

An Associate's Experience by Keith Starr

Taking the IAM test has been on my 'Bucket List' for some years, having been riding to what I thought was an acceptable standard for nearly forty years, I decided it is about time I took the plunge and see if I can really improve my skills. I was encouraged to attend the 'Doug Miners' lecture which were delivered superbly both interesting and captivating. By the end of the third lecture I had filled out the application form and paid, "It's now or never," I thought.

Geoff Brazier, Membership Secretary, explained the procedure and within two days Jim Hill, Chief Observer, called to arrange an assessment rideout – blimey this DWDAM lot are keen ! With some apprehension on the day I rode my R1200GSA to the pre-arranged meeting point at the local football ground, Jim was waiting for me, stood next to his BMW R1200RT – great I thought, a fellow BMW rider, turns out that Jim is not exactly a fan of the R1200GS, putting this aside he immediately put me at ease and explained what was about to happen.

Jim informed me of the route we were to take and wanted to ensure that I ride in my normal style, I thought I signed up to learn, therefore I would ride as I have done for the last forty years, afterall I'm still here so must have done something right over those years. After about twenty minutes he pulled me over for a chat – here we go, crunch time, Jim was very diplomatic, he said there was a lot of good stuff but my positioning was all over the place and to stop avoiding man hole covers like I was on some sort of slalom course. Time to follow him to see how it is done, we stop, he checks whether I have actually picked up anything by observing him and it's now my turn to lead back with him following me. Nervously I set off attempting to demonstrate that I have actually learned something. We stop at the Swannery car park and this time it is more positive, it turns out that I did take on board and apply what he had said. The next stage is to place me with an Observer, did I mind if a Trainee Observer took me on. He explained that I would be getting two for the price of one, as he would have to assess the trainee observer who would be observing me ! Enter Jeremy Weekes who will take me up to test standard. As I rode home I thought 'Starr, you have been riding for four decades and boy you have so much to learn'.

About a week later I receive an email from Jeremy suggesting a time and place to meet up together with Jim, trying to sync diaries three ways is not easy! On a sunny Saturday morning we set off only now I've two guys on my tail and start to feel a bit of pressure. When we I get the bad news, speed, positioning, observation, I feel like a naughty schoolboy. However, the briefing is very constructive and I take it like a man, Jeremy also gets some words of advice from Jim which kind of makes me feel a little better – I'm not being singled out here! We set off again and at the next stop it appears that I have improved a little, I must have been listening but clearly I have a problem with speed, I find the GS really lumpy in the lower gears at less than thirty miles per hour and struggle to maintain constant speed – must work on that. We arrive back and confess that I feel exhausted; the concentration on my riding is draining. To be fair both Jim and Jeremy warned me of this – looks like they are right yet again! I say my goodbyes and Jim conducts a debrief with Jeremy.

A few days later I receive my ride report and feedback, it is what I had expected together with some homework to read certain sections of the HTBBR (*How to be a Better Rider. Ed*). I take full opportunity to practice and apply what I have learnt before the next ride, I cover four hundred and fifty miles in three days.

The next ride it is just Jeremy as Jim has other commitments. We take an enjoyable ride out to Studland, very narrow roads, but this used to be Jeremy's stomping ground so he has a clear advantage of

knowing the roads, we stop for a few briefing sessions, usual thing for me – speed. We stop on the way back to practice some slow riding, I am hopeless, the GS is a big bike but I am going to nail this one, I am now on a mission. Feedback and ride report arrive and highlight speed, overtakes, shoulder and mirror checks. However, I am now off to France with a few mates – we cover 2,400 miles in ten days – great fun.

Back from France the next ride is arranged we meet up and Jim throws me a bit as he arrives on a Suzuki Bandit, has he come on hard times or does he own a bike collection? We are off to Lulworth to master bends, Jeremy gives his verdict on my ride so far, Jim is very complimentary, confident, etc. and then hits me with, “But your positioning was pants”. This knocks me off my perch, but I am determined to improve on the way back. I am now shown the correct way to read the ‘limit point’ this was most informative with Jim taking the time to explain in detail by walking the bends. On the way back my positioning improves and we take in some dual carriageway riding on the Puddletown by-pass.

Three rides in and I have to be honest I am not enjoying my riding and question whether I have done the right thing, Jim and Jeremy both explain that this is a point that everybody hits, them included. With so much concentration the fun has gone from riding, but I am assured that there will be a point at which it all clicks and I will enjoy my riding better than before.

I now plough the miles on each week by practising and have also nailed the slow riding, I feel chuffed and now actually look forward to my next observed ride. The next few rides are just with Jeremy, we cover a lot of miles but some things still do not click, reading the HTBBR and Roadcraft books are fine but no substitute for practical demonstrations, I ask Jeremy for more demo rides, I follow him and immediately it all fits into place, fifteen minutes observing the observer teaches me more than one hour reading the ‘manuals’. I feel great, the guys are right I am starting to get this, my riding is smoother and my speed is now spot on, my practice rides are so much more enjoyable, I cover 1,500 miles in seventeen days. My feedback form now has more one’s than two’s – this is looking good. Over the next two rides I achieve all one’s and a lot of encouragement from Jeremy, time for a pre-test ride with Jim – gulp! We finally arrange a day for my pre-test assessment; I know that Jim will be ultra-critical so have to give 110%, and at the debrief he explains that in his opinion I should get a pass and he recommends me for my test – YES!

I feel good, now I just need to get some miles in before my test date arrives, wrong, less than thirty six hours later I receive a text from Doug Miners saying could I meet him at the Co-op in Bridport for my test that same day – I am now in a panic, but also relieved that it is sooner rather than later. I hastily text and email Jeremy to see if he can make the appointment and I anxiously wait a couple of hours and get confirmation that Jeremy can attend.

The morning was bright sunshine but by the time of my test the clouds turns to heavy rain and continues for the rest of the day. I meet up with Jeremy and arrive at the Bridport Co-op where Doug looks like a drowned rat in all his fluorescent gear next to his Paramedic bike. He puts me at ease and explains the test, route and what he expects. We set off, in appalling conditions, and I am immediately in advance mode, I ride as I have been taught by Jeremy and Jim and forget that I am on the test (apart from Doug virtually touching my number plate) till it ends in Morecombelake, he advises me that I am to be recommended for membership – fantastic, it has all been worth it

My grateful thanks to Jeremy, Jim and DWDAM for making it all possible. I would advise any associate that practising in between the observed rides is a must, get as many miles in as you can, the observer can immediately see on the next ride that you have applied what you were taught previously 🐾