



CHAPTER
ONE



WELCOME TO MOTORCYCLING

This is going to be more fun than you imagined

BEFORE YOU START

If you're anything like most aspiring riders, you've been thinking of riding a bike for some time now. The final push might have been yet another traffic jam, a friend's enthusiasm, or the dawning realisation that you have a bit more leisure time these days. Whatever it was, none of it matters now. You need to get down to the nitty gritty of actually doing it!

This book is here to help you. It will guide you through every stage of your journey to become a full licence holder, and answer virtually any question you might have along the way. On top of that, it will do something no other beginner's book has done: give you the skill and knowledge to ride any motorcycle competently and safely.

At Circuit Based Training we have helped

thousands of people just like you to gain their full motorcycle licence. We know all the pitfalls and problems new riders encounter. For more than a decade our courses have gone beyond the legal minimum to offer what we believe is the best possible CBT and Direct Access training.

Although we like to think we're pioneers, we're certainly not the only bike school to operate in this way. And if you only read one more sentence in this book, it's this: find yourself a riding school with similar standards.

The reason is simple: we want you to pass your test and enjoy your bike for years to come.

The bike test process

Legally speaking there are five stages:

1. Theory test
2. Compulsory Basic Training
3. Pre-test training – either Standard (under 21s) or Direct Access (over 21s)
4. Module 1 (off road test)
5. Module 2 (on road test)

1. Theory test

This is a multi-choice Highway Code test with a few bike-related questions thrown in. If you fail it, you shouldn't even be driving a car! There are test centres throughout the UK, not to be confused with the practical test centres.

Along with the theory test is the hazard perception video, where you click a mouse when you consider a hazard to be relevant. It's easy.

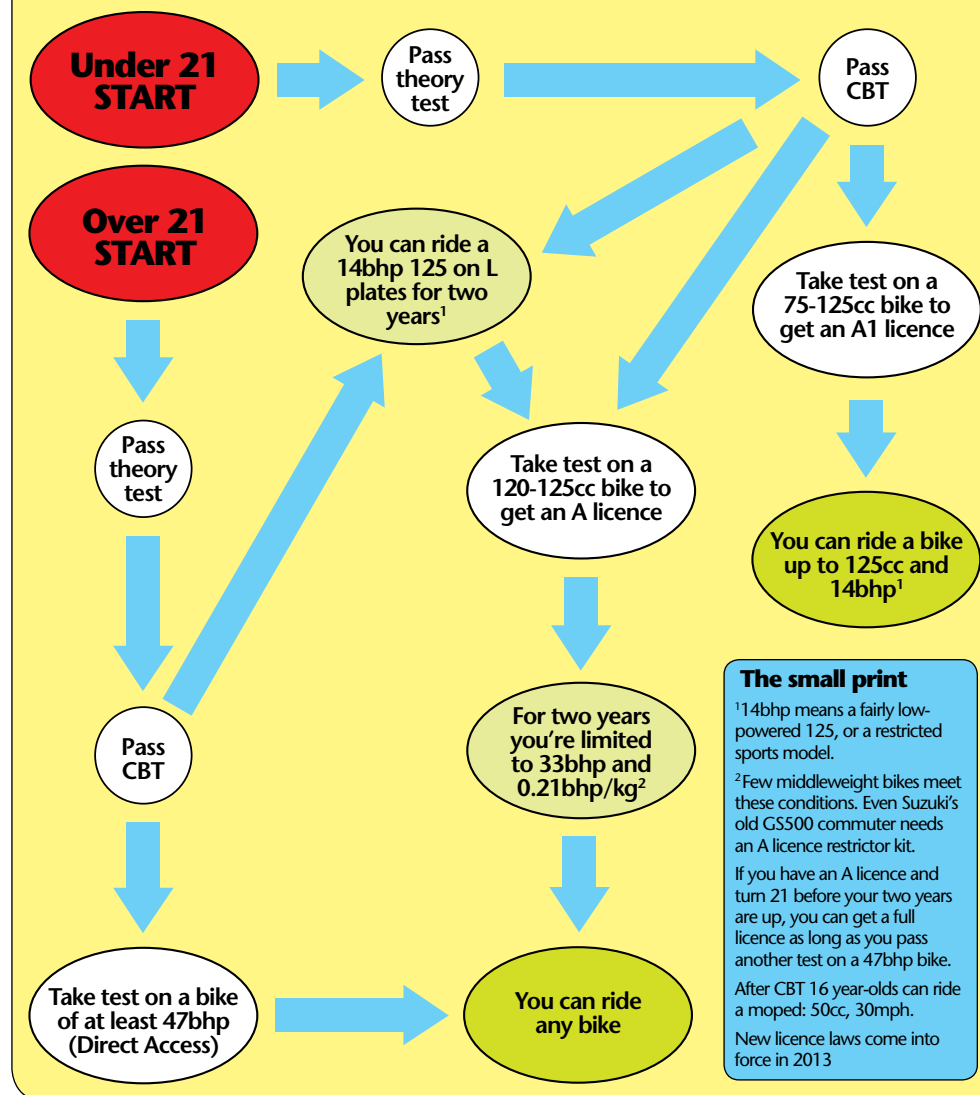
2. Compulsory Basic Training

CBT is your practical riding starting point and, as the name suggests, it's compulsory. Many schools try and rush you through in a day, but there's no time limit. Once you have your CBT certificate



The law for new riders

The route you choose depends on your age and what you want to ride. You can start the process shown here from your 17th birthday onwards



you can ride a 125cc bike on the road (or 50cc if you're 16). If you don't go on to pass your bike test in two years you'll have to retake your CBT. Budget on £120-£150.

Many training schools do an excellent job in meeting or exceeding the minimum legal requirements for CBT, but there is also a minority that hands out certificates when riders don't deserve them. Many clients tell us how they passed their CBT after only 20-40 minutes of road riding (the legal minimum is two hours!).

The truth is, they have been shortchanged. Too many schools compete on price, charging as little as £80 for what could be a two-day course. Saddle yourself with an outfit that cuts corners like this and all too often it's first gear, second gear, STOP!!! (before you hit the tennis nets) – then out onto the road, before you are really ready, often with illegal numbers of fellow trainees, and little or no classroom learning. When CBT is conducted like this people get hurt. And no wonder.

3. Pre-test training Standard Training (under 21s)

Done on a 125, which is all learners can ride at this age. Expect to cover many road miles in a variety of situations to prepare for the test. When you pass you're restricted to 33bhp for two years. That gives you a good choice of bikes; dealers can fit restrictors to many models. You'll still get up the the speed limit – it'll just take you a little longer.

Direct Access (over 21s)

The popular choice for older riders. You'll gain lots of experience on larger bikes, typically 500cc – 650cc. Once you've passed you can ride anything you like. If this freedom doesn't appeal, you can do the same as the under 21s – take your test on a 125 and stay limited to 33bhp.

Going from rank beginner to to test-ready rider in a few days sounds fine, but there is no official



This could be you soon. Especially if you pay attention to this book

2011 BMW R1200CS

syllabus or regulation. Yes, you read that right. In other words, a Direct Access/Standard Training course is as good (or as bad) as the trainer you put your trust in – a crazy situation.

4. Test Module 1

Introduced in April 2009, Mod 1 is a series of exercises on a pad away from the road, designed to ensure you can handle the bike in various situations: U-turn, slalom, emergency braking, cornering, jinking round a hazard, and so on.

Pre-test training: block course or hourly lessons?

A good school should offer either, with block courses ranging from three to seven days, depending on their philosophy, facilities – and you! Many people find the block option is less expensive in the long run, with five days being typical for someone with no previous experience; four days is possible if you're confident. Seven days might sound excessive, but remember: this is a dangerous pastime,

not to be treated lightly. If block courses don't suit you, ask for individual hourly lessons and tailor these over the weeks or months to suit your schedule. Talk to your school to find out what they can offer (p??). Above all, don't imagine you can rush it. This often leads to bad experiences, coupled with test failures and roadside incidents. Expect to pay £700-£1200 for a course, or from £50 per hour.

Riding a bike well gives you the most amazing sense of freedom. But to get to that point, you first need to find yourself the most amazing instructor



5. Test Module 2

This involves about 40 minutes of largely urban riding followed by an examiner checking that you are confident in (or away from) traffic at a variety of speeds, and able to navigate.

So, where do I start?

Hold on just a little bit longer. Perhaps the biggest issue with Mod 1 and 2 is whether to take them separately or on the same day. Same day sounds sensible – less time off work, lower trainer fees – but if you fail Mod 1 you’ll be barred from taking Mod 2, and forfeit your slot and test fee.

Separate booking is less risky, because if you fail Mod 1 you simply retake it at the next available slot a week or so later. It does mean, however, that your training is going to take longer, and therefore cost more.

To most of our clients the thought of going through the whole nerve-jangling experience on separate days is too much to bear. Certainly you can do both Mods in a day if you’ve been well trained. You’ll already have ridden an average of 50 miles to get there, so you know you can conduct yourself on public roads!

Be careful about booking a Mod 1 test on your own. Unless you’ve been riding bikes off road since you were a kid you are, at the very least, going to need plenty of riding before the test. Turning up in your car to meet your ‘instructor’ at the test centre, then getting on a strange bike with no practice and hoping you can wing it, is no way to go about learning to ride. Motorcycling is fantastic fun, but it’s also a serious business, and the idea that ‘first you pass your test and then you learn’ is totally wrong. A good many trainers still believe it, though.

So before you even think about taking your test, you have a job to do: find yourself a decent training school.

2011 Honda CBR1000RR



For most folk, Google is a good starting point. But nothing beats word of mouth

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT TRAINING SCHOOL

There are around 670 DSA-approved training schools in the UK, most of them offering the full menu of CBT, 125cc and Direct Access courses. Many beginners imagine (why shouldn't they?) that all schools offer the same course. In fact, standards vary from excellent to dangerous. Picking the right school for your needs is the biggest decision you can take in learning to ride.

There's a syllabus for Compulsory Basic Training laid down by the Driving Standards Agency (the Government body responsible) which every training company is aware of, and should adhere to. In reality a significant number of schools don't bother, or fall well short of best practice. As your training is a one-off purchase about which you know little, we've put together 15 crucial questions (p??) to help you make the right choice. But you should also trust your own instincts – ask yourself how you would like to be treated, and what the ideal training environment would be.

Don't, whatever you do, choose on price alone. You get what you pay for, and many new riders have found out that what appears to be the cheapest option turns out to be anything but in the long run.

For example, in 2008 I saw a young learner

rider in a group of four at a petrol station in Nottingham. The lad was plainly uncomfortable with the fact that his bike didn't have a front brake lever. So I asked his instructor about it. 'Yeah, he dropped it this morning doing a U-turn. We'll keep him in the middle, he's got a back brake – he'll be all right. Besides, we'll just stay in town'. The poor kid sensed he was in danger, but he and the others were too afraid to say anything to interrupt the day.

Another classic situation is finding yourself starting a CBT course with up to a dozen others, of varying ages and ability. If the manpower is there to instruct and keep you safe then no problem – but when you realise there's only one instructor to try and keep everyone happy it soon becomes apparent why the course cost £80 for the whole day.

If you've signed up for Direct Access and are looking to ride a big bike you don't want to be bundled together with four or five 16 year-olds on 50cc scooters. This is a regular shock to many new riders who find that their experience doesn't match what they signed up to.

So, onto the three biggest areas of complaint with any school:

1. The bikes

Training school bikes have a hard life. But they should still be reliable, of good quality, and come with a reasonable spares backup in the event of a drop. Many riders who've come to us from other schools have told us they've lost valuable time during a course because of a breakdown, and no spare bikes were available. So ask if the school carries spare levers and indicators, how many spare bikes there are, and what happens if mechanical problems occur.

We've often heard of Direct Access trainees having to start on a 125cc machine, even if they are six foot two, and then doing one or two days on this before they are allowed to move up to a bigger bike. This is nonsense – if

you're paying for Direct Access you should be on a big bike straight away. A more likely explanation for confining you to a 125 is that the school doesn't have a bigger bike available until much later. This can prove very frustrating when your test is looming.

Check the selection of bikes. If they're all the same make of 500, that will not suit everyone. It's best to go with a school that has a selection of different bikes, with various engine sizes, twins and four cylinder machines, with and without fairings. You should get a chance to ride different ones to see which you like the most. Not only does this improve your chances in the test, it gives you a better idea of what bike you could buy once you've passed.

Three 650cc fours (faired and unfaired), plus a 650cc V-twin – a decent selection



2. The instructor

Good instructors are like sports coaches, giving excellent advice in a style that focuses your awareness and responsibility, and builds up your confidence. Find such a person and you'll be glad you did. To help you decide, get testimonials from previous clients.

You can recognise a bad instructor – and they do exist – in two ways. First, your instinct tells you something's wrong. Second, they behave like a complete arse, constantly shouting and belittling each client.

You are looking to put your life in this person's hands, and it's a decision you must make for yourself, whether that takes a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. Do you like them? Do you trust them? Would you genuinely work well together?



One of the good guys: Dave at CBT



An in-helmet radio: it has to work perfectly



Humour, plus a tendency to celebrate each moment of success, are very good signs

3. The radios

Training needs good quality in-helmet radios, and we hear more complaints about these than anything else. Inaudible instructions are a distraction you could do without. Get an assurance that your training school's radios work well. Better still, try them out before you commit.



I took Direct Access in 2001 and jumped on my 1997 CRB600F. I went out riding on my own, in groups and with my girlfriend on the back. I covered 15,000 miles in the first year. How I survived is still a mystery.

After the first year, one riding buddy said to me that I may need to brush up on my road position, cornering technique, braking and observations – though he did say that I was really good at gassing it. So, I was crap. He booked us in for a three-day with Paul Cheshire in North Wales which taught me techniques that I continue use in my day-to-day riding.

Looking back, the idea that someone can do what I did and jump on any bike is ridiculous. My mate, an experienced and competent car driver, passed his test and came out for a ride with me on the same afternoon. I watched in horror as he nearly killed himself on the approach to a roundabout, flew past cars and then finally sobered up as he put it into a ditch.

Ben Woolveridge



The instructor was a sullen ex-Naval NCO. By the end of day two I'd had about enough of the patronising tone of voice in the one-way ear piece: 'You did that again, didn't you Sarah.' 'No, no, no, pull over.' 'I thought you already HAD a bike.' And so on. I got back to the office thoroughly stressed and upset. Whilst it was pretty clear I was doing it wrong, I hadn't a clue why or how.

Sarah Maguire



I came back to biking after a 20 year absence. I passed in 1979, but the entitlement disappeared from my licence, so I had to take CBT and DAS. The CBT was at least training, but very basic. The DAS was designed solely for me to pass the test. The fastest emergency stop I did was from 20mph. Countersteering was never mentioned. I was truly astonished to find that no one tried to teach me how to ride a motorcycle.

Richard Slimming





15 CRUCIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU BOOK

If you're a beginner, these questions arm you with the knowledge you need but don't yet have. Ask them when you ring up a training school, or better still try them on any former clients. You're looking for an outfit that delivers what you want. If you have to travel, that's what you have to do.

1. What is your instructor/pupil ratio?

The maximum allowed on the road is two pupils to one instructor.

2. Can I start on a 500cc+ straight away?

If you're doing Direct Access you should be able to. Refusal may be a ploy to extend the amount of time you spend with them, or to link you up with people on small bike/scooter courses.

3. Can I move onto a 600cc+ machine during the course?

Many schools just provide the minimum Direct Access requirement of 47bhp. It helps if you can match (or at least approach) the power of the bike you are likely to buy.

4. Are there bikes with and without fairings?

Trying both helps you find what suits you, and gives you a steer towards choosing your first bike.

5. What daily client progress records are kept, and can I see any?

If you have the chance to write down how you've progressed after each day, you remain in control. See Appendix 2 for examples.

6. Is there room to get out of second gear on the training area?

You've got six gears. You need to find out what third, fourth and fifth are like before going out on public roads. The training area needs to be big enough to replicate the Module 1 course too.

7. What cornering techniques do you teach?

Planning, road positioning, making the bike lean, driving out – they're all vital. Countersteering is often brushed aside as being too complicated to explain at this stage. Choose a school that recognizes its importance, and can teach it.

8. Do you practice emergency stops at realistic speeds?

There's no point practising at 20mph when real incidents occur at 50-70 mph. The bike test requires a stop from at least 31mph, so it's best to be able to get well above this.

9. Do you practice emergency mid-corner braking?

It's not what anyone plans to do on a bike, but in the interests of safety you simply have to know how to do it. Which means being taught it. Preferably at 45-70mph.

10. How fast can I ride before going onto public roads?

Too many new riders report that their off-road training up to a maximum of, say, 20mph left them with no experience of how fast they could accelerate or brake. This is not ideal preparation for joining traffic at up to 70mph.

11. Who decides when I'm safe to go onto public roads?

It can only be you. Many new riders benefit from an extra day's practice off road. It should be possible. Make sure you remain in control: you are the best judge of whether you are safe or not.

12. How long do I spend on public roads?

By law a CBT certificate can only be issued after at least two hours of successful road riding.

13. How far away is the nearest test centre?

As long as you can get there in an hour or less you'll be fine on test day. Many riders find that a good long ride like this helps them get focused and ready for the test. Examiners often form the

opinion that if you've managed to ride to the test centre from a training school 30-50 miles away, then you can obviously handle your bike.

14. Do you pre-book your tests in advance?

Good training schools pre-book tests two or three months in advance, giving you a range of options which will avoid long delays. Other schools may ask you to arrange your own test which is a hassle you can do without. Besides, the time you get will not always fit the school's schedule.

15. What further training is available after my test?

The only way to ride a motorcycle well is to stay up to scratch. So how good is the training school for post-test riders? A strong reputation here is a good indicator of their overall approach to training.

“ I took my Direct Access with Bryan's in Stoke. They were simply fantastic throughout. CBT was shorter than I expected but they were aware I would be going full strength immediately. In those later lessons they taught me braking at high speed, and if Neil tried to get countersteering into my head any more I think he would have wrapped his ZX-10R round my neck!

If you're only doing your CBT to get on the road then I think you should have at least ten road hours. But if, like me, you're using it simply as a stepping stone, you just need to make sure your instructors are spot on like mine were.

Gav Wilding

