

# Preparing Your Bike for UltraMan Hawaii

When I first thought of creating a technical support reader for the UltraMan athletes (and their crews as well), my goal was to provide information that may not occur to someone frantically preparing for this event and trying to have a life as well. Ultimately, these tips may help you prevent, or mitigate a severe mechanical problem caused by a crash, and could save you the necessary time that allows you to get back on the bike and finish within the day's 12-hour time limit. I also want to address these issues because I have witnessed things that should not have happened at all, and could have potentially resulted in a debilitating accident. My sincere wish is for all athletes to finish this wonderful event knowing their bike and support equipment was in top shape and that their equipment was never a limiting factor in achieving their goal.

Most of these tips are a result of over 17 years of competitive cycling and triathlons, and from having been in the trenches as a "mech tech" at many races over the years, including Ironman Hawaii, UltraMan Hawaii, and The BOCA Mountainman Triathlon series on Oahu, in which I had been a bike course director from 1996 to 2003. I've also served as crew support for UltraMan athletes since 1995 until my attempts at the race in 2000 & 2002. Additionally, I relied on my best friend, fellow athlete, and certified bicycle mechanic, Darren Broome, for invaluable assistance, proofreading, and review of my ideas contained herein.

First and foremost, have your bike thoroughly checked at your local bike shop by a competent bike mechanic prior to arriving in Hawaii. This serves two purposes: first, it will identify any major issues that need repair prior to leaving for Hawaii, and gives you the time to repair the problems if needed; and second, it will serve to give you that necessary peace of mind in knowing that your bike is ready to go and in top mechanical shape. Always make your mechanic aware of any little thing about which you may have a question; some major problems start out as minor ones that were never addressed in time.

Some of the easiest, but most often overlooked, things that can go wrong with a bike are the shifting and braking. First and foremost, get all shifting and brake cables checked, and replace any or all that are rusted, frayed, or that do not perform at tip top level. That may also require replacing the brake and shift housing as well. Brake and shift housing are specific, so don't mix them up. Also, check that the anchor bolts for the front and rear derailleurs are secure and properly oriented, especially with the 9 and 10-speed systems. Another very important item to check is the alignment of your rear derailleur hanger, as a bent hanger will have a noticeable impact on shifting and chainline throughout the rear cogs and front chainrings. This check is best done by a qualified mechanic using a specific tool made for this purpose. This is also a check that may best be performed after your bike arrives in Hawaii, since derailleur hangers are often bent as a result of the packing and shipping of one's bike in bike cases or boxes. Also, replace any overly worn brake pads: if in doubt, replace them!

The first major issue I've encountered is with tubular tires. To be blunt, it is imperative that the spares being used have been pre-stretched and pre-glued prior to being used in the event. My advice is to take care of this chore well in advance of the event, ride the tires for a few miles, then pack them away until needed in the event of a flat on your primary tires. It is much easier to mount a pre-stretched tire, and the glue already on the tire will bond strongly with the remaining glue on the tubular rim, provided there was an adequate amount of glue on the rim to begin with. My personal preparations have always been to put one good fresh coat of glue on the rim, two coats on all my spares, and then mount fresh, new tires on which I plan to begin the bike segment of the event. I usually carry at least two spare sets of prepared tubular tires, and I have always carried a separate, spare set of tubular wheels for the race, to facilitate fast changes in the event of a flat, or in the event that one of my primary race wheels is damaged or non-functional in any way.

Another task I strongly encourage for tubular tires is taping and affixing valve extensions, on your primary race tires as well as ALL your spares. By taping, I mean the use of plumber's tape around the threads of the tire's valve, prior to affixing the valve extension. This practice will insure an airtight fit of the extensions, which are notorious for leaking if not properly sealed. It is very frustrating to use several CO2 cartridges trying

to air up a tire only to have the majority of air leak out during inflation because of a leaky valve extension. If this task is beyond your ability, or that of your crew members, take the time to have your local bike shop do this before you get to Hawaii. As a note, an interim emergency measure that works well for sealing valves prior to extension installation is to use regular bar soap. This is a technique best demonstrated by someone who has done it before, but it does work in a pinch. It is not something I recommend if you have the time to tape the valves properly.

When it comes to clincher tires, my advice is to bring only long valve spare tubes and avoid using valve extensions at all. At the very least, make certain that any valves stems are the correct size for the type of wheels you're using. Most of the better quality aero race wheels require more than the standard length tube valve, so lengths of 48mm or longer (up to 60mm) are encouraged. HED Deep aero and the newer ZIPP 808/909 wheels require up to 80mm or even 100mm extensions! If you're using these types of wheels, make doubly sure you bring spare extensions of the required length. Make sure beforehand that all tubes you bring have the correct valve length for the wheels you'll be using. Bringing just long-valve tubes, however, insures that you won't have to deal with valves that are too short for any wheel you use. I would also recommend "powdering" your spares as well. This is easily accomplished by putting all your spare tubes in a freezer bag with a small amount of talcum powder. (And no, don't put the freezer bags in the freezer!) Then, when and if you need to use them, they are much easier to install and are far less prone to pinching during installation. Putting a small bit of air in the tube just prior to installation, which one can do with one's mouth, also helps installation and lessens pinch flats. Any good bike mechanic should be able to demonstrate this to you so both you and your crew can breeze through the occasional flat tire.

I also recommend starting the race on fresh, new tires, or at least tires that have not been ridden very hard. Inspect carefully any used tires inside and out for cuts and/or embedded pieces of wire or thorn heads. These sometimes hidden and difficult to find items are the main cause of flats in Hawaii, in my experience. And have at least two pair of spare tires (all pre-glued if you're using tubulars) with one set already mounted on your spare wheels.

With the advent of 10-speed drive systems (Campagnolo, Shimano and SRAM), I encourage you to bring a pre-sized spare chain in your bike repair kit. The bike shops in Kona may have spare chains available, but obtaining a spare chain on the second day's long ride around the Hamakua coast, if needed, likely won't happen in any timely manner. Having a spare chain ready to install, and already at the correct link size, will make emergency repairs, by either your crew or the technical race support staff, much less of a hassle and most assuredly faster. Campagnolo 10-speed chains also require a special chain breaker tool that is incompatible with the Shimano tool. Be sure to bring a Campy specific tool if you're using Campagnolo equipment on your bike. Also bring a few brand-specific chain pins as well, just in case. Make sure the pins are the correct ones for your drive system, meaning that 9-speed pins are only compatible with the 9-speed chains, etc... Campagnolo and Shimano chain pins are not interchangeable. Nor can a 9-speed chain be used with a 10-speed drive system.

I also want to put to rest the belief that one must have their bike chain (and other parts) swimming in lubricant in order to work properly. In fact, just the opposite is true. One need only impart a good sheen on the chain in order to provide the necessary lubrication. Anything more will attract more dirt and grime that it repels, and grimy chains are like sandpaper on a bike's chainrings and cogs. My recommendation is to thoroughly clean and degrease one's chain, either by removing and cleaning (which is most thorough) or by cleaning with Simple Green, or other degreaser cleaner. Once the chain has dried, relubricate by putting your lube of choice on a small patch of rag, loosely clamp the rag around the chain, and spin the chain through the lube area by reverse-spinning the crankset. I assure you that this is all the lubrication a chain requires during dry weather riding, and depending on the miles of training one puts in, needs repeating only once or twice a week at most. If riding in wet weather, this should be repeated after every ride, but only after the chain has been cleaned and dried again prior to relubrication. The general rule of thumb for Hawaii is that, if the chain looks wet, it has too much lubrication on it, and the excess should be removed.

I also recommend bringing several spare brake and derailleur cables, just to be on the safe side, even though the UltraMan tech support crew carries them as well. These can be purchased from your local bike shop, or when you get to Kona. I personally recommend using only stainless steel cables, unless you're already using any of the very high end cable systems with Teflon or other special enhancements, but that choice is up to you.

Bring a spare seat clamp pin specific to your seat post diameter, or a spare seat clamp collar, depending on your brand of bike and its components. These small items are usually one of the items damaged in the event of a crash, but are easily replaced if you have one already available. Some of the newer aero bikes have specific seat tube clamps unique to that particular brand, and finding one in an emergency will likely be next to impossible. So, bring one in your repair kit and you'll always have the correct one on hand!

Other items you may consider having as backups are:

- a. Spare bike shoes with cleats already mounted and adjusted. Bring a spare cleat set, just in case.
- b. Spare saddle and seatpost.
- c. Replacement front and rear derailleurs
- d. Replacement spokes for any premium race wheels (both drive and non-drive sides)
- e. Replacement battery for bike computers and heart rate monitor (if needed)
- f. Replacement hub skewers, front and rear
- g. Replacement chain rings

In order to mitigate expenses involved with these items, ask your local bike shop if you can use "on consignment" any of these items you may not already have. That is, have them put on your account in case you have to use them, but if not used, return them in the packaging and remove them from your account. It's just an idea, and it won't hurt to ask as long as you have a good relationship with your local shop. Fellow athletes are also a source to check for these parts. In any event, a bit of pre-planning on these things will go a long way to making your UltraMan World Championship event stress-free and successful!

Should you or your race crew have specific questions prior to arrival in Hawaii, feel free to contact me via email at [DPCpresto@gmail.com](mailto:DPCpresto@gmail.com) and I will do my best to respond quickly. If I don't have a good answer, I will find someone who does have an answer. Above all, remember that there is no absolute correct way to accomplish some repairs, or to glue a tire and such. Many mechanics have little tricks and secrets they have learned over the years that make repairs faster, easier, or more secure. You would do well to consider as part of your preparations for UltraMan spending some time with a good mechanic, learning how to take care of things about which you're unsure. I know my usual fee for this teaching is good beer, and I bet your mechanic would appreciate much the same fee! Aloha.

**Important Phone Numbers in Kona and around the island:**

Bikeworks Kona 74-5583 Luhia Street Kailua Kona, HI 96740 808-326-2453 <a href="http://www.hpbikeworks.com">www.hpbikeworks.com</a>	C&S Outfitters Waimea, HI 808-885-5005	Mid-Pacific Wheels 808-935-6211
Hilo Bike Hub 318 East Kawili St Hilo, HI 808-961-4452 <a href="http://www.hilobikehub.com">www.hilobikehub.com</a>	Cycle Station Kailua-Kona, HI 808-327-0087 808-329-2200 (Fx) <a href="mailto:cyclestation@aol.com">cyclestation@aol.com</a>	Da Kine Bike Shop 18 Furneaux Lane Hilo, HI 808-934-9861 <a href="http://www.bicyclehawaii.com">www.bicyclehawaii.com</a>