

# Wet Weather Riding

## Introduction

This is a subject that doesn't come up that often since it can be difficult getting people to ride their bikes when the rain starts coming down. However, riding in these conditions can be challenging and fun. Here are some points you may wish to consider the next time you are riding on wet roads.

The main objective for avoiding unwanted slips and slides is to ride smoothly. This involves developing your riding plan early so that rapid braking, accelerating or quick changes in direction are not required.

## Cornering

Your motorcycle is most stable when traveling upright, in a straight line, at a constant speed with the engine just pulling. To maintain maximum stability when negotiating a corner you should try to comply with as many of these elements as possible. While cornering, *upright*, and *in a straight line*, are out so what we have left is *constant speed* with the *engine just pulling*.

If you negotiate a turn on a motorcycle and maintain the throttle position that gave you constant speed on the straight, you will slow down as you go through the corner. The main reason for this is that while cornering you are using more of the side tread of the tire which has a smaller radius. To maintain constant speed through the corner you must roll-on the throttle. Your motorcycle was designed to drive through turns. Applying the throttle early settles the suspension, unloads the front and enables you to feel more accurately what the motorcycle is doing. With the correct amount of roll-on the bike should be operating in the mid-point of its suspension travel with approximately 40% - 60% weight distribution front to rear. This complies with the elements described above and allows your suspension to work effectively in order to maintain maximum stability. On wet roads this roll-on should be smooth, even, and constant through the corner.

All braking and gear changing should be done on the approach when the bike is upright, before you enter the turn. To properly drive the corner the bike will be slowest at the entry. Sounds obvious, but having to roll the throttle off while in a corner blows away our *constant speed*, loads up the front end and unsettles the bike, thus compounding the chance of an unrecoverable front-end slide.

Developing the habit of selecting an entry speed that allows you to ride all curves pays dividends as follows:

1. You will be able to stop the bike safely, on your side of the road, in the distance you can see to be clear.

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2. You will be able to adjust your exit speed as the curve, and view, opens up.
3. You will also be able to negotiate the whole curve within your own limits.
4. You will build on your confidence because you won't be frightening yourself all the time.
5. The time it takes you to travel from the entry to the exit will be the same as the person who ran in too fast, but you will be safer, in total control and happier.

Road surface is obviously of paramount importance in the wet, especially through a corner. Recognizing slippery surfaces early is preferable. Patches of shiny tarmac, drain covers and mud are obvious ones, but also just as problematic are surface changes. The high grip surface and grooving used on some roads and curves are good examples. The speed and lean angle you may have chosen for the traction available on these surfaces may be safe while it lasts but, when you exit, the high grip surface usually reverts to the normal, black and 'slippery when wet' stuff. Think about that one.

### Passing

As mentioned earlier, abrupt use of the throttle should be avoided. This means that passing another vehicle in the rain or on wet surfaces needs to be planned so that it can be carried out smoothly.

Note: Remember, that most roads are crowned to a certain degree to expedite water drainage when the surface becomes wet.

Regaining your side of the road after passing can be especially dangerous in the wet. White lines and debris brushed into the center of the road provide a very slippery surface to cross. In this case, regaining your side of the road on a closed throttle is best avoided. It is not desirable to have the bike's weight biased on (toward) the front tire while crossing this slippery section. Waiting for a passing opportunity that allows you to ride over a relatively clean crown of the road is much safer.

### Braking

Extra emphasis should be placed on the smooth operation of the controls. Under braking, as the weight of the bike and rider moves forward, the front tire makes the transition from unloaded to loaded. Make this change too quickly and the front won't be able to cope with the sudden requirement for additional traction. Taking up the 'slack' smoothly and then applying pressure progressively will allow you to brake harder and also feel the amount of grip you have to play with. Using the back brake settles the rear and plays a large part in how the weight is distributed during braking - which should only be done in a straight line!

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Due to the loss of braking ability on wet surfaces, good forward observation is even more important. Also, choose the best section of road to brake on. Think about where traction will be compromised (e.g. traffic lights - the center of the road is sometimes very slippery due to engine oil dripping from stationary vehicles).

### **What Else?**

Plan your ride and think about some of the conditions that you can expect to encounter. For example, if you go on a ride up to Yarnell, AZ via the Yarnell hill on a wet August day you can expect some interesting conditions. Wet leaves, mud and gravel washed from the banks, but it's monsoon season and it's raining - what did you expect?

Some other things to consider:

1. The road is the most slippery in the first half hour after the rain starts.
2. It is preferable that the road is completely wet. Patches of dry road make the surface very variable in terms of how much traction is available.
3. Riding from a dry area into rain should be treated with a great deal of caution. Having covered a few miles in the dry and established a rhythm it may be difficult to snap out of this immediately and re-adapt to the new conditions.

In addition to your wits and ability some other assets are also required for optimum safety on wet roads:

1. Good tires, correctly inflated with plenty of tread.
2. Appropriate clothing. Being cold and wet will distract you from the job at hand.
3. A clean visor, in good condition. Rain will cling to a dirty visor and rapidly impair your vision. Also, if the inside of the visor has been meticulously cleaned it will not be so susceptible to fogging.
4. Following distances should be increased due to less effective braking.

### **Conclusions**

You may notice that all the points that have been mentioned concerning riding in wet conditions also apply, and are desirable, in dry conditions. Riding in the wet develops good habits because it demands good technique. So, the next time you have a ride planned and it rains, don't put it off, rather treat it as an opportunity to show off your advanced riding techniques.