

## Tips for riding a tandem

Riding a tandem is neither as easy as some people think nor as difficult as some people say it is. Each year at bike swaps the number of tandems for sale is a testament to dashed cycling dreams. There is a solution – learn from those who enjoy tandem riding.



The first issue is to decide who will be the captain (front person) and who will be the stoker (rear person). In most cases, one can't switch back and forth. I'm 5'11" and my wife, Sheree, is 5'8". The larger person, whether male/female, should be on the front for control purposes. You don't want the back of the bicycle creating issues in steering. We paid to have each cockpit fit to our bodies. Even though both of us have a medium cockpit, the measurements are not the same. The proper fit is a lot more than simply raising/lowering the seat.

Then one has to decide how to start from a stop. There are several options. Sheree is the designated stoker. For us, the best system is to have her clip in first. Then she raises the left pedal to about "11 o'clock" and I clip in with my left foot before pushing off with my right. Once we get some momentum, I clip in on the right. I don't announce that I'm clipping in and slowing the pedaling for a moment. We've ridden enough miles that she anticipates that I will be clipping in. And when we're stopping, we have a 10-inch rotor disc brake system to give us maximum, smooth stopping power.

At a stop light, Sheree remains clipped in and I leave my left foot clipped in with my foot at "11 o'clock". That way, I'm ready to push off when the light changes to green. I do have a habit that annoys her – I like to do a track stand if the light is close to turning green. Warning: Be sure you can do it successfully. If you lose your balance and fall over because you didn't clip out, the fall from grace may complicate the next ride!



Many tandem riders communicate every shift, change in speed etc. I'm ADHD. We tried the communication styles we'd seen and it took the fun out of riding – at least for me. We've reduced the commands to the minimum. When I plan to turn, I say, "Left turn" or "right turn". Sheree signals for us since she's on the back and more visible to vehicles behind us. She doesn't have to have her hands on the handlebars. As the captain, I want both hands on the "steering wheel" while turning.

Sheree also has a mirror on her handlebars. She says “car back” to alert me to a vehicle approaching from the rear. That’s important on a rural road, where I might be daydreaming. But if we’re on a more heavily-traveled road, I tell her she can suspend the alerts. Otherwise, she’d sound like an auctioneer. In return, I say “bump” and put the pedals at “three o’clock” and “nine o’clock” to allow both of us to stand up momentarily.

When it comes to shifting, I do it smoothly instead of having to say “shift” each time. On the other hand, I tend to be a “gear masher” instead of a “spinner”. Sheree is the opposite. If I’m in too high a gear for her liking, she says, “Shift down, please.” The word please, for the captain and stoker, is a key to successful tandem riding.