

ASK THE RIDING COACH

With Rapid Training Coach Ryan Decarteret

‘Should a bike with high-tech rider aids mean a different style of riding?’

Q I'M LOOKING AT buying a new R1250GS with all the gizmos – it's the TE, so it has semi-active suspension and loads of rider modes, for example. Having previously had purely analogue bikes, are there any ways my riding should evolve to take advantage of the tech?

Rob Grant, London

A FOR THE MOST part, no. The core principles of good riding involve learning throttle control, acceleration sense and vision so we're always in that sweet spot of having time on our side; we arrive at hazards at the right speed and in the right gear to settle the bike, deal with the problem and then power it through the other side.

If I'm following a rider who goes into a corner a fraction too quickly, then gets

stuck off the gas with the front end feeling nervous before eventually tentatively getting back on the power again, my conclusion is not that they need more electronics. What they need is more practice at reading the road, making plans and controlling their bike.

But that's not to say we can't change how we ride in subtle ways to take advantage of electronics. The other day, for example, I had been instructing at a fairly moderate pace in the damp and on the way home, I pressed on to blow out the cobwebs. I was on my BMW XR1000 which has TCS and ABS and, as I was overtaking round a slight left-hander, I went over a bit of hatching which on my GSX-R1000 K5 would have made me more wary because of its lack of traction control. It made me think that maybe you do learn to rely on it a little bit, allowing the electronics to become a safety blanket that lets you concentrate more on everything else.

But I don't believe electronics should be any more than that. I've never seen a road rider play at being a MotoGP star and bang the throttle open straight after the apex, knowing that traction control will kick in and hold the slide. That would be madness – if you try to rely on that on the road, you're going to come unstuck because of all the unknown variables. MotoGP riders rarely round bends to find a removal lorry parked.



Having spent seven years as a surveillance rider with the National Crime Agency, Ryan Decarteret is one of Britain's most-skilled, safest and most qualified road riders

The question of whether semi-active suspension changes your riding is interesting too, because it's difficult to feel the suspension altering, so you're never sure how much difference it's making [the compression and rebound damping of semi-active suspension constantly alters depending on what the bike and the road are doing – Ed]. This is why the first thing that race teams do is remove it – at the ragged edge, it's not consistent enough for racers to predict what it will do next.

On the road though, my experience is that it allows you to ride faster. I used to have a semi-active R1250GS and when riding fast with a fellow Rapid coach, we found his VFR1200 struggled to stay with the GS on bumpier corners because the GS could put the power down and the VFR couldn't.

Overall though, I don't think most riders should get hung up on electronics. I coach plenty of good riders but few of them go anywhere near fast enough to get to a point where traction control and ABS will kick in. I know I'm bound to say this, but my experience is that almost all riders would go faster and be safer if they spent their money on some decent advanced training rather than getting all the electronic gizmos. **R**

► Rider aids are a back-up, not to be relied on



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