

The Rhythm of Racing

By Dale Dutcher

Aaron Stevenson and other motorcycle racers describe the essence of their success on the race track as: Rhythm. You will frequently hear a professional racer say in an interview: "I need to find my rhythm". If the motorcycle is setup correctly; then all that remains is for the human element to find its rhythm. This single concept transcends languages, geographic boundaries, cultures, and countries all over the world.

Among the attributes of rhythm we might include continuity or flow, regularity, proportion, repetition, pattern, shape, animation, and motion (or at least the semblance of high speed motion on a motorcycle often running nearly or at 200 mph).

Indeed, so intimate is the connection of the rhythmic with the motorcycle and its driver that, we could perhaps most concisely and ecumenically define the combination as the rhythmicization of motorcycle racing.

"If I had to sum up how I like to see my students end up, it would be pretty simple," says Aaron Stevenson.

"I help them understand and achieve a manner of riding where they are not 'chasing' the bike they are riding, but instead, getting into a flowing motion where they become one with their bike." (Rhythm) Ask Aaron Stevenson about rhythm sometime and prepare yourself for his all day lecture at Cornerspeed.

Motorcycling is an extremely technical sport. It is obvious to you if you are a motorcycle owner and rider but it is seldom so to many people who are merely spectators at the track or drivers of cars and trucks whom you see on the highway. Scientists have shown that the top gun pilot of a fighter plane or helicopter uses close of 4000 motor skills involving many technical aspects of training and conditioning while the average motorcyclist also uses 3500 of those same or more complex motor skills easily.

Aaron Stevenson uses Cornerspeed classes to make motorcycling come alive through the rigorous non-stop day of classroom instruction and lab work of on the track experience.

A dictionary of motorcycle racing jargon is used to explain that turns are defined not as hairpins or long sweeps, but instead, as having either an expanding radius, decreasing radius, or a constant radius. According to Aaron Stevenson, most turns at the Virginia International Raceway (VIR) are of the decreasing radius variety, which means that the turn tightens as it progresses, becoming sharper past the apex than at the turn-in.

Aaron Stevenson expertly uses a felt tipped marker to quickly diagram the most efficient line to negotiate each of the turns at VIR. (Meaning the fastest one can go while keeping the bike on two wheels on the track)

Aaron stresses that the motorcycle driver should be setting up early to properly negotiate a particular turn. If you apply your brakes too soon, too late, neglect to properly time your acceleration for the upcoming apex, or even double apex of the turn, then you will take a rather unflattering turn mowing the grass on the shoulder of the track. (i.e. you are no longer the pilot (rider); you become a passenger on a projectile)

The Cornerspeed course is literally jammed packed with new informa-

tion, valuable technical knowledge, and anecdotal stories from Aaron Stevenson's experience. Most students can expect that each hour of the Cornerspeed course will contain about 30 minutes of classroom instruction, about 10 minutes for transition grid time, and about 20 minutes out on the course practicing what you just learned with Cornerspeed's Expert rated on track instructors providing guidance and feedback.

You will quickly learn that the reason why Cornerspeed is so popular with students is that Aaron Stevenson has designed the course with a very high instructor-to-student ratio (typically 2:1 student to instructor ratio). Instructors accompany all students out on the track riding both in front and behind them. One instructor will be present to as few as two students as they drive their motorcycles using their newly learned skills faster and faster. There is even one drill where students run the whole track without using their brakes for 20 minutes.

Aaron Stevenson rides out on the track at VIR, driving his bright red motorcycle with distinctive flames clearly visible to everyone, with his students along with a talented staff of seasoned race winning instructors who have distinguished themselves in the WERA and even AMA National levels of motorcycle road racing.

Cornerspeed students will initially wear their own safety gear and drive their own motorcycles on the VIR course following behind an instructor to observe and learn the proper "lines" to take through various straightaway and turns of the VIR course. The instructors wear solid red helmets and a big letter I printed on a light colored t-shirt that is actually worn over the top of their leathers. This ensures that Instructors are always visible to track officials and students. Instructors wave the students ahead, allow them to pass and then follow them mentally noting any changes or improvements each of the students need to make. As many as 10-12 instructors can be seen on the course with the students during any given track time session.

After each track session, Aaron and the Cornerspeed instructors take the students back into the classroom building layer upon layer of technical help and observations to share with the students. One class session includes a presentation on the dynamics of fine-tuning the motorcycle's suspension system. The next session looks at a video of a rider from the camera view up front and then behind the driver to illustrate the driver's position on the motorcycle and how quickly the movement in and out of the 1/2 bubble... takes place relative to the motorcycle's position, speed, and movements on the track.

Aaron climbs on a yellow motorcycle in the front of the classroom to better illustrate to students the correct riding posture, placement of your arms and knees, and the correct position of your feet on the pegs as a way to fine-tune the handling of the bike by using the drivers position and weight distribution to literally steer the motorcycle without moving the handlebars as he or she anticipates the next challenge on the track.

Aaron Stevenson's philosophical overview of his race school is key elements in helping his students find their own personal 1/2 Rhythm.... There are many aspects of both the bike and rider that each student must be focused on and figure out the details for themselves, before any substantial progress in lap times are made.

"I like to use the analogy of the musical instrument," says Stevenson. (There is that rhythm analogy again)

"No matter how talented a musician you are, your performance will only be as good as your instrument (motorcycle equipment)."

You can have a great suspension, but bad tires will negate that....

You can have great tires, but a bad suspension set-up will ruin that....

You can have all of the horsepower in the world, but if it doesn't translate into an efficient connection to the asphalt, there again, the overall goal of faster times is eliminated, says Aaron.

Aaron Stevenson constantly stresses that becoming a better rider is the sum total of a lot of factors, both technical and mechanical for the bike, and the rhythm, intelligence, and concentration for the rider.

He then uses the similarity of a motorcycle rider and a master of the martial arts. The repetition of the basics over and over builds an instinctive action that you don't have to consciously think about do-



ing. The student is told to close his or her eyes and visualize the track, slow down their breathing and mentally focus on their memory of the track.

This is similar in the martial arts as it is akin to the "kata" (performing a series of attacks against "visualized" opponents) This imaginary journey of the practitioner through the many skills and motions of martial arts self defense or attack is no different than the racer that closes his/her eyes and takes a lap around the race track seeing the track in their mind and imitating all the inputs, shifts and movements that are used to complete one perfect lap.

This is an ideal exercise when you consider the human mind has a reaction time that can be improved by anticipating certain finite and known events and how they will most likely occur: setting up by putting your knee out in anticipation of a turn, individual shifting of gears or block shifting gears, and braking or not braking before you are accelerating out of a turn. There are hundreds of techniques and drills that the student is exposed to with spaced repetition until it literally becomes engrained into their instincts creating a catalog of new experiences or overwriting and erasing old bad habits.

If you take all that you pay for a brand name sport bike then you owe it to yourself to attend at least one class with Aaron Stevenson at Cornerspeed because unless you are a racer you are actually leaving 90% of your motorcycle's engineering value and capabilities on the table unused and unenjoyed.

If you have never been to Virginia International Raceway (VIR) then you are truly missing an amazing insight into yourself as a person, a motorcycle owner, and what is possible with a sportbike running on a closed course racetrack.

Aaron holds Cornerspeed classes at the Virginia International Raceway (VIR) in Alton, Virginia just up the road a piece from Milton, North Carolina. Any good map and a magnifying glass or MapQuest on the internet will help you locate VIR.

For additional information about, Cornerspeed go to <http://www.cornerspeed.net> or you can directly e-mail Aaron Stevenson at: cornerspeed@carolina.rr.com

