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How I learnt how to fix my own bike

by Esther Clarke

I have been tinkering with and attempting (sometimes successfully) to repair my bike for many years but I learnt how to do this either by trial and error or from library books so I was never quite sure I was doing things right. And there have always been a few basic jobs which have daunted me. I don't mind using the local bike shops for repairs and servicing but surely some things, I thought, are straightforward enough to do at home if you know what you are doing and have the right equipment? And what if things go wrong when you're out on a ride? So when I heard that GoCycle had teamed up with a new, local bike repair business to run a basic bike maintenance course on a Saturday morning at Vandyke Youth Club I booked on, keen to build my confidence and skills.

The training was given by Sam Darling, a Leighton resident who has just started up the company MBRS UK. The 'MBRS' bit can stand for four different things depending on which of Sam's services you require – Mobile Bicycle and Repair Service, Mountain Bike Race Support, Mobile Bicycle Recovery Service and Mountain Biking Route Suggestions, are all offered by the company. Sam is a CyTech qualified mechanic with over 11 years experience in the bike trade working for companies such as Trek, Gary Fisher, Klein, Lemond, GT, Schwinn and Saddle Safari. So he knows his stuff. And he is a good teacher too.

The session covered all the basics – starting with the 'naming of parts', which I found really helpful as I never am sure what things are called when I am trying to buy spares or explain a problem in a shop. Some of the stuff I had done before – changing an inner tube for example – but it was good to learn how the professionals do it, what handy shortcuts can be taken, and to know that I have been doing it right all this time!

I also learnt new stuff, like how to change a gear or brake cable and how to check and adjust spokes and although I'm still not sure I can feel the difference in tension between correctly and incorrectly adjusted spokes I did go home and successfully replace a gear cable – and the gears still work!

Handouts with good, clear pictures were provided, covering all the elements taught and which I am still using to remind me how to do things. At the end of the session Sam took a look over everyone's own bikes, answering questions and giving individual advice.

Sam also gave advice on which tools to buy so as to be able to carry out repairs at home. This was very useful for me and I made a list and immediately went and bought some of the essentials – which actually wasn't all that many.

So was it worth it? Well, it cost me £30 and a couple of hours of time and although I knew some of the stuff already I definitely learnt new skills which, along with the new tools in my tool box and my new level of self confidence, should help me to keep my bike out of the repair shop for a bit longer and therefore save me money and inconvenience. I have even put a bike workshop stand on my Christmas list!

If you want to know more about Sam's courses or his mobile repair and rescue services (yes he really will come out and fix your bike for you to save you having to get it to a shop!) take a look at his website: www.mbrsuk.com, and to find out what maintenance courses GoCycle are running keep an eye on their website: www.gocycleleightonlinlade.com. Buzzcycles members can get discounts on some of the training courses (though not on the one I went on.)

