

All On Cycling Club Safety Brief: Part 1

For the first week we are going to address those bikes that just got pulled out of the garage and were collecting cobwebs all winter. Ideally the rider will have brought the bike to a shop or given it a once over themselves, but there is always that one person....

Let's remind the riders that safety starts with a well-maintained bicycle. I am going to start with some plagiarism by stealing pages from the NJ DOT Bicycle Manual (see attached). Let's have the riders inspect the following components:

1. Tires: Squeeze the tire and make sure it has adequate pressure, if the rider gets on the bike and the rim squishes to the ground that tire needs air! Make sure to inflate the tire to the pressure recommended by the tire company and the wheel company. Rotate the wheel and check the tire for cuts and punctures, and if the rider has rim brakes make sure the brake pad is not rubbing on the tire. Ask the riders if they have a spare tube and way to inflate the tire again. (Side note, if a tire is repaired and re-inflated with CO₂, the CO₂ particles are small enough to eventually leak out of the tire so after a day or two the tire will look low again. If you see a roadside repair with CO₂, remind the rider that before the next ride they should deflate the tire and use an pump to re-inflate it).
2. Wheels: Check to make sure the axle is secure. The wheels should spin freely without wobbling or hopping. If you hear a pinging sound from the wheels that could be a loose spoke and that wheel will need professional attention.
3. Brakes: Have the rider squeeze the brake levers and push the bike, if the brakes are working properly the rider should not be able to move the bike. Again, the wheels should spin without the brakes rubbing.
4. Chain: The chain should be cleaned and lubricated. If the chain is rusty and links are frozen then that bike is unsafe. A clean and well lubricated chain will last longer, shift smoother, and be less likely to skip and drop.
5. Gears and shifters: The rider should conduct a short test ride to make sure the shift levers move and the derailleurs shift. Crossing Rt 22 is not the time to find out your bicycle doesn't shift properly.
6. Saddle and Handlebars: Have the rider make sure they are secure. A loose seat can be annoying, a loose handlebar can be dangerous. Often our modern bicycles are made from carbon fiber which have specific torque specifications and can easily be crushed with a little too much elbow grease. If something is loose on a rider's bike, and they are unsure of tightening it themselves have the bike checked out by a shop. Damaged carbon fiber is not always obvious, and an overtightened bolt can have serious consequences. Make sure the bartape is tightly wrapped.
7. Pedals: Are the pedals secure to the crank arms? Can the rider clip in and out? Check the cleats to make sure they are secured to the shoe.
8. Other stuff: Are the bottle cages secured? How about that saddle bag? Is their light loose and pointing down at the ground, or worse up in the eyes of other riders? Have the rider pick the bicycle a little off the ground and drop it – it shouldn't sound like a one-man band when it hits the ground.
9. Go ride, be safe, have fun.