

Anyone watching an elite cyclocross race is likely awed by the seemingly impossible speed maintained by racers as they dismount their bikes, clear barriers, and remount their bikes in one rapid, fluid series of movements. As it turns out, this skill can also be very useful to MTB racers who occasionally have good reason to walk or run a short part of the course. In this tutorial we'll cover both the basics of a successful dismount/remount and offer a few tips for ironing out the kinks in your form as you get started learning this technique. Like many aspects of bike handling there is no substitute for one on one instruction, so meet with your coach to do these under direct observation if possible.

The best way to learn dismounts is on flat, soft, grassy terrain with no barriers or obstacles. Once you get the movements down you can begin performing them with barriers to get your timing and rhythm dialed in. Start off slow but not too slow (the pace of a brisk jog is about right), otherwise your momentum crawls to a halt since the actual dismount is done without pedaling.

Dismount

This is a 4 step process, as follows. We'll describe it for right-handed riders:

- 1) Rolling in a straight line with your head up, **unclip the right foot**.
- 2) **Swing it back over the saddle**, around to the left side of the bike and then forward between the bike and the left leg. This requires leaning the bike slightly to the right or you'll end up turning left.
- 3) **Bring the right hand back to the top tube**, 3-4 inches forward of the seatpost clamp. Your forearm should just clear the nose of the saddle.
- 4) **Unclip the left foot** (decisively!) as you plant the right one on the ground and break into stride, carrying the bike with the right hand (on the top tube) and the left which is on the bars.

Notes:

- **Slow Speed dismounting:** If you are going really slow or are in a momentum-robbing section of the course, you may need to wait until the last possible second to stop pedaling and dismount. In these cases, you can do a "kick out" where you unclip the left foot just as the right comes around behind it. So you will plant the right foot behind the left, and keep both hands on the bars. At this point you can grab the top-tube to lift the bike or just push it with both hands on the bars.
- **Hand Placement:** Beginners will find it easier to commence a dismount with hands on the tops of the bars. Those with more experience may want to practice with the hands on the brake hoods.
- **Shouldering the bike:** For long running sections or steep run-ups it is often faster to shoulder the bike. In this case, reach the right hand down the left side of the bike (not over the top-tube) to the downtube, right about where gear shifters would have been many years ago, instead of the top tube. Once you get both feet on the ground, hoist the bike up, resting the top-tube inboard of the shoulder on the collarbone. Once the weight of the bike is on the shoulder, reach the right hand *under* the downtube and grab the left handlebar end. The bars and front wheel will be turned to the left to allow you to reach the bar end. Now your left hand is free to swing to help you balance and you can use the right hand on the bar to control the bike.
- **Hand carry:** When doing a hand rather than shoulder carry, once you get the right hand back onto the top tube, put some weight on the right arm and hand and use it to help you support your upper body and keep the bike tracking steady as you unclip. This also helps unweight the left pedal, which sometimes makes unclipping easier.
- **Lefty disadvantage?** Lefty's can be at a slight disadvantage if they are only comfortable dismounting on the right side. Because the drivetrain is on the right a lefty has more chances for an adverse encounter with a chainring. You'll have to evaluate which is worse – dealing with the proximity of the drivetrain or learning to dismount like a right-handed person. You'll be at an advantage if you can do both equally well and can dismount on whichever side works best for the particular situation.
- **Left handed rear braking?** Now you know why some cross racers run their brakes "moto style" (left lever controlling the rear brake). This allows them to use their left hand, which stays on the bars, to brake the rear wheel at the last possible second.

Remount

Obviously you want to maintain all that speed you carried as you remount the bike. Here is how it goes:

- 1) **Set the bike back down quickly but with purpose** – don't let it flop or bounce around. You want it planted on the ground and rolling steady for the remount, not bouncing all over.
- 2) **Get your right hand back up on the bars.** Keep your head up, eyes focused down the trail. Don't look down at the bike.
- 3) **Lean forward and push your arms out in front of you**, almost like you are about to break into a Superman pose, but not that extreme.
- 4) In full stride, **bring the right knee up & back like a hurdler**, swing the leg up over the saddle.
- 5) You want to **land on the upper inside thigh** - NOT planted on the saddle ready to pedal. The reasons for this should be obvious. It only looks like the pros land right on the saddle. In fact they just perfect landing on the thigh, close to being in position, and they slide into position very fast in one smooth movement.
- 6) **Slide your butt into position on the saddle** as you reach your legs down to get your feet clipped back into the pedals. Again, do this with your head up, looking down the trail.
- 7) **Pedal like mad!**

Notes

- **Avoid "Two hopping"** - A common problem is "two-hopping" on the left foot as the right leg comes up and onto the saddle. One way to unlearn this is to concentrate on jumping really high as you launch off the left foot to get back on the bike. This teaches you to commit fully to the remount move instead of hopping along next to your bike. Once you get good at remounting without the two-hop, you can gradually reduce the jump until you reach the optimal jump height to smoothly get back on the bike.

Mountain bike dismounts

For MTB racers, a few additional notes apply.

- 1) **Very seldom will you ever need or be able to shoulder the bike.** Don't worry about learning this version of the dismount.
- 2) You might struggle a little because **the low top tube on the MTB makes it harder to weight that right arm**, this is normal but with practice it should not slow you down. Very often you won't be bringing the hand down to the top tube anyways (see the next note).
- 3) You definitely need to **learn the kick-out method**. Because there are no man-made barriers in MTB races, the majority of your dismounts will come in tricky or uphill terrain where you need to keep pedaling as long as possible. Be sure to practice this.

One final cautionary note. Dismounting and remounting maneuvers use muscles in a way that most riders do not routinely exercise their legs. Warm up and stretch before attempting any dismount workouts or racing. Start off with baby steps, doing just a few dismounts each ride for a week or so, until you get the muscles accustomed to the motion. If you go out and do 10-20 dismounts your first time out, you will have some very sore muscles and could end up injured.