

# Check your tires and oil your chain for carefree spring cycling

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Assistant News Editor

*Editor's note: Last summer, Keith Hollar was a mechanic at a bicycle shop in Winston-Salem.*

If your bicycle has been sitting idle all winter just waiting for spring, it probably needs a little maintenance work before you take that first warm-weather jaunt.

And if you are just a casual rider, much of that work, if not all, is simple enough that you can save some money by doing it yourself, especially with the

guidance of repair manuals such as Tom Cuthbertson's *Anybody's Bike Book* (\$3 at bike shops and book stores).

Of course, your bicycle may be past the point of requiring simple maintenance. If you have had your bike for 18 months or if you left it outside to suffer in the weather, it's time for an overhaul at a bicycle shop.

Local shops will regrease all the bearings (hubs, headset, pedals and bottom bracket) as well as adjust the brakes and gears and true the wheels for \$18.50 to \$24, depending on the shop.

An overhaul is about the best thing you can do for your bike for the money in terms of your bike's performance and longevity.

But if you have taken relatively good care of your bike, chances are that it will require only a tune-up before you hit the streets again.

The first thing to check is the tires. If they are in good condition, a little air may be all that is needed. Check the sidewall to determine the correct amount of air pressure. If you don't have a foot pump or a good frame-mounting pump, go to your friendly service station and use its air compressor. Be careful—these pumps are designed for cars, and they can overinflate a bicycle tire in a matter of seconds. Another alternative is to use the free air hose behind the Chapel Hill Cycle Shop (next to Hector's).

If you don't have an air-pressure gauge, get one. Most gauges for autos don't have a high enough pressure reading, so you might have to invest \$3 or so at your favorite bicycle shop. Be sure to keep the pressure at the recommended level (slightly less on hot days). And check the pressure at least every two weeks, because with bicycle tires a little loss of volume means a big loss of pressure.

The next thing to check is the chain, most likely, it will need some cleaning and oiling, so get a can of WD-40, a light-grade oil that comes in a can with a spray spout for reaching those hard-to-get-to places. It's available at hardware stores and most bicycle shops, so get a can and go to work. Spray each link of the chain, and then dry off the excess while you wipe away the grime. Always keep some oil on your chain—not so much that it flies all over the bike when you ride, but enough to keep everything running smoothly.



drops into the little capped spout on the rear hub. This should be done every six months or so to keep the gears shifting trouble-free.

If you ride a five- or ten-speed bike and your gears are shifting poorly or not at all, a little adjustment should take care of the problem. Better go to a bicycle shop for this job, because it can get a little tricky.

Handbrakes that either won't stop you or that won't let you move usually can be adjusted without much trouble. Follow the brake cable from the hand lever to the brake mechanism. See that little threaded metal thing that looks like it's made for finger adjustment? It is, so give it a few appropriate turns—clockwise if the brakes need loosening and counterclockwise if they need tightening. If this still doesn't eliminate the problem, see your bike mechanic.

Also, check your handlebars, seat, axle nuts and all accessories to make sure they are tight before you pedal off down the street—unless you enjoy being surprised when you're going down a hill and your bike falls apart.

To clean your bicycle, use a dampened cloth. To help keep it clean, give your bicycle a wax job—car wax works fine—but be sure not to wax the sides of the rims if you have hand brakes.

Proper care can add years of usefulness to your bike while improving its performance. If you do your own repair work, you'll know what to do—and who to blame—if something goes wrong.

Before you begin heavy cycling this spring, it's a good idea to make sure the handlebars, saddle and components are secure. It's an eerie feeling when the gears begin shifting by themselves.

Other parts of your bike also need to be lubricated every month or so: the moving parts of the brakes and brake levers, the gearshift levers and the derailleurs (those funny-looking contraptions that move your chain from sprocket to sprocket). Give these a liberal dose of WD-40 and wipe off the excess lubricant. Neglecting to oil these parts can result in rapid wear and poor

performance. But don't overdo it—oiling any parts having bearings will dry up the grease and virtually destroy the component.

For three-speed bikes buy some oil made for such hubs and drop a few

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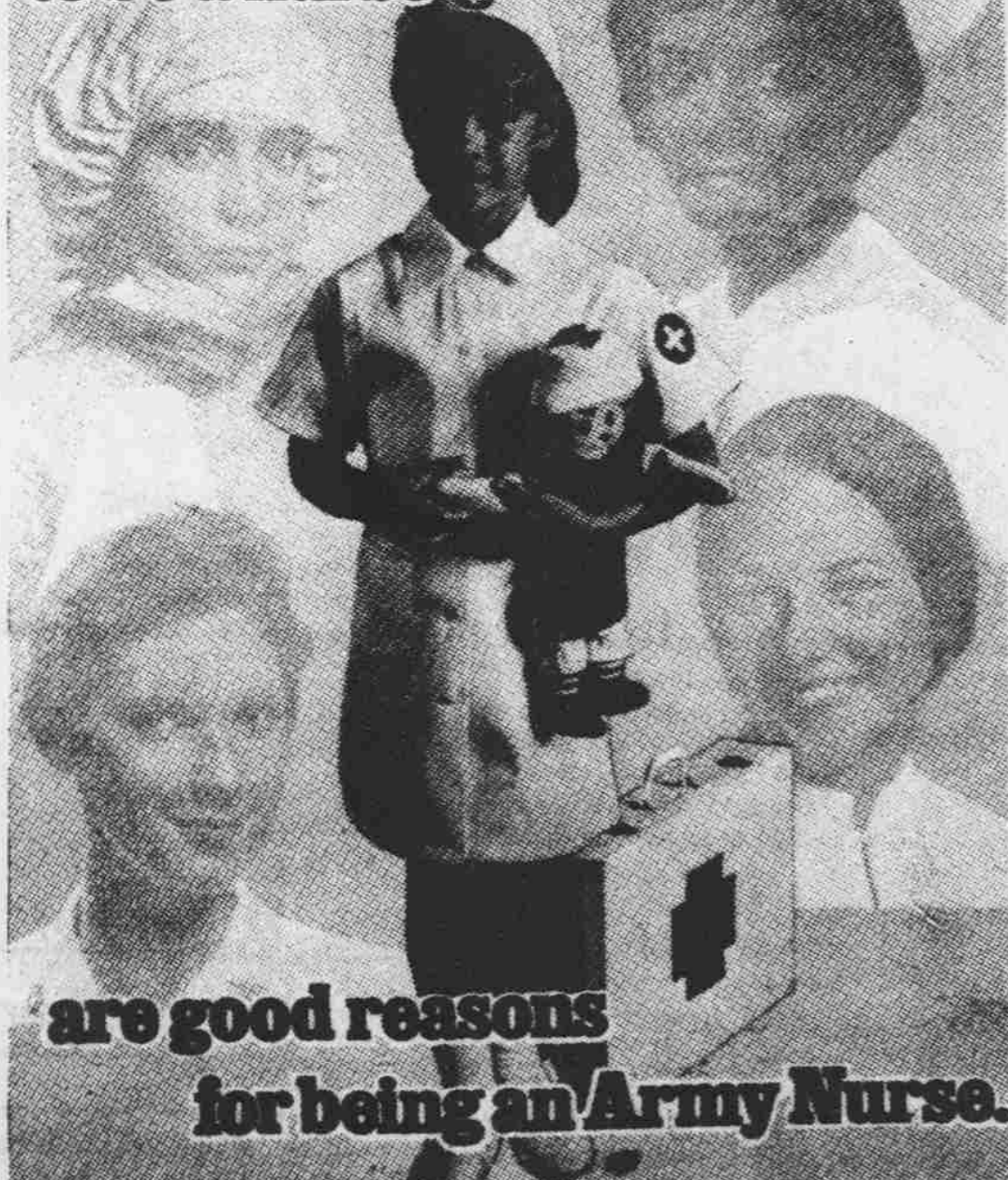
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