

# How To Ride A Motorcycle Trike:



*And What's The Difference??*

*Compiled By:  
Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

The above trike photo is "Dances-With-Trikes" which is a Trinity Trike conversion of a 1982 Honda GL500i, SilverWing



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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## ***“How To Ride A Motorcycle Trike ”***

### ***(Wisdom For Newbies From Others Who’ve Been There Already!)***

***Preface:*** *I don’t claim any real originality in this presentation. After all is said and done, it really is just common sense stuff and some good thoughts from all over. As the Bible says in Proverbs 11:14 “...In the multitude of counselors, there is safety.”*

*Therefore, as a public service, when I was at the now defunct The Trinity Trike, Mfg I pulled this information together by gleaning from personal experiences, conversations with other trikers, YouTube.com and various internet sites, rider forums, answers to FAQ’s and reading stuff long enough ago, I can’t possibly remember where it came from. Accordingly, what I have in here is advice, opinions and experiences, not absolutes. Not everything will apply to everybody, but I’m sharing what I have applied to my own riding experience and therefore, can recommend it (otherwise why would I have bothered to type all of this in the first place!!) Anyhow, here we go.....*

For novices (aka “Newbies”) learning to ride a motorcycle trike is not as easy as it looks, even for the seasoned motorcyclist (perhaps even more so for you regular bikers!). Here are some pointers to either get you going as a triker or hopefully to help you be a better triker even if you've been triking awhile already!

- The typical trike handlebars and control arrangement is of course, exactly the same as on a motorcycle (well, Doh!) However, the steering with those handlebars is *different* and you need to get used to it. I would have you begin driving the trike in an empty parking lot and leave the trike in first gear, steer it around the lot and do some figure-8’s. Get used to the long arm push/pulls to turn. Odd as it may seem, it might help you in this most important exercise by leaving your left hand in your back pocket so you can get a better “feel” for it!
- You *steer* a trike very much like a car. You will find it easiest to use a push/pull steering technique. That is, when you want to turn right, pull the right grip toward you while pushing the left grip away from you. Similarly, for a left turn, pull the left



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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grip toward you while pushing the right grip away from you. This technique is especially useful making turns in the famous twisties we all love. You will find it much easier and more natural to lead with a *pull* on the grip on a hard turn rather than using a push on the grip -- which is what your two wheeling “muscle memory” will want to do.

- You really need to spend some significant time getting familiar with the differences in steering and how evasive maneuvers are executed. A couple of hours rather than a few minutes is preferred. Your mind will keep telling you that you are on a bike, which for steering is no longer true. You must train yourself to steer the vehicle, not *countersteer*. Throwing your weight around will only wear out the seat of your pants, it will do little or nothing to steer the trike properly. In other words when on a trike, your knee dragging days are over!
- Watch where you are going (not where you want to go!). If you were trained properly for motorcycle riding, you were taught that looking where you want go is half of getting there upright (again because of leaning & counter steering). This is something you will need to “unlearn” or at least not using it as you did on two wheels. What is true for two wheeling in that regard is no longer true for triking. Where you are *steering* is where you are going regardless of where you are looking! The cage advice is sage advice – “Keep your eyes on the road!!”
- You should drive the trike in traffic lanes positioned much like you would a car. Riding through long sweeper curves will be easy. Doing the twisties will take new techniques and a bit more muscle (but still can be loads of fun!). Again, since you can’t shift weight and cannot lean when taking curves, the best advice is to slow down before getting into *all* curves and then halfway through, apply a bit of power on your way out. Stay towards the “tight side” (i.e., on the inside track) and keep that front wheel in the middle of your lane as much as possible. Remember to point the front wheel in the direction you want to turn (again, I can’t say it enough, there is *no counter steering!*).
- If you think you will be able to reach out and touch something to one side or the other, you're too close to whatever it is! Your width is greater than before so watch out for curbs, toll booths, gas pump barrier poles, etc. **Hint** – add a pair of those one



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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inch convex mirrors so you can see the outer edge of the fenders. Oh yeah, you are not going to fall over, so don't put your feet down when you stop!

- Because of the natural physics involved with a three wheeled vehicle, when you hit a pothole or bump with one of your rear wheels, the bars will react with a bit of a “snap.” Less so for the independent rear suspension systems, but it is a bit more noticeable on the straight axles. Don't worry, this is completely normal so anticipate it. Also, if you take both your hands off the bars when going down the road on any number of trikes, the front end may start a slight “wobble” as well. (But then you shouldn't be doing “no hands” riding in any case – ever!!) Hang on to the bars, and there shouldn't be any wobble to worry about!
- Speaking of wobbles, don't ignore your tires as a contributory source. If you've just triked a ride you have had for awhile, consider first a re-balancing of the front or better yet, a replacing *and* balancing of the front tire. New tires are great even on a two wheeler, and work wonders for the newly triked. And don't neglect the rear tires either – they need to be well balanced at all times, and rotated as well.
- Don't worry about the normally modest decrease in gas mileage. You now carry more weight, have bigger wheels (not to mention having an extra one) and need more energy to overcome the inertia of the extra mass. There can be two “air brakes” right behind you, (aka "fenders") or worse yet, perhaps a full body blocking the flow.
- Remember, trikes are somewhat sensitive to air pressure in the rear tires. Unlike cars and SUV's, running your rear tires a bit *under* inflated will usually enhance the handling and ride. Because those auto tires you put on are only carrying a fraction of what they were designed for, a few pounds of under inflation won't affect the tire wear much, if at all. Also note that the trike will pull toward the tire with a lower PSI. This is another good reason to check your tire pressure frequently. Also you can use this to your advantage especially if you ride a lot of roadways that have pronounced “crowns” on them that are always pulling you to the side (especially true in the northern states). Try taking a couple of pounds out of your left rear tire to compensate, but keep in mind you will now pull to the left a bit on the good flat roads! *But then, nuthin's ever easy!* The best solution is to move to Florida where most all our roads tend to be nice and flat, and virtually pot hole free!!



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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- My experience is that the PSI for automotive tires in the back should be in the low 20's and the motorcycle wheel in front in the low to mid 30's for the small to mid size bikes upwards to 38-42 PSI for the Wings and big twin super cruisers. Suspensions, passenger loads, etc., will of course affect those numbers. Trial and error will modify them to your needs, but these are all good starting points. In any case, you should not run your front tire's pressure greater than 5% over the max rating.
- With apologies to Darth Vader, before leaving tires behind, a word about the “darkside” tires. (going to the darkside means using a regular car tire on a motorcycle.) Of course, most every trike conversion in the USA has “darkside” tires on the *rear* wheels, but an increasing number are doing it for the fronts as well. The thinking seems to be that the front tire is no longer “rolling” on the sidewalls in the twisties and normal curves, so there’s no particular advantage to the motorcycle specific tire designs. And as is well known, the bike tires wear out in a small fraction of the time compared to any plain Jane car tire! Those wanting to research this themselves should Google it using “motorcycle dark side” as your keyword search. I understand also that at least one major bike tire maker is considering manufacturing a flatter profile tire for the front of trikes.
- As we all know, tires and suspensions combinations are quite variable, so experimentation will almost always be needed. One handy test is to put a line of chalk across the tire tread and drive down the driveway. If the chalk is worn evenly all the way across, you at least have the right pressure for full contact of the tread on the pavement.
- Tight turns or decreasing radius turns on entrance and exit ramps and in parking lots are more noticeable on trikes. These are best negotiated with a steady pressure and whenever you can, under a *slight* acceleration (to avoid crashing into walls & parked cars!!). Again, this slight additional effort is caused by the nature of the “resistance” between the center front wheel and the two wheels in the back that is more or less common to all trikes.
- Unless you have one of the Burgman or Honda Silverwing “super scooter” trikes, stiff joints, bad knees and just plain old age contribute to making it increasingly



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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difficult to “throw a leg” over your steadfast mount! There is a particularly good way to safely and more easily mount a trike that you likely didn’t realize. Look over the steps shown in the YouTube video linked below for an easy sequence of moves:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icj07O6\\_90g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icj07O6_90g)

*(Note: if you are reading a paper copy of this, there is an underscore character between the “6” and the “90g” above – or just get on YouTube and search the phrase “getting onto a trike” and you’ll pull it up).*

- The passenger can use a similar approach when they get on, but generally it is easier for them to hang on to a rear sissy bar or travel trunk, especially if there’s a driver’s backrest in the way.
- Also here’s a final comment for the aging “Boomers” with bad knees. If your weaker knee doesn’t like the left side approach shown in the video, it is “reversible” by mounting the bike from the right side. After all, your trike isn’t a horse so there are no “rules” that dictate you should only mount from the left side. Besides, the horse really didn’t care and you no longer have to deal with a left side kick stand lean which kind of forced a left side mounting. I think it came from something about Middle Age knight’s swords getting in the way of mounting their steeds from the right side! Since then, it has been carried on for “*no reason, just policy!*”

### ***Some Final Warnings!***

- Once again, *do not* assume that since you've been riding motorcycles for decades, that you already know how to ride a trike. You may find yourself in the ditch because your “muscle memory” will cause you to do the wrong things!! Caution and moderation will greatly assist you in being a safe triker.
- As I said before, trikes tend to be more sensitive to the “road crown” than motorcycles. That crown is built into many roadways so water will run off to the side. On your two wheeler, it is barely noticeable, but on a trike, the vehicle will want to pull down towards the shoulder. Some roads crown more than others (rural two



*Bob Witte, Hudson, Florida*

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lanes for example) and this can be disconcerting to newbies. If your trike runs straight and true on a flat surface, just plan on steering slightly to the left when on the “overly crowned” roads. You'll get used to steering to compensate and after a while it will be second nature.

- Finally, enjoy riding your trike but if you're shy or just don't like talking to strangers, I would think twice about getting one in the first place. Riding a trike will draw people of all kinds over to you like a magnet. If you are single and interested in dating, then you can be well on your way to making new friends!

Enjoy!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bob Witte'.

Bob Witte,  
*The Ghost of The Trinity Trike (Past)*

Last revised October 2015