

KEEPING IT UP

Maiden Voyage

I'd like to address the issue of what a newbie has to confront when he buys his first motorcycle and has no more experience than successfully completing a beginner's class (if that!).

What should he do to get that scoot home? Well, first, he should ask his dealer to deliver it. If that fails? If he has a friend who already rides he could ask that friend to ride it home for him. That makes a lot of sense and allows him to graduate his riding experience one step at a time instead of via 'immersion therapy'. I know, many first time riders do not have friends who ride or the ones they do have are not exactly role models, so often their only alternative is to ride it themselves.

So, here are some thoughts for those people to consider ...

Get familiar with the instruments and controls while the bike is still in the dealer's possession - engine OFF. Sit on the saddle and practice lifting the bike off the side-stand, kicking it back out of the way, balancing (get a feel for heft) and then 'find' the side-stand and push it into place and LOCKED. Use your eyes to do this!!! Do not rely on the feel of it - especially before you lean the bike back onto the side-stand. Again, use your eyes to confirm that it is properly in place and locked there before you let the weight of the bike rest on it!!!!!!

Now squeeze both levers and 'work them' (in/out, in/out) - engine OFF - to get a feel for how much pressure your hands have to use (and get used to.) Honest, you may be a 120kg Mr. Universe, but by the time you get home from your first ride your hands (especially the left one) will ache! That will quickly pass as the new demands you put on your muscles condition them.

Then, insure it's in neutral and the side-stand is UP then start that engine. Again, squeeze both levers and hold them HARD. NOTICE, PAY ATTENTION, BELIEVE that it is because you have BOTH levers squeezed that you are in complete control and not in any danger. NOTICE, PAY ATTENTION, BELIEVE that no matter what happens out there on the road if you don't know what to do next YOU CAN ALWAYS SQUEEZE BOTH LEVERS and get out of trouble (or at the very least, minimize it.)

We use 180cc bikes. They are TAME and easy to maneuver. Your scoot will almost certainly be more powerful and heavier. That means that the little 'muscle memory' you have developed will NOT BE APPROPRIATE!!! You must learn all over again - that is, you need to find out how much braking energy is required to stop without skidding, and you need to know EXACTLY WHERE YOUR FRICTION ZONE STARTS.

So, engine running, do the beginner's exercise - ease the clutch lever out until it just enters that friction zone and the bike tries to move forward. Allow the bike to move forward slightly, then squeeze that clutch lever and then use your legs to pull the bike back to where it started. Again, and again until you KNOW where that friction zone is.

Now, remember that you can only steer at very slow speeds - like when you are leaving the dealer's parking lot - but that thereafter you can ONLY counter-steer. 'Push right, go right' gets stuck in your brain and from then on that's how you steer. If at any time the bike feels like it is 'fighting you', not 'wanting' to make the turn you want it to make, then it is time to say 'push right, go right' and BELIEVE IT because at that time you are fighting yourself, not the bike.

Slow speed control is almost entirely in the left hand (friction zone) - while riding in a straight line the clutch lever belongs fully released, but if you are in a slow speed turn the odds are good that you should be 'in the friction zone' and using it to control your speed, NOT YOUR THROTTLE.

Turn your head and check traffic with your EYES, not your mirrors!!! (They only tell you about danger, they do NOT tell you it is safe.) Keep your eyes UP and away from your instruments while riding. Danger is primarily in front of you, not somewhere between the speedometer and tachometer. You will have lots of time to get familiar with your instruments later. This time all you want to do is control the scoot and avoid dangerous situations. Shift conservatively - do not let your engine 'scream at you' or lug. Do not enjoy the scenery on the maiden voyage. Pay attention to traffic, signals, how the bike 'sounds', and how it reacts to throttle and brake usage.

Before you know it you will be putting the puppy in your garage - mission accomplished.

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