

Yes, bicycle chains do wear out

“What’s that?” a customer asked as I used my Park CC-3 chain checker.



I explained that I was checking his chain for wear.

“I didn’t know a chain wore out,” the customer responded. I assured him that he was in good company because very few people realize a chain wears out. Even fewer are aware of how to check for wear.

If one rides just a few times a year, odds are the person will wear out before the bicycle! However, if one is a frequent rider, a rule of thumb is that a mountain bike chain can wear out in as little as 500 miles while a road chain lasts, on average, 3,000 miles. Chain life varies depending on road/trail conditions. Mud, sand, general grime, moisture all shorten the life of a chain.

The consequences of poor chain maintenance, including not checking for wear, can be costly. A substandard chain will shorten the life of one’s cassette and chain rings. Worn chains also are more likely to break or catch on the cassette/chain ring teeth. More than one rider has catapulted to the pavement when a stuck chain froze the pedaling process.

All of the above can be avoided with a few simple steps. I use a Park CC-3 chain checker. One inserts the gauge into the chain on one end and tries to get the other end to also drop through the chain. The CC-3 has two sides – 0.75 and 1.0. If the gauge falls through at 0.75, but not 1.0, the rider knows the chain is at least three-fourths worn out but not 100 percent worn out.

I’ve come across many customers who either don’t lube their chains or use whatever greasy substance they have around the garage. I confess that in my early days of cycling, I used 3-in-1 oil like my dad used on tools. I quickly realized that my chain would attract dirt. My preference is White Lightning because it’s a wax-based product. I lube the chain and wipe it off with a paper shop towel to remove residue. Then I re-apply White Lightning and wait five minutes before I ride. If I know I’ll be pedaling more than 100 miles before I re-apply lube, then I use Tri-flow on my chain.

