

## ***PACE YOURSELF***

### ***The street is not the track - It's a place to Pace***

Two weeks ago a rider died when he and his bike tumbled off a cliff paralleling our favorite road. No gravel in the lane, no oncoming car pushing him wide, no ice. The guy screwed up. Rider error. Too much enthusiasm with too little skill, and this fatality wasn't the first on this road this year. As with most single-bike accidents, the rider entered the corner at a speed his brain told him was too fast, stood the bike up and nailed the rear brake. Goodbye.

On the racetrack the rider would have tumbled into the hay bales, visited the ambulance for a strip of gauze and headed back to the pits to straighten his handlebars and think about his mistake. But let's get one thing perfectly clear: the street is not the racetrack. Using it as such will shorten your riding career and keep you from discovering the Pace. The Pace is far from street racing - and a lot more fun.

The Pace places the motorcycle in its proper role as the controlled vehicle, not the controlling vehicle. Too many riders of sport bikes become baggage when the throttle gets twisted - the ensuing speed is so overwhelming they are carried along in the rush. The Pace ignores outright speed and can be as much fun on a Ninja 250 as on a ZX-11, emphasizing rider skill over right-wrist bravado. A fool can twist the grip, but a fool has no idea how to stop or turn. Learning to stop will save your life; learning to turn will enrich it. What feels better than banking a motorcycle over into a corner?

The mechanics of turning a motorcycle involve pushing and/or pulling on the handlebars; while this isn't new information for most sport riders, realize that the force at the handlebar affects the motorcycle's rate of turn-in. Shove hard on the bars, and the bike snaps over; gently push the bars, and the bike lazily banks in. Different corners require different techniques, but as you begin to think about lines, late entrances and late apexes, turning your bike at the exact moment and reaching the precise lean angle will require firm, forceful inputs at the handlebars. If you take less time to turn your motorcycle, you can use that time to brake more effectively or run deeper into the corner, affording yourself more time to judge the corner and a better look at any hidden surprises. It's important to look as far into the corner as possible and remember the adage, "You go where you look."

## ***DON'T RUSH***

The number-one survival skill, after mastering emergency braking, is setting your corner-entrance speed early, or as Kenny Roberts says, "Slow in, fast out." Street riders may get away with rushing into 99 out of 100 corners, but that last one will have gravel, mud or a trespassing car. Setting entrance speed early will allow you to adjust your speed and cornering line, giving you every opportunity to handle the surprise.

We've all rushed into a corner too fast and experienced not just the terror but the lack of control when trying to herd the bike into the bend. If you're fighting the brakes and trying to turn the bike, any surprise will be impossible to deal with. Setting your entrance speed early and looking into the corner allows you to determine what type of corner you're facing. Does the radius decrease? Is the turn off-camber? Is there an embankment that may have contributed some dirt to the corner?

Racers talk constantly about late braking, yet that technique is used only to pass for position during a race, not to turn a quicker lap time. Hard braking blurs the ability to judge cornering speed accurately, and most racers who rely too heavily on the brakes find themselves passed at the corner exits because they scrubbed off too much cornering speed. Additionally, braking late often forces you to trail the brakes or turn the motorcycle while still braking. While light trail braking is an excellent and useful technique to master, understand that your front tire has only a certain amount of traction to give.

If you use a majority of the front tire's traction for braking and then ask it to provide maximum cornering traction as well, a typical low-side crash will result. Also consider that your motorcycle won't steer as well with the fork fully compressed under braking. If you're constantly fighting the motorcycle while turning, it may be because you're braking too far into the corner. All these problems can be eliminated by setting your entrance speed early, an important component of running the Pace.

Since you aren't hammering the brakes at every corner entrance, your enjoyment of pure cornering will increase tremendously. You'll relish the feeling of snapping your bike into the corner and opening the throttle as early as possible. Racers talk about getting the drive started, and that's just as important on the street. Notice how the motorcycle settles down and simply works better when the throttle is open? Use a smooth, light touch on the throttle and try to get the bike driving as soon as possible in the corner, even before the apex,

the tightest point of the corner. If you find yourself on the throttle ridiculously early, it's an indication you can increase your entrance speed slightly by releasing the brakes earlier.

As you sweep past the apex, you can begin to stand the bike up out of the corner. This is best done by smoothly accelerating, which will help stand the bike up. As the rear tire comes off full lean, it puts more rubber on the road, and the forces previously used for cornering traction can be converted to acceleration traction. The throttle can be rolled open as the bike stands up.

This magazine won't tell you how fast is safe; we will tell you how to go fast safely. How fast you go is your decision, but it's one that requires reflection and commitment. High speed on an empty four-lane freeway is against the law, but it's fairly safe. Fifty-five miles per hour in a canyon may be legal, but it may also be dangerous. Get together with your friends and talk about speed. Set a reasonable maximum and stick to it. Done right, the Pace is addicting without high straightaway speeds.

The group I ride with couldn't care less about outright speed between corners; any gomer can twist a throttle. If you routinely go 100 mph, we hope you routinely practice emergency stops from that speed. Keep in mind outright speed will earn a ticket that is tough to fight and painful to pay; cruising the easy straight stuff doesn't attract as much attention from the authorities and sets your speed perfectly for the next sweeper.

## **GROUP MENTALITY**

Straights are the time to reset the ranks. The leader needs to set a pace that won't bunch up the followers, especially while leaving a stop sign or passing a car on a two-lane road. The leader must use the throttle hard to get around the car and give the rest of the group room to make the pass, yet he or she can't speed blindly along and earn a ticket for the whole group. With sane speeds on the straights, the gaps can be adjusted easily; the bikes should be spaced about two seconds apart for maximum visibility of surface hazards.

It's the group aspect of the Pace I enjoy most, watching the bikes in front of me click into a corner like a row of dominoes, or looking in my mirror as my friends slip through the same set of corners I just emerged from.

Because there's a leader and a set of rules to follow, the competitive aspect of sport riding is eliminated and that removes a tremendous amount of pressure from a young rider's ego - or even an old rider's ego. We've all felt the tug of racing while riding with friends or strangers, but the Pace takes that away and saves it for where it belongs: the racetrack. The racetrack is where you prove your speed and take chances to best your friends and rivals.

I've spent a considerable amount of time writing about the Pace (see *Motorcyclist*, Nov. '91) for several reasons, not the least of which being the fun I've had researching it (continuous and ongoing). But I have motivations that aren't so fun. I got scared a few years ago when Senator Danforth decided to save us from ourselves by trying to ban superbikes, soon followed by insurance companies blacklisting a variety of sport bikes. I've seen Mulholland Highway shut down because riders insisted on racing (and crashing) over a short section of it. I've seen heavy police patrols on roads that riders insist on throwing themselves off of. I've heard the term "murder-cycles" a dozen times too many. When we consider the abilities of a modern sport bike, it becomes clear that rider techniques is sorely lacking.

The Pace emphasizes intelligent, rational riding techniques that ignore racetrack heroics without sacrificing fun. The skills needed to excel on the racetrack make up the basic precepts of the Pace, excluding the mind-numbing speeds and leaving the substantially larger margin for error needed to allow for unknowns and immovable objects. Our sport faces unwanted legislation from outsiders, but a bit of throttle management from within will guarantee our future.

## ***THE PACE PRINCIPLES***

Set cornering speed early.  
Blow the entrance and you'll never recover.

Look down the road.  
Maintaining a high visual horizon will reduce perceived speed and help you avoid panic situations.

Steer the bike quickly.  
There's a reason Wayne Rainey works out - turning a fast-moving motorcycle takes muscle.

Use your brakes smoothly but firmly.  
Get on and then off the brakes; don't drag 'em.

Get the throttle on early.  
Starting the drive settles the chassis, especially through a bumpy corner.

Never cross the centerline except to pass.  
Crossing the centerline in a corner is an instant ticket and an admittance that you can't really steer your bike. In racing terms, your lane is your course; staying right of the line adds a significant challenge to most roads and is mandatory for sport riding's future.

Don't crowd the centerline.  
Always expect an oncoming car with two wheels in your lane.

Don't hang off in the corners or tuck in on the straights.  
Sitting sedately on the bike looks safer and reduces unwanted attention. It also provides a built-in safety margin.

When leading, ride for the group.  
Good verbal communication is augmented with hand signals and turn signals; change direction and speed smoothly.

When following, ride with the group.  
If you can't follow a leader, don't expect anyone to follow you when you're setting the pace.

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