

The Point of Lowest Potential

Motorcycles have an innate, engineered desire to be tipped over when they're not moving, or moving very slowly. I call this "lowest potential," a mysterious force permeating the universe, and motorcyclists especially are stuck with it. Like every object, the bike is constantly seeking a place to "rest" where it will have no desire to move again.

Example of lowest potential: a boulder that has fallen off a mountaintop and come to rest in the bottom of an empty valley. Only an earthquake or a flood is going to make that boulder move. And it's not going to cause any more trouble. It's done. Example of highest potential: the same boulder teetering on the mountaintop, ready to fall onto a pile of nuclear weapons set on "hairtrigger." The boulder wants to fall off, and the bombs want to explode. (Another example of high potential is the fertilized egg cell that eventually developed into Thomas Edison.)

Think about it: a motorcycle, if it's lucky, spends its life balanced on two wheels. When unattended, it's up to the sidestand or centerstand to keep it balanced. A strong wind, a brain-dead motorist backing up, or soft asphalt can give the motorcycle what it most wants-to reach its point of lowest potential, the point at which it can no longer move on its own. On its side. When you buy it, you become a lowest-potential babysitter.

When you adopt a motorcycle, you take on the responsibility to never let that thing reach its lowest potential. Your entire relationship with that bike will always have an undertone of effort, of watchfulness, of stewardship--when it's not moving or moving slowly, you're charged with keeping it from doing what it really wants to do (fall down), and instead keeping it in an "unnatural" upright state (fun and adventure balanced perfectly on two little patches of rubber).

When an ordinary motorist catches a glimpse of a motorcyclist, out riding around in the big, scary world, they might think: "Wow, that looks like a lot of fun." It is fun, but what they don't see is that awesome responsibility, hidden beneath the surface, of having to constantly be on guard and working against gravity just to keep the "shiny side up." Fortunately, a moving motorcycle has a very strong desire to keep moving and doesn't fall over easily. So what's the best way to keep a motorcycle from falling over? Ride it!

Pat Hahn is the author of How to Ride a Motorcycle, Ride Hard Ride Smart, and a co-author of Track Day Handbook. He lives in south Minneapolis. You can e-mail Pat at read-erresponse@hedonistic-enthusiasm.com or visit his Web site at www.debaucheryball.org.

[PHOTO CAPTION] Here we have a high potential for movement. That wheel really wants to move. All it takes is a little push....



The cat with the rat bike  
By Huey

Oh what's wrong with this darn bike? Why won't it do the think I like?

Once it was a joy to ride & it filled my hears with so much pride.

But now that's all in past for fear it's day has come at last.

I've kicked it till my face turned red. I kicked & kicked until I bled.

My pride & joy it idles not. Its pistons have turned to rot.

I pushed it up a big hill & when it wouldn't start running going down hill I felt ill.

I tried to start it with a bump & fell on my rump. Somebody tell me why my bike chose now to die?

The salesman said it'd run for years. Now I'm dripping in sweat & tears.

I tried to get an electric start. It coughed & sputtered then it'd fart.

I've pushed & shoved for many a mile. While others rode by, they wave & smile.

I don't like this bike today. In fact I wish it would just go away.

It really isn't like a friend. I think it will soon meet it's end.

I truly hate this dumb machine. If it don't start this time I'll scream.

But hey what's this it almost fired, just one more kick I'm not that tired.

Well what do you know it running again. I guess I'll keep this finicky friend.



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