

normal color. This is called normal capillary refill time. When you are dehydrated, your cap refill time will increase. If it goes to two or three seconds you better park it and get some water to drink.

Speaking of something to drink, remember this rule: For every high there is an equal and corresponding low. Stay away from or minimize caffeine, sugar and alcohol on long trips. They are a diuretic, which means they displace water and promote dehydration. As for sport drinks they are better than nothing in that they usually have some electrolytes in them. They usually have a sucrose or fructose sugar base. They will give you a short sugar high and then dump you. A better way to go is one of the electrolytes and carbohydrate mixes available from a good bicycle shop. These mixes are in powder form and can be easily transported. They are mixed with water, fruit juice or milk. But keep the original package with you. We once had divided the white electrolyte powder into individual Zip Lock baggies and a Mexican border guard thought he had a drug bust on his hands. He changed his mind after tasting it though, lucky for us.

PART III: Mechanical Reliability

This is split topic. On one hand it means avoiding breakdowns. On the other it means preparing your bike for maximum physical efficiency. Since there are a gazillion articles on mechanics we'll skip that and focus on the ergonomics.

Your bike is the center of your universe. One of the most meaningful elements of riding well is often over looked. We are not taught to recognize the importance of the center of the bike. Your motorcycle is a three-axis vehicle and so it is critical to understand how the muscles of your body are affected by the attitude of your bike. Although this subject can't fairly be covered here, I can sum up the concept by saying you use different muscles to ride the bike at different times.

Your front-to-back weight bias will shift in a pitch, lean or slide situation. For example, if you are braking hard or going down a steep hill, you tend to move forward requiring you to either brace with your arms or grip the bike with your knees and legs (the preferred method). Your training and conditioning must anticipate this sort of muscle recruitment and prepare you accordingly.

If your hands go to sleep, you have a problem. When we grab the handlebars,

we compress nerves in our hands and wrists. Eventually these nerves become irritated and our hand(s) starts tingling. Eventually, if nothing is changed, our hand goes to sleep. We bang fingers on the bars, or rub them, or shake the hand until it wakes up. We add cruise controls; wrist rests, padded grips, and eventually goes see the nerve specialist. He fixes it with inpatient surgery and we either quite riding or begin the process all over.

STOP! Do not ignore this situation, fix it. First, don't trust the truing and balance job on your wheels. Even the computer-balancer systems are not perfect. More than once we have taken wheels off a computerized spin balancer and placed them on a truing stand to re-balance them by hand. Guess what? The computers are often inaccurate. Also, a tuning and balance job won't last the life of a tire. Consider truing or re-balancing a wheel anytime it starts to shake. Also, consider placing a strip of duck tape over the wheel weights as they have been know to fly off.

Another issue is how do you grab the handlebar? Most people just reach out and grab with their hands 90 degrees to the bar. OK, so what? When you roll the throttle on you must bend your wrist down. This compresses the nerve bundle and can lead to injury over time. Why not try what the desert racers do: "Look for the V!" As you reach for the bar, angle your hand outward by slightly lifting your elbow. This creates a "V" in the web of your hand between your thumb and pointer finger. Now when you roll the throttle on, your wrist angle is reduced, as is the pressure on the nerve bundle.

Finally, evaluate your hand-arm-handlebar position. Short, clip-on style bars usually require you to brace your body weight on your arms. This can lead to locked elbows. If you ride with low bars, consider sliding forward in the seat and gripping the tank with your knees to take some weight off your hands. If you see that position ruining your racer look, consider using gloves with gel pads in the palms to distribute weight and absorb vibration.

Monkey butt is not a zoological term. Every wonder why motocross racers stand up to ride? Yes, I know they sit down in the turns to weight wheels, but when they hit the whoops, or land big air, their body weight is mostly on the foot pegs. Why?


There are two reasons. First, a standing position allows the rider to shift the center of the bike quickly in response to changing

conditions- much more quickly than if she were sitting down. In other words, in some situations standing improves control by reducing the required lean angle for a given speed and turn radius.

Secondly, standing improves suspension performance. Every hit a pothole or bump while firmly planted on your butt? Hurts, huh. Most of us try to shift some weight to the foot pegs before impact. Why? Our legs are powerful shock absorbers - that's one reason why we run on our feet and not our butts. We can absorb a tremendous amount of shock energy with the muscles, tendons and ligaments in our legs. We lose the benefit of our natural shock absorbers if we are firmly planted on our backsides. All the shock not absorbed by the bike goes straight up our spine. So, it follows that if we can somehow compliment our bikes suspension, with our human suspension, we can reduce the stress on our back and neck.

Why not learn to ride standing up. You don't have to make a big deal out of it, just once in a while to stretch. Who knows, you might like it. If you ride a cruiser style bike, you will have a harder time standing if your foot peg location is forward. It's still possible to stand up, but not recommended.

The term Monkey Butt comes from the tenderness and redness caused by sweat and rubbing in the lower region. It can be avoided by a seat covering other than plastic or smooth leather. The rough side of tanned leather, sheepskin, or other fabrics that promote airflow make great seat coverings. Gel seats are fine if they don't promote sweating or chaffing.

If you are doing long days in the saddle, you are probably a cowboy or a motorcycle rider. In either case, training and preparation are critical to success. Why not start your exercise program now? Why not take a little extra time for some thoughtful organization and planning. It only takes a little more effort to assure a great ride and a safe return. 

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