

STREETMASTERS

PRECISION CORNERING WORKSHOP

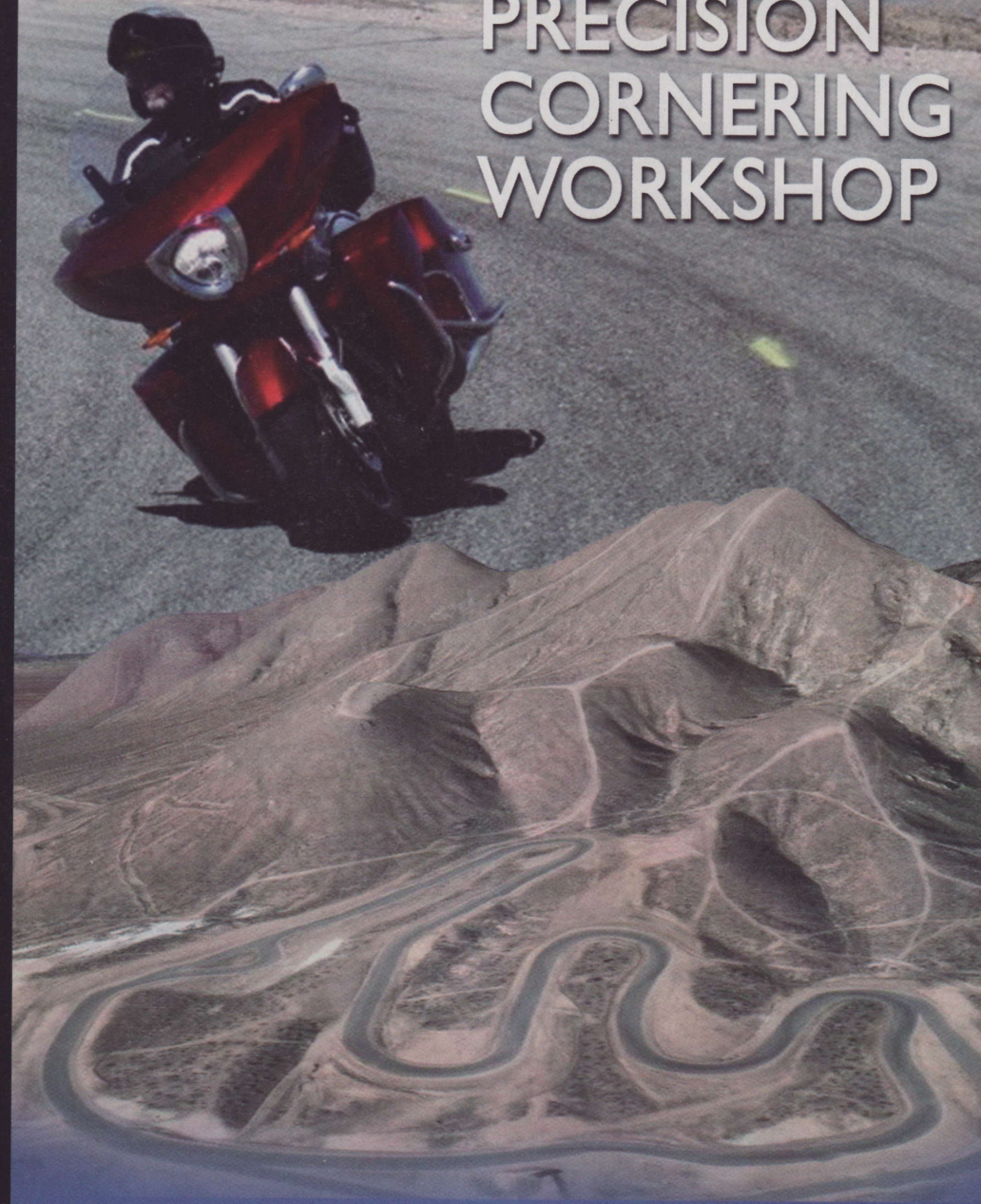
BY GARY MRAZ

Epiphanous, enlightening, humbling, perhaps not adjectives normally associated with motorcycle training yet this journey elicits such verbiage. I recently reviewed the book "Shifting Gears at 50" by Phil Buonpastore in which Walt Fulton is a contributor. Walt Fulton III and Nancy Foote are the owner/operators of Streetmasters Motorcycle Workshops, and I decided it was time to attend. Walt's father, Walt Junior, won the very first Catalina Grand Prix race in 1951 so you could say motorcycling is his DNA. In fact, the entire Streetmasters staff is a veritable cornucopia of motorcycle knowledge from a San Luis Obispo PD motorcycle officer, to a retired motorcycle officer who still trains other motorcycle officers, to many others of their staff that have ridden hundreds of thousands of miles around the world. I was fortunate enough to attend their second Streetmasters class in 2012 at Willow Springs. A short jaunt from Los Angeles, they offer classes 6 times a year and as of May of last year, they added a Trikers class.

This class of 30 students ranged in age and gender. From police officers, notable TV News anchors, young female sport bike riders to grandmas. Class began with a 7 am cup of coffee at the Hampton Inn Lancaster. Everything seemed to be moving along smoothly with the standard what to and not to do's, the obligatory proper riding gear details, to riding etiquette. Mr. I've-been-riding-30-years was humming and yawning until the slide on delayed apex - Walt explained that delayed apex was one of the key principals we were to learn today. Via diagrams navigating a mountain curve he showed entry point, the line, the tip-in point then the late apex accelerating out, elementary. But after several more diagrams and drawing our own late apex's, I was perplexed. Raising my hand "But this isn't the inside outside riding (cornering tight in the inside of a curve then accelerating outside the lane) that I was taught, that's what racers do, that's what I do." "You are exactly right it's not," Walt stated, "and we're not racing, in fact most my students never race; they're riders, they tour." Hmmm Good point, I personally never intend to race motorcycles, I ride motorcycles.

It became apparent that what I was going to learn was very different than 30 years of untrained riding had taught me; I've never taken a riding course. Then came the second eye opener, big head turns, looking at your target destination. This skill actually was from motorcycle racing. Looking through the turn, not looking twenty feet in front of you but fixing on a target your heading toward. You know, those photos of Ben Spies hunched in at hitting a corner at 100 mph looking at where he's going, not where he is.

We began with exercises on the practice pad and of course started with head turns. Keeping our head up eyes and nose in the direction we want to go. My instructor could see I was struggling and pulled me aside. He stood in turns and hand ges-



tured at the exact point I should look into a corner with a head turn. He set up visual cues and then we exercise keeping my eyes locked with his as I did U turns, this helped enormously with what was to come. Pictures don't lie

We moved on to turns with out breaking, turns with braking, turns at higher speeds with shifting and braking then carving the perfect corner. Understand here that many of us are on very large touring motorcycles, Victory Cross Country Tour, Harley Ultras, Goldwings to BMW GS and that's why we've taken this course. Handling these large bikes efficiently through the most challenging roads is the goal. Every rider gets personal instructor feedback after each exercise then a group debriefing. We are ready for Horse Thief Mile replete with grades and corners representative of mountain riding. We are separated into groups of four riders to one instructor. You really getting quality focused one on one instruction here. The track has a centerline like a two way road and we ride it that way. This is where (warning, cliché coming) the rubber meets the road.

It turns out that riding the late apex affords several primary advantages. First, as you enter the curve riders have more options available because, due to positioning you can see further through the curve. This extra sight distance translates into more time to make decisions, like an evasive maneuver, if necessary, you see further into the curve and can make evasive maneuvers if necessary. Second, on winding roads a left turn is generally followed with a right and a right turn is generally followed with a left turn and the delayed late apex sets the ride up perfectly for the entrance of the next curve. in left/Right Right /Left winding roads late apex exiting sets the rider up perfectly for the entrance of the next curve. Late apexing "straightens out the curve" meaning that making smoother, safer and faster. I had read about all this in various books and magazines but actually taking this course with these instructors turns theory into reality.

The staff kept everyone properly hydrated, snacked and lunched. Once on the track you really never want to leave. It's exciting and daunting at the same time. I was getting comfortable with late apex, in fact, I totally got it.

After a full day of training they threw us to the lions...we have the run of the track but in the opposite direction. Damn! I had late apex nailed going the other way; now it's like a whole new road! Wow Mr. Overconfident is humbled once again, but only for the first few laps. Instructors were on hand with constructive criticism and helpful tips. We had the rest of our time here to just do laps. Staff had to checker flag me in because I was not leaving here willingly.

This class isn't for everyone. If you're happy with old habits and don't think learning better riding techniques to navigate curvaceous terrain is important, that's fine. Perhaps you don't really ride that much anyway and that's cool too. But if you actually want to become a better rider, the rider you should be, consider Streetmasters. Yes they will challenge you, yes, you'll probably find your skills needed improvement, yes you will have a total blast knocking through Horse Thief Trail all day long and yes, you WILL become a better rider.

Contact Streetmasters at <http://www.streetmasters.info/index.html>

Editor's Note - I took a similar course years ago (thank God) where I learned many of these techniques as well. The MSF courses, Rider's Edge through the Harley dealers, etc. teach a lot of the same principles. I don't doubt that Streetmasters is more specialized but like the guy in the alcohol treatment commercials used to say, "If you don't get help from us, get help somewhere." I personally believe every rider should take a rider's skills class - it's typically 2 days out of your life, but you will dramatically improve your technique, boost your confidence and learn to see trouble coming, and thus, be safer and have more fun while riding.

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