



THE TAP AND GO THE POINTY END OF ADVENTURE BIKE TRAINING

By BILL DRAGOO

Riding at a snail's pace, she looks miniature on the giant machine beneath her. Easing the bike to a halt, she pauses in perfect balance before stepping down. The ground is unforgiving and slopes steeply to the right. Her left foot lightly touches an embedded rock. No fuss, no fanfare, just a stop on the trail. She is 5'1" tall.

It happens that heavy adventure bikes are usually also tall. This combination of characteristics is, by necessity, to aid in agility, ground clearance and suspension travel. Unfortunately, seat height becomes a limiting factor for many who would otherwise love to enter the world of two-wheeled off-pavement exploration. Mitigating the challenge is what training is all about. Dispelling the myth that the bike is too tall is part of any good off-road training program.

I'll preface this discussion by acknowledging it is easier for a new rider to ride a short bike. That said, skill triumphs over inseatman every time. The rider can adjust his or her skills to fit the bike rather than the other way around which usually involves lowering the suspension, impairing the bike's handling characteristics on- and off-road. Exercises that help students learn include one of my favorites: the Tap and Go. This exercise is great for riders of all sizes and skill levels, but is particularly helpful for those challenged by tall seats.

Set-up for the Tap and Go is simple, and similar to many of the other Level 1 exercises taught at DART. It starts with a row of cones or makeshift markers, laid roughly eight paces apart on relatively flat ground. Six or seven cones is plenty. Enter the exercise area to the right of the

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first cone, far enough away to allow a counterclockwise, symmetrical circle centered around the cone. As the first cone comes up on the nine o'clock position, lower your left foot to the ground, keeping the motorcycle in balance by pushing it upright when you step down. Push enough that you don't have to hold the bike using muscle—only balance. This can be done even by a rider whose inseatman is well below the seat height by simply slipping the butt off to the same side as the foot being lowered. Briefly touch the foot to the ground then resume circling the cone counterclockwise. Make an S and proceed by approaching the second cone on your right at your three o'clock position. Continue alternating until you have completed all cones. Return to the start and repeat. Initially, the point is not to come to a complete stop, but to just a "tap and go," as the exercise name implies. Later, as you become more confident in your ability to remain upright, bring the bike to a full stop each time.

Success will be significantly improved by your clutch management skills, so practice riding slowly, slipping the clutch enough to maintain momentum, before attempting the exercise. You can even start by touching alternating feet to the ground as you ride slowly in a straight line before circling the cone. Break it down as much as needed to keep it simple and to feel the success of each segment of the exercise before attempting it all at once.

Practice only improves your skill when you know what to practice. By following a well choreographed curriculum, you will soon discover that no bike is too tall.

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5'1" 110 lb Jocelin Snow dispels the "bike is too tall" myth with her BMW R1250 GS Adventure.