

Hi HOG members,

Earlier you should have received an e-mail announcing slow speed training. In that e-mail I said that we would be sending out some material for you to read before you come to practice. Here it is. Before we get to that I want to encourage all of our members to come. Are you a new rider? Then please attend. This will be easier to teach if you do not have bad habits to break. Are you an experienced rider and have been dreaming about entering cone course competition? The techniques are the same and this will be great practice to brush up on your skills.

There are only three controls that are used in slow speed riding. The throttle, clutch and rear brake. Let's go through each of these.

> Throttle. Your Harley has an idle speed of around 1000 rpm. If you try to take off without giving it any gas sometimes it might go but usually your bike will stall and fall over. The same thing happens when you are making slow turns. Sometimes you might make it but other times your engine will stall, and you will drop the bike. A good safe range is 1500 to 2000 rpm. In case you don't have a tachometer that means just bring the throttle up a little. I was always taught that upon entering a turn to decrease your speed. One way to do that is to decrease the throttle. That works great at road speed but will be your enemy at slow speed. So, bring your throttle up and keep it there all day. If you would like a demonstration of this, please go to my Facebook page and watch Nic and I chase each other around the parking lot. Turn up the sound and listen to how our motorcycles stay at a constant throttle sound.

> Clutch. This is the real control of your bike. Yes, throttle and rear brake are important but as we have talked about your throttle should be constant all day. The throttle gives power to the rear wheel and that is what will keep your bike upright. That is really an important point, so I am going to repeat that. Power to the rear wheel keeps you upright! If your throttle is set to a constant 1500 rpm then your speed will be controlled by how much you use your clutch. When you are sitting at a stop light your bike is still. When the light turns green you bring your throttle up, let the clutch out and the bike moves. Same with slow speed. If the throttle is at a constant setting, then pulling the clutch in will decrease your speed. Letting the clutch out will increase your speed. In the middle of letting the clutch out or pulling it back in is a zone where the clutch is engaged or disengaged. That zone is called the friction zone. I really don't want to get into a "how a clutch works" discussion but you do have to understand that at slow speed you will be controlling the bike using the friction zone. During class you will hear this term a lot.

> Rear brake. Let's talk about bad habits. We all have them. Some of us were taught them and never learned to stop doing them as our skills improved. Maybe we sort of got rid of them but still use them in certain cases to feel more comfortable or for more control of our bikes. Ok that was a confusing statement so let me clear that up. I have never been to a class that didn't teach you a bad habit. So please don't think by my following examples that I am throwing shade on the organization that uses bad habits as a teaching tool. The MSF uses a bad habit all the time. It is called duck walking the bike. If you have been to that course, then you have used that technique to learn to ride your bike. It is extremely effective in building your confidence that you are in control and can

balance the bike at slow speed. By the end of the course you should have gained your motorcycle operator's license. Think about that, in two days you can ride a bike. Hopefully you progress and have confidence in your control and feel like you will never use duck walking again. Until you get to the parking lot. I still sometimes duck walk my bike. So here is my bad habit that I need to teach you. Cover your rear brake. The rear brake is used to slow your speed normally, but I would like to change how you think about that. Let's think of covering the rear brake to mean drag the rear brake. Umm dad always told me that was bad. Wear out the brakes he would say. So, you have to learn to drag the rear brake to give yourself time and distance to transition the motorcycle from going in one direction to go another direction. Do you need to drag the brake all the time? To start with yes. Much like learning to duck walk, dragging the rear brake will move you faster along in building your skills in slow speed maneuvers. When you master the drills and know what the bike is going to do then it will be time to learn the drills without brakes. You should at that point have your turning points and speed control figured out. The third and last evolution will be to truly cover the brake. Your foot will rest gently on the rear brake not on the foot board or peg. If you rest your foot on the board and decide that you need your brake then that takes time to move to the brake. A sense of urgency will ensue, and you will hit the brake too hard causing the bike to become unsettled and bob. That will throw your line of travel off. A foot that is resting on the brake can apply light pressure and avoid unsettling the bike. You may have noticed that I just talked about using the brake to control bike speed. Sometimes you will just have too much speed to be controlled by the clutch.

Lets recap: leave the throttle constant a little above idle. You want constant power to the rear wheel. The more of the three controls that you don't have to think about allows you to concentrate on other things. Drag the rear brake. Again, since it is delivering a constant drag it will slow your bike when you pull in the clutch. If the rear brake and throttle are constant the only thing you have to worry about is how much to let the clutch in or out. The clutch is your speed control. The faster you learn clutch control the faster you will learn slow speed control.

An important thing to consider is your comfort. You really need to be comfortable. On the road I want to lean back and put my feet up on the highway bars and relax. That is an inappropriate setup for slow speed. At road speed the bike will use momentum to remain upright with little input from the rider. Slow speed requires constant input. The motorcycle has been pretty well thought out. Most of the weight is near the front of the bike. A triangle is formed with the fork, gas tank and engine. By leaning forward on your seat a few things happen with the control of the bike. First of all, you become part of that triangle. By moving your weight to the front of the bike you will gain stability. When you lean back the weight is transferred towards the rear and the bike is less stable. By leaning forward, you lower your center of gravity. In a tight turn a lowered center of gravity will ease your mind versus sitting straight up. In the upright position you will feel like you are falling and then you will pull in the clutch and drop the bike. So, let's test this. Stand up on one leg maybe even close your eyes. Not so scary. Try climbing to the top of a tall ladder. As you ascend the ladder how do you feel? Are you brave enough to close your eyes and stand on one leg? Do you feel comfortable as you descend the ladder? The last thing that happens when you lean forward is that it is easier to turn the handlebars. You have physically shortened the distance between you and the bars. If you're leaned back, you may not even be able to turn your bars to full lock. Finally, I have learned that raising your elbows into the attack position will help you to be able to go to full handlebar lock

without interference from your body. Umm ok self-disclosure I am a little plump. When you lean forward the arm that is extended has plenty of room to get to the lock position. The arm that is coming in toward you however will hit you in the ribs. By raising your elbows level, the incoming arm will not hit you in the ribs. For practice get the broom out and sit in a chair. Place the broom at the level that you feel your handlebars should be. Turn the broomstick like you would your handlebars. Now try it by raising your elbows up. How far should you lean forward? Well, I have heard and been told of many different ways and here are a couple. If you're sitting on the seat, you are too far back. You can stop leaning forward when your helmet hits the windscreen. In other words, everyone that I have had this discussion with wants you to radically lean forward. If you watch any of the well-known YouTube bloggers or watch cone competitions it doesn't seem like they are that far forward. What you need to focus on is their seats. They will be raised in the back forcing a forward riding position. Most of the big cruising bikes have handlebars that are very comfortable on the highway. They are low and can cause interference with turning the bike to full lock by hitting your knee. So be prepared to flair your knee out of the way when going into a tight turn.

Tight turns are a lot of fun and can be performed in a few ways. One of the first drills that we will learn is how to ride at a slow speed in a straight line. That technique can easily be used in a turn. If speed is added, then you will have to lean the bike. How tight and how much of a lean you can perform depends on what type of bike you ride. I ride a big cruiser so let's use that as an example. The tightest turn for the cruiser is 15 feet. Mind you at full lock and lean. So how do you lean the bike? Apply the techniques that I have previously described. Everything builds onto itself. Put the bike in first gear. Have a constant throttle. Drag the brake. Stay in the friction zone. Lean forward with the elbows in the attack position. While going in a straight line obtain the speed that you want to use to make the turn. Use patience to get to the turn. Upon arrival at the turn use your clutch to control your speed, NEVER pulling the clutch in during your turn. If you feel like you're falling let the clutch out putting more power to the rear wheel. The bike will straighten up with the added power to the wheel. Ok I got off track there a bit with NEVER pull the clutch in while you are in the turn. So, let's get back to making the turn. You are at the right speed and have finally gotten to the turn. Turn your handlebars and look in the direction you want to go. It really is that simple to make a tight turn. To gain full lean do everything above but when you turn your handlebars turn them to full lock and prepare for the bike to lean or fall toward the turn. Do not lean with the bike. That is a habit that works well at road speed. At slow speed however your mind will think I am falling so let's pull the clutch in and drop the bike. Stay upright while letting the bike fall under you. In other words, the bike leans - you do not. Stay on top of the bike. Get your broom out again and practice not leaning in the turn. As you turn the broom let your inside arm drop and bring it close to your body. Your outer arm will then go up and away from your body. It kind of feels like rowing a canoe. To recap keep the throttle constant and drag the brake. The only two variables are the clutch and turning the handlebars. You might also prepare for a scraping sound and a big smile.

Bike protection. Motorcycle Drop Guards, Harley flat bars and pipe collars seem to be popular options for those that want to have protection all the time. Those are costly but do a good job protecting your expensive ride. For those that want to not have a permanent attachment to their bike, then use anything that puts a barrier between the chrome and pavement. Pool noodles, pipe insulation, painters tape and duct tape on the plastic parts. How about removing your saddle bags.

Set up. Slow speed control takes patience to succeed. We talked already about setting your throttle above idle (around 1500 rpm). When you approach a drill it is tempting to get up to what you are dreading the most, so that you can just get it over with. That doesn't work very well because you will let the clutch fully out losing the friction zone. Or maybe you will open the throttle a little more to get to the drill. Now you are at the drill with too much speed and will need to slow down. Do you pull the clutch in and take power away from the rear wheel? You might make it from sheer coasting but that will be poor technique. Do you keep the clutch out leaving power to the rear wheel and use a lot of brake? Those are poor choices. So here is what you should do. Let's say the drill is a turn. Upon approach to the drill go to the speed that you want to take the turn at. To do that drag the rear brake, set the throttle to 1500 rpm and keep the clutch in the friction zone. That should be the same technique for EVERYTHING. Lastly be patient and wait for the drill to come to you. When it does all that is left to do is turn the handlebars and go around the corner. When you get to the drill that you are going to, consider it over with and look for the next place you want to go. You heard right get to the turn at the speed you want and start looking for the next turn. If you concentrate on where you are at then there is a great temptation to look at the cone or ground in front of you. You'll pull the clutch in, lose power to the rear wheel and drop the bike. That occurs partially because your brain is saying, "Hey we made it to the point we are staring at which is the cone in front of me. Now what? Let's pull in the clutch and stop."

The course will be as follows but may change without notice. Three classes will be given with make-up practice sessions given throughout the summer. Tests will be given during the class and practice sessions. Upon successful completion of the tests, you will have earned the right to wear a patch.

Class 1, Start and stops, slow speed control, slow speed drag race, and the box. Test #1 cone course with a 90-degree turn. Test #2 turn 90 degrees from a stop.

Class 2, Test #3 cone weave. #4 offset cone weave. 22-foot u-turn. Test #5 Intersection.

Class 3, 20-foot U-turn and introduction to 20-foot figure 8.

Classes will be held on Sunday afternoons at 1pm.

March 9th, which is daylight savings time.

April 6th.

May 4th.

Requirements for attending this class.

Be a National and Chapter HOG member.

Wear a Dot helmet.

Gloves

Boots that cover the ankles.

Jeans or riding pants.

Eye protection.

Recommended but not required:

Have a full tank of gas.

Wear a coat, riding jacket or shirt to cover your arms.

Bring water. This style of riding is fatiguing. So take breaks and drink plenty of water.

Don't worry about the completion of the drills. Practice sessions will be available to make them up. The goal is to make you an awesome rider. If you can't master a drill leave it and move on to something else. Sometimes we just need a short break from the task and upon return we succeed. Also please remember to thank Nic Lowther for letting us use the Teddy Morris Renegade Harley Davidson parking lot. If it is a pretty day and you want to get a head start on these drills, then please call me. Hope to see you soon at the March class.

Wil 417-840-5915.