

Brake lever positions

‘The brake lever for a front brake shall be positioned on the right-hand side of the handlebar, and that for a rear brake on the left-hand side.’

– Taken from:

Australian Standard AS1927 - 1998 Pedal Bicycles - Safety Requirements page 16 Section 2.14
Braking System 2.14.2.1 Handbrake lever location

Notes:

1. This is a mandated requirement for all bicycles sold in Australia designed and designated for General purpose riding.

2. AS1927 - 1985 is the CURRENT mandated Standard.

AS1927 - 1998 is as revised edition yet to be designated under mandatory actions but that matter is in train. The latter Standard will prevail until a new Gazettal of the 1998 version.

3. There are exceptions to this requirement for example

- Excludes two wheeler machines of LESS than 640 mm wheelbase
- Excludes all one-of-a-kind bicycles
- Excludes bicycles specifically designated for racing
- Excludes custom made bicycles (in small numbers)

4. The ‘handing’ of brakes on bicycles in Australia is specified as in 2.14.2.1 above because a rider making a right hand turn from a centre position on a road (median line) is required under road traffic regulations to give a hand signal, which means having one hand off the h/bar. If the left hand brake lever operated the front brake there is an increased risk of locking the front wheel and spilling the rider (who is already in a destabilised position). Doing a ‘hook turn’ gets around the exposure problem and allows full control at all times. Although it is the front brake which provides the greater braking force (usually about 60:40 split front and rear), this one critical maneuver has been deemed to take precedence over other factors. In typical riding the right hand and front brake combination provides the greatest and most efficient braking capacity. With disk brakes the risk of locking up the front wheel under sudden braking is increased and not something to experience when moving down the middle of a road surrounded by other traffic, so the left hand is safer working the rear brake.

Probably as important as getting the brake levers correctly configured is having the brake LEVERS adjusted so that at least the middle section of the fore and second fingers can cover the lever in the open position, in order to assure a secure grip. Brake levers which require an extended ‘reach’ by the fingers is neither comfortable or allows for quick and controlled braking. Too many riders, and bicycle retailers fail to set up the brake levers for both ‘reach’ and orientation (i.e. angled at about 8 o'clock - and definitely not 10 or 11 o'clock which requires a dropped wrist action).

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