

**Safety Tips # 29**  
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**“How Do You Get to Carnegie Hall?”**

OK, it's an old joke: While visiting New York City a person asks for directions to Carnegie Hall. And the answer, *of course*, is “Practice, practice, practice.”

And that's the topic for this month's sermon. We all need to practice our riding skills. Yes, even we motorcycle riding trainers need to practice. Perhaps we need to practice even more than others, but that's another discussion for another time.

I ride often. But merely riding a lot is no substitute for dedicated practice *with a purpose in mind*. If we don't use our skills, we will lose them. (Example: Did you learn a foreign language in high school? How well do you speak it now? Getting the point?)

The rider training company for which I work (that would be ABATE of Colorado) offers numerous training courses, for riders of varying levels of skill. There is one (the Basic RiderCourse) that is far more in demand than any of the others. So we instructors tend to have many more opportunities to teach that course than the other ones. When it's time to teach a different course, some brushing up is

definitely called for. After all, we are expected to be able to ride the *perfect* demonstration of each exercise in the courses. And if we don't practice them beforehand, things can get ugly out there on the training range. A bad riding demonstration can result in a disorganized riding exercise with the students getting little or no benefit from their own riding practice. Worse, the students can begin to develop bad habits which can lead to unthinkable situations once they get out of the class and onto the highways.

Alright, so I think we can all agree that instructors have to practice in order to do right by their students. But most people reading this aren't instructors, so let's get back to why riding practice is important for ALL who ride. Author Pat Hahn, in his book *Maximum Control – Mastering Your Heavyweight Bike*, says, “This kind of practice builds muscle and endurance and helps your body develop the memory of the motions. Physical practice helps the motion become unconscious, instinctive, and instantaneous.” These benefits result in better and quicker decisions on the road, which is invaluable because it can mean the difference between crashing and almost crashing. Mr. Hahn recommends, “Every day, before you set out, decide what skill or skill component you'd like to practice during that ride.” “Once a week, at the end of a ride, practice a riding skill for 10 or 20 minutes before parking the bike, such as U-turns, heavy braking, clutch control, whatever. If you can show some improvement or finally get something just right when you're tired, you know that you are on your way to really building that skill.” And that sounds like some good

advice, but make sure that you are not completely fatigued when you are practicing; that's when mishaps occur.

I've ridden almost a half-million miles, and I still practice.

Why? Because it works, and it's fun. And the next time you ride you will feel better about your skills and your bond with your bike.