

Hints for Smooth Starts, Stops and Cornering

Have you ever seen someone wobble when they take off on their motorcycle? Have you ever seen anyone lose their balance when they stop? Have you ever seen someone quickly put both feet down before they stop and wonder how they could stop without keeping their foot on the rear brake? Have you ever experienced these things yourself? What prevents some riders from making smooth controlled starts and stops?

Lack of balance is the single most probable cause for wobbly starts and shaky stops. Riding a motorcycle requires balance, and balance requires that you maintain a perspective on the horizon. If you don't believe that, try walking around looking straight up and see how far you go before you feel like you're going to fall over.

Starting Out

If you look down when you take off, you lose your perspective on the horizon and tend to lose your balance. The result is you veer off your intended path when you start and have to steer back to where you want to go. By keeping your eyes up and looking where you want to go, you maintain that perspective and are then able to maintain your balance. This results in a smooth take off with no wobble.

Stopping

If you look down when you stop, you also lose your perspective on the horizon and your balance. Because you are pressing on the right side of the motorcycle (brake), you fall to the right. You have to quickly put your right foot down to catch yourself. By keeping your eyes up and looking well ahead, you maintain your balance and can come to a smooth, controlled stop. Your right foot will stay on the rear brake and your left foot can be brought down easily.

Remember, you go where you look and visual control is the key to smooth riding. For smooth starts and stops, keep your eyes up and look well ahead.

Cornering

When a motorcyclist runs off the road in a curve, the official police accident report usually lists "excessive speed" as the cause. But actual speed entering a corner is only part of the equation. How or when you roll on, or off, the throttle has a lot to do with whether you make it around the corner safely or not. The technique is to smoothly roll on a little throttle as you lean the bike over, and to continue to ease on the gas all the way through the corner.

Rolling on the gas as the bike is leaned over accomplishes several things.

1. *It smoothes out the wobbles at mid-turn.*

One reason for a wobble is in the transition from brakes to throttle. When the bike is leaned over, the tires are riding on the sidewalls and the contact rings are smaller in diameter. A smaller-diameter tire will need to turn faster to maintain the same bike speed. The point is, if you try to lean the bike over with a steady throttle, the bike will actually decelerate to match engine revs. Rolling on the throttle slightly while leaning over keeps the engine pulling, even if bike speed doesn't increase.

2. *It keeps the bike up on the suspension and the weight better shared between the wheels.*

With most motorcycles, rolling on some throttle lifts the bike up on the suspension. It's most obvious with shaft-drive bikes. Lifting the bike up higher on the suspension not only improves leanover clearance, but also helps absorb bumps because you have more suspension travel. The message to remember for cornering is that rolling ON the throttle transfers weight rearward and rolling OFF the throttle transfers weight forward.

3. *It helps conserve traction.*

It's easy to forget that the engine provides braking as well as forward thrust. We realize the bike is slowing as we roll off the throttle, but we may not appreciate that decelerating on a trailing throttle applies engine braking through the rear wheel only. As it happens, rolling on a bit of throttle while leaned over not only helps keep the bike up on the suspension, but also provides more traction back at the rear wheel to keep it from stepping out.

So, rolling on a bit of throttle as the bike is leaned over helps stabilize the suspension, lifts the bike up to increase leanover clearance, distributes weight rear/front to maximize traction, and smoothes out the mid-turn wobbles. Put it all together, and it helps achieve a smoother, more predictable cornering line.

Slow, Look, Press, Roll

Start the turn from the outside, the left side of your lane approaching a right-hander, or the right side of your lane approaching a left-hander. Roll off the gas and brake as necessary to slow the bike to entry speed, and then get off the brakes. Entry speed is a speed, which will allow you to accelerate slightly through the corner. Do your slowing (braking) while the bike is upright before you enter the turn.

Lift your head and eyes up, looking as far through the corner as you can. Swivel your nose around to point exactly at your intended line. Remember, you go where you look. Based on research done by the Code group, it has been determined that 90+% of the riders look and lean simultaneously. Think about this. How can you know where you want to go, or the required lean angle, if you don't look before you enter the corner? If you don't look before you lean, most of the time you will have to make a mid course correction.

At the turn-in point, push the bike over with one smooth push on the "low" grip, and simultaneously ease on the throttle. Your goal is to be able to keep easing on a little more throttle all the way through the turn. As you lean the bike, tilt your head to keep your eyes level with the horizon. At the apex, roll on more throttle to lift the bike up, and plan ahead for the next turn.

Also, one steering input per curve is the ideal. Yes, you can make small adjustments to your line while turning, but every steering input eats up traction, which can become a precious commodity if you suddenly encounter a hazard midway around the corner. Ideally, push the bike over toward your intended line with one precise push and then stabilize it with the throttle.

Portions of this article were taken from "Ride Smart! Ride Safe!" by Chuck Miles, and from *Motorcycle Consumer News*, May 2000, "Mastering the Throttle" by David L. Hough