

How to U-Turn a Motorcycle

By Basem Wasef

It may look easy, but a smoothly executed u-turn on a motorcycle is more challenging than you might guess.

How do you perform a u-turn that looks effortless? Consider these tips and practice them in the safety of an empty parking lot, and you'll find yourself more easily turning your bike around on the street:

It's All in the Eyes

The old adage "You'll go where you're looking" holds especially true when it comes to u-turns. That said, don't look down, and keep your line of vision going through the turn, constantly focusing your eyes ahead, where you want to go, rather than towards the pavement below.

Ride Within the Friction Zone

The friction zone is the area where your clutch is slipping enough to transmit some, but not all power from the engine to the rear wheel. Don't try to u-turn in neutral, and don't do with a gear fully engaged, either; riding within the friction zone will give you more control over the bike through the throttle, which helps modulate the motorcycle's lean angle through subtle adjustments.

Drag the Rear Brake

Avoid using the front brakes during u-turns, as the forks are more sensitive to diving at low speeds. Gentle dragging of the rear brake creates stability, enabling better control while you're maneuvering your bike through the turn.

Keep Your Weight Mass Centralized

There's a natural tendency to stick your leg out when you turn (making it ready to break a fall), but your motorcycle will be more manageable when peripheral mass (ie, you!) is closer to the bike. Keep your feet on the pegs; if necessary, you might be helped by putting some weight on the outside peg, in a similar but more subtle way than you would while riding offroad.

Practice Turning Both Ways

For whatever reason, most people find it much easier to make tight left turns than right turns. To develop a more balanced u-turn skill set, practice doing figure 8s in an empty parking lot. The drill will build your muscle memory for both sides of your body. Similarly, try riding in a wide circle and narrowing your path so you're forming an ever-narrowing spiral; once you can't turn any more tightly, exit and try it again the other way. Remember to keep looking where you want to go, especially when you're changing directions.