

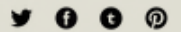
Drivetrain maintenance - that just serviced feeling



My take on keeping the chain clean and running smoothly from ride to ride and between major drivetrain cleans. It takes a few minutes and requires baby wipes (Aldi is fine), chain dry lube and paper towels. At the same time, I'll go over the bike and attend to anything that needs attention and wipe it down so it's ready to go and looking great when I next want to go for a ride.

Rule #65 // Maintain and respect your machine.

Bicycles must adhere to the Principle Of Silence and as such must be meticulously maintained. It must be cherished, and when leaning it against a wall, must be leaned carefully such that only the bars, saddle, or tires come in contact with the wall or post. This is true even when dismounting prior to collapsing after the World Championship Time Trial. No squeaks, creaks, or chain noise allowed. Only the soothing hum of your tires upon the tarmac and the rhythm of your breathing may be audible when riding. When riding the Pave, the sound of chain slap is acceptable. The Principle of Silence can be extended to say that if you are suffering such that your breathing begins to adversely affect the enjoyment of the other riders in the bunch, you are to summarily sit up and allow yourself to be dropped.¹⁰

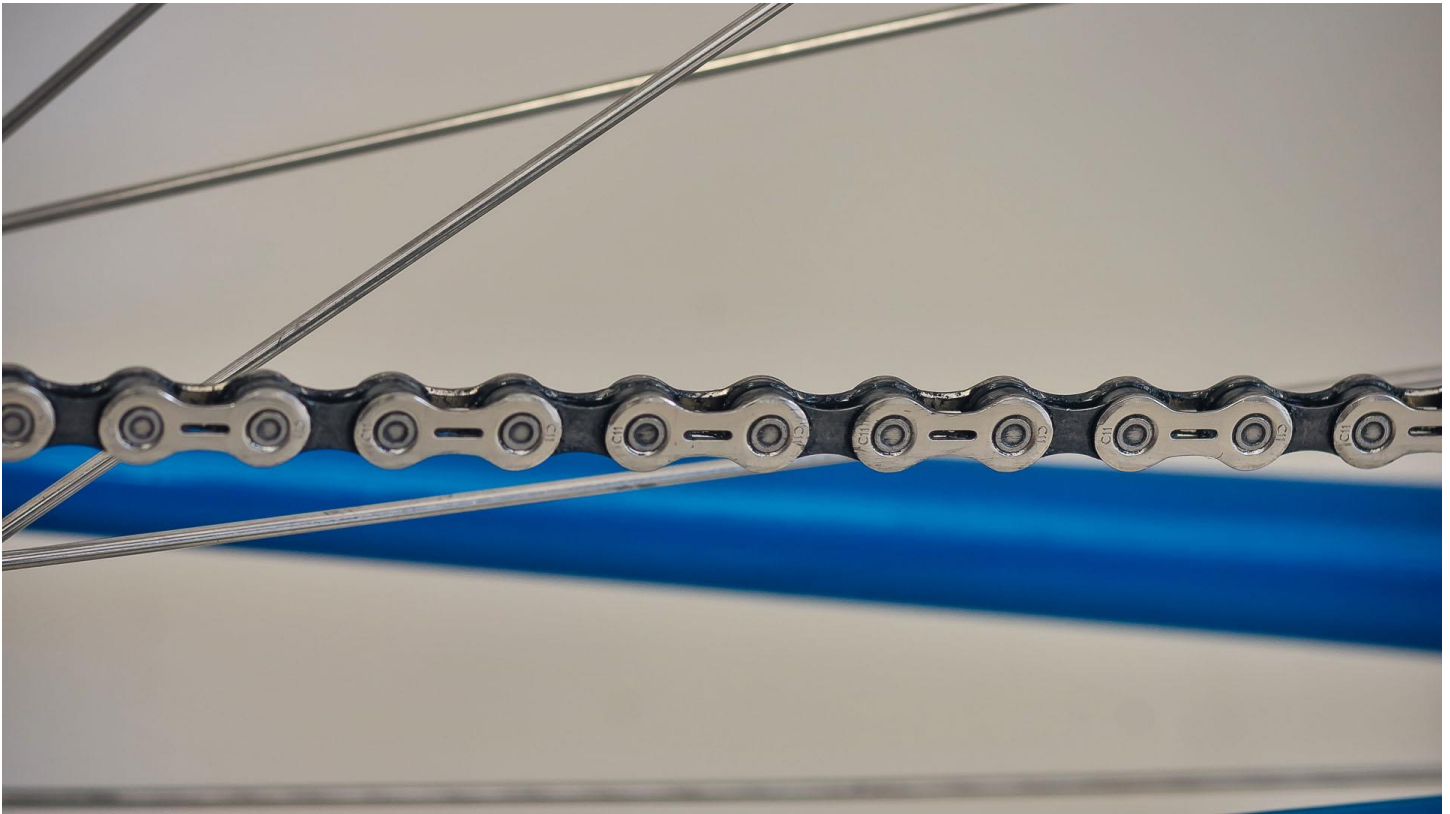


The rules mandate that you must respect your machine keeping it meticulously maintained. No-one wants to be “that guy” whose bike sounds like a box of Guinea pigs, squeaking and groaning incessantly. Behold then my sage words as I impart the wisdom of effortlessly maintaining that just serviced feeling.

The drivetrain after a 50km ride this morning. It's reasonably clean looking, but there is debris on the inside of the chain.



Step 1, run the chain through a baby wipe by folding it over the bottom of the chain and moving the pedals backwards. Remove and represent clean portions of the wipe and continue until the chain is reasonably clean. While the chain looks clean, the rollers are still carrying debris which needs to be removed.



Step 2, hold a paper towel below the chain, run chain lube over the lower section of the chain in sections and wind the chain backwards. I'm currently using [ride mechanic bike mix](#), a dry chain lube which is a solvent carrying pftfe or something similar and this does two things:

- the solvent dislodges any remaining grime
- lubricant is deposited inside the chain rollers.

Remove the excess with the paper towel, by now it should be looking good. Once the chain sparkles, apply and then leave the lube. Rotate the chain again, holding a paper towel under the chain to catch any excess.

Note that it won't be possible to remove all traces of black marks because the rear cassette is not being cleaned at the same time. I typically don't worry about it unless the rear cassette is especially filthy in which case I would clean the whole bike including a proper degrease of the drivetrain which is a story for a different time.

The chain now cleaner, lubed and ready for another ride.

Step 3, pass a baby wipe over the frame gently removing any accumulated grease. In particular, pedals, headset, the derailleur jockey wheels, chain rings. Look for any damage, lube anything that needs it. Visually inspect the tires, brakes and cables. Finally, wipe the bike gently with a microfibre cloth. Try not to spend too much time obviously gazing wistfully at the fruits of your labours lest comments ensue from elsewhere in the house.

This takes maybe 5 minutes, keeps the drivetrain clean for an extended period and most importantly, keeps the machine running nice and smooth. The chain should not leave any black residue on your finger at this point and look quite clean. OK, maybe a little if the rear cassette really needs a clean.

Before heading out, a quick check, pump up the tires, run a finger over the chain and top up the lube if it needs it, and it shouldn't unless the bike has been sitting for some time. I have a couple of bikes and so if I take one that's been unused for some time, I'll normally lightly lube the chain before heading out, even though I will have done this after I last rode it.

If you top up the lube before heading out wipe the chain with a paper towel to avoid spraying lube everywhere when you ride.

Eventually the drivetrain will need a proper clean, the rear cassette, jockey wheels, chain rings as well as the chain. That's a story for another time. But if you follow the 5 minute post ride clean, the periods between a deep clean are greatly extended, the bike always feels awesome, and you look even more pro.

A note that the pictures used show a 500km old chain with the residue of the manufacturers original lubricant all over everything. When I eventually clean the whole drivetrain it will be much easier to keep properly clean. So this is probably a worst case scenario for this approach.

[A word about chain lubricants](#)

I prefer a dry lube for the riding I do and I've tried a few including Rock and Roll Gold, Muck Off dry lube and Ride Mechanic Bike Mix. They are all great for the first 100 or so km and then I notice the smoothness diminish. Because #pedantic, it would be awesome to have a small quantity on hand to top up the chain enroute on a longer ride. But not really necessary.

In the wet of course all bets are off and your bike will be a filthy mess from dry lube getting sprayed everywhere. Just saying. This is where and why a wet lube would be preferred.

Wet lubes last longer but are messier and are preferred for bad weather. Horses for courses I suppose. Read the primer below for more information about which type might be best suited to your application.

[Chain lube primer.](#)

[Last word](#)

This is an approach that works just fine for me, but realistically I expect that there are pros and cons to this approach depending on individual circumstances. From my own experience I am getting good chain life and the bike runs great in the sorts of conditions I ride. If you have a different approach, other preferred products, please share the wisdom because it's great to have options.

[Bonus reading](#)

[Chain wear explained](#)

[Sheldon Brown on chain maintenance](#)