

# Getting It On (The gas)

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**Applying the throttle earlier in the corners can not only improve your lap times, but also add a whole heap of fun factor. Glen Williams explores the art of leaving rubber on tarmac and the rear wheel slide.**

Opening the throttle early and hard when exiting corners at a racetrack can make a huge difference to your speed around the circuit. However, it's one of those skills that's 'easy to say but hard to do'. To keep it plain and simple, on something with the power of a superbike it can be downright scary! However 'doing skids' and leaving long black lines on the tarmac is genuine fun. Mastering the basics of 'power slides' is one of the great challenges (and joys) of riding a motorcycle fast on tarmac. The problem is fundamental – when it all goes wrong it will usually hurt both you and your wallet!



## Learning The Fundamentals

Firstly you need to learn how a motorcycle reacts when getting the throttle on and also how your own body language on the bike affects rear wheel grip. One of the best ways to do this is to get yourself an old trail bike, or even a light road bike that you don't mind scratching – then fit it with some shagged road tyres or knobbies. Take this out to a grassy paddock or maybe a beach and do some riding. Practising in this type of environment with inappropriate tyres fitted allows you safely experiment your throttle control and sliding skills compared to using your race or road bike at an unforgiving race circuit. This training will also help keep your fear levels down and install confidence in your own ability to instinctively control a power-slide.

Many top road racers use this type of riding or something similar to keep their brains 'race fit' so to speak. The fact is that the more comfortable you are with the wheels being out of line – the less likely you are to over-react or under-react to the same situation when it occurs on a race track at much higher speeds.

With practice you will quickly realise that hitting the gas hard and early when exiting corners will require you to use a specific technique to stay onboard.

These techniques include the smoothness of your throttling-on action, your body position on the bike, and even where you are focusing your eyes will dramatically affect how early you are able to apply the throttle, whilst at the same time

attaining the desired result of driving hard as possible out of corners.

If part of this involves the rear end of the bike being out of line for a brief period then so be it, as long as you can manage that moment in relative comfort and even get to the point of maybe even turning the power sliding technique to your advantage (by being able to turn the bike even faster).

## Back On Track

On the race track there's a bit more to it than just getting to a certain part of the corner and opening the throttle, in fact a big part of your corner exiting technique is closely related to your entry and mid-corner speed. For example if you go through a bend at say 5kph slower than the rider in



front of you then the respective loss of momentum alone means that you will need to hit the gas harder and earlier than him/her to keep up with them along the next straight. The simple answer is to take care in trying not to wash off too much corner speed – otherwise you will have no choice but to take more risks and load up the tyres more trying to keep up coming out of the turn.

## Body Position

Where you sit yourself on the bike has a dramatic effect on how and when you can 'hit the gas'. Every bike is subtly different, however on a superbike or a supersport

bike moving your weight at the right moment so as to load up the rear of the machine can gain a whole lot of traction, and of course more traction = more throttle = more acceleration/speed! Be careful though as smoothness is the key here and your transition from being in a 'bodyweight forward' and 'off to one side' position when negotiating the corner mid-turn followed by moving yourself rearward in one smooth motion, is an art in itself – but worth learning.

Using the bars as leverage to pull yourself forward is generally a no-no. On some bikes and in some corners – the exact opposite will apply and you will be trying to move your weight forward on the machine for different reasons, such as anti-wheelie control or to actually deliberately generate a rear slide. Or maybe simply avoid a bump in the track that screws up your suspension and bike attitude if your weight is set toward the rear end. Either way, it's worth practicing different body positions and seeing

how this promotes (or detracts) from rear traction and also how it affects your confidence in getting the gas on early.

## Gently Does It

Some race machines have elaborate traction control systems fitted and it is indeed possible to literally hit the gas damn hard and rely on the electronics to some degree to smooth out wheelspin and any sliding on your behalf. But for the majority of us who ride on more road-orientated machines we need to concentrate on how we actually 'apply the throttle'. My suggestion is that you practice getting the throttle gently back on (even if only a little bit) as soon as possible. This could be even before the apex point of a corner in some instances. By doing this the bike will begin the transfer of weight and power to the rear of the bike and start loading up the suspension, frame and tyres in one smooth and constant motion. The advantage is

that the bike invariably reacts positively to a 'throttle on' situation.

A motorcycle's geometry seems to be much happier when being driven along by the rear wheel compared to a trailing throttle or on the brake, therefore the recommendation is simple – get the throttle on smoothly (even if only a little bit), and as early in the turn as possible. Next time you are at a track and watching the faster riders – listen carefully to where the engine note changes from throttle off to throttle on – I guarantee you will hear a difference where this happens between the faster and slower racers/riders.

## The Eyes Have It

You wouldn't think that your eyes have much to do with the throttle, but they do. Looking well ahead and up and out of the corner does a number of positive things for your throttle control. It focuses you on where you want to be at in a few moments time and also how best it is to get there as quickly as possible. Looking well ahead

takes your focus away from the track surface directly in front of you (which increases the impression of speed but reinforces your fear of 'current moment' lean angle and risk).

Focusing ahead helps release you from these fears and enables you to ride your bike in a more positive and in some respects a more forceful manner.

Getting out of corners has a huge kick-on effect in respect of the accumulated speed that you carry along the straight that follows each corner. It is also one of the great challenges that forever tests riders of all levels, and is a skill worth mastering to your best ability, if not only for the technical challenge but certainly for the smile factor of leaving great big black lines on the track

We have not discussed machine set up in this article but obviously as your skill and corner exit speed level increase you will likely need to make a number of changes to suspension settings. But in the meantime, get out there and do some skids!

BRM

