

Safety Tips #43

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A Pet Peeve

If you've taken a riding safety course you probably have heard or read the phrase, "Slow, Look, Press, Roll" when learning about the steps in making a turn. I have problems with this, particularly in the way it's often presented to the learner. Yes, most turns do involve those actions. But are they supposed to happen in the sequence in which they are written above?

Let's face it: some turns don't require slowing first. Think of a gradual turn on the interstate highway; usually there's no need to slow down. But, for most turns, slowing first is a great idea. I have no problem with "Slow" coming first in any description of cornering.

Consider "Look." Shouldn't we always be looking all over to identify potential hazards? (Of course.) So there must be something else, some reason in particular to do something more than just to scan for issues. And that would be a little thing called "visual directional control." That's the name for the technique we do after we realize that a bike tends to go where the rider is focusing his/her eyes. Want to go around a turn? Focus your eyes to the end of the turn and that will help direct the bike. It works. But it works for straight paths of travel as well. So we should always be using visual directional control, not only after we slow for a turn. No problem yet....

But then things get sticky. Next, there's "Press." This means press on the handlegrip of the direction of the turn and, presto, *countersteering* occurs, and the bike begins to lean and turn. It works. Sound good so far? Don't answer yet....

And then there's "Roll." This means rolling on the throttle gradually and steadily in order to maintain speed and to keep the

suspension from pitching forward or backward and making the bike unstable. This is a good thing.

So, what's my problem??? It's the idea that "Slow, Look, Press, Roll" is a sequence that should be taught to most riders. It *can* be a sequence that is used in some turns, however, in most cases it results in very poor cornering! Why? Because if a rider presses (begins countersteering and changing direction of the bike) before rolling on the throttle, the result is usually an early apex. An early apex, followed by a throttle roll-on, tends to result in a wide exit while under acceleration. This is not usually a good thing!

A friend and I, both motorcycle safety instructors, did a test. We asked several highly experienced riders to ride a path of travel which involved a straight path which then headed into a curve. In EVERY case in which there was a smooth controlled turn, the experienced riders slowed first, and then rolled the throttle *as* they focused through the turn, and finally pressed the handgrip to make the bike turn. Some of the final three steps happened simultaneously, and NEVER were they in the sequence of slow, then look, then press, then roll.

Then we asked them to try to consciously make the turn by using the four steps *in the sequence in which they are written*. Either they were absolutely unable to do it, or their turns were very ugly, requiring lots of countersteering and throttle adjustments in order to keep control of the bike and stay on the intended path. These were experienced riders, in fact, they were all motorcycle safety instructors!

As safety instructors we must tailor our coaching to the needs of each individual student. Teaching "Slow, Look, Press, Roll" *as a sequence* is a disservice to most students, because it can form poor cornering habits. We should be teaching that these are the things we do for cornering, but they may not happen in the order we see them on paper.

If you are not happy with your cornering, remember the four actions involved, do slow first, and then try the other three steps in

a different order, or simultaneously. (Do this in a place that's safe for practicing.) You may be pleasantly surprised by the results.