

HOW TO: RIDE A CHUTE WITH A STEP IN IT



I have a lot of people say to me on Skills Clinics that they struggle with steps and drops on steep tracks because they have already got their weight back and can't push back any further to stop the front wheel from falling off the edge. I'd like to begin here. For a start you need arm extension if you are riding off a step or drop and if you are leaning back at any stage the bike will violently try to drag you forward (because there isn't any give in your arms as it rolls over the edge) and/or give you a good old wallop from the rear wheel at the same time. This is not a desired result in my books... Let's first analyze whether we have a step, a rollover or a drop as this can be very misleading.

Steps: as they sound are small square edge steps that you can roll over.

Rollover: generally a high bank that has a smooth vertical slope into a transition. It may have a small section of freefall in the middle.

Drops: a big step that you can't rollover. E.g, the actual square edged drop is bigger than about one foot in height. You must jump off of the drop to remain in control.

In this issue we'll tackle a step, the next issue the drop and the third one the rollover.

So, our problem lies in being able to approach the step in control so we aren't already hanging back on entry. This is done by remaining in control of the brakes, especially our front brake. Practice rolling slowly down a steep hill, maybe on tarseal and learning how to control your front brake. This will give you confidence to use your front brake on steeper terrain.

Once you have mastered control of the brake in a safe environment try to use it more down the chute which will allow you to ride the chute without skidding the rear wheel. If the front wheel skids you have leant back too much. When rolling over the step we must be perfectly balanced over our cranks. If you are leaning back your arms will be straightened which means that as the bike tries to seesaw around you it is restricted in its forward tilt and will drag you forward. At the same time your rear wheel is going to kick up off the step because you have compressed it into the edge by putting extra weight on it like a "jack in the box".

Getting low on the bike is a good idea as it gives you more bend in your arms so that the bike can tip further away from you, and a lower centre of gravity so you don't tip as much. Try not to brake as the wheel touches down after the step and look ahead, but other than that go for it.