

# Slow Dancin'

by Tara "zukigr1" Walker

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Lower lap times are not everybody's goal of track riding. Every once in a while there comes along someone who gets off on the method alone. I am one of those "someones."

Two years ago, I had never been on a motorcycle. Then I met the man who would become my husband. He put me on the back of his 2001 Busa and it was all over. Just riding on the back of that big bike, with its power and balance, hooked me for good. I was never frightened; never uncomfortable. Joy was all I felt.

Of course, I had to get my very own bike soon after those first experiences, and after getting hooked on a Busa, I had to get one of it's baby sisters; a 2003 sv650s. "Penny" became my copper daughter; but I ended up the child in the relationship once she showed me that I was the one in need of rearing. After a few stalls, a couple of low-speed drops, one crash, and 1000 miles on the road, I was ready to take her to a playground; BeaveRun was to be my first.

At first, I didn't get it. "What's the big deal", I asked myself. Maybe I just wasn't meant to be there in that so-called paved Heaven. It took a couple of sessions, and an incredible control rider, for me to understand that there's a science to the movements; a method to the madness; a draw to the drug.

Over a year after that first track day, I've done 14 other days at Jennings, Vegas Motor Speedway, VIR North, VIR South, VIR Full, Barber and Carolina Motorsports Park; and my life has been intensely enriched by each experience. I've also crashed twice on the track, and I've sold the SV and bought a new baby: a 2004 gsxr600, one of the most incredible machines ever made in my opinion.

I'm now one of the more senior Novices riding the track in this mid-Atlantic region; and I love that I am. I'm not even interested in bumping up to a faster group any time soon.

"Why?" you may ask. The answer is simple. The dance.

When I go out on the track, a sense of euphoria comes over me. It's the only time that I feel completely and utterly free. I now know a lot more about body position, throttle control, trail braking (thank you Freddie Spencer!) and entrance speeds. But I'm not as good at implementing these techniques, as I am in comprehending them. Therefore, my personal goal of riding the track is balance, control, smoothness and consistency. Higher speeds are not even on my list at this time.

Outside of the track environment, I communicate with many other motorcyclists who've never been to a track day. A lot of the people seem to have a misconception of track riding. I don't know how many times I've heard or read people express that they will never be interested in the track because they either don't want to go fast, or they think it's the most dangerous type of riding. I believe that they are mistaken about what the track is all about; and it's frustrating to me. Unfortunately, that misconception is fed by the discussions of others, who mostly speak of lap times, and who's faster than whom. That kind of talk scares a lot of would-be track addicts, and I would like to dispel some of the myth.

There's really SO much more to the track than increasing your speed. There are the lines one should follow, to "straighten out" the track. There's the balance between braking and putting the throttle back on in the corners. There's the head, arm, body and foot position to consider; the shifting of one's weight and learning that you affect the bikes movement in a big way. In addition, there's the looking through the corners, handling the changes in elevation, and the shifting of gears up and down. All of which is taught by the awesome control riders that inhabit the clubs in this area.

Personally, I love to be coached. The same lessons have been taught to me many times by different control riders, and I get something new out of each one's guidance and teaching methods. Every single coach I've worked with has a real passion for the track and the heart of a guardian. It's been some of my most rewarding experiences when a coach has asked me to follow them for one reason or another, then rides behind me to observe my implementation, and comes by again with the famous thumbs-up.

I can honestly say that not just learning to ride a sports bike, but riding a sports bike on the track, has completely changed my life for the better. There is absolutely no way to truly learn what a sports bike was designed for without riding in a controlled, safe, no-pot-holes, corner-worked, coached, and law enforcement-free environment. Because of this, most of my focus right now revolves around planning my upcoming track-riding season. It's really the only reason that I can endure the few months off that I must take because of the cold weather.

So, for anyone who has considered going to the track, but believes that it's only to increase your speed, please consider the following:

Wake in the morning, ready to play  
Motors start humming; it's a track day today

Go out for a session, try to keep myself humble  
It's part of the plan to prevent a bad tumble

But nothing compares to feeling I get  
When I hang off the side, on one butt-cheek I sit

Roll off the throttle, ease on the brakes  
Turn in so smoothly, learn from mistakes

The physics still thrill me, my bike is a gem  
The riders are happy, and I'm happy with them

Lowering one's lap time, may help one advance  
But let's not forget, you'll find peace in the dance

Happy Track Riding!!

Tara "zukigrrl" Walker