



Dynamic Riding: Sportbike Athletics

by David Podolsky

Riding a motorcycle is not like flying a plane or driving a car. Instead, riding a motorcycle is physically dynamic. In a plane or car you are strapped into the seat and only able to operate the controls; your body movement and force have no effect.

On a motorcycle you are part of the system.

You can hang off the side, move over the bars or slide back in the seat; this changes the weight transfer and center of gravity with very real results. If you weigh 150 lbs and the motorcycle weighs 450 lbs, your body weight is 25% of the total, which is significant.

Not only can you move your weight around,

but you can also add muscle and force things to happen. This is how motorcycling becomes a sport and why as riders we need to be loose and not get stuck to the seat as if we were Velcro-ed to it. Performance riding really has you moving around the bike and using all your limbs more than most riders realize.

How to ride and body positioning is a vast topic, so let's look at only three examples to get the idea of how athletic you can be on a sportbike.



Photo by: E-Tech Photo

Looking Through the Turn

Perhaps you've heard "the bike goes where you look," and this is basically true. It is hard to go around the corner if you are looking at your feet, behind you or anywhere else other than where you want to go. When you are trying to shoot a bulls-eye I bet you are very focused on the target. When riding it is ideal to look as far through the turn as you can. The farther

down the road or track you are looking, the bigger the picture you are taking in, which helps make things feel a bit slower and you feel less rushed. Try counting the lines on the highway while driving 60mph and it is easy if you look down the road; then try again looking out the passenger window straight down at the road and it seems dizzying and difficult.

Transitioning the Motorcycle

Going from full lean left to full lean right at speed is one of the most fun things to do in performance riding. To do this quickly and effectively you need to put strong input into the handlebars and also be able to move your body quickly. Having the balls of your feet on the pegs and actually lifting your butt up out of the seat just a bit makes the motion faster and smoother. Putting input into the bars, with your butt off the seat and on the balls of your feet, is like one motion where the bike feels like it goes from side to side underneath you — not you going up and over a big arc. In the picture of Kurtis Roberts you can see him getting up out of the seat and over the front end, as he changes direction from full lean right to full lean left in the final chicane at the Assen MotoGP.

Accelerating and Braking

Having your body weight up front or far back makes a huge difference when you are accelerating or braking. If you want to wheelie, sit far back and accelerate hard. The photo of Ben Spies shows he has moved very far forward to keep the front

“Going from full lean left to full lean right at speed is one of the most fun things to do in performance riding.”

Photo by: Team Yoshimura Suzuki



David Podolsky races a Ducati 1098S for Chicken Hawk Racing. Competing in WERA, CCS & AMA Sports races David has won 11 National Championships mostly aboard big twin machines.

Photo by: Kevin Link Photography



wheel down while he's accelerating hard. He wants to give it full throttle and not have the wheel get too high.

On the stopping side of the equation, braking hard can cause the rear wheel to rise up and get in the air because the front brakes are so strong. Once this stoppie happens, your ability to brake much harder is limited. To get maximum braking done, squeeze the gas tank with your legs and use your back to hold you up. This helps put your body weight into the tank and not into the handlebars so the bike is less inclined to stoppie. Also, with less pressure on your hands you are able to brake and down-shift with more precision.

Of course this column won't have enough room for all the things there are to learn and practice. Racing isn't for everyone either, but that is why I instruct at track days and think they are a great place to learn and practice your skills. As you get comfortable with your motorcycle, riding just gets that much more fun. ★