

BRAKING

This issue we're talking about braking; how to set the levers, brake control and modulation, and how important weight distribution is to maximise traction through your tyres when braking.

To start with, if you have hydraulic disc brakes you should try one finger braking for two reasons: Your brain is sending a message to one finger rather than two so you are less likely to over-brake using one finger. Secondly, this will leave three fingers (and your thumb) on the handlebars holding you onto the bike. **THE MORE GRIP AND CONTROL YOU HAVE WITH YOUR HANDS, THE MORE PRECISE YOUR BRAKING WILL BE** as they won't be bouncing all over the place.

One finger braking is best done with your index finger in the most opportune braking spot (see photo) which is the curved piece of your brake lever at the outside end. You will most likely need to slide your brake along your bars towards your stem an inch or so, so that your finger lines up nicely. This may make it more difficult to reach your gear shifters but if you think about it you always brake in pressure situations, and change gear when you are under control so you are usually much happier to move your hand around on the bar. More room for your fingers on the bar also makes it easier to think – **WEIRD BUT TRUE.**

Now that you have your bar arrangement sorted, you want to think about how you actually apply your brakes. Definitely stay away from grabbing a handful! It is always better to anticipate and ease the pressure on in a gentle, smooth and controlled manner. Anticipating and maintaining an even speed throughout a corner and exiting faster than you entered is always faster than entering too fast, skidding to a halt and then pedalling out of the corner. The other advantages are that you are braking on the smooth, straight piece of track (hence you actually slow down) and you get a slingshot out of the corner.

IF YOU DO IT RIGHT IT FEELS PRETTY COOL.

Now we are going to pop back to a previous article where we dealt with body position (article #2, Issue 15). To get the best braking grip you need to get back to our favourite down and forward body position. The harder you brake the lower you have to get your body weight (essentially you are bracing yourself against that overwhelming urge to get thrown forward when the brakes are applied). What we mean by this is that you can add grip to your tyres by adjusting your weight from front to back. When you are braking hard you need most of the grip to be going to your front wheel as that is going to slow you down the fastest and **IF YOU WEIGHT THE BACK WHEEL THE FRONT WILL START TO SLEDGE,** not cool when you are approaching a corner at Mach 10.

Now, getting technical, there is a general consensus out there that braking should be split 70/30 front to rear. I personally have no idea half way down some gnarly slope whether my percentages are right, but rather feel/listen through my tyres whether I need to apply more brake (front or back). If one or the other is skidding then I need to apply less pressure to that brake, and if I'm not slowing down enough I need to apply more.

One way to practise finding a good braking (body) position in a happy environment is to find a gravel road on the flat and listen to your tyres. Obviously they don't say much when you are standing there yakking to your mates, but play around with braking more, and less, and find out where you get grip when you distribute your weight around. If they lose traction (either front or back) then you need to add weight. This is similar to the experience of climbing a steep hill. If you are too far back you start to pull wheelies and if you are too far forward you spin the rear wheel. Try practicing in different terrain especially muddy, slippery, bumpy, or sandy conditions. **THE SMOOTHER YOU CAN BRAKE IN AWKWARD CONDITIONS THE MORE CONTROLLED YOUR RIDE WILL BE.** In bumpy terrain you might also like to try braking just in the smooth areas between the bumps, it will make your ride much more comfortable.



BRAKE CONTROL TAKES PRACTICE. PLAY AROUND ON THE FLAT BEFORE YOU HIT THE SLOPES.



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