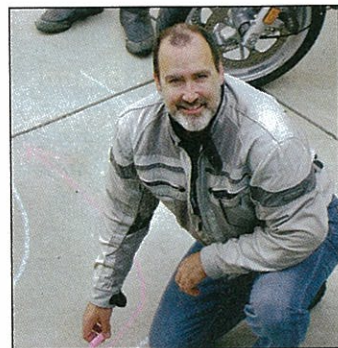


# Riding well

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## Dancing the Two (Wheel) Step

BY ERIC TROW

Recently, my wife and I had the pleasure of watching fellow Stayin' Safe instructor Pete Tamblin and his lady friend Jackie slip into an impromptu couples dance in our family room. We were in awe as they gracefully moved across the room in perfect synch with the music, somehow gliding around large pieces of furniture as if their routine had been designed specifically for our home. It was great fun. Until I heard Amy say to me, "Why can't *you* do that?"

As Pete and Jackie continued to "trip the light fantastic," I had to admit that I have only ever made it as far as "trip." It's not that I have two left feet. I'm actually quite coordinated. My lack of skill on the dance floor has more to do with the fact that I only know one or two basic steps. So, on the rare occasion when I do find myself unwittingly in the middle of a dance floor, I just kinda fake it. You could easily spot my wife and me among the other couples. We'd be the ones circling each other, crouched with arms forward like wrestlers, with Amy just waiting for me to make the first move. It ain't pretty.

Oddly enough, when I'm out on a motorcycle I feel as though I actually do dance. There is flow. Rhythm. A sense of being "one" with my motorcycle—and even with my passenger. When Amy joins me on the bike, we suddenly find ourselves dancing beautifully together. So, while you may not want my advice for your next wedding reception, I do believe I have a few things that might help you become a more proficient dancer on two wheels.

**Lead, don't follow.** Every dance couple must establish who will lead and who will follow. Are you leading your bike or do you sometimes find yourself along for the ride? Assume the lead. That means staying at least one step ahead of your bike at all times by reading the road ahead and planning where to place the machine next. Done correctly, you will be consistently riding in the future while the bike performs in the present.

**Grab your partner? Heck no!** You wouldn't grab onto a dance partner's hand and squeeze it like a washrag, right? Nor would you roughly throw your partner around the floor with stiff arms and jerky body movement. Yet many of us tense up and handle our motorcycles that way. Instead, rest your hands on the bike's handlebars as you would take the delicate hand of a petite dance partner. All handlebar steering can be done with just a nudge so why use ham fists?

Then move your body smoothly and gracefully to lead the bike along. Riding—even through a challenging section of switchbacks—should never feel like work.

**Dance cheek-to-cheek.** An effective way to lead the motorcycle is to roll your weight from one butt cheek to the other. As you approach a right bend, roll your weight onto your right hip and allow your body to lean inward toward the upcoming turn. If you find the bike wanting to lean in too early, apply light forward pressure to the *outside* handlebar (the left in this case) to keep it upright. Then, simply release the outside bar pressure and let the bike come to you as you enter the curve. As the bend is about to straighten or switch back to the opposite direction, roll your weight across the bike to the other hip, orienting yourself for the next stretch of road while the bike continues to finish the current curve. Again, when you're ready, simply bring the bike to you.

**Pick the right dance.** Some roads are a waltz while others are a fox trot. So naturally, it doesn't always make sense to dance a quick step for every road, right? Think about the character of the road and decide what pace and style of riding you need to adopt for each particular stretch for peak smoothness and lowest risk.

**Learn some new steps.** Just as I could stand to take a few dance lessons, most riders have room for additional learning. Pete and Jackie go to dance class every week to refine their dance skills. And it shows. Taking just one training course of some kind every year will show in your riding as well.

We have a wedding to go to next month. And, just as a bead of sweat begins to form on the brow of some riders even at the thought of riding the Dragon, I'm already tensing up at the prospect of dancing anything beyond the Hokey Pokey (which is *not* what it's all about, it turns out). You don't suppose they'd let Amy and me into the hall on the bike do you?

*Eric Trow is a lifelong motorcyclist and a veteran motorcycle safety instructor. He currently operates Stayin' Safe Advanced Rider Training. Have column ideas or questions? He can be reached at [etrow@stayinsafe.com](mailto:etrow@stayinsafe.com) or via [rider@ridermagazine.com](mailto:rider@ridermagazine.com). 37*