

# ADVENTURE SKILLS

## GRAVEL 102 - CORNERS AND CAMBERS

With John Nick

We might like to imagine cutting through gravel corners speedway style on our new Adventure mount, but the reality is that gravel roads are no specially prepared circuit, and besides there are sure to be other vehicles coming in the opposite direction. As we have already discussed four wheeled traffic scrubs the gravel road into wheel tracks and berms. The wheel tracks are relatively free of stones and more or less clear to ride and the loose berms, mounds of gravel that we only cross as we have to. Simple enough if all gravel roads were straight and level, but they aren't, more to the point they are usually extremely windy and cambered, so it's the corners that pose the challenge. How then do we thread a 200kg Adventure bike through a series of gravel corners?

### BREAK IT DOWN

The answer is to break each corner down into three distinct zones: 1. Approach, including braking and gear changing. 2. Initiate the turn and lean in with power on. 3. Accelerate through the exit and beyond. Here's how we go about it.

1. The approach. It takes a lot of skill to scrub off excessive speed mid corner in gravel, so apply the proven rule, slow in, fast out. Mentally mark the point where you will end braking, do all your braking before the corner, making sure you are upright and in more or less a straight line. Use both front and rear brakes progressively. At the same time change down to an appropriate gear that will give engine braking and still allow the engine to pull out of the corner. Bring up the revs to match your road speed in the lower gear, as your rear wheel will lock up far easier than on seal. While being aware of your turn point do not focus on it, rather keep your vision up and as far around the corner as you can see.

2. Initiate the turn and lean in. We do this by applying counter-steering, something we also do on the road, knowingly or not. Gently nudge the bars (a little), steering the front wheel away from the direction the corner turns (yes this seems to be the WRONG way), but in doing this the bike will naturally lean in towards the corner and begin to turn. This is also the moment to change from engine braking to acceleration. Adding power at this stage confirms the turn. We are also going to add a technique foreign to many road riders. As you initiate the counter-steer, straighten your arm closest to the inside of the corner, pushing the bars slightly away from you and down, towards the inside of the corner. Your outside arm will now be slightly bent at the elbow. As the bike tips in, try to stay upright, do not lean your body in

towards the inside of the corner. In doing this you are shifting your weight bias to the high side (outside) of the seat. It's only a subtle weight shift, but this technique is fundamental to riding on all loose surfaces. It gives better control and traction as the rider's weight is centered over the tyre contact area.

3. Accelerate gently through the corner applying power progressively throughout to help stabilise the bike and give you control. Continue accelerating, changing up the gears again smoothly and looking well ahead for the upright braking zone for the next corner.

It may take some time to gain confidence cornering on gravel, so start off gently. Accept that the bike will move about a bit and that it will take some time before you are truly comfortable in the gravel environment.

## CAMBERS AND RIGHT HANDERS

Quite severe cambers are often graded into windy gravel roads forming a marked crown in the centre and deep drains, or water tables, at the edges. As the roads turns one way and the other the necessity to stay on the left side of the road on blind bends will mean having to tackle alternating positive and negative cambers, a real challenge for motorcycle riders.

Left hand turns, riding into the camber, are easy. Right turns can be a problem, where close to the edge of the road you are turning against the camber, drawing you out and down towards the water table.

The temptation is to cut right hand corners, staying on the neutral camber in the middle of the road. This is a very dangerous practice, because drifting towards the inside of any blind right hand corner greatly reduces your clear vision ahead around the corner, compounding the risk of collision.

The only answer is to slow more for right hand corners, especially downhill ones and ride conservatively around the extreme left wheel track. You will also find that it's possible to brake later on uphill corners, especially on-camber left handers.