

BECOMING A BETTER RIDER

You learn to ride when you get your first bike. When you think you've learned it all, you punch through your envelope and take a tumble. Your "envelope" is your own abilities, your bikes abilities, and conditions in your immediate environment. The edges of your envelope are constantly changing. Pilots, for instance, try to "fly within the envelope." A particular airplane may need 140 knots minimum take off speed for the weight, temperature, and airport altitude. If they don't achieve 140 knots, the airplane won't fly.

Motorcyclists also have an ever-changing envelope. For example, your bike may lean over to a 45 degree angle on a smooth dry curve and successfully negotiate that curve. If, however, you hit spilled oil, or increase your speed and begin to scrape and the bike leverages your tires off of the pavement, or the curve decreases in radius, you may burst your envelope and go squirting off in a cloud of dust.

So how can we learn to predict our envelope? Can we increase our own personal skill limits to expand that envelope? Yes. Considering that risk management tactics for motorcyclists are similar to that of pilots, we might take a lesson from airplane drivers. Pilots take high quality training in ground school classes, study their operations manuals frequently, and take recurrent training on a regular schedule to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. Commercial and military pilots also spend a lot of time in flight simulators, increasing and testing their skills in a realistic but risk free environment.

That leads us to rider training courses. They can increase your knowledge and riding skills. It's a low risk way to cram a lot of trial and error learning into a few hours. Motorcyclists don't have simulators, but there are ways to increase your knowledge and skills. If you have not taken an ERC yet, that ought to be a high priority. It is an excellent way to learn more about the physical limits involved in cornering and braking, as well as accident avoidance tactics. It is six hours of fun while you pick up more knowledge of what your limits are, and those limits of the motorcycle that you ride. Those who take the ERC course are invariably glad that they did, and often return to pick up more knowledge. There are other ways to pick up more knowledge. Continue to read. Motorcycle magazines all have valuable information. Your riding skills can be improved by riding the twisty roads as often as possible. Practice as often as you can.

A fellow rider in another chapter used to get my attention as we prepared for a chapter ride somewhere. We would often find him riding tight circles in the parking lot or weaving between parking lot lines prior to our departure. He paid attention, practiced often, and demonstrated that he was a very good rider. He eventually joined a drill team.

You can become a better rider, but you have to make an effort and work at it. We should all be doing that. Take a course, do some parking lot practice, work on improving your skills, no matter how good or bad they are. You can improve. Ride Safe.

This article was prompted by David Hough of "Proficient Motorcycling".