

Fear Factor

Fear is the single biggest hindrance we motorcyclists face when trying to improve our skills, yet few riders ever seriously confront it. By removing fear, the barriers to learning disappear. Anyone can follow step-by-step directions. It is fear that keeps riders from following through on their desires to make a change in their riding.

All fears are fueled by the belief that “I can’t handle it.” If you are afraid that you can’t handle something, like going into a turn 10 miles per hour faster than you usually do, your body’s survival mechanisms will make you incapable of pushing through the barrier. Although your conscious mind may want to turn the throttle a little more, your unconscious mind will not allow your wrist to comply. This is a frustrating situation for riders who are serious about improving their skills, but are unaware of what is stopping them from making progress.

Fear is actually a good thing, but we must learn to work with it rather than struggle against it in order to make it a positive influence on our riding. Fear is necessary for our survival. If we weren’t afraid of anything, we would soon die by doing stupidly dangerous things. Fear can increase your adrenaline flow, which provides added strength in emergencies. Fear can also be your worst enemy if you don’t learn to control it. Too much of it can have a crippling effect on even the most experienced riders.

Every motorcyclist has what can be referred to as a “fear threshold.” A fear threshold is a point at which the level of fear becomes so great that the rider’s mind cannot process any additional information. This is like trying to run a math-intensive software program on an old computer. It can only make so many calculations per second. If you throw too much information at it too quickly, it is liable to crash. Likewise, if you try pushing a motorcycle faster than your brain can disseminate the sensory inputs, you may also crash.

Often, right before a rider crashes, he says to himself, “I think I am going to crash.” Usually, that is exactly what happens. The rule of thumb here is that if you think you will or you think you won’t, you are right. In other words, your attitude toward your situation actually makes it real. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The opposite of fear is confidence or certainty. Confidence is a state of mind, an attitude based on your knowledge and faith. Knowledge comes from the analysis of physical and mental experiences. Faith is a trust in your knowledge. Faith is trust in yourself. The more faith you have, the more confident you will be. There is no such thing as good faith or bad faith, only more faith and less faith. More is better.

When learning new skills, it is best to always push yourself just enough to feel a little fear and get in the habit of riding within it. That way, when the unexpected takes you by surprise, you will be able to handle the feeling without shutting down.

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Paraphrased with excerpts from Total Control by Lee Parks.