

# The BMW MOA SMARTrainer – An Invaluable Tool for Your Club

I OFTEN TELL MY STUDENTS THAT BY taking the MSF Basic Rider Course (BRC), they will learn two sets of skills to help them survive while riding motorcycles. Those are the physical skills of operating a motorcycle and the mental skills needed to search and evaluate the hazards of operating a bike on the road. The mental skills are the ones that in any situation can and do make a difference. Even those of us who have ridden for many years find that our mental skills need honing from time to time. A way to look at how those two skills sets work for you is that the physical skills help you to react to a situation, while the mental skills help you to respond to the situation.

In the classroom we teach the search, evaluate and execute (SEE) strategy, or similar strategies, and stress how risk awareness, acceptance and management is the first step to surviving on a motorcycle.

Another tool is still needed to make the importance of mental skills real to any rider. We need a safe method of practicing our mental skills without the actual risk of riding in traffic. Enter the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) SMARTrainer.

The SMARTrainer (Safe Motorcyclist Awareness and Recognition Trainer) is a training device developed by Honda, with the cooperation of the MSF, to help riders learn and practice their street strategy skills. It is a motorcycle simulator only insofar as it has standard motorcycle controls and presents scenarios that simulate riding a motorcycle in various traffic situations.

Through the efforts of the BMW MOA Foundation, the BMW Motorcycle Owners of America has two SMARTrainers available for use by the member clubs. One is stored in St. Louis, MO, and serves the Midwest and East Coast; the other is stored in Tacoma, WA, and serves the western US.

First, it must be said that the SMARTrainer is not just for the new rider, but all riders. As we ride we need continually to be honing our street strategy and mental skills. Often over the years of riding we accumulate some bad habits that we are really not aware of. This is where the SMARTrainer can help the experienced rider.

If you have been to an international rally in recent years, you may have seen a SMARTrainer. It is a simple device consisting of a seat, standard motorcycle controls and a computer monitor. In using it the student sits on the seat and operates the controls, much as they would do while riding their bike. A visual representation of the ride is projected on the monitor. As the student “rides” the scenario, various hazards are presented to them and the student must respond or react to the situation. The computer scores the rider on how well they handle the various hazards, including crashing the bike. The nice thing about this is that if you “crash” this bike, no one—or his or her bike—is hurt. You do get a “D” for that hazard, and if you do it more than once, you may get a “D” (for dead) for the entire ride.

Several scenarios are available for the rider to “try”: City, Suburban, Highway, Touring, and so on. Most times we use the City scenarios, as these can be the most effective to test the riders’ skills in hazard recognition and avoidance.

The session starts with a practice ride, wherein the rider has an opportunity to become familiar with the controls and



**Left and Above,** users hone their riding skills by using the SMARTrainer.



**Above,** a pair of scenarios users face when training with the SMARTrainer.

visuals on the screen. After the SMARTrainer Coach determines that the rider has a grasp of the controls and understands what is happening on the screen, they then have the rider take their “ride.”

After the ride, the SMARTrainer Coach will replay the ride and discuss what happened. The idea is that the rider gets to see how they did from a different perspective. There are several options on how the ride can be reviewed. My favorite is the bird’s eye view, where the SMARTrainer Coach positions their view above and behind the rider as the scenario replays. This allows the SMARTrainer Coach to show how different lane positions could be used to better see and be seen. It also allows the review to be looked at from different positions in intersections and on the street.

Another review tool allows the SMARTrainer Coach to show the rider what other vehicles see at any given time. This demonstrates to the rider how much, or little, the rider was visible to other vehicles in crucial situations. In addition to the review tools,

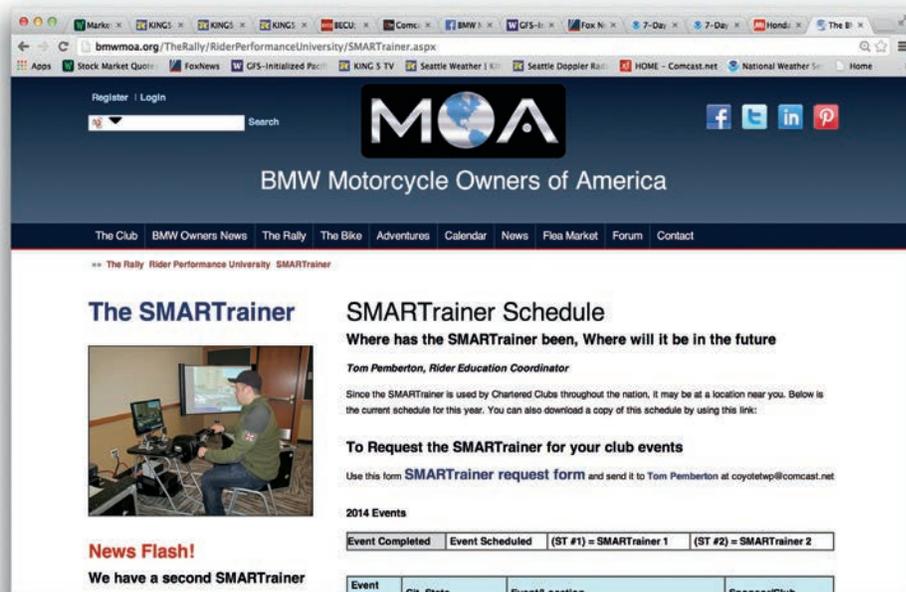
the replay also shows the Coach and rider what controls the rider used as they rode their ride. This often helps the rider see some of the bad habits they have acquired over time, such as improper brake usage or riding the clutch.

This tool is very useful to any and all riders, whether you are a novice or have a million miles under your tires. It is designed to be used under the tutelage of a SMARTrainer Coach, individuals who are often certified MSF RiderCoaches. They can also be individuals other than MSF RiderCoaches who want to help others. MSF has a certification process for both types of individuals; for non-RiderCoaches they simply need to have taken a recent BRC, or review of the Street Strategies section of the BRC. Both need only then pass an on-line test.

The SMARTrainer is available to all BMW MOA Member clubs. The only

requirement is that you have a certified SMARTrainer Coach scheduled to operate the SMARTrainer at your event. The Rider Performance University coordinates the scheduling of both the SMARTrainer and the SMARTrainer Coaches. Often the clubs using the SMARTrainer help defray some of the cost of shipping and operating the SMARTrainer, either by donations to the MOA Foundations and/or helping pay the expenses of the SMARTrainer Coach.

Requesting the SMARTrainer is a simple process. On the BMW MOA web site, under the Rally menu you will find the Rider Performance University listed. A drop down menu will take you to the SMARTrainer Webpage. On that page you will find the current schedule of where the SMARTrainer is going to be in the next few months, along with the link to the SMARTrainer Request Form. Download it, fill it out, and return it to the Rider Education Coordinator (Tom Pemberton) via the e-mail link on that page. We only ask that you plan early for the SMARTrainer at your event. It can take up to three months to schedule shipping and SMARTrainer Coaches. ☺



The SMARTrainer schedule published at bmwmoa.org.