



The all mighty stopwatch. This simple tool is the measuring stick used by many people to gauge the success of racers around the globe. Many riders have onboard lap timers mounted right on their dash, giving them instant feedback on the results of their previous lap. Many of these same timers are capable of acquiring GPS data, providing valuable insight and pages of data that can be poured over and analyzed after each session. Couple this data with simultaneous onboard footage and you can spend hours dissecting a single 8 lap track session. While this process can certainly help some riders, there is a point at which this over-processing simply turns into entertainment. There is nothing wrong with having this type of fun, but in this article but we will discuss some valuable ways to utilize these fantastic tools that only take a few minutes each session.

Even before the advent of all this technology, I've seen many riders get so hung up on trying to churn out a fast lap time that they sometimes hinder their own progress. In the end, most riders (especially newer ones) can knock time off if they are simply willing to scare themselves. Hold that gas on a little longer, roll the throttle on harder onto the front straight, let go of the brakes earlier on the way into the corner....all these things will drop your lap time as long as you can stay on line and don't run off the track. Unfortunately, simply taking extra risk doesn't make you a better rider.

Riding 11/10ths all the way around the track just to satisfy the on board lap timer is going to put your brain into survival mode, and even if you are fortunate to keep it upright you will not likely be able to repeat your heroic time the next session – let alone the next day. It reminds me of a philosophy that I heard from a basketball coach evaluating the true meaning of mastering a shot. "Anyone can hit a certain shot once or twice, and some players think they are masters once they've hit a shot three times in a row. Without good form and lots of practice, these players are relying on luck. A real shooter is one who can not only hit that shot 9/10 times, but knows what they need to adjust in order to make the 11th shot fall again."



In order to make real progress, your brain usually needs extra time to process new information. The key is to improve your skill and your strategy, not to simply grit your teeth and try harder. In order to make that 11th shot, most riders need to attack the track with a plan and focus on making changes in one section at a time. When riding in this mindset, Penguin School coaches will encourage students to ride the rest of the track at good pace, but one that allows them to relax and focus on the section that we are trying to improve.

For example, let's say that a rider wants to figure out if squaring off the exit of a corner to get a better drive will produce faster lap times. This process usually involves a slightly wider entrance and a corresponding more definitive turn-in. This tighter radius at the point of turn-in requires the rider to give up a couple extra MPH so that they can straighten out the exit and get the bike up on the center of the tire sooner. In the process of working on a change like this, a rider will have to adjust the magnitude and timing of the initiation of the turn, focus on getting the up on the center of the tire sooner and incrementally increasing the rate of roll on. This all needs to be done while keeping hands and arms soft – especially once the roll on begins. It's a lot to process and might take a couple sessions to sort all out. If the rider is working on a body position change, it might take even a few days to successfully re-wire your muscle memory.

Coming back to our original mentions of using technology to speed this process along, let's look at how these tools can help us. Many good lap timers have the ability to produce section times, which can be a real key to progress. A rider can set up the timer to start a test section midway down the straight preceding this corner, and end it at a few seconds after the throttle is shut off at the end of the following drive. The timer should be run for a full session before any changes in strategy are implemented to establish a good baseline. With this baseline, the rider can now focus on the test area and, using all the extra free attention to analyze the feedback of the motorcycle in the important area and to formulate a plan of attack for the next lap. The overall lap time does not matter!

Once back in the pits, all the rider needs to do is to look at the section times the terminal straightaway speeds compared to the baseline laps. When working on drives, a faster trap speed at the end of the straight will result in a faster section time 99% of the time. Riders should have a pad and paper ready so that they can record what they did on their best laps. Maybe on lap 3 you squared it slightly less sharply, carried more mid corner roll and that produced the best trap speed.

For those riders who do not have section times and GPS lap timers, there is an old school method that works nearly as well. In order to judge your drive, simply find a reference point down the straight where you glance at the tachometer every lap. If you make a change and notice an increase is even a couple hundred RPM, then you are surely on the right track. Couple this together with data analysis back in the pits, and you'll be dropping those times and more quickly and efficiently than ever before.

The key with making any successful change is to attack things with a plan and a singular focus. When riders try to do three things at once or simply try to grit their teeth and try harder, they often have a hard time pinpointing the keys to success. The final key to success is the determination and resolve to stay focused on the primary goal until progress is made. Too many riders give up on implementing crucial riding techniques simply because re-wiring your muscle memory can take time and the willingness to take a temporary step back. You just need to ask yourself if you want to ride a little faster today or ride a lot faster for the rest of your life. It sounds like an easy choice, but what's holding YOU back?

Until next time, ride fast – ride safe!

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