

The Skinny on Cycling  
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True

I recently won a cycling grant (which will undoubtedly be the focus of a future article) that provided me the opportunity to take a cycling repair and maintenance class.

Prior to taking this class, I had changed a tire, raised and lowered my seat, and greased the kick stand on my nine-year-old daughter's bike. Except for distant memories of using a hack saw and a friend's set of forks to (unsuccessfully) create a "chopper" bike in the mid-70s, that was the extent of my bicycle repair resume.

So, a few weeks ago with a basic set of tools and my take-on-the-world-CAN-DO attitude, I headed down to BGI south to learn my way around the shop and my newly acquired carbon fiber road bike.

The class occurred over two Saturday mornings and, during that time, we learned how to lubricate, adjust, tweak, repair and upgrade many of the components on our various bikes. By the time the class was over, I had trued two wheels, re-cabled my brakes and shifting systems, and had even spent a little time polishing up my trusty steed so that my wife could see how I'd become an accomplished bike mechanic practically overnight

After class, I purchased several tools including a nice repair stand, various wrenches, lubricants and a wheel truing stand. With my new-found expertise, I decided to take the small wobble out of the rear wheel of my other road bike. After all, I'd done it twice before, so this should be a piece of cake, a walk in the park, a stroll on the beach, right?

They say life is full of lessons and that we never really stop learning. I learned a number of things over the next 24 hours. These things include: 1. ALWAYS make sure you're using the correct sized spoke wrench. If you don't, you end up with rounded nipples. And yes, for the uninitiated, this is a very bad thing. 2. When you live an hour away from your local bike shop, you should keep a supply of commonly replaced/repared items close at hand. 3. "Righty tighty, lefty loosey" is only "sort of" true when it comes to spokes and you either have to stand on your head or put your chin on a bike tire and reach across the wheel to make that old adage work in your favor. 4. Vice grips very rarely have a place in bike repair.

Because of the damage I did to one of the spoke nipples, and the fact that I didn't have a replacement spoke, I eventually came to the realization that the only way I was going to be able to make this wheel true again would involve taking the wheel completely apart—spokes and all. My class had been in "intermediate repair". I

was now looking at spending some late night hours doing a complete “wheel rebuild” which is widely known to be an “advanced repair” project. If you don’t believe me, just ask around. The guys who do that on a regular basis get tattoos of spoke wrenches, dishing tools and tension meters on their biceps!

After a couple of hours of frustration, my wife came into the garage and found me sitting in a pile of spokes, nipples, cogs and noticed a strange spoke-shaped line stretching from the corner of my mouth to my left ear. I can’t explain that particular greasy mark, but I’m convinced that it adds a certain look of distinction and accomplishment. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

I’m pleased to tell you that a few hours later; I had turned rim, hub and pile of spokes into a wheel that was again true and round. In fact I took the bike out for a test ride and it seemed to run just as smoothly as when it was new.

It’s only as I sit and write this article that I’ve realized; three years ago I weighed over 300 pounds, had out of control diabetes and high blood pressure and cholesterol. Along with becoming a cyclist, I’ve completely changed my diet, my habits, my interests and activities. I’ve lost over 100 pounds and my health is better than it was when I was a teenager.

As I sit and write this article, I’ve come to this conclusion. Becoming more healthy is a lot like bicycle repair: Sometimes you have to take something apart to make it true again.

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Wade Wingle, the author of “The Skinny on Cycling” is the father of one adorable little girl, the husband of a beautiful & talented librarian, a Yogi and an avid cyclist. His web site, [www.HowILost100Pounds.com](http://www.HowILost100Pounds.com) features common sense advice on losing weight without suffering and improving your cycling through healthy living.