

# KEEPING IT UP: Become a good Pillion

It's fair to acknowledge that there are many ladies out there who are happy never to own their own bike, but want to experience motorcycling. Being a pillion takes concentration and experience, it may come naturally to you, but take a look at these pointers anyway - your rider may be too shy to tell you what you need to know or what you are doing wrong.

As an experienced pillion you will be able to:

1. Identify the best grab points on a motorcycle.
2. Grip tightly with your knees to cope with all but the heaviest braking/accelerating situations.
3. Identify in advance when to put a hand on the tank or the grab rail for hard braking.
4. Identify in advance when to grab the rider for hard accelerating.
5. Realise when you need to concentrate hard, and when you can relax and enjoy the scenery.
6. Know when there's time to shout a couple of words and when it might risk distracting the rider too much.
7. Carry a back-pack without complaint.
8. Minimise knocking helmets together.
9. Withstand numb bum for at least 80km before demanding a cuppa.
10. Inspire such confidence in the rider that it improves his cornering and he wants you there all the time.

**TOURER:** As a rule the "default" position is with 100 – 300mm gap between you both on the seat (depending on the size of the seat and if there is a separate pillion perch). Lean forward slightly and try holding on gently to the sides of his jacket - if there are straps there then use those. Grip gently to the sides of the bike and his bum with your knees, you will very rarely need to adjust your position for steady riding. If there is excessive braking put your hand back and grab the aptly named grab rail. If there is excessive acceleration move your arms further around his waist and hang on.

**CRUISER:** Usually these come with a huge soft pillion seat and a "sissy bar" - which is a large metal contraption just behind the seat which you can lean against and grip onto. You're very unlikely to need any more help staying on.

**SPORTS:** This type of bike needs the most concentration to hang on. The rider is likely to be zooming around showing off and even trying to get his knee down. If you're daft enough to get on the back then you're probably the one egging him on and asking him to pop wheelies. I'm not knocking it! Get out there and have fun - it's a hoot if you go with the flow and don't worry too much.

To fit onto these machines it helps if you are less than 1.5m tall. The best position is tucked in as tight as possible and squeezed up as close as you can get. If you're lucky and the bike has a grab rail then hang onto it until your arm goes numb, then swap arms at a suitable point (i.e. stopped at traffic lights). The other arm should be tight around his waist as far as you can get it to take the acceleration. If there is no grab rail (most Super Sports bikes) then both arms should be around his waist as tightly as possible. Your knees should be in a vice-like grip around his legs and bum.

If he's really going hell for leather then turn the "round the waist" hand round so that your palm is towards the tank - this is so that under hard breaking you can push against the tank to stop all of your weight catapulting into him. He'll really thank you for this because riding a sports bike is hard enough on the arms without having to bear the weight of a pillion too. He'll probably like the cuddling up feeling of it too!

**LEAN ANGLE:** You should always move your body with the bike. When you get used to it the flow will be natural and the ride will feel smooth. NEVER be tempted to sit up because you don't think you're going to make it round a corner. Rest assured that if you do this you will NOT make it round the corner. Have a little faith in the rider's abilities and recognise that bikes can lean to scary angles - watch some bike racing and you'll see. If you don't trust the rider then don't get on the back!

If you are on a Super Sports bike and adopting the position described above, then you won't have any choice but to go where the rider goes. Try this on other types of bikes too if you find you are uncomfortable and keep trying to sit up - snuggling up to the rider is the best way to "be in harmony" with him and the bike.

**COMMUNICATION:** If you don't have an intercom then establish a rule for various prods, signals and gestures before you set out, for instance:

- Push the middle of his back = go faster, I'm bored
- Tap on his left shoulder = request to get on or off
- Tap on his right shoulder = indicate that you are ready to roll
- Tap on his side several times = I'm a little nervous, would you slow down now please?
- Pat his legs or a give big hug = I'm really enjoying the ride, thanks, keep going
- Wave to the side of his helmet when passing a sign = I want to go there or tell you something

Hein Jonker