

How to Ride Through Mud

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Last Updated: May 13, 2021

Mud is an inevitable part of life for the off-road bike rider. It might seem daunting the first few times you ride through it but there are techniques to get through it without slowing down, sliding or falling into it! This guide seeks to help you think through the various steps of preparing for the mud ride, riding in the mud, and cleaning up afterward, so that you have a great time and your bike lasts longer.

Things You'll Need

- ☐ Gaiters, suitable clothes and shoes
- ☐ Safety glasses
- ☐ Helmet
- ☐ Mountain bike
- ☐ Gear as outlined above for protecting mountain bike

Steps



1 **Check the weather and know the conditions of the tracks you're about to ride on before heading out.** If you don't know the condition, presume that there is a high possibility of mud on the track if there has been rain recently or if it's of a temperature when a lot of dew forms on the surrounding trees and plants. If there are **streams** and other bodies of water running across the track, expect muddy conditions in some places. The other source of mud can be **hikers**, horse riders, and other sports users of the trail.



2 Prepare yourself before you set out for the ride. Dress appropriately for the weather, as always, but be sure to also add **gaiters** to protect the lower half of your legs from the mud. There's no doubt you're still going to get quite muddy but it won't feel as uncomfortable riding if your lower legs are fairly mud-free. Other things to consider include:

- Many trails 'close' this time of year to avoid erosion; be aware of whether the trail you are heading to is one of them.
- Wear **eye protection**. You can't always be sure what's *in* that mud. Hard objects and infection-creating particles can end up in your eyes if you're not careful.



3 Prepare the bike for mud. Your mountain bike should be prepared for mud at all times, so that it's easier to keep clean and protect it. Some things that will help include:[1]

- Choose chunky tires; the wider the knobs on the tread, the more mud will be dispatched before it has a chance to congeal on the tire.
- Good **tires** for mud-riding include directional tires (chevron pattern) and semi-slicks, a smoother tire that allows the bike to cut through the slime on the surface to reach for harder ground beneath. And slimmer tires (1 1/2" (40mm) can be good in mud.
- Spray the entire frame with **lube**. For simple muddy conditions, this can help to repel mud build-up on the frame.
- Use a thick lube oil for the chain. It needs to be thick to stay on in the face of the mud. Although it's more expensive, chain wax is preferable, as it won't hold the grit from the mud like lube will. A heavy lubricant/protectant dissolved in a lighter carrier, such as a motorcycle chain lube or "Boeshield T-9" is easier to apply but still clings tightly.[2]
- Keep tire pressure low, about 35–40psi. This allows the tire to mold itself better in the conditions.
- Change the brake pads before leaving or take a spare pair. Brake pads wear down to the pegs or housing when you're constantly descending muddy declines; if it's wet, the mud acts like sandpaper, grinding away.
- Add mud guards to the down-tube and front wheel to protect the front as best as possible.
- Make sure the gears are well-cleaned before setting out. Mud can cause them to jump around otherwise.[3]
- If you are a serious mud-rider, make sure that your **brake cables** and gear cables are of high quality, to allow for smooth shifts and braking when the mud is severe.



4 Practice getting used to mud gradually. Mud riding takes some getting used to initially, and it's important to realize that mud from one season may well be very different from mud that forms in another season, so knowing your local conditions and the bike's responsiveness to changes is something that will grow with time and experience.^[4] The ultimate aim for any **mountain bike rider** is to be comfortable riding continuously without having to reduce the pace, so tackling mud with dexterity should be a **goal** to include in your repertoire of off-road riding skills. As well as knowing how your localized conditions impact your riding, here are some generalized pointers about mud and watery trails:^[5]

- Mud creates a **slippery** riding surface.
- Mud will slow down your riding, regardless of your skill with the bike. The more soaked the ground, the more the bike is likely to sink in to the ground as you ride through the mud.
- **Horse-riding trails** after rain are *not* the off-road rider's friend. Avoid them as much as possible. Also avoid trails that are really boggy and clearly deep in mud.
- Traction is hardest on clay or chalk trails that are wet or have mud.
- Always take extreme care with corners. **Tree roots** on corners can cause you to slip right over. When approaching corners, be prepared stand up if a wheel spins. Use the brake sparingly when approaching corners.^[6]
- The wetter the trail, the more grip you'll have.
- When there is a choice, always opt for trail that you can see over trail covered in mud and/or water.
- Grass parts of a trail can provide **traction** between mud. However, roots and rocks can make it very slippery, and require experienced technique.^[7]
- Beware ditches of water, especially as a beginner and don't accidentally ride into them. Many trails have ditches to ensure that the water runs down the sides of the trail rather than eroding the trail; this is true for walking, hiking, biking, skiing, and **horse riding** trails in general; these can be useful for grip and cleaning the bike on occasion.



5 Be thoughtful. Sometimes the challenge is so great that it escapes your mind that yet another bike riding this trail is causing **erosion** and damage for the trail, for future riders, for other users, and for the environment itself. If the **trail** is in such a bad state that riding it will just result in leaving great gouges and ruts, forgo the ride until the weather improves, or find a trail that's less messed up.

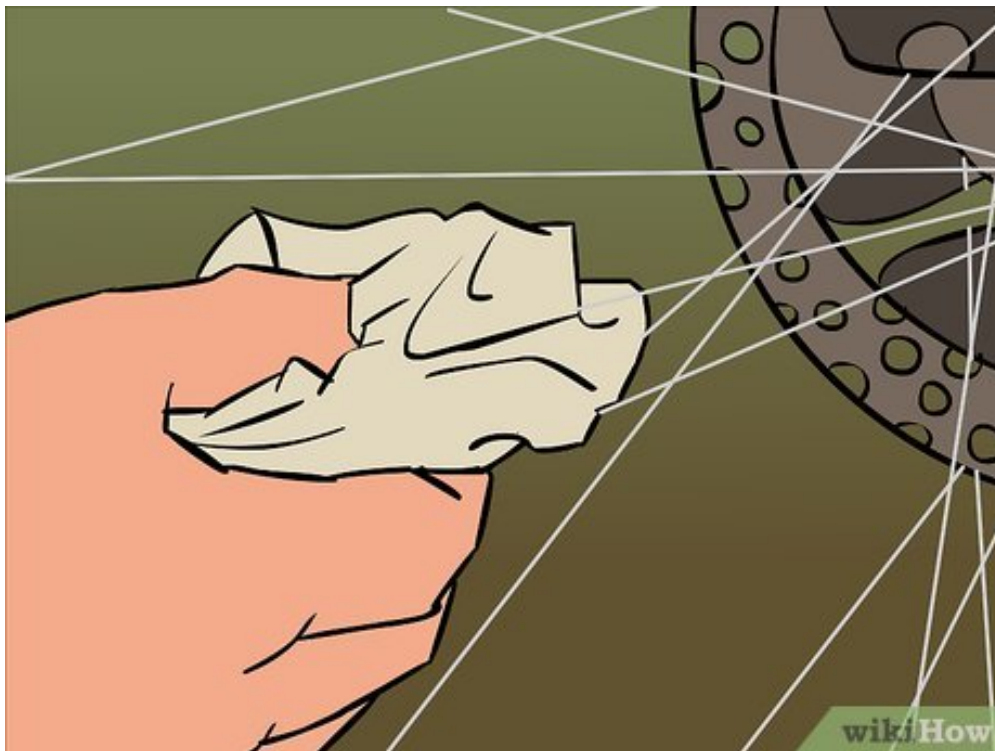


6 **Learn some techniques for riding through mud.** Begin your **sprint** far before your bicycle reaches the mud patch. When approaching the mud patch, stay loose, in the saddle, and prepare for slippage. Where possible, keep closer to vegetation where the line on the trail will be less likely to be as muddy.[8]

- When faced with slippage at high speeds, do not lean your bike one way or another or your tires will slip out and you will fall. Instead, steer with your **handlebars** and steer with preciseness. This will require a little leaning, however, it still gives your bike a centered balance as well as continued traction with your tires. It is also a good idea to spread your weight over the bike but if you need to slide back on the saddle (seat), use the bar ends.[9]
- Keep pressure on the **pedals**.[10]
- When approaching the exit of the mud, begin a sprint. You will feel the connection of your tires with the hard dirt and then pick up speed.
- Lean back a little bit when going downhill to place your weight further over the back wheel.[11] Your rear tire will bite more and your front tire doesn't really need all that weight on it anyway.
- Don't do anything drastic! Your goal is to maintain speed, not increase it or change your line.
- Always select the right **gear** *before* climbing or descending. With the descent, control your speed *before* reaching deep mud, or you might find yourself being flung off as you reach the mud.[12]



7 Enjoy it and don't be fastidious. A lot of riders *love* mud because it tests the rider's skills and technique to their limits and well, they *love* getting dirty! After you've spent time getting used to the feel and learning how to keep your pace going even though the mud's in the way, you will probably find yourself relaxing about it more and starting to enjoy the experience every time.



8 Clean the bike. After every single muddy ride, be sure to clean your bike thoroughly. You'll be surprised where mud ends up, so you'll need to do a thorough inspection of the bike to ensure that the mud's removed from everywhere; look at the end of the handlebars, in between the chain stays, under the fork crown, etc. Wet mud is easiest to remove when wet, so try to clean your bike as quickly as possible. Be aware that removing dry mud with a dry cloth (easier for a thin layer) can also dull or remove paintwork.

- Clean mud away from the sprockets using a sprocket scraper.
- Hang the bike upside to dry after a muddy ride. This will help to ensure that water cannot rust the tubes. Just remove the seat bracket prior to hanging.^[13]
- Spray the bike with lube as a quick protection measure if you don't have time to wash the bike that same day.



9 Finally, clean yourself. After a particularly muddy ride, congratulate yourself on using an ancient tradition for beautifying the skin but be sure to wash it all off thoroughly. A nice warm **bath** or a hot shower are ideal after a hard day's riding.

- Clean inside and behind your ears, two places where mud can hide away.



Tips

- Have spare, dry clothes in the car. Additional pairs of socks are always a good idea.
- Don't forget to bring a towel, and take a shower afterwards. You may or may not get dirty.
- Non-sealed bearings should be replaced with sealed cartridges if you regularly ride in mud and wet conditions.
- Something else to consider is how to transport your bike back home. Few people want the mud from a muddy ride to end up all over the car. If your bike goes inside the car, be sure to provide adequate coverage over seats and the trunk space using something like a tarpaulin that will catch the mud. In addition, since you'll be muddy too, cover seats with plastic wrap or plastic bags and place all muddy clothing into spare plastic bags, and *not* on the seats.



Warnings

- You will get dirty. Live with it.
- Be careful where you wash your bike. If you've been biking through an area that has local plant or animal disease problems, don't wash your bike over soil, plants, or near animals when you get back home, in case you transfer unwanted parasites, bacteria, or other germs that have hitched a lift with the mud. On the other hand, if you are sure the area is clean, consider washing the mud off in the garden, to make

use of the water for watering the plants at the same time.

- Watch out for anything else hidden under the mud (rebar) or anything that might be deceiving, such as two feet (60cm) of mud where there were only two inches (5cm) previously.

References

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Co-authors: **17**
Updated: **May 13, 2021**
Views: **63,225**

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