

# The Safety Corner

## CORNERING - A NEW VIEW

By Gary Province

Recently I was reading the local newspaper and I came across a story about a motorcycle fatality. It involved a 65-year-old man and his wife riding a Gold Wing. He failed to make the curve and struck a tree. Unusual you say! Unfortunately NOT. It has become the norm. As of now, the number one cause of accidents involving motorcycles over 1000 ccs is failing to make a turn. What does this say about us as riders? We need help with cornering and other riding skills.

In October 99, I took Keith Code's Cornering School at the Talladega Grand Prix racetrack. Yes, I took it on the Gold Wing. They called it the Mother Ship, as it was the biggest thing there. Just me, one Harley Sportster and all those crotch rockets. This is not an advertisement for Keith Code's course but it is an advertisement for additional Rider Education. The Code class was awesome. Alternating from the classroom to the track to practice the riding skills taught in the classroom was great. Each student had an instructor riding on the track to monitor progress and coach him or her. Yes, there were ladies in my class and they rode quite well. By the end of the day I was bone tired, since I had been there from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. What does this have to do with a 65-year-old rider and his co-rider, and the fact that the cause for most motorcycle accidents is failing to make a turn? The course teaches you the basics for cornering. And I learned a lot. I have a new appreciation for the cornering technique.

Let's take a new look at the **Slow, Look, Lean and Roll** steps of cornering. No it has not changed, but I want to share some ideas I got from the course. They are very thought provoking, and can further your knowledge of cornering. How do you accomplish the task of cornering?

First, let me digress a little before I discuss the first step – **slow**. What is your job in a corner? I know it sounds foolish to you and it did to me but our only job is to relax and control the throttle in the turn. If you are doing anything else you are cornering incorrectly. Think about this part of the technique! Once you are in the turn your job is to Roll on the throttle. No adjustments in direction or braking should be required if you have done your job correctly. You must relax and be as neutral as you want your co-rider to be in a corner. Any tension you feel will be transmitted to the motorcycle, thus possibly affecting it. Try it, you'll see what I mean.

I started with the final step, "**roll**" to help you understand the objective of planning a successful corner. Again, no change in the technique, just a refinement that will allow you to know where you will be in a corner every time.

The first step of the technique is **SLOW**. That is, **SLOW** to an entry speed. It is a speed, which will allow you to accelerate, or at least maintain your speed through the corner. Of course, you must know your limits (skills), the roadway and your motorcycle. Now, here is what I learned in the course. As you approach the corner, don't use your brakes to adjust the speed. Use the roadway and engine. You may need to down shift to the appropriate gear depending on your entry speed. This is a real test of your cornering judgement skills. Most of you will over speed the turn and need to use the brakes as a crutch. Generally this slows you too much and then you come out of the curve much slower than required. It is also harder on the brakes, engine and drive train. With a little practice you can be entering curves without using the brakes as a first resort and attaining the proper Entry Speed. Remember, when practicing, if you get into an over speed situation use your brakes, gently. No accidents please. As we gain experience using this method, your technique will be smooth and controlled, as long as your **LOOKING** well ahead. The next step in the cornering technique, but you knew that.

Based on research done by the Code group, it has been determined that **90+%** of the riders look and lean simultaneously. Think about this. How can you know where you want to go, or the required lean angle, if you don't look before you enter the corner? Remember visual directional control. Again this is elementary, but very true. You must separate the look / lean steps of the cornering technique. There needs to be a defined look before the motorcycle is leaned. (In your car, have you ever completed all of the braking and looked through the turn before you turned the steering wheel?) Practice looking and then leaning for turns.

Exaggerate the steps to insure separation. If you don't look **BEFORE** you lean, most of the time you will make a midcourse correction in the curve. What was your only job in a curve?

The last step to review in the cornering technique is **LEAN**. How do you lean the motorcycle and how quickly is this done? Some riders slowly enter corner and never seem to get the motorcycle leaned over. In fact, the longer you take setting the lean angle the less likely you are to predict precisely where you will exit the corner. You should look at where you want to go, or to the exit of the curve, and then quickly set the lean angle to accomplish the desired turning radius. Note the separation of the **LOOK and LEAN** steps of the technique.

How do you lean a motorcycle? You press on the handlebar in the direction of the curve. In other words "Press right, go Right", "Press left, go left". The duration and quickness of the press determines the arc of the curve. During the leaning step make sure your body remains one with the motorcycle. This is not a swerve but a turn. The sooner you place the motorcycle at the proper lean angle the sooner it stabilizes. Once you set the lean angle, then you can start doing your only job in a curve - relaxing and **Rolling** the throttle to at least maintain your speed or accelerate through the curve.

I hope this article offers you a different perspective to your cornering technique. You can know within inches where you will exit with this technique. Take an MSF Experienced Riders Course and practice this technique and let me know how you fare.

*Gary Province*

*Former Assistant National Director - Rider Education*

