKING YOUR BIKE SHINE

By Leah Flickinger / Bicycling Magazine

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If we learned one thing about riding in 2021, it's that more and more people were getting on their bikes for exercise and some adventure. And you probably realized the more you go on a particularly muddy ride on the trails or want to bring your bike indoors for a training session, that you'll need to give it a good scrub.

But even if your bike isn't completely caked in mud and dirt, it still needs some TLC every so often. We recommend cleaning your road bike monthly (or every 20 to 25 rides) and a mountain or cross bike more often.

If you need some guidance, watch the video above for a demo on how to properly clean a bike, and keep reading for a few tips and tricks to make the cleaning process less of a hassle.

What you will need:

You'll need these everyday household items to clean your bike:

1. Clean shop rags or old cotton T-shirts (*free!*)
2. Bottle brushes
3. Scrub brushes
4. Two buckets
5. Soft, Square-head brush for wheels
6. Garden hose with trigger style spray head
7. Sponges
8. Dawn Ultra

Optional, but recommended tools:

1. Bike stand
2. Chain keeper
3. Degreaser

DO'S AND DONT'S

DO

- Recycle your dish sponges. You'll get another couple of months out of them on bike-wash duty
- Floss with a clean rag between chain rings, cogs, and other hard-to-reach places
- Be committed. A clean bike rides better and lasts longer

DO NOT

- Mix your buckets and rags. You don't want to cover your frame with drivetrain grease.
- Use an abrasive sponge or brush on your frame
- Blast your bike with a high-pressure hose. Water will get into and degrade your bearings.

THE SETUP

Step 1:

Fill two clean buckets with water and a generous squirt of dish soap. Lay out your brushes, sponges, and rags.

Step 2:

Place your bike in a work stand—this brings it up off the ground and makes all the nooks and crannies easier to reach. No work stand? Try hooking the nose of your saddle over a taut clothesline.

Step 3:

Next, remove your wheels. You can insert a chain keeper—a guide for your chain when the cassette is removed—to keep tension on the drivetrain. It's fine to skip this step if you don't want to spring for the tool, but using one prevents the chain from folding up on itself or falling off the bike when you try to work on it. Trust us, it's annoying.

THE WASH

Step 1: Chain

Use a degreaser and turn the cranks backward so that it gets on every link. After about five to 10 minutes, rinse with a gentle stream of water from the hose. If the chain is still grimy, apply small drops of dish soap like you would a lube, grip the chain in the rough side of your sponge, then turn the cranks for several rotations. Rinse.

Step 2: Drivetrain

Dip a stiff-bristled brush into one of your pre-filled buckets and scrub the chainrings. We recommend using a bottle brush or toothbrush to get into crevices around the teeth, pulleys, and rings. Then rinse with a gentle stream of water and repeat if you still see any lingering crud. Next, grab your rear wheel and drip dish soap onto the cassette, scrub, then rinse. Repeat if necessary.

Step 3: Frame

Dip a clean, soft sponge into your second (fresh) bucket. Soap up the frame, working your way from front to back, then rinse. If you have caliper brakes, clean the pads with the abrasive side of the sponge.

Step 4: Wheels

We recommend using softer, bigger brushes for tires and rims so you can get into every nook and cranny with minimal effort. Dunk your brush into the bucket you used for your frame. Starting at the valve, scrub all the way around the wheel, hit the spokes and hub, then flip the wheel to get the opposite side. Repeat on the other wheel, then rinse. (If you have disc brakes, use the soft side of a clean sponge with soap and water on rotors.)

THE FINISH

Reattach the wheels and spin the cranks to make sure the drivetrain runs smoothly. Wipe everything down with a dry, clean cloth or let it air-dry in the sun. Lube your chain.

MY COMMENTS AND TIPS – LESSONS LEARNED

FOR YOUR BIKE'S FRAME:

Despite the advice provided in the above article, don't use dishwashing liquid on your frame/painted surfaces. Dishwashing liquid contains degreasers that will deplete or degrade the natural oils in your bike's paint over time, leaving the paint dull and less resistant to natural wear. If you feel compelled to use soap, you can purchase bike-specific soap from a bike shop or on-line. Or you can use soap specifically mixed for automobile paints.

What do I use? I just use a bucket of warm water for stubborn, caked-on dirt/mud. Spray on the water with a gently spray, let the dirt soften, and then rinse it off with water or gently rub off with a sponge. Be careful NOT to rub the dirt along the painted surface.....you will scratch your paint job.

EXCEPTION: Now, it is common to have grease or oil smudges on your frame, especially in the areas where your chain is close to the chain-stays and seat-stays. In those instances, it's OKAY to spot clean with dish soap. **BE AWARE THAT SOME DEGREASERS WILL REMOVE YOUR PAINT** so please don't use degreasers other than dish soap on the frame.

AND THEN, after I clean the entire frame....I spray common furniture polish – Pledge – on a soft, clean rag and wipe it on the paint. You will be surprised at how nice your bike looks. Use another clean rag to buff it. Your bike will look new. **DO NOT SPRAY IT DIRECTLY ON YOUR BIKE** as you will risk getting the polish on the braking surfaces. If you have disc brakes,

and you get the polish on the discs or pads, you will RUIN THE BRAKE PADS and will need to clean the discs with isopropyl alcohol.

Don't air-dry your bike. Doing so will leave water spots, particularly if the bike is painted a darker color. While the bike is still wet, wipe it dry with a towel or a micro-fiber cloth.

FOR YOUR CHAIN:

DO USE DISHWASHING LIQUID on your chain, chain rings, and cogs. You don't need to buy a specific degreaser. I drip it on each link, rotate the chain a few revolutions, and then let it sit. Then wipe the liquid off as you rotate the chain. In this process, you likely will get dish soap on the bikes painted surfaces. No worries, after you dry the bike, just follow the advice above using furniture polish and it will look new.

Be sure to rinse the chain thoroughly with water from your garden hose to ensure that the soap is completely removed from the outside and inside of the chain links. Let your chain air-dry. THEN LUBE YOUR CHAIN. Don't forget to lube the chain. One more time...DON'T FORGET TO LUBE THE CHAIN AFTER YOU CLEAN IT.

FOR YOUR WHEELS AND DISC BRAKES:

As you clean your disc brakes and the areas around the disc brakes, do not touch the discs with your hands and take great care to not let bike lubricants get onto the disc brakes. (Caution: the natural oils on your skin will get onto the brake pads and ruin them). If you accidentally touch the discs with bare skin or splash lubricants on the discs, clean them immediately with a very clean rag and isopropyl alcohol before you ride the bike.

If you have disc brakes and you remove your wheels (and thus the discs) to clean them, DO NOT SQUEEZE THE BRAKE LEVERS. If you do, the brake pads will close in a manner that will not allow you to open them easily.

ONE MORE THING:

Never use a power washer or powerful stream from a garden hose on your bike. Even though most modern bikes use sealed bearings in the wheels and the crankset, it is possible to force water into those sealed bearings. Doing so will result in ruined bearings.

Okay riders, see you next time. Until then,

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl