

Buying a second hand bike



Why buy a used bike?

- Second hand bikes are typically at least 30% cheaper than the same bikes new so you can save money.
- For bikes under \$1000, a new bike which is the same price as a second hand bike will usually be heavier, so a second hand bike can save you weight as well.
- A second hand bike may allow you to upgrade to higher quality components in time where a new bike at the same price may lock you into a lower quality bracket.
- A used bike will probably have higher quality components than a new bike of the same price. The higher quality may mean they work better even though they are no longer new.

What do you get on a new bike that you don't get on a second hand bike?

- A warranty.
- The newest models with any recent improvements.
- Some free service (varies from shop to shop and brand to brand).
- Professional advice in choosing and fitting.

Who should consider a second hand bike?

- Parents buying for fast growing children without younger siblings.
- Anyone with a budget of less than \$400. This is where the greatest benefits are to be found.
- Anyone who has a good knowledge of bikes.

Who should be wary of buying second hand bike?

- Anyone who knows very little about bikes and doesn't have a friend who can assess the condition of a bike for them. If this is you try to buy a second hand bike from a bike shop you trust.
- If your technical knowledge isn't sufficient to understand most of what's here in these questions and answers then please get professional advice.

What are the major pitfalls unique to second hand bikes?

- You may buy a bike which needs lots of money spent on it very soon .
- Don't buy a bike with a bent frame or fork.
- Don't buy a bike with bent wheels.
- Don't buy a bike with worn out chain and cassette.
- Don't buy the wrong size just because it's a bargain.
- Don't buy a bike which has been cobbled together out of second hand parts.



How do you avoid these pitfalls?

- Inspect the frame carefully. Run your finger along the underneath of the main tube for about ten or fifteen centimetres from the top of the fork back down toward the pedals. If you can feel ripples in the tube, it's bent. Don't buy it. Get someone to hold the bike upright with the front wheel pointing dead straight ahead. Stand back behind the bike and sight along the wheels down near the ground. If the front wheel appears to be offset to one side relative to the back wheel, the frame is bent. Don't buy it. Sight down along the side of the head tube at the front of the bike. The straight section at the top of the fork should line up with this. If it doesn't don't buy it. (This last warning does not apply to suspension forks which are often offset from this line.)

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- Spin the wheels (off the ground) and watch the rim as it passes between the brake blocks. If it has sudden little wiggles side to side or up and down the rim has been knocked about. Don't buy it.
- Shift the chain on to the largest chainwheel (at the front). Grab the chain at the three o'clock position on the chainwheel and try to pull it forward so that it lifts off the teeth slightly. If you can pull it far enough to clear the tip of a tooth then the chain is worn out. The cassette (of cogs on the rear wheel) will be worn to match. Both will need replacement. Take the cost of this into account, it may be quite high.
- Make sure you know how to set your seat to the correct height. Adjust the seat on any prospective purchase to this height. Mark the seat pillar with a pen at this height then pull it out and see how the mark you just made compares with the maximum height mark on the pillar. If the two marks are less than 15mm apart the bike is too small. If your mark is more than halfway up the pillar from the bottom end then the bike is too big. [Getting a perfect fit is harder than this, but as a guide for buying a second hand bike this is quite good.]
- Look carefully at the bike. Are the wheels (hubs and rims) the same? Is everything about the same age? (It's OK if the tyres are new.) Does anything belong on a different type of bike? (BMX handlebars on a mountain bike say.) Did the seller buy the bike new from a shop? Count the number of cogs on the rear wheel. Is this the same as the number of index positions ("clicks") in the gear lever? If the bike appears to have been assembled from a collection of odds and sods don't buy it unless you are very sure about their compatibility and the standard of assembly.

Are there any other mechanical problems to look for?

- If one or both tyres are worn down to the bottom of the tread they will need replacement. Take the cost into account.
- Look for looseness in the bearings of the wheel hubs. Try rocking the rim lightly from side to side across the bike. It shouldn't have any "play".
- Look for looseness in the bottom bracket bearings. Hold one crank and try to rock it from side to side similarly. Again there should be no play.
- Check the headset bearings. Lock the front brake only on hard. Rock the bike backwards and forwards. You should not feel any 'knocking' in the bearings. Then lift the front of the bike up bike by lifting the frame, not the handlebars. The front wheel and handlebars should swing slowly and easily to each side with just a very light push from one finger. There should be no signs of 'clicking' into place in the straight ahead position.
- Look for obvious things like kinked cables or cable housing, rust, dents, scrapes and signs of abuse.
- If it is a BMX bike inspect the seat rails (under the seat). If they are bent down from the clamp the bike has been used for jumps with heavy landings.
- Look at the ends of the pedals and the side of the rear derailleur. If they are badly scraped the bike may have been in a fall.

Where are good places to buy second hand bikes?

- Start with your local bike shop. Some shops take trade-ins. You might even get a limited warranty.
- Most editions of The Trading Post have a page or two of bike ads each week.
- Second hand dealers such as Cash Converters often have stocks of bikes.
- eBay Australia has thousands of cycling items for sale although most are accessories not complete bikes. Test rides and inspections may be hard to organize though!