

Fitting Tips: Small Changes Make a Big Difference

By Dario Fredrick

In over a decade of fitting cyclists, from first-time bike buyers to world-class professionals, I am continually amazed at how the combination of very slight changes to position can significantly alter one's biomechanics, comfort, efficiency and overall ride quality. Make a small shift in cleat position, a minimal tilt of the foot or even move the saddle angle one degree and the entire pedaling experience can change. Given that a little goes a long way when it comes to fitting changes, if you decide to switch your saddle, shoes, pedals or bars from your original fit, a follow up fitting will ensure that your position continues to serve you well.

Saddle Up

Not all saddles are created equal. Saddles vary in shape, length, ideal contact points, and degree of compression. Saddles also wear out, and can compress quite a bit over time to alter your position. The softer the saddle, usually the more it will compress. Also, cutout saddles tend to morph in shape where the material and padding are minimized in the center. If you change your saddle, even if you match your new saddle exactly to your original fitting specs, you may be significantly altering your position. Each saddle will usually have its own set of fitting measurements. Your unique fitting specs include not only the saddle position relative to the bottom bracket, but reach and drop are measured from the saddle to the bars as well. Quite simply, if you get a new saddle, it requires a follow up fitting to ensure proper positioning. For tips on saddle selection, check out the article [By the Seat of Your Shorts](#).

These Boots Weren't Made for Walking

Cycling shoes are like saddles in that, first and foremost they must fit you well regardless of brand, model or shape. If your feet are not entirely comfortable in your current shoes, start trying on other options. Once you've found a pair that fits well, where the footbed accommodates the width and length of your foot, the shape of the sole of your foot is well-supported, including correct arch support, and the volume (vertical area within) can be closed down onto your foot comfortably and snugly, it's time to get your cleats re-fitted. Cleat nut drilling can vary among shoes, and even if you are meticulous about matching the cleat position between shoes, your feet may end up in a different place relative to the pedals. Changing pedals can have the same effect as well. Come see us when you change your pedals and/ or shoes to make sure that this critical contact point is optimized in your fit. For additional foot-related fitting tips, see the article [Start at the Foot to Reach the Peak Fit](#).

Getting a Handle on It

Handlebars comprise the final contact point of your integration with the bike and their dimensions can vary much like saddles and shoes. In our last newsletter, we covered many of the details of handlebar selection and placement in the article [It's in Your Hands Now](#). For drop bars, width, reach, drop, shape and angle of the drops, and position of the levers all combine to define the front-end of your position. Even shift levers themselves vary in shape and length among models and brands. Mountain bike bars can also vary in rise and sweep, which affect hand position and wrist angle. If you find that your hands

are not comfortable in the drops or you can't reach the levers easily, your bars and levers need adjustment or perhaps the shape and dimensions of your bars could be improved with a different handlebar. A quick refit is the best way to determine exactly what you need to best accommodate the front end of your position.

Stay in Contact

Each of the three contact point components (saddle, shoes/pedals and handlebars) provides unique body to bike interaction and orientation of your fit, and not all components are created equal. The measurements from one model rarely translate exactly to another. If you do decide to change any of these, be sure to come see us for a quick follow up to maintain your optimal position, biomechanics and maximize your enjoyment of riding.

About the Author:

Whole Athlete founder, [Dario Fredrick](#) brings a unique blend of experience and well-rounded qualifications to the bike fitting profession. With over a decade of experience fitting a multitude of cyclists, a Master's degree in applied exercise science including formal training in biomechanics, 13 years teaching Iyengar Yoga and an accomplished cyclist himself, Dario is uniquely qualified in the fitting world. His fitting philosophy is to work with each individual in a holistic fashion without limits or confines of any one fitting system, formula or tool.