Headset Adjustment

Learn how to adjust headset bearings.

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INTRODUCTION

Headset bearings are the bearings that support steering inputs. Loose headsets generally present themselves as a knocking sensation when applying the front brake. Tight headsets present as a stiff steering feel.

With this guide, no matter which of these problems you are experiencing, you'll know how to fix it.

TOOLS:

- Torque Wrench (1)

Step 1 — Headset Adjustment

- To start the adjustment process first loosen the stem steerer clamp bolts.

Step 2

- If you feel a knocking sensation when pulling the front brake and rocking the handlebars forward and back, then the headset needs to be tightened.
- Turning the handlebars 90 degrees and repeating the process can help to ensure that any knocking sensations are not coming from play within the brake mechanism.

Step 3

- Torque the bearing preload adjustment bolt on your stem cap just enough so that the knocking goes away.
  - Torque required is usually in the 2-3nm range.
  - If the steering feels rough or sluggish after tightening down the headset bearing preload bolt when turning your handlebars from side to side, you've over-tightened the headset.
  - Back it off an eighth or a quarter of a turn and check it again by turning the handlebars from side to side and pulling the front brake and rocking the handlebars front to back to feel for any knocking.

Step 4

- If no amount of tightening eliminates the knocking, add a two or five millimeter spacer under your headset top cap to increase the available range of adjustment.

Step 5

- Once you get a smooth steering feel without any knocking when performing the front brake test, your done with the adjustment and it is time to tighten the stem steerer clamping bolts.
- Align the stem with the front wheel and torque the steerer clamp bolts to the manufacturer’s recommended torque spec.

To reassemble your device, follow these instructions in reverse order.