

# Skills clinic: U-turns

How do you feel about doing a U-turn? It's a simple manoeuvre but one that many riders dread doing. Here are some easy steps to get it right every time...



## Phoenix Motorcycle Training

Phoenix Motorcycle Training is the UK's largest motorcycle training provider, with 25 local training centres. The company provides high-quality courses from CBTs to full licence and post-licence training delivered by fully accredited instructors, and designed to meet a range of customer needs, from complete beginners to experienced riders.  
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Executing a perfect U-turn is a much-neglected skill among both new and experienced riders, simply because very few riders bother practising it. But we want to change that, because it's a skill that can make the difference between a clumsy 12-point turn and a smooth and confident swoop. Knowing how to do a U-turn properly also can keep you safe if you need to do the manoeuvre in traffic.

### Don't make these mistakes

The biggest mistake with U-turns is not practising U-turns. It's simple enough to find a quiet space to practice, but make sure that the area is safe without any other traffic giving you a fright mid-turn.

The good thing about all of this is that you are not alone. Even advanced riders often struggle with slow-speed riding and U-turns. Not many want to admit it, but if you spend any time at a

biker café or a bike night, you will see plenty of examples of riders awkwardly pedalling their bikes back and forth.

It's worth remembering that not all bikes turn the same. How easily and tightly you can perform a U-turn will depend on the steering lock, centre of gravity, riding position, etc., but with practice you will be able to turn any bike.

And remember this: Don't be a hero. A little dab of your foot to the

ground to keep things smooth is fine. This is not a test, and a foot on the floor is better than a bike on the floor. But with a bit of practice, you won't even need that dab.

### This is how to get it right

There are three key elements to doing a spotless U-turn. You need to concentrate on what you see and feel, and most importantly, believe in yourself.

**Look** around you for traffic and hazards. Once you're happy that

it's safe to go, do a lifesaver check over your shoulder, then look where you want to go, not where the front wheel is. Scan your surroundings so you can take the largest safe radius for your turn. Take your time when preparing, and make sure you're happy with everything before you commit to the turn. You don't want to end up rushing or panicking during the manoeuvre. **Feel** the throttle, clutch and rear brake. They are your

friends for slow riding. If you have plenty of space and you are not going too slow, you can do a U-turn just on tick-over without the other controls, but if it's a tight turn or you need to go really slow, slipping the clutch and applying light and consistent rear brake makes the bike more stable and easier to turn. Also, you need to up the revs as you pull the clutch in and apply the rear brake – you will feel when

you hit the sweet spot as the bike moves forward steadily and feels stable. The revs may sound a bit high, but you need that so you don't stall, and the spinning parts in the engine add to the gyroscopic forces helping you to stay upright. Do NOT touch the front brake, it's too sharp for U-turn control. Moving your body slightly may help a little, but this depends on your weight, and the weight and shape of the bike. As a general

rule, moving slightly to the outside of the turning arc can help balance the bike. **Believe** in yourself – you got this! As with most things, success partly depends on you being confident about your riding, and you can only truly be confident when you have practised the manoeuvre so much it becomes second nature. If at first it seems difficult to get it right, don't despair, repetition and practice will get you there.

### And don't forget...

Practice the turns both ways. In the UK the majority of your U-turns will be right-hand turns, but there are times when you need to turn left, too, if the traffic layout is unusual (roadworks etc.); you are off the public roads; or there are hazards or other reasons to make a left-hand turn preferable. And, of course, if you head out to Europe, you will be riding on the right, and doing the U-turns to the left.

When you do your bike test, you will need to keep your feet on the pegs for the U-turn. Once the test is done though, there are no prizes for not touching the ground, so don't be afraid to have a little dab to help keep your balance. Try to do the turn with your feet on the pegs, but be ready to put the foot down early if needed – if you leave it too long, the bike will be more difficult to stop from falling.