



Road Master

Text by Jon DeVecchio

Looking back on my fifteen years of riding, I'm somewhat embarrassed. I recall statements or actions over the years that revealed my inexperience. I surely repeated information without fully understanding it. There were also occasions when I was certain something were true, only later to realize my ignorance. But at the time I was talking the talk and thought my actions were appropriate. Even today my thinking occasionally wanders down the wrong road. Proficiency is an illusion.

Incompetence vs. Mastery

When it comes to operating a motorcycle, most people will overestimate their skill level. We commonly refer to this as someone "in over their head". After several years of riding, I was fortunate to discover that increased knowledge lead to more questions than answers. This isn't an easy awakening. Incompetent riders have little way of knowing they are incompetent. Their feedback loop is inefficient and distorted.

It's basic psychology. Incompetent people cannot recognize their lack of skill without effort. Because they don't know what good skills look like, they cannot recognize genuine skill in others. Thankfully, individuals can recognize their lack of skill after exposure to instructional activities. This certainly describes my progression from beginner level to mastery.

Please don't misinterpret the term "mastery" as knowing it all. Masters aren't experts because they have learned

everything there is to know about a subject. They are masters because they realize there is always more to discover on a topic. For motorcyclists, understanding that there is more to learn fuels peak performance at any skill level. Knowledge provides something immediate to work on and propels us in the direction of mastery.

Becoming a Master Rider

How can you become a master rider? Accelerate the transition by overcoming the human tendency to limit growth. Keeping an open mind when exposed to ideas is key to success.

However, success is only a one shot deal. Examples of success can include a fun ride, years of experience, being crash-free or passing a skills course. Mastery on the other hand is the constant pursuit of excellence. Just because a rider has been successful in the past does not guarantee future success.

In order to defeat incompetence, a motorcyclist must realize the difference between past and future performance. Since skill development activities lead us to improvement, a personalized self-study program is a good start.

The following are some avenues toward motorcycle mastery:

Pursue New Knowledge

It's not for lack of resources that riders become stagnant. There are many books written on riding skills. Authors agree on many concepts and there is some redundancy. But they all stress different things and often share their own unique insight. Buy these books. Highlight the pages. Take notes and compare. Then try what you learned while riding your motorcycle.

Every motorcycling magazine has a skills or safety column. These are generally short articles prompting readers to move in a certain direction. Take action from them.

There is also a variety of advanced riding courses available, in addition to the basic licensing ones. I'll bet you can find multiple course offerings within a few hours from home if you look into it.

Keep in mind that there is no definitive "winner" in the riding skills debate. Various riders may choose this or that from certain experts. What works for you may be totally different from someone else. There isn't just one path to skilled riding for everyone. By exposing yourself to many different ideas is how you will form your own rider's profile.

Review Previous Knowledge

Experience needs to intersect with an appropriate technique. A novice's exposure to an advanced skill will be difficult to acquire. But as a rider's abilities increase, it will be easier to attach higher level information to previous learning. This explains why some people take the same advanced skills course repeatedly, yet still come away with satisfying improvements.

There are no shortcuts. There is no magic wand. With time and experience certain techniques become more relevant. It's not possible to be exposed to a technique once and master it. Sometimes people reject a technique at first, only later to find value in it. Don't assume that because you are aware of counter steering or trail braking that you fully benefit from it. Riding skills are not like on/off switches, but more like the dimming style. We progress along a spectrum. Revisit techniques as your miles accumulate.

Even top experts have embraced previously rejected or undervalued techniques. A good example is Nick Lenatsch's Pace street riding technique update to Pace 2.0. Had Nick simply stopped pursuing mastery with the original Pace concept, he might have never finished his masterpiece contribution.

Create Knowledge

This one may be more difficult for the average rider. Motorcycle technology is advancing rapidly. Our roadways are changing in dramatic ways. What knowledge will be required to promote rider enjoyment and safety in the future? Maybe you'll have the next big idea.

Looking at motorcycling from a user perspective is much different than an instructor's view. Not only does teaching provide an external look into proper riding, but it builds the foundation for advanced study. In my opinion, future experts in our field will continue to come from humble beginnings teaching the basics. Perhaps now you're ready to become a certified instructor.

Bottom Line

In my opinion, riding is more of a personal journey than a pastime. In

***“Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance.”
-Confucius***

order to do it well and for a long period of time, attention must be focused on self-reflection and growth.

Regardless of the time or distances ridden, mastering the ride has more to do with a positive attitude toward learning

than simply racking up the miles.

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