

training wheels... *How to do it*

# SUSPENSION TUNING FOR IDIOTS

(I.E. NORMAL PEOPLE)

This issue, I thought I'd take it up a notch, seeing as how I've helped you all become trail legends, which is no bloody good if your bike is riding like a donkey on wooden wheels. So let's have a look at training your bike instead.

Does your head hurt every time you try to understand how your forks or rear shock are 'meant' to be set up? What about when that cool looking dude on his flash 6" travel all-mountain carbon rig is spouting on about how this next section of trail requires a couple more clicks of high speed compression? Or how much better his ride is since he sent his shock away to get a custom pro tune from some guru in a faraway land which took a month and only cost \$300? Make you a little green with envy does it? And those bloody Internet forums with all those amazingly knowledgeable ordinary guys saving each other's bacon with fantastic advice. Not.

Well you can rest easy because it's all BOLLOCKS! Oh dear, I can hear every flash dude/suspension guru downing their spring curve calculators and jumping onto a 'Rod is full of crap' thread and wasting hours and hours justifying their excessive spend/charges etc.

Okay, I'll give you an example. Me. I know bikes; I've owned many over the last 25 years. I can tell if my tyres are 2psi off, whether I have the correct amount of air/spring in my suspension, I push my bike and myself to the limits (at times) and still get some podium results when I do the odd downhill race. BUT, I still get to the bottom of the trail sometimes and find that I still have my forks locked out and my ProPedal on firm from the previous climb. MUPPET! And I'm not alone here am I you flash dudes? Go on, admit it!

I'm not denying that we can all benefit from the latest damping technology, or guru suspension tuning, but let's be realistic. My riding is so much better now that my fork has only rebound adjustment, and my shock has an on/off switch only. You flash buggers can have your trick techs and tips so you can sit on your bike at the trailhead and waffle on. I'm just gonna ride.

So, here we go. I'm going to tell you how it is. Do it or not.

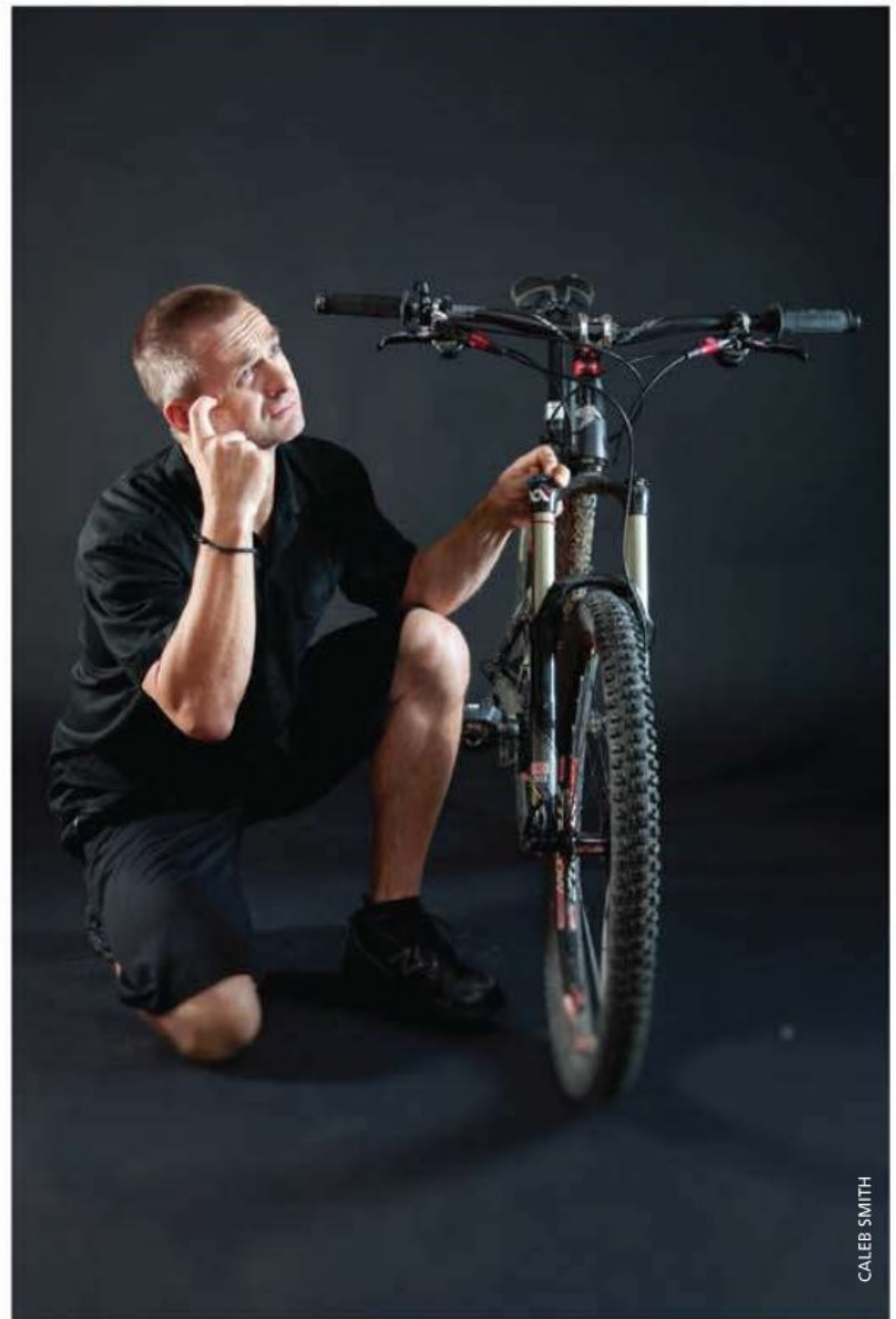
Sag. Run your rear shock from 20–25% (XC) to 30–35% (DH). This is particular to your body weight so you need to play around with it depending on your riding style. You want to feel your travel gently bottom out on the hardest hits. For your forks, sag is a crock. Due to stiction, especially in air forks, it's best to run your air/spring so that when you push down as hard as you can in the car park, you get about 4/5 of your travel.

Preload. Never wind your spring up; it should only be tight enough to stop it rattling. PRELOAD ONLY CHANGES THE FIRST FEW MILLIMETRES OF TRAVEL! Change your spring if it's too soft.

Rebound. Set it as fast as you can and ride off a curb seated and feel it 'boing' back up, then slow it down so that it's controlled and doesn't bob. I never change my rebound unless I'm hitting big bumps and the rear end is bucking all over the place. The faster the rebound, the quicker your bike is ready for the next bump.

Ramp-up (spring curve rate). Pretty much any fork or air shock can have the end stroke modified by the addition/subtraction of a few cc's of oil. Talk to someone who actually does rebuild suspension, and doesn't just talk about it.

High-/low-speed compression. If your fork has it, you must be a flash dude, therefore you know exactly what to do. Ha! Okay, run the high-speed (bumps) at near minimum and low-speed (pedal bob) at minimum for down, and wherever you desire for along or up.



CALEB SMITH

ProPedal (low-speed compression damping on rear shocks). Off for descents, on for climbing. As for just riding along; depending on your bike's suspension and how you like your ride, on or off or somewhere in between (if it's adjustable, e.g. ProPedal 1 or 2 setting).

Tyres. Probably the most important bit. If you're running 2.1" tyres, that's an extra 2.1" of travel to deal with (think tyre hitting tree root and compressing into rim and... shit, pinch flat!) You need to run the pressure at optimum for your weight and riding style. Too soft and the tyre will roll/puncture; too hard and you'll lose traction and feel like your shocks are locked out. For example, I am 90kg (all muscle and brain) and have to run 29/31psi front/rear to get the most from my ride. Try letting air out until you feel the tyre roll/bottom out on the harshest corners, jumps or roots and then run about 4–6psi more.

Guru/Pro suspension tuning. In spite of what I said earlier, do send your suspension off for a regular rebuild. New fork and shock assembly is usually done in a factory by someone's old grandma in China/Mexico/Guatemala and, well, I'll leave that to your imagination. Also, think of the abuse you give your bike. It needs some serious love from a trained professional at least twice a year. (It's the same as you heading off to Queenstown for a holiday this summer. You need it. Right?)

So, there you have it. And remember that this is just me and my take on it. I've simplified it because you're an idiot. If you're a flash dude, then you didn't need to read it, right? Look back at the title. Either you really are an idiot or you may have secretly been aware that you really didn't know what you were spouting on about. Which would make you an idiot. Phew. **ROD BARDSLEY**