



MISTI HURST

LIFE ON THE  
FAST TRACK

## HOW WELL DO YOU BOUNCE?

It's been raining in Vancouver for over a month straight now, and to say that I'm bored, and that I miss riding, would be a gross understatement. My home office window looks directly outside into the drizzly dark clouds, and, if I peer over to the right, I can see my beloved 2001 Kawasaki ZX6-R street bike, and my 2000 Suzuki SV650 race bike, looking lonely and neglected in the garage. The other day, while I was supposed to be working, I found myself staring at my two babies and daydreaming about the many brilliant experiences I have had aboard each of them.

I recalled thousands of kilometers of road trips around Vancouver Island, the interior of B.C and the Washington, Oregon and California coastlines. I remembered crazy fast rips along various back roads with my riding buddies, and dozens of motorcycle races around U.S. and Canadian racetracks.

I smiled at the thought of all these wonderful memories, and then, spying the large, ominous looking dent in the SV tank, I suddenly remembered a lot of crashing.

I started counting all the crashes. Well, there was the one on the street, shortly after I got my license in 2000, when the lady in the car changed lanes into me and I slid down the damp road while she continued on her merry way, and then there was the crash about 6 weeks later, when the man on the side street decided to dart out in front of me. I grabbed my brakes a little too forcefully for the wet weather conditions and found myself testing the bumper of his car with my butt. There was the time at Mission raceway when I got t-boned by another rider in turn 3, and the time I high-sided myself out of turn 6.

There was also the crash at Pacific Raceway in Seattle, when I low-sided in turn 6 and slid across the track and far, far into the blackberry bushes, and a big crash at Shannonville Raceway, where I catapulted myself about ten feet in the air, to land neatly on my head in front of a crowd of spectators. The worst crash by far happened in turn 1 at Mission Raceway in B.C., the season finale and points championship decider, when I collided with the leader and barrel rolled down the straightaway. I landed in a heap in the dirt, visor of my helmet ripped off, earth in my mouth, and for the first time ever, I experienced the humbling sensation of not being able to get up. I suffered a broken collarbone, a lot of shoulder damage and a bunch of bumps and deep bruises.

After staring out the window and into the dismal darkness of rain, rain and more rain, and making calculations in my head, I came up with the magic number of 11. Wow, in 6 years of riding I've had 11 crashes in total, two on the street, and 9 on various racetracks. Impressive isn't it? Well, let me just put a few things in perspective first, before you dismiss me as a horribly uncoordinated rider, and allow me a few more moments to eventually get to the point I'm trying to make out of all of this.

I started riding in January 2000, having never had anything to do with motorcycles previously, except for being the occasional passenger, and in the first year of riding a 1989 CBR 600, I put 28,000kms on the bike and only crashed it twice. In the next three years, aboard a brand new Kawasaki ZX6-R, I put 55,000kms of hard riding in and began my racing career. In 2002 I purchased the SV 650 and that year I raced 18 race weekends with an average of three races, three practices and a full track day each weekend. The following year, I raced another 18 race weekends, and, in 2004, I became an instructor with the California Superbike School, riding about 50 track days. Last year, I test rode about 10 different bikes on the street and taught 63 track days on 14 different tracks throughout North America and Europe.

In six years of riding I've ridden over 100,000 kilometers on the street, and have done approximately 221 track days, so I suppose when you look at it that way, 11 crashes is not as many as it seems. What is also remarkable is that, in 11 crashes, the only major injury I've had so far (knock on wood) is a broken collarbone.

What I'm trying to say is that there are a few things I have learnt from all this crashing. The first thing is that experience and training play a significant role in reducing the probability of crashing in the first place. And, personal fitness and the way we maintain our bodies plays a considerable role in how we fare, if and when, we do find ourselves cart-wheeling across the pavement.

**Motorcycle Rider Training:** It is my humble opinion that taking part in some kind of formal rider training, early on in your riding career, and continuously throughout it, has extreme benefits and will no doubt improve your riding, and reduce your chances of crashing. I readily admit that when I first started riding I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing, hence the amount of novice mistakes and unnecessary crashes. Some friends of mine showed me the basics and that was about it. I fumbled around, made mistakes, crashed, got up, crashed again, started racing, and fumbled around some more. It wasn't until a sponsor of mine, Phil Cady of CLS West, decided to send me to the California Superbike School as a student, that I got any formal training. It was there that I first realized how important skills and training are in regards to riding. After doing all four levels as a student, I've since moved to a position as a coach for the Superbike school and find that my riding has improved steadily ever since. Instead of riding around oblivious of what I am doing with the bike and how it affects the outcome of certain situations, I now ride around with a new understanding of what I'm doing, exactly what will happen when I do it, and what to do if something bad happens.

For example, in my first few years of riding, I high-sided a couple of times at the track, but never really understood what was happening with the bike or how to avoid it. Recently, I was working with a fast student at one of the Superbike

schools at Laguna Seca. I was chasing after him, it was fairly cold and my tires hadn't quite gotten up to temperature. Coming out of turn five I got on the gas a little too hard and felt the back end start to slide drastically. In my days of little or no training I would have made the rookie mistake of chopping the throttle and probably would have ended up flying through the air like Supergirl, but this time, I mentally knew what was happening and made the conscious decision to NOT chop the gas. Instead, I held the throttle constant, stayed relaxed on the bars and waited for the bike to slow down gradually and come back into alignment. I knew what to do, and I was able to maintain that very advantageous upright position!

Having the skills and the knowledge of what to do in certain situations is great insurance against unnecessary crashing. There are several motorcycle schools that are available nowadays that teach really beneficial skills. I suggest you try one sooner, rather than later; it may just save your bacon.

**Personal Fitness:** I've had some people say that I "bounce well," when I crash. I suppose this is a desirable quality but what is it that really makes some people less prone to injury than others? And what else can we do to ensure proper rehabilitation and optimal health?

I've recently been working with Dr. Richard M. Cleland, a Doctor of Chiropractic who is currently practicing in Vancouver, British Columbia. He says, "Being physically fit helps with injury prevention because your body is accustomed to regenerating itself rapidly and efficiently." He goes on to explain that, "injury prevention can be maximized by simply making yourself more adaptable to the stresses that occur in your particular sport. Some of the most effective strategies to accomplish this include weight training, cardiovascular workouts, core stability and stretching, as well as relaxation time which increases recovery time."

So, in my case, being fairly fit, from various kinds of exercise over the years, has helped me prevent some injuries from occurring over my many crashes in the

first place. But that is only a part of it. Dr. Cleland says that, "Specific exercises for people who ride motorcycles should include a cross section of training techniques as I have mentioned above, and that the more specific the exercise is to the actual riding demands, the more effective the training technique. For instance, if a rider is required to ride for one hour at a time, training for only fifteen minutes is not the best choice of training duration. In this case, the cardiovascular portion of one's training program should be at least one hour in duration according to this example. Similarly, if one's riding position (riding posture) is very low to the motorcycle, it makes sense to emulate that posture when designing a stretching program or set of core stability and balance techniques. To work on one's balance in an upright posture would be less effective than working on one's balance whilst in the crouching position using this example. The first step to designing fun and effective exercises involves analyzing one's particular riding experience. Once this is clear, it is enjoyable experiencing a wide range of training techniques."

I began seeing Dr. Cleland (BA, DC, RTP, CPTI, FTIMM) for treatment because of the fact that I was still experiencing pain from all my little injuries. My right shoulder hurt all the time and felt weaker than the left. My collarbone was sore and I had many other painful twinges and pangs that were not debilitating but just down right annoying. I also wanted to assess my overall physical performance as I head into the 2006 motorcycle racing and teaching season. What I learnt right away was that all these little annoying injuries were having a great big effect on my overall health.

"When I first started working with Misti," says Dr. Cleland "it was evident that two components of her training were missing. These included effective rehabilitation of her previous injuries and strains as well as her neurological performance. As an athlete, it was natural that Misti had a history of falls, bumps and old bruises. Unfortunately, most of these injuries were still affecting Misti's

performance today.”

“Working with Misti involved a two-step process. The first was to thoroughly examine and test Misti to reveal where her mind and body were being held back due to prior experiences. Second was to design and implement a customized protocol to remove these blockages.”

Working with Dr. Cleland has been an eye opening experience for me. Usually skeptical, and very much of the mindset of “I can do it myself,” it has not been easy to let go and accept treatment, but the results have been staggering. Having dealt with the pain and irritations for so long, I’d virtually forgotten what it was like to NOT feel pain. I’m also realizing physical and mental potential that I never before believed was possible. Balance, overall strength, coordination and flexibility have increased. Mental clarity, concentration and even my mood have improved. Dr. Cleland does this by utilizing a wide variety of both Eastern and Western paradigms, and by integrating chiropractic, neuromuscular therapy, cranial work, and personal goal-setting to create a customized program for each patient.

So many people I know have fallen off bikes, crashed, or hurt themselves in other sports or situations, and, like me, haven’t really done anything about it. Without realizing it, it may be affecting so much more than just the physical comfort or physical abilities.

Dr. Cleland says, “I strongly believe that the health of neurological and muscular systems in one’s body is pivotal in overall health and performance. As a result of the treatment protocols that Misti is receiving from our work together, I believe that her riding and racing will directly improve. In addition to freedom from pain, Misti will improve her balance and co-ordination, neurological and muscular response time, mental clarity and direction, muscular and joint range of motion (flexibility), circulation and breathing capacity, and overall physical and mental confidence in her abilities.”

Maybe he means I’m less likely to crash 11 times in the next 6 years of riding!

So, what I’ve learnt, from all this pavement surfing, is that if you have the proper skills you are less likely to fall down in the first place, if you are fit and healthy you are less likely to hurt yourself if you do fall down, and if you bang yourself up a bit with a fall off a motorcycle, or a mountain bike, or skies, then rehabilitate yourself properly so you can get back out there and conquer the world. MMM

*For more information please visit [www.drCleland.com](http://www.drCleland.com). Misti Hurst is a motorcycle racer, an instructor with the California Superbike School, and a freelance writer. More information about her can be found on her website at [www.mistihurst.com](http://www.mistihurst.com)*