

Knowing you have the skill to tackle Tincup Pass makes even difficult trails a joy to ride.



THE LOOSE HILL START
BROWNIES, ROCK 'N ROLL, AND DANCIN' WITH THE GIRL WHAT BRUNG YA!

BY BILL DRAGOO

YES, THERE IS A SECRET TO GETTING A BIG BIKE BACK UNDERWAY ON MOST RIDEABLE SLOPES

It's a scramble. Colorado's Ophir Pass has the multiple personalities of Sybil. One day a base model 4x4 can climb it but on another day a tracked vehicle might wind up slipping and sliding as if it were in a swimming pool full of ice cubes. I've likened it to a road paved with Teflon-coated tortoise shells.

Riding a loaded adventure bike over Ophir can be a challenge. Not much causes more stress than stopping a 600-lb. mo-

torcycle on a steep, rocky incline, knowing you'll have to get it moving again before one of those infamous mountain thunderstorms closes in. It's no fun to be stuck at 11,000 feet on the aforementioned tortoise shells. As soon as the rear tire spits out one shell, another takes its place—spin, grind, rinse and repeat. Meanwhile the heart rate is tapping the redline.

We've all been there in one form or another. Clutch management is key to getting a big bike moving again, and hamfistedly forcing the issue just makes the rear tire spin, stalls the bike or, eventually, can send a pack of fiber discs to clutch plate hell.

As luck would have it, there is a secret to getting a big bike back underway on most rideable slopes. Anyone who grew up in the country has done it, probably in Grandpa's

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(1) You know you did it right when your tire tracks look like a pan of freshly baked brownies. (2) The D.A.R.T. Team encourages a group of riders to "dance with the girl what brung ya." (3) A rocky road like this requires a fair degree of skill to master.



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old pickup truck. When the truck is stuck in the mud, you just rock it against the rut, press in the clutch until it rolls back a bit, then engage the clutch again as the truck naturally begins to move forward. The process is repeated, each time with a tiny bit more aggression balanced against a modicum of finesse. Eventually, with good timing and a little luck, the truck surmounts whatever was holding it back and continues onward.

With a motorcycle, the process is a tad more complicated and the stakes are higher, and consequently more skill is required. At D.A.R.T. we call the exercise the Loose Hill Start. Initially, the objective is to simply stop the bike on a slope using the rear brake, which, as the downhill brake, is most effective at preventing an uncontrolled retreat. Once you are set, the engine is revved just enough that the clutch can be engaged to hold the bike without stalling and the rear brake can be released. Essentially, while keeping your right foot on the footpeg, the slipping clutch replaces the brake. From there, the clutch is modulated with extreme finesse, letting the bike roll back twelve to eighteen inches. The clutch is then further engaged just enough to rock forward again.

This process is repeated three times without touching the brake. On the third rock forward the rider simply stands and continues up the hill. The clutch and throttle settings are not changed until enough momentum is established to continue over the top. We call this "Dancing with the girl what brung ya"—meaning, stay with what works. If you dump the clutch (or girl) here you will likely stall or spin out. You'll know you got it right when you look back and see defined knobby prints in your wake. We call that, "making brownies," your reward for doing the right thing.

Once the skill is mastered, it is not always necessary to rock back three times before proceeding. Just let the bike roll back a foot or so then smoothly rock forward, standing on the footpegs as soon as you have enough movement to get in balance. It's fun and certainly empowering to know you have a weapon in your arsenal to help you get moving again on a nasty slope. And next time you decide to tackle Ophir Pass, you just might beat the storm to the top. 🍪

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