

THE OUTSIDE EDGE

CONTROL, PRECISION ...AND SMOOTHNESS

By: George Tranos



Do you think you're a good rider? How do you think you compare with other riders on the road or in your riding group? What criteria would you use to measure your skill?

Riding a sportbike, or for that matter any motorcycle, requires not only balance and coordination but also other intangibles. You may not be able to define what a really good rider is but you know one when you see one! I often ask my students what do you want to look like if you were to view yourself riding? Many answer that they want to look "smooth."

How can some riders make it look easy as they carve up a twisty mountain road while others struggle to just get down that same road at half the pace? More importantly, how can you obtain that same expertise?

A motorcycle is controlled by numerous inputs to the handlebars, throttle, brake and shift levers, sometimes done simultaneously. The amount of pressure, length of application, sequence of operation and timing all affect how the motorcycle moves. The beginning rider may have a hard time with the coordination of all of these controls. They may struggle to simply maintain control of the motorcycle while trying to get it to go where they want it to go.

Once aptitude is obtained, the more knowledgeable rider will seek proficiency. This is not easily attained. Much time and practice is needed to increase your ability. This requires patience and dedication on the part of the rider. Routine motions of the hands and feet will get translated into motion. A specific motorcycle will react a certain way with each press of the handlebar or roll of the throttle. Knowing how much throttle to apply or how hard to press on the handlebar to initiate a turn is a learned response. The more uniform and repeatable the process, the more precise the rider will become.

Once control and precision are obtained, smoothness should follow. Instead of a series of disjointed control applications, a smooth rider will automatically transition from one control to the next with finesse. The actual physical control function becomes an extension of the rider's mind. Through practice and repetition, a skilled motorcyclist will be looking well ahead and their body will naturally react to the road ahead. The muscles will move instinctively as the mind instructs the body on what needs to be done. A confident rider will exhibit relaxed awareness of their surroundings and will not panic.

This confidence should come from applying the proper technique to your riding, scanning ahead and identifying road conditions and hazards early and proper physical and mental condition.

Even if you know all this, you still need to get out and practice! Some of the best practice can be done at slower speeds in a parking lot. In an upcoming column, I'll talk about some of the exercises you can use. Braking, swerving, turning, weaving and limited space maneuvers can all be practiced there. Once you're warmed up, there's nothing like a curvy stretch of tarmac to hone your skills. Ideally, the road in this section should be in good condition and the traffic should be light. In the real world, this requirement is difficult to meet and it's not that important. You should ride the selected tract in both directions and then repeat. Try to look as far ahead as possible and search aggressively for roadway hazards, banking, curve radius, traffic, etc. Anticipate and plan your movements in advance. Try to limit control inputs and smooth the transitions from throttle to brakes to turning. Repeat again until you feel smoother. Be patient and don't go full blast. The purpose of this should be to become smoother not faster. Once you feel smoother, you will be going faster, so don't concentrate on speed.

With practice, you will continue to develop control, precision and smoothness. Your confidence will increase as your competence does. You will find the right pace and rhythm to your riding. You still may not be "cool", but you'll definitely be smooth! Ride safe.



George Tranos is a freelance writer and photographer. His reviews and stories have appeared in many national publications. You can write him at George@BigAppleMoto.com