

Safety Tips #35

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NICE POSTURE!

If you have been reading these articles for a while you already know that I am a motorcycle safety instructor. The most popular course by far is the basic course, so I teach more novices than folks at other levels of skill and experience. Novice riders make lots of errors while they are trying to learn how to ride. (Don't get me wrong – experienced riders make their share of errors as well.) And it's fairly easy to see what type of error they are making. Sometimes it's that they aren't smooth on the throttle. Sometimes it's brake application that is too abrupt. Other times it's turning too wide. Sometimes they miss shifts. Etc., etc.

All trained instructors can see what it was that the student did that *directly* caused a problem. That's the easy part. But many times there is an *underlying* cause, an action/lack thereof which made the student do that other thing which then directly caused the problem; and that underlying thing is not always so obvious.

In my experience, at least nine times out of ten that underlying thing is the rider's posture – the way that the rider is seated on the bike.

Here's an example: beginning riders typically have trouble blending the throttle and the clutch, and they end up

stalling the bike (or worse; use your imagination). Many times those riders release the clutch lever too rapidly and the bike jerks and then stalls. A less experienced instructor might tell the student to release the clutch more slowly and smoothly. But a more experienced instructor might tell the student to keep their eyes up. While both may be correct, one will be far more effective than the other. How will keeping the head and eyes up affect clutch release? And how does this apply to experienced riders who are not in a training course?

Utilizing good riding posture when seated on your bike yields certain desirable results. For one, it gives the rider better balance. For another, it allows for better control operation (for instance, if the riders arms are fully extended all the time, it will be difficult to press on the handgrip in order to make a change of direction; it will certainly necessitate movement of the rider's entire torso to do so, which can other, undesirable effects). Another benefit of good posture is that the rider gets a view of what's happening far down the road, rather than only what's up close; and that can yield fewer unpleasant surprises leading to more safety and confidence. It's also more comfortable and therefore less fatiguing.

What comprises good riding posture? Head and eyes are up. Back is fairly straight. Arms are slightly bent at the elbow. Right wrist is fairly flat, with little bend between the elbow and the knuckles where the fingers join the rest of the hand. Knees should be close to the gas tank. Feet should be in a position to activate the foot controls without too much movement. And when riding fast around turns,

slide those feet back on the pegs so they will not touch the ground at extreme lean angles.

Bikes can be modified to some extent to allow better posture from the rider. Or maybe another bike would fit better.

If you are having some problems with control of your bike, or are having confidence issues about controlling it, maybe it's your riding posture that is a problem. Try having a friend take a few photos from varying angles of you while you are riding the bike, and then review those photos. They may reveal something that's easily correctible and has a big payoff in safety, comfort and riding enjoyment. It's cheap and easy, so give it a try.