

Owner's MANUAL

THE MOST FROM
YOUR BIKE AND BODY

EDITED BY JENNIFER SHERRY



THE TALENT

Scaling Steep Switchbacks

PICK A GEAR While there's no set rule about gearing for a switchback, according to Lawwill, the key is being prepared for the steepness of the exit—you need to be able to pedal through an uphill turn without stalling or spinning out. "In general, I drop down to an easier gear or get my cadence up just before I enter an uphill switchback," he says.

NAIL THE APPROACH As you near the turn, move your body weight slightly forward on the bike. Then, as you enter the turn, work your front wheel as far to the out-

ILLUSTRATED BY MATT VINCENT

THE CHALLENGE: In mountain biking, switchbacks—those hairpin turns that allow a trail to zigzag up a steep slope—are a fact of life. They let us take on near-vertical pitches without looping out on the way up or ripping erosion-pumping grooves on the way down. While the folks at the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) will tell you that the most eco-friendly switchbacks use a level corner platform that sheds water away from the turn, many switchbacks feature climbing turns, where the rider must maneuver the trail's steepest pitch before continuing up. How do you do that without crapping out halfway up? Here, BikeSkills instructor Joe Lawwill tells you how. (Watch a video of this skill at MOUNTAINBIKE.com/bikeskills4.)—*Brian Fiske*

side edge of the trail as possible. (Avoid loose rocks or dirt—you want all the traction you can get.) "Don't be overly concerned with the path of your rear wheel," says Lawwill. "Just keep your front wheel following the outermost part of the switchback as you turn." According to Lawwill, almost everyone cuts back to the trail too soon and fails to make the corner. Rolling your front wheel along the outside edge prevents you from making that mistake.

BEND AND LEAN A key switchback-clearing principle: Keep your front wheel perpendicular to the ground as much as possible as it rolls along the outside edge of the turn. To do that, lean your body forward on the bike and toward the inside of the turn as you extend your outside arm and bend your inside arm. ("Your head will be close to even with your front axle," advises Lawwill.) To prevent slipping, keep even pressure on the pedals and pull the handlebar back toward your chest with your inside arm as you push down with your outside arm.

EXIT, AND REPEAT When you're about three-quarters of the way through the turn, spot your exit, which is the outside line of the uphill trail. "That makes it easy to get your weight back to the uphill side of the trail," explains Lawwill. "Plus, you avoid the buildup of dirt that often happens on the exit, and get a little backside push to help keep the momentum going." Keep climbing. Repeat as necessary.

