

Descending Hills

This is the fun bit of hills, to me anyway. Heavier people tend to descend much quicker than light ones.

As you start to tip down hill test your brakes, make sure they are working.

Lots of questions have been asked on how to go down faster. The three major inhibitors seem to be fear of losing control, the overuse of brakes, and straightforward vertigo (fear of heights). If you don't crash on the flat, there is no real reason to suspect you will be any more at risk of crashing on the descent of a hill.

Key points on positioning.

- Ride loose, don't go over-tense. Whilst keeping control of your handlebars let them shudder around a bit.
- Hands should be positioned on the bars, or drops, near the brake levers to enable a quick reaction to brake.
- My preferred brake is the front brake.
- An alternative is to inhibit your speed with wind braking, by sitting up straight and maximizing your torso's scooping of the air.
- The best time to brake is before a corner, and
- the worst time is through and coming out of a corner, particularly on a wet or greasy surface.
- Get to learn the descents you regularly make and ride them assertively.
- Keep your body weight central, i.e. don't un-weight either wheel in favour of over-weighting the other. The risk is that a wheel may skip out from under you.
- There are two more common techniques for position.
 1. One is with the knees tucked to your top bar and body scrunched to reduce the affects of scooping air.
 2. The other is to keep the legs turning slightly. This option tends to give you better stability and an action that will enable you to ride your way out of any problems.
- Look ahead to establish where you are going, and selecting your preferred line through any corner.
- You should tend to be wide-ish at the start of a turn, cut the curve just past its apex and take a nice line out without swinging all over the road.
- **Lean**, don't steer.
- Riders should avoid the "tour" habits of sitting on the top tube, or adopting a pseudo aero position with elbows resting on the handlebars with hands clasped in front if your bike does not have aero-bars fitted.

- Ensure that your inner pedal is up going around sharp corners so that there is no risk of it clipping the ground. To ensure this is done, point your knee to the direction of the turn. By default your outer foot will be down and your inner foot up. Obviously you can't point your knee if it is the straight.
- After you have passed the apex of your turn (maybe before or after the apex of the corner if you under or overshoot) and about 2/3rds around you can enhance your control by re-starting pedaling with pressure initially from the raised inside foot.
- If you get into trouble you can often escape it by accelerating, not braking on a steep windy hill it therefore becomes **brake, lean, pedal** and again brake, lean, pedal.
- On very tight corners you can corner faster by having your bike lean in an exaggerated manner, but rather than your body leaning with the frame, keep it more up-right, with your inner knee up and almost over the top bar. This is called counter-balanced steering. Braking during this maneuver is unwise.
- Give other riders plenty of room when you are passing and keep predictable lines so that those passing you can execute the passing action with the best safety to both of you.
- **Over-Braking** or riding your brakes throughout a descent reduces the effect of the brakes as your rims become super heated. Over-braking gives you undue stress on your hands and upper body; so that when you really need to brake, your reaction is much weaker. A bad scenario would be when your inner tube bursts because of the heat build up. In New Zealand, descents are mostly short enough for the risk of this to be reasonably slight.
- If it is raining, touch your brakes often to give wet and greasy rims a quick wipe.

Caution:

- Adopt a more cautious approach to your descent if there are obstacles ranging from heavy traffic, wet or damp, sandy or gravelly.
- Be aware some cars cut the berm of left handed turns and spray roadside gravel back into the lane.
- On some roads such as Monument Hill there can be severe wind gusts, or at the bottom corner pine needles from trees along the side and Twilight is often greasy with green leaves in the winter, Hunua Gorge with gravel around the quarry areas.

Speed Wobbles:

Many bike brands have had this phenomenon from time to time to specific models. If it happens, back off your speed until the bike settles and adopt the

practice of pedaling most of the time, albeit much of the time without pressure on. It usually doesn't happen until over 50 kmph.

Get to know your Roads:

At MCVCC we ride many courses many times. I have learned that a descent of Aririmu at 100kg weight and no brakes the fastest I have glided is 65 kmph, and Gellings down to Hunua is about the same. I have found that with no brakes applied there is no pressure in cornering unless they are unduly wet. I rate these two descents as "no brakes" hills; I just enjoy the thrill of the speed. The two fastest hills I have descended with club are the Eastern side of Ponga (long and straight with a graceful left hand curve at the bottom, 90kmph) and Hill road off the Bombays, where I once topped 97kmph but had to pedal firmly to get there.

Vertigo:

I guess you are stuck with it. If you suffer from this phobia, get your other descending skills right and it should lessen the risks and allay your fears. Remember over-braking is also not so good for your safety and by overdoing it, it will add to your tension and stress.