

October Safety Article: **Are You On Fire?**

Many years ago, I taught a class of elementary school children about fire safety. It was rewarding as I watched the children explain to me what to do in case their clothes were to accidentally catch fire. They showed me how they fiercely "stop, drop, and roll" as if their lives depended on it, which it very well could! These third graders were well-prepared to save their own lives in case something happened which was beyond their control.

I recalled those third graders as I was recently riding through the hills in the Ozark and Ouachita mountains of Arkansas and finding myself thinking upon a chapter from the book "Proficient Motorcycling" by David L. Hough. In the picture-intensive chapter on cornering habits, Hough provides comprehensive tactics on throttle control, traction, apices, braking, and tempo while managing curves and corners on motorcycle.

There are two things that stuck with me from this chapter. The first is to always look where you want to go, because if you don't, you certainly won't get there. If you plan to go through a curve, look through the curve. If you look at the hills in the distance, into a bluff, or a ditch while you are cornering, call the tow truck. Looking through to where you want to go is always a good practice for everyday life as well, whether it be your career, your home life, or your health.

The other thing that stuck with me had more to do with the "stop, drop, and roll" I mentioned earlier. One doesn't have to be a third grader to understand that if you don't corner well, you may suddenly find yourself trying to stop from riding out of your traffic lane, drop your bike, and roll into oncoming traffic. Stop, drop, and roll may be a survival tactic if you are on fire, but it just doesn't make for safe motorcycling.

Hough suggests the slogan, "Slow, Look, Lean, and Roll" to use as a mantra the next time you find yourself out discovering roads that are as curvy and crooked as malaria germs.

As you approach a curve, you need to **SLOW** your bike. Let off the throttle for the compression braking to take effect on the rear wheel and squeeze on some front brake. Using the braking available on both wheels will help you be able to more aggressively brake without sliding out.

Hough also states that before you dive into a corner, you really ought to **LOOK** and figure out where that road goes. Blind right-hand turns can be tricky, as the angle you need to see around that curve is best found close to the centerline, rather than the right side of your lane (which is one of the reasons group leaders should be on the left). As you look, make sure to actually turn your head to where you are going, which helps provide directional control and a smooth entry into the turn.

When the bike is slowed and positioned for the best view around the curve, and with your nose pointed toward where you are going, it is time to **LEAN** your bike over a bit by applying pressure on the handgrips. Push forward with the hand that is the direction you wish to lean for your turn. Turning right? Push right to lean right. Turning left? Push left. Make sure to synchronize your hands as it isn't uncommon for the opposite hand to be resisting the steering input. If you find this is a struggle, perhaps try relaxing the opposite arm and provide the steering input with one hand. This is something I have found myself to be useful, yet humorous, as it somehow ties in with the old adage of "left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing".

Finally, when the bike is leaned to your desired angle, it is time to easily **ROLL** onto the throttle. The throttle isn't only for speed control, but easing on the throttle actually helps stabilize the lean. Good throttle control is all about managing traction, as well as stabilizing your bike, improving ground clearance and steering. It helps balance weight between front and rear, and helps maximize lean clearance. Ever find yourself grinding your footboards? I know I'm guilty of that! Perhaps this method will help!

While in October, and Fire Prevention Week is celebrated, make sure you check your smoke detectors and teach your kids and grandkids to "Stop, Drop, and Roll". October also provides some wonderful days to get your iron horse out of the stable and enjoy the colors of the leaves on Missouri's backroads and an opportunity for you to practice your "Slow, Look, Lean, and Roll".

Ride safely, arrive alive, and live to ride another day....and "Hey! Let's be CAREFUL out there!"

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