Adjusting Threadless Headsets

Threadless headsets work on the principal where the bearing races press against the bearings. The bolt in the top cap will put pressure on the stem, which presses on spacers below the stem, which press on the bearing races, which press against the bearings. All of this should be under the proper tension.

NOTE: The cap and bolt at the top of the stem do not secure the stem onto the steering column, so don’t just tighten this randomly. The bolt or bolts on the side of the stem keep the stem from moving once the adjustment is made. The cap is used for bearing adjustment only.

Remove the adjusting bolt in the center of the steering column, and remove the top cap. There may be a star-shaped nut or other fittings inside the steering column. The bolt threads into this fitting and pulls on the fork against the headset bearing surfaces, which acts to tighten the adjustment. Note the height of the steer tube relative to the stem. It should be about 3-4mm (1/8") below the level of the stem. The stem needs to press down on the spacers and headset properly in order to adjust the bearings. If the steer tube is level with the top of the stem, another spacer is needed below the stem.

1.Remove bolt and top cap to inspect steer tube. Re-install cap and bolt by hand only, do not over tighten.

2.Loosen stem bolt(s) that secure stem to the tube.

3.Move the stem side to side to see that it is loose. If the stem is jammed or seized to the steer tube, no adjustment can be made.

4.Align stem and gently secure the top bolt. Stop when any resistance is felt.

5.Tighten stem bolt(s).

6.Check for play by rocking the handlebars back and forth. Turn the handlebars in different directions while checking for play.

7.To adjust the bearings, loosen the stem bolts.

8.Turn adjusting bolt in center cap only 1/8th turn clockwise.

9.Secure stem bolts, check for play again.

10.Repeat adjustments as above until play disappears. Remember to loosen stem bolts before turning adjusting bolt in cap.

11.Check alignment of stem and tighten stem binder bolts fully.