

Signs of Caution

Incorrect title used; written title:
Learning to Lea(r)n

I HAVE ALWAYS EMPHASIZED TO MY STUDENTS, seminar attendees, and riders in general that the most important things we can do are to learn how to address our collective skills correctly, constantly practice them, and keep learning. Even as I

strongly recommended these guidelines on a regular basis, I realized I was becoming dangerously close to falling into the "Do as I say, not as I do" category.

The course of choice was Lee Parks' Total Control Advance Riding Clinic. This came with a bonus — Lee would be one of the instructors. I'd heard and read a lot of good things that Lee's course had to offer and was looking forward to it. On the other hand, I was a little nervous as to what the expectations would be. Granted, I'm able to ride fairly well with the skills I've acquired through my riding career including with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF), but I had a feeling this class would require a more elevated skill level than that I was used to. Here was my return to the anxiety of learning. I kept wondering if I would screw up.

There were 17 riders in the class, all aboard various types of machines. For the session I opted to use my Buell S3T since my new Ultra was only 10 days old, and I was still learning the feel of the bike. From Harley touring models and Softails to an array of foreign sportbikes, it was an interesting mix of cycles, riders, and experience. Skill levels ranged from fairly new riders (with two years' experience) to others with over 40. Although most of us were at different levels on different bikes, we all shared the passion of riding and looked forward to the events about to unfold.

We started off in the classroom discussing topics including traction, steering, and setting up for turns. Some of this information was a review for me; the rest was brand new. The approach on turn preparation, working with the correct apexes for a better line of vision through the curves, was different than what we teach in the MSF course. Although I have read about late and early apex turns, some things make more sense when explained in person rather than presented in print. This was one of those topics. Now, I shouldn't say that one curriculum is better than the other. You have to take a lot of things into consideration when reviewing both, like riding style, experience, and capabilities. And since the class, I've been using both approaches.

The other topics Lee covered included maintaining the right attitude and concentration, as well as coping with fear. The attitude and concentration parts were easy to digest; the fear was something I



was feeling prior to riding exercises on the range. For me, the biggest fear was doing poorly or making a mistake and possibly hurting myself. But once I recognized that fear and understood the risk, it was more acceptable and easier to deal with.

The riding exercises started with learning better throttle control and how it affects your suspension and handling. This was a valuable skill to develop. Having better control with speed, whether increasing or decreasing (even with proper brake use), helps with cornering correctly. We then learned how to set up for turns with body positioning and head positioning and how to let the motorcycle do the work around those turns. These exercises were the ones I struggled with a lot in the beginning; they were new skills for me to learn and considerably different from how I've ridden in the past (I never really was much of a knee dragger — until now). Lee was great at picking up my strong and weak points and kept giving pointers on how to improve the exercise on the next pass, as well as encouraging me. It wasn't until some time passed that I realized I was doing exactly what many of my own students do: overthinking the exercise. I was focused on everything I had to do as soon as I left the start point instead of addressing each part of the exercise as it came up. Once I realized that I needed to relearn how to learn, the rest of the pieces started to fall into place. So along with understanding the skills exercises, I gained a better understanding of how my own students feel and why some of them make the mistakes they do.

We finished the day discussing information relating to the importance of suspension adjustment. All in all, the class was well worth the time and money. Lee Parks has put together a great riding program for those from almost any riding level to improve their motorcycle skills. I can also say that the other attending instructors were just as informative and great riders, even without any national championships on their mantles. With these ideas added on as the proverbial new chrome to the bike, I can now tell you to do as I do. So head out there and improve your skills. You'll see how much fun it can be to learn to ride better. **AIM**

For more safety info, check out www.SkilledRider.com.