

About the sense and non sense of fork bleeders



Hi fellow countrymen, at last I feel like a real South African again now that I have settled down back in SA. I love it here. Blue skies, open spaces and total freedom to ride bikes!!

Since I arrived I have already seen quite a lot of things that make me smile and one of my all time favourites is the use of aftermarket fork bleeders on

off road bikes. These bleeders are used around you guys like the answer button in a game show – just hit it as often as you feel like it and you might win something.

The bleeder is mounted to make it easier to bleed the fork. Instead of unscrewing the little screw on top of the fork you just have to press the little knob. To begin with forks should normally not just build up pressure except when changing altitude. It mainly builds up due to bad seals or poor bush tolerances found sometimes in production forks. Servicing your fork and replacing the bushes can usually help reduce the problem unless tolerances are really bad.

The reason to use the air bleeder is to equalize the pressure in the air chamber of the fork with the outside atmosphere. If the outside pressure is higher, for example in low altitude, air will enter the air chamber when bleeders are pushed and vice versa.

Rule No1 Never push the air bleeder unless the bikes front wheel is off the ground!

If you push the bleeders (as I have seen, very much to my amusement) while the bike is strapped down on your trailer, that can have two effects. A vacuum will be created in your fork when released and if your

bushes are worn dirt can be sucked into the fork. Needless to say this is detrimental to the performance of your suspension. If your forks are sealing properly as they should then the vacuum will keep the fork down in the stroke and also cause diminished performance and a harsh feeling.

So from rule No1 you can easily figure what happens when you push the air bleeder while you are sitting on the bike or while riding it. Don't do it!

Rule No2 Bleed air out of your forks before your ride at the chosen location!

It doesn't make much sense if you bleed your fork after you have ridden at de Wildt and your next ride will be at the coast. You want the pressure equalized at the altitude where you want your suspension to perform.

At races it is only advisable to bleed the fork when there is a lot of change in altitude like in Lesotho. But also there make sure the front wheel is off the ground so most will have to do it at a service point.

If you can push them while you wheelie then good on you mate, 'cos that is a perfect time to do it!!