Trials Notebook

A monthly course in the art of trials riding. Instructors: Bob Nickelsen, Mike Obermeyer

PROBLEM

How to practice everyday when the nearest riding area is 40 miles away. . . .

SOLUTION

Ride up and down the sidewalk! Actually, it's a little more complex than that, as the accompanying photos will show.

You can make this exercise extremely tough, simply by tightening up your line and staying as close to the curb as possible. The following techniques are important and should be actively thought about and worked on as you try this exercise.

Key points: 1. *Controlled lift;* anybody can blast the front wheel three feet in the air; concentrate now on gentle, controlled lifts that pick the front wheel up just enough to clear the curb, and then put it right back down for steerage. 2. *Weight shift;* slightly back to make front end light and allow it to loft with a quick, easy tug and slight throttle burst. 3. *Throttle control;* throttle must roll off to prevent rear wheel spin. 4. *Shock absorber knee action* lets the rear wheel off gently and keeps the bike on-line for the next turn back into the curb. 5. *Unweighting;* if you tighten up and take a "shallow" angle, the rear wheel may want to spin and crab against the curb without climbing. One solution: "load" the rear shocks by firm, abrupt leg pressure, then "jump off the pegs" as you come off the spring rebound. This will force the rear end up and forward, minimizing wheel spin and causing the rear wheel to come right on up the curb.

ADVANCED EXERCISE 1

1. Look at the picture of Nickelsen straddling the curb. With weight shifted to the outside, the front wheel cocked to provide a counteracting force to the rear wheel, Bob can ride almost indefinitely this way without the rear wheel ever coming up on the curb. Purpose? Once you get comfortable with this track, ruts should never scare you again.

ADVANCED EXERCISE 2

Try the following variations: 1. Rear wheel up, front wheel down. 2. Rear wheel down, front wheel alternating between up and down. 3. Front wheel down, rear wheel alternating between up and down (super unweighting technique). 4. On a curve, rear wheel up, front wheel down, following the turn (remember the last lesson? Front wheel and rear wheel track on different arcs).

What's the purpose behind all this? Nickelsen explains it in terms of two factors: *reactions and control.* This kind

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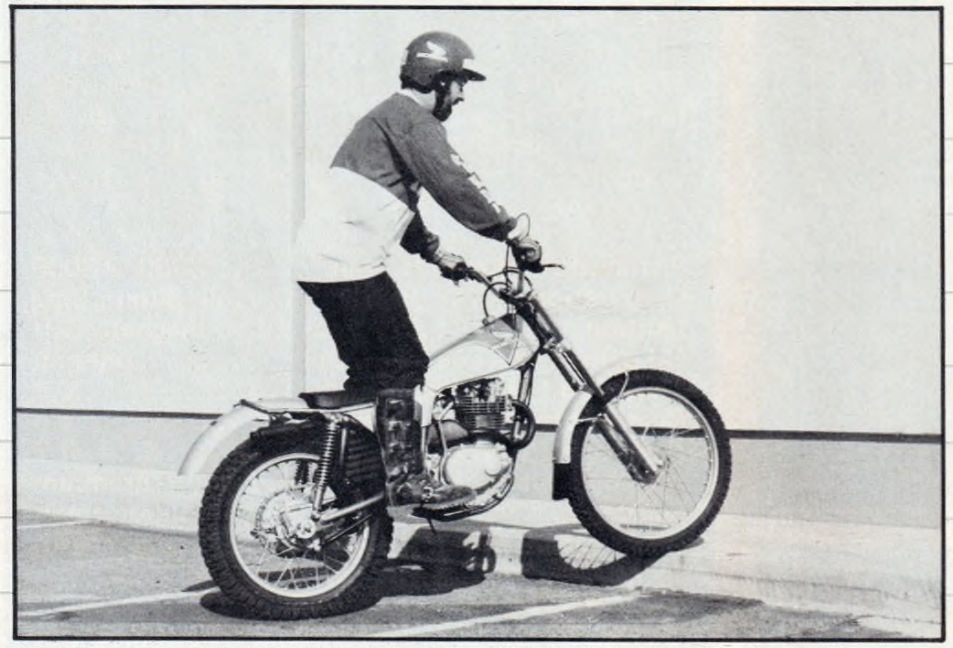
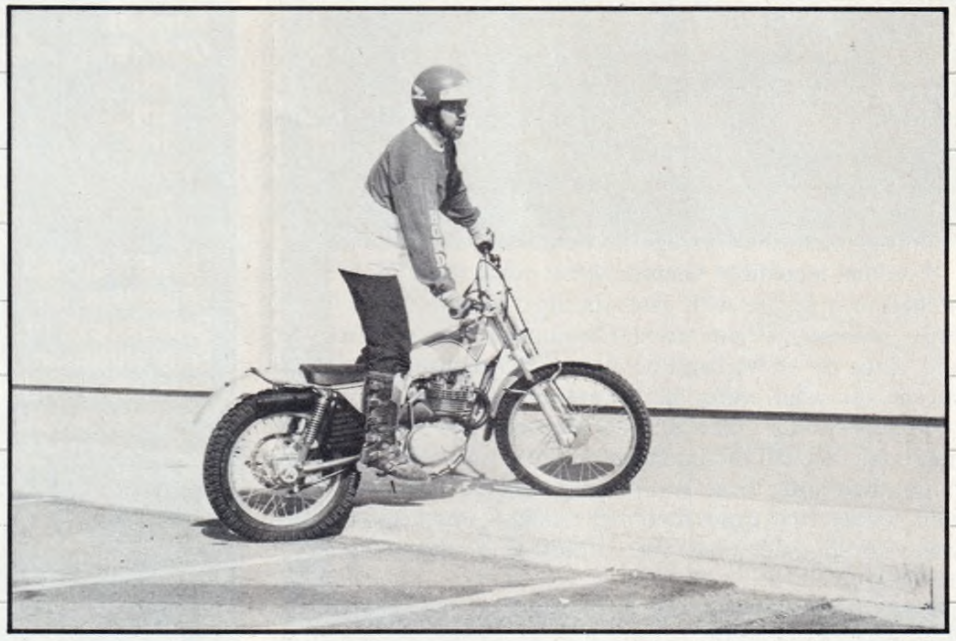
ONE



ONE

Precise lift puts the front wheel just on the curb lip, without building excessive speed that would blow the next turn.

TWO



TWO

Nick unweights slightly to bring rear wheel up and over the curb.

THREE

THREE

Weight slightly out and back to bring the front end around to come off the curb.

FOUR

Bike is dropped off at a very slight angle to the curb. As soon as rear wheel hits, Nick will set up for turn and lift.

FOUR

FIVE

FIVE

Knees flex to take up the shock from the rear wheel drop-off. Weight swings across bike to set up next turn.

SIX

Weight shift is lessened to keep bike closer to vertical. Throttle is turned on to lift front end, and arms and shoulders tense to provide physical lift.

SIX

SEVEN

SEVEN

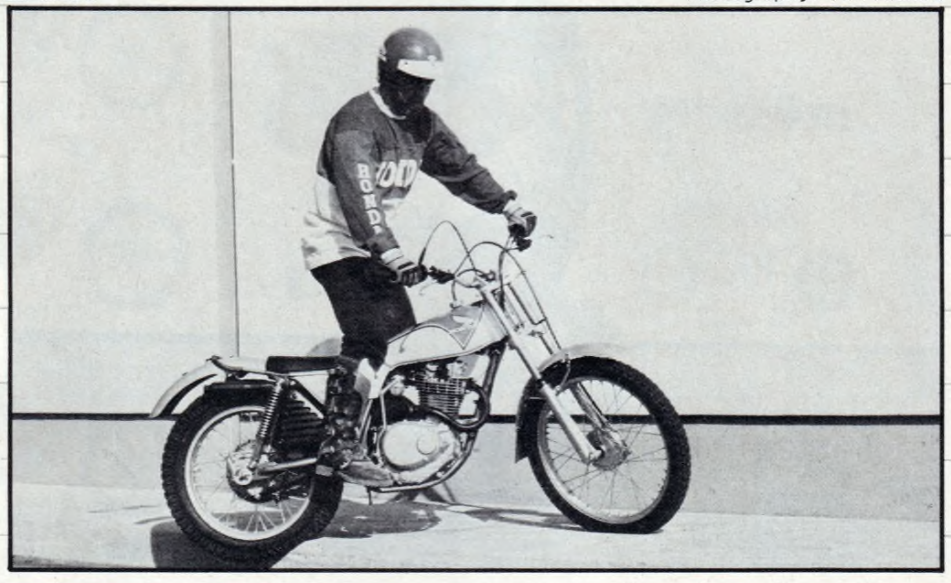
Throttle is shut off to set front wheel down. Bob gets ready for rear wheel to start to slide.

EIGHT

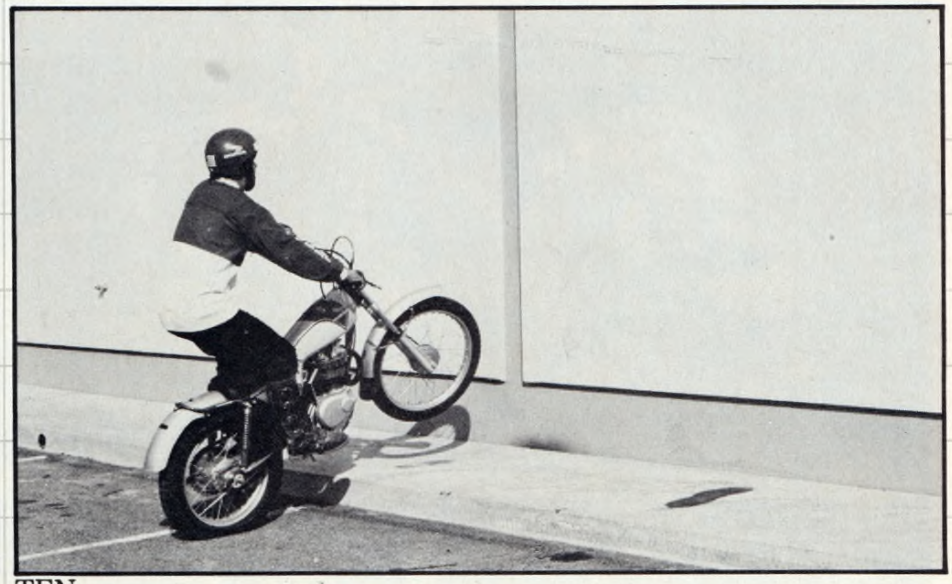
Rear wheel is climbing, following unweighting, indicated by very slight tire deflection.

EIGHT

Photography: Tim Hickox

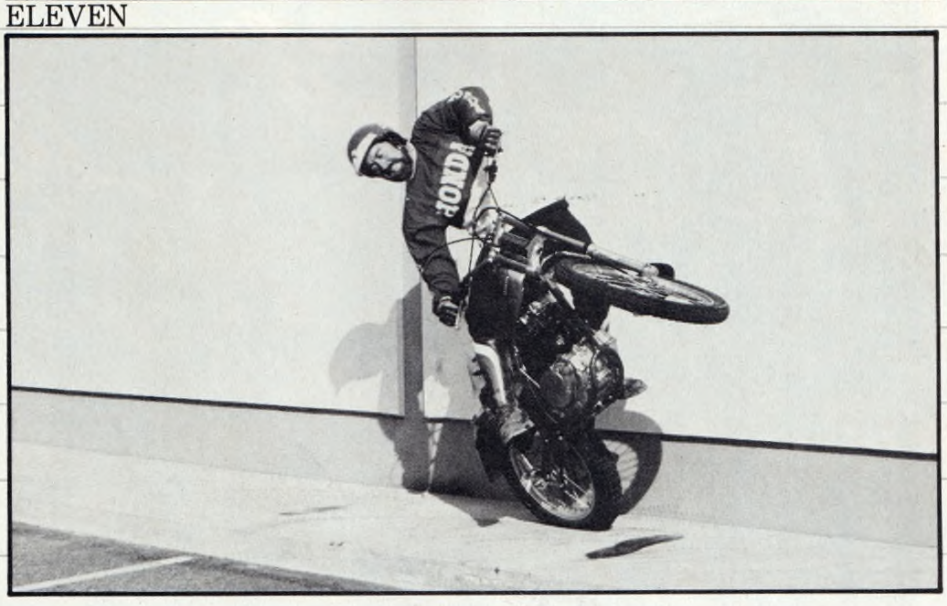


NINE



TEN

ELEVEN



of practice will get you used to making pinpoint lifts and unweightings, and will force you to think in terms of *reacting* to sideways rear wheel slides. Planning for these, and for rear wheel unweighting to get the rear wheel over the kind of nasty little rear wheel "kickers" that throw you off-line in sections, is half the game. You must learn to work the bike constantly in rocky or rutted sections, rather than being a passive passenger. One of the sardonic comments Sammy Miller frequently makes during intensive coaching sessions is, "Machine in control!" What Sam really means is, "Rider *not* in control."

Our appraisal of trials riding is that—for most people—it's a question of *learned reactions.* Most of us have to unlearn bad habits and force our bodies and brains to make the right saving move automatically, without having to think about it. Any type of practice that forces you to learn these automatic moves will improve your riding and save you points in every event.

Several of the young hot dogs currently dominating the national trials scene practice this way regularly, and the relaxed way that they move their scooters around in rock sections is excellent evidence of how well this practice technique has paid off.

For a capper, take a look at Nick making a wheelie turn off the back side of the American Honda building. This looks like grandstanding, but it's a great way to practice a useful technique. This move requires *very* precise throttle control and arm lift. The front wheel is flipped sideways to bank the bike around, and weight then comes around and outside to bring the bike down in a controlled manner. Note that without this move the bike has a tendency to fall over to the inside of the turn. It's a long way down.

So, the next time your next door neighbor implies that you're not very fast, and klutzy to boot, dazzle him with a quick routine up and down his curb and then finish off with a spectacular 180-degree off the side of his Gran Torino. That'll fix him.

NINE, TEN & ELEVEN

Look at that determination. Grimace and body English make it work. Advanced practice only! Note the way that Nick's body is arched from the outside in, to bring the bike around and down.