

# ASK THE RIDING COACH

With Rapid Training Coach Ryan Decarteret

## 'I dropped my bike doing a U-turn. How can I get better at them?'

**Q** I RECENTLY DROPPED my Triumph Tiger doing a U-turn in a car park. I put my foot down on gravel and slid over in a heap. Only my pride was hurt and I know I'm unlikely to die from a rubbish U-turn but I'd still like to be better at them. Any hints?

**Kev Grainger**

**A** THAT SORT OF thing can happen to the best of us but there's plenty we can do to make sure such incidents are few and far between. And although you're right to say that being good at U-turns isn't as safety-critical as, say, reading the road, it's still an important skill.

However, there's still a significant safety element because being able to do a swift U-turn will reduce the time you're exposed to danger flailing around in the

middle of the road. Maybe even more important is that a lack of low-speed skills can easily erode your overall riding confidence, and that of significant others who may see low-speed wobbling as a sign you're not safe on the open road.

Before getting into the techniques you need to practise, let's cover the safety angle. The biggest risk with a U-turn is getting into a one-sided argument with a car, so check the road is clear. Also, if you think there's a chance you won't make it round in one go, allow even more space between vehicles.

Once you're sure the road's clear, look where you want to go. In that sense, it's like any other corner but, because you want to turn far more tightly, you need to exaggerate everything. Don't just look at the halfway point of the turn, twist your body and look all the way round to the exit. This twists your upper body, encouraging you to turn the bars more.

Throttle/clutch procedure should be:  
**1) Go slowly enough** on entry that you need to play the clutch around the biting point to stop the engine stalling. Hold the throttle at a set opening.

**2) Keep your speed steady** as you turn in and let the bike lean gently. You need the lean to turn - don't just try and twist the handlebars. It helps keep your body upright and push the bike down, so you're creating more lean angle with no increase in speed. Of course, in higher-

speed corners, you do the opposite (ie, lean your body into the corner) because you want to reduce lean angle for the same speed.

**3) As you feel the bike drop in**, add drive via the clutch to keep a steady lean angle.

**4) If you want a tighter turn**, slow down a fraction by taking away some drive via the clutch - this will cause the bike to lean more. You control the tightness of the turn as much with the clutch as the bars. The throttle stays steady.

**5) Keep looking at your exit** (and beyond), and keep the bike driving by playing out the clutch.

As with all slow-riding techniques, smooth, sensitive clutch control is everything - just ask any trials rider. If you're going slowly, you shouldn't need the brakes but some riders like to drag the back brake to add another layer of control. That's fine, but don't be tempted to use the front brakes - they're far too powerful for this job and you risk unsettling the bike.

Finally - and you knew I was going to say this - you need to practise, practise, practise. Take your Tiger to an empty car park and start turning within five parking spaces (going both ways). When that's easy, move to four spaces and so on. Within a couple of weeks you'll be U-turning in two spaces like a pro! **R**



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



Practice makes perfect - but start off doing solo U-turns