

How to...

Stretch groups

in mountain biking



Trials for trails - Part two

In part one of this series of articles, we looked at how you can stretch more able mountain bikers, without having to move venues or use more advanced equipment. In part two we'll move on to looking at some more advanced trials type skills to really stretch your more bike-proficient students. Having said that, as the skills become more advanced, so do the chances of falling off, so if at all possible avoid doing most of the wheel-lift based skills on hard concrete or tarmac. Grass or softer earth based areas are better as they hurt less when you fall off. One important aspect of teaching these skills is teaching the 'get-off-if-it-goes-wrong' move for each, which will be explained in this article. Similarly, I recommend removing rucksacks when attempting these skills; if you do fall with a rucksack on

(even a day sack) it tends to protect your upper back but prevents you rolling backwards to spread the impact and therefore make you fall more heavily on your coccyx – and if you've ever damaged this bone in your lower back, you'll know why you don't want to do this! (It hurts – a lot!)

As I said in part one, these skills are progressive, in that you (or your students) should have mastered some of the skills from part one before proceeding to the skills outlined below. Though you can have a go at most of them fairly close together if you need some variety in a session. They often develop the same bike handling skills and some of the balance skills overlap too.

Handy hints

Get your group to practice these skills on grass or other 'forgiving' surfaces.

Always encourage the use of elbow/ knee pads as well as gloves and helmets.

Remember to check if any participants have any pre-existing back or other injuries that might make falling off a bad idea.



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Images illustrating skills are from the author.



The manual

What is it?

Riding on just the back wheel with the front wheel lifted in the air, without pedalling.

How is it useful on the trail?

Allows you to avoid obstacles in front of you, in particular puddles can be manual-ed into to keep your goggles cleaner, and also you can manual between rollers to maintain speed (watch Olympic BMX racing to see this in action).

Why do it?

Develops core strength and balance, and the appreciation that movements in bodyweight distribution can have a large effect on the wheels.

Progression

Start with lifting the wheel in short sharp bursts, and progress to finding the balance point on the bike, after which you can manual for a long way.

How to do it

Start by getting your weight low over the bike, similar to when you prepare for a bunny hop. However, this time, instead of springing up you move gently up but mainly back, so your hips and hence weight, move backwards past the rear axle. Keep your arms straight in this, and avoid the temptation to just pull up, as this will lift the front wheel but not keep it up. You are trying to find the balance point of the bike where your weight and the distance behind the rear wheel (the pivot point) is exactly balanced by the weight of the bike and gravity acting on the front of the bike. Most people struggle to commit to this move and pull up with their arms when learning. The trouble is that if you do commit and put your weight too far back (it's almost inevitable to do this once) you fall off the back of the bike and land on your backside unless you are quick enough to get one or both feet off the pedals. To get out of this if you feel yourself overbalancing, either let the bike continue in front of you and step off the back of the bike, or your weight forwards and pull the back brake - but be ready for the bike to stop and you to carry on moving forwards.

Brendan demonstrating a manual



1. Brendan prepares by getting low over the bike, ready to spring up a little but mainly backwards.



2. Brendan springs backwards, keeping his arms straight and pushing with his legs so the bike rotates around the rear axle and the front lifts by being counterbalanced by his body, not pulling up with his arms (look at his arms throughout – they are always straight).



3. He maintains the lift by straightening his legs to keep his weight right over the back of the bike just past the axle. He can maintain balance by bending his legs slightly or straightening them and moving his hips forwards and backwards by small amounts.

Top tip



It's important to remember that you don't have to be able to demonstrate the moves perfectly yourself, as long as you know the key coaching points¹ and are able to spot the markers or flags displayed by a rider when they are attempting these moves.

Concentrate on what they are doing with their head, and their body shape (look at the photos in this article to see good examples of body shapes). As the moves get harder, the more attention you will need to give, both to getting technique correct, and ensuring that students don't injure themselves through not escaping from moves that go wrong, or not quite committing fully to the moves.

However, if you're able to challenge your more able riders, then I hope you are able to run successful and enjoyable sessions, no matter the ability of the students you are working with.



WANT TO UPSKILL?

There's a whole host of mountain bike leadership training available at:

www.britishcycling.org.uk/mtbleadership/article/leaderst-Level-2-Mountain-Bike-Leadership-Award-0

Take a look at 'The mountain bike leader's handbook' by Graham French (1) for more information, more skills to try and coaching tips

Whether you're already experienced in taking groups out or a newbie, it's worth checking out your insurance liability options.

For more info visit:
www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Develop-your-Organisation/Insurance-Liability-Cover

The wheelie

What is it?

Riding on just the back wheel with the front wheel lifted in the air, whilst pedalling.

How is it useful on the trail?

Allows you to avoid obstacles in front of you, allows you to keep the front wheel clear even if you have lost speed momentum and can't manual.

Why do it?

Develops core strength and balance, and the appreciation that movements in bodyweight distribution can have a large effect on the wheels.

Progression

Start with lifting the wheel in short sharp bursts, and progress to finding the balance point on the bike, after which you can wheelie as far as you like.

How to do it

Very similar to the manual, but this time stay seated. You lean your weight back whilst staying on the seat, and pedal gently forward to move the bike under you as you lean back. The key is to be in a fairly high (stiff) gear, so you don't spin out, and as with the manual to lift the front wheel by counter balancing it with your weight, not just pulling up on the bars. If it goes wrong, it's easier to get out of – step off as for the manual, or just pull the rear brake. In fact, I advise doing this always covering the back brake just in case you need to bail out early on.

A wheelie



Brendan's right knee is slightly away from the bike to give some lateral balance.

These skills are definitely the more advanced end of what you may be able to do with a group, but they do offer scope to challenge even the most confident and capable riders. ■

References

(1) French, G. (2017) The mountain bike leader's handbook Independently published via Blurb/Lightning source: Milton Keynes (available through [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) or direct from [Blurb.co.uk](https://www.blurb.co.uk))