

Trifecta



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Horse racing is an ancient sport. The Babylonians, Greeks and Romans all practiced this equine endeavor. Undoubtedly, gambling quickly associated itself with horse racing not long after its inception. To this day, many people have whiled away a summer afternoon trying to guess which speedy steed would finish first. However, even a spectator with a modest modicum of knowledge can predict the fastest steeds, thus narrowing down the list of potential winners, and increase their odds of winning the bet. Thus, the creation of the 'Trifecta'. As in Olympic sports, horse racing rewards the top three finishers of each race. While picking the three winners might be attainable (bet on the three most consistent winners), a Trifecta ups the ante by asking the gambler to choose not only the winners, but the order in which they will win. Challenging indeed!

Motorcycling, though only tangentially related to riding a horse, shares a common theme in the Trifecta: Know your road, know your bike, and know yourself. And most importantly (and most frustratingly) know the order of importance. Let's weigh the three and see what order sorts out.

Knowing the road you'll be riding is critical--not only for an enjoyable, but safe adventure too. Now, by the term 'knowing' I don't mean actually memorizing swaths of super-slab, committing every ripple and rock to memory. Knowing a road means understanding the nature of a road, and its inherent risks. Imagine your friend invites you on a Saturday morning ride, and decides that a spirited canyon run is in order. Before even seeing the actual road, your mind already begins to envision the nature of the road. You picture a narrow, most likely two lane road, with limited visibility. Traffic may be a concern as there is limited passing area and mixed vehicles (cars, trucks, RVs) may all agglomerate in unpredictable masses. Rocks, gravel and sand may be likely road hazards, so you see corners as being of particular concern. Though you have yet to see the road with your eyes, your mind has already 'seen' it. Taking a leisurely run down a remote interstate would be a completely different experience. So realistically, knowing your road, to the extent that it is possible, is invaluable.

Knowing your bike sounds relatively pedestrian after examining road knowledge. Aren't most bikes the same? Wheels—check. Brakes—check. Seat—check. But wait—refer back to part one: knowing the road. Though fundamentally similar, motorcycles can vary wildly in operation depending upon usage. Returning to the canyon carving analogy, you arrive at the meeting place for the ride. A sunny Saturday morning, you thank yourself for taking your 600cc unfaired semi-sporty bike. Its light weight and unrestricted airflow ensure a spirited and comfortable ride. Momentarily, you hear the unmistakable rumble of a large displacement twin as your friend arrives on his touring bagger. Though the road remains the same—are you really riding the same 'road'? Undoubtedly no. While your approach to the ride will involve higher speeds, less speed scrubbing into corners with only a smidgen of effort, your friend will need an intimate knowledge of his bike to keep pace with you. With a much higher weight and less clearance, keeping a smooth and spirited pace requires not only a different use of skills, but potentially a higher level of skills as well. As a cynical rider once noted (no names!): you're always on the wrong bike. Canyon run—brought your bagger. Interstate blast—scooter sounded fun. But by knowing your bike, you can maximize both enjoyment and safety.

Knowing yourself sounds, on the surface, relatively simple. If you forget any important details you can always check your drivers license, right? But that's not quite what 'knowing yourself' means. In a meta sense, it involves knowing what you know—and what you don't know—a challenging self examination at best. How many years have you been riding? How many bikes have you ridden? How many miles do you have under your belt? Who invented non-alcoholic beer and why? The questions remain endless—but a savvy rider will know his limits, and strive to find them and acknowledge them. Like the old analogy of the river goes—you never ride the same road twice. Each time, both the road and you have changed subtly (perhaps your bike has too—trying new tires?). At another, more local level, you need to know yourself right now. Did you get enough sleep? Did you eat a large breakfast—or any at all? Did you take your medication—the one with a small poster's worth of side effects shrunk and glued to the bottle? A myriad of factors can affect your ride—because they affect you.

Back to the notion of the Trifecta. While the three factors (Road, Bike, Rider) may not be surprising—the answer to which comes first in the order may: You. Roads all share common factors—and indeed astute drivers can pick up many of the useful bits by driving varied roads. Bikes, while challenging, do share mostly similar traits (unless you're riding a pre-war British bike—think about those shifts carefully!). The rider, however, has a constantly shifting series of meta and local factors to keep critically assessed. Being mindful of them all can be, truly, mind boggling.

Much like the gambler astutely assessing his odds at the track—we as motorcyclists are gamblers too. Betting that we have the information, and have correctly ordered the Trifecta.