

Riding To Your Potential*
Ramey 'Coach' Stroud © 2018

Are You Riding In Circles or Towards Your Dreams?

We are all given some genetic gifts at birth. But far too often those gifts still have the ribbons around them when we die. They were never unwrapped or used. Why? Because some people don't know they are there waiting. For example most of us have never fully trained for a sport. To eat, sleep, drink and live to compete. And many of us have not yet fully developed our minds. We made it through high school and maybe college, but we have never fully immersed ourselves in academic exploration. Why not become the elite athlete or the learned scholar or excel at some other pursuit? Maybe our self-talk holds us back? "Oh, I could never do that!" "If I don't try, I can't fail!" "I'm not good at that sort of thing!" Or maybe our lives are full of important distractions like going to school or earning a living or raising a family?

So are we done? Is negative self-talk or a busy schedule hopeless roadblocks?

The answer is clearly, no.

Passion is not a distraction, it's the fire in our belly. It gives us the desire and the energy to do more. It's also important to understand is that being passionate about riding is not an either/or proposition. You can live a normal life and still enjoy two-wheel dreams. You can be husband, wife, father, mother, worker or boss and still learn, develop and become a great rider.

Passion also provides a way around negative thinking. Since self-talk is learned—it's not genetic— passion can help you create a new, more positive vocabulary.

So how do we convert passion into action? We begin by creating mental pictures.

We humans have a well-developed brain that contains about 86 BILLION neurons. What makes us special, what sets us apart for other mammals, is that a large portion of our neurons are concentrated in a part of the brain that allows us to live beyond the present. We can visualize the future. We can forecast outcomes. Based on what we have learned, what we can see or feel and our experience, we can make predictions about what will happen next. Most animals can only think and live in the present.

So what, you ask? Being able to predict outcomes gives us two very important tools. First, based on available resources we can plan to accomplish something. Build a home. Start a business. Take a trip. The typical method is to start at step one knowing that when it is done, we will go to step two. Then to step three and four and so on until we have accomplished our task or reached our goal. This is the average forward-thinking linear way to get things done and it usually works. BUT, this approach limits our thinking because it is based on currently available resources and information.

We have another genetic tool that is often used by the more innovative people among us. Successful entrepreneurs use the step-by-step building process but they do it in reverse! I call it, "backing-in" to the goal. You set the goal first and then create the skills and resources to achieve it. Let's say your goal is learning to become a better rider. How much better? That's up to you: I want to see how far I can go, how good can I get? Or, I need to learn more in order to take that trip or win that race. Set your target and then create the training program to hit it. It's like starting at the TOP of the stairway. That's your dream. Whatever knowledge, rider skills and fitness are required to do what you want to do. When you get to the top of the stairs you will have the ability to be safe and successful doing what you dream of!

On the BOTTOM STEP is where you are now. What do I know now? Where am I physically? How well can I ride now? This is your baseline, your starting point.

The stairway STEPS in between are the learning curve of your training program. The steps begin with simple skills and concepts. Then the lessons get more and more challenging as you climb the stairs. The training stairway builds your base and then introduces level-after-level of increasingly more difficult rider knowledge and skills.

That's the overview of learning to ride to your potential. Use your passion to create positive mental pictures. Work on a self-talk vocabulary that is upbeat and positive. Plan your training program one step at a time. Become a student for life.

Now let's move on to a framework for each step of your training stairway. A learning system you can use over and over on each step of your stairway. I call it KSA Training. The letters stand for the three phases or parts of adult skill training:
Knowledge— Skills— Abilities.

KNOWLEDGE

The first step of advanced motorcycle training is not on the bike. It's in your mind. We need to learn how to make good decisions on the bike under any conditions. Knowledge is the "WHY" part of motorcycle training.

Good decisions are based on two kinds of information, subliminal and conscious. Subliminal consciousness seems to happen off the radar. It's more of a gut feeling. It is based on training and experience and intuition. When police officers enter a restaurant for lunch they probably take a seat facing the door. As people enter the officers automatically size them up. Threat—No threat? If you were a fireman you might look for a second way out of the dining room or are there sprinklers in the ceiling? This level of information gathering is not the focus of the moment but a thought-process that goes on in the background. Whether we realize it or not, we have been trained to be aware of specific things. Unfortunately, that training is sometimes very limited, we miss a lot of information. We don't see it. We walk or ride past it never knowing it is there.

In sports subliminal consciousness is a perception-reaction that is sometimes called being in the zone. This is where decisions and movements seem to happen automatically while the brain is actively dealing with other issues. In motorcycle riding it might be an automatic weight shift in response to something seen ahead or felt through the tires. Subliminal consciousness is the payoff for the time spent training and conditioning.

Conscious awareness is different than subliminal awareness. It's the on-screen focus of your awareness: driving in traffic, a conversation, balancing a budget. Sometimes conscious awareness is about making a decision or solving a problem. Your pannier starts to drag on a fast, sweeping right curve. Roll-off the gas and possibly run wide, let it drag or stay in the turn and shift body weight to the inside? You identified the problem. You looked for possible solutions. You picked the best one. You reacted.

Look, Think, Choose, Execute.

This style of conscious decision-making is often called "situational awareness." For example, the fire captain is in the front seat of the truck as they roll into the structure fire. She sees the color, shape and intensity of the smoke coming from the roof of the house. She notices flames starting to show from the vents just under the eaves. There is

a car, a family van, parked in front of the open garage. It's 6:15 am so the residents are probably still inside. They pass a yellow fire hydrant on the left as they come to a stop in front of the house. She orders a hose to be pulled to the front door. She hears on the radio that the second-in engine is one block away so she orders them to ladder the roof to cut a hole in the sheeting, The goal is to allow smoke and fire to vent upward from the rooms below. The fire captain is making life and death decisions based on what is in front of her face. She has trained for this and she's good at it.

Unfortunately traditional motorcycle classes often overlook situational awareness training. The motorcycle instructor is standing in front of a hill describing to the class how to climb it. Then he mounts his bike and demonstrates what he just said. Next the class is expected to mount their bikes and do what the instructor did. The picture in the minds of the students is of the instructor riding his bike. They are not being taught how to make good choices. How many trails go up that hill? Which trail is the best for me? Can my bike or tires handle this surface or that degree of pitch? What are the go- no go-factors? These mental skills are just as important as turning the handlebars or shifting gears.

Another problem with traditional motorcycle training is that classes are not sequential. Each program has it's own curriculum. The learning curve has gaps. Riders who attend a lot of classes still don't get important information. The solution? Take responsibility for your own training program. Don't leave it up to others to make you into a great rider. Identify your learning gaps and then you take the responsibility of filling them in.

Do some reading, watch some videos, talk to and watch more experienced riders. Ask questions. Make a conscious decision to always be interested in more information. How does my suspension work? What is the difference between torque and horsepower? How can I use my clutch to control power? What body position do top riders use in what situations? Why do they do that?

For racers, we walk around the tack before practice and look— really look. What do you see? What surface changes? What pitch or camber changes? What sequence of obstacles? And then we watch other riders practicing. How do they do it? Why it that rider faster than the others? What are other people missing? What works and what doesn't? How can I do, be and act better with no additional effort? Pretty soon your mental picture takes on more detail and color. Now that you have a strong mental picture of why things work and what is needed, it's time to get on your bike!

SKILLS

Skills are the “HOW TO ACT” part of motorcycle training. In this second part of your training you learn to connect the pictures in your mind to the sensations of touch, position, pressure, balance and sequence. Skill training begins in static simulation with your bike parked on the center-stand or a box. Engine-on dynamic training comes later.

Static Training

It is amazing to me how many riders are not connected to their bodies. They just move around without much understanding how they do it. Spend some time standing next to your bike and visualize doing things like accelerating or braking. Turning and hills. Feel the floor. Feel your balance shifts and which muscles are working and when? Notice what movements you make. Then, once you have those memories, get on your parked bike and do those same simulations. Notice how things have changed. When most riders get on a bike they give-up their natural movements. It's as if the motorcycle becomes the boss and the rider adapts to the bike. Remember: the motorcycle is an extension of YOUR body, it's not the other way around. Your job is to invite movement, not force it. Your muscles are for balance and control, not forcing the bike to bend to your will. Let the motorcycle do the work while you move and act naturally.

You have turned your bike into a training simulator. You can try things without worrying about crashing. Body movements can be practiced and felt one at a time and then combined with control sequences that I call, “chains-of-movement.” Static training allows you to connect your mental pictures with the sensations of the bike in a safe, protected environment. You don't have to deal with traffic or terrain while experiencing foot-peg pressure as you operate the clutch, throttle, brakes or steering. Static simulation allows you to pay attention to how things change when you are in various riding postures. Any fighter pilot will acknowledge simulator time yields more confidence, better control, and fewer crashes. Once a rider demonstrates stationary proficiency, he or she suits-up and moves out to the training range, track or trail.

Dynamic Training

Find a safe training place so you can practice one small-movement after another on a moving bike. Dynamic training begins at counter-balance speeds and then moves on to counter-steering situations. Your goal is to maintain control, balance and stability— with minimum effort—during all movement. Learn to apply your new skills one at a time in different postures— seated, scout (standing), attack, and braking. Eventually all of the individual skills merge into the ability to accelerate and brake on various surface, handle seated and standing turns, ride pitch-up or down situations, rocks, ruts and more. Skills

training then repeats with a new focus: *conserve energy*. Adventure travel sometimes means long days in the saddle so riding well with less effort is a worthy goal. Relax, breath and focus-- keep moving. Next it's time for you to apply your new knowledge and skills in the real world.

ABILITIES

Ability is the "WHEN TO ACT" part of learning. This phase can be more rigorous. In classes we ask students to show-off their new knowledge and riding skills in the real world. Students demonstrate their ability to look ahead, evaluate all options, choose the best one, and then execute. Riders are asked to see, think and act in both common and unexpected or unfamiliar situations. Students are gently tested to see if they can apply their new knowledge and skills under stress.

The reason we gently test for competency is because adults often have difficulty with applying new skills or information in stressful or unfamiliar situations. Our instincts and conditioned reflexes (old habits) sometimes block out our higher reasoning capacity. During training and learning we use one part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for executive function. Under stress the prefrontal cortex can be hijacked by another part of our brain, the hypothalamus, which is responsible for our genetic stress reactions of fight, flight or freeze.

The ability to preserve an effective mind-body connection is what differentiates KSA riders from those who panic and freeze under stress. KSA-trained riders replace old reactive habits with advanced pro-active agility.

If you are not in a class, then you can self-test your abilities. Some riders set-up a simply trail course and see if they can get around without "dabbing" (putting a foot down). Others like more speed so the trail course is against the clock. One way to test under light stress is to enter a competition at a rally that matches your current skill level. If you are a traveller, then training rides of more miles/kilometers or more days give you feedback on attention span, endurance and enjoyment. Whatever your dreams and goals, find a way to test your progress toward achieving them.

Where to Now?

You get to answer this question. The only true limiting factor is you. You can always find a way around obstacles and barriers if you want it bad enough. Sure, maybe it will take some time, years maybe. But so what? Learning can be an enjoyable part of your journey. Remember: *Dreams become goals when they go on the calendar.*

About the Author

Ramey "Coach" Stroud is a former off-road racing champion and expert road racer. He has also brought home the gold in tough motorcycle endurance competitions. Keynote-speaker and internationally acclaimed instructor, Coach's presentations are always standing-room only. You will find his ideas, thoughts and suggestions on-line and in magazines and books around the world. His passion is exploring your potential-- finding the best you have to offer. Coach will teach you about the mind, body and soul of being a great rider as well as the insider tricks learned the hard way during his decades of pushing the performance envelope.



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