

TACKLING WET TRACK DAYS

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Riding track or race days with rain on the agenda can create a queasy feeling in your gut. Some claim they actually 'enjoy' riding in these conditions, but the reality is getting wet and cold when enjoying your sport is a lot less fun than doing it with warm sunshine on the back of your leathers.

Wet track riding is pretty much an inevitable reality at some point if you ride regularly in New Zealand's summer or winter season - so why not take a 'game plan' to the track and put the conditions in your favour.

It's clear that there are riders and riding styles that suit wet weather track conditions and some that don't. It is also clear that certain types of tyres and motorcycle designs have advantages over others in wet conditions. However all things being equal - there are some basic techniques that will make your day in the wet a more consistent and hopefully more speedy experience.

It's a given you will ride slower in the wet than you do in the dry (no matter what tyres you have fitted) and it's pretty simple to work out why - less grip from the layer of water on the track which disturbs the direct contact of tyre rubber with the track's surface. As a result you will struggle to brake as hard into corners, carry speed through the corners and accelerate out of



Keep away from the painted lines - They can really spoil your day!

them as quickly compared to dry conditions. All of this adds up to you losing precious time in any given lap.

But riding fast in the rain is a sure way to test your skills, as the line

between your machine starting to 'move around' and when it is 'gone beyond saving' can be very narrow compared to dry riding. So here are a few tips.



1. PARALYSIS BY ANALYSIS

The number one rule in the wet also happens to be the hardest one to learn - *Try To Relax!* - with relaxation comes added smoothness to your style. To some this comes naturally - yet to others when confronted with the problem of riding in the wet it can lead rapidly to 'paralysis by analysis'.

This is when the rider over-analyses the situation and 'tightens up' on the bike. It's much easier to overanalyse in wet conditions due to your mind's uncertainty of the perceived available grip, and of course

the fear of crashing.

Tightening-up on the bike causes problems in any type of riding conditions, but it becomes especially apparent in the wet. Relaxing is important as it is very hard to be smooth on the bike when you are trying to squeeze the life out of the handlebar grips and your body is rigid from uncertainty or fear.

Fast wet weather riding absolutely demands that you be ultra-smooth with any physical inputs into the machine (particularly through the handlebars). Sudden or unplanned

inputs can rapidly reduce the bike's already depleted grip. Concentrate on the small things like; applying and releasing the brakes, feeding the throttle on, moving from side-to-side on the bike - they all require that extra bit of finesse in the wet.

It's a bit of a catch 22 - if you are nervous and tight on the bike, then its feedback will reflect this and will respond back to you with sudden or ragged movements, this in-turn makes you even more wary and prevents you from loosening up and relaxing a little.

2. THE GAS IS YOUR FRIEND.

The second rule in the wet is 'treat the throttle as your friend'. When exiting corners make a plan to 'throttle on' as smoothly and as early as possible (sometimes this can be before the apex). Build the throttle application progressively, working toward loading up the rear of the bike. Small slides from the rear can be expected on occasions and are eminently easier to catch, whilst front-end slides are sometimes tricky to recover from in wet conditions.

Getting on the gas early can settle the bike and frees up both the steering and front tyre for some extra gripping duties.



3. BE PREPARED.

In the wet - make especially sure that you are prepared for the corner before you arrive. This means position your bum off to the side and fore/aft to where you want it. Plan your gear downshifts and match engine revs. Avoid moving on the bike mid-corner, re-gripping the bars for throttle or brake adjustments, or aggressively blipping the throttle to match revs to rear wheel speed.

5. SMOOTH, RELAX, BREATHE

Remember, try to relax, remember to breathe - and be smooth at the controls. Get on the gas early to settle the bike. With these tips, hopefully you will find improved rhythm and confidence. With confidence comes speed.

4. CH, CH, CHANGES...

Be aware that conditions can change in the wet quite quickly. Running water on the surface can become 'standing water' (puddles) - an area where a keen eye is actually an advantage. Standing-water as a rule is best avoided, even with true wet weather tyres fitted. It is also worth remembering that the same track you rode on one month ago in the wet, is not necessarily going to have the same wet grip level the next time you ride it. If there have been other events at the track, these can have a large affect on available grip compared to last time you visited. Excess rubber or oil leaks from other users can take time to wash out of the surface - so always be on guard during the first few laps of a wet track to ascertain the available grip 'on the day'.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THINGS

In the wet you can usually go a darn site faster than you think. Your natural survival instincts kick in pretty hard when riding a motorcycle fast on a slippery or inconsistent surface and it's very easy to slow down 'too much' due to your quite natural fear of the conditions. To combat this you must try to avoid to some extent the image that your eye (and brain) are taking in and pay more attention to the feedback that the machine is giving you. The visual distraction of the wet track surface can be hard to ignore - but the fact of the matter is that wet surfaces that 'look slippery' will often provide good grip - just as the opposite can be true.

What is consistent though is your machine's feedback in the given conditions. Your skills to judge and trust the machine's feedback will take time to develop - but as you gain these skills you will learn to ignore some of the visual distractions that can 'trick' you into slowing down too much.

