

MAKE THE TIME:



MY INSPIRATION FOR

By Jim Ford #61985

LIKE MANY OF YOU JUST GETTING INTO (or back into) motorcycling, I too was initially puzzled at *where* to go riding as much as *how* to ride. Of course I took the MSF course, but I still felt like a fledgling when I bumped out onto the streets those first few times. It was both exhilarating and scary at the same time. I know you know what I mean.

When I did steal a morning here or an afternoon there, I pretty much stuck to familiar roads. Since I live in Kensington, Maryland, a ride along the Potomac River and back was enough. It didn't take long, though, before I ventured out on my first long ride from the Washington Beltway to Virginia's Great Falls, then west into Leesburg and outbound to the river town of Point of Rocks. I had lived in the DC area nearly 20 years by then and had never before been across the Point of Rocks Bridge, so it was fairly novel to cross the Potomac River on other than a metropolitan DC bridge. With the rebound ride back to the DC area, the round trip was roughly 85 miles.

It was when Bob Henig hired me to share the sales duties at Bob's BMW with Paul Mihalka (whose oldest friends call him *Pablo*) that my riding education began in earnest. Early on, I remember casually asking the man just where he'd typically go on a Sunday morning ride. Since he lived in a western Baltimore suburb, I guessed it would be to Gettysburg or Harpers Ferry. When Paul said he rode to Deep Creek Lake for breakfast (that's a cool 175 miles) and only then began his ride, I thought: holy smokes, motorcycling personified! For sure I was an eager student. When Paul said

to me in his unique accent, "Come with me, Jim. I show you," I knew my teacher had arrived.

Now, I am not going to wax inspired here (nor do I want to swell a particular Hungarian head), but the fact was then and still is today, Paul is a master motorcyclist, and in



those early days, at least, I was *Grasshopper*. It wasn't long before I met up with Paul one Sunday morning for brunch at a restaurant in Flint Hill, Virginia. For him to share brunch with me took some persuading on my part, because normally by late morning, Paul is on the back half of his Sunday ride. After brunch he suggested we go for a "little ride." I said, "No problem." I thought for sure we'd angle back toward the Baltimore/DC area, and maybe he'd show me a new road or two. That was not to be.

Instead we swung westward, accelerated up and over the Blue Ridge and bee-lined across the Shenandoah Valley. From the

Shenandoah, we headed even farther west into the Appalachians with its shaded valley roads. As we swept northward along a winding, utterly deserted, local road, I grew very alert. It was crystal clear that I was on a ride like none before. This was a singular education for me, with new roads, new scenery, and a brand-spanking new skill level just to keep up!

Paul gradually rolled on the throttle and laid down a fluid, snaking, groove. Never, ever hurried or rushed, instead his style was effortless. He sat still in the saddle, sphinx-like (except for his left foot, which seemed to be kicking around a bit) and let the motorcycle do his work.

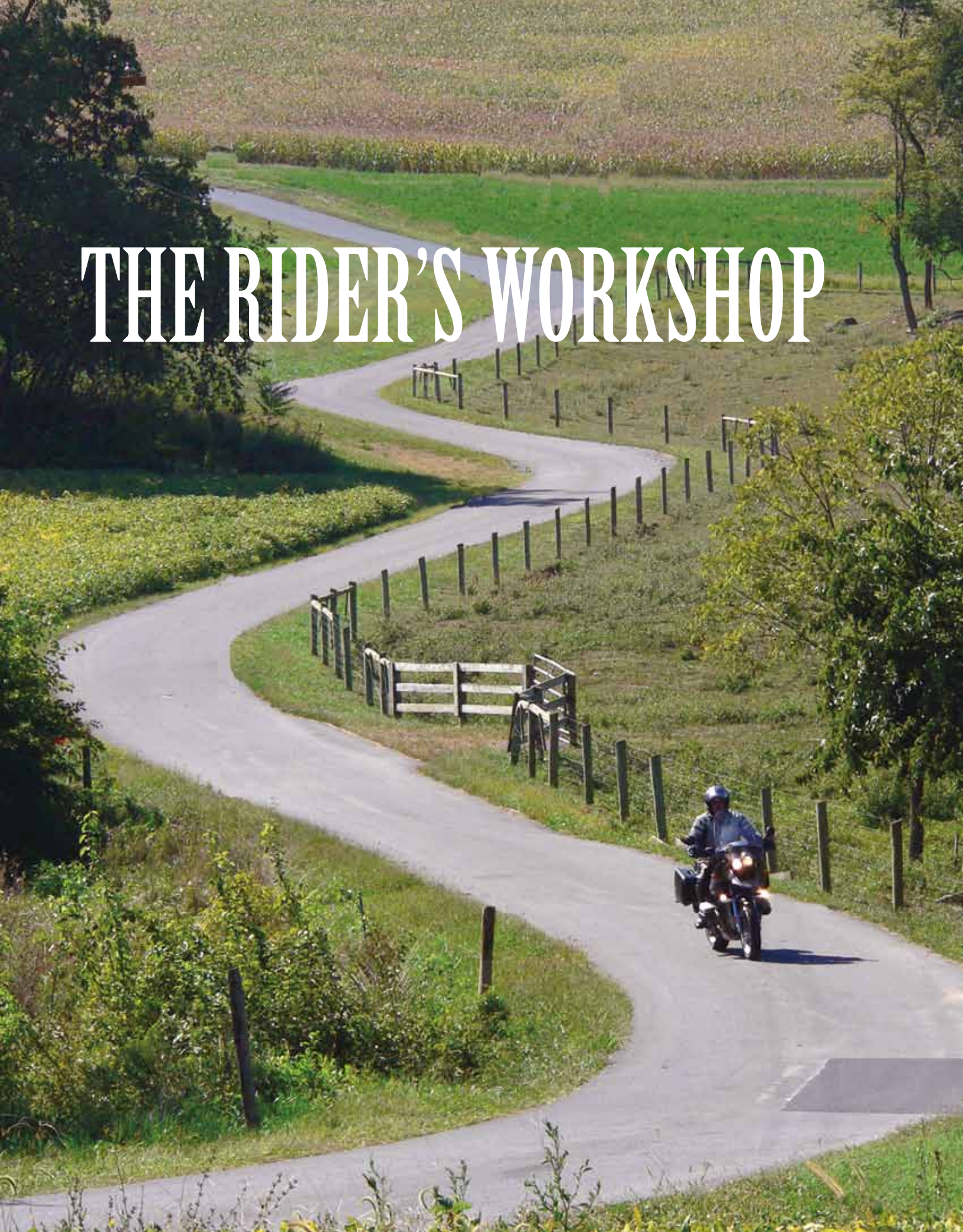
We made a brief stop to gas up, knock back a hot chocolate and share a laugh. I asked him what's up with his left foot. Did he have a cramp? He shook his head, no cramp. He told me he was changing gears. Changing gears, I thought to myself. Lord, he's changing gears three times as often as I am. "Why are you changing gears so much?" I asked. "For control," he said. "But that often?" I queried. "If you want even better control," he said. Hmmm.

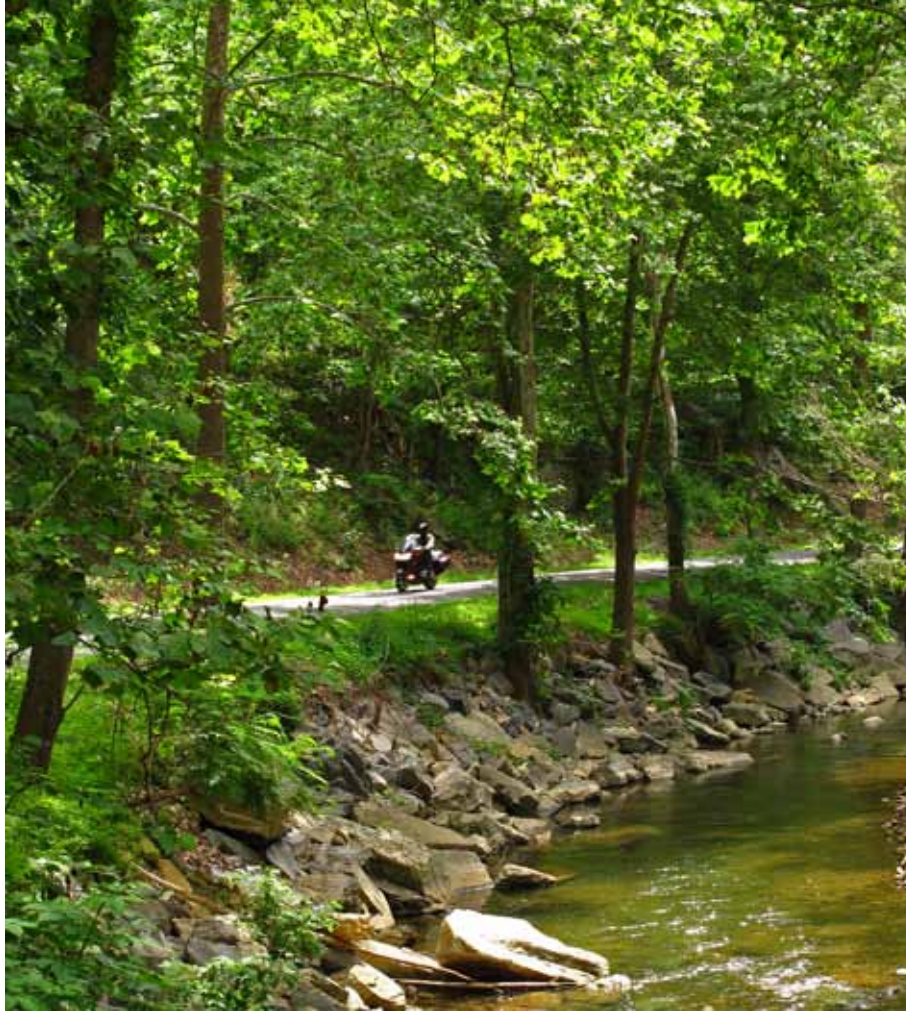
Soon it was more roads behind some mountains farther north, only this time I was a gonzo gear shifter. Whoop Wee! What a difference! The next thing I knew, I was seeing city limit signs for Berkeley Springs, WV.

In all, Bethesda to Front Royal, then we lit that back road bomb to Berkeley Springs, then more back road riding back into the DC area. My trip odometer read 350+ miles just like that and I didn't feel tired at all.

My motorcycling changed that day. My riding was stretched big time, but more

THE RIDER'S WORKSHOP





importantly, my motorcycling ability was stretched even further. Our ride introduced me to *riding smooth* and what those two words actually meant. Up, down, and along all those miles of back roads, neither Paul's pace nor his line wavered much. Approaching a curve, his brake light might flicker as he'd duck a shoulder, hike his big K-bike over, only to straighten up and, in a puff of smoke be gone. His line wasn't a line; it was a rail! I asked Mr. Paul how he did this. He laughed and said simply: "I ride." I needed to know more.

A rider's signature is his line. Paul clearly scripted on one side of the lane in one moment only to angle purposefully to the far other side of the lane in the next. "Pray tell me about your line," I implored. "I position the bike for the clearest view of the road ahead," he explained. "Follow my line and your sight lines will open more." I did, and he was right. I could see clearer and farther down the road than ever before, and over the miles, I became more aware.

"Do you ride these distances often?" I asked. "Often enough," Paul said. "Sheesh, how do you find so much time?" I asked skeptically. "I make the time," he said, looking me square in the eye.

Ahh, make the time, I must do that, I promised myself. I kept the promise and my riding has never since been the same. This is what *The Rider's Workshop* is all about. It's about making the time to invest in ourselves to ride our motorcycles on alien back roads to faraway places. It's about the *art of riding smooth* and riding our motorcycles as well as we possibly can. Miles and miles of massaging your gears and setting up line after line of mountain curves will do this for you. The Workshop is more of an event than merely a ride. (Dare to) sign on and soon, you too will feel the polish. We're riding the motorcycling continuum. We'll all get stretched... we're all *Grasshoppers*.



HIS BUDDIES CALL HIM PABLO

Four years ago, Paul Mihalka passed the 1 Million Milestone aboard BMW motorcycles. That's a million since 1973, the year he joined BMW MOA as member 2193. His odometer is still rolling, clocking more than 143,000 miles since then on his '05 R1200GS.

As a rider, Paul is the real deal. To appreciate the full measure of his riding, look to 1950, when, in his adopted country of Venezuela, "Pablo," as he was known then, was a motorcycling sensation. During that decade, he was the 1952 Venezuelan novice champion in the 500cc class, the 1953 350cc national champion, and the 350cc South American champion. In 1954, he concluded his racing career as the 500cc (top category) national champion.

Recently Paul celebrated his 80th birthday. It's no significant milestone, he's quick to say: Age is simply a number; its mind over matter—if you don't mind, it doesn't matter.





Experiencing The Rider's Workshop— The Art of Smooth Riding

By Mary Baker #121770

IN 2006, I ATTENDED MY FIRST BMW MOA Rally in Burlington, Vermont, on my first BMW motorcycle, purchased in 2005. Despite years of motorcycling, I didn't feel I was riding well. I was looking for some tips and thought I might find some in the seminars at the Rally. It was a safe place to garner information without providing any in return. After all, I'd done most everything in life on my own and I would conquer this beast too.

I'll admit here and now that it was largely ego that kept me from acquiring the skills I needed. I took several MSF classes back in the early '90s when I'd first been licensed. A couple of bikes later, I thought my skills had progressed sufficiently to have confidence when I rode; yet, I wasn't where I wanted to be.

Enter Jim Ford and his seminar on The Art of Riding Smooth. He explained the concept of power band and maximum torque; by keeping the bike in lower gears at higher RPMs, the engine would run better,

you'd gain more control and you'd ride your motorcycle more smoothly. This was a concept I immediately tested and implemented. It worked exceptionally well for me. That was the only idea I took away from this seminar, but I did remember Jim Ford and the Rider's Workshops he conducted through the Appalachian Mountains.

Since 2006, I've joined a number of BMW Charter Clubs up and down the east coast and ridden with more skilled riders than myself. This, I thought, was a clever way to steepen my learning curve. I soon found it was also a way to get into trouble, which I did. I became absorbed in books on riding techniques and practiced these on solo rides—my preference. If no one was around, then no one would witness my various blunders. Finally, I started to reach a level of enjoyment and thereafter, riding became a central part of my life. While going through a particularly challenging life juncture, riding was my saving grace. It

taught me all about staying in the moment. As I headed off on a ride, all worldly concerns disappeared.

Last summer I rode across the country from Virginia to attend the Rally in Redmond. At this point I'd put on many miles but was again sensing that I had hit a plateau. I attended the launch of the F800R in Los Angeles in December 2010 and rode the canyons of Malibu with photo-journalists in attendance. Many of these guys had rich and diverse backgrounds in the motorcycle industry and they could ride! I felt like a girl, when my aspirations have been to fit in like one of the guys and be a damn good rider. I vowed to find a way to bring my skills to a higher level.

It was no coincidence that Jim Ford and his Rider's Workshop entered my life a second time. I had the opportunity to head east for one of his two-day workshops, which included technical riding on the mountainous and scenic roads of Virginia, West

Virginia and Maryland. How better to ramp up my skills than with an instructor who had taught me a thing or two before? While I'm not always open to suggestions, I was eager to learn. They say when the student is ready, the teacher appears, and so it was. There were four other riders, each of us coming to the workshop with different skill levels and experience. With energy, enthusiasm and as one who embraces the ride, Jim first met each of us where we were on the motorcycling continuum and then set to work polishing and inspiring us to become our own personal ideal.

In the short discourse of this article, I can't begin to tell you all we learned. Suffice it to say that Jim was thorough in preparing us. Some of the highlights included; selecting invisible roads that have little or no traffic; positioning for alertness, to be seen and for the clearest view of what's ahead; lane positioning; reading the road and vanishing point, sizing up the view; paying attention to your emotional state of being; downshifting, upshifting and carrying momentum;

the power band—I hadn't forgotten this lesson; smooth application of throttle and brakes; risk management, meeting challenges, accelerating out of harm's way; riding smooth in curves: approaching, scrutinizing, entering, in the curve and exiting.

We've all heard portions of this information before. It was the manner in which Jim disseminated it, giving us mantras and making analogies to life—drawing us all in and engaging us with his discourse. Aside from a feeling that the workshop was abundantly Zen, it was also a tour of the Appalachians. Jim has a remarkable wealth of historical knowledge rivaled only by his amazing ability to navigate a complex network of invisible roads. He would ask us, "how continuously, how precisely, how thoughtfully can you place your bike on the pavement for safety and traction first, and then for the absolute clearest view of the vanishing point?" Then there would be a long silence as we climbed up a sweeping mountainous road or came upon a breathtaking, scenic vista.

As often happens with riders, our group of six bonded during the workshop; we shared the fine feeling of learning to ride well, experiencing the scenery and general beauty of the natural world. Jim's gift is tapping into our potential and inspiring us to take our passion for the ride to a higher level of proficiency. We got our money's worth. Each of us earned a newfound sense of accomplishment and confidence that we would take home from the workshop and use for the rest of our riding careers. We all agreed that we were enlightened with more usable riding instruction than we'd gotten elsewhere.

Jim says, "Our motorcycling journey is one of becoming. It's to a lofty place called getting better, a destination we might never reach. But with regular practice, and the earnest intent of arriving, we all become more of ourselves as motorcyclists and surely become pretty damn good riders."

That's what this workshop is about. Look toward your own experience with the Rider's Workshop at www.ridersworkshop.com.

