

Riding Blind

by Bill Boles



John McGarry finally manages to clean an easy section at Great Brook Farm but runs over a hiker's cat.

Photo by Philip Keyes

the opposite sides of a coin, but when you do it right it will actually increase your ability to ride safely. Of course I'm not suggesting that you ride around with your eyes closed, but rather I'm suggesting that much of the effort that you expend preparing for and reacting to minor trail obstacles is not only unnecessary but a waste of energy.

For example: let's pretend that you're riding on a trail that contains a long series of small roots or rocks, in other words a typical New England Trail. If you focus your attention on everything that is in your path, or that's potentially in your path, you'll tense up and waste a lot of effort trying to force your bike to go exactly where you want it to.

Alternatively, if you look further down the trail and concentrate on where you want to go rather than on what you want to miss you'll find that you're riding faster and smoother. And that you're riding with less effort.

Your bicycle's suspension is quite capable of absorbing minor trail irregularities without any input or help from you — but only if you let it. Try this exercise: find a trail that has one small deadfall, rock or root, maybe something that sticks up an inch or two. Now ride down the trail looking at the object and when you get close to it get ready and do whatever you'd normally do to get over or around it. Repeat this a couple of times until it seems easy. Now, go back and ride the same trail again. Go at the same speed, or maybe a little faster, but look well

beyond the obstacle and just ride over it. Let your bike do everything, just trust it. Try this a few times. Notice the difference? It may seem weird at first, but when you can ignore things and let your bike do the work for you everything becomes easier.

Now try this same technique on a more typical trail, one that's littered with constant irregularities. You'll find that as you are able to do this more and more that you're becoming a much better rider. And that's the key. Good riders already know how to ignore what they don't need to react to. While the rest of us constantly waste energy when we don't have to.

Riding blind doesn't mean not seeing things, it just means editing out what's not important. It lets you relax, and it will let you enjoy your riding a whole lot more.

We had just completed a late fall ride. The trails that we rode were very familiar to us but were covered with a blanket of wet brown leaves. Larger obstacles protruded through the leaves but the ground was, for the most part, hidden. Surprisingly, despite not being able to see most of the small roots, and stones that normally litter the trails, and despite the slippery leaves, we were able to ride as fast as we normally did. In fact, most of us commented on how much easier the trails seemed.

A few weeks later those same trails were covered with an inch of snow. Again, seeing what was beneath the snow was difficult except for larger objects which were very noticeable and quite easy to avoid. Once again the trails seemed easy, and most people commented on how much faster we seemed to be riding.

In both cases we were riding blind, and didn't know it.

Riding blind and being in control may seem like a contradiction, like

