

Riding Right: Finding the Best Riding Position for You

The three riding postures and what they mean

By Susan Rzepka Orion

To ride a motorcycle, you're going to have to do some posturing. Riding postures are dictated by two main factors—the design of your bike and the build of your body—both of which can be modified, but only to a point. Sit on as many bikes as possible to find the right combination to fit your needs. You'll find there are countless models to choose from, but there are really only three basic riding postures: standard, sport and cruiser.

Standard Riding Posture

This posture is called "standard" for a reason. Of the three riding postures, the standard position is the most neutral. The rider isn't angled forward or slung back in any way. The body is upright. Head and eyes are up, looking through the path of travel. For the hands to rest comfortably on the grips, the arms must be extended, but not hyperextended. There should be enough slack for elbows to remain relaxed and slightly bent. You should be able to "flap your wings" in this position. Knees should rest against the tank and be bent at a height that is slightly lower than the hips. The rider's feet should rest on the footpegs at a 90-degree angle, positioned almost directly below the knees.

Because the rider sits up straight and high, this position allows for increased visibility. This generally means a higher seat height, which might cause problems for riders (like me!) who have short legs and may have trouble putting both feet on the ground. Due to the upright body position, there may also be increased wind resistance. From the standard riding posture, riders can easily stand up on the pegs to surmount an obstacle. The standard position can also be sustained for long road trips or short commutes. In general, standard posture provides excellent access to all controls and is often preferred in most new rider courses.



Standard posture, as demonstrated on a BMW F 650 GS. Note the rider's upright back and the position of the feet relative to the knees.

Many models employ standard riding posture, but a few examples are the BMW F 650 GS, Harley-Davidson Sportster, Buell Blast and Honda Nighthawk.

Sport Riding Posture

Sport riding demands a forward lean. The rider's head is angled in front of the body, with the head and eyes looking through the path of travel. The upper body is angled in front of the hips. The stomach rests against the tank, while the back muscles and legs support the weight of the upper torso. The arms are relaxed and elbows bent. Knees are also bent and held against the tank, with feet resting on the footpegs in a position behind the knees.

Sport posture is an aerodynamically superior position resulting in the least amount of wind resistance for the rider. Riding performance, particularly in curves, may be enhanced. Without height, the ability to see far down the road is reduced, and the riding position is often cramped, which may be difficult to sustain for more than a couple of hours.



Sport posture, as demonstrated on a Ducati Monster. Note the forward lean, relaxed elbows, feet positioned behind the knees, and stomach resting against the tank.

There are many popular sportbikes that employ the sport riding position, including the Ducati Monster, Yamaha YZF-R6, Kawasaki Ninja and Suzuki GSXR.

Cruiser Riding Posture

Cruisers are slung low and back, giving the rider a relaxed look. The rider's body is slightly reclined, almost leaning back toward the rear of the motorcycle. As with all riding positions, the head and eyes are looking forward through the path of travel. Arms are more extended in this position than in others, but the elbows should still be bent. Due to the degree of the body's backward lean, some riders overextend to reach the handgrips, which may cause fatigue, shoulder pain and muscle stiffness. The knees should be bent and rest against the tank at almost the same height as the hips, and the feet should rest on the footpegs forward of the knees.

Cruising posture is popular, and understandably so, as the laid-back riding position allows greater extension of the legs. When cruising, the leg position can even be varied with the addition of accessory footpegs. With forward controls, however, the rider will find it difficult to stand on the pegs to cross an obstacle without pulling weight onto the handgrips. Lower seat heights, often found with this posture, provide comfortable flat footing.



Cruiser posture, as demonstrated on a Suzuki Boulevard S40. Feet are positioned forward of the knees, with a low seat height.

Harley-Davidson's cruisers are mostly from the Dyna, Softail and Touring families. Other cruisers include the Yamaha V Star, Honda Shadow and Suzuki Boulevard.

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