

SIDETRACKED

WHY *We Stand*

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Ouray, CO, “Little Switzerland.” Vehicles roll through town packed with overlanding gear, and dual-sport motorcycles parade the streets with their colorful jockeys aboard. Smack in the middle of this melee rides a group of Space Rangers on loaded, knobby-tired beasts, some with cylinders protruding from the sides like proud iron rhinos. The riders are standing as though their bottoms are too tender to touch the plush saddles beneath them. Why would they do that?

It’s a mystery to many who ride skinny bikes with more than a foot of suspension travel; however, if the bike’s name includes Adventure, GS, AT or Ténéré, the ratio of weight to suspension travel alone would be reason enough to stand when the going gets rough. But these guys are on a smooth road. What’s up?

It all begins at the footpegs. Big bikes are best steered primarily by pressing a foot in the direction of a turn. Consider the distance between the pegs and the leverage available when applying full body weight to one side or the other. Seated, motorcyclists are baggage. Standing, the rider has significant influence. The devil is in the details, but weighting the opposite peg after initiating a turn minimizes lateral tire slippage on sketchy ground and helps keep the tires planted when skirting off-camber terrain. With practice, peg weight steering can mean impressive upgrades in one’s ability to handle a large dual sport bike off road.

Next, bending the knees enhances the mediocre seven to eight inches of suspension travel afforded by most adventure motorcycles. Standing, knees slightly bent, allows immediate reaction to dips and bumps, essentially letting the rider remove his body weight from the duties of the springs and shock absorbers.

A rider’s eyes are also higher when standing, presenting an unobscured view over the windshield and a longer view down the trail and over hills—advantages that yield a more timely heads-up when the need arises for braking or steering around obstacles.

It’s also about balance. Adventure riders, as these Space Rangers are often called, benefit from the ability to move about on the machine and keep the whole bike and rider assembly in balance. Tight turns at slow speed are best accomplished when using body weight to counter the tendency to fall over. Although it is possible to “counterweight” to a degree from a seated position by sliding the butt to one side, more force can be applied when actually rising from the saddle and rotating the whole body in the direction of the turn, keeping the shoulders parallel with the handlebars. From here a knee can be pressed into the fuel tank to stabilize the bike or press it down into the turn. Or legs can be held wide, knees out, as with a trials bike.

Braking and accelerating are also aided by changing body position beyond the range allowed from a planted position. Bending slightly forward at the hips helps counter the forces of acceleration and makes it more comfortable to oppose the wind by remaining in balance rather than hanging off the handlebars, which causes early fatigue. Moving back better positions the rider to oppose braking forces.

By defaulting to the standing position for most off-pavement riding (and evidently some on pavement), pilots of big adventure bikes become accustomed to the position. And proper bike set-up, including bar risers and large footpegs, makes it easy to reprogram the muscles and brain from the habit of always sitting down. Once trained to this position, the rider takes less of a beating from rough trails and remains fresher on long or multi-day rides.

These are all great reasons to stand, but why are these riders rolling down a paved street into Ouray standing up? Is this even legal? That’s another story, but perhaps the most important reason they stand is that it looks so dang cool. **RR**

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