

Overcooking The Corners

What do you do when you find yourself going into a corner too hot?

We need to look closely at this subject because it's one of the most frequent causes of motorcycle accidents.

First, we need to look at why we found ourselves in this predicament in the first place. A few possibilities:

1. Our perception of speed and distance didn't measure up. This comes with experience and time in the saddle.
2. Not familiar with our machine or we upgraded to something faster and more powerful that takes us to the corners way quicker than we are used to.
3. Not familiar with the braking system or the lay of the road.
4. Riding with a group and trying to prove something when in front or trying to keep up when at the back or middle of the group and riding beyond your own abilities. (The most common error.)

There are many reasons, but at some time even experienced riders are going to enter a corner way too fast and then it's "OH, CRAP!"

So, here you are, blasting along and you come up to what looks like a nice sweeping turn, you're watching the vanishing point and it appears all is OK. You downshift and roll your bike into the corner only to realize it's one of those nasty decreasing radius type turns that gets tighter and tighter and you are now leaned well over.

For the inexperienced, the first thing they do is panic and have a mental block where their mind tells them they can't lean any further, so they don't. Or they stand the bike up and jump on the brakes, or they jump on the brakes while cornering to slow their speed. In each case, they are going to have a closer look at the scenery than intended and in various states of pain, depending on which panic reaction they took.

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Let's look at these different panic reactions more closely:

1. Not leaning any further. It's widely believed that it takes at least 3000 miles of riding any particular bike to know fully what it's capable of and what its limits are. A bike can lean a lot further than many people think. By not leaning more you will run out of road, hit the gravel and low-side, which is a lot better than a high-side as long as you disappear into some soft cactus on the roadside.
2. Stand the bike up and stomp on the brakes. This will slow down your velocity some but your eyeballs will still have a close look at what's on the side of the road. If you're lucky you might stick your bike into a fence, and if you stop suddenly there's a good chance you'll damage your "valuables" on the mirrors as you go over the front.
3. Using the brakes while cornering. This can work depending on your lean angles. If you are near the limit of lean angle for your bike, front braking will wash out the front tire with a resulting low-side. Rear braking at or near the limit of lean angle will high-side you more often than not as the rear tire slides out and at some stage re-grips the road, throwing you off the top of the bike. This is the nastiest way to come off as you will more than likely bounce and roll a few times. Also, there is always the chance the bike will bounce and roll, as well, and try to catch up with you.

So, what do you do?

Travel Tip: When in trouble and on the limit and nothing can be done with the following tips, it's always better to go down on a left turn than a right. That way you hit the side of the road from your lane. Therefore it is better to leave more of a margin for error on a right turn than a left. If you come off your bike on a right turn you would hit the side of the road after crossing the opposite direction traffic lane, and there is a chance you could become a hood ornament on an oncoming car or truck.

Obviously, it is good to ride on the road with a large margin for safety, but most people on motorcycles, tend to ride closer to the limits of their machines than they really should. Also, many riders go in too hot on corners they can't see all the way around.

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These tips are for those who push the envelope and ride harder than most, but will cover 95% of the problems faced when entering a corner too hot on dry pavement, and to a lot lesser extent on wet.

Tips:

1. Don't panic.
2. Your bike will lean a lot further than you may think. In fact, find a nice road somewhere safe and practice leaning more and more into the same turn until something touches down or you feel your tires starting to squirm a bit. Then you'll know exactly how far you can go. Chances are you'll be surprised.
3. If you're in too hot, just push the inner handle bar forward a bit more to drop the bike down even further. You can do this as often as necessary in a corner. It's called counter steering and is a life saver when extra lean is required.
4. You haven't panicked and you've counter steered but now things are touching down a little or getting close to maximum lean angles. Remember that if you are at maximum lean for your bike, you are at its cornering limits and any use of the brakes is going to take you out at that point. If you are not at full lean for your machine, you can brake slightly with the front brake to bleed off speed. In a corner, on most bikes, the weight is more on the front tire than the rear until you reach the point of acceleration. If you use the rear brake at maximum lean your rear tire will slide out with a good chance of high-siding. Normally, the use of brakes when cornering will have the effect of standing the bike up, depending on how hard you brake. You will need to counteract this standing up from braking with a little more counter steering by pushing the inner bar forwards slightly.
5. You can use a lot of braking into a corner but remember as your lean angle increases into the corner, your braking force must decrease correspondingly (e.g. you are at 60% of maximum lean for your bike, then you can use only 40% braking or you will exceed the forces being applied to your tires, and it's all over. Deeper into the corner, you may be at 80% of your bike's lean angle, then you only have 20%

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braking available without becoming one with the earth.)

6. When coming into the corner and late braking hard, it is easy to lock up the front tire and wash out the front. Do not slam the brakes on hard when entering a corner. When using the throttle on a bike under acceleration or maintaining speed, the weight is more on the rear tire than the front. If you hit the front brakes hard, the weight has not transferred to the front quick enough and you "beat" the weight transfer to the front resulting in a locked front wheel. The best method is to use a little rear brake to start the weight transfer to the front tire and then progressively apply the front to maximize braking into the corner. This takes only a split second. On most modern motorcycles, once the weight transfer has occurred, the rear brake has minimal braking force and virtually none when using the front hard.
7. If, you are at maximum lean, you can't brake and there is not a lot you can do. You are well past your safety margin and if the corner is still tightening up, you'll have to bail. Always go for a low-side (by a combination of pushing more on the inner handlebar and applying some front brake) and get away from the bike. You will slow a lot quicker on your own and the bike will always slide further.

Hope this helps.