

Mountain Bike Grips



they take a lickin'
but they keep on grippin'

by Charles R. Kelly

With the 10-speed boom of the early '70's, handlebar tape replaced grips as standard equipment, since most new bikes had drop-style handlebars. BMX brought grips back with a vengeance, since riders needed ruggedness combined with a surface and configuration that helped them hang on while performing seemingly impossible cycling feats. In the past few years "mountain" or "all-terrain" bikes have begun to take a share of the bicycles sold to adults, and grip manufacturers are turning their attention to this area.

Nearly every mt. grip on the market is a direct descendant of those originally designed for BMX, but different riding styles and accessory equipment have dictated a few changes. In order to accommodate the thumbshifter that is mostly standard equipment on mt. bikes, the inner flange has been reduced or eliminated on some products.

Because mt. bike riders spend considerably more time on their bikes than BMXers, whose races are measured in seconds, there must be some attention paid to comfort during hours of pounding over rough roads and trails. Manufacturers use various combinations of

materials and designs to achieve these purposes.

Popular material

Closed-cell foam is popular with some manufacturers, including Hunt-Wilde and Grab-On. According to Ken Hunt of Hunt-Wilde, that company's mt. bike grip is made of a compound they call "Vibrafoam," which absorbs shock. Instead of flanges, this grip features a slight "flare" at each end, which serves to position the rider's hands.

their BMX grips were very successful. According to owner Mike Tillay, the new MTN-1 line of mt. bike grips is not just a redesigned BMX grip, but was designed from the start with mt. bikers in mind. Tillay says, "We didn't design the grip, the mt. bikers did, and we just responded to their wishes." The MTN-1 is made of a new material developed in the last year, and is said to resist weathering and wear better than previous products. In shape it features a smaller flange than the BMX

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Three grooves around the center of the grip provide air circulation while improving the rider's hold. These grips are sold on a point-of-purchase display card along with a pair of metal end plugs for the handlebars that keep abrasion from wearing out the ends. The Hunt-Wilde grip is standard equipment on the popular Ross lines of mt. bikes.

Grab-On was a pioneer in the use of closed-cell foam for bicycle grips, and

grip, with a flared and a contoured shape that helps keep the hand in the correct position.

Two-part grip

The Oakley company in California got its start manufacturing BMX grips, and their off-road model is the same one they sell as a popular BMX item. Called the "F-1," it is a two-part grip with a core of hard material covered with an outer sleeve of softer rubber.

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The rubber used is a synthetic product that resists attack by sunlight or petroleum products, and according to company spokesman Norm Fraijo, it feels just like natural rubber.

According to Fraijo, grips can slip on the handlebars if they deform under use. This is the reason for the hard core material; it doesn't deform, and will stay in place without adhesive. The two parts are assembled before distribution, so the customer need only get the inner sleeve slightly wet, then slip them onto the bars. The outer sleeve is textured for a non-slip surface, and the F-1 comes in a number of two-color combinations. Fraijo ad-

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mitted that the large inner flange was a problem when the grips were used on mt. bikes, and that some riders cut them down to provide clearance for thumbshifters or brake levers.

From Ornate Design comes the ODI "Mushroom" grip, an unusual configuration made of a synthetic rubber and featuring a series of grooves around the grip. Company president Herb Guerr says that this design provides shock absorption while also keeping air circulating between the grip and the hand. Like Oakley, Ornate Design first made BMX grips. For mt. bikes they changed their design, going to a smaller flange to accommodate the shifter and making the profile a little more rugged and squared-off.

Wired

A'ME has a unique feature on their mt. bike grips, a pair of grooves for safety

For grips which cover the end of the handlebar an inserted plug underneath the grip will help durability.

wires that keep the grip from slipping (wires not supplied). The rubber compound, described as "Thermoflo," resists ozone and sunlight, and softens after a break-in period for more cushioning. The pattern was developed especially for mt. bikers, and features a recessed triangle surface. Like most mountain bike grips the inner flange has been reduced for shifter and brake clearance.

With the variety of grips on the market and so many approaches to design, there are few generalizations that apply, but it is worth noting that if the grip doesn't have a provision for keeping it in place, it should be put on with an adhesive. For grips which cover the end of the handlebar an inserted plug underneath the grip will help durability.

The variety of brands and colors available make it unlikely that any but large shops or those specializing in mt. bikes will have them all, but a good selection will be one more factor for any shop in assuring repeat business.

Charles R. Kelly has pursued an interest in off-road bicycles for more than 11 years. In 1976, he promoted the first races staged strictly for this kind of vehicle. Formerly a partner in the MountainBikes Co., he is now a full-time writer, specializing in the recreational-vehicle field.



Ross' Signature 290S

Signature 290S from Ross Bicycles featuring CroMo tubing, Nikko lugs and BB, forged dropouts, Araya 700C rims, and Ross 700C GW tires. Also Simano's Z alloy brakes, Uniglide chain, and Z alloy 503 derailleurs. Sugino Crankset DGS, SR custom alloy stem, and Ross Aero suede saddle. Comes with black foam cushion grips, 2 bottle braze ons, chain hanger and top tube cable guides.

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