



A.C.E. the Corners

Text by Jon DeVecchio

Riding corners on a motorcycle is not fun. To be more specific, corners are not fun for a large number of motorcyclists. The majority of single-vehicle motorcycle crashes happen in curves. What does that tell us? Riders are attracted to corners like a moth is to a flame.

One can speculate that corner-crashing riders either overestimate their skills or have legitimate misfortunes such as loose gravel when the road bends. Research suggests that rider error is most to blame. Think about the last time you were startled in a corner. Were you riding beyond your skill level? Distracted? Or was it a genuine surprise?

I couldn't possibly top what has already been published regarding cornering technique and skill. So this article will explain what worked for me and how you might benefit from my experience.

I believe that a rider cannot simply decide one day to be more skilled in the corners, snap their fingers and it's done. I'd also assert that even using "techniques" learned by a rider still doesn't mean they have acquired skills.

I've made informal observations on how quickly someone can go from deciding they want to ride a motorcycle to them really being comfortable. My role as an educator is to facilitate shortcuts to learning. Instructional courses, text, audio and video can help the shortcutting. But from what I've experienced personally, nothing can bring a rider to absolute riding bliss without time in the saddle. Add to that countless twisties for those that enjoy cornering.

Some call it the "panic test"—two simple and priceless words to any rider with cornering aspirations. The panic test is a good way to decide if you have mastered the curves. If you're not approaching 99.9% of your corners with absolute confidence and control, you may be riding over your head. A good ride for me is zero panic moments. A bad ride for me is one panic moment. Any more than one and I'm certainly riding like a fool and have no business being on that machine.

Here is how to A.C.E. the corners with Activity, Curves, and Effort:

Activity

The first step to becoming an ace in the corner is to ride often. But even that may not be enough. Motorcycle choice can seriously

affect your skill development. My first pick was a small cruiser which provided four years of riding experience, but little cornering growth. My next bike was a gigantic Kawasaki Concours, which was less than ideal for one's first sporting model. It wasn't until purchasing my VStrom 650 that I had the desire and a suitable motorcycle to practically build my cornering skills.

Only through substantial practice can you truly find trust in your motorcycle and the ability to control it with precision. Trust inspires confidence.

Physical motor skills take time to develop and require feedback from the activity to get right. Talking or thinking about riding your motorcycle isn't as beneficial as actually doing it. So to improve quickly, start by doubling your annual mileage.

Curves

In addition to riding often, set a goal to seek out curves of varying complexity. Many riders live in places where the roads are purposefully designed to be as straight as possible to facilitate traffic flow and increase safety. It's typical for riders to have a "favorite corner" on their commute because there are so few in populated areas. That means most of us have to actively find the curves.

Ask other riders where the good roads are. A quick internet search will reveal excellent roads in your vicinity. Once you have chosen some tantalizing routes, get on your bike and explore. Day or overnight trips to hilly places can expose you to more curves in one weekend than you might experience in a whole riding season in your immediate riding area.

Find curvy roads to practice skills. It doesn't happen instantly, but eventually you'll be more confident in the corners and panic moments will drop off.

Effort

You have to want it. Acing the corners requires effort and a lifelong learning attitude. Basic instruction teaches the "slow, look, press, roll" technique. While you can corner skillfully using only these basic actions, variations offer skill-builders more options. Here's the fundamental technique:

- **Slow** entering the corner. This can be accomplished by smoothly rolling off the throttle, downshifting, braking, or a combination of these.
- **Look** through the turn and seek your exit.
- **Press** the hand grip in the direction of the turn while looking for the exit. The press is only required to initiate lean.

Once the motorcycle is in the turn it will require a stabilizing press in the opposite direction to exit the corner.

- **Roll** on the throttle just a bit entering the corner. As the exit appears roll on gradually to straighten out. Powering out of a curve offers the most fun. A simple rule of thumb is to enter slow/exit fast.

This technique seems simple enough, but there is much more to it. For example, improper body positioning and poor cornering "lines" can stifle your advancement. Break down the steps and study them.

From my perspective, there is no single resource, book or course that will fit you perfectly. I read books, became an instructor, took advanced training, and devoured magazines to discover compatible riding styles. Even the pros take fragments of techniques that work for them to create their cornering mosaic.

One more suggestion is to be accepting of advice and criticism from others. Humility and receptiveness were instrumental to my progress. It also took an open mind. Before taking the MSF's Advanced RiderCourse, I was comfortable with my technique. Resistant to change initially, my eventual objectivity led me to new techniques that revolutionized my cornering ability.

Final Thoughts

Those times when you feel "one with the motorcycle" are special. Most of us pursue that connection when we throw a leg over our machines. The most exciting occasion to feel that bond is in the corners. However, if you find yourself scared or nervous in the corners on a regular basis, you're not there yet.

All three elements of the A.C.E. concept of Activity, Curves, and Effort are necessary to become highly skilled and comfortable in the corners. Remember to ride often, hit lots of curves, and apply knowledge to execute flawless corners. If any one part is missing you may be obstructing your growth.

Even though I'm comfortable in the curves and thrilled with each turn, I still recognize there is a "next step" in my improvement. Together let's turn those corners into learning opportunities instead of danger zones.

Street Skills is a regular feature in Motorcycle Times that highlights safety techniques and practices that could save your life! Visit StreetSkills.net to find more ways to access Jon's knowledge and tips.