

IAM Motorcycle Training & Test

By Ron Harrington

BACKGROUND

When I retired I had a list of things that I wanted to do now that work did not 'get in the way'. One of them was to pass my bike test and get a motorbike. My first bike, a Triumph Tiger Cub still on 'L' plates, had been sold some forty three years earlier. My trainer doubted my ability to execute a 'U' turn on a 500cc machine so with a blow to my ego I passed my test on a Honda CG 125. I then bought a Honda Deauville 650. I found the bike a bit heavy and dropped it a few times on slow speed manoeuvres (so the trainer was right!). I then did the Police Bikesafe course which I found of great benefit. A year later, able to balance the bike I could see the benefits of further training.

MOTIVATION FOR IAM

Four years after taking my bike test I was regularly taking my wife on the back and had undertaken my first trip to Southern Spain on a BMW R1200RT. By now, I realised, it is a different ball game to driving my car which is a strong box with crumple zones, multiple airbags, ABS, ASC, traction control, etc. Here I am sitting astride a powerful machine, exposed to the elements and sharing the roads with car drivers, driving I am ashamed to say, as I used to. Probably too fast and thinking I could do almost anything else whilst driving, one hand on the steering wheel, changing radio programmes, etc. Add to that, encounters with 'white van man', the pressurised sales rep., the mum on the school run with troublesome kids in the back, the HG vehicle that is really too big for the road it is on and I began to feel more and more vulnerable. I now felt that I owed it to myself and my wife to reduce those risks as much as possible by riding a well maintained machine, dressing appropriately and being a skilled and safe rider.

IAM TRAINING

I had heard about the IAM but most of it was hearsay, although generally positive. On a ride out with the local BMW riders' group I met an IAM observer and he put me in touch with DWDAM and I duly signed up. I was subsequently called by the Chief Observer to arrange an assessment ride. We met in Wareham and from the outset I found him to be friendly and keen to put me at ease. He explained that he would follow me on a prescribed route for about fifteen miles. The points that he wished me to note were:-

- ☛ I was responsible for my own safety at all times. Therefore, I should not do anything that I did not feel comfortable with.
- ☛ I should: ride safely and legally; ignore the fact that he was following me and just ride normally; ignore his position on the road as it may or may not be the correct position.
- ☛ It is not a navigation test so if I forgot the route, I was to look for his indicators at junctions.

We set off and despite all the assurances, I wasn't relaxed. I wanted to ride well but what was the right position on the road? I kept to the speed limits and did one overtake in a 60mph limit. We stopped for a coffee at the end of the route when I was told it was 'a good ride'. However, he found my lines through roundabouts a bit vague and I needed to look further ahead in my observations. He also told me that it was usual for a trainee to be test ready in eight to ten observed rides but that it did vary a lot. I was recommended to buy the Police Rider's Motorcycle Roadcraft manual and to study this as well as the IAM's How to be a Better Rider (HTBABR), which I had been sent. I found these to be excellent and would thoroughly recommend others to purchase and study of the Roadcraft manual. (*Not a requirement more of a 'reference' book along side the IAM's very readable HTBABR. ed.*)

My observer had a pleasant no nonsense approach to mentoring, which I liked. She gave her time and advice for free so I was getting one to one guidance on safe riding for just £10 per session towards her running costs, this was looking fantastic value for money! We had a ride out every seven to ten days and between our rides I was to practice the points discussed. I was criticised on one occasion, for not having practiced in between, which was fair enough. After each ride, at coffee, I would be asked what I thought of my ride. I would then get her views which were generally encouraging but always with an emphasis on the areas where improvement was needed and how this was to be achieved. Immediately after I would receive a ride report by email with general comments and a table of thirty-three specific skill areas, each of which would be marked with a score or 'n/a' if not part of the ride:-

- 3 Observer advice and assistance required
- 2 Has an understanding but requires more practice and observer advice
- 1 Test standard

The first three rides showed progressive results but by the fourth I had forgotten some stuff from the first and was being marked down. So, I extended the periods between observed rides and put more practice in between these. It paid off. One area of difficulty for me was over a requirement to make progress through traffic. You are expected to overtake and make progress through traffic provided it is safe and legal. I had a practice ride with my wife as pillion and she declared afterwards that she did not want to ride pillion again until after my test because the continual looking for an overtaking opportunity made her nervous. After some soul searching we agreed that I would drop this element of practice while she was on the back. After eight observed rides I was declared 'test ready' and was to have a further assessment ride with the Chief Observer. He gave me a few pointers and confirmed that he also felt I was ready.

On the morning of the test I met the examiner and the Chief Observer who was going to accompany us. I felt the pressure but by now I was somewhat used to being observed. The test was around forty-five minutes in length over a total mixture of roads. There were urban roads, smooth sweeping bends with a 50mph limit, dual carriageways, single track roads with grass in the middle, steep descents into hamlets with tight bends and mud across the road. I mentally recited prompts to myself – 'observation', 'front', 'sides', 'rear', 'speed limits', 'road positioning', 'correct use of signals and gears'.

At the end of the test the examiner asked some questions about the ride and seemed satisfied. "Would I have done anything differently?" he asked. "Yes" I answered "I should have been a bit slower into those hamlets with the bends". He said "Good, congratulations you have passed" and handed me a signed form.

CONCLUSION

IAM say this is the start of your training not the end and I hope to further improve my riding skills. I have certainly adopted the 'system' of riding, as it is called, and the good thing is that I no longer have to work so hard at applying the basic techniques as these are now 'hard wired' into the way I ride. What I do work at is planning ahead and continual observation and anticipation. I do still make mistakes but the good thing is that I now have the 'tools' to review and correct these.

The result is that I enjoy my riding more than before and I feel safer on the road.

I would thoroughly recommend IAM training to any motorcyclist.

Do not be daunted by the thought of it, the people I met were both helpful and friendly

Safe Riding !