

ADVENTURE SKILLS

SET UP YOUR CONTROLS

With John Nick

In our last Adventure Skills we looked at the importance of fitting handle bars that enable the Adventure rider to stand comfortably for extended periods. Setting your hand and foot controls in the correct position is equally critical for riding on loose surfaces. Getting used to a more off road oriented set up may take time.

The line

I set up my Adventure bikes first and foremost for gravel and off road riding and compromise for on road conditions. What might be a minor annoyance on the road, becomes a real issue of fighting for control on loose surfaces. The main downside to the offroad oriented stance is the amount of wind pressure created at speeds over 100 kays.

The aim of the off road position is to achieve a near straight line from the rider's shoulders through elbows (held high) continuing through handgrips and levers, when sitting and standing. When standing the rider's head should end up more or less over the steering pivot. This position gives the most power and economy and also allows you to grip the throttle well over the front, vital if you are ever going to get it right open. Adjust both bars and hand levers to achieve the slight compromise required between the two positions, experimenting with both bar and lever angles. It's also a good idea to slip the levers towards the centre of the bars as far as possible, making the less vulnerable to spills.

The hand grip

Now test your hand grip. Holding on with four fingers and thumb might feel secure, but it doesn't allow your fingers to move fast enough to control the bike in either high speed, or technical going. This applies to both brake and clutch. Generally in offroad conditions only one or two fingers are required lock the front wheel. As well as only using one or two fingers, we also shadow the levers, both brake and clutch, that's to say those fingers will always be rested on the lever. This technique effectively reduces reaction times, so we can instantly use both brake and clutch lever to slow the bike, or maintain momentum and drive to the rear wheel.

The feet

Most beginner Adventure riders have their foot pedals set for sitting only, but as we discussed last month, standing takes precedence, as this is the mode

in which we tackle all the complexities of off road riding. Your foot controls will be used standing as much as sitting and need to be adjusted to suit.

Though the rear brake provides very little stopping power off road, it does act as a vital steering control - more on this in a future issue. It's critical that the rear brake is set up so you can use it while standing, even while stretching way back for a downhill. This requires setting your rear brake lever higher than usual for street riding. The down side, is that when seated, especially riding with heavier offroad boots, it may be impossible to rest your instep on the peg during braking. The gear lever is also set higher, so you can slide your boot underneath to up-shift, even when standing. Once again, you may have to lift your boot somewhat off the peg to up-shift when sitting, and lift your foot up onto the gear lever (with your instep clear of the peg) to downshift. These are compromises we all have to accept to ride effectively off road.

The final thing to work on is your foot position on the pegs. Varying your foot position from instep to the balls of your feet gives the various muscles a chance rest. On trails with lurking stumps, rocks and rut edges, the splayed foot easily becomes a broken foot. In likely situations, ride on the balls of the feet.