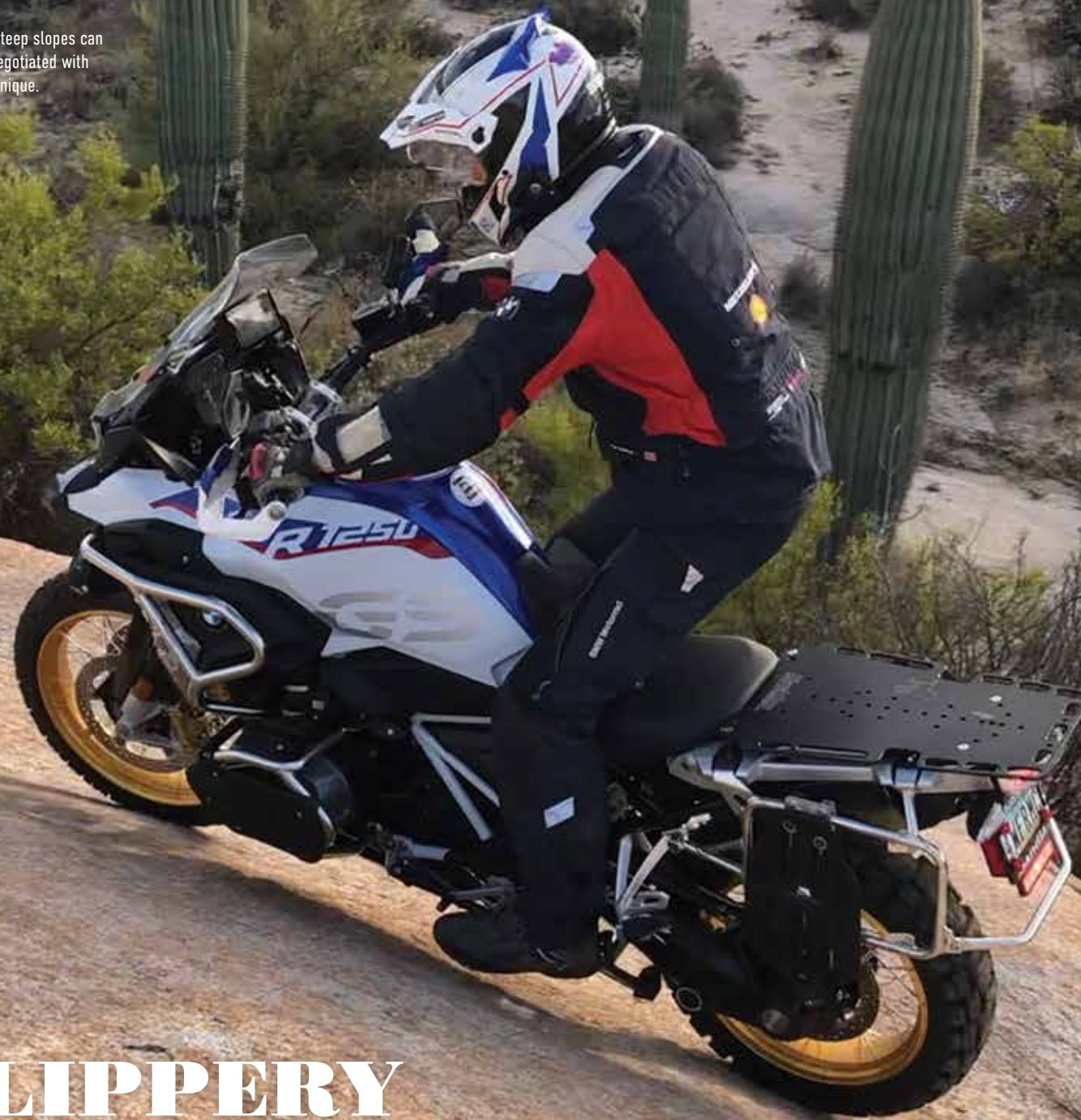


Incredibly steep slopes can be safely negotiated with proper technique.



# SLIPPERY SLOPES AND SENSITIVE FEET

BY BILL DRAGOO & PHOTOS BY REBECCA THOMPSON

## THE ART OF OFF-CAMBER RIDING ON LOOSE TERRAIN

*The sun is setting after a long day of riding. 2018 U.S. BMW GS Trophy team member Tom Thompson leads the way over rocky ground on his BMW R1250 GS. We have just found our campground but, instead of pitching our tents, we decide to explore the area...and the limits of our skills. Tom pulls a full bar-lock turn to the left, uphill and between tall and prickly saguaro cactus. The ground is steeply sloped, generally tacky but slippery in places with loose dirt and granite marbles. . . .*

**O**ff-camber riding on big bikes is a mystery to some. Watching an expert like Tom Thompson tackle a gnarly surface is a study in gravity defied. How does he do that?

It begins with a surgeon's dexterity on the clutch, throttle, and brakes, but proper application of body position and weight on the footpegs is essential, along with impeccable line selection. Anticipate what the bike will do if and when it does slip. Prepare to quickly adjust and try to minimize the possibility by predisposing your weight to the downhill footpeg. Most importantly, visualize success.

Imagine a wheel with its axle protruding several inches from either side of center. Place that wheel on a slope and apply downward pressure to the uphill end of the axle. It will be difficult or impossible to prevent the tire from sliding down the slope. Now, press the downhill axle. In most cases the tire will remain stuck to the slope. The angle of force is not only downward, but also inward against the bottom of the tire, forcing it toward the slope and reducing the chance of slippage.

In actual practice, keep your bike and body combination balanced, with the majority of your weight on the downhill footpeg. Be careful not to apply too much weight too soon or you can force a downhill turn. If you sense slippage, instantly add more weight to the outside. When the bike slides down slope, the beginner's instincts are to dab, throw out the clutch or both, exacerbating the loss of traction. By dabbing, we also separate ourselves from the bike and we unweight the downhill footpeg, further reducing traction.

Note: A strategic dab to the uphill side here is still better than falling, but only as a last resort. Practice on a grassy hillside first, gradually increasing the slope until some slippage begins. A downslope fall can be violent, so use caution as you increase



Pressing the downhill footpeg helps keep the tires from slipping, but you and the bike must remain in balance.

the degree of difficulty. Wear all your gear and always keep modular helmets closed to prevent a chin bar strike and subsequent neck injury.

*... I give Tom room to complete his track then engage the hill. The line is tight and I fear slipping but I remain calm and commit, gradually adding weight to the outside footpeg as I make the uphill turn. My feet sense the edge of traction. It's close. I feel the first signs of slippage but the meaty Shinko 805 manages to cling to the surface and I squeak through the gap. Tom disappears through a brushy section above and I breathe a sigh. Here we go again. I guess we'll make camp by the light of the moon. 🍷*

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