

How to Hop like a Springbuck!

From the staff at the Trials Training Center

Trials Competition News, Fall, 2004

What the heck is a springbuck? It's the South African national animal, kind of a small deer that jumps like a spring-loaded impala! Bruce & Brent LeRiche are pros at hopping the bike, and they tell us that the springbuck is the animal from their homeland that is most known for its jumping ability. The SA Rugby team is known as the Springbucks!

Hopping the bike is one of those techniques that most trials riders wish they could do effectively. Ever notice how quickly young riders learn to hop? Maybe some of the motivation is the show-off factor, especially when dad can't do it. But there are other reasons to learn these tricks. For the turns that are so tight that the bike can't be driven through, or when you need to set up perfect alignment for that obstacle or hillclimb, or even to hold your balance in extreme conditions, the ability to hop the bike is a useful technique. For expert riders or those with aspirations to become experts, hopping is absolutely essential. But everybody can learn the techniques and put them to use.

Although you see the pros hopping around in every section, in order to learn the techniques it is best to start on smooth ground. You will need to spend time practicing to develop skills and confidence before applying hopping techniques in a trial because the skill must be mastered before they can be applied effectively within a section under the pressure of confinement and on rough ground in a precise way. It is also necessary that you must first be able to balance consistently in just about any condition. If you cannot balance the bike, then you will first need to learn this technique before you even consider trying to learn to hop.

Hopping the Front

Hopping the front of the bike is a good way to maneuver a tight turn, especially before a hill or obstacle. It is easier to do when the front is slightly elevated, so you might try to practice this technique pointed uphill. The key to hopping the front is to use the suspension and to get your timing in synch with the reaction of the suspension.

1. Start by loading the front end with body weight. The body comes down and forward with a dip of the knees, keeping the head and upper body still. A common mistake is to dip the upper body in order to pull with your arms. The head and shoulders remain upright, while the knees are forward and the front suspension is almost fully compressed.
2. Lift the front by using the legs to push back and reinforce the suspension rebound. As the bike comes to you, the arms are only used to bring the bike in to you. A common error is to use too much arms to try to pull the bike up, and pulling at the wrong time (usually too fast!). Slow it down, work with the suspension, and develop good timing. First work on timing and don't worry about moving side to side.
3. In order to keep the bike from rolling back, it is necessary to have both brakes locked throughout. With the bike running, the clutch can be used to help prevent the roll back. However, you need to be careful and precise with using the throttle to hold position, or else you could cause yourself to move forward and lose valuable set up room in the section.

4. To move the bike to the side, move your body slightly during the rebound to the side to which movement is intended. When the front comes up, pull the bike back under you using the bars. Don't try to go too far in one hop, but rather use many small hops to move the bike, always keeping the bike centered under you.

5. When the bike lands, use the downward force to compress for the next hop. This saves energy and also makes it easier to keep balance by hopping each stroke in a flowing motion rather than trying to stop and regain balance after each single hop.

Hopping the Rear

It's not possible to pull up the rear with force, since the rider doesn't have grasp of anything on the back of the bike. The real secret to the technique for the rear is to use the rear suspension and brakes to make the bike lift in the rear and rotate about the front axle.

1. The rear is first loaded by shifting the weight back and down and using the legs to load the rear suspension.

2. Weight is shifted forward to allow the suspension to bring the rear up. Note that the front brake is held firm to keep the front wheel locked and allow the rider to push against the bars and initiate the rotation about the front axle. A good practice technique is to roll over a small log or brick to use the impact of the rear wheel to help compress the rear suspension. When the back wheel impacts, you must have the front brake on. Another trick to help learn is to practice by going downhill, which makes it easier to lift the rear.

3. The push against the bars is evident, as the rear comes up. The front suspension is compressed as all the load goes onto the front, but the push against the front is a bit more forward rather than down.

4. In order to move the bike to the side, turn the bars in the direction opposite the desired motion of the rear. Move to the right or left just as the bike is coming up on the rebound of the rear.

5. As the bike comes up, twist the bars to pivot the bike about the steering head and move the rear to the side. Upon landing, it is almost always necessary to continue to turn the bars into the direction of the hop in order to keep your balance.

TTC instructor Ray Peters uses a slight variation on the rear wheel hopping technique. Ray likes to lean the bike into the turn as the suspension is loaded, then straighten the bike upon rebound. This helps move the rear in the direction away from the bars. Ray says that this approach allows the rider to more easily land in balance. A common mistake is to lose your balance and dab on the outside in the direction the rear wheel moves.

We hope this discussion and the video clips on our website (<http://trialstrainingcenter.com/how-to-ride-motorcycle-trials/hopping/>) can help you master this important trials skill and help you to "hop like a springbuck".

The most effective way to master all the techniques is with some individual training under the guidance of a professional instructor, like those here at the Trials Training Center. We hope to see you soon!