

Nice tight U-turns

By Bertie Kotze

Tips for riders wishing to do nice, tight U-turns without the humiliation of

- Your passenger having to get off the bike;
- Dropping your pride and joy;
- Padding your feet on the ground like you are riding a child's tricycle;
- Wobbling around like a learner rider;
- Driving around and around town until you can find a roundabout;
- Driving around two entire blocks, so as to reverse you direction;

This is the technique that the NSW Police pursuit motorcyclist utilize to do U-turns, whether it is on their K1100LT, their Harley Road King, or their Honda 1500. Bare in mind they have around 100kg (220lbs) of equipment on board, which would equate to a pillion passenger in most books.

This technique will turn you cycle around in a two-lane road, leaving about 1.8m (or 6 feet) to spare. Interested? Read on....

The key to making nice, tight U-turns is centripetal force. Remember that expression from your high school physics days? It is the force you can feel when you hold a spinning top, and try to move it suddenly. The top resists – the faster you spin it, the more resistance you feel. To make centripetal force work to your advantage, you induce spin into your engine components by revving the motor. Not blipping the throttle, but by running up to, and holding at around 2,500 RPM. The centripetal force exerted by your spinning engine components under these conditions is considerable – more than enough to hold you, your bike, your pillion and luggage upright whilst you maneuver through your turn.

The steps to follow are:

1. Pull to side of road and stop.
2. Check mirrors for traffic approaching from the rear.
3. Check for on coming traffic.
4. Signal you intention to turn.
5. RPM to 2,500 and hold it there.
6. Clutch out until it begins to engage and you move off. Do not fully release – allow it to slip only. BOTH FEET UP!
7. Control your speed by using the rear brake ONLY, and continuing to slip the clutch.
8. **** KEEP YOUR HEAD UP – LOOK TO WHERE YOU WANT TO GO **** Failure to do so will result in you leaning the bike, which means you are approaching fall-over territory at low speeds.
9. Did I say **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP?** Well, I'm saying it again, **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP.**
10. Using the rear brake to control your speed, come to full lock and begin your turn. **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP, AND**
11. **KEEP YOUR HEAD UP** – control your speed with the rear brake – maintain engine speed.
12. Accomplished riders do not even need to take their feet off the pegs to execute this maneuver, especially if they keep their head you-know-where... UP!
13. After you have completed your graceful U-turn, allow the clutch to engage fully and ride off into that sunset, to the admiration of onlookers and other lesser riders that have witnessed your skill and precision.

Guide for reluctant daredevils

If you are not-so-sure you can do this, try a little practice. A good venue is a car-park, where you can go nice and slow and get the hang of slipping the clutch and riding the rear brake at the same time. When you are making a U-turn, you should do it at about walking speed or less – at 2,500 RPM this can only be achieved by the use of both clutch-slip and rear brake. Try a few low speed figure 8 turns, wide at first, then approaching full-lock. You will be able to do full-lock (bars against the tank) U-turns in either direction with practice.

Get in the habit of keeping your feet up on the pegs, so as you develop your balance and make use of the centripetal forces generated by using the motor (cops call feet-down riders ‘paddle-foots’, and feel it is a sign of only limited ability to control the motorcycle).

A few of you are saying – slip the clutch! NEVER!! Believe me, the cost of replacing a worn clutch is much LESS than that of replacing a busted fairing (my k1100LT has 60,000 km on it and the original clutch is holding up just fine. The first 40,000 km were spent as a low speed Police escort cycle).

Summary

HEAD UP, HEAD UP, HEAD UP