

GETTING PASSED

Words & Pics: Glen Williams

Track day enthusiasts and racers alike will be aware that overtaking another rider requires quick thinking and a positive plan to make the manoeuvre safely and with a minimum of fuss. BRM's resident racer, Glen Williams run us through the ins and outs of passing manoeuvres.

Safety First

There is one thing to consider above all others when passing and that is safety. Firstly for the rider who you're planning on dispatching into your wake and secondly for yourself. The fact is that having two motorcycles in close proximity to each other travelling at high speed requires some care and thought to be taken. There is a very important unwritten rule when passing another rider on the track; let's call this RULE 1 - 'The onus of responsibility is always on the passing rider'. This is because you (the passing rider) will be 100% in control of how to complete the pass from start to finish and you're also the one with the clear vision of the road ahead. The rider being passed may well be unaware of your presence and is relying on you to plan your manoeuvre with him/her in mind and trust that their safety is also being considered. This usually means there should be no contact and no requirement for the passed rider to radically change their own line to avoid you as you overtake.

Choosing The Right Moment

Your decision on where to pass is important. At track days where having fun is the primary concern, there is often a place that passing is only allowed to happen on the straights or around the outside of slower riders if the passing is to be done during a corner. Having faster riders pass on the outside assists in preventing riders making contact with each other - thus improving safety. There are circumstances though that might not allow this, if for instance you are on a less powerful machine and the person in front simply blows you away on the straights or when racing - then your decision to pass may well involve an 'inside line'. Take care when making this call though as 'the door can be shut' quite quickly by the rider you were planning to go by and also any error in your judgment may have a dramatic effect on the line of the rider you are passing who is effectively stuck on the outside of you. Rule 1 certainly applies in these instances!

Thinking Ahead

Planning ahead is very important when it comes to making a clean, swift pass that will stick. Often you will see good riders 'building up' to a pass as many as three or four corners prior to the actual planned manoeuvre being executed. Sometimes this can even mean dropping back a little from the rider in front allowing yourself to build your speed and 'arrive' to make the pass with a greater bike speed than the fellow in front. This becomes particularly important when racing against machinery that is very closely matched speed-wise. Passing by 'slipstreaming' or 'drafting' is very similar, timing your arrival by exiting a corner onto a straight section of track at a higher speed than your competitor will allow you to 'run up' close behind them and use their slipstream to maximum benefit to affect an easy and safe pass on the straights.

Racing Passes

When racing, it will be very likely that you will be planning your passing well

in advance. Often when following a rider of very similar skill and machine speed, you will need to identify where your strengths and weaknesses are over your competitor. Are you better on the brakes going into a specific corner? Do you carry greater mid-corner speed? Can you get on the gas and accelerate out of selected corners a little earlier? Does your machine have a top speed advantage? All of these things will dictate where and when you make your decision to make a pass and more importantly make it stick!



Formula 3 icon Terry Fitzgerald (2), lines up the author for a pass at Timaru

It's no good diving up the inside and only to run wide and come out of the corner farther behind your competitor than when you went into it. Patience can also be a virtue when racing and simply following your competitor closely and applying pressure to them, waiting for them to make a subtle mistake may well open up an 'easy pass' opportunity to be gifted to you.

Look Ahead

Remember when following closely - try not to 'target fixate' on the rider

ahead of you, as you will simply end up following the other guy's rear wheel through the corner. Keep your eye focussed well up the track ahead of the rider in front and position yourself slightly to the left or right hand side of the rider being followed so as to maximise any potential opportunity to pass when it arrives. Keep in mind also that if you are passed by another rider, you will often have an opportunity to immediately re-pass them back. This is because they will likely have had to move off-

line to get by you and there will be a moment of opportunity for a corner or two for you to respond with your own pass - quick thinking is critical here!

Take Care With Newbies

Take special care (particularly at track days) when you're passing riders who are circulating a lot slower than you are, as you will arrive behind them with a closing speed a lot quicker than normal. A slow rider may well be learning their track riding skills or they might be on a much smaller machine than you and your faster closing speed will limit the time that you have to react to an unexpected manoeuvre that they might make. (Remember he/she will likely be concentrating hard on what they are doing and are unlikely to know that you are arriving from behind - and fast!). If the slower rider decides to jink one way or another at the last moment - it may mean that they end up on the piece of track that you were planning to use whilst

passing them, - this can result in things getting very tight very quickly, at best you may simply have to take an avoiding line. At worst you might come into contact or crash - closely followed by some finger pointing, some name calling and occasionally some fisticuffs.....The salt in the wound of course is that YOU will be the one that's in the wrong (remember RULE 1!).

It is quite common for newbies to the racetrack to take unconventional or erratic lines through corners whilst they are learning their way round. It pays therefore to allow that little bit of extra space 'just in case'. My personal preference in these situations is to always take an outside passing line as it gives you more options to take avoiding action if required and is also much less likely to panic the slower rider as you go past. Beware though that the track will often be a little slipperier when you are off the race line and on an outside line.

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NZ Superbikes Carey Brier (21) takes the inside pass line under David Lees (75) with room to spare and keeps it safe.

