

Only a CBT stands between Ginge and the open road. Look out Bristol!



Pass Master

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The new test may have caused carnage in test centres up and down the land, but even our Ginge managed to get through it...



PART 1 - THE CBT

It's 8am on a cold, dark and very drizzly February morning in Bristol and I haven't felt this nervous in years. No, it's too early for dogging, but I am about to change my life forever. I'm here to do my CBT and transform myself from tin box driver to skilled biker. Well, that's the plan.

I've come to ACE Motorcycle Training, next to Fowlers Motorcycles, right in the heart of Bristol, and I'm not alone. There are five other concerned looking faces staring back at me for a glimmer of confidence I can't display.

The day kicks off with a briefing on motorcycle clothing; essentially it's a guide of 'what not to wear' and the reasons why. Thankfully, I'd just raided Fowlers for a stack of Weise gear and an HJC helmet, so at least I started on the right foot.

We head to the training ground for the first part of our CBT course. It's a bleak and barren patch of Tarmac, and the weather isn't helping the gloom. But the drizzle can't distract me from the line of bikes and the excitement is knotting my guts like I'd had a bad ruby the night before. The instruction kicks off with control familiarisation and getting the bike off the centre stand. I was in danger of giving myself 'roids until Damien (my instructor) showed me that it's more technique than effort. After a few minutes pushing the bike around to get a feel for it we're ready to start up. This is it, there's no going back now.

The Honda CG125 starts and settles into a nice calm beat. I wish I could say the same for my heart, and now my tongue has managed to stick itself to the roof of my mouth. I get myself together then it's feet up and off we go. The sensation is brilliant, liberating even, and I soon work out that it's better to be brave and give the bike a little more gas. It makes the bike more stable, and I'm soon rattling through the gears.

The instructors are great, and help me get my head back into gear after I catch a bad dose of stage fright when ▶

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► Moby turns up without warning to watch. I then encounter a problem I wasn't expecting when doing the low speed figure-of-eights. I can't turn left. I've never had to do it before; we've been going right all morning and I'm getting annoyed with myself. This is made worse by everyone else having managed it with ease.

Instructor Damien soon figures out that I'm looking down at the ground rather than looking where I want to go. He's right, of course, and it makes a world of difference.

That's the last of the closed-road action, so it's back to HQ for a bite to eat and a spot test on the Highway Code. You have to pass this part to go out on the road and complete the CBT, but luckily I'm like a sponge with this sort of anal stuff (yep, Ginge loves anal - Ed) and it helps that I drive a car already.

We're then told we'll be going out on the road for a two-hour ride so that we can put what we've learnt this morning into practise. We knew it was coming, but suddenly we've all got brown trousers.

It's a great feeling being out on the road. I feel instantly more at home riding here than on the Tarmac pad. Everything we did earlier now makes much more sense, you really can see the morning's theory working, and I'm finding it easier to do the lifesaver routines, indicators, gear changing and braking sequences. I even manage to do a U-turn on the road on my second attempt.

In the blink of a bloodshot eye, the

afternoon disappears and I'm relieved to find out that I've passed. Then I had to get back in a car to drive home, all the time daydreaming about nipping between other road users - and the full test looming ahead.

MODULE 1

The main motorcycle tests, known as Modules 1 and 2, are the next hurdles in my quest to gain a full motorcycle licence. A couple of weeks after doing my CBT, I'm back at Ace Motorcycle for two days of training, with the Mod 1 test at the end.

Mod 1 is the new part of the test that's come in for a lot of flack. No doubt you've heard the horror stories of people breaking arms and near-death experiences involving the 'swerve and brake' test. Now I'm going to find out first hand what it's really like, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous.

The training starts with a ride around to get a feel for the bigger bikes; I'm riding a Suzuki GS500, which feels awesome compared to the CG125s that I rode for the CBT. It's miles more stable, and the weight of it is oddly reassuring.

The Mod 1 test consists of a series of tasks designed to test a rider's bike control, starting with slaloms, figure-of-eights, U-turns, and the emergency stop. Then there's riding at a controlled speed behind the examiner, and the notorious 'swerve test'.

From a standing start you accelerate into second gear and enter a 180-degree turn. As you leave the turn you need to get on the gas



This isn't the only skid mark Ginge has had to deal with today



Not a speed gun, but rather a monitor to measure the percentage chance of passing



THE SUZUKI GS500 FEELS AWESOME COMPARED TO THE CG125 OF THE CBT



Knowing Ginge was coming, Tesco's customers desert the car park for their own safety



down a narrow corridor of cones to the speed trap, at which point you throttle off and 'swerve' left or right (depending on how the test is set) round the obstacle cone, straighten the bike up and then come to a controlled stop inside the box. The only catch is that you have to be doing 32mph through the speed trap. We do a couple of slow runs so that we can get a feel for it and then it's the real deal.

I decided to just go for it and open the throttle right up coming out of the turn. I've got a left-hand swerve coming up, so I position the bike to the right of centre so that as I go through the speed trap I'm already starting my turn. I reckon it buys me an extra few feet of thinking time, I jink left and right and come to a controlled stop in the box. Mint; I did it, and I'm not even dead. I did go through the speed trap too fast though. Well, this is Fast Bikes.

We finish the day off with emergency stops, which I actually find harder than the swerve



GET ON

Pretty much every one of us knows several non-bikers who have uttered that age old phrase 'I'd like to get my bike licence one day'. They never do. It's either an insurmountable fear (the 'I can't trust myself' or 'I'd kill myself on one of those' brigade), or they're just never going to do it because there are too many obstacles.

Well there is a way to get them on a bike and make those first steps a thousand times easier - it's called the 'Get On' campaign.

Get On allows non-bikers to have a go on a motorcycle in a safe and controlled environment - and it's completely free, you don't even need riding kit. Newbies can try a motorbike or scooter at a time and place that suits them, with hands-on experience and advice from a qualified trainer. The session will last about an hour, and the newbie will be loaned a helmet and all the safety gear. Direct your wavering chums to www.geton.co.uk, and set them on a journey of two-wheeled discovery that will lead them into pure addiction and financial ruin. Think of it as being a non-nibbling vampire - it's our duty to infect others.

test as I've got a habit of locking the rear up and not using enough front brake.

The morning of day two is more of the same, we practise the individual exercises over and over and then run through a mock test, which all goes swimmingly. It's also at this point you realise that the test itself probably won't last more than 10 minutes.

The afternoon of day two is out on the roads for a confidence-boosting ride up to the test centre to take a look at the place and observe an actual test taking place.

THE TEST

It's an early morning ride to the test centre. It's dry, but cold and a bit misty. After a twenty-minute wait I'm out on the pad ready to start, feeling really tense with my visor properly misting up, adding to the stress.

The examiners are all bikers though, the commands are all clear and concise, and they



Repairing crash damage is all part of the learning process. Well, it is for Ginge

LEARNER ERRORS

It's easy to get it wrong when you've got no experience. Ginge here even dropped it twice in one week. Cock. So here's a list of what not to do.

FALLING OVER AT STANDSTILL

Forgetting to get a leg out when you stop is most embarrassing; stabbing away at the floor like a flamingo with a dead leg, as you gracelessly hit the deck (eh Ginge?).

RUNNING WIDE

Too fast in? Not sure about leaning it over yet? Muppet. Slow it down before the corner, and build up to big lean angles. Experience will build confidence.

HUGGING THE WHITE LINE

Not so bad on a lefthander, potentially life-threatening on a righthander. You might want to take some advanced rider training asap.

LOSING IT IN THE WET

Cars have nice big contact patches, bikes don't. Too much lean, throttle, or brake in the wet can lead to you making a right mess of yourself, and your bike.

LOCKING THE BRAKES

Pretty easy to do in the wet, not that hard in the dry - especially in an emergency-stop scenario (eh Ginge?)

MANHOLE COVERS AND WHITE LINES

Best avoided at all times, but they're often like ice when they're wet. Steer clear, or eat Tarmac.



► try to put you at ease. You should know before your test if you are able to pass it, so all you really need to do is keep your head and listen to the instructions they give you. I passed with one minor fault; taking too long to stop the bike in the emergency stop - although the examiner noted that this was mostly due to me doing 61kph through the speed trap! The swerve test was dispatched with ease, although I've never had to try it in the wet.

MODULE 2

Module 2 is the bit that's most like the test of old. It's roughly 30 to 40 minutes of riding on a variety of road types with an examiner following and asking you to perform certain manoeuvres. The only bit that's different now is that the emergency stop and U-turns have been banished to the off-road section, so there's no need to do these in the 'real world'.

Again, the build up is two days of training followed by the test on the morning of the third day. The training is all conducted on the public roads and centres on observation, hill starts, pulling away from the kerb and road positioning. It's all about improving the general standard of your riding.

I found being out on the road more normal than the off-road stuff. You can get a bit cone crazy after three days of Module 1. I suppose I'd like to think I already have some road sense and I'd rate myself as a decent driver (absolutely no-one else does - Ed), but being on a bike is totally different, not least because wearing a lid restricts your view on the world.

The training focuses on getting you comfortable with the procedures for making your turns. To start off with it feels like you've got a lot to do in a short space of Tarmac with the mirrors, indicators, life savers and

positioning to get right. But after a while you get into the groove. Car drivers don't really have to bother with this as much as bike riders, so it takes some getting used to. But its key to being clear about what's going on around you and making sure that everyone else knows what you're doing.

I did have one uncomfortable moment, which brought me back to earth with a bump. Literally. I made the silly mistake of not getting my foot down fast enough at a junction where the surface looked like it had been laid by three-year-olds on work experience. The resulting steering input error, combined with a bit of over balance due to my late leg deployment, had me eating pavement before I knew what was happening. The pain of the embarrassment was only outweighed by the pain in my left knee after the bike landed on it. It was a timely reminder that motorcycles are inherently unstable, and will just fall over if you're a cretin. It's not a stunt I ever want to repeat (but has anyway. Twice. Ed).



If ACE Training can get Ginge through his test, they can get anyone done



Ginge couldn't afford the red flag, but at least his arrival comes with a warning



With skills mastered, Ginge's troupe practise their synchronised routine



"For God's sake - keep up!" Ginge gets a dressing down for his less than pedestrian pace

OUTBRAKING YOURSELF

Easily done, especially into corners or at junctions after a prolonged time at speed. Chill out hombre. Find a clear stretch of deserted road and practice hard braking, so you know what your bike can do.

DISC LOCK

Best removed before riding away.

SPEEDING

Going fast can feel deceptively slow - don't get caught out.

FUEL

'But my car does 60 miles on reserve!' Yeah, your bike won't. If you've got a fuel tap and use reserve, remember to switch back before you run it dry again...

FILTERING ERRORS

Think you're a filtering god? You're not. Drivers won't see you. You won't anticipate their levels of their ineptitude. Take it steady sunshine.

COLD TYRES

Depending on your tyres and where/how you're riding, your rubber will take anything from 5 to 40 minutes to get to optimum temperature. Don't ask too much of that credit card sized contact patch, or you'll be using your credit card.

KILL SWITCH

Bastard bike won't start? Have you flicked the kill switch...

STUNTS

Anyone who tells you they don't want to be able to wheelie is a liar. Take it steady though - flipping a bike hurts, physically and financially.



He doesn't look like a potential accident here, but don't be fooled



Ginge and his stalker head out to the country for some fun

"With the handing over of £500 I'm pleased to say you've passed." Ginge gets his license by hook or by crook



► **THE TEST**

The thing to remember is that the examiners are looking for a good, safe ride. They will mark minor faults for obvious stuff, like lack of observations, iffy steering and road positioning. This only becomes an issue if you repeatedly gather these faults, as it can then become a major fault – resulting in a fail.

I'm lucky with the weather again, it's cool,

“MY EXAMINER TELLS ME I'VE PASSED WITH ONLY TWO MINOR FAULTS”

but the roads are dry. I'm feel both confident, and nervous. We start with the usual technical questions like 'how do you check the tyres?' and then we head out onto the road.

As I find out later, I make my two minor faults within the first hundred yards, by running slightly wide out of the entrance to the test centre and then leaving my indicator on slightly too long at the following mini roundabout. A common mistake.

In my head I reckon I've made a load more than that, so I decide to chill out and relax and just ride. It pays off, and after forty minutes of

uneventful mixed city and country riding where I manage to get the GS500 up to 60mph round some nice twisties, we're back at the test centre. The whole thing feels like its gone in the blink of an eye and my examiner happily tells me that I've passed with only the two minor faults.

The new test has come in for some flack since it was introduced a year ago, and there are certainly some elements that could have been better thought out (the lack of test centres for one and the impact it's had on the riding schools as well), but overall I think that

if car drivers were taught in the same way roads would be a much better and safer place to travel on. I also wonder how many of the critics have actually given it a go.

If you're thinking about getting your full licence, or you just want to get your CBT to start with – go and do it. There's nothing to fear – except fear itself. The test isn't dangerous, and if you find it too hard to pass, then you really shouldn't be riding.

The sense of freedom and exhilaration I've experienced since getting my licence is incredible. I couldn't wait just a couple of weeks to get my longterm test Suzuki GSX650F, so I went and bought a CBR600F just so I wouldn't have to be bikeless. Nothing can prepare you for the addiction, and I can't imagine it ever leaving me. ☑