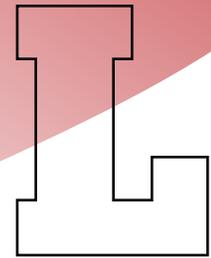


***THE RIGHT PLACE FOR***

# **SPEED**

By April Phillips



et's face it – part of the reason so many people love riding motorcycles is because of the potential to go fast. Yet, we also know that speed is often a factor in crashes. So how do you balance the adrenaline

rush of going really fast with the level-headedness needed to remain in one piece?



Photo by Dito Milan

For many Sailors and Marines, the answer is to take it to the track.

Aviation Electronics Technician First Class (AW) Hoge Young, currently stationed in Atsugi, Japan, rides a 1999 Honda CBR900RR. When he was stationed at Point Mugu, Calif., he started going to a coffee shop that was a hang out for local bikers. The shop organized occasional track days for the group.

"Many riders in California told me that taking my bike to the track was the best way to gain skill," Young said.

His first track session was in 2005, and he said he's seen massive improvement in both his form and technique. Riding on the track allows him to go fast in an environment where it's safe and legal to do so.

"There are no oncoming cars, animals, gravel, oil slicks on a blind corner, and no cliffs to go over or trees to hit if I run off course," he said.

Wendell Dunn is the traffic safety manager for US-NAF Atsugi and he's also an MSF *RiderCoach*. Five years ago he purchased a Triumph Daytona 955i and fell in with a group of riders who raced motorcycles or took their bikes to track days. At first, he went just to watch but soon felt the need for speed. He goes to the speedway several times a year and agrees that it provides the opportunity for riders to improve their abilities in relative safety.

"The primary skills that most riders lack are braking and cornering skills. Going fast in a straight line is easy, but getting the bike back down to an entry speed takes some practice. Nice, easy braking won't get the job done. If you're going to ride at a hundred miles per hour, you need to be able to stop from a hundred miles per hour. Then there is cornering. Typically, an outside-inside-outside path of travel will get you through a corner in the shortest amount of time," Dunn said.

Learning techniques such as these takes practice. Young said new track riders are often concerned about leaning at extreme angles.

"Learning to lean and how far you can actually lean may amaze you," Young said.

Dunn explained that there are three typical ways of riding on a track. The first is a free track day, usually sponsored by a tire manufacturer.

"The drawback to a free track day is that the riders have varying skills, from very good to extreme novice," he said.

The second method is to attend a class and get a track license. A license is usually for a particular track,

and with it a rider can sign up for sessions arranged by skill level. The third method, known as a riding party is Dunn's favorite, even though it tends to be the most expensive.

"I prefer the riding party because of the regimentation. There are three distinct groups: novice, intermediate, and expert, or as I like to say: the slow guys, the fast slow guys, and the fast fast guys."

These sessions last all day and usually include lunch.

It's important to remember that just because it's safer to ride at high speeds on a track, rather than on the street, there is still some risk involved.

"I have been to six track sessions, and yes, there are crashes at every one," Young said. "But even with the high speeds, the goriest injury I saw was a rider needing minor medical attention for an abrasion on his arm. His crash might have been much worse had it occurred on the street. Most serious injuries are not from the rider sliding on the road, but from impacting an immovable object."

Young said that his experience on the track has helped curb his need to ride at excessive speeds on the street.

"After traveling at more than 150 miles per hour on the front stretch of Willow Springs Raceway, I have no desire to try that anywhere but a track. A race track has a wider road surface, and you can use every inch of it. That wide track surface is also inspected before the riding starts, swept clean of debris, and in good repair," he said,

There's another thing Young loves about riding on the track: He loves dragging his knee.

"Dragging a knee is an important milestone to a sport rider. It's an awesome feeling to hang off the bike, stick a knee out, and lean the bike over and touch the macadam," he said. "I am allowed to explore my limits while operating the machine in its native environment as this is what it was designed to do while dragging my knee. Did I mention dragging my knee?" he added with enthusiasm.

However, he wouldn't think of doing it on the street or without the tough gear that protects his knee and the rest of his body. Young was involved in a few minor crashes when he was stationed in the United States.

"My bike and my pride were damaged more than by body because my PPE worked." ■

*For more information on locating tracks in your area, contact your nearest base safety office or Motorcycle Safety Foundation RiderCoach.*