

## » Jim Ford

### THE ART OF RIDING SMOOTH

**“Anticipate continuously, and precisely place myself first for safety, then for traction, and then for the absolute clearest view of the vanishing point.”**

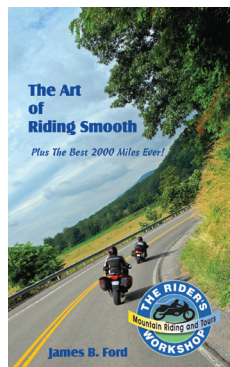
– *The Jim Ford Rider’s Workshop Mantra*

Exactly 10 years ago, I had the pleasure of attending Jim Ford’s Rider’s Workshop for a review (MCN 2/08). It still remains, without question, the most enjoyable single weekend of motorcycling in my entire 21 year riding career.

What makes Ford’s courses so profound is his repeated emphasis on tapping into an introspective mindset, far beyond the mere physical aspects of learning to ride competently. As I wrote in 2008, “We were being guided in the very personal process of tuning in to what noted psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has termed flow.” Flow is an often elusive mental state in which a person is fully immersed in the moment with complete focus, free from all discursive thoughts.

In this meditative state of “mushin,” humans rely more on what they feel intuitively than on what they think rationally. Jim encouraged us to home in on our own intuitions, sensing the unique rhythm of each surface we negotiated. The idea was to ride those roads the way a great musician approaches a solo, where each note is not only played precisely in and of itself, but also fits perfectly within the context of the overall song.

After 11 years of running The Rider’s Workshop and well over 600,000 miles of motorcycling under his belt, Mr. Ford has finally penned the definitive guide to his proven concepts of mastering mountain roads. “The Art Of Riding Smooth” covers



the essentials of the Rider’s Workshop including positioning, awareness, intuition, and mind-melding with the motorcycle so that the rider and machine become one holistic unit. Ultimately, if practiced with intention, the reader can achieve what Jim calls being “unconsciously competent,” or fully aware as second nature. This is the springboard for true development, both mental and physical.

Ironically, both in print and in person, Jim rarely speaks in terms of motorcycles or their controls when instructing his students. His analogies and instructions are usually given in terms of piloting aircraft, or of playing music. The skills required for proficient riding are in fact the same, and I’ll never forget the euphoric feeling of “getting it” for the first time.

The last chapter of the book is the proverbial final exam—the “Magical Mountainous Tour.” Ford is a true believer that the serpentine tarmac of the Appalachian Mountains constitutes the finest, most challenging riding in the U.S., if not the world. Mastering the mountains is a genre in and of itself. This last chapter proves it by intimately detailing an eight-day, 2,000-mile dream route by which the reader can utilize all the valuable lessons, tips, and tricks contained in “The Art Of Riding Smooth.”

A thoroughly educational, enjoyable, and entertaining read, Ford’s new paperback deserves to be right next to David Hough’s books in any serious rider’s collection, and that’s the highest praise I can give. \$25.

—Moshe K. Levy



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front of the thigh, one per leg. They inhale air like a vacuum cleaner.

There’s no closure flap, and these pants don’t come with a liner. In cold weather, the chill is noticeable and you’ll know if it rains. Two weeks after purchase, I found myself riding in Austria in fresh-falling snow at 39 degrees! Thankfully I’d brought heavyweight leg-hugging fleece tights to wear under the pants, plus a pair of waterproof overpants. The triptych layering worked great.

Twin zippered slash thigh pockets will hold a set of keys and thin wallet, but not much else. A

cargo pocket overlay would have greatly enhanced these pants. The lower-leg zippers seal at the cuff with rubber-and-Velcro flap closures. This allowed the pants to wrap around my legs and fit snugly inside my Forma Adventure boots. The legs are also wide enough to fit over the boot.

There’s a reflective strip down each thigh. Pliable and height adjustable NP2 protectors wrap around the sides of knee and extend down to the shin, offering tremendous protection. Hip protectors, however, are dismally small. My only other complaint is

the token pocket space.

Matching AirFlow jacket and gloves are available. However, the pants will mate to any other BMW jacket thanks to a compatible zipper. It wed perfectly to my five-year-old AirShell jacket. These pants may appear pricey at a MSRP of \$409, but I love ‘em.

—Christopher P. Baker

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