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# TOOLS THAT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Used regularly or not, these are the tools to rely on

Let's face it, for many of us, riding our bikes is not just therapeutic but essential. However, when the bike isn't performing as it should, it can become a mostly frustrating experience.

As we start to roll into a new season of cycling, it is a good time to give the bike a complete overhaul. And by that we mean to inspect every component, check all the bearings, flush out the dirt and grime, and apply a fresh load of grease and lube. This might sound like a big job—and it is—but this level of bike prep will pay big dividends throughout the riding season.

In our circle of riding friends we have a "Garage Night" where we all gather and enjoy some snacks, listen to music, and help each other clean up and work on our bikes. There is always one or two of us that know more than the others and are happy to lend a hand on the finer details. These garage gatherings are a great way to get the crew together outside of riding. They also help build everyone's on-the-bike confidence by not only knowing how their bike works, but, most important, that their bike works.

We can all agree that one of the most celebrated aspects of the bicycle is their inherent simplicity. Still, keeping yours in proper (and safe) running order does require some specialized tools. To do it right means that in addition to serving the correct snacks for that garage gathering (like tacos and donuts), the correct tools also need to be on hand. And we don't just mean everybody having their own multi-tool! Along those lines, here's a list of what we think are the tools that count.

## A MATTER OF NEED AND WANT

Number one on everyone's list should be a proper bike stand. Once you get

a stand, you will be surprised at how much you use it and the difference it makes in small tasks and large ones. Think wheel or tire swaps, lubing the chain, wheels-off cleaning and so many other frequent tasks made easier.

There are a lot of different styles and brands out there, but for us, the go-to is the Feedback Pro-Elite repair stand for \$270. Honestly, all the Feedback stands are very nice, but the Pro-Elite in our opinion is worth the extra expense. It has a quick action head to make mounting the bike easy and fast. Its telescoping frame is light, stable and adjustable, but best of all it folds down fairly small. For an additional \$20, you can get the tote bag too. [www.feedbacksports.com](http://www.feedbacksports.com)

## TORQUED OFF

Number two on the list is an adjustable torque wrench. Every bolt on your bike has a specific torque setting, and that is to protect the bolt, the component that it is securing and, most important, you. For most repairs and maintenance, you just need one that goes up to 15 N/m. There are, however, a few jobs that are common that require a larger torque wrench, like swapping cassettes, cranks and bottom brackets. Even pedals have a torque spec, and it is to protect the cranks and pedals, both of which are expensive to replace if damaged.

Torque ratings are all about accuracy, so having a tool that is up to the job is important. We know some wrench heads who will say that when it comes to bike maintenance, a set of torque wrenches is even more important than the bike stand.

For us, Effetto Mariposa makes the cream of the crop, and their range of torque wrenches are levels above the competition. It's not about fancy screens or a compact size—it's all about Italian build quality, accuracy and reliability. Priced at \$160 for the Giustaforza 1-8 N/m, \$260 for the Giustaforza 2-16 N/m Pro Deluxe

and \$300 for the Giustaforza Pro 10-60 N/m, these imported tools will set you back, so start saving. However, if used correctly, they can save you in the long run and will be an heirloom to pass on.

[www.effettomariposa.eu](http://www.effettomariposa.eu)

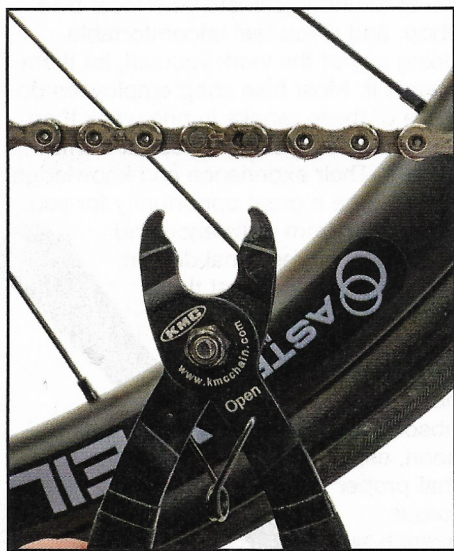
## GETTING BIG AIR

Number three on our list might surprise a few, but it's an air compressor. For us, it's not big and it doesn't need to be powerful, but the benefits of having an air compressor is a value not only for cleaning a bike, but also for mounting tubeless road tires. While an air compressor might be overkill for filling standard road tires with inner tubes, when it comes to tubeless tires, a compressor will pay for itself on the first run.

Sure, there are the more portable booster pumps, but 90 percent of tubeless setup is done at home. The other 10 percent is on the rare occasion you get a flat on the side of the road, and then most of the time we just resort to a spare tube and will deal with it when we get back to our homes with the almighty air compressor.

We realize not everyone has made the investment into tubeless, but an air compressor can still be a useful addition in the garage. We use ours every time we clean our bike. Now when we say

"clean," that doesn't mean a full-fledged weekend ordeal. Sometimes we just spray down the bike quickly with the hose after a ride because we spilled some drink mix on the frame that



left our stem and bars sticky, or it could be just a light film of dust from a gravel ride.

To expedite the process and to get all the water off the bike quickly, a pressurized air-dry is hard to beat. A 3- to 6-gallon unit is more than adequate for most bike-related use, and they can range in cost between \$80-\$200.

## LOOK TO THE HANGER

Number four and probably the second-most underrated tool (behind a torque wrench) is the derailleur hanger alignment tool. I think most know that a properly working rear derailleur can make or break a ride, but no rear derailleur can ever function correctly and shift smooth if the hanger is not straight. Almost every cyclist we know that has shifting issues jumps first to twisting and turning the derailleur limit screws like somehow they magically adjust themselves.

More often than not, the real culprit, is the hanger got bent. This can occur even if just someone leaned their bike against yours or when you removed your rear wheel for a flat repair. The hanger is meant to bend and break instead of the frame breaking. With that said, be careful using this tool, but remember it doesn't matter how much you turn and adjust the limit screws; if the hanger is bent, it will never shift correctly.

Park Tool has had a few different versions of the DAG (derailleur-hanger alignment gauge) that we like, and while our reliable DAG 2 has been replaced by the new 2.2, we also dream about the Abbey Bike Tools HAG (hanger alignment gauge), which comes in a titanium version for the bike geek in all of us. The Park Tool DAG-2.2 is \$75, and the Abbey Bike Tools HAG is \$185. [www.parktool.com](http://www.parktool.com) [www.abbeybiketools.com](http://www.abbeybiketools.com)

## THE CHAIN GANG

The last recommendation is more than one tool but a combination of chain-related tools that will make easy work of routine



Campagnolo chain, make sure the one you choose is compatible. These two tools can allow you to remove your chain for a deep clean or make easy work of swapping a worn chain for a fresh one. (Side note: Split-link master links are one use only, so if you use the pliers to remove one, replace it with a new one. We keep the removed one as a backup in our saddle bag for an emergency.)

***“Every bolt on your bike has a specific torque setting, and that is to protect the bolt, the component that it is securing and, most important, you.”***

By checking your chain regularly, you can monitor chain wear and identify lubes that are offering less wear, as well as identifying when a chain is close to its limit and changing it before the chain degrades other components. This can save you loads of money on replacing cassettes and chainrings, since most of those are made to last up to three chains if they are changed at the correct wear limit.

Unior makes two versions of this tool, and both get the job done, but the Pro version is much easier to read, and for \$31, it is in our opinion a better buy than the \$11 version.

Next is a chain breaker and master link pliers. Most brands, even Shimano, have gone to split links instead of

master pins to connect the two ends of a chain. This is where a set of master link removal pliers come in handy. We have a set that KMC makes, and they are a huge time-saver and are only \$10.

A chain breaker is still needed if you are modifying the length of a chain or installing a new chain, so getting both is key. Most chain breakers are between \$20 and \$50, and if you run a

And to round out the chain-related tools is a chain whip/pliers and cassette lock-ring tool. While many kits like our favorite Feedback Sports Team Edition tool kit will come with a handled version of the cassette lock-ring tool, we highly recommend the version that has a 1/2-inch socket so you can use your torque wrench to tighten it down correctly. These two tools are all that is needed to swap cassettes between wheels or removing the cassette for a deep clean. Most chain whips are around \$30, and the lock-ring tool will be around \$15.

[www.uniorusa.com](http://www.uniorusa.com)  
[www.kmcchain.us](http://www.kmcchain.us)

Some of these tools are expensive, but they all serve an important role in keeping your bike rolling. Our last tip is never to underestimate your local bike shop, and if you feel uncomfortable doing any of the work yourself, let them handle it. Most bike shop employees do more of these repairs in one week than you will do in the life of your at-home repairs. Their experience and knowledge can also be a great opportunity for you to observe from a distance and see how a professional does it.

Also remember that these tools are a long-term investment, and all of the tools listed have no signs of being obsolete any time soon, especially that proper torque wrench set.

