



Grouptest

Tight-tyre tools

Fitting tight tyres requires good technique and grip strength – or maybe just a different kind of lever...

Liz Colebrook tests four



LIZ COLEBROOK

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Ever struggled refitting a tyre? You may have managed at home in the warm but at the roadside with cold hands it's a different matter, and you may have reached for a tyre lever despite the risk of pinching the tube. Enter the 'bead jack' or tyre-seating tool: a clever device to neatly pull that final section of tyre safely over the rim's edge. They're like tyre levers but different.

Tyre and rim combinations have differing tolerances due to the manufacturing process (long story). Some are relatively easy to fit without the need for an ordinary tyre lever, while some are so tight they need three levers to remove and divine intervention to refit! The knack is to squeeze the tyre beads together, shifting them from the rim's shoulders down into the recessed middle of the rim, also known as the well. This wins you some slack, making it easier to fit the section that's diametrically opposite.

With tubeless tyre and rim combinations, where the fit between rim and tyre contributes to forming a seal, fitting a tyre can be difficult even with this knack. It's nevertheless an important step.

Details

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1 Portability

Consider the tool's size and weight. Will it fit in your saddle pack or, if you don't use one, your jersey pocket?

tool locate onto your rim sidewall?

2 Durability

No tyre lever is indestructible. Some of these tools showed wear after only a few uses.

4 Tyre removal?

Will it remove tyres as well as re-fit them, or are additional tyre levers required? And is there still room in your saddle pack?

3 Compatibility

It needs to work with your bike's tyre and rim width. Will the tool fit over your deflated tyre? Will the

5 Ease of use

How much leverage is required for your grip strength? Could you use the tool with cold hands or wearing gloves? Could you use it in torchlight?



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Tyre fitting tips

Find out how toe straps or cable ties can help fit stubborn tyres: cyclinguk.org/cycle-magazine/cycle-hacks-try-year

3



4



Verdict

Given that the knack of fitting a tyre is not universally known, the advent of tyre-seating tools will help a lot of riders.

Least fiddly for installation-only is the Cycle Pal, even though it looks a little over engineered, may require a larger saddle pack to carry with you, and needs a bit of practice holding it with a relaxed grip. It was also the only tool not to show signs of scuffing after use.

Crankbrothers have a tool that's very much for non-tight combinations, where conventional levers may serve.

The TyreKey is a no-nonsense tool for wider rims that requires another tyre lever or two to do both jobs.

Finally, the Var tool has removal and installation covered in a very compact form. It's my personal best buy.



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1 Var Tools RP-42500

£7.50 vartools.uk

THIS CLEVER FRENCH design is distributed in the UK by JD Whisker. It features a second tyre lever inside the tool, providing the standard minimum for successful tyre removal. Refitting requires you to manipulate the tyre bulk between the tool's deceptively accommodating 'jaws': one jaw locates onto the rim and the other hooks neatly under the tyre bead. It's effective, light and compact, just a little awkward to remove after use. (It gets easier with practice.) The tyre levers are robust and nicely shaped to engage well under the bead during tyre removal.

▼ **A neat design for removal and installation – and great value**

2 Cycle Pal Compact Tyre Seating Tool

£14.95, cyclepal.co.uk

A SPRUNG SCISSOR action and ergonomic grip design make this a comfortable tool to use. There's a larger 'standard' size for tyres up to 55mm wide (£16.95). This 'compact' version is suggested for tyres up to 28mm but as tyres aren't inflated when fitted, I found it also worked for standard MTB widths as well as my ultra-tight tubeless road tyres. I'd buy the standard for home use and fat bike tyres and the compact for use on the go. I noticed novice users try to zealously squeeze the handles together, so some practice is required.

▼ **Bulky but installs virtually any tyre and rim combination**

3 TyreKey TyreKey

£9.98, tyrekey.com

THE BLURB FOR this tool says it makes removing and installing tyres simple. I needed an extra tyre lever to get enough tyre removed initially to glide it round. It's light (20g), but I found it slipped installing tyres onto narrower rims, probably because this tool has a flat surface that locates against the rim rather than a specific slot. It's competent on modern, tight-fit wider rims, however, and best suited for tyres up to 37mm approx. The tyre lever tip could be a little more scooped for removal and the 'handle' is quite short for leverage.

▼ **Best suited to modern, wider road tyres and rims**

4 Crankbrothers Speedier Lever

£6.50 extrauk.co.uk

THIS CALIFORNIAN-DESIGNED lever is a light (26g), all-in-one tool that's for removing and refitting tyres. Unlike the other tools on test, this tool mimics how car tyres are installed – but manually. If the tyre has a loose-to-average fit – not a tight fit – this method works. Turning the tool round, the same principle is used for installation as long as your rim sidewall is slim enough to accept the tool's hook. With a tight rim and tyre combo I couldn't shift the tool to start removal let alone drag it round the final 10 inches during installation; it ground to a halt!

▼ **Best suited to remove and install 'loose fit' tyres and rims**