



STREET SKILLS by Jon DeVecchio

This Is The Seat

Text by: Jon DeVecchio

"Street Skills" is a feature to get you reflecting on your riding skills and habits. Each article will give you something to think about or work on to sharpen your riding skills for more safety and enjoyment. The articles are written by Jon DeVecchio, the author of Motorcycling streetSkills Flashcards and host of the streetSkills Motorcycle Safety Podcast. Visit www.streetskills.net for more information.

straighter back can help take the weight off your arms in that case.

It seems almost ridiculous to write an article about sitting on a motorcycle. There's only one way to sit on a motorcycle, right? Sure, stunters have figured out many ways to sit on a motorcycle. However, I'll go out on a limb and say that the majority of us sit with our butt on the seat, our hands on the grips and our feet on the foot pegs.

As an instructor, I have watched people get on and off a motorcycle from the wrong side. Some have forgotten to put the side stand down when dismounting. While I haven't seen anyone sit backwards yet, I have told students their open-face helmet was on reversed. Eventually, we all get it right. Or do we?

Over time, many riders take for granted riding posture and the benefits of proper fit on a motorcycle. Perhaps riders are unaware that a motorcycle can be custom

fit or they simply trust the manufacturer's placement of the controls. It's even likely some choose the "cool" look over comfort.

What are the advantages of good posture? The answer is comfort and safety. If you're uncomfortable, you're more likely to focus on discomfort than riding environment. So what exactly should you strive for in your posture?

Starting from the top, your head and eyes should be looking up. Not up to the sky, but down the road so you can see what's up ahead. Your back should be relatively straight, perhaps even a slight arch. Over a long ride hunching can be tiring or even painful. Shoulders and arms should be relaxed with a slight bend in your arms. Tense riding makes it more difficult for your body to control the bike with finesse.

Often riders (especially those on sport bikes) have their elbows full lock straight, as if they were holding up their body. A

Another downside to straight arms on the bars is that the rider has more difficulty "pressing" the handgrips or "turning" the handlebars to effectively steer the motorcycle.

Ergonomic changes that can improve upper posture include replacing the handlebar with one that brings the grips closer to the rider and bar risers. Bar risers come in several varieties. The idea behind risers is that they are designed to lift the bars up, and in some cases rearward, to bring the stock bar closer to the rider.

A closer look at the hands requires they be curled on the grips, but not overly tight. Needless to say, you should keep both hands on the bars. If you grip too tightly you may lose some finesse, get numb hands, or make it more difficult for the front wheel to soak up bumps. However, don't hold on so lightly that you may lose your grip.

20

STREET SKILLS

A rider's wrists should be in flat position. A good way to illustrate a flat wrist position is to set your palm and forearm on a table. Next, make a fist and rest it on the table with your forearm. That is the flat wrist position that you should use on the throttle. It's about a quarter turn or twist of the throttle. Riding around at steady speed, regardless of what gear you are in, you're usually about quarter turn/twist. If you have too high a wrist position, you make reaching for the brake lever more challenging. Too low and you risk numbness and carpal tunnel syndrome.

The fix for improper wrist position can be as simple as placing your hand on the throttle where it provides the flat position while riding a steady speed. However, rotating the throttle assembly slightly on the handlebar might also help. Another trick I've used is to rotate the handlebar up or down in the risers to find the sweet spot where my hands lay correctly on the bars in the ideal position.

Working down to the lower half of the body, your knees should be in against the tank. While racers and track day junkies "hang off" or "drag a knee", it's hardly necessary to ride the twisties; it's a skill developed to ride at the highest level in our sport. Reasons to keep your knees in

include better balance, leg grip on the tank for body position changes, and staying in position under hard braking so that your arms don't have to do all the work.

Lastly, your feet should be placed with the ball of your foot on the peg. If you keep the balls of your feet on the pegs, you are less likely to catch a toe on the road in corners. Also, it allows for more pressing control on the pegs during cornering when one wants to shift weight. Of course, when you are using the foot controls you need to anchor your heels on the pegs for those maneuvers.

Other modifications that can make you more comfortable on your motorcycle include windscreen changes, seat adjustments or changes, and lower foot pegs. I've discovered that there is a solution for just about any discomfort if you do some research. Here are some examples of life-savers for me, but they required thinking outside the box:

I was having awful wind buffeting problems on a motorcycle. My head was bouncing around like a balloon. My solution was a larger screen with a bracket that allowed me to change the angle. Without that bracket I'd have had to sell the motorcycle.

People like to complain about motor-

cycle seats being uncomfortable. I'll admit some are better than others. People spend hundreds on a more comfortable seat, when I find all that is necessary to prevent monkey butt and soreness is wicking underwear.

My legs were really sore after a day ride on a new motorcycle. I bought 1" lower pegs and the problem disappeared.

I had a bikini screen that looked awesome, but after all day on the bike, the wind noise it produced was deafening. I sold it on the internet.

Two hours into a four-day trip, I realized my hands were more numb than I recall ever experiencing. I swapped my gloves and the numbness went away! The offending gloves had a really tight gauntlet band that was cutting off the circulation.

Please keep in mind that any modifications you make to your motorcycle may not be safe or effective. Seek guidance from a qualified mechanic when necessary.

To wrap this up, go after that nagging problem preventing you from fully enjoying the ride. Be it bars, peg position, sore tailbone or numb hands. Do some research. Try a few things and see if you can make posture improvements. You'll literally be in a better position to enjoy the ride and focus on hazards if you do.