

## Mountain biking not just for daredevils

By Wil Morat  
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Mountain biking may seem like something for extreme kids of "Generation X" who base-jump from bridges while slamming the newest Red Bull energy drink, but the off-road trails in El Dorado County can be surprisingly enjoyable for the average bicyclist.

Even beginners who haven't ventured far beyond the asphalt will find that with the right bicycle, mountain biking is what you make of it, and knowing your limits can turn many off-road trails into entertaining rides.

Two trails capture the best sample of what the Sierra Foothills offer – the Culvert Trail at the Auburn confluence and the Salmon Falls Trail in El Dorado Hills.

Both trails offer the opportunity to practice advanced skills for off-road riding but at the same time can be safely ridden by beginning or intermediate riders. New riders can find the thrill of leaving the pavement behind and venturing out into nature where no 10-speed riding, spandex-wearing, Tour de France road cyclist has gone before.

There are several things a mountain biker should do that will make the Culvert Trail and the

Salmon Falls Trail safe, enjoyable and challenging.

First, you need a bike. There's no need to go spend thousands of dollars on some futuristic, 52-speed ultra-light bike with optional jet-packs. Basic mountain bikes will work just fine.

Eric Alley works at Bob's Cycle Center in EDH and has a wide array of bicycles, equipment and knowledge. He said that entry-level mountain bikes would perform well on many off-road trails.

"The Specialized Hardrock Sport runs \$359. It's a little heavier than others, but is fine for the trails around EDH," he said. The entry-level bike has good V-brakes, front shocks and a sturdy frame.

Moving up the line is the Gary Fisher Piranha at \$659. Much lighter than the Hardrock Sport, the Piranha has disc brakes and a lighter frame, making climbing hills a little easier.

Alley said the two bikes are popular but there is more to choose from.

"For mountain bikes, the sky is the limit," he said.

### Riding tips

Three keys to assuring your personal safety:

1) **Go slow.** Don't assume that because it's downhill, you need to go fast. That's what brakes are for.

2) **Wear a helmet.** Under no circumstances should you ride off-trail without an approved helmet.

3) **If you sense a crash is imminent, jump.** It seems that some of the worst injuries come from collisions with your own bike as you fall. If you feel like you're losing control – jump, pushing your bike away from you and at least maintaining some control over your fall. If you wait for the bike to throw you, there is little chance of breaking a fall.

Other precautions can be taken to make your ride more enjoyable.

If you do any amount of mountain biking, you will fall. Biking gloves provide some protection for the palms of your hands.

Bring plenty of water. Mountain biking trails aren't like the American River Bike Trail where water fountains are interspersed along the way. Water-bladder backpacks are perfect for bringing water and snacks.

Watch out for rattlesnakes. If you've lived in the area for any amount of time, you're familiar with the local rattlesnake population, but that's easily forgotten when racing downhill.

Stand up while riding as much as possible. You're not on a smooth paved road, and the rocks and

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bumps can quickly make sitting very painful. Coasting downhill with little physical exertion is the main reason you pedaled up the hill in the first place, so take advantage and stand up. Standing intermittently also stretches your leg muscles and prevents cramping.

Along the same note about protecting your rear – make sure you have a good seat. There are good neoprene seats at most bike shops or even big box stores for anywhere between \$20-50.

When going downhill, put your weight toward the rear of the bike. Extend your arms, shifting your rear behind and almost level with your seat. This keeps

the weight over the back tire and is the best method for avoiding a tumble over the handlebars. Your hands should still be able to easily work the brakes.

Lastly, make sure your bike is in good working order. You don't want to be mobbing down a hill and find out your brake cable just snapped.

Bob's Cycle Center will do a complete tune-up for \$60, which includes a full safety check. They will true the rims, check the brakes, cables and derailleurs and make sure anything with a bolt is secure. Typically it takes a week for a tune-up.

"Right now we're in the middle of the season,"

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