

Help

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STAYIN' SAFE

The 20-Minute Tune-up

I'll admit it was the lights and sirens that drew me to ride the big FLH police bike—my chance to brazenly flaunt the paraphernalia of authority.

"Shamu" is accustomed to crowds.

First-time acquaintances observe this simple name stenciled on the right side of officer Larry Shaw's bike and summarily ask, "Is that you or your bike?"



"Take your pick," is the usual response of Officer Shaw, a bearlike man whose handshake is always remembered even if his appellation isn't. "Community relations" is another phrase he freely dispenses...and his rationale for letting me herd the copsickle around his U.S. Park Service pursuit course at a recent holiday picnic. The lessons that followed were a necessary show of force; our rounds of the mall this bright summer morning are, well...*Street theater?* The cleaning lady inside the department store scarcely bats an eyelash, even as our front tires turn and dart away, inches from the plate glass window she's washing. To the 30,000 residents of Monroeville, Pennsylvania, the sight of Shamu's urban trials



ILLUSTRATION BY ROLAND ROY

maneuvers is endemic—like a spotted dog in a Norman Rockwell painting. In fact, it gives the sprawling suburban community a bear policeman's familiar presence—but with even greater range than a patrol car.

Clutch in the friction zone, little bit of rear brake, slowly wearing in and out of the 10 stone pillars; about two feet is all the clearance between the barrier and the curb. Watch the mailbox—never make it with those saddlebags and mirrors poking out. Turn around—now back the other way, 15 mph this time—just cleared that cake machine. U-turns—left then right—then a 75-foot slow ride with the right side mirror close enough to warm the bricks in the wall. What's the point?

"You don't feel the same every day," explains Shaw. "Some days you're a little tight, a little stiff. Some days you can't do right-hand turns as well as left, but when you ride for a living, you have to be able to execute all your skills when you're called upon, so I come down here to warm up, and I don't go out on the road until I feel right."

The kids at the school playground swarm around us like pigeons at feed-

ing time. They must have seen Shaw's Harley climb those schoolyard steps a hundred times, but the shower of sparks still signals a happening.

Up and over the dirt mound. In and out, in and out of the little round pyramids, on tracks barely wide enough for our tires. How did I get on top of this four-foot wall? Oops! Curbside pull-out; lean 'er way over, turn the wheel and don't look back—good practice. But what's this? How was I led to the top of this toboggan run? And why am I sliding down the hill...backwards?!

STOP! Thank-you, Officer Shaw. I think I'm warmed up now.

"These are things that anyone can do," says Shaw. "You don't need any special equipment or a special area. I mean this is a playground, a public place. We're not breaking any laws." The toboggan run? "You know, it helps sometimes if you have a badge."

Short of a get-out-of-jail-free card, the following is the best usage of free space that I can recommend to tune up your riding on a weekly basis. A dozen four-inch traffic cones will fit easily in your saddlebags (all MSF instructors have a list of suppliers) or saw some old tennis balls in half.

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THE DRIVEWAY:

U-turns—No matter how narrow your driveway, you can use it for valuable turning practice; just adjust your pre-turn angle accordingly. Shaw, who practices 140-degree curbside pull-outs (about halfway between a 90-degree and a full U-turn), says you should determine the turning radius of your bike, then give yourself a foot or two of leeway. Start with the front wheel already turned, the bike leaned and one or both feet on the ground. Turn your head sharply and strive to hold your lean angle and full steering lock through smooth clutch and throttle.

Slow Ride—Take some jumbo chalk or find a painted line 30 feet long. Eyes up, knees in. Best control is achieved with steady throttle and clutch, adjusting speed via rear brake modulation. Should be able to ride the line for 15 seconds.

Stop 'n' Plant—From 10 to 15 mph, squeeze front brake progressively but firmly enough that forks bottom. Keep eyes up and knees on tank until forks are fully rebounded, then plant left foot.

Stop 'n' Go—Before you leave home, try stopping momentarily at the end of the driveway without putting either foot down.

THE PARKING LOT:

Stabilizing highway speeds make convenient camouflage for aberrant throttle and turning behaviors. But the dynamics of a five-mph parking lot turn are nearly identical to the 70-mph sweeper.

Figure Eight—Mark a box 20 feet by 60 feet (bigger or smaller, according to your skills and equipment). Only the clutch work and counterbalancing (optional) make this different from highway-speed turns. Running wide? Most riders run out of space because they don't turn quickly enough. So practice until you can "flick'er in there."

Offset Weave—String four cones at 60-foot intervals and, on a parallel line 60 feet away, three more in the gaps. Start outside the first cone and commence weaving. Loosen up those butt cheeks, turn your head and hold that throttle nice and steady. Also, try accelerating, then braking the machine before each turn, but finish

all braking before leaning the bike.

Stop in a Box—One of motoring's great myths is the "panic stop." Besides the fact that there is no place for panic on the highways, it assumes that you've exhausted your reserve and a collision is almost inevitable. A better plan is to practice smooth stops with a goal of narrowing the reserve you need to operate at the same or lower risk levels. Chalk a four-foot box, choose a speed and then see how long you can delay your braking and still plant the front tire smoothly in the box. Eventually you will learn to detect impending skid. Just make certain that you keep both feet on the pegs until you're virtually stopped. That way if you do lock the front brake, you can easily release it without losing your balance.

Swerving—You *do* understand countersteering, right? If not, enroll in a rider education course at once. Find one by calling (800) 447-4700 nationwide or (800) 227-4337 in California. Play around with your own dimensions, but strive for a loose and easy style that enables the motorcycle to move independently of your body. Principles of swerving: 1) the harder you push, the quicker the bike leans; 2) the longer you hold the push, the farther out it goes.

THE ROAD:

Swooping—On a familiar piece of road, select a gear and settle into a rhythm that lets you set up for corners without braking or shifting.

Late Apexing—Works great in concert with swooping. Approach on the outside of the turn. By increments, delay the moment when you turn the bike (never at the expense of smoothness). From your parking-lot practice you know the importance of turning the head, and late apexing has the real-world advantages of increased ground clearance, greater visibility, elimination of wasteful directional changes and—most important—a space cushion against oncoming cars.

Smoothness is the logical aim of every rider, from enduro champion to freeway fier. But smooth riding takes planning; you don't get there by simply hopping on the bike and riding off. And one more bit of advice from the man in blue.

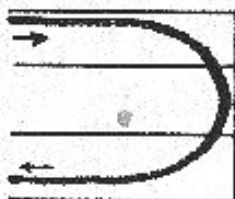
"Practice on the bike the way you ride the bike," advises Larry Shaw. "So if you ride two-up, do your drills with your passenger on the back."

But hey—not on the toboggan run!

20 MINUTE TUNE-UP

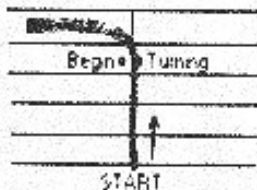
This is not an article on how to tune-up your motorcycle in 20 minutes or less, but rather how to sharpen your riding skills in 20 minutes or less. All that's needed is a willingness to practice and an empty parking lot. The key: remember that most parking spaces are 10 feet wide and 20 feet long, thus is it like having a pre-marked course already laid out for you. The exercises listed below are taken from the GWRRA *Cornering Practice Guide*. **Caution** always wear proper riding gear, check the area for debris and oil, and take along a friend to watch for traffic and help if anything goes wrong.

U-Turn One of the easiest to practice yet one of the most difficult to master. Start by idling the bike in first gear as you approach the parking



spaces. Come in on one line, turning your head and keeping your eyes up, begin your turn to the right. You should be able to complete the turn within 3 spaces. With practice you can cut that to inside of two spaces. Don't forget to practice left turns as well (they will probably be the ones you make most often on the road). Hints: keep your eyes up and look where you want to exit the turn. If you feel the bike starting to fall over *gently* roll on the throttle.

Sharp Turns This drill will help you make sharp turns when leaving stoplights, pulling out of driveways or turning onto a narrow street. In first gear begin riding across the parking lot at 10 mph. Before reaching the marker *slow down*—as you reach the marker make a sharp turn to



the left or right. Hints: keep your eyes up and look to where you want to be at the end of the turn.

Exercise Weaves This is one of my favorites. Every Gold Winger should be able to do 30-ft. weaves (most do it in second gear). Place half a tennis ball on every third parking space. Begin in first gear and go to the left of the tennis ball then to the right of the next ball and so on. One word...boring. It's much more difficult to do the 20-ft. weave. Same procedure only place the balls on every other space. Now if you really want to impress...do the 10-ft. weave. Hints: as you approach the first ball, shift your eyes to the next one. Likewise, as you approach the 2nd ball shift your eyes to the 3rd ball etc.



Quick stop Practicing this will help you stop quickly when something suddenly appears in your path. Approach marker 1 at 10 mph, try to stop before marker 2. Then try it at 15 mph. Then once more at 20 mph, do not exceed 20 mph. With practice, you should be able to stop in 25 feet or less. If you lock up either brake, you failed. Hint: keep head and eyes up, use both brakes.



These are simple exercises and can be done just about anywhere. Smooth highway speeds make a convenient camouflage for bad throttle and turning behavior. The dynamics of a 5-mph parking lot turn are nearly identical to the 70-mph sweeper. Practice often and be sure to *watch for traffic*. Smoothness is the logical aim for every rider, but smooth riding takes planning and practice. If you ride two up, then practice two up. Ride Safe,

20 MINUTE TUNE-UP

U-TURN



EXERCISE WEAWE

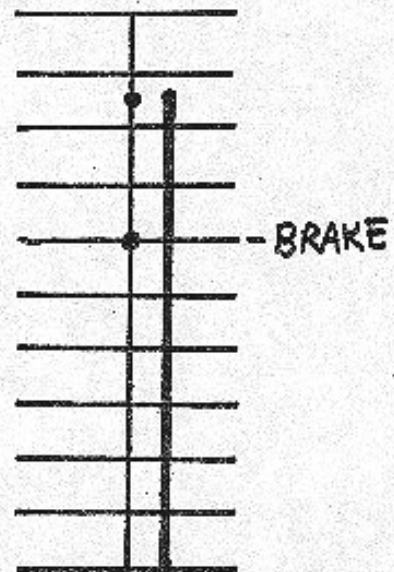


SHARP TURNS



START

QUICK STOP



START