

First, buy a good pump

A pump is one of the least-expensive items and least-valued accessories – until one has a flat. One customer referred to her “graveyard of pumps” when I arrived to fix her flats. I confessed to her that I too had had to learn the hard way about cheap, unreliable pumps.

The difference between a reliable pump and a purchase that one will regret is about \$15. If you’ve spent a significant sum on a bicycle, get a good pump and consider it as “tip” to yourself.

When it comes to pumps, “beauty” is more than “metal deep”. The biggest issues with cheap pumps are they: a) don’t last; b) are hard to pump; c) have a tendency to ruin the tube valve stems. If they have an attachment hose, they look just like the more-expensive ones but the hose is made of inferior material. More than once I would start to pump and “hiss” was what I got as air escaped from a hose rupture. Many cheap pumps have no hose attachment. Without realizing it, you’re yanking the stem with each pump stroke.



I’ve been a Topeak Road Morph frame pump advocate for a decade for five reasons: 1) The first Topeak I purchased still works; 2) I’ve never replaced the attachment hose because quality lasts; 3) I can air up a flat quickly; 4) I can pump a road tube to at least 120 psi; 5) The Topeak comes with a built-in tire pressure gauge.

What about CO2 cartridges? I find some cyclists switch to CO2s because they have their own “tale of frustration” to tell about frame pumps. But CO2 pumps have their own drawbacks – starting with environmental waste. There are a lot of empty cartridges dotting desert landscapes. And if one lives in a puncture-vine area, one may not have carried enough cartridges.

When it comes to a floor pump, as you might suspect, I have a Topeak Joe Blow – the more-expensive floor model. It has a Smarthead that automatically adapts to either Schrader or Presta valves. On the frame pump, the head is designed for both valve types but one has to flip two internal pieces over – a 15-second task.

Are there other pumps that deliver if you invest a similar number of dollars? Yes, names like Blackburn, Park Tool and Silca come to mind. But since the pump I purchased a decade ago is still working, I don't need to switch!