



PRO RIDER

RIDING IN THE WIND

Words **Karel Pavich** | Photos **BRM**

In New Zealand, we frequently have to deal with the effects of wind while riding and it can be one of the trickiest conditions to cope with, especially if the roads are wet or icy.

Wind is one of the most unfavourable and unpredictable conditions a motorcyclist can face on our roads. You need to make sure you wrap up warmly and don't underestimate the effects of wind chill.

Check the weather warnings before you head off, as high winds can be really dangerous. If you don't absolutely have to

travel, then consider the option of not riding in those conditions at all, especially if you are a relatively inexperienced rider.

If there are high wind warnings, try to schedule your riding to a time where the wind will not be at its peak. Riding in wind will tire you very quickly and make you pretty uncomfortable. But if you can't avoid it, here are some tips for riding in wind:

Learn to read the wind and predict how large objects redirect wind. Clouds, flags, trees and grasses are a good indication of which way the wind is blowing.

Large trucks push a "bow wave" of air, and a gust will push turbulent air around the front and downwind. When you are approaching an oncoming truck, the best plan is to move as far away as possible, get tucked in to withstand the sudden wind blast, and be prepared to steer quickly to keep the bike under control.

In high wind situations, steering controls lean. When a wind gust slams into the bike, it is necessary to get the bike leaned into the wind quickly. If a gust from the left pushes the bike toward the right, you need to push the bike into the wind (to the left) to counter this.

You may have to ride for some distance with the bike leaned into the wind, so use pressure on the 'bars and footpegs to keep it heading in a straight line. When the wind suddenly dissipates, you will need to react quickly and put pressure in the opposite direction to get the bike upright again.

In a head or tail wind, get as low as you can on the bike and tuck in your arms and legs. Try to relax your grip on the 'bars and lock into the bike using your legs and feet. Make sure you are in a gear that will give you mid-range revs so you can "drive" against the forces of a headwind.

Crosswinds are trickier. You need to stay relaxed and not have the "grip of death" on the 'bars. Get used to the fact that the bike is going to get blown around a bit, so don't fight it, the trick is to stay relaxed and steer the bike where it needs to go using the throttle and counter steering to balance out the effects.

Hang it out! This is a trick that I've used often and always seems to work when riding in cross winds. Hang your knee out (into the wind) and the knee seems to act as a stabiliser and keeps the bike much more upright, with a lot less effort required.

Lightweight bikes will also get pushed around more than heavy bikes or cruisers which have a lower centre of gravity. If you have usually have luggage attached, but aren't using it, then it would be wise to leave it in the garage.

Removing side mass will make your bike easier to ride.

Keep your weight low and forward on the bike to try and stay under the wind, especially on bikes where you sit taller on them.

Avoid getting fatigued. The extra energy you expend in keeping the bike under control will wear you out quickly, both mentally and physically. Take a break at least every hour.

Get off the bike, find some shelter from the wind, drink some water to stay hydrated, and use some eye drops if needed. Don't forget your earplugs. Wind noise causes fatigue, and fatigue slows your reaction time.

Give yourself space on the road to allow for unexpected gusts, especially on the narrow twisty roads in New Zealand. Ride in the middle of the lane and give yourself a safety margin to prevent sudden gusts blowing you off the side of the road or into oncoming vehicles. ■■■



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