

**Many thanks for confirming your subscription to the OMM Bulletin. This set of notes was created as a space for ideas, considerations and interventions on competent biking and on the link that biking has with life.**

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## **Natural is often unnatural**

Riders who talk of “freedom, independence, adventure and wind on the hairs” often snob any conversation about training invoking the natural talent that, according to them, is in some of them (not in all of us).

They call themselves “natural talents” and invite fellow riders to get rid of any educational effort and process.

*“On the bike, down the gear, turn the throttle and roar in the wind”* ...and that all it takes to be on the road to good and competent riding.

Geoffrey Colvin, senior editor-at-large of Fortune Magazine, ten years ago wrote an article on **“What it takes to be great”** and I often go back to these words of wisdom.

*“Research now shows that the lack of natural talent is irrelevant to great success – he wrote - The secret? Painful and demanding practice and hard work”*

The majority of us like to believe that a great talent in arts, sports and business *“was a natural who came into the world with a gift for doing exactly what he ended up doing – Colvin continues - It's not so simple. For one thing, you do not possess a natural gift for a certain job, because targeted natural gifts don't exist... You will achieve greatness only through an enormous amount of hard work over many years. And not just any hard work, but work of a particular type that's demanding and painful.”*

It sounds as a hard-work recipe but *“the good news is that our lack of a natural gift is irrelevant - talent has little or nothing to do with greatness. You can make yourself into any number of things and you can even make yourself great”*

We need to be clear in considering talent or skill: it is not to be confused with intelligence, motivation or personality traits: *“It's the ability to do some specific activity especially well”*

Scientists worldwide have conducted scores of studies focusing on various skills-talents in which performance is relatively easy to measure and plot over time such as sports, music, chess and business.

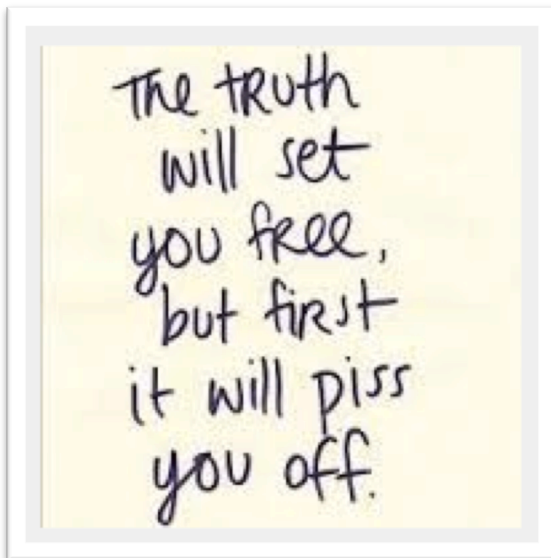
*“They found surprising similarities across a variety of skill's fields.*

- *No substitute for hard work... There's no evidence of high-level performance without experience or practice... In many fields elite performers need 20 or 30 years' experience before hitting their zenith.*
- *Practice makes perfect... The best people in any field are those who devote the most hours to what the researchers call "deliberate practice." It's activity that's explicitly intended to improve performance, that reaches for objectives, provides feedback on results and involves high levels of repetition”*

Does all this apply to being a good rider? Isn't motorcycling a simple activity for simple people?

Yes and no.

As many motorcycle dealers, anxious the move metal, will tell you there is nothing difficult about biking.



If you know how to drive, if you are familiar with the laws of traffic and if you had a past experience with a pushbike you can be on your way in less than an hour proud owner of a 100+HP instable vehicle.

**Yes**, it not so difficult and, if the wheel of fortune keeps you on the high side every time and business keep you

away from biking most of the time, you can end up logging kilometers without any major problem.

**No, without hard work and deliberate practice you will not enjoy biking on the short term and you may find problems on the long one.**

**Maybe** it is better and clearer to keep “natural and freedom” out of the equation; such abused term only creates confusion.

Or, maybe, it is a good opportunity to clarify “freedom” with the help of **Mr. Ruskin**.

Agreed, he was talking about drawing and painting but if one reads with attention and interest one can spot similarities between the hand of the artist and the hand of the biker (after all good riding is an art).

*“What is usually so much sought after under the term ‘freedom’ is the character of the drawing of a great master in a hurry, whose hand is so thoroughly disciplined, that when pressed for time he can let it fly as it will, and it will not go far wrong.*

***But the hand of a great master at real work is never free: its swiftest dash is under perfect government.***

*Paolo Veronese or Tintoretto could pause within a hair's-breadth of any appointed mark, in their fastest touches; and follow, within a hair's-breadth, the previously intended curve. **You must never, therefore, aim at freedom. It is not required of your drawing that it should be free, but that it should be right; in time you will be able to do right easily, and then your work will be***

*free in the best sense; but there is no merit in doing wrong easily. The real difficulty and masterliness is in never letting the hand be free, but keeping it under entire control at every part of the line.*

“Keeping it under entire control at every part of the line” it sounds written for people on the saddle and it is a good way to define natural freedom while biking.

“Never letting the hand free” makes great paintings and great riding: mastering the bike with a systematic approach to hazards is the ONLY way to bring joy to the ride while eliminating fear. Natural comes from knowledge and experience. And riding turns into naturally enjoyable.

Andy Goldfine founder of Ridearwear and creator of the famous [Aerostich](#) suit sent a good rendition of the difference between “naturally ignorant and controlled rider”: *"Here the parallel ride: the one who rigidly forces the bike into a direction, with locked shoulders, straight arms, white knuckles and rigid posture on the saddle, this rider fights the bike, the line, and every change of direction and speed...and tension will turn into fatigue, and fatigue will invite mistakes...and these close the circle to tension. This is why, deep down, many riders are afraid of riding, and why advanced riding is mostly an act of knowledgeable relaxation.*

*It is the one who flows with the road, the rider who leaves the bike free in balancing, the one who has no pre-conceived and mandatory rules but dances with the bike, aware of what is going on around him, practiced*

*and flexible in infinite applications. This rider will explore all possible lines, will examine all "if's" will study surface, environment and traffic, will test skill and fitness, will do all that is possible to make progress combine with fun"*

There is no natural way: with or without training and experience biking remains a dangerous activity. Without training and experience is a scaring and boring one.

## **Hyperbole, the road to violence**

Hyperbole derives from the ancient Greek meaning to throw over the target, to overthrow, to exaggerate

Exaggeration is a virus so easy to catch rapidly spreading through the body and entering our behavior.

Once used mainly for poetic purposes or for humorous connotations hyperbole is now a normal show-way of speaking. Boredom is the fertilizer of hyperbole and in a world of bored sleeping spectator's hyperbolic descriptions are the wakeup calls.

So, it could be fun for a little while to listen to a commentator describing a bicycle race as a gladiator event (this portion of the road is deadly... there will be blood... it going to bring pain...and so on), it could be an quick laugh to hear a journalist talking about a tennis event as if the sorts of humanity would depend on the result. So, do not call it a match... call it a battle, do not call it hobby ... call it obsession, do not call it

competition... call it clash of giants, do not call it long ride... call it epic journey.

Less funny when the hyperbole becomes a normal description of the reality and reality takes hyperbolic tones with athletes screaming, gesticulating, insulting, showing rage and aggression. Take a look at the reactions of a tennis player scoring a point or a footballer going to goal. What is a game turns into tragic-comic performance, the sport turns into a conflicts fuelled by the commentators.

[EUROSPORT](#) is currently giving an recipe for success in the New York Tennis Open: *“be excessive, be loud and party all night”* seems to work for natural talents but an old proverb from the Elders of Aleppo was wiser: *“Excess is obnoxious even in religious worship”*

**Sport should be an exercise of modesty, of facing (and recognizing) the personal limits, of respecting the camaraderie with peers. Rare, in our times, to see a winner modestly taking the podium and shaking hand with defeated companions.**

## Back to '77: Drive the next mile

Ted Simon is the beginning of all travelling legends: before [Horizons Unlimited](#), before the [Long Way Round](#) before the Adventures Bikes Fashion, Ted was not only circumnavigating the world but writing about it in such way that inspired thousands of bikers to take the roads less travelled. Personal



good friend and frequent visitor of Turkey, Ted moved recently from USA to France and wrote: *“when moving house all sorts of things float to the surface. Here’s one of them, a piece I wrote for the Sunday Times in 1977, just after getting back. I think it’s interesting to read now, and some of it is not a little prophetic. It’s easy to look back and think of those days as relatively peaceful and innocent, but that’s not at all how they seemed then”*

I asked permission to reproduce the article in this bulleting and I am sincerely touched by the insights and I invite the few readers of this note to get [Ted’s books](#) and dream of distant places on two wheels, even better, plan for a replay.

*The twin track of molten tire rubber began halfway round the bend, a steeply descending right-hander on a Turkish mountain. I kept to the right side near the rock face, and watched the tracks veer away to the left and across the far edge of the road where they disappeared. Beyond the edge there were several hundred feet of nothing. Some policemen in rough khaki with red insignia stood nonchalantly looking down. I stopped the bike and joined them. Far below, the rear end of a lorry was visible. I rode on contemplating those fresh black tracks, imagining myself in the lorry driver’s seat as he was launched into space. It made me shudder. I thought of the various ways it could have happened. One lorry overtaking another on the way up? Steering failure? Terminal fatigue? Some drivers on this Eastern run use opium to keep going. I went on to imagine how I would react if a lorry like that came hurtling round a corner towards me, and paid homage to the dead man by*



*using his example to stay alive.*

*It was one of the methods I employed to survive a 65,000 mile journey on a motorcycle.*

*On the road from India to England there were endless chances to learn from other men's' tragedies. At times one could imagine there was a war on. Seven thousand miles strewn with wrecks. A TIR juggernaut sliced in two, the cab here by the roadside, the container in a river 200 feet away. How could that happen? A new white Peugeot rammed down to chest height under the rear axle of a trailer. Tankers ripped open. Innumerable vehicles upside down. All the way through Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey the carnage mounts up as the traffic concentrates.*

*On the Iran-Turkey border (a wonderful old-style frontier where you have to pass through a stone gateway) the biggest TIR trucks queue up, two abreast, in a two-mile-long line. At the Pakistani end I was, in a sense, lucky. Newly proclaimed curfews and martial law had reduced the traffic to a trickle.*

*I was privileged to see a great city, Lahore, apparently deserted by all life except for the cows moving majestically in herds along the broad thoroughfares, quite independent of man.*

*Worst of all was the notorious Yugoslav Autoput from Skopje to Zagreb. Juggernauts and impatient German tourists bound for Greece pack these 800 miles of two-lane monotony as tightly as the meat in a sausage skin.*

*The skin of course bursts in frequent and bloody accidents.*

*Nowhere on the 7000 miles from Delhi to London is it a difficult ride; unless one chooses to cross the high passes in winter. (In Africa and along the South American Cordillera I had a much tougher time with rocks, sand, mud, flood, and corrugation). After four years of traveling I was glad to have this relatively easy – and often tarred – surface rolled out for me all the way home but, thank heaven, I had also acquired the road sense to survive on it.*

*Many people who took an interest in my journey consider that my greatest accomplishment was to come back alive. With my mind full of more positive benefits this seems like the least important achievement, though it was done with great effort. But at least it proves that the odds, however bad they may seem statistically, can be defeated. The only serious injury I suffered – to an eye – was due to a fishing accident.*

*I found the best aid to survival was the old truckie's motto "drive the next mile". to which I would add my own corollary for motorcyclists "and don't let the other fellow get you." Most people believe that situations can arise on the road which make them helpless victims of chance. I think you stand a much better chance if you believe that everything that happens to you on the road is your own fault. Everything.*

*The truly astonishing volume of traffic that now surges up and down the Great Orient Expressway has rather*

*overshadowed what used to be called the Hippy Trail but the Hippies still flourish. The “freak buses” still plough between Munich and Goa, Amsterdam and Khatmandu, advertising stereo sound, free tea and fully collapsible seats. In little rooms in Kandahar, Europeans wearing odd combinations of ethnic dress, from Turkish Depression gear to Gujarati mirror clothes, still fondle polished slabs of compressed hashish and dream about the price on the streets of Paris and Hamburg.*

*And dope-hunting Iranian police still make tourists turn their camper vans inside out at the Afghan border where cornflake packets and supplies of Tampax blow away in the high wind.*

*So it is all the more bizarre to find oneself riding in central Turkey among bountiful acres of white and purple opium poppies, their fat pods ripening for another harvest of morphine base.*

*The anti-Hippy crusades pursued with gusto by some Asian authorities may have been justified, but seem designed mainly to clear the way for the big spenders of tourism.*

*What is a Hippy? “If you are found dressed in shabby, dirty, or indecent clothing, or living in temporary or makeshift shelters you will be deemed to be a Hippy. Your visit pass will be cancelled and you will be ordered to leave Malaysia within 24 hours ..Furthermore you will not be permitted to enter Malaysia again”  
Signed: Mohd. Khalil bin Hj. Hussein (Dir Gen of Immigration) The above definition would have included me with my tent and jeans as well as a high proportion of*

*the native population.*

*In Nepal “every guest who is in Immigration for their problems (sic) should be polite and noble behaved, any misbehaved activities and discussion by the guest shall be proved a crime”. Difficult advice to follow in view of the impolite and ignoble behavior of the officials there.*

*However Mother India remains mercifully benign to all comers. A few more people in shabby clothes and makeshift shelters are not going to make much of a dent on several hundred millions in the same state. As long as India is India the Trail will live on.*

*These have been four crucial and violent years to travel in the world. Of the 45 countries I visited, 18 have been through war or revolution. Many of the rest have faced economic depression or internal violence. **Yet my own experience has been overwhelmingly peaceful, marked by kindness and hospitality everywhere.***

*I have returned to find prices double, the European pecking order changed, and the political complexion of Europe much pinker than it was. Britain seems a bit chastened but otherwise unchanged. **People are as oblivious as ever of their relatively great material wealth. I suppose they are right to be, since what we have here is not really important to the quality of life; indeed most of it, to my mind, is a burden.** My mother’s garden, about half an acre of lawn, flowers and fruit trees, could accommodate an Indian slum of a thousand inhabitants (not that I suggest it should). I watch her move about in it alone, pruning and trimming, and I imagine she wishes there were less to do.*

*I used the word slum, but for me that denotes people who have abandoned hope in their squalor. The Indian slums that I saw were not like that. They were scrupulously maintained in the village tradition. Given just a few amenities (sources of clean water within reach, drainage, a supply of roof tiles) they would reach an acceptable minimum standard. Direct comparisons between European and Indian lifestyles are as fraudulent as ever.*

*I have spent a lot of time wondering how “they” could arrive at some sort of parity with “us”. During these four years “they” have acquired much more power to press their demands. **I see no alternative: we shall have to sacrifice some of our abnormal privileges. If we did it gracefully and imaginatively we could benefit a great deal from the sacrifice, but I expect it will be a bitter and bloody business in the end.***

*Around the world I have been asked to defend Britain in her “decline” and have tried to conjure up some notion of a British “genius” at work. Under the stresses of these last years I thought maybe new directions would be found, new social forms experimented with. I see now that this was foolish. We still carry so much fat. There is no sense of change, just an occasional whiff of decay.*

***But things will change. Having been among the two billions who will demand it I know they are not just images on a screen or on posters for Oxfam. They are real. We will have to accommodate them.***

*“How will you ever be able to settle down?” people ask. “Will you want to do it again?” I used to laugh. The prospect of stopping in one place, of doing some real work and living among familiar faces was all I could dream of.*

*The book I have to write has been on my mind too long, but now I realize that until the book is written the journey will still not be over. And already I know what makes the tramp go back on the road. There’s a tingling vista of freedom that is as elusive as it is intoxicating, and it is peculiar I think to those who travel widely alone. There is a wild pleasure in being able to vary one’s behavior at will, with nobody around to remind you of what you said or did yesterday.*

*For example, I used to take it for granted that I preferred to sleep on a bed. In these four years I have slept on all kinds of surfaces, wet or dry, hot or cold, in a prison and in a Maharaja’s palace, still or moving, in pin-drop silence or in railway platform bedlam. I now find that I would choose, whenever possible, to sleep on a rug on the ground in the open air.*

*Why does it matter? To me, enormously. **The habits of sleeping, eating, drinking, washing, dressing that I learned in youth had great influence on my state of mind and body. But they are not habits I would have chosen and in these four years they have all changed. In many ways I find that the old ways of doing things were unnecessarily complicated and expensive. Today what I do is much closer to what I am.***

*It does not take much imagination to see that the same process applies to less tangible but even more potent habits of behavior. I think I used to make great efforts when meeting people for the first time to impress them. This kind of thing obviously demands a lot of energy and creates a good deal of anxiety as well. If I had tried to sustain it through four years during which I met, practically every day, new people from whom I wanted help, often with no common language to fall back on, it would have made me a quivering wreck.*

*Relax or crack were the only possible alternatives. I managed to relax by abandoning expectations. **“Whatever it is you want” I told myself, “you don’t need.”** Whether it was a visa or a pound of rice, or permission to sleep on somebody’s land, I prepared myself in advance to be content with refusal. The result was a revolutionary illumination. I was almost always given what I wanted and at the same time I found I wanted much less.*

*These personal discoveries once begun, became the foundation for a philosophy which, while in no way startling, is intensely real to me, having arisen out of my own personal experiments.*

*Towards the end of the journey the power I had built up in this way began to fail. There is obviously a limit to a learning process like this; in my case about three years.*

*After many months in India I began to wish I was home. I knew the wish was dangerous and debilitating. To hurry now would invite the accident I had avoided for*

*almost 60,000 miles*

*In Delhi I became absurdly frustrated by a delay of two weeks in getting some spare parts. When I finally climbed out of Old India through the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan I experienced a psychological dizziness that astonished me, and kept me in Kabul days longer than I intended. It had a lot to do with the way I had adapted to the pressure of Indian life, the permanent exposure to people, their curiosity, hunger and clamor. Coming out of that was perhaps like decompression for a diver, but earlier in the journey I would have taken the transition in my stride.*

*On the long route home I made mistakes attributable only to apathy. For the first time I looked for companions to ride with, and used them to support my faltering spirits. And finally, in Istanbul, I lost all restraint and I rode for home almost non-stop, getting to Munich in three days although I dared not take the bike over 50mph.*

*Somewhere along the way I wrenched my back and so, having spent four years in almost perfect health I managed to arrive home a physical wreck. And my imagination having worked overtime for so long went into a coma. For many days I could hardly recall, with any conviction anything that had happened to me “out there.”*

*For a while I felt as though those four years had never happened at all.*



## **WARNING: good reasons for crashing**

At the end, as usual, some legal warnings on accidents and reasons used after them to justify simple incompetence.

1. Blaming the “others” can take you off the hook for a brief moment but it only shows your lack of love and dedication to big trucks, comfortable busses, yellow taxi, elegant cars and lovely animals sharing the road with you in peace and harmony. Blaming human is simply human.
2. Fixations are never a positive sign of character and looking at natural beauties while motoring can spoil portion of the ride and portions of life. Target fixation on attractive elements of the human body or majestic views of the Turkish Turquoise Riviera restore the mind while standing and damage it while riding.
3. Thinking to high of yourself is always good in generating confidence but is a fast way to crashes. You knew you could not do it, you thought you could do it, you persuaded yourself to do it and now you know you could not do it. Experience is not always a gentle teacher and never a good excuse.
4. The use of minutes to pace life and targets (... we will meet at 19:45) is a relatively modern invention and it can be a timely cause of accidents and a good excuse to use. Trying to be “on time” and pressure ahead can generate big loss of time in hospital or permanent loss of time in life.
5. Hours on the saddle and kilometers on the clock may build the macho reputation of a rider while

inviting as passenger a risky character: Mrs. Fatigue reassure gently about not being there but, on your back, her voice has the magic impact of a winged siren song luring unwary bikers on to rocks.

Blaming sirens voices as excuse shows knowledge of mythology quite useful in a conversation with doctors.

6. Reading kilometers per hour is always reassuring when crossing roads patrolled by police: still it may be reason for good accidents. "I was riding slowly" as justification for an accident can be easily contradicted by transforming kilometers per hours into meters per second (divide km/h by 3.6)
7. Pretending that you just decided to "put down the bike" to avoid major consequences has the inherent consequence of making you sound stupid: only stunt riders in movie (well trained, well paid and without damages to pay for) do it. It sound as a pro excuse but if tried on the road it tastes asphalt and blood.
8. Loosing wheel-handlebar-chain-frame, if seriously proved, is a serious good excuse. If you can survive a catastrophic failure of the bike your place on the Olympus of biker is assures. If not, your place in the Olympus of Gods is acceptable alternative.
9. "Rogue Gravity Pockets" or "Collision with Black Hole" can be the ultimate excuse and good reason from crashing when all others failed. As Sherlock Holmes said "*when you have excluded the impossible whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*" This excuse for crashing (the most esoteric one) comes from [Court Fisher](#) great friend and international rider reporter. Court already lifted the author rights of this excuse so, it is free for personal use at any time and in any territory.