

TRAIL SKILLS

STANDING POSITIONS

With John Nick

You may be amazed, but top off-road racers spend as much time standing as sitting and trials riders do it all standing, they don't even have a seat. Properly done standing is not tiring, you can see dangers and bumps and ruts further ahead, you can move your body weight more quickly and over a greater range to control and help steer the bike, your legs can absorb bumps much better than your spine and because your body input goes mainly through the foot pegs you can actually improve bike stability.

In the hyper-intense world of motocross there's only one standing position, the standing attack. Trail riders will use the standing attack position in many instances including hard braking, rough ground, whoops, obstacles, and occasional patches of red mist. That's perfect for a short burst, but where we might be cutting out up to 200 km in a day (sometimes for days on end) we require another trick in the toolbox, a less intense standing position I call the standing trail position.

Achieving either standing position requires that your controls and handlebars are the right fit for your body size. See the Trail Tech section for set up details, but the bars most importantly must be correctly shaped, correctly placed and right for your body size. Your hand and foot controls must be correctly adjusted as well – but we will cover that in detail later on in Trail Tech.

Standing attack position

With your bars set right you should be leaning forward from the waist, lowering your shoulders, knees slightly bent, your bum thrust out, and an easy arm reach to the bars. Lift your elbows up and out, forming a straight line between shoulder, elbow and wrist viewed from the side. Clutch and brake levers should be set to extend this same line. Your arms are braced, your head is over the steering pivot, but make sure that you are not too far forward or back to maintain balance with relaxed arms. By strongly gripping the frame and fuel tank with your boots and knees you can relax your arms. Almost all of your weight will still be on your legs - don't worry, they are the biggest, strongest, muscle group in your body. Your knees being slightly bent means your legs can act like giant extra suspension units, doubling your potential speed.

Standing trail position

In this subtly different position the trail rider straightens at the knees and the waist, standing tall and now leaning forward over the bars, while boots and knees still grip the frame and fuel tank. To be successful your head must be well forward, over the bars, or for tall riders even further. Keep your elbows up and experiment with the bend in your elbows to find your natural balance point, so as to keep your arms as relaxed as possible. In this position you should be relaxed yet alert, and have even better sight of the trail ahead, but can instantly change your standing stance to the attack position for braking, corners, or if something nasty in the way of terrain turns up. Applied properly this dynamic position can be comfortably maintained for hours at the moderate to quick pace we wish to maintain on long trail rides.

Next month: We take a look at the interface between body and your bike - your hands and feet. If you want to ask a question or share your ideas e-mail the writer at jnick@nztrailrider.co.nz

Try some standing exercises.

Braking: Get used to the feel of braking while in the standing attack position. If you can't reach the rear brake, now is the time to adjust the lever higher. As you brake harder, stretch your arms out fully, get your body low and push your bum back. See how far you can get back on the bike.

Gentle turns: In second or third gear lean the bike into a series of slight turns, alternately left and right. Keep your knees into the tank and your arms relaxed. Concentrate on keeping your head and shoulders as much as possible over the steering pivot. Gently push the bars down to turn tighter. Your weight will now be mostly on the outside foot peg. Try this exercise in both standing attack and trail positions.

Standing slide: Pick an open patch of smooth dirt and place an object in the centre to mark your turning point. Using the standing attack position turn as you did before, but apply throttle progressively until you are sliding the rear wheel through the turn. Again, keep your head centered over the steering pivot, your weight mostly on the outside foot peg and tip the bars gently down into the corner.