

## Back to the Basics

The first thing you must master is head and eyes. What this means exactly, is that wherever you look, that's where the bike will go. The reason the phrase head and eyes is used is that if you turn your head to the right, but your eyes look straight ahead, the technique WILL NOT work. Both your head and eyes must turn in the direction you want the bike to go. Never look down unless you want to go down. Head and eyes does take practice to become second nature. The good news is that you can practice this technique every time you are on your motorcycle. Simply pulling out of your driveway, for instance, if you are turning to the right, turn your head and eyes to the right, look down the road where you want the motorcycle to go and you'll immediately notice you will be making a much tighter turn than normal. When you stop at a stop sign and are about to make a left hand turn, turn your head and eyes to the left, avoid looking at the curb or the center line of the road and focus on where you want the bike to end up and you will find you will never drift towards the curb or the center line of the road. You can even practice this technique on a bicycle by making U-turns on the street in front of your own home.

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The second technique you must learn is how to use the friction zone. The friction zone is the area on the clutch between fully open and fully closed. In other words, as you let the clutch out and the bike starts to move, you're entering the friction zone. An easy way to become accustomed to riding the bike in the friction zone is to practice the slow race. That is simply going as slow as you possibly can without releasing the clutch completely

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The third technique is the proper use of the rear or controlling brake. With the motorcycle in the friction zone, keep your foot on the rear brake and feather it as the bike starts to move. By doing this you are making the motorcycle think it's going faster than it is. When you apply power and keep your foot on the rear brake, it keeps the motorcycle from falling over at low speeds which is where most people have a problem. I've never heard of anyone having problems balancing their motorcycle at 50 or 60mph. If you don't use these techniques at 5 or 10mph the motorcycle feels clumsy and wants to fall over on it's side. AVOID using the front brake at all costs when riding at parking lot speeds, as applying the front brake at 5 or 10mph with the handle bars turned even slightly, will pull you to the ground like a magnet. Of course, once above parking lot speeds, you must use the front brake as well as the rear brake, as 70% of your braking power comes from the front brake.

Avoid dragging your feet along the ground as this tends to upset the balance of the motorcycle, and of course, if your feet are dragging on the ground you cannot have your foot on the brake. As soon as you start to move your bike from a complete stop, both feet should automatically come up to the floor boards or pegs and your right foot should be feathering the rear brake. Once you master these three simple techniques, you will be amazed at the tight manoeuvres your bike can perform. You'll know you've gotten it right when you can make full lock turns in both directions at 5mph with the pegs or boards scraping a perfect circle in the pavement.

## ***The Barrel Race***

Whenever you mention the words practice, exercise or even training, it brings to mind something unpleasant. Now, if I say the word "race", it seems to have the opposite effect. So, let's talk about a race this month. And no, I don't mean the slow race, as that can get kind of boring.

What I'm talking about is a barrel race. A once popular event at local bike meets. Haven't seen it much lately and it's possibly due to the lack of skilful riders. For those who don't know what a barrel race is, here's how it works.

Set up two cones, cans, rocks or whatever you got handy in a straight line about 60 feet apart. Then you set up another two objects along side these with about 100 feet between them. Put your starting line about 60 feet from the first object, have both bikers race towards the first object and make a complete circle to the left around it. They then head for the second object, make a complete circle to the right.

They then head back to the first object, circle to the left and then head for the start/finish line. The trick is, to make the tightest, smoothest circles around the object. The rider who can do this, will win every time. As you are circling the object, keep your head and eyes up and never look down. If you look down, chances are, you will go down.

Smoothness is the key in this type of race, not speed. It's a great way to practice the three techniques, head and eyes, the friction zone, and the proper use of the rear brake. It's also a fun competitive way to get some training in. The more riders you have, the more fun. Go ahead, give it a try, I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

## ***The Foot Dragger***

The reason I bring up the "foot dragger" is because I see more and more of it all the time. I'm not sure if this is due to there being a lot of new riders on our roads or just simply a lack of knowledge of the basic riding techniques.

Then again, it can't be just a newbie problem because I've seen people I know that have been riding for over 30 years, drag their feet around an entire parking lot. I know what the problem is, it is instinct. Your instincts tell you, you're going slow, the bike may fall over, so keep your feet down just in case. As I've stated before, riding a motorcycle is not instinctual. Most of the time the proper technique is actually the opposite of your instincts, as in the case of the foot dragger.

All this came to mind recently while I was doing some filming at the Leesburg Bike Festival. I watched a middle aged rider, obviously looking for a parking space on Main Street, riding about 5mph drag his feet the entire length of Main Street. It was at least a 1/4 mile of some of the worse foot dragging I've ever seen. I had to use the zoom lens on my video cam to catch the entire spectacle. I think many riders aren't ever aware they're doing this.

Here's your first clue, if you wear out your shoes before your tires on your motorcycle, you're probably a foot dragger. Another draw back of being a foot dragger is that people who really know how to ride, will pick you out as a "no riding" fool, and they will point and laugh at you behind your back. If that's not enough to discourage you, keep this in mind. You could get your foot caught between the muffler and the pavement and break your ankle. In addition, you really can't control your bike at low speeds while dragging your feet because your foot isn't on the rear brake where it needs to be at low speeds.

The answer fortunately is very simple. As soon as you let the clutch out and the bike starts to move,

pick your feet up and put them on the pegs or floor boards. At parking lot speeds (below 15mph) use your rear brake only and stay in the friction zone. remember, at low speeds, if you hit your front brake when your handlebars are turned even slightly, it will pull you to the ground. Using the rear brake while in the friction zone and applying power will keep the bike upright just as if you were going 50mph instead of 5mph. Practice the slow race (going as slow as you can with both feet on the pegs while feathering the rear brake). Remember to keep your head and eyes up and look where you want the bike to go. Never look down at the handlebars or the ground.

Practice this technique and you'll find you have better control of your bike, your shoes will last a lot longer and you will no longer look stupid while riding through the parking lot at the local bike night.

## ***Counter Steering***

In a nut shell, counter steering is simply pushing the handle bars right or left in order to steer the motorcycle. In other words, push left to go left, push right to go right. On most full size cruisers the necessity for counter steering occurs at about 15mph and up. At low speeds, below 15mph whatever way you turn the handlebars, that's the way the motorcycle will go. It's called, handlebar steering. Counter steering doesn't come into play until the gyroscopic effect of the two-wheeled vehicle takes over. The shorter the wheelbase of the motorcycle, the lower the speed gyroscopic effect takes place. I don't believe it's anything you have to think about as it is one of the few riding techniques that is instinctual. In order for the motorcycle to turn at higher speeds, you must counter steer whether you realize you are doing it or not.

A friend of mine who recently purchased a Kawasaki Nomad and obtained his learners permit, asked me to help him pass the motorcycle drivers test. Unfortunately, he picked one of the most difficult motorcycles to drive through that particular course.

The course was designed years ago when most motorcycles had short wheel bases. The problem area with the state course is the off-set cone weave. This consists of 5 cones set 12 feet apart, with 2 of the cones having a 2' off-set. In order to manoeuvre through this exercise on any long wheel base cruiser, especially the Nomad, you have to be able to turn the handle bars from lock to lock at less than 2mph. For new riders, or even experienced riders who don't know the technique of HEAD AND EYES or have not mastered the friction zone, it's damn near impossible.

I set up a replica of the exercise in a parking lot and was able to get my Kawasaki Nomad through it, but did find it quite difficult. Most people believe it is impossible to get a large motorcycle through this exercise. While difficult, it is not impossible. However, it is going to take considerable practice. Your best is to borrow a friend's small 250cc, etc. type bike or take the motorcycle safety foundation course. If you are intent on passing the motorcycle exam on your cruiser, here's my recommendation to get you through it.

Get yourself 5 cones, cups, cans, etc. Set them up in a straight line 12 feet apart. Keep your foot on the rear brake, stay in the friction zone, keep your head and eyes up and look at least two cones ahead. The more cones you set up the quicker you will learn to weave your way through them. If you are worried about dropping the motorcycle get some heater hose or an old garden hose and tape the pieces to your crash bars. You will be going so slow that if you do drop the bike, it should not cause any damage.

Once you get comfortable weaving through the cones, start off-setting the 2nd and 4th cones in 6 inch increments, until you eventually get to the two foot off-set.

With enough practice and patience, this can be accomplished. If at first you have to put the cones 14' apart to comfortably weave through them, do it. Good luck and ride safe.

## ***SLOW RIDE***

I've received some E-mails lately asking why I only write about how to handle a bike at low speeds. One person stated, "I never ride around at 10 to 15MPH and nobody I know does either, so why should I need to know how to make tight turns at low speeds?" Another rocket scientist writes, "why don't you teach people how to pop wheelies and do burnouts in a circle?".

Let me answer the 1st question first. You DO ride at 10 or 15MPH or even SLOWER if you turn into a parking lot or if you are stuck in traffic. No one I know or have ever seen riding a motorcycle has a problem balancing their bike at 50 to 60 or 70MPH. At those speeds, the gyroscopic effect of a motorcycle keeps the bike up all you have to do is steer. It takes little or no skill to ride in a straight line at those speeds. Statistics show that when a motorcycle crashes, the impact occurs at less than 20MPH. The reason for this is, let's say you are traveling down the interstate at 70MPH, the car in front of you suddenly stops, you jam down on the brakes. By the time you strike the car, you have already slowed to about 20MPH.

Now, if you know how to handle your bike properly, you could brake hard, turn your head and eyes to your escape path, release the brakes and swerve and lean your bike till you are out of danger. If you never practice hard braking, leaning, and swerving and the proper use of head and eyes, I GUARANTEE in that situation, you will lock your rear brake and stare at the car and slam right into it.

If you learn to handle your bike at low speeds, high speeds are easy. It's at low speeds where everyone has the most problems because obviously, with two wheels, the bike wants to fall over with out enough momentum. By keeping the bike in the friction zone and feathering the rear brake while applying power, you're making the bike stay up on it's two wheels as if it were going much faster.

You can lean the bike over until it scrapes the floor boards at 5MPH and make extremely tight turns if you use these techniques. Believe me, knowing how far you can lean your bike over at 5MPH is far better than learning the same thing at 60MPH for obvious reasons. If you follow and practice these techniques, your confidence will be much stronger and you will improve your riding skills tremendously and hopefully be able to avoid that crash or at least minimize the damage to yourself and your motorcycle. Yes, it's true, there are some crashes you can't avoid no matter what your skill level, but, there are many more you can avoid with the proper training.

To the person asking why I don't teach people how to pop wheelies and do circle burnouts, it's simple, I can't think of even one instance where doing either one of those things will help you avoid a crash. In fact, just the opposite would happen.

## **MAKING THE BIKE FIT THE RIDER**

Unlike most automobiles, which have endless adjustments to the seat and steering wheel, and in some cases even the brake and gas pedals, the ability of a motorcycle to fit the rider is limited. If a person is small of stature or even extremely tall, finding a comfortable riding position can be a problem. Sometimes though, a few small adjustments can be made that will greatly improve your riding comfort.

Let's start with the clutch and front brake lever. Even if your bike is not equipped with adjustable levers which bring them closer to, or farther away from the handle bars, the angle of the lever always can be adjusted. I've seen a lot of bikes with the clutch and brake levers turned almost under the bar which places your wrists at an uncomfortable angle and also makes it much harder to safely manipulate them. It's an easy adjustment, usually 2 allen screws to adjust the levers up or down. Try it some time and I'm sure you'll find a comfortable position. If, as in the case with many women, the levers are too far away from you for a comfortable grip, smaller after-market levers are available for a nominal price. If your having a problem reaching the handle bars without leaning forward, try adjusting their position up or down. If that doesn't work, after-market bars with more pull back or pull back risers are readily available for almost all cruisers.

Let's talk about lowering the bike now. A lot of riders feel more comfortable with their feet flat on the ground. If they can't touch easily, the first thing people do is lower the shocks. What a lot of people don't realize is that this can and will cause other problems especially if you lower the bike more than one inch. All cruisers are designed to have that long low look and to achieve that look, compromises must be made. Think about it, manufacturers have scores of engineers working on the suspension and seat height and the bike turns out the way it does because compromises can come up when ground clearance, ride, and comfort are considered.

The easiest and safest way to get your feet closer to the ground is to lower the seat. If you want to use the stock seat, take it to a professional upholsterer. Once the seat cover is removed, it's easy to cut foam from the top and sides of the seat. Cut a little at a time and keep trying the seat until it feels right. On my wife's bike, we were able to lower her stock seat 3 inches with ease. You can also purchase an after-market seat which will bring you considerably lower to the ground. Corbin comes to mind when lowering seat height, as almost all of their seats are lower than stock seats.

As a last resort, you can buy lower shocks and fork springs, but keep in mind that lowering anymore than one inch will severely limit your lean angle and will cause hard parts to touch down and possibly lever a wheel off the ground when you least expect it. I've seen people lower their bikes so much that they can barely lean the bike even slightly. While this may be fine for a show bike that spends most of it's time on a trailer, if you plan on actually riding your bike, use a little common sense. Always contact the manufacturer and ask just what a certain shock absorber will actually lower the bike. If your stock shocks are 12", an after-market 11" shock doesn't mean your bike will only be lowered one inch. Make sure you talk to the professionals and ask the right questions. Ride safe and be comfortable while you ride.

## ***THE BEST OFFENSE IS A GOOD DEFENSE***

It's been said that the best offence is a good defence. Well, when riding a motorcycle, a good defence is exactly what you need, if you want to live to be a ripe old biker.

Here's scenario #1. You're cruising down the left hand of the highway, the vehicle in front of you signals a left hand turn. Of course, you are looking way ahead, as you should be, and you can see the left turn lane approaching. The vehicle starts to move into the left turn lane and now the question is, where should you be? I would say, if you're like me and you like to ride in the left portion of your lane, you should now move as far right in your lane as you can. The reason I say this, is because so many times I've seen the driver decide at the last second to change his mind and suddenly pull back into the left lane.

You can almost bet he neither knows you are there, or cares. If you move to the right part of your lane, start covering your brakes and get prepared for him to move back into the left hand lane, you will at least have half a chance of being able to squeeze by him and the car to your right. Always plan for the worse and be prepared for it.

Here's scenario #2. You are on a 3 lane highway heading north, there's an island which separates the roadway from the southbound 3 lanes and there is a break in the island which allows cars to cross from one side to the other. You see an SUV in the island waiting to make a left hand turn. What you can't see is the vehicle to the north of the SUV which is trying to pull into your side of the roadway. If you can't see that vehicle, you can bet he can't see you. About 50% of the time, especially if it is a busy roadway, you can bet that vehicle you can't see is going to pull right out in front of you. You should always be prepared for a situation like this. Remember, he might end up with a dented fender, but you would be lucky to survive such a situation.

What should you do? Well, it's just common sense. Slow down as you approach the break in the road, cover your brakes, check your right side rear view mirror and prepare to either brake or swerve. Remember, you can't do both at the same time. Plan ahead in your mind what you are going to do. The same thing applies if a vehicle to your right is attempting to pull onto the highway in your path from a side road. If you always plan for the worse, you'll be ready when it happens, because after all, you've got a plan.

Remember, when you are riding a motorcycle, you need to be defensive. It could mean your life.

## ***CRASHES INVOLVING MOTORCYCLES***

Most single vehicle crashes involving motorcycles, occur while negotiating a curve. Accident investigators have found that the crash is almost always the riders fault and was not due to sand or gravel on the road along with other obstacles. Investigators have also found that in most cases, the motorcycle was capable of making the curve at the speed the rider was travelling.

### **So, why did the rider crash????**

What generally happens is the rider believes he/she is going too fast to complete the turn so they hit the brake with the bike leaned over, consequently, the bike slides out from under the rider or the rider

releases the brake and high sides. Some riders will hear the pegs scrape, panic, and straighten the bike up and run right off the road. Others will simply look at the edge of the road and of course, the bike will go where you are looking and you will ride off the edge of the road. To avoid these situations is very easy.

First, become familiar with the maximum lean angle of your bike. Do so in a parking lot at low speeds. You will find that scraping the pegs still allows you to maintain control and is not a reason to panic and straighten up the bike.

Second, NEVER brake hard in a turn with the bike leaned over. If you're going to have to brake hard, you must first straighten the bike up even if it means going into the opposing lane. The safest procedure for negotiating a curve is to place the motorcycle in the portion of the lane which gives you the most visibility around the turn. Quite simply, if the road curves to the right, you should be in the left side of your lane looking to the end of the curve and visa versa. You need to look as far to the end of the curve as you possibly can and keep your head level with the horizon.

NEVER look at the line in the road or the vehicles coming in the opposite direction. Your braking should be done before entering the curve. Now, go find a winding road and have some fun practicing this technique.

### ***GROUP RIDING***

Often times I see large groups of motorcycles of 15, 20 or 30 motorcycles or even more. Generally, they are spread out over 1, 2 or 3 lanes. The riders towards the rear find themselves having to at times run red lights to keep up with the group. There is no reason for this. For safety's sake, it's best to keep the group at no more than 6 riders. If you are all going to the same place, what's the difference if one group arrives moments behind the other group. If you have 10 riders, split it up to 2 groups of 5 riders, etc. Always ride in staggered formation and make sure everyone is aware of the route you are going to take.

The lead rider should be experienced and conservative. Hand signals are a good idea, however, they should be held to a minimum. Everyone should do their best to stay together and it should be the rider in the rear's responsibility to keep riders from falling back too far. Allow enough space between the motorcycles for a safe stop, but not so much that a motorist can feel they have enough room to pull out from a side street between the group.

It's a good idea to discuss the ride before departing so everyone in the group knows where they should be in the formation. Whenever possible, keep the group in the center lane and try to avoid constant lane changes. Do your best not to block traffic. If you have to move over to the right to allow cars to pass, do so. New riders should avoid group riding till they become familiar with their motorcycles and different traffic situations. All these tips may seem like common sense, but I have found that common sense isn't so common after all. Pay attention and remember, HEAD AND EYES and keep the shiny side u

### ***HAVING AN ESCAPE PATH***

I was recently asked about how to avoid one of the most frequent types of motorcycle accidents, (the vehicle that turns left in front of you, violating your right of way, and what can you do about it).

This is a tough one, I am not trying to avoid the question, but the best answer is, it depends on the situation. If for instance, you are driving on a two lane road, approaching an intersection where you spot a vehicle that you believe may pull out in front of you. First, you should be covering your brakes whenever there is a possibility that another vehicle may violate your right of way. For instance, if you are north bound and the vehicle is southbound and about to make a left hand turn, the best thing may be to first, brake hard then release the brakes and swerve to your left going around the back of the vehicle. Of course, if you are going slow enough to stop, do so and avoid the swerving manoeuvre.

A good idea is to practice the brake and swerve maneuver in a parking lot so that when this situation arises, you will know what to do. In this same situation, you are on a four or more lane road with a busy intersection you may have only one choice. That would be to stop prior to hitting the vehicle as swerving to the left could cause a head on collision with oncoming traffic and swerving to the right could cause a collision with a vehicle going the same direction with you.

In other words, if there is an escape path, make sure you turn your head and eyes to that escape path. Never become target fixated on the left turning vehicle or you will surely hit it. There is no hard and fast rule on this situation. The best thing to do is practice your braking. Concentrate on the front brake. Practice braking from 20, 30, to 60 or 70mph in a controlled environment, such as a deserted road or parking lot. If you always ride at higher speeds, practice braking at those speeds. In a panic situation, you will always revert to your training. If you never train, you will only have panic and dumb luck to rely on. Practice, practice, practice. Practice is the key.

## ***MASTERING THE U-TURN***

Recently some friends and myself took a Sunday afternoon ride to Ybor City. Ybor, for those of you who don't know means, NO PARKING in Spanish. Once there, as usual, we had a tough time finding a parking space. In order to actually park, we had to make several quick U-turns on the narrow streets. Since I was leading, I could see in my mirrors the dirty looks my friends gave me as I led them on several U-turns in an effort to find the elusive parking spot. Their grumblings over the quick turns inspired me to write these tips.

As I have stated before, just about all production motorcycles are capable of making a U-turn in well under 20 feet. That means that you can U-turn on just about any two lane road including the narrow streets in Ybor City.

Here's the technique you need to apply. If you are about to make a left hand U-turn, keep your foot firmly on the rear brake, keep the clutch in the friction zone and roll on the throttle. Dip the bike towards the right curb, then quickly and smoothly turn your head completely around to the direction you want to go. At the same time you are turning your head, you should be pushing on the right grip turning your handle bars as far as possible and leaning the bike to the left. The same technique applies if you are making a right hand U-turn.

To practice this manoeuvre, find a parking lot with back to back parking lines. You will find the white lines of the parking spaces are placed 10 feet apart. At first, use three parking spaces. Start with your motorcycle towards the left side of the first parking space, then ride forward towards the right of the opposing parking space, turn your head completely around as you turn the handle bars and make a 30



foot U-turn.

Keep practicing this making your turn tighter each time till you can eventually turn using only two of the parking spots. That will give you a 20 foot U-turn and enable you to make a U-turn on just about any street.

Practice this manoeuvre equally to the right and to the left. You may find that making a right hand U-turn seems to be more difficult if you are right-handed. That means you practice the U-turn to the right more than to the left and you will get comfortable making the U-turn in both directions.

The real key to this manoeuvre is to look where you want the bike to go. Remember, if you look at the curb or the end of the pavement on that narrow street, that's where you will go. So, at all costs, avoid that temptation. With about 3 hours practice, you should be able to turn on any street whenever you feel like it with total confidence. Good Luck!

### ***IS EXPERIENCE REALLY THE BEST TEACHER?***

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a bike gathering at a local Harley Dealer when I struck up a conversation with a guy who was taking delivery of a new Anniversary Edition Ultra. The guy was into his mid to late 40's and he tells me he's been riding for 20 years and this was his 4th new Harley. He said he had an 02 Ultra, but some clown turned left in front of him and he had to "lay her down".

The bike was totalled and he had a broken leg which he said was now in good enough shape that he could start riding again. I then asked him if he had ever taken any rider training courses. He looked at me like I was crazy and said, "I've been riding 20 years, that's enough training for me". I then watched him as he duck-walked his bike around a U-Turn a Greyhound bus could have easily made, and then saw him drag his feet about 100 yards through the parking lot and out onto the highway. It made me think of something an MSF Instructor recently told me.

He said he teaches the MSF Experienced Rider course and that he see's a lot of people who think they're good riders because they have been riding 20 or 30 years. The instructor said what they really have is one year's experience 20 or 30 times.

That made a lot of sense. In other words, a rider gets to a certain level and then, never improves any further, but instead, keeps repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Now, if you're driving a car, you can get away with a lot of mistakes for a lot of years before it catches up with you. But, on a bike, there's usually no such thing as a little fender bender. In almost every crash on a motorcycle, you're going to get hurt or even killed and your bike is going to be a mess, if not a total wreck. The point is, don't fool yourself into thinking you know what you're doing just because you've been riding for a lot of years.

Look at it this way, if experience was all you need to be a good driver, then that 80 year old guy blocking the left lane of the highway with 60 years of driving under his belt should be able to easily win the Daytona 500 should he choose to since he has far more experience than most of those young whipper-snappers in NASCAR, right? Of course not!

Those young experienced NASCAR drivers have received the best training available and constantly

practice and improve their skills. Now, the old guy with all the experience, like you, the experienced rider, can cruise on down the road just fine, until something unexpected happens. Then, all he and you can do is jam on the brakes and hope for the best. The highly trained driver or rider can rely on his skills and training and probably can avoid the crash altogether instead of "laying her down", (in other words, to avoid the crash). Now, it's true, you can't avoid every crash, but it sure would be nice to avoid most of them

## ***Proper Braking***

I was asked recently by a friend who just purchased his first bike what is the most important safety tip you can give me? I thought for a second and answered, learning how to use your brakes. He looked at me as if I were kidding him. What's to it, he said, ya just stomp and squeeze just like in your car. That's the problem I said. Too many riders believe that, and coincidentally, bikers crash way to often. You've all heard the story about the guy who had to "lay er down" because somebody pulled out in front of him. What that actually means, is he panicked, locked the rear tire and the bike slid on the ground and stopped when it hit the vehicle or just before it hit the vehicle. In either case, the rider crashed in an attempt to avoid a crash. Ninety percent of the time, if the rider had braked properly in that situation, he would never have struck the vehicle.

So, the question is, how do I minimize my chances of crashing into something? The answer is simple. Practice emergency, maximum braking. But, first there's a couple of things you need to know. Number 1: The front brake is 70% of your braking force. Due to that fact, you must put more pressure on the front brake than the rear brake. If you happen to lock the front tire, you must release it immediately then reapply it. Squeeze the front brake, don't grab it. If you lock the rear tire, don't release it. If you do, there's a good chance you will high side. With a motorcycle, you can still steer when the rear tire is locked and sliding. You must also remember that the motorcycle must be straight up when performing maximum braking. This is not to say that you can't brake with the bike leaned over in a turn, you can lightly brake with both brakes in that situation, but maximum braking must be done with the bike straight up.

The point is, you must learn to modulate your brakes to keep from locking them and the only way to do that is to practice. Keep repeating to yourself, front brake, front brake. That will assist you in putting more pressure on the front brake than the rear brake.

You should practice maximum braking from whatever speed you normally ride. I guarantee your bike will react differently when braking hard at 80mph than at 30mph. If you practice, then in an emergency situation, you will revert to your training, rather than dumb luck. The only other alternative is to buy a bike with anti-lock brakes, just remember, even with anti-lock brakes, the bike still has to be straight up to perform maximum braking. Till next month, ride safe and get some practice in.

A word of thanks to all the riders who have bought my "Ride Like a Pro" video and for all the positive reviews received. I truly appreciate all the support and just remember, always apply the techniques I show you in the video every single time you ride. You can call our toll free number and order the video with your MasterCard or visa. Dr. Donna or myself will be happy to take your order. You can order by calling: 1-866-868-7433. It will be the best motorcycle accessory you can buy for you or a friend!

You can also pick up my Ride Like a Pro Video at the following dealers in the Tampa Bay area: BMW of Tampa Bay on Gunn Highway, or Action Honda in Hudson. Ride Safe!

### *Obstacles and How to Avoid Them*

There you are cruising down the road just enjoying the ride. You're a safe distance behind the SUV in front of you, when suddenly a large tree branch appears in the center of your lane. The SUV went right over it without a problem. Unfortunately, the tree branch is too large for you to go over it and it came into view so quick, you don't have time to brake. What should you do? Obviously, you have two choices. Now the untrained rider will probably look at the obstacle and run right into it, the trained rider will simply get off the gas and counter-steer around the obstacle.

Let's talk about counter-steering for a moment. Above about 15mph, the gyroscopic effect of the motorcycle becomes apparent. In other words, to go left you push left on the left hand grip. To go right you push right on the right hand grip. Now, this would seem the opposite of what you should be doing. But, believe me, it isn't. At speed, when you push on the left grip it causes the bike to lean to the left, and since a motorcycle at speed turns by leaning, when it leans left it goes left and visa versa.

The good news is counter-steering is instinctual. Anyone who has ever ridden a motorcycle above 15mph and has turned even slightly, has counter-steered. If you doubt me, try this. Cruise down the road at 30mph, keep both hands on the grips, but loosen your hand on the right grip, then push slightly on the left grip. Your bike will immediately lean to the left and steer to the left. Then try pushing on the right grip, you'll quickly understand the counter-steering phenomenon.

Now you're ready for an obstacle avoidance exercise. It's called the 30mph cone weave, but should be practiced at lower speeds until you get the hang of it, 18 to 20mph would be a good starting point. All you need is 3 cones set at 36' apart with the center cone offset 3'. Go to the left around the first cone then to the right around the second cone, the third cone should be on your left as you pass it. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, give it a try and you'll see that it isn't as easy as it sounds, especially at 30mph. If you want to make the exercise more difficult, add more cones or increase your speed. Once mastered, this exercise will improve your obstacle avoidance skills immensely.

## Art Of The Lean

While I've written about this subject before, I believe it's very important and needs to be repeated and discussed in even more detail.

In this article, I will give you every single tip, trick and technique I can possibly think of to get you to lean your motorcycle. First, keep in mind that a motorcycle or any 2-wheeled vehicle including your bicycle turns by leaning, especially at speed. By speed, I mean anything above about 15mph where the gyroscopic effect takes place on most motorcycles. On a bicycle or a small motor scooter, the gyroscopic effect may take place at 3 to 5mph. At very low speeds on a motorcycle, you can turn without leaning

simply by turning your handlebars back and forth, however, turning with the bike straight up is not a natural movement, the motorcycle was designed to lean. Let's take a Harley Road King as an example. If you walk that Road King around in a circle with the bike straight up, it would have a turning radius of about 22 to 24'. If you lean the bike over to its lean angle limit, that same Road King will turn in well under 18'.

So, if you're able to lean that Road King over only about as much as it leans while sitting on its kickstand, you can make a U-turn on a 20' wide street with little problem. If you try to turn with the bike straight up on that same 20' wide street, you won't make it. You'll wind up having to back that 800 lb. bike up and duck-walk it forward to make that turn. At 40 or 50mph, if you're afraid to lean that bike, when a car turns left in front of you, you're going to steer right into it or jam on the rear brake and slide into that car, when all you had to do was lean the bike a little and steer around it. Consequently, if you're afraid to lean your bike, you're a crash looking for a place to happen, it will be inevitable.

So, to get you familiar with leaning, we'll start small. First, get out the old mountain bike you've got rusting in the garage and start pedaling it. Get up as fast as you can then start coasting and begin pushing the handlebars back and forth. This will force the bicycle to lean from side to side and hopefully show you that you're not going to fall over. Keep your head and eyes up and maintain some speed. You can even set up a few cones in a straight line, say at 15' apart and weave through them allowing the bike as much side to side lean angle as you dare. Then, coast through a few U-turns set up at 12 or 13'. Keep your pedals up so they don't get caught on the pavement and lever your tire off the ground. In addition to helping you get over your fear of leaning, the bicycle can also help to teach you why dragging the rear brake gives you stability at low speeds. Just put the bike in first gear and try to pedal as slowly as you can in a straight line, then try the same thing only this time, put a little pressure on the rear brake (on a bicycle, the rear brake is at your right hand). I'm sure you will find pedaling against the rear brake will allow you to go much slower and with a lot more control. You can even see why hitting the front brake is the wrong thing to do when the handlebars are turned and the bike is leaning.

I guarantee you a couple hours on a bicycle will help you get over your fear of leaning the 2-wheeled vehicle, plus, it's great exercise.

Now, it's time to get on the motorcycle. The first thing to do is get familiar with the friction zone and using the rear brake. First, try going slowly in a straight line, remember to keep your head and eyes up. Begin making turns at 3 to 5mph by turning your head from left to right. Now, get your speed up to 15mph or above, let the clutch out all the way, get off the rear brake and start pushing the bars back and

forth. Hold the throttle steady and let the bike weave from side to side. The bike wants to lean, so let it, in fact, above 15mph it must lean when you push on the bars. Once you get familiar with the sensation, slow down to 5mph or so and try to duplicate that side to side leaning sensation while in the friction zone and putting a little pressure on the rear brake. Set up 6 cones in a straight line at 14' apart and begin weaving through them. As this exercise gets easier, start cutting the distance to 13', then 12' apart.

When you get bored with the cone weave, start turning circles. Start with no markers and big 30' or 40' turns. Have a person stand in the center of the circle and focus on that person's face as you ride around them, that should keep you from looking down at the ground. In addition, that person can tell you how far you're leaning, the further the better.

Well, that's it for this month. I know this sounds like a lot of work, but it will save you from injury or even death. All it takes is a few hours of practice.

## The Art Of The Dip



Let's say you're in a parking lot on bike night cruising down the lanes looking for a spot to pull into. You find a spot on the right between a couple of other bikes and you make the 90 degree turn into the space. The problem is, as you put your feet down when you come to a stop, your handlebars are turned and you have to use the front brake. If you squeeze that front brake instead of grabbing it or snatching it, you won't have a problem. BUT, if you pull that brake in too quickly, you're going down. Not only will you damage your bike, but you'll hit the bike on your right, plus, your body will be caught between the two bikes and you could be hurt and suffer severe embarrassment.

How can you avoid this situation, you must be asking by now? Well, there are two things you can do. The first and most common technique used by unskilled riders the world over, is to stop while the bike is at a 90 degree angle to the parking spot and duck walk the bike into the space. If you don't mind looking like an unskilled amateur rider, this technique works just fine.

But, if you would rather ride like a PRO and not have to backup and go forward several times to get your bike aligned in the space, this is the technique you should use. It's called the DIP.

Let me explain why this works so well. The further you lean a bike, the tighter the turn you can make.

The rear tire tracks inside of the front tire with these two facts in mind, this is what you should do. If you want to turn right, first turn the handlebars to the left, let the bike lean to the left, then turn the bars to the right, let the bike lean to the right, straighten up the bike, and you're in the parking space perfectly straight without duck walking or dragging your feet like some kind of sissy. Using this procedure, when you have to stop in the parking space, you will be able to use the front brake as you put your feet down because your handlebars will be pointed straight ahead. The dip will also help when you're turning right or left from a stop. To practice the dip, get up to 5 mph, stay in the friction zone, put a little pressure on the rear brake and turn your handlebars as far to the left and to the right as you can.

You must let the bike lean from left to right. With a little practice, you should be able to scrape the boards as you dip the bike side to side. When you can touch those boards down, you've mastered the dip.

## Turning From A Stop On A Hill



Surprisingly, I'm often asked by even experienced riders how to turn when stopped on a hill. Obviously, there's some confusion here. The rider's who ask this question state they know not to use the front brake at low speeds since it will pull them to the ground, but, since they're holding the bike up with both feet, they can't use the rear brake either.

I understand the dilemma. There are actually several things you can do in this situation. One, you can feed a little throttle and let the clutch out just enough to hold the bike from rolling backwards (which is my personal method), but in order to do this, you must be very familiar with the friction zone. Two, you can hold the bike from rolling back using the front brake which will enable you to keep both feet on the ground, just remember to keep the front brake applied as you feed a little throttle and start to let the clutch out. As soon as you feel the bike push against the brake, release the brake, allow the bike to start moving forward then immediately turn your head and eyes in the direction of the turn. The 3rd and last method would be to keep your right foot on the brake, let the clutch out, feed throttle and as you feel the bike push against the brake, release the brake and again quickly turn your head and eyes in the direction you want to go. Of course, this method is only for those who are comfortable with balancing the bike on one foot.

The best thing to do is try all 3 of these methods under controlled conditions. In other words, find a parking lot with a slight incline and practice until it becomes 2nd nature. You should first try taking off

on the incline smoothly going straight ahead and little by little, start turning the handlebars after you've released the brake.

The bottom line is, you must become familiar with using the friction zone. Practice duck walking the bike but instead of pushing the bike forward with your legs, let the clutch do the work. Also, practice the slow race. You need to only get down to a quick walking pace. Remember to put a little pressure on the rear brake and keep your head and eyes UP! Just 20 or 30 minutes in a parking lot should get you very good at coordinating that clutch and throttle.

## Winding Roads

Recently, on my Internet forum, Motorman's Tips and Tricks, <http://forums.delphiforums.com/motorman/start> there was a long discussion about riding the Dragon and winding, curving roads in general. It seems that many people fear riding winding roads and try to avoid them at all costs. Many of the people who have windingroadaphobia say, "I can ride straight roads just fine, but those curves scare the hell out of me." What these people may not realize is that anybody can get on a motorcycle and ride it straight down the road. Riding straight takes virtually no skills at all. But, when the road starts to wind, you're going to have to counter steer, down shift, up shift and use the brakes properly. In other words, you're going to have to actually ride the bike instead of just being along for the ride.

If you don't have the skill and confidence to perform the above, don't even think about riding a very challenging road like the Dragon with 318 turns in 11 miles. What's more, though I haven't ridden the Dragon, I understand there's quite a few bikes on this road and a large number of them are being ridden very aggressively. Plus, there's the occasional 18-wheeler and a good number of sports cars on the Dragon at any given time. Obviously, it's not a stretch of road for the timid rider.

So, the question is, how do you get over your windingroadaphobia? Fortunately, the answer is quite simple. You learn to use the proper techniques in as safe an environment as possible. Now, I know I've written many articles on riding the twisties, but, since failing to negotiate a turn is still the number one motorcycle crash that involves just the rider and no other vehicle, the proper techniques bear repeating.

The most important technique is the proper use of your head and eyes. You must look only where you want the bike to go. That means, focus as far towards the end of the turn as possible. In order to do this

properly, you must put your motorcycle in the correct position as you enter the curve. If the road curves to the right, placing your bike in the left portion of the lane closest to the center of the road gives you the best view around the curve. Naturally, if the road curves to the left, start the turn on the right portion of the lane, close to the edge of the road.

Don't look at the yellow line or oncoming vehicles. Brake and downshift before you enter the curve, then roll on the throttle or at the very least, maintain a steady throttle throughout the curve. Rolling on the throttle causes the bike to rise up on its suspension which gives you the most ground clearance. Avoid braking in the turn and rolling on and off the throttle in the turn, either one of these mistakes will cause the bike to straighten up and run wide of the curve.

It's very easy to practice these skills and build your confidence. Find a road with long sweeping turns or a low speed winding road and take it slow. You can even set up some low speed (15 to 25 mph) turns in a big parking lot to gain confidence. If you never do these things, you will never lose your fear of winding roads and you'll be missing the best part of the motorcycling experience. Practice is the key, with repetition comes confidence and skill. It's that simple. Now, get out there and ride.

## The Timid Rider

This month, I'm going to talk to you about the timid rider. Everyone knows at least one timid rider and in fact, you may even be one and not know it. You may even think as all timid riders do, that you're just being cautious. There is however a big difference between cautious and timid.

In order for you to understand the difference, let me introduce you to "Timid Tony". Tony is someone I actually know, but of course, I've changed his name, even though I'm sure he wouldn't recognize himself in this article. Tony's been riding for more than 30 years, but in all that time, he's lucky to have traveled twenty thousand miles.

Tony is a real short guy, maybe 5'2", and feels that he absolutely has to have both feet firmly planted on the ground on whatever bike he rides, and of course, he has to ride a big heavy Harley cruiser. That means he has to lower the bike considerably, so he has the bike lowered 3 inches in the back. That means he now has severely limited the ground clearance and has virtually no suspension travel on his bike. In short, (no pun intended), he can't lean the bike now since it will rub the frame on the ground and lever a tire. That's ok, because Tony is scared to death of leaning his motorcycle anyway and it gives him a great



excuse as to why he has to slow down to a walking pace to make a turn. This causes a major problem for the group riders behind Timid Tony and like most timid riders, Tony loves group riding. It's also very annoying to the riders in front of him because they all have to slow down to allow Tony and the riders behind him to catch up. This causes another problem. Tony and the poor bastards behind him now have to accelerate rather quickly to catch up since the riders in front had to slow, you now have the classic accordion effect. Timid Tony has no faith in his brakes or his braking ability and almost never uses his front brake because he believes it will put him over the handlebars. He starts braking slowly, the riders behind do likewise and before anybody realizes what's happening, Tony now jams on the rear brake and starts to slide sideways. The riders behind are now put into a panic braking situation for no reason. Maybe he lucks out and via dumb luck, avoids a crash. The problem is, Timid Tony is now scared even more than he normally is and slows down even more than usual.

Since he's now obstructing traffic, cars start to pull around him and wind up splitting the group ride even further. All this occurs because Timid Tony is afraid of his motorcycle and has no confidence in his ability to control his bike. Let me add, Timid Tony has taken an experienced riders course. He listened intently as the instructors told him what he was doing wrong, but stubbornly, he refused to use any of the techniques they instructed him to apply. In other words, the course was a waste of time for Tony. So, what should you do if Timid Tony reminds you of yourself? First, don't lower your bike more than one inch. Instead, have the seat cut down 2 or 3 inches, that way, you won't severely limit your lean angle. You can also buy a lighter weight bike. Maybe a Standard would be better for you. Their seat heights are higher, a Standard or naked bike as they're called, now can weigh 1/2 of what a cruiser does and can be balanced easily on one foot. Their shorter wheelbase also makes them a lot easier to maneuver at low speeds.

The next thing to do is to retake the MSF Beginners Course, then a few thousand miles later, take the Experienced Riders Course. As you gain confidence, you might even try one of the track day courses. If none of these work, find another sport, quit riding and save yourself and everyone around you a lot of grief.

Remember, riding a motorcycle takes skill and confidence. If you have neither, you should not be riding.

## Seats

I'm often asked what kind of seats I have on the Harley Electra Glides I use in my rider skills show. I know the reason they ask is because most people are not happy with their stock seats, or the after market

seats they've tried. Plus, the fact that I've had the seats we use upholstered in a distinct black, white and gold pattern, must be the cause of the curiosity. First, let me say the seats we use are Harley Davidson Sundowner Solo seats that I've had reupholstered in the white, black and gold pattern. The reason I like these particular seats is that they are the only ones I know of that brings the rider 2 inches closer to the handlebars. What's more, the nose of the Sundowner Solo is very narrow which allows the shorter rider to flat foot the bike much easier. The fact that the Sundowner is also comfortable is an added bonus.

Sitting upright and close to the handle bars gives the rider much more control, especially when turning from lock to lock. Plus, being flat footed makes it much easier to back up the motorcycle when the need arises.

Recently, I replaced two of my Electra Glides with 2008 Street Glides and unfortunately, Harley does not make the Sundowner Solo for any of the 08 models as of yet. Since the stock Street Glide seat is too far from the bars and too wide in the nose for shorter riders and both these Street Glides will be ridden in my shows by women, I had no choice but to modify the stock seats.

I've done this type of modification myself, but since I also wanted some custom upholstery on the Seats, I decided to let a pro do the job. I took the seats to Anthony's Auto Upholstery, Inc. at 903 East 93rd Avenue, Tampa, FL 33612, 813-931-8722. But, if you like to try this modification yourself, here's how it's done.

1. Use a sharp flat screwdriver to remove the staples from the upholstery and the seat pan.
2. Once the upholstery is removed, you may find the stock foam is covered with a saran like wrap. The saran wrap keeps the foam from getting soaked through when the seat gets wet. Remove that wrap by simply peeling it off.
3. Next, put the uncovered seat back on the bike and sit on it. If you're trying to get flat footed, the best thing to do is narrow the nose or the front sides of the seat. With a magic marker, make some marks on the side of the foam where your thighs meet the seat. If you want to get closer to the bars, you will have to acquire some dense foam from an upholstery shop and cut it to fit behind you on the rear lip of the seat. This can be tricky, so get plenty of extra foam. To shape the foam use an electric knife and some rough sandpaper.

4. Once you get your foam in place and you're satisfied that you are close enough to the bars, mark the sides of the seat.
5. Now, it's time to start trimming the sides. Do it a little at a time on each side. Try to make the slices as smooth as possible. Once you're satisfied that you've taken enough foam off, use the sandpaper to smooth out the cuts and shape the seat.
6. If you're unable to smooth the foam enough and you're afraid your rough cuts will show through the upholstery, don't worry, a piece of thin head liner foam can cover all your mistakes. Some 3M foam glue will hold the headliner foam in place.
7. All that's left to do is stretch the stock upholstery over the foam and staple it in place. If all you've done is narrow the nose, the stock vinyl should go right back on if you pull it tight and use plenty of staples. If you've added foam to move you forward, you'll probably have to have a shop make a new skin.
8. You now have a custom seat made especially for you for much less than you'd pay for an after market seat that may or may not fit you.

## Riding On Gravel

Quite often I'm asked what is the best technique for riding on gravel roads. In fact, just today, I received an email from a Sherry Neelson, she states, "I have a long gravel driveway with a long down hill slope and a 90 degree turn at the bottom, I've dropped my Harley 3 times in the past month going both up and down the driveway no matter how slow I try to go, what should I do?"

I must admit, I am tempted to reply, "how about paving the driveway", but since this question comes up so often, here goes. Why gravel appears to be such a problem on a heavy bike is because the tires tend to sink into the gravel. The deeper the gravel, the more you can sink. The best defense is a little momentum. In other words, rather than following your instincts, pick up the speed a little. This will keep the tires from sinking into the gravel and have the bike more or less float above it on the surface. Turn your handlebars as little as possible since a sharp turn of the front tire will have a plow effect and will cause a tip over. Also, rely on the rear brake for stopping as well as control. I can't say exactly how fast to go but if you're having a problem on a particular road or your own driveway, pick up the speed a little at a time until you find the bike easier to control. Oh, and whenever possible, pave that driveway.

It's all in your head!

Last week at one of my citizen's classes, I had 10 enthusiastic riders, ready and raring to improve their skills. I always start them off with the slow cone weave, which consists of 6 cones in a straight line set at 12' apart. This is a great exercise to get the riders used to turning the handlebars quickly from side to side to avoid hitting the cones. It also teaches the rider where their focus needs to be, which is on the very last cone in the line. This exercise also simulates obstacle avoidance, such as, in a case where a truck in front of you drops his load and you must weave around the obstacles.

Generally, it takes the average rider 5 or 6 runs through before they can complete the exercise without hitting any cones. But, on this day, I tried something a little different. In an effort to teach the students that the proper techniques for riding are mainly in your head. In other words, mind over matter.

Instead of using 12" traffic cones, I placed 6 tennis balls, cut in half on the ground. Still set of course at 12' apart. I then stood down at the end of the line and told the riders to focus on me at about my eye level and not to look down at the tennis balls. Every rider made it through the weave without running the tennis balls over. I had them perform about 5 runs through the exercise. I then placed the 12" traffic cones on top of the tennis balls and had them run the exercise again. Low and behold, every rider struck at least one of the cones. They all swore that the cones were set closer together than the tennis balls, even though they saw me place the cones right on top of the balls. It took another 5 or 6 runs through the exercise before all the riders could complete the cone weave successfully. Thus proving, that it was all in their head. The exercise hadn't changed one bit. What was actually happening of course, was that they were now looking at the cones and of course, wherever you look, that's where the motorcycle will go, so the riders struck the cones. Once I convinced them of this fact, and got them to focus on me standing at the end of the line, they breezed through the slow cone weave without error.

I then set up the U-turn exercise at 24'. I had the riders turning to the left. I removed the right side line of cones so the riders could not see the actual edge of the 24'. All the riders made it through turning their bikes in 24' or less. A few were even able to make the turn in less than 20'. As soon as I put the line of cones on the 24' mark, once again, everyone had difficulties making the U-turn. It appeared to them that the size of the U-turn had been reduced. Once I explained to them that they had all made the U-turn previously in well less than 24' and repeatedly told them not to stare at the cones on the 24' line, they once again were able to make the U-turn with no problem.

The moral of the story is, focus only where you want the motorcycle to go. If you look at the edge of the road or the curb when making a tight U-turn, you will surely hit it. If instead you focus where you want

the bike to go, you'll make that turn everytime. Remember, motorcycling is 90% mental and 10% physical.

## Passing

Here's the scenario. You're cruising down a two lane road. The speed limit is 55mph, but there's two cagers in front of you, the first of which is poking along at 40 to 45mph. The car directly in front of you has had many chances to pass the slow poke, but for reasons unknown to you, that driver seems content to stay behind the slow poke and tailgate instead of passing him.

You glance in the rear view mirror and notice there's a parade of vehicles behind you and the cager directly behind you is too close for comfort. So, what's the safe thing to do?

Well, if you've got more patience than me, the safest thing to do would be to slow down enough to give yourself plenty of distance between the car directly in front of you and keep a close eye on the car tailgating you. The second option is to pass the car in front and the slow poke and get away from the entire pack of four wheelers. However, before I make the pass, I'm going to look out for a few things.

Number one, oncoming traffic. If the oncoming lane is clear and there is no double yellow line, I'll next look for intersecting streets on the left. Keep in mind that if a vehicle is at a side street waiting to pull out, that driver will be looking to his left for oncoming traffic, not to his right where you'll be accelerating to make your pass. Also keep in mind, the intersecting road on your left might just be the street the slow poke is looking for. There's always the chance that he'll suddenly jam on his brakes and make his left just as you're passing and you'll wind up t-boning him at a high rate of speed.

If that happens, the slow poke would be at fault in the crash, but that's not going to help you. Another thing to watch out for as you pull out to pass is the car directly in front of you may suddenly decide to make a pass the same time you do, and then there's the possibility that one of the parade of vehicles behind you might be trying to pass the entire line of vehicles.

Sounds pretty complicated, doesn't it? Here's the safest way to make the pass. First, make sure there are no intersecting streets, put on your left signal light to let the drivers behind you know you're about to make your move. Look in the rear view mirror to make sure no one else is about to pass, flash your lights or toot the horn to let the driver in front know you're coming around, then open the throttle and pass as fast as you can. Make sure to cover both brakes the entire time in case you have to abort the pass.

The bottom line is, look at least 12 seconds ahead of your bike at all times. Have a plan, work that plan. Till next month, ride safe. Give me a call toll free and order my new Ride Like a Pro DVD. It just might save your life.

## Obstacles and How to Avoid Them

There you are cruising down the road just enjoying the ride. You're a safe distance behind the SUV in front of you, when suddenly a large tree branch appears in the center of your lane. The SUV went right over it without a problem. Unfortunately, the tree branch is too large for you to go over it and it came into view so quick, you don't have time to brake. What should you do? Obviously, you have two choices. Now the untrained rider will probably look at the obstacle and run right into it, the trained rider will simply get off the gas and counter-steer around the obstacle.

Let's talk about counter-steering for a moment. Above about 15mph, the gyroscopic effect of the motorcycle becomes apparent. In other words, to go left you push left on the left hand grip. To go right you push right on the right hand grip. Now, this would seem the opposite of what you should be doing. But, believe me, it isn't. At speed, when you push on the left grip it causes the bike to lean to the left, and since a motorcycle at speed turns by leaning, when it leans left it goes left and visa versa.

The good news is counter-steering is instinctual. Anyone who has ever ridden a motorcycle above 15mph and has turned even slightly, has counter-steered. If you doubt me, try this. Cruise down the road at 30mph, keep both hands on the grips, but loosen your hand on the right grip, then push slightly on the left grip. Your bike will immediately lean to the left and steer to the left. Then try pushing on the right grip, you'll quickly understand the counter-steering phenomenon.

Now you're ready for an obstacle avoidance exercise. It's called the 30mph cone weave, but should be practiced at lower speeds until you get the hang of it, 18 to 20mph would be a good starting point. All you need is 3 cones set at 36' apart with the center cone offset 3'. Go to the left around the first cone then to the right around the second cone, the third cone should be on your left as you pass it. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, give it a try and you'll see that it isn't as easy as it sounds, especially at 30mph. If you want to make the exercise more difficult, add more cones or increase your speed. Once mastered, this exercise will improve your obstacle avoidance skills immensely.

Thanks to all the riders who have purchased my video for all the wonderful reviews. For riders who have not purchased my video yet, you can go to my Home Page [www.ridelikeapro.com](http://www.ridelikeapro.com) and see a clip of the video, and read all my safety tips and tricks and enjoy all the cool links.

## Proper Braking

I was asked recently by a friend who just purchased his first bike what is the most important safety tip you can give me? I thought for a second and answered, learning how to use your brakes. He looked at me as if I were kidding him. What's to it, he said, ya just stomp and squeeze just like in your car. That's the problem I said. Too many riders believe that, and coincidentally, bikers crash way to often. You've all heard the story about the guy who had to "lay er down" because somebody pulled out in front of him. What that actually means, is he panicked, locked the rear tire and the bike slid on the ground and stopped when it hit the vehicle or just before it hit the vehicle. In either case, the rider crashed in an attempt to avoid a crash. Ninety percent of the time, if the rider had braked properly in that situation, he would never have struck the vehicle.

So, the question is, how do I minimize my chances of crashing into something? The answer is simple. Practice emergency, maximum braking. But, first there's a couple of things you need to know. Number 1: The front brake is 70% of your braking force. Due to that fact, you must put more pressure on the front brake than the rear brake. If you happen to lock the front tire, you must release it immediately then reapply it. Squeeze the front brake, don't grab it. If you lock the rear tire, don't release it. If you do, there's a good chance you will high side. With a motorcycle, you can still steer when the rear tire is locked and sliding. You must also remember that the motorcycle must be straight up when performing maximum braking. This is not to say that you can't brake with the bike leaned over in a turn, you can lightly brake with both brakes in that situation, but maximum braking must be done with the bike straight up.

The point is, you must learn to modulate your brakes to keep from locking them and the only way to do that is to practice. Keep repeating to yourself, front brake, front brake. That will assist you in putting more pressure on the front brake than the rear brake.

You should practice maximum braking from whatever speed you normally ride. I guarantee your bike will react differently when braking hard at 80mph than at 30mph. If you practice, then in an emergency situation, you will revert to your training, rather than dumb luck. The only other alternative is to buy a bike with anti-lock brakes, just remember, even with anti-lock brakes, the bike still has to be straight up

to perform maximum braking. Till next month, ride safe and get some practice in.

A word of thanks to all the riders who have bought my "Ride Like a Pro" video and for all the positive reviews received. I truly appreciate all the support and just remember, always apply the techniques I show you in the video every single time you ride. You can call our toll free number and order the video with your mastercard or visa. Dr. Donna or myself will be happy to take your order. You can order by calling: 1-866-868-7433. It will be the best motorcycle accessory you can buy for you or a friend!

You can also pick up my Ride Like a Pro Video at the following dealers in the Tampa Bay area: BMW of Tampa Bay on Gunn Highway, or Action Honda in Hudson. Ride