

Streetmasters Motorcycle Workshops

by Mike Douglas



HOW MANY OF you have ever attended a motorcycle training class? Probably quite a few. Being an instructor, I know the MSF courses very well. So when I was invited to attend the inaugural Streetmasters Motorcycle Workshop, held on the Horse Thief Mile track at Willow Springs Motorsports Park near Rosamond, California, I jumped at the chance. Heading out on a closed-circuit one-mile track—that sounded like fun!

The Streetmasters Workshop is a very new and different kind of precision cornering school, designed specifically for touring and sport-touring motorcyclists. Our inaugural class was made up almost exclusively of Honda Gold Wing riders, mostly on new GL1800s, but with a few GL1500s tossed in. The highest speed attained at any time during the training was about 50 mph. But believe me, on this tight, twisting course, with 11 curves of every possible description, 50 mph on a Honda-bago is quite a challenge for most people's riding abilities.

For the track training, students were divided up into groups of five or less, each with its own instructor. While one group rode the track, the second hit the "practice pad." There was plenty of opportunity for one-on-one instruction, and the instructors themselves were of the highest caliber. The lead instructor, and creator of the training curriculum, was Bob Reichenberg. Bob is known to most MSF instructors, me included, as the former Chief Instructor Trainer for the foundation. I received my training as an Instructor and later as

a Chief Instructor from Bob. One of the other principal instructors was MCN's own Walt Fulton. Besides being this magazine's primary test-bike rider, Walt's name will be recognized to many in motorcycling as a former team racer for Harley-Davidson, Suzuki and Kawasaki, also as one of the BMW "Battle of the Legends" racers, and most memorably as one of the riders featured in Bruce Brown's "On Any Sunday."

In the track portion, the instructor first explained the exercise and led his group out onto the track. After three laps, he then pulled to the rear, allowing the first student to lead for two laps, who in turn pulled off, filing to the rear just in front of the instructor, while the next student led. This pattern continued until all students had led and the instructor had a chance to evaluate everyone. I was fortunate enough to be in the group hitting the track first and Bob was the instructor of my group.

During the first set of drills, the students are instructed to ride around the course at 25 mph, in

second gear, and try to avoid using their brakes unless absolutely necessary—sounds easy—but it is not! In fact, after 10 laps, fewer than one rider in 10 had been able to negotiate the course without resorting to their brakes at least once. With a little practice and a lot of engine braking, most could make it through 10 of the curves, but there was one that repeatedly eluded virtually everyone, myself included. This particular beast was at the end of a very steep downhill straight, making a 160°, hard right-hand turn with a decreasing radius going steeply back uphill. *Ouch*, my neck still hurts, just thinking of trying to look all the way through that turn. Even with an entry speed of only 10 mph, and the suspensions on their GLs pumped up to the max, most riders felt they had to get on the brakes to negotiate this particular turn.

Once we mastered this technique, the instructors threw a monkey wrench into the process. Students were now instructed to stay in the center of the lane all the way around the track, including the corners. I personally found this to be one of the most difficult challenges, since I have been trained and train others to use the "Outside-Inside-Outside" cornering lines. After the instructor had a chance to evaluate each rider during the drill, he would resume the lead and take us into the "hot pit" for a quick critique, and individual suggestions for changing one particular aspect of our riding style. Notice I said only *one* aspect. The instructor would then have you get back out on the track for several more laps, practicing that single change until he



Classes are divided in groups; on the track, the "Practice Pad" or in the class room.



Lead instructor and former MSF Chief Instructor Trainer, Bob Reichenberg created the curriculum.



With their instructor's help, riders hone their braking and swerving skills on the Practice Pad.