

Summer cycling safety tips

Nick Hopton, of Blue Horse Bikes in Drayton Parslow, offers his advice

Now summer is finally here and the evenings stay lighter for longer, many of us will be tempted to dust off bikes that have been hibernating for the winter.

Before you go out on the roads for the first time, it is important to stop and think, not just whether your bike works, but whether it is safe and legal to be out on the roads.

There are a few simple checks to make to quickly and easily ensure your bike is safe and legal for the roads...

- Is there any play in the headset? Without sitting on the bike, squeeze front brake to stop the front wheel moving and rock the handlebars backwards and forwards. It should feel solid, with no movement or knocking.
- Is there any play in the wheel hubs? If you hold the rim of each wheel, with it off the ground, then try moving it side to side, again there should be no sideways movement or noises.
- The same goes for the bottom bracket that the pedal crank arms are attached to, if you hold a crank arm and try and pull and push it away from/towards the bike, it should feel solid.
- Are the tyres in good condition, no bald spots or cracks that go deep into the tyre? If the bike has not been used for some time, it may well have lost pressure, as rubber innertubes leak air over time. Also check for any thorns etc. that may be lodged in the tyre, before inflating to correct pressure. At least the maximum pressure should be displayed on the tyre sidewall.
- Are the brakes worn or need adjusting? If you push the bike along without sitting on it, then



pull the front brake on, the front wheel should stop you and the back wheel come up off the ground slightly. If you do the same with the back brake with one hand, whilst putting pressure on the seat with the other, the back wheel should stop and skid along, not rotate.

- Do the gears work as they should? Most bikes have derailleurs these days, so it is worth checking the gears move smoothly, without the chain coming off the gears altogether, or any stiffness in the chain links that could cause it to skip or jump off the gears.

There are also minimum legal requirements to be out on Britain's roads on a bicycle between sunset and sunrise. The lights don't apply during daylight hours, but it would be best practice to have as many in place as possible at all times. Apart from lights, new bikes sold in the UK must include these features...

- A visible rear, red reflector between 25cm and 90cm from the ground.
- Four yellow pedal reflectors, 1 facing front, 1 facing rear on each pedal.
- A front lamp showing a white light, up to 150cm from the ground, facing forwards. If capable of emitting only a flashing light, it must emit at least four candela (a unit of light intensity, comfortably exceeded by modern lights). If capable of emitting a steady light, the light must comply to BS6102/3 standards.
- A rear lamp showing a red light, positioned between 35cm and 150cm from the ground, facing rearwards. If capable of emitting only a flashing light, it must emit at least four candela. If capable of emitting a steady light, it must comply to BS3648, or BS6102/3 standards.
- Two independent braking systems (rear fixed wheel or coaster brake systems count as 1).

It is not a legal requirement to have a bell, although new bikes must be sold with one, as is the case for front and wheel reflectors, and their use is suggested in the Highway Code. The important message though, is to make sure you are safe and confident, both in your and your bike's ability to be out on the roads.

If you need advice, or anything doing to your bike that you are not competent in doing yourself, you can contact me at Blue Horse Bikes, or any other qualified technician such as those in the Cytech Directory.

Call Nick at Blue Horse Bikes on 07464 171032, visit www.bluehorsebikes.co.uk or email info@bluehorsebikes.co.uk