

What Kids Said About Eight Different Sleds

Our testers slid down (yay!) and trudged back up (boo!) a snow-covered slope for more than two hours. They commented on each sled's speed, control, and *lug factor* (how easy or hard it was to tote back up the hill).

Toboggan, flexible plastic

Control: Not much
Lug factor: Easy

This inexpensive, familiar sled didn't excite our testers at first, but it delivered on fun. "It's incredibly light [three pounds]," said Adam. "I'm down and back up the hill in a jiffy, and that's what counts for me." Testers liked the versatility,¹ too: They could ride it solo lying down or sitting up, and fit two riders sitting up.



"A smooth, fast ride!"

¹**versatility:** having many uses

Toboggan, rigid plastic

Control: Not much
Lug factor: Heavy

The wide, flat bottom of this sturdy sled gave it *buoyancy* (it won't sink into deep snow). And the curved-up front plowed a path while moving. But many testers dubbed this sled "slowpoke" because it rode more like a supertanker than a speedboat. Zack docked this bulky 12-pounder after two runs because "the short ride down wasn't worth the long walk back up."



"A straight-forward ride, even though you can't control it very well."

Toboggan with runners

Control: Some
Lug factor: Moderate

The built-in back support added comfort and stability and let riders sit up straight and see where they were going. Testers said this was one of the fastest sleds, but often frustrating because it tipped over easily. More daring riders liked the speed (and inevitable² wipeouts). "Spilling out is part of the fun," said Damien.



"You really fly!"

²**inevitable:** expected

Toboggan with steering wheel

Control: A good amount
Lug factor: Moderate

Some testers couldn't handle the bumpy ride or sensitive steering wheel and were left stranded, sledless, in the middle of the slope. But others enjoyed the challenge of making bold, hairpin turns. "It's more fun when your body bounces up from the sled and you have to hold on to the steering wheel for dear life," said Michael.



"I loved zipping around, coming in close on other sleds, then scooting away."

Saucer

Control: Good luck!
Lug factor: Easy

"Yikes!"-minded testers felt that a plain saucer couldn't be beat for a wild, laugh- and shriek-filled ride. But controlling a saucer is practically impossible because only a small, circular area in the center of it touches the ground, so there's nothing to keep it on track. Testers also liked that it was a cinch to carry, weighing just two pounds.



"Spinning around and not knowing where you're going is really cool."



"It's fast and steers great once you get used to it."

Wooden sled on metal runners

Control: A good amount

Lug factor: Moderate

Some testers had never been on this old-fashioned sled and discovered it was quite zippy and responsive when making smooth, gradual turns. Testers rarely fell off after bumps or quick changes in direction when riding chest down, facing front. "Just watch out for facefuls of snow," warned Samantha.



Snow catamaran

Control: Some

Lug factor: Heavy

Testers loved the soft, cushioned ride and bouncy trampoline effect. "The bumps don't hurt your bottom!" said Samantha. But the steering was stiff and slow to respond. The novelty wore off soon after testers lugged the 15-pound snow raft uphill.



"You go fast and far without falling off."



"It's a wild ride!"

Sled luge

Control: Some

Lug factor: Moderate

Very few testers figured out the technique and balance needed to get this luge-like sled down the hill without crashing. (Luge is a Winter Olympics sport.) Adam eventually got the hang of it and rode with speedy abandon. Some testers liked the feeling of being close to the snow. For Tammy, though, it was too close: "Wear a ski mask because you will get sprayed in the face."

Go On 



Climb Every Mountain

by Jeff Csatari

As the old saying goes, “Once you learn how to ride a bicycle, you never forget.” But when you hop on a mountain bike for the first time, you still have some learning to do.

“Riding on a trail is completely different from riding on pavement,” says expert mountain biker Dave King. “Jumping over a log, riding through a stream, and coasting down a mountain trail take a brand-new set of skills.”

Mr. King should know. He created the world’s first mountain biking school at Mount Snow in Vermont years ago and has taught thousands of people how to ride mountain bikes.

Here are some tips from Mr. King that will help you ride like a pro.

A Stable Platform

To be able to react to rapidly changing terrain, your body has to be in a ready position, so you must turn it into a stable platform. First, rotate your pedals until the crank arms are parallel with the ground. Then stand on your pedals and lift

your rear end off the seat. Bend your elbows slightly, keeping your arms loose. From this position, you can shift your weight and dip the bike from side to side to avoid obstacles. “On a mountain bike, you can’t be a passive passenger; you have to move around,” Mr. King stresses.

Go slow. Practice riding as slowly as possible to improve your balance. On a technical trail—that is, one with lots of rocks, branches, bumps, and dips—you need to ride very slowly to steer around obstacles.

Use your front brake. If you use only your rear brake when mountain biking, you will cause your back tire to skid, which can damage the trail. So learn how to safely use your front brake. Mr. King says 75 percent of braking power comes from the front. But to avoid flying over the handlebars, *always squeeze your rear brake first*. As you decrease speed, slowly apply your front brake. Practice braking on flat land until you get the hang of it. Then head for the hills.

Go On 

Go Uphill Seated. Pedaling while standing can help you climb steep roads, but that won't work on a mountain trail. If you stand and try to pedal up a hill that has loose dirt or gravel, your back wheel will lose traction and spin. You'll go nowhere.

The right way to attack a dirt hill: First, downshift into an easy gear. Stay seated to keep weight on your rear wheel but tilt your upper body forward to keep your front wheel from coming off the ground.



Hop Over Logs. Let's say you are on a narrow single-track trail and there is a branch across the path. You have to ride over it, or "clear" it, as pro riders say. Here's how:

Slow down, but keep pedaling until just before your front tire hits the branch.

As it is about to hit, slide your body rearward and lift the handlebars. That will raise the front wheel over the branch. Next, pull yourself forward to transfer your weight from the rear to the front. Doing that will help the rear tire hit the obstacle as lightly as possible, so it won't dent your rim. You can practice "clearing" by placing a few broomsticks or small branches 15 feet apart on a level, grassy surface and riding over them.

Go Downhill Safely. On downhills, you need to slide your body backward to distribute your weight evenly over both tires. Start by shifting into a higher gear. Then gradually lift yourself off the seat and slide backward, while standing on the pedals.



Go On



Stand Still. This skill comes in handy when you need to come to a complete stop for a second or two to pick a safe route through a trail full of trouble.

The best way to practice balancing is to do “trackstands.” Choose a flat area with soft grass that will break your fall if you tip over. (Of course, always wear your cycling helmet.) Squeeze both brakes to come to a stop. Stand on your pedals, keeping pressure on your forward pedal. Shift forward so your shoulders are directly over the handlebars. You will be able to stand still this way for a few seconds, but then you will start to tip to one side. When you do, turn your handlebars away from the direction you are tipping, and you will bring the bike back upright. (If you feel that you are falling, let go of the brakes and pedal forward to save yourself.) With practice, you’ll be able to “stand still” as long as you like.



- 1 The MAIN purpose of this article is to
- tell the story of the first mountain biking school
 - explain the importance of mountain biking as exercise
 - give instructions and hints about how to ride a mountain bike
 - describe how to go safely uphill and downhill on a mountain bike