

Practice, Practice, Practice 'Skill' is often no more than CONFIDENCE

By: James R. Davis

Some time ago I was riding with a group down a back-country road when our group leader decided that we needed to perform our 'mandatory' U-turn. The road had two lanes (one in each direction) and there was no oncoming traffic.

With only one exception everybody made a 'three-point' maneuver. That is, we turned across the road and stopped when we could not keep going without running off the pavement, then backed up after turning the front wheel, stopped and turned the front wheel again and proceeded to complete the maneuver.

There was, as I said, one exception. This rider was on a relatively new GoldWing and he was carrying a passenger. Further, he is a BIG man - well over 6' tall and well over 300 pounds.

This man simply aggressively leaned his bike over and drove his bike through the entire 180 degree turn without needing to stop or running out of pavement.

The chatter on the CB was filled with compliments relative to his profound skill with his bike. Those compliments started again at our next rest stop. They were well deserved compliments. But they were misdirected.

That is, what should have been complimented, in my opinion, was the rider's CONFIDENCE rather than his skill.

Don't get me wrong - the man demonstrated lot's of skill. He had demonstrated a mastery of his clutch, his throttle, and his HEAD!

With even modest skill almost anyone can lean a bike far enough in a slow-speed turn to drag a peg - but very few of us want to or would even try to get close to that big a lean because we do not KNOW that we can do it successfully. Why? Because we lack confidence in either our machine or ourselves. So, we compromise and do what we KNOW we can do - we make a three-point U-turn on a narrow road.

And how is it that this BIG man developed the confidence to make that slow-speed hard lean needed to complete his smooth U-turn? He had lot's of experience. Experience gained from lot's of practice.

Whether you call it skill or confidence, this man handles his bike very well indeed. He deserves recognition and regard, and he certainly gets both from me. Further, his U-turn maneuver took substantially less time than mine did. In other words, he was at risk for far less time than I was. THAT aspect of the value of experience never occurred to me before - confidence can reduce time at risk.

So, schedule some time on a regular basis and go out and practice, practice, practice. Earn the respect and regard of your friends by increasing your confidence/skills. Potentially reduce your at-risk time while on the road.

Practice increases confidence. Confidence shows as 'skill.' Over-confidence, however, can kill. The difference between the two, of course, is that being confident means you know you can do something, being over-confident means you think you can.

Making a U-turn like my friend did may not be the most important thing you will ever have to do, but failing to negotiate a curve at high speed because you lack confidence enough to lean the bike just a bit more is simply unacceptable motorcycling.



And remember: Drive on the right except to pass...