

Your front brake might save your life!

This article on using your bicycle's front brake should be considered a must-read for all cyclists. It's great to have 3rd-party validation of something I've been talking to customers about for years. I cannot tell you how many times I'm replacing the 3rd or 4th set rear brake pads on road bikes and the front pads are the original and untouched. How many accidents have occurred, and possibly even lives lost, because cyclists didn't know they could stop in $\frac{1}{4}$ (or less!) of the distance they think they can? Different rules apply if it's raining or wet, of course. And a hard grab of your front brake on gravel isn't a good idea either. But on normal dry pavement, where most of us ride 98.5% of the time, it's your front brake that is going to save you.

It's tough to sell because some are so concerned they're going to go over the handlebars, a scenario rarely actually caused by the front brake but more often something else (front wheel digging into a pothole, too much weight forward of the center of the bike when encountering an obstacle etc). The way I get people over the hurdle, with some success, is to suggest using only their front brake on a very gentle grade. Keep the speed down. Maybe descending Alpine from Portola Valley towards Arastradero. A non-critical environment where you don't have to apply a lot of brake to slow down or stop.

The other thing missed out on when you don't use a front brake is the effect it has on maneuvering. If you're leaning over, going through a turn, and apply the front brake, it will try to straighten you out. That's a tool you can use to change your line in a hurry if need be.

Your bike may be capable of a lot more than you think!