

TAUGHT BY THE FUZZ

Do you think you're the best rider you can be? Do you think you know it all? If you do, you're missing out...



WORDS BY: RICHARD 'MOBY' NEWLAND
PICS BY: FLOW IMAGES



A load of lambs giggling nervously as the fluoro foxes sharpen their teeth

When was the last time you got that proper heart-thumping boost of adrenaline while riding? How often do you get it? Once a year, once every ride, or is it on every corner? It happens to us all at some point, whether we've overcooked it on the way into a bend, had a car pull out on us, or hit a patch of diesel on the apex of our favourite corner. Whatever the apparent cause, riding sportsbikes should be exhilarating, not frightening - there is a difference - and you're the person that determines your riding enjoyment, not other road users.

If you've not had any training since you wobbled around on L-plates trying to pass whichever version of the DSA farce, sorry - test, you had to suffer, the chances are that you're not riding at anywhere near your full

potential - and that means you're not enjoying your bike as much as you could be. Sadly there are too many of us who think training is solely for Sam Brown-wearing wax jacket lovers who harbour a life-long desire to put an IAM or ROSPA sticker on the screen of their Dullsville. If you're one of them, you're missing the chance to get the edge over your mates. Pretty much every one of our race heroes is still learning how to ride better - so you and I certainly aren't immune to the benefits of a bit of constructive feedback.

Perversely, the training you receive as a

newbie doesn't teach you how to be a good rider, and is often actively pointing you in the wrong direction. So not only do you get the ticket that says that you're good to go, you've been pushed out into the most challenging riding environment with a worrying lack of skills to start your biking career.

In case you hadn't noticed, you're a bit more exposed to the elements, road surface inconsistencies, trees, and errant biddies in Nissan Micras when you're riding a bike. While we never like to think about it, getting it wrong on two wheels is always going to ►

RIDING SPORTSBIKES SHOULD BE EXHILARATING, NOT FRIGHTENING



RICHARD NEWLAND

Job: Editor, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 37

Licence held for: 17 years

Previous Training: Test + One-day advanced course in 2009

Total road miles ridden: 300,000+

I am a: Fast and confident road rider, intermediate track rider, and always think I could be doing both better

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

It ratified the things I learnt doing a previous one-dayer, and reconfirmed where my weak areas are. This style of riding, and using IPSCA, has made me a dramatically faster and safer road rider. I hardly ever have 'panic moments', can't remember the last time I got a corner really wrong, and have avoided numerous blind car drivers and collisions because I can see situations developing, and react accordingly. My enjoyment of road riding is enormous, mainly stress-free, and addictive as a result.



SIMON ROOTS

Job: Deputy Editor, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 37

Licence held for: 20 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 200,000+

I am a: Road racing wannabe (who doesn't want to crash)

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

I'd been trying to ride in a BikeSafe manner before the day, so slipped into the mode pretty easily. I knew I wasn't reckless, but was sure that I'd have picked up some bad habits. The classroom stuff was interesting, but the ride was the best bit of the day. It's odd following a copper, as they are so systematic in their riding that it looks odd and I'm sure the road position could be exploited by other road users when there's no policeman about. My assessed ride went OK. I rode to a decent level, apparently, and my assessor had no real issues with how I was riding.



ALASTAIR FAGAN

Job: Road Test Editor, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 29

Licence held for: 13 years

Previous Training: Test + One-day advanced course in 2009 + California Superbike School Levels 1-4

Total road miles ridden: 150,000+

I am a: Fast and confident road rider/ex-BSB racer, addicted to corners

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

After our day with Tony a few years ago, the BikeSafe day was more of a top-up session - recalibrating my brain to use all of the road and not just apexing. Nothing was entirely new to me, which was a benefit in some ways as I could concentrate on my riding. Getting tailed by a rozzar on an S 1000 RR was entirely wrong. I also liked the reminder to use lower gears in every situation, in order to aid bike control - this is a personal weakness of mine. BikeSafe teaches you a lot for very few spondoolies.



BENJAMIN KUBAS CRONIN

Job: Features Editor, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 36

Licence held for: 18 years

Previous Training: Test + California Superbike School Levels 1-4

Total road miles ridden: 200,000+

I am a: Confident but safe (as I can be) road rider, and fast trackday rider

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

It opened my eyes to riding on the road and increasing my vision by correct placement approaching corners, which I can mix with vision lessons learned at CSS, thus incorporating the best of both practices. Also, using off-side vision for safer overtakes is priceless, though oddly this is something I already found quite easy on continental roads, but never in the UK which I now know is because of my positioning. It is something I now intend to work on continuously.



It wasn't exactly TT3D, but it still managed to hold everyone's attention

► sting more than getting it wrong on four. Riders most commonly come unstuck on left-hand bends, or end up on the wrong end of what might diplomatically be termed 'right of way infringements'. Get it wrong on a left-hander, and you're in oncoming traffic, which is an uncomfortable place to be. Equally, a lot of us get punted off because we had right of way, but Granny McBlind or Testosterone Boy didn't think to take a look through the glass bits of their tin box before making a manoeuvre. Their fault, but you're the one looking at the sky and saying 'ouch'.

The good news is that you've got a lot more control over your destiny than you might imagine – you might just need someone to show you how to make the most of it.

Team Fast Bikes isn't exempt from all the

same obstacles you face every time you ride, so we decided to road test the easiest and cheapest stepping stone to advanced training, it's called BikeSafe, and it's a one-day course run by the Police. 'They're the enemy aren't they?' Well, you can believe that if you like, but what you can't learn from a Class 1 Police rider about being smooth, fast and safe on the road simply isn't worth knowing. The internet is littered with videos of ordinary humans on sportsbikes trying to outrun plod on their over laden police hacks – and how often do they get away? Exactly. Class 1 riders are a force to be reckoned with – no pun intended. You may be surprised to learn that bike riding plods tend to be serious bike nuts off duty, too.

So, nerves jangling like a wind-chime orchestra, the whole Fast Bikes team, plus a

couple of readers and industry friends, found ourselves stood in the rain at Gordano services just off the M5 waiting for a police escort to guide us en masse into the belly of the beast – force headquarters at Portishead, where we'd be starting our BikeSafe course with Avon & Somerset's finest.

Our experience levels range from advertising-boy James 'Ginge' Thomas, who hadn't even ridden a bike 12 months ago and snapper Jonny (1,500 miles in 18 years!), to tubby-Al's British Superbike skills and Yamaha Simon's IAM qualification and 350,000+ road miles. With a couple of million miles between the 15 of us, the police had a diverse group to deal with. And amusingly, they were just as nervous as we were. Apparently a room full of journalists is nearly as scary as a room full of



ANDY SAUNDERS

Job: Art Editor, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 31

Licence held for: 9 years

Previous Training: Test + California Superbike School Levels 1-4

Total road miles ridden: 65,000+

I am a: Fast and confident road rider, who loves riding on track and off-road

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

The classroom chat and use of video was well measured and very useful. I could instantly make a comparison with my riding. Riding with the Police was strange at first, but to see how they do it is very useful. Overtaking is something I can work on, giving myself more time to see a possible overtake. I was surprised how the Police pull right the way out to look for overtaking space, then just pull back in if the overtake isn't on. It feels a little uncomfortable doing it, but it's a useful tool if used correctly. I'd definitely recommend BikeSafe.



NICK ANDREWS

Job: Technician (and FB reader)

Rider Age: 22

Licence held for: 5 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 10,000+

I am a: Fast and confident road rider, addicted to corners and straights, and I love trackdays

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

Apart from getting seriously wet, I also have a lot more respect for police riders after spending the day with them. It has definitely bridged the gap between 'us' and 'them'. I learnt that it is okay to move about more in your own lane to get a better forward view of the road, especially when cornering. The road positioning you get shown is much more extreme than you learn on your test, and enables you to see hazards faster, and gives you more space to react to them. It was a very useful day, which I'd recommend to everyone.



LUKE PLUMMER

Job: Suzuki GB Press Officer

Rider Age: 32

Licence held for: 15 years

Previous Training: Test + trackday tuition and RH Race School

Total road miles ridden: 200,000+

I am a: Confident road rider, occasional trackday rider. Enjoy the twisties more than the straights

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

The day made me think about my road riding more than I have in the last 15 years. Most of what is taught is common sense, but it makes you re-evaluate and think a little more about each element of your riding. The techniques discussed, and the methods suggested, enable you to be smoother and enhance your vision at the same time, making everything that little bit easier with less associated risks. The biggest thing I took away from the day was more awareness of my road positioning.



TOBY LANHAM

Job: IT Analyst (and FB reader)

Rider Age: 31

Licence held for: 2 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 8,000+

I am a: Confident road rider, fast in a straight line, gentle in corners - I haven't ever got my knee down, yet

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

It was great to have some feedback, and I felt like it came at a good time for me (2 years after my test). It was all about road positioning for me and using all of the road (providing there are no potholes / drain covers etc), this is what I'll continue to work on. Once my positioning is second nature, it will make my riding more relaxed, and I will be more confident negotiating corners. I'd definitely recommend it to a friend, and think that for £25 it provides excellent value for money, and a good taster of what an advanced course would entail.



After sacking the monastery, Beej and Andy did get in just a little bit of trouble

fluro-jacketed warrant card holders.

A mere £25 (at most forces) gets you through the door for what is a game of two halves. The morning is spent supping coffee and getting an insight into the theory of riding well, looking at common road riding errors, and evaluating your sensitivity to hazards. It's not a preaching session about speeding or road legalities; it's all about awareness, and a systematic approach to your riding.

You might have heard of 'IPSGA', probably the least catchy acronym ever choked out, which stands for Information, Position, Speed, Gear and Acceleration. It's the five-stage process used and taught by most advanced riders, and if used correctly it gifts you the all the raw materials to improve your skills and riding almost immediately.

If you get the I and P wrong, the rest of the process can become a panicked set of reactions - that adrenaline rush scenario - instead of a planned set of actions. If you still can't work out why your mate is so smooth, and able to lose you at will on your Sunday blast – the chances are that his balls aren't bigger, but his ability to process information, and set his road position are better than yours.

Amazingly it really could be that simple. The majority of this comes from your



recognition of one element – Positioning. If you're in the right place on the road, it enables you to gather more information, after which setting your speed, gear, and getting back on the gas will almost automatically fall into place over just a couple of practice rides.

Every one of us on our BikeSafe day cited

an unhealthy love of corners as being one of the primary reasons we ride bikes – and a couple admitted that they're also the things that scare them rigid. By the end of the day those bottom-twitchers were peeling into, and out of, bends with dramatically more confidence just because they'd made

STILL CAN'T WORK OUT WHY YOUR SMOOTH MATE CAN LOSE YOU AT WILL?



Ordinarily there'd be two nervous people in this picture - but on this occasion it was three



It's hilarious how many motorists give you the 'poor bastard' face when you're talking to a copper kerbside



'Just follow your nose for the next couple of miles Andy. You can do that can't you?'



THE NET RESULT IS THAT YOU CAN USUALLY CARRY MORE CORNER SPEED

► tangible improvements to their corner entry positioning. Position isn't a one-stop answer to all your problems, just ask the wife, but it certainly opens the door.

Arrive at a right-hander with your wheels nudging the centre line, and one day you'll end up changing direction pretty fast as a bonnet mascot. Equally, hugging the verge through a left-hander with your head in the hedge could lead to forced consumption of vegetation, and you're virtually blind to what's waiting round the corner. In both scenarios there are two inevitable results. Firstly; your vision is being artificially reduced and secondly; you're sacrificing speed - or your own safety if you ride like Jedi.

So where should you be? If all else is equal (road surface, junctions, traffic, weather, etc) then you should be as far to the left of your lane as safely possible on a right-hander. Your ability to see through the bend is instantly maximised, you're not hanging your noggin over the white line, and you're also opening the corner out. The net result is that you can

see more, react earlier, usually carry much more corner speed, and you can get on the throttle again earlier on the exit. This doesn't mean that you can't 'apex' the corner, it just means that you're creating your own apex point as soon as you have full view of the corner exit. On track you'd take the racing line, using the optimal apex point.

On a left-hander, making the same set of assumptions, your wheels should be close to the central white line - providing you all the same benefits you enjoyed on the right-hander. This can feel slightly counter-intuitive at first. If you're a racing line apex hunter (Alastair), or recent DSA test victim (Ginge), it'll take cognitive effort to change your road positioning. In many ways it's harder for newbies and entrenched 'middle of the road' riders, as this systematic approach to riding will initially feel radical; even dangerous.

Riding in the middle of your lane feels like a safe place to be, and in town situations it's the right place to be as you're equalising the threat from all angles. Riders who learnt to drive first also tend to position themselves where they'd be if they had 3ft of metal between them and the kerb. It's just where they feel comfortable. But with this systematic approach to riding, you're using almost every inch of your lane. Kerbs can feel close, and it can feel like you're actively surrendering some of your margin for error. Once you experience the benefits, and understand the exceptions though, you'll never look back (unless you're doing a lifesaver, obviously).

This is a massive oversimplification of ►



DAN SAGER

Job: Director, Fab Biker PR

Rider Age: 45

Licence held for: 27 years

Previous Training: Test + IAM + California Superbike School L162

Total road miles ridden: 100,000+

I am a: Experienced and confident but 'steady as she goes' rather than 'banzai' rider

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

The day doing BikeSafe reminded me that I've virtually stopped using life-savers, which is a potentially life-saving revelation. Also, although my road position in corners was solid (thank you California Superbike School) I was failing to think about positioning myself for maximum forward vision when riding in a straight line. A day talking and riding with Police riders really does make you assess your riding skills, and think about what you are doing on the road - which is always a good thing!



BEN MATTHEWS

Job: Sales Director, Royal Enfield

Rider Age: 40 (but don't tell anyone)

Licence held for: 19 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 75,000+

I am a: Reasonably fast and confident road rider, I love twisty roads - although I ride more off-road than on it nowadays

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

I found it very useful in terms of raising awareness of what's going on around you (highlighting urban and rural hazards). We all know they are there, but seeing the video's and illustrations really focuses the mind. The opinions on road positioning and riding techniques are interesting and theoretically very good, but I found putting them in to practice a bit uncomfortable, and I'm not sure that I agree with all aspects of them. I'd definitely recommend everyone to do a BikeSafe day though - it's very good.



SIMON BELTON

Job: Marketing Manager, Yamaha UK

Rider Age: 51 (cheeky gits)

Licence held for: 34 years

Previous Training: IAM - in 1979!

Total road miles ridden: 350,000+

I am a: Fairly quick and confident road rider and enjoy corners rather than straights. I like lean angles

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

I am an aware rider (slightly grumpy with unseeing, uncaring and unaware car drivers) and enjoyed my time being chased by the Police. It makes you ride well and smoothly, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. There is no doubt that we learn by experience and I am constantly referring to my IAM training, meaning that any novice or intermediate rider taking a BikeSafe assessed ride would benefit hugely in their motorcycling career and it would help them become a better, smoother and safer rider - and that doesn't mean boring!



CHARLIE OAKMAN

Job: Advertising Manager, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 37

Licence held for: 15 years

Previous Training: Test + California Superbike School L162

Total road miles ridden: 80,000+

I am a: Confident road rider, with excitable bursts of speed

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

It's amazing that this is the first road training I have had since taking my test 15 years ago. I had never thought too much about road positioning until Moby pointed out that I was hugging the centre line on a right bend, my body in the path of oncoming traffic. An afternoon with a Police rider taught me where I should be positioned for rights, lefts, and straights. Braking, gears, and speed are all looked at in a constructive, non-confrontational, and relaxed manner. There is no doubt that I am a far better rider now than I was before.



However nice the police officer is, there's still something wrong about him getting an S 1000RR to ride

CONTACTS

BikeSafe: bikesafe.co.uk

Avon & Somerset BikeSafe:

avonandsomerset.police.uk/bikesafe

TRAINING, MIXED WITH EXPERIENCE, IS WHAT MAKES YOU A GREAT RIDER

► corner entry positioning, and the reason Information comes first in IPSGA is that you have to process a lot of it before you can take up the optimum road position. However, if you don't know where you're aiming to be, the information you process won't be as useful. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

There's nothing better than being shown the benefits first person – you can see that for yourself from the feedback of the fifteen of us here. We could do a whole issue of manual-like theoretical advice, but someone has already written that, it's called 'Motorcycle Roadcraft: The Police Rider's Handbook to Better Motorcycling'. Dull? Yes it is.

What you'll find far more engaging and beneficial is to grab a couple of mates and sign yourself up for a BikeSafe course local to you. Consider it as a ride out, a day with your mates, and an opportunity to revolutionise your riding. If you like it, you can go on and get more training. If you never do anything else, you'll probably still have learnt a lot – and met your local bike plods too (and you never know when that might prove useful).

Training isn't dull, for people with small winkies, or something that should stop once you've got a licence – it's what you mix with practice and experience to make you a good rider. Maybe even a great one. ☐



BIKESAFE SOUTHWEST SHOW Castle Combe - 4th June 2011

The BikeSafe Southwest Show returns to Castle Combe on the 4th June, and Fast Bikes will be there, so come and say hello. Book yourself an assessed rideout with the Police on the day, and you also get a couple of laps of Castle Combe in the deal!

There'll be lots of retail exhibitors, rides and things for all the family to enjoy. It's completely free to turn up, park, and enjoy the show – you only have to open your wallet to book an assessed ride, or buy yourself a burger. We'd suggest you book assessed rides in advance, as they always sell out by the morning of the show. Head to avonandsomerset.police.uk/bikesafe to find out more.



JAMES THOMAS

Job: Account Manager, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 31

Licence held for: 1 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 4,500

I am a: New-ish rider, who lacks some confidence when cornering

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

I expected the police to be a bit unapproachable and 'we're right, you're wrong' – but they were the exact opposite. My assessor thought that my road positioning was poor on corner entry and exit. He worked with me to allow me to exploit my bike's abilities, raise my corner speed and reduce my need to adjust my line mid-corner. I found my flow from bend to bend improved and because I used more of the road I was able to make progress much more smoothly. My confidence increased and by the end of the day I was already enjoying the results. Highly recommended.



CHARLEY DAVIES

Job: Publisher, Fast Bikes

Rider Age: 56

Licence held for: 40 years

Previous Training: None at all

Total road miles ridden: 115,000+

I am a: Returnee to biking after a nine year lay-off from two wheels. Got a licence in the days before training was obligatory, so never had any

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

The day emphasised that road bike positioning is not the same as car (or trike, ahem). It made it obvious that I've never set myself up for corners properly in all the years I've been riding: entry lines used to be fine, but I'd apex early restricting forward vision leading to those 'this bend's tightening up a bit!' moments... It was good to hear from the police that my riding isn't unsafe after such a lay off. Would definitely recommend BikeSafe – bike cops are just as passionate about biking as us.



JONNY GAWLER

Job: Director, Flow Images

Rider Age: 37

Licence held for: 18 years

Previous Training: Test

Total road miles ridden: 1,500

I am a: Long-time novice. Love the machinery, hate having to share the road with people who don't want to share it with me

Has BikeSafe helped your riding?

It was a brilliant day. If someone could have convinced me to do a day like this straight after my test (obviously I knew everything at that point!) it would've saved me from nearly nearly killing myself a few times before I actually nearly killed myself. Before BikeSafe I was just bumbling round with the traffic flow, not thinking much about it, but now I've been shown how to string bends together I can make progress, have more fun, and actually be safer because I'm being more pro-active about hazards.

THANKS TO: THE AVON & SOMERSET BIKESAFE TEAM

PC Ian Marriott (pictured below) and PC Phil Scull (pictured bottom) for arranging the day, and PCs Jerry Burt, Neill Sedgwick, Carl Gadd (Charlie), David Stiles (Nobby), Kieran Ball and Richard Willis for their riding services, top-quality feedback, classroom banter, and not nicking any of us... Top blokes.

