

U-TURNS & FIGURE 8s

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This month, the ProRider team run through how to make U-turns and low-speed manoeuvres as easy as 1-2-3.

The road can present many challenges when you stop your bike or need to execute slow manoeuvres such as U-turns and tight turns. Things to consider are cambers, changes to elevation or gradient and limited manoeuvring space, especially if you have weight on the back such as a pillion or luggage. At very slow speeds your weight has a huge effect on the bike's balance point. Developing the skill

of safely manoeuvring your bike in slow or space-restricted conditions will give you the confidence to handle the challenges properly without risk to your own or anyone else's safety.

Doing a u-turn on a motorcycle is part balance, and part power. To get the perfect blend of both, three very basic, simple techniques apply to manoeuvring your bike at slow speeds: Balance, clutch control and rear braking.



Bum out bike in - tightens the turning circle

PART 1 - PREPARATION & BALANCE

Weight Out - Look in

You may also find it useful to shift your weight to the outside edge of your seat, especially if you have a sportsbike with limited steering lock or a long wheelbase cruiser bike. This counterbalancing technique will help you turn the bike in a tighter line.



Weight out - look in

Look Where You Want To Go

It's a well-documented fact that where you look is where you and your bike will go. With your eyes fixed on your exit point, turn the handlebars and keep your body upright. Let only the bike lean into the turn, and apply pressure to the outside footpeg to counterbalance the lean of the bike.



Look where you want to go - you'll go there

Eyes Up

Keep your line of vision going through the turn. If the bike starts heading towards the kerb and everything else is in check, it probably means you're not looking where you want to go. A mere glance at the kerb is enough to throw you off course.



Eyes up and looking into the turn and to the exit



PART 2 - CLUTCH CONTROL

Throttle & Clutch

From stationary, disengage the clutch just enough to find the friction point - where it starts to "grab". That is when your bike just starts to move forward, where you are "slipping" the clutch, i.e. it is not yet fully released.

Slipping The Clutch

Set the clutch at this point so the bike is just moving forward. Use enough throttle to ensure the engine doesn't stall – it's the clutch that controls your forward momentum at this stage, not the throttle.



Feet Up

Don't drag your feet, because that will compromise the balance of the bike. It's a natural tendency to throw a leg out for stabilisation when making a slow turn, but the bike will only be balanced properly when your feet are on the pegs. Practice a wider arc first, then tighten it as your confidence grows



Loose Surfaces & Confined Spaces

Where there isn't room to do one clean arc or there is loose gravel, use your inside leg to avoid the front tucking. This will make your turning circle greater than counter-leaning but will save cost and embarrassment in awkward situations.



PART 3 - REAR BRAKE

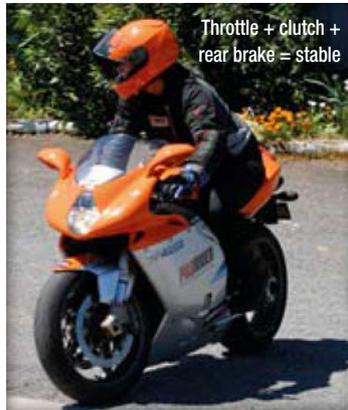
Tug o' War

Because some bikes don't have enough feel or progressiveness in their clutch, using the rear brake to help control the power assists the throttle/clutch manipulation in maintaining smooth power to the rear wheel.



All Together Now

With the clutch and throttle set, apply the rear brake to slow the bike down further or you can dab the brake on and off. Gentle dragging of the rear brake creates stability, enabling better control while you're manoeuvring your bike through the turn. Aim to create a slight tug-of-war between your rear brake and your engine to stabilise the bike. Keep in mind that the speed you're travelling at should be the speed you'll maintain through your turn.



Leave the front brake alone

Avoid using the front brake during u-turns. Applying the front brake at slow speeds with the bars turned even slightly will pull the bike to the ground like a magnet.



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



Both ways

Most people seem to find it much easier to make turns in one particular direction. To develop a more balanced u-turn skill set, practice doing figure 8s in an empty parking lot. The drill will build your muscle memory for both sides of your body. Similarly, try riding in a wide circle and narrowing your path so you're forming an ever-narrowing spiral; once you can't turn any more tightly, exit and then do it again in the opposite direction. Remember to keep looking where you want to go, especially when you're changing directions.

Coming up to traffic lights or in slow moving traffic is also a great way to practice slow feet-up riding.

Once you master these simple techniques, you will be impressed at how tightly you can perform confident manoeuvres on your bike. You can apply this technique to a bike of almost any size or weight, and get safely through a tight manoeuvre without falling off or dropping your bike.

