

Back To Basics

HEAD & EYES

by Jerry Palladino (MOTORMAN)

I've gotten a lot of email lately stating some of my readers missed the first few motorman columns. Being it never hurts to review the basic techniques involved, here goes.

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.

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.

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 maneuvers 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.

Remember, all it takes is a little practice. Good Luck!