## Is Your Bike Ready to Race?

With the 2024 Scottish Schools' Mountain Bike Championships just around the corner, it's time to get your bike race-day ready. Take a look at these top tips from Ben Brough, store manager at Alpine Bikes Glentress store, on how you can prepare.

1. Clean your bike! A clean bike is a fast bike; use a suitable bike cleaner, some soft brushes and a hose to get the dirt out of all the hard to reach areas. Spend a bit of time cleaning the drivetrain (a good quality degreaser can help here), so your chain and cassette is shiny and free of grime.

2. Once clean, dry your bike thoroughly with an old towel or rag. This is a great opportunity to check the condition of the bike; look out for worn tyres, brake pads etc.

3. While drying your bike, pay particular attention to the drivetrain, make sure the chain is completely dry before applying a suitable chain lube. Choose your lube based on the weather forecast for race day; a wet or all-weather lube will last longer, but it will pick up a lot more dirt and clog your drivetrain up faster than a dry lube – unfortunately dry lubes don't often last long in Scottish rain!

4. Once your bike is dry, do a quick bolt check; we want to make sure that all of the bolts (including both of your axles) are nice and tight – if you're not sure how tight to go, use a torque wrench.

5. Now your bike is clean, dry and well lubricated, it's time to turn your attention to any of the wear components on your bike:

> Tyres: bald or worn tyres can be more prone to punctures and won't provide as much grip on a slippery race course. If your tyres look like they've had a lot of use and the knobs are worn down, it might be time to change them. If your tyres are setup tubeless, make sure there's still plenty of sealant inside.
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> Brake pads: brake pads can last months or just a few rides depending on conditions; check your brake pads by looking into the caliper from the top, if in doubt, pop a new set in (don't forget to bed your pads in before race day!).
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> Drivetrain: chains, cassettes and chainrings all wear out over time; a worn drivetrain can be less efficient and it can be difficult to change gears. If your chainring or cassette have missing or worn teeth, or if your chain is stretched (use a chain checker to make sure), then it might be time to replace them.
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> Cables and hoses: gear, brake and dropper cables can collect dirt over time and this causes extra friction, which can make shifting very difficult. Check that your gear cables feel smooth and it's easy to actuate your shift and dropper levers. Also check

that your hoses are undamaged, a kink or split in the hose can be disastrous in a race.

Touch points: your grips, pedals and saddle are some of the most important components on your bike; that's what you'll be clinging onto! Take a minute to check they're in good condition, pedals are spinning freely and your saddle is firmly bolted to your seatpost.

6. Once we have checked all the wear components of the bike, check for any play or movement throughout the bike that could be caused by worn-out parts: grab your wheels and give them a wiggle side to side, do the same with your cranks, your pedals, your handlebars etc. If any of these parts feel like they are loose or wobbly, take your bike to a mechanic to have it checked over. This is especially important on full suspension bikes, where play in your suspension pivots can damage your frame

7. Finally, go ride! Take the bike for a quick spin up and down a quiet street first. Make sure that the gears shift smoothly and your brakes can slow you down quickly. Once you're happy, take the bike on a longer off-road ride to make sure everything is dialled in for race day!