

This Dog Bights – A mishap in a left turn.

Whenever I see a pro rider lay it down in a corner I admire their ability to get back on their bike and go flat out without calling a timeout to cry or spending several months regaining the confidence to lean hard through a turn. I, on the other hand, usually need a moment.

In July of 2000, my new Cannondale had accrued less than 500 miles without a single scratch. While descending Dog Bar Road near Colfax, I entered a knotty twist of a hairpin turn that lurks near the bottom of this steep little grade. If memory serves, a car had just come up the road towing a boat that was dripping water from its drain hole. When I leaned into the turn, my wheel hit the wet spot and I hit the pavement so fast I don't even remember falling; just a vague sense of unrecoverable balance then sliding and hoping my buddy wouldn't ride over my flailing arms and legs as I tumbled across the tarmac.

When I came to rest, I surveyed the damage. I had blood on my knee and a raspberry on my gluteus that caused me to lay face down on the couch for several days. But I didn't cry. Then I inspected my bike. My seat cover was ripped. My bar tape was torn. And my left shifter was scratched. Back when my kids begged for bed time stories, I would pepper this tale with a bit of sports psychology. "I didn't cry. You know what I did?" I asked at the climax of the story. "I got right back on my bike and rode." (By the way, this brainwashing actually works. But that's another story involving a first bike and training wheels).

For months after that fall, however, I had a mental block about turning left – even at moderate speed on the bike trail – let alone on technical drops like Mt. Diablo, Highway 49 to the confluence, or Mulholland Highway. Just as with climbing, poor cornering can cost minutes in a race or isolate you on a training ride. So, I focused on relearning basics: be smooth, maintain consistent speed, start wide, look for the exit, drive through the apex, trust your tires, keep up with the group, don't touch your brakes, peddle through corners, and when you can't peddle, weight your outside foot like a downhill skier. And, oh yeah, survey the corner for slick stuff like water, sand or squirrels. Over many years of therapy (AKA schooling by my friends) I eventually regained enough confidence to maintain group contact. I'm still no "il Falco," but I do manage to repress most of the subconscious angst that once plagued even a slight left lean.

I've ridden past the turn to Dog Bar Road perhaps 25 times in the last seven years. Each time, I flash back to an unsettling, unbalanced feeling and remember a dog-leg corner where I left skin.

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Dog Bar Road is a gateway toward Grass Valley. Read [Steve Ward's Longhammer Ride of the Month](#) submittal for more details on the roads beyond Dog Bar.