Beginner Bike Guide: Everything You Need to Know as a New Rider

Created by the Bianchi Dama Ambassador Team
Welcome

Congratulations on deciding to participate and challenge yourself on a bicycle with other survivors, thrivers, co-survivors, friends, family, and supporters. It will be an epic adventure for sure. Laid out in the following pages is information designed to help you succeed on the bicycle.

We will cover:

Bicycle Basics (Pages 3-7)
Bicycle Care (Pages 8-9)
Nutrition and Hydration (Pages 9-10)
Safety (Page 11-12)
Frequently Asked Questions (Pages 13-15)

We hope you enjoy the therapeutic and healing powers of being on a bicycle and riding with friends as much as we do.

-The Bianchi Damas
Above diagram used with permission from United Bicycle Institute
Let’s jump right in with the what’s what of bicycles.

If you are sitting on your bicycle, the right side is the “drive side” of the bicycle. It has all the components that propel your bicycle forward (chain rings, chain, cassette, and front/rear derailleur).

If the need arises to lay your bicycle on the ground make sure that you lay it with the drive side up. Some of the components are fragile and laying the bike drive side down could bend or misalign something causing issues with shifting.

The lever on the left side of your handlebar operates shifting and braking on the front of the bike.

**Hot Tip**

The lever on the right side operates shifting and braking on the rear of the bike. One way to easily remember is that right = rear.

**Tire Size and Tire Pressure**

Proper inflation of tires helps prevent flats and should be checked before each ride.

Typically, road bikes come with a wheel size of 700c, which is the diameter of the size of wheel and tire, but there are many different widths of 700c from 21mm to 40mm. The typical size on road bikes is 700c x 25/28mm. Each width will have a different recommended inflation range or maximum. The manufacturer prints the inflation maximum on the sidewall of the tires. It will look something like this: max 120 psi or min 90 – max 120. Most of the time 25mm tires are inflated to 90 or 100 psi.

You should take into account the riders weight when determining what psi to inflate your tires to. A heavier rider may want a higher psi in order to prevent pinch flats. Conversely, a lighter rider may want less air in their tires to reduce vibration from the road. If you are unsure of how much air you should put into your tires you can always ask your local bike shop.
Braking

The front brake (left side lever) has up to 70% more stopping power than the rear brake. Most riders will develop a sense of how much pressure to apply to the brake levers to engage the brake, but not so much so that it throws the body’s center of gravity off. Some riders will engage the rear brake (right side lever) first and add the front as needed. Others may apply pressure to both levers at the same time increasing pressure as needed.

Braking is something that should be practiced in order to find out what works best for you and what you are more comfortable with.

In an emergency, our reaction is to grab both brakes levers and squeeze until the lever hits the handlebar. This will increase the likelihood of going over the handlebars. When grabbing both brake levers and squeezing for dear life all momentum is rapidly thrust forward.

It is IMPORTANT to practice emergency braking. When rapid deceleration is required, apply steady even pressure on both brakes while simultaneously pushing your backside over the rear tire. This will move your center of gravity over the back of the bike significantly reducing the chance of going over the handlebars and safely bring you to a stop.

Saddles

Saddles are very individualized and what feels great for one person may be incredibly uncomfortable for another. If your local bike shop has a saddle library try out numerous saddles on long rides (20-30 miles) to see if you will be able to tolerate long days in the saddle.

Some individuals may be inclined to purchase thick padded saddles. While this may be great for beach cruisers, it is not the case for road bikes. Riding numerous days with high mileage on thick padded saddles will increase the
likelihood of pinching a nerve (such as the sciatic nerve), which will cause tingling or a loss of feeling in the legs while riding.

**IMPORTANT:** There is a certain breaking-in period when starting out on the bike. Meaning your sit bones aren’t used to sitting on a saddle, therefore, you will likely experience a certain level of soreness. For some it can last several weeks; for others maybe a month depending on how often you ride when you are getting started.

After the first ride you may experience immediate soreness or it may take several hours to feel it. The inclination is to wait to ride again, however, the more rides you can get in (without over doing it) the more quickly your sit bones and soft bits will get used to sitting on a saddle.

**Hot Tip**

Equally important if you decide to take the plunge into lycra riding shorts – **DO NOT** wear underwear. This will increase the likelihood of friction and pressure sores. Wearing cycling shorts will feel odd at first, but they are designed to pad and take care of our nether region.

**Pedals**

There are basically two different types of pedals.

**Bold Platform or Flat Pedals** – requiring no additional gear or shoe in order to use them. These pedals are great for first timer/beginner riders until they are ready to try clipless.

Bold Clipless Pedals come in two different forms: Road and SPD/Mountain Bike. The advantage of using a clipless system is that you have the full power of your leg muscles at your disposal. Not only can you use your muscles to push on the down stroke, but you can also pull up on the up stroke making each pedal stroke more efficient and powerful.
ABC’s

Before every ride, it is important to check your bicycle’s ABC-Q’s.

**Air** – make sure tires are properly inflated.

**Brakes** – spin the wheel and depress the brake lever to ensure the wheel stops. If you have disc brakes, make sure there isn’t a constant squeal (like metal on metal) when the wheel is rotating.

If there is a squeal or the brake lever is depressed all the way to the handlebar in order for the wheel to stop you may need to have a brake adjustment, which can be done by your local bike shop.

**Chain** – ensure the chain isn’t overly stretched and worn. This is determined by number of miles on the chain but also if the shifting is skipping or jumping gears. Your local bike shop will have a tool that can measure if your chain is stretched and requires replacement. Replacing your chain before it becomes too stretched will ensure your chain ring and cassette will last longer.

*Hot Tip*  
The advantage of the SPD pedal over the road pedal is that the shoes and cleats for SPD are much easier to walk in due to the recessed cleat.

It is also important that the chain is properly lubricated. If you have a dry chain you may notice more noise and if your chain is over lubricated you will pick up more grime, which will require more frequent cleaning. A good rule of thumb is to reapply lubrication every 100-150 miles of riding.

**Quick Release** – this is the skewer that goes through the wheel hub and keeps the wheel in the fork dropouts. Sometimes, in order to transport your bike you may need to remove the front wheel. When replacing the wheel make sure the wheel is centered in the fork and the quick release is tightened. You shouldn’t be able to release the quick release with one finger.
It is important to maintain your bicycle much like you would your vehicle. Routine and regular maintenance will ensure a long life for your bike.

Cleaning

Bicycles collect road/trail grime every time we ride. Sometimes electrolyte mixes from water bottles and/or excessive sweat also collects on the frame of the bike. It is important to wash and clean your bike regularly.

Simple dish soap, water, sponge and a brush is all that is required. When hosing down your bike, ensure your nozzle head is set to SHOWER and not JET. Do not spray water directly at your bottom bracket, headset, or wheel hubs. When water gets into these places it can cause rust to build on the bearings, which will affect smooth operation of these parts and may require more frequent replacement of bearings.

Degreasing and re-lubing your chain is also important as previously mentioned in the ABC’s section. There are many bicycle degreasers and gizmos available for this job, but a cost effective way is dish soap (such as Dawn) and a brush. Scrub the chain with the brush as it rolls over the cassette teeth. This is also a great time to scrub the entire cassette. Allow the bike components to DRY. Once dry take a clean rag (old t-shirt) and use it to grab the chain while you hand pedal. This will pull off any extra grime that may have been missed. Apply chain lube, one drop for each roller, and then run through all of your gears by holding the rear wheel up (best if you have a second person or a bike stand) and hand pedal while shifting. Allow the bike to sit with the lube on the chain overnight (best) or 5-15 minutes to allow it to soak into to the crevices of the chain. Wipe off any excess lube by grabbing the chain with a rag and hand pedal. Cable Stretch

Hot Tip

Second mention of the special care your drivetrain requires. If you need to lay your bicycle on the ground or load it into the back of your vehicle always make sure the drive side (right side when on your bike) is facing up.
03. Bicycle Care

Cable Stretch

If you have a new bicycle the cables (brake and shifter) will stretch over the first few months. THIS IS NORMAL. Once the cables have stretched it will affect your shifting (not shifting, makes clicking noise, or skips gears) and braking (need to pull lever all the way back in order to stop). The bike shop where you got your bike can easily adjust the cable tension which most of the time fixes these issues. Again, this is normal for new bicycles or bikes that have recently had housing and cable replaced.

04. Nutrition and Hydration

Cable Stretch

Hydration Many riders, new and experienced, can ride 1-2 hours with minimal hydration and no nutrition depending on how strenuous the activity and the temperature. However, when starting to train for longer ride this routine will quickly deplete your body’s fuel resources leaving you dehydrated and fatigued (likely with other physical symptoms).

Our goal is to give you the tools to have a successful and fun event. So lets take a look at hydration first.

Hydration

It will be IMPORTANT that you practice reaching for, drinking from, and replacing your water bottle while riding. This is an important skill and will keep you well hydrated during the Tour de Pink event.
04. Nutrition and Hydration

Hot Tip
The RECOMMENDED intake of fluids is 20-24oz of fluid per hour. That may increase/decrease depending on weight of rider, temperature, and how strenuous the course is.

Many riders use sport hydration or electrolyte mixes (such as NUUN, Skratch Labs, Hammer Nutrition etc.) in one of their water bottles. Other riders prefer using only water. It is important to experiment to see how your body reacts to water vs. water/electrolyte mix.

Riders should always eat and/or drink before feeling hungry and thirsty. If we wait until we are thirsty or hungry, we are already dehydrated and are using reserve fuel stores. One way to remember to regularly eat or drink is to set up an alert or alarm (easily done on bike computer) for every 15-20 min.

Nutrition
Nutrition is very individualized and both play a large part in our performance on the bike and how long it will take us to adequately recover. Most riders will use a combination of different sources of fuel for rides. Gels and chews are a quick but short lived energy burst. A good mix of protein/carbs/simple sugars (such as homemade rice cakes, protein powder mixes, or half sandwich) for a more sustained and longer lasting energy.

Hot Tip
A good RULE OF THUMB is to put some form of fuel into your body every 20 to 30 min. The longer or more strenuous the ride the more energy your body will require to preform at its best.

Recovery
Recovery On longer distance rides it is also important to consider after-ride nutrition and recovery. Experts suggest an intake of healthy protein/carbs/fats within 30-60 minutes after getting off the bike. Doing so will help muscles replenish vital nutrients and minerals.

Some riders also have a post-ride ritual of stretching, massage, compression socks, and additional fluid intake. Experiment to see what works best for you.
Safety

Safety and safe cycling practices should always be on your mind. Cycling is an inherently dangerous sport. The goal of this section is to help give you the tools necessary to minimize risk.

Below are a few bulleted safety tips.

- **Always be aware of your surroundings.** This will help avoid collisions with other cyclists and road debris. It is also valuable to identify your location incase you need to call for help.

- **Never assume motorists see you.** Always try to make eye contact with motorists if you are making a turn or a driver is coming from a side street or driveway. Wearing bright clothing and using head and taillights also make us more visible.

- **Ride in a predictable manner.** This is done so that other cyclists and motorists can reasonably predict your actions (i.e. no random braking, darting out into the traffic lane, or making a sudden left hand turn across all lanes of traffic).

**Hot Tip**

First and foremost is that a bicycle is considered a “vehicle” and therefore, unless otherwise stated, is required to follow the same rules of the road as a motor vehicle. We ride in the same direction as the normal flow of traffic.
05. Safety

- **Keep 1 to 3 bike lengths between you and the rider in front of you** unless you and those you ride with are comfortable and confident in a tighter group. Keeping a distance between you and the rider in front will help prevent half-wheeling (overlapping your front wheel with their rear wheel) and the crash hat will occur should you touch wheels.

- **Don’t ride beyond your abilities or skills**, as that is when accidents are more likely to happen.

- **Don’t look directly at an obstacle you are trying to avoid.** Notice it and look beyond the obstacle at where you want to go. When you look directly at something you tend to steer towards it.

- **If you have to stop, anticipate that need, call out “STOPPING”,** and pull over in a safe place (driveway, wider section of road, gravel shoulder, etc.).

- **WET METAL = BAD METAL.** Wet railroad tracks, road stripping (cross walks and lane dividers), and wet leaves are all incredibly slippery.

- **Railroad tracks should be ridden across at a 90-degree angle.** As best as you can, try to position yourself to cross the tracks in this manner otherwise there is a possibility that your front wheel will wedge in the tracks and you will crash.
06. Frequently Asked Questions

Is the TDP Track a race or timed event?
While the TDP Track is not a race or a timed ride, the rest stops are open and then closed at a specific time. No riders will be left out on the route before a rest stop is closed. All riders will have to check in at each rest stop so that staff know that all riders have passed through before closing the rest stop. If a rider is falling farther behind and will no longer have time to complete the day’s route by 4:00pm, they will be asked to get into a SAG van to the finish.

Do I wear underwear beneath my padded cycling shorts?
The simple answer is you shouldn’t. Wearing underwear increases the likelihood of saddle sores (caused by friction) and the seams may increase the chance of numbness by inadvertently laying on sensitive pressure points.

What is chamois cream or chamois butter?
Chamois cream reduces friction between the saddle and your nether region. Some riders find it helpful and others have never needed it. To apply, simply apply a ½ dollar sized portion of cream to the creases where your legs meet your body, as well as, to your chamois in your riding shorts. Reapply as necessary.

Do I need to check my tires before every ride?
Checking your ABC-Q’s is a good habit to get into before each ride. Road surface, ambient temperature and other factors can cause a decrease in tire pressure, screws to rattle loose, or chain lube to dry out faster than expected. It’s easier to take 5 minutes before your ride to check your ABC-Q’s than 15-30 minutes in the middle of a ride to fix a flat or mechanical.

Why do I need to practice eating and drinking on the bike if there will be rest stops? Great question. Some people may find that the food at aide stations doesn’t agree with them while riding and find themselves in GI distress (lots of bathroom breaks) and need to bring snacks they know are best for their own diets. Others, depending on their average pace, may be one of the last riders to get to a rest break and find the food options are limited. Not to mention that your training rides probably won’t include aide stations (but may have coffee and bakery breaks).
What if I start to struggle on the bike?
It’s okay to pull over and take a breather. A ride marshal, moto, or SAG van driver may ask if you need a ride or a push.

If you are asked if you’d like a “push”, it is when a seasoned rider comes up on your left side and places their right hand in the small of your back and helps push you. All you need to do is look straight ahead and pedal as you had been. The “pusher” will typically ask before they put their hand on your back. They may ask you to shift into an easier or harder gear depending on the terrain. Think of it as a little added horsepower. It may be to get you up a hill or just to allow you a break while continuing to progress on the course.

If you are uncomfortable with the thought of being pushed or don’t feel you require the assistance, just let the “pusher” know that you are good.

Below is an example of a participant being helped by a “pusher”.
06. Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to know to how to change a tire?
Well, yes and no. It’s always helpful to be self-sufficient while riding, but maybe you don’t feel confident in changing your own tire. Not to worry as there are mechanics out on the course, but it may take them a while to get to you. There are plenty of riders and ride marshals who will offer to help you. It is important that you carry a spare tube, tire levers, and either a frame pump or CO2 cartridges and adapter.

What is the difference between the two cogs on my chain ring?
The bigger cog on your chain ring is for when you are riding downhill or on flat-ish terrain. The smaller cog is when you are riding rollers or hills. The small cog sometimes referred to as your granny gears and make pedaling a little bit easier is the hill work. It is important to understand that when riding you will be shifting frequently. Practicing is the only way to fully understand when and how often you will need to shift.
Wahoo let’s ride

While this manual is not comprehensive, it does cover quite a bit of material that will be useful for new and beginner riders. We want to set you up for many miles of success and fun, and this information will get you well on your way.

Congratulations again on jumping into the amazing adventure of cycling. We are honored that you are allowing Bianchi and the Damas to share this experience with you. You are amazing!