

Rider Education Report

Rider education is more than just learning tips and techniques in a classroom and then practicing them on a closed course. It is taking what you have learned in the classroom and applying it to your day-to-day riding; making your daily rides a place to practice and polish the skills you need everyday to survive the asphalt jungle. Riding with this in mind, you will notice what works well for you and what needs additional development or a different solution. At work we call this Continuous Improvement, and it is a necessary task required of every employee. I call it Riding to Live, and it is a necessary task required of every motorist to stay above ground.

One of the skills that gets a lot of attention in rider courses is braking. From the dictionary, we get the definition:

braking (noun)

*"The action of making a moving vehicle slow down or stop by using a brake."
("Solved 1. (Definition braking: the action of making a moving - Chegg")*

This of course should not be confused with "breaking" which is defined as any action of separating, damaging, or interrupting something. In fact, there seems to be a correlation between the two words. If you are not good at "braking" you may find that you will become experienced in "breaking".

In the several and various rider courses I have completed, braking has always been a focus. For standard arrangement controls (hand brake on the right, generally controlling the front brakes, and foot brake on the right, generally controlling the rear brake) the best stops are performed using both controls in proper measure. How much of each control you use can depend on the speed you are traveling, the available traction (which depends on the weather and the condition of the road surface), and the condition of your equipment (motorcycle). The rider courses always stress the proper technique for braking, especially with the hand brake control. The beginner technique is to always use all four fingers to squeeze the brake lever. This is for several reasons:

- Maximum grip strength requires all four fingers (and this is **REALLY** important if you find yourself stopped on the side of the road in a windstorm in Nebraska)
- Having maximum strength available allows the operator to better modulate the brake for smoother and shorter stops
- All four fingers on the brake lever mean no fingers are stuck between the lever and the bar grip, which could prevent maximum lever throw and thus maximum braking force being applied resulting in longer stopping distances
- All four fingers on the brake lever also mean no fingers wrapped around the throttle, which will remove the ability of the engine to work against the brakes

There are also times when less than four fingers can be a benefit. The last few months I have been purposefully trying different numbers of fingers to learn where this works better for me. I have found that with two fingers:

- I can cover the brake during most riding scenarios which allows good throttle control yet almost instant response to a perceived threat
- Rev matching while down shifting, especially just before entering a turn
- Faster and smoother transitions between braking and acceleration when riding becomes “spirited”
- Smoother parking lot maneuvers when more than just the foot brake is needed

Braking is a skill that you never need to use – if you never start your motorcycle. Any other time, it may be the most important skill to learn. Good braking technique is what separates a good rider from, well, breaking and becoming broken. Every ride ends in a stop. Please practice this skill, stay safe, and stay together.

Richard Artmayer
KY State Educator