

Perils Of Gravel

There is a saying among those in the motorcycle community. That there are two types of bikers; those that have gone down, and those that are going down. For those few who believe they will never go down, want to play poker? In the right situation it takes only a few pebbles to take you down. Anyone who has ridden for even a very short time has felt that gut tightening sickening sensation of an unexpected "fishtail". It can quickly become obvious who are the experienced riders and the novice. What do they know the novice biker has yet to discover?

Gravel should be considered as dangerous as ice. You cannot lean a bike while traveling on ice. Speed must be greatly reduced to control the smallest maneuver without the loss of direction and stopping capability. It is impossible to avoid all gravel and sand but you can watch for it. Have a mental checklist prepared to deal with an emergency.

The physics of the road can give indications of impending danger. Curves pose an obvious problem. There are three items on a curve that keep you up; speed, traction, and braking. The tighter the corner the more likely a rider may have to negotiate the outer lane line. Debris such as sand accumulates from being applied in poor weather conditions. Gravel washes down during rainstorms or is brushed away from the medium by street sweepers.

As a rider enters a curve at speed a lean occurs to continue momentum placing less tire tread against the road. That's when your heart leaps up into your throat because your wheels have lost traction. It's a frightening experience but you can handle it. At highway speed steer slightly in the direction of the skid. If you are leaning to the left and skidding to the right, turn the handlebars a bit towards the right. Chances are you will clear the spot, the tires will grip the pavement, the bike will stand up, and you'll continue on your way. Safety courses teach when in doubt=accelerate out. If you choose to brake, DON'T LOCK UP THE FRONT WHEEL. It will guide you in the direction needed once traction returns. Experienced riders tell stories of white-knuckled skills that saved them from certain death. While old timers announce, "all I could think of as I was going down was looking for a soft place to land." Thank god for old timers advice.