



Practice

Like many other sports, practice is the key to success. Cyclist rarely practice specific skills but it is very essential to improve your bike handle skills. To learn perfect cornering or sprinting the body needs to refine specific motor skills and then reflexes will become automatic. So at an end of a ride or on a specific day, set aside some time for corner/sprint practice. Find a quiet neighborhood or parking lot and work on increasing your speed when turning and sprint out each turn. Incorporate sharp and wide turns as well.

Cornering

Set-up

Most mistakes while cornering happen before or during the entry into the corner. The main goal is to be relaxed and have confidence in your skills. When you tighten up and straighten your arms your bike will push to the outside and the chances of you missing the turn are higher.

By bending your elbows, and relaxing your muscles your body is able to react and is ready for the turn. Grip the bar firmly (elbows bend), but not too tight. The saying “never brake in a corner” is impossible but the goal is to try to limit your braking. So the rule is if you must brake while you are in a corner then feather/tap/pulse your brakes. If you approach a sharp turn very fast you have to brake harder. Once you have reached a safe speed, let go of the brakes. Your goal should be to enter the turn wide (within the limits of the traffic and road limitations).

Turn

You have to lean your bike to be able to turn. You cannot turn with turning your handlebars. If the turn is sharp you need to lean your bike more. If the turn is wide and open you do not have to lean as much. The ultimate goal is to move your centre of gravity by leaning the bike into the turn, while keeping the body weight over the centre line of the bike (the bike leans and body stays more straight). During fast long wide turns it will be easier to lean with the bike into the turn. Approach the turn from as far outside as possible, cut into the apex as close as possible and then exit the corner wide. The goal of cornering is to try to ride the straightest line as possible.

While turning you have to maintain seated on the saddle and with the hands on the drops. You have to extend the outside leg and press into that pedal and at the same time you push down on the bar with your inside hand. Try to lower your upper body and your head by bending your elbows.

The bike will straighten up if you break in the turn. This will make you turn wider than you expect. But if you find that you came into the turn too fast, you should gently slow down by lightly feathering the brakes.



Once you reached and passed the apex of the turn you should be able to start pedaling again and start accelerating again. You want to try to maximize the road again while exiting the turn. With starting to pedal early you will gain speed faster and the tires have more grip (the same principle when cornering with your car). Look ahead as far through the corner as you can so your bike will go the straightest line as possible. If you look down or at a spots where you do not want to go your turn will be unsuccessful and you will lose momentum.

Sprinting/Accelerating

Body position

Put your hands in your drops. Rest two fingers on the brake levers. Lift your bum up and forward out of the saddle. Make sure you do not elevate your body too high. Move your weight forward but not too far forward. Your nose can go forward as far as your front hub. Keep your face down but your eyes looking forward.

Try to keep your bum inline with your saddle height. Take your tailbone and curl it under while keeping your center for gravity low. Let your back serve you as a fulcrum, swaying forward and back to increase your power and speed.

Let your legs pretend that you are running on the bike. You do not want to have straight legs on the down stroke. Keep your knees always bent and pull up on the pedals.

In order to use your whole body in the sprint to gain power, pull on the bar as if you are performing an upright rowing motion. Be a ware of your extra power and speed.

Accelerating in a group ride

To accelerate after a stop light or a slight decrease in speed, stand up out of the saddle for at least 100 meters until you reach the back of the pack.

If you are dropped from a group ride/or race, stand up and sprint out of the saddle. Pretend that the finish is near. Faster you reach the pack faster the pain (lactate acid) from the sprint will be over and you can once again hide in the pack and rest.

Go out and test yourself after every ride. It takes only 5 minutes to practice cornering and then accelerate into a sprint but the benefits are enormous.