

RIDERS

... magazine of the KAMG



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KENT ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS GROUP



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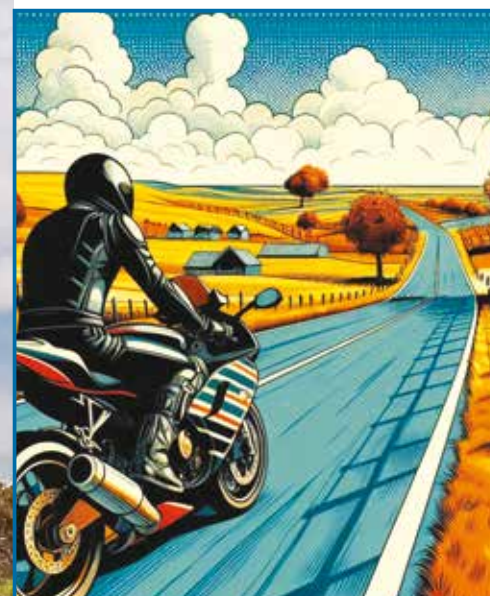
THIS EDITION INCLUDES . . .

REGULAR FEATURES:

- 3 Forthcoming Events
- 4 Editorial
- 5 View from the Chair
- 5 Test Passes
- 23 KAMG merchandise
- 30 IDCAM and MCD dates
- 31 Contacts

NEW FEATURES:

- 6 Green Mean Machine
- 9 What's the ETA
- 13 Christmas at Scotts
- 14 Just Twist the Throttle
- 16 Why Ride a Motorbike?
- 18 Rider Aid
- 21 A Circular Argument
- 24 End of Year Report
- 26 Riders Rants
- 28 KAMG AGM 2025



Page 16



He knows . . . page 16



Page 6

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

March

- Sun 2nd Social & Training ride. Shorne park to Manston
- Sat 8th Annual Observer Conference
- Sat 15th IDCAM
- Sat/Sun 22/23 Peterborough Training Weekend
- Thurs 27th AGM
- Sun 30th Social & Training ride.

April

- Sat 5th Trainee observer workshop
- Sun 6th Pillion workshop, Ebbsfleet car park D
- Thurs 10th Fish and chip ride to Lenham

- Sat 12th IDCAM
- Thurs 24th Group Night
- Sun 27th Social & Training ride. Lullingstone to Headcorn

May

- Sun 11th Machine Control Day
- Thurs 15th Fish and chip run to Tenterden
- Sat 17th IDCAM
- Sun/Sat 18/19 Peterborough Training Weekend
- Thurs 29th Group Night

June

- Sat 1st Vianden trip starts



Nick Farley, Editor

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine are solely the views and opinions of the people who write the articles, and those views and opinions should never be taken as, nor be presumed to be, the official view of, nor views supported by, either IAM RoadSmart or the KAMG.

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Everything is done to ensure the correctness and accuracy of the editorial content of the magazine, but neither the editor nor the KAMG accepts liability for information errors, omissions or typesetting errors.

Riders is the place for every single member, or associate member, of KAMG to say what he/she thinks about anything and everything connected with riding and driving and the KAMG. Every article submitted will be published (provided it is legal) and no opinions or views will be changed or cut out. The magazine is apolitical, but criticism or praise of politicians of any political colour is welcome if the criticism, or praise, is about the politician's actions or views on road safety, roads or some other aspect of transport.

Please submit articles for publication, or letters to the editor, to the email address of the editor (see page 30). Please send pictures for publication as separate file attachments to an email if possible, rather than embedding them in the email content, and ensure that the pictures are of the highest resolution possible. Please do not send information or pictures via Facebook.

MAGAZINE DESIGN AND LAYOUT
BY JOHN GARDINER

EDITORIAL

Happiness is a Pretty Roundabout

It is well known that councils, be they parish, borough or county councils are peopled by idiots. One of the first questions prospective council candidates are asked at councillor training school is: "Are you an idiot?" And if the answer is a strong confident "Yes, I certainly am," they're in and have taken their first step to glory and power, which is why so much that councils do is idiotic. However, even among your ordinary, average, every-day, run-of-the-mill council idiots there are some truly world class acts: people who stand out, people who are the very Mozarts of stupidity. These idiots are capable of such towering, baroque super idiocy that we ordinary gentlefolk have the very breath sucked from our feeble bodies by the sheer daring and magnificence of their idiotic feats. Yet even in this category of Olympian idiocy, there is a council of such out-of-this-world lunacy that all others are left gasping in its wake: My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Wokingham Borough Council. Ta Da!

This body of the breathtakingly brainless (many of whom I assume have probably bred in the normal way and thus perpetuated their priceless genes) has decided to paint coloured stars and pretty leaves on the California roundabout in Finchampstead. I mean they have actually painted the frigging road surface. And you, because you are not a qualified idiot and therefore cannot begin to see the point of doing this, may well ask why? Well, apparently it's to make the roundabout safer for pedestrians. You see, it's obvious, isn't it? Dammit, why didn't anyone else think of that? It's so obvious – paint pretty stars and leaves on the road and we can all dance happily among the traffic safe in the knowledge that we are protected by the pretty stars and the lovely pictures of leaves. There's none of those silly, old fashioned, black and white pedestrian crossings; no, you just skip across on the painted leaves. Such joy. Such safe freedom.

Now, if it was a case of a council bloke with a pot of paint and some stencils nipping round the roundabout at dead of night, I'd say that it was still a stupid idea but within in a week the pretty pictures would be rubbed out by tyres and oil and stuff and we could all go on our way and forget it. However, it wasn't actually like that. Oh, deary me, no! It took from February to September 2024 to complete this project and it cost £5.5million. Five and half million would, I imagine, fill quite few potholes. Of course, that's only a guess on my part, and well out of my field of expertise, but I bet I could have painted a road for less than five million quid and done it in less than eight months, then again I'm not an idiot, so what do I know?

I'd like to show you pictures of this happy and picturesque little roundabout, but copyright rules make this impossible; so, instead, I urge you to Google 'Wokingham Council California Roundabout'. It'll make you laugh and cry at the same time.

Dave Murphy

Another KAMG stalwart is easing himself away from the KAMG frontline. Dave Murphy is the Group's Vice President and has been its chairman for the last three years, although chairman is a role he has filled before this most recent spell. He has been a presence on the committee for the last 25 years and although he will now withdraw from the committee, he will still be a member of the KAMG, and he will still be an observer. Dave, we owe you much, thank you. And thank you for the stuff you are going to do in the future, but which you don't know about yet. We'll tell you in good time what that is.

In the meantime, everyone please note that Dave will be leading another of his famed trips to Vianden in Luxembourg starting on June 1st. Book now.

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

This will be the last time I write this column, From the Chair. Having joined the KAMG committee in March 2000, I have decided to step down from the committee at the end of my tenure as chairman this March. After 25 years of continuous service to the group, I believe I deserve a well-earned rest. While I will remain as an observer, my focus will now shift to retiring from work and immersing myself in family and travel.

I am confident that the KAMG has a fabulous committee and the structure to carry it well into the future. It was unfortunate that the formation of the CIO [Charitable Incorporated Organisation] was not able to be completed during my watch and remains in the hands of the IAM Roadsmart legal team. However, the existing KAMG team will do a sterling job in organising this change of status and you can all be proud of the effort they have made, not just for our group, but potentially for the benefit of every other IAM Roadsmart Group.

There will be a vote for committee posts and a new chairman at the AGM on the 27th of March, so it is crucial for you as members to attend and have your say. The AGM is the main platform for the committee

members where they can explain what has been happening behind the scenes during the past year and set out our vision for the future.

Members have requested more KAMG organised trips, in addition to our healthy WhatsApp group for ad-hoc ride-outs and our traditional monthly Training and Social Rides, and a couple of additional trips have been introduced this year for members. The highly successful Peterborough Training Weekend has added a further weekend this year, bringing the total to three. There are still plenty of places on these runs available for you to enjoy in March, May and August. And the Vianden-Luxembourg Tour, which has been run almost every year since 2005, will depart again this year for a week on the 1st of June. Currently, we have places available to book through Tracker for all of these trips, so get in quickly.

It has been hard work but a pleasure to serve all of the members in all of my roles. I will continue to be an active member of the group and will always be available to offer assistance to the committee should they need it.

Good luck! – Dave Murphy

TEST PASSES Since the last edition



Graham Hills receiving his Masters (Distinction) qualification from his mentor Colin Underwood



David Chillingworth receiving his Advanced Rider F1RST qualification from his observer Nigel Clibbens



Michael James Doe receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from his observer Matt Barnes



Peter Dungate receiving his Advanced Rider F1RST qualification from Tina Underwood on behalf of his observer Craig Ayres

A GREEN, MEAN, OFF-ROADING MACHINE – PART III !!

Little Zed makes some good progress in Martin Brown's shed, but. . .

Hello my tinkering chums and welcome to the next exciting instalment of the restoration of my KDX200.

Since last time, the engine parts have finally come back from being Cerakoted. They look the nuts – unlike my bank balance. The barrel has also been machined and re-Nikasil-plated prior to coating, and as you can see from the pics it looks at least as good (if not better) than new.



The newly Cerakoted parts "look the nuts."

I have also sourced a new piston, rings, con rod and bearings (not easy), as well as some new seals, which are also quite elusive. This is all good news and has allowed me to get everything together to start the engine rebuild.



The re-Nikasil-plated bore is better than new

A new piston, rings and bearings were sourced

The new con-rod in place on the crankshaft with its bent predecessor for comparison

More good news is that Egg came good with my rear shock. He [Egg] had another old one in his stock so he 'cannibalised' it to get the correct number of shims to install in mine in the right order, and he also managed to source new seals, so my original shock is back to life. Unfortunately, he reassembled it all before I got a chance to paint it. However, I'm not going to de-gas it just to paint the spring. It will have to stay as it is for now. I might try to touch it up a bit, but it is now working and that is the most important thing.

On the not-so-good-news front, it appears that the previous owner had had quite a significant issue with the carb. When I stripped it to clean and service it, I immediately noticed a big *blob of glue* holding the needle into the slide. Oh dear. So out came the heat to melt the glue and see what lay beneath. Grr: somehow the previous owner had managed to snap the needle, and out it came in two bits, but after a bit more cleaning I did find the needle number. OK, lets order a new one. . . or not. Completely unobtainium in the UK. I rang everywhere and asked everyone. No dice. More Grr. So, USA it is then: they're easy to find out there; \$11 to buy and \$25 to ship. . . plus whatever taxes I get lumped with when it arrives. Double Grr. And clearly why the previous owner glued it.



"The previous owner had had a significant issue with the carb. . ." which he had tried to repair with a big blob of glue!

New 'frozen' bearings seated in the mini-oven-heated crankcase

Crankshaft and gear cluster in place on one side of the crankcase

So, to the build. First, I cleaned the engine cases and then cleaned them again. Yes, they *looked* clean but, the bead/sand/medium from the blasting can get stuck in all sorts of nooks and crannies. I put the cases in my ultrasonic cleaner a couple of times and then blew out all the bolt holes and oilways with compressed air. Rinse and repeat. I didn't want any of this stuff ending up inside the engine.

When the cases were clean, I popped them into my newly acquired mini-oven – £20 from the British Heart Foundation shop (it looks like it has never been used) and just the right size for smaller engine cases. Why? I hear you ask. Well, while the cases are heating up to around 100 degrees C, the bearings are in the freezer.

Generally, engine bearings are a very tight (interference) fit. So, heating the case and freezing the bearing means that, due to the expansion of the heated crankcase metal and the contraction of the frozen bearings, the bearings drop right in without too much banging. In this case both of the crankshaft bearings did need a bit of extra persuasion. I had already installed the new seals and applied a dab of grease to ensure there is some lubrication in place before start-up time.

Same thing applies to dropping in the newly rebuilt crankshaft: crankshaft went in the freezer, engine case in the oven. Crankshaft dropped in, no problem. The gear clusters were assembled and dropped in too. These were all in good condition with little sign of wear. The shift drum was next and this went in with a dab of Loctite on each of the retaining screws.

Finally for this side of the engine I needed to instal the shift forks. Unfortunately, I did not follow my own rules when I dismantled them and the forks were not labelled. Luckily, the manual and a couple of YouTube videos came to my rescue, but it turned out that they can only go in one way. These Japs know what they are doing.

With the cases now ready for assembly I had a bit of a wait for CSMNL [A Dutch company specialising in spare parts for Japanese bikes.Ed.] to send me some new bolts. I was going to use the original ones but on inspection many were rounded off and not really suitable to go back on. I have kept some of the better ones as you never know when they might come in useful. Cheaper bolts are available from eBay, but these are invariably Allen head bolts that on an off-road bike just get filled with mud. Once the bolts arrived, I applied a nice layer of gasket sealer (there's no actual gasket on this side) and installed the cover with its nice shiny new bolts.

I was then able to flip the engine over to finish off the clutch side. I soaked the clutch plates in oil overnight

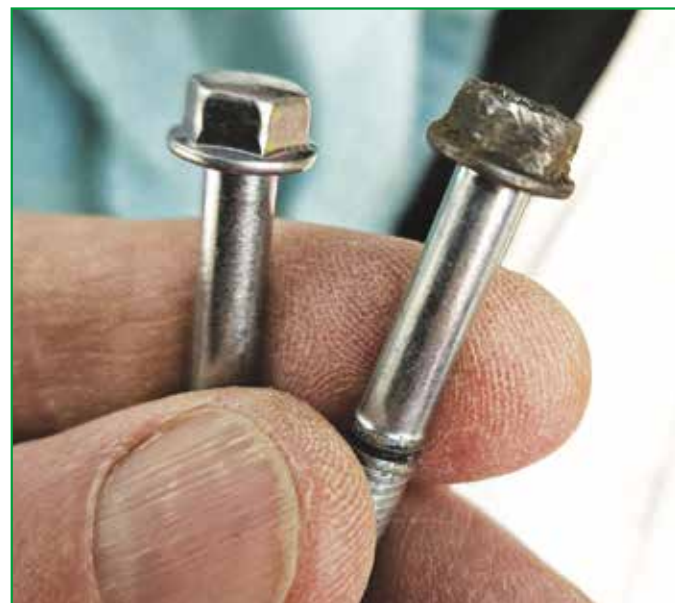


Clutch plates soaking in oil overnight



Clutch basket fully loaded with oily plates

and then reassembled the clutch as per the manual. Everything went back together nicely and I then moved on to the installation of the kick start, the idler gear and the main drive sprocket. Again, all good. Lastly, I installed the clutch cover with a new gasket and nipped it down with the rest of the shiny new bolts.



Scruffy bolt and its shiny replacement from Holland.

It was about then that I realised that I still needed to install two new seals for the drive shaft and the gear change. I know I have ordered them and I know they have been delivered. Where the hell are they? My shed, of course, looks like there has been the scene of an explosion. Only one thing for it: major tidy up, checking every packet and every nook and cranny for the missing seals. When will I ever learn?

I found them. . . some time later. . . installed them and, after annealing the copper gasket for the cylinder head, I finished getting the engine all buttoned up to go back in the frame. (What is 'annealing'? Annealing is the process of softening the copper gasket. This is



"The piston was just poking up a smidge too far."

necessary because, over time, copper hardens and becomes less malleable, but you want the gasket to be soft and malleable so that it seals any pesky gaps. Whether you are re-using the old gasket – quite acceptable in this case – or using a new one, you anneal it by simply heating it up to red heat – don't melt it – and dropping it in to some cold water. As if by magic the copper then becomes soft and pliable again, ready to take up any small imperfections in the mating surfaces and make a perfect seal.)

Finding the missing seals was the good news. But after the good news, yes, you guessed it, there was the bad news: I thought I'd just attach the kickstart and make sure the engine still turned over, but clonk, the engine jammed when I did that; no movement at all? Oh dear. I removed the cylinder head and the engine turned over fine, yet the piston was just poking its head up a smidge too far. So, barrel off, measure piston and compare it to the old one; it looked fine. Double oh dear. It must be the con rod or, worse, someone has been tinkering with the barrel or head or both.

I fished out the box that had contained the new con rod from my bin to see if there was any information on it: oh dear, yet again; my bike is a 1983 model but the box label says 1986-2006. Looks like it could be the wrong size. I will check with the suppliers. If it is wrong, then the whole engine needs to come apart again, and even if it's right there is still some major work to do. At any rate the engine will not be back in the frame very soon. So, the build is stalled until this is sorted.

There is a **stop press** addendum though – a friend was going to America to visit another friend, so, I got my friend who lives there to order me a new carb needle so my other friend could bring it home for me. Bingo. No postage costs. Happy New Year. *[What it is to have international friends. And fingers crossed that the piston is the right size. We look forward to Part IV. Ed.]*

WHAT'S THE ETA OF ETA

Geoff Curtis never found out



The Grossglockner pass, Austria. The mountain is 12000ft high, the road pass is at 8000ft.

After dealing with its misfiring problem ['Kangaroo Kwaka' November *Riders*.] and with a nearly new front tyre and a completely new rear, plus a new chain and new sprockets, my bike was fully prepared for another tour.

Eventually northern France and Belgium were behind us – 'us' being me and a couple of touring friends – with a yawn from me and nothing of interest to report. Northern France is far too flat for my liking. I perked up on reaching the Ardennes, and then on entering Luxembourg the routes became more interesting still. Border-hopping between France and Germany led on to Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Austria. Then, there I was back in my favourite playground, the Alps. And for the second time in 2024! The bike's new ECU software was behaving properly ready to provide smooth power for cool morning starts high up on the passes, and so another test was passed, which put a big smile on my face.

Heading east and taking in plenty of high passes – some famous, such as the 8000ft Grossglockner (€33 for the pleasure of riding it), and others not so well known – we reached Slovenia for another one-night stop. Slovenia was a new country for me, so it needed another sticker

to go in the space reserved on my screen. I need a bigger screen. More high passes came the next day, with the weather remaining mostly favourable, even becoming rather too warm as we headed south into Italy. Good progress was maintained until . . . as I was approaching a tight, right hand, downhill hairpin, and having shed most of my speed with firm use of the front brake, I eased off the brake at about 15mph while gently releasing the clutch for first gear to hold me on the steep descent. As the engine took over the load a CLUNK, CLATTER, CLATTER assailed my ears from the back end and I was coasting round the bend – under control, but using the rear brake alone. Then when I opened the throttle for a little acceleration there was only a whir of revs and no drive. Oh, deary me! (Or words to that effect.) Something serious has happened that needs investigation.

We were approaching a small town and the forecourt of a disused hotel just down from the hairpin provided a safe refuge. Having stopped, a quick look round and down confirmed that all was not well: my chain was hanging limply on the Tarmac, so I quickly alighted for a better look. Well, I'm no expert but generally there is a spikey thing at the end of the drive train on to which the chain



The roadside repair...

usually fits rather snugly, but it wasn't there: the rear wheel sprocket had vanished! I must point out that I don't regularly perform wheelies or try to pull my arms out of their sockets with the supercharged acceleration; I use my bike considerably, IAM fashion, usually achieving well over 25k miles from a chain and sprocket set, and I've never had anything like this happen before on any bike. At that point I thought the tour was over for me.

Having already been out of contact in remote locations many times on this trip, I was relieved to see a strong signal when I turned on my mobile (yes, even this neo-Luddite carries one) and called my preferred breakdown service, ETA Insurance, which has previously repatriated me from Luxembourg. On this occasion I was not happy with them and I have since registered my complaint and disapproval of the call handling because the process was repetitive and tedious in the extreme. I'm sure there was little experience in their nice comfy office, however I was by the roadside where it was only slightly too warm in the shade, but in other circumstances it could have been unbearably hot, or cold, or wet. It took many repeats of information before the young man found my location on his map. And having given my policy number and the bike's registration as identification, I didn't see the need to state my home address when it is on their system. Furthermore, I didn't see the need to give it each time I called back for an update, or even when they called me. There was clearly no sharing of information between the various parties involved – the UK office, European office, local agent etc. I also didn't see the need to send me a text demanding to know when I departed on this tour. What I really needed to hear, as a one hour's wait turned into two, was whether a breakdown vehicle was available and on its way, so that I could be taken to that night's accommodation and deal with matters better in the morning, as I requested. What I didn't need to hear was a monologue telling me all about my entitlements under the policy, including a hire car, blah blah blah. Eventually they understood that continuing in a car is not the idea of a motorcycle tour; I needed a repair, urgently.

You may be wondering where my friends were while all this was going on. Well, after a few miles they had

noticed an absence in their mirrors and came back to look for me, and as well as sympathy, they provided much needed water; I had drunk all that I was carrying. What's more, while I was busy losing patience with my breakdown service, one of my friends – the piloting one, not the pillion one – had an interesting thought: where did the sprocket come off? I said that it was at the last bend or perhaps the one before that, and off he went, walking up the hill in the blazing sunshine. One long phone call later he returned with not only a big grin on his face but also, and held aloft like a winner's trophy, the errant sprocket. By the sound when it came off, I thought it must have shattered but it was in good condition with no missing teeth. He reported no sign of any bolts but these could have sheared and fallen off one by one over many miles. Talk about a convenient place to break down; there was a garage a mere fifty yards away and it was open. Armed with the sprocket, he walked off again in search of bolts and some more tools. Unfortunately, the garage owner had no bolts of the right size, but he knew someone who supplied fixings to all the motor trade in the area. And so, back on his bike, my friend went off across town to the address provided.

Half an hour (and more phone calls) later he was back with some really tough, chunky looking bolts, with washers and nuts to suit. Unlike me, he is very experienced in practical matters and is by trade a highly skilled motor mechanic. That was useful and, before I could object, with his already dirty hands now in possession of the necessary parts, he proceeded to re-attach the sprocket. There was some concern that the chain might have also slipped off the front sprocket, or that the hub position might need adjusting to allow the chain back on, but with a little persuasion with a screwdriver the holes lined up and the first bolt was through. Then it was just a case of adding the other four and ensuring the sprocket was held securely and nothing snagged against the over-long bolts that were protruding. The chain looked good and it was likely still on the front sprocket so a short test ride commenced. Luggage was replaced and a tentative start made downhill to the café where my friends waited. All seemed well, so we



... some really tough, chunky looking bolts

decided to press on and go a little further towards our destination that day, rather than having an early dinner first.

I was eager just to get the day over with. At a petrol stop fifteen miles on I decided that as the bolts were still tight and holding, they would likely last a lot longer, so I cancelled the breakdown vehicle, while leaving the claim on the policy open in case further assistance was required later. This turned out not to be the case and my confidence in the bike staying in one piece returned as I continued to enjoy going up and down the mountain passes, albeit with no sparkle, but instead with a large degree of tippy-toeing around hairpins and lightening the load on the final drive as much as possible. The tour must go on. Border crossings came and went and at the end of each day I thought: that's another day's riding closer to home and easier for recovery. A little negative perhaps, but understandable. The 'temporary' repair was becoming 'permanent'.

One event lightened my mood considerably: we were still in the mountains and the unpredictable weather was changing to light rain after a sunny start to the day, when we came upon about fifteen bikes, mostly cruisers of the H.D. brand, parked at a bus stop. I thought the riders must have stopped to don waterproofs yet I did not see anyone immediately. Looking around to wave as we passed, I laughed aloud to see all of them packed like sardines in the tiny bus shelter waiting for the rain to stop, I assumed. The irony was that no more than one mile further on, the rain stopped and the road was dry. Sometimes it's just better to plough on.

During a rest day playing with steam trains, I checked over the bolts and sprocket and thought I would reposition the Scottolier dispenser. I discovered that this and the lower chainguard were unfortunate casualties of the long bolts when riding. Never mind, that was a small problem that could wait until I reached home, so I just tucked the pipe out of the way. In the meantime, manual lubrication was carried out periodically.



Rest day play time on the Furka cogwheel steam railway...



... which rises to 6500ft

Home was reached thankfully without further drama, and new OEM nuts and bolts have now been fitted at great expense – nearly £140 just for five bolts and Nylock nuts – outrageous. I imagine they are high tensile steel, unlike the Frankenstein type temporary ones that cost just a few euros. Never mind; we pay for our fun and all's well that ends well. "It's not a holiday, it's an adventure," as some say.



... and the non-protruding, real McCoy, £140 super bolts.



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CHRISTMAS AT SCOTTS PROJECT TRUST



Paul Jessop

Remember storm Darragh? By the time you read this much water will have flowed under the bridge since then, literally much water in many areas. That particular storm arrived on the weekend of our scheduled Christmas charity ride to the Scotts Project Trust in Tonbridge in early December. The result was that the ride had to be cancelled and so rather than the planned dozen or more bikes there were actually four cars with one 'pillion'. Never mind, we were welcomed as warmly as ever by the staff and service users at Scotts and were well catered for with plenty of cake and hot drinks. We were also joined by two members of the local constabulary, who proved to be quite a hit when some of the Scotts residents tried out the blue lights on the police car.

Scotts are currently planning a kitchen refurbishment, and also the conversion of an upstairs bathroom to a wet room to allow wheelchair access. To help with this, £769 from KAMG – which was half of the proceeds of

the KAMG Christmas dinner auction and raffle – plus an estimated £250 of private gifts made on the day of our visit, means that around £1000 was donated to Scotts, which will make a big contribution to the refurbishment costs. Scotts have expressed their enormous gratitude both for our donations and for our continuing visits, which are always very much enjoyed by all at the Trust. My own thanks also go to Chris, Mark, Nigel and Lynn for taking the trouble to brave the elements on the day.

We hope to be able to arrange another visit to Scotts at Easter (TBC) when we also hope that the weather will be a little kinder so that we shall be able to enjoy our customary ride to the venue rather than a drive. Keep an eye on Tracker for details.

For more details of the Scotts Project Trust go to: <https://scottspj.org.uk>



JUST TWIST THE THROTTLE IN ANY GEAR AND OFF IT GOES!!

Roger Lancaster hangs on to his hat . . . and one ear

Back in October, I had a niggling thought about my then current bike, a Yamaha FJR 1300; it was heavy to push around and I was no longer confident in my total ability to keep the machine under full control when stopping at junctions (especially when turning left – dodgy left knee) or manoeuvring to park it. It was a heavy bike.

Once rolling it was beautiful to ride. Its power was exhilarating, especially when you hit the power band at about four and a half thousand revs. That was a real 'ang on to yer 'at moment. So, what to do? I remember Simon Collis, owner of Sondel Yamaha, and my 'associate' a year or so ago, saying to me how he absolutely loved the Yamaha MT-10 SP that he had ridden at a dealer track day in 2023. In fact, I remember him telling me he would treat himself to one whenever he retired from the business. Now that's a pretty good recommendation. Add that to my previous experience of owning a first-generation MT-10 back in 2016, and also recently riding an MT-10 as a courtesy bike from A2 Motorcycles, Gravesend, and you can imagine the formation of a plan in my simple mind. Well, maybe not, as it is my mind we're talking about.

I scoured the internet for dealers selling the model that I wanted. The bike that kept ping-ponging up on my watch list was a '23 SP with under two thousand miles on the clock; it was in the showroom of Alpha Motorcycles, a dealership in Leigh, Essex. Test riding wasn't a goer because I was recovering from an ear operation and couldn't get a lid on. I was going to have to rely on remembering the loan bike ride and trusting the dealer that all would be well with my impending purchase. Going back to the loan bike experience – I was impressed with its improved suspension compared to the one I previously owned, a positive that helped with my decision making.

Once I'd put down a deposit on the MT, I had to wait for a couple of weeks before I could get a crash helmet on to go and collect it. I found a balaclava in the garage and used it to keep my outer ear in place as I pulled on my helmet – blimey, it made me wince, but who cares, I was off to collect my new bike.

It was raining; that drizzly muck that makes you continuously wipe your visor. Oh well, just have to take it easy. During the following week I managed to get out on it and discover how much of a smile it put on my face; and smiling didn't hurt my ear. This bike didn't seem to have a power band like the FJ; you just twist the throttle in any gear (perhaps not sixth), and off it goes. Not only exhilarating but blindingly quick, it made a great noise, and smile, I did. It put new meaning into 'hanging on to yer hat'. Apart from the fact I have to oil a chain, get filthy dirty when I ride on wet roads and can get naff-all under the seat, it's absolutely right for me; and it's comparatively light to handle and push around. Eureka.

Since owning the MT, I've been back to A2 Motorcycles to get daylight running lights added to the indicators. I had these on my previous MT and found the reaction to them

from other road users with regard to my being seen was very positive, probably better than any hi-vis jacket (except a pink one, maybe). The light configuration at the front of my bike is now triangular. Apparently this is good for conspicuousness.

While I was waiting for the few bits to be added to my bike, I had a brief ride on a Yamaha MT-09 Y-AMT, that's the one with the auto gearbox. This was a first for me and I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed riding it, despite a clunky change into first gear when slowing down to a stop, and the poor road surfaces close to the dealership that caused the gearbox to jump around when the engine was cold. I can't imagine owning one as an only bike, but I would certainly consider buying one as a second bike.

The final point and the real reason for this article is to say that I found every person at every dealership I contacted during the whole process, to be very pleasant and obliging – the world of motorcycle sales and support still has a good number of enthusiastic and honest people who help us fulfil our passion for motorcycling. My thanks go to Alpha Motorcycles and A2 Motorcycles for their support.



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WHY RIDE A MOTORBIKE ONLY WE KNOW...

Have you ever tried to explain to a non-believer why you ride a motorbike? It's not easy. Non-riders simply don't get it, and we, the gifted and enlightened ones, are completely incapable of explaining it to them. Why is that? To us the reasons for riding a motorbike are many and obvious; why then, are they not obvious to lesser beings; why can't the man on the Clapham omnibus, the man in the street or Joe Schmoe, see what, to us, is so blindingly obvious?

For me the whole motorbike thing started in a split second when I was about ten years old in the early 1950s and I was ill in bed with one of the numerous juvenile poxes that we all happily caught and shrugged off in those days. The kind man from the paper shop in the village had given my mother a pile of old copies of *The Motor Cycle* for me to read. I was hooked instantly and irrevocably. How could anyone with a brain cell look at these machines and not want to be riding one? What needed explaining or justifying? Nothing. It was all inarguably obvious. In those magic pages there were real motorbikes with big engines; there were pictures of racing and of a particularly bizarre race called the TT; there were reports of scrambles and trials, and there were pictures of people going on holiday in Europe on motorbikes. Remember, this was at a time when the few people that I knew who were lucky enough to go on holiday anywhere, went on a day trip to Margate, they didn't go swanning round Europe on motorbikes! In those old magazines, a whole world of proper motorbikes opened up before my eyes. There was also, I admit, some less glamorous stuff in the magazines, such as road tests of scooters, and reviews of double-adult sidecars, but I was

able to look past such dismal reminders of normality and stare instead at Manx Nortons and 7R AJSs confident that one day I would ride them. (Sadly, that bit hasn't happened yet, and time's running out.)

When I was a boy, the motorcycle world was very different from today: motorbikes were mostly perceived, by the aforementioned 'man in the street', simply as cheap transport for people who couldn't afford cars. To most people, motorbikes were not things that any sensible 'grown-up' would aspire to own *just for fun*. They were cheap wheels. However, although motorbikes were cheaper than cars, they were still a means of personal transport that only a minority could afford to own. And it was a *tiny* minority too. It seems difficult today to imagine a time when hardly anyone – in fact, virtually no one at all – had his or her own private means of powered transport, be it a motorbike or a car, yet that was the case in the early 1950s. Think about this: in 1950 there were only three million registered cars on the road – today there are 33 million. In 1950 there were just over three quarters of a million two-wheelers – today there are 1.3million. So, in 1950, there were not many 'private' vehicles of any kind on the road, yet one in four of them was a motorbike... of sorts. There were, of course, lots of farty little 50cc autocycles and Villiers-powered 98cc pop-pops that looked vaguely like a motorbike but which certainly didn't qualify as proper motorbikes in the eyes of a schoolboy. There were also umpteen companies making sidecars; yes, there were lots of companies actually making a good living from building that bizarre engineering contradiction that was called, with blinding accuracy, a *sidecar*. (The Jaguar car company



started life as Swallow Sidecars in the 1930s.)

But in this sea of the ordinary, the hideously dull, the boringly practical and the definitively mundane, there also swam some extravagant, exciting and mighty fish. Sleek ferocious fish such as the awesome Vincent. Ah, the mysterious and, by then, the already legendary black, 1000cc Vincents. Just imagine: *one thousand cubic centimetres* of raw shove at a time when 500cc was considered a lot. Imagine, too, owning such a bike and being able to ride it at well over 100mph on the road in 1950. In those days everyone standing at their dismal bus stops thought that 50mph was breathtakingly fast. And, what's more, imagine being able to come safely to a halt after your 100mph ride, because the Vincent had that very unusual feature of the 1950s – brakes that actually braked.

Very occasionally, on extra special days, as I stood at my country bus stop on the (unrestricted) A226 at Higham waiting for the bus to school in Gravesend, a chap on a Vincent Black Shadow would *lope* past at great speed on the deserted road – I can only say 'lope' because it seemed so easy and utterly effortless, it was like nothing else I had heard or seen. I could almost count the lazy, 'occasional' firing strokes. Try explaining that to a non-believer.

Brands Hatch was about 15 hilly bicycle miles away from where I lived, and let me tell you that 15 miles on a heavy bicycle with only four inadequate Sturmey Archer hub gears (but with home-built leading link front suspension), was a bloody long way to pedal, yet for two years in the mid-fifties, winter and summer, we – that is my mate (he who bought *Motor Cycling* to complement my *Motor Cycle*) and I – we did not miss a single meeting. There were several race meetings on the track in the summer, but there were also occasionally scrambles in the Brands woods, and in the winter, there were sometimes trials. I wouldn't have crossed the road to see a car do anything, but pedalling a 30mile round trip to see motorbikes several times a year, was a no-brainer. Motorbikes can do that to people... and it lasts all their lives.

Today, when someone finds out that I ride a motorbike, their response follows a pattern: first, they say "Is it a Harley?" because, of course, it's the only name they know, and when I say that it isn't, they then say "Ooh, I couldn't do that, isn't it dangerous?" And when I say that it isn't and that I quite often ride several miles without falling off, they say "I know but it's the other silly people on the road that I'd worry about." I tell them that I worry about the other silly people on the road too, but that's not the point; and then we get the "but isn't it cold and wet?" and, of course, I have to admit that it sometimes is cold and wet and uncomfortable, but under my breath I mutter "Can't you see, you bone-headed moron, that life does not begin and end with being warm and dry in a bloody Range Rover or aspiring to own one of the stupid things?" But sadly, they can't see what to us is so crystal clear – that going round a corner on motorbike is exciting precisely because riding every corner on a motorbike is a thrill and has an element of danger, and requires of the rider a degree of skill and sensitivity. That's what makes it all worthwhile. It sounds sort of weedy to say it's good fun, but that's exactly what it is. And it's stark-staringly obvious when you just look at a motorbike that it

wasn't designed to be warm and safe and 'neutral'. Jeez! It's only got two wheels for a start. How mad is that? It screams "ride me and find out," and we all have.

If we are honest, going round a corner in a car, in any weather, at virtually any speed, is safe and easy and, frankly, requires almost nothing from the driver, whereas going round every single corner on a motorbike always requires everything from the rider. When did you last feel any satisfaction at driving round just any old corner while going to the shops in your car? You can't remember because it hasn't happened... ever. But, on a motorbike the feeling of having got a corner just 'right' or, alternatively the damning knowledge that you got it wrong, is present at every corner. Every single corner is a test. Driving your car simply doesn't require that input. Obviously, it's better if you are actively involved when you drive, but you get away with it all the time when your mind is far away, don't you? Yes, you do; you know you do. That's not the case on a motorbike. And being wet or cold on a motorbike is nothing more than a bit of an inconvenience and has nothing to do with it. In fact, being on a motorbike in the hissing rain when you are properly dressed is all part of an experience that Arthur Rover-Range will never know. Ask yourself today, right now, would you give up riding because it is sometimes cold and wet? Of course not.

So, how do you explain to the non-believers what it's like to ride a motorbike? The answer is, don't even try, because they will either have looked at a motorbike and known in an epiphanous split second all that there is to know, or they won't. Our lame words ain't gonna change anything.

"There are those who know and those who don't know. And for every ten thousand who don't know there's only one who knows. That's the miracle of all time – the fact that these millions know so much but don't know this." Carson McCullers

NF



1948 Black Shadow in the Sammy Miller museum

RIDER AID, NOT FIRST AID

In which Dave Willson skids to a halt. . . or perhaps not

A conversation I had with an ex-colleague of mine got me thinking, something I admit I usually try to avoid. You see we're both crusty old advanced police car drivers who did our training in the 1990s. Back then we trained on a skid pan, and there were two skid pans at the driving school at the police training college at Hendon – now a housing estate. A skid pan was a large circular area that was sprayed with oil and water, and which you drove around in a car that had bald tyres pumped up to about 100psi. You went round, and round, and round being taught how to control oversteer in a rear-wheel-drive car. And you went round, and round, and round being taught how to correct understeer in a front-wheel-drive car. You were taught cadence braking, amongst other techniques, for driving on a 'loose' surface, and this all led to you pursuing an instructor in another car and trying to keep up with him while not doing any 360° spins. This was followed by a day on a disused runway at Radlett airfield in Hertfordshire, practicing all the aforementioned techniques at speed.

Well, as mentioned, the skid pans now form part of a housing estate, and it's been a long time since a police officer has run over a dopey sheep that's wandered on to the runway at Radlett, which is why this discussion got me and my colleague asking why aren't these skills taught anymore? It's not because the young men and women don't have the ability; it's because with the invention of ABS and traction control you don't need these skills any more. You can be as heavy footed as you like, in fact you could happily drive around all day with your divers' boots on and the in-car technology will sort out any poor driving by the 'driver' or, rather, the steering wheel attendant. There used to be a section in *Roadcraft* entitled 'Causes of a Skid', and it included things like coarse steering, harsh acceleration, sudden braking, and you had to know this stuff to pass the written exam. I don't even know

if it's in *Roadcraft* anymore, because who cares? The car will sort all that out for you.

And our conversation led on to another conversation: do all the rider aids that are now available on bikes mean that motorcyclists are losing the skills they once had, and indeed are young riders even learning those skills in the first place?

I'll give you an example – I'm hooning along on my Yamaha MT07 in sixth gear at 70 mph and I'm going to turn left into a junction that requires second gear. Now forgetting all that IPSGA malarkey, here I'm just talking about the mechanics of operating the machine. As I approach the junction I need to close the throttle, pull the clutch in, block change down to second, and I need to blip the throttle to match the engine revs to the road speed before gently letting the clutch out while feeding in some throttle, and there'd probably be some braking involved as well. Now take a young rider on his Ducati Panigale Dolce and Gabbana Frappuccino, Quattro Super Allegro, he doesn't have to pull the clutch in as his Carlos Fandango slipper clutch will sort out all that nonsense for him. All he has to do is close the throttle, and with his diving boots just smash it down through four gears. Forget all that matching engine revs to road speed, his auto blippers will sort all that for him. The only skills required in that situation is the ability to close the throttle and open the throttle.

I'll give you another example – I'm still on my MT07 and without doing a full review of it, it's a bike noted

for having lots of torque, for being lightweight and having a particularly light front end, and as such it'll pull a wheelie if you just look at it wrong. Mick Neeves who is MCN's chief road tester reviewed it when it was launched back in 2013 and said that all the journalists set off down the road and there was a massive wheelie fest before anyone got down to some serious road testing.

So there I am riding my MT07 and I find myself in pole position at the traffic light Grand Prix. Now obviously I'M NOT CONDONING RACING ON THE PUBLIC HIGHWAY, but if I was seeking a really quick getaway it would require skills that I don't have; namely, feeding in as much acceleration as possible whilst letting out the clutch allowing the front wheel to head for the clouds, but not so much that I'd end up sat on my arse. However, there's no such problem for our youngsters: they engage anti-wheelie, engage launch control, open the throttle as far as it will go and when the lights change just dump the clutch and the bike, in conjunction with the anti-wheelie will decide the optimum rpm.

Don't get me wrong, some rider aids are good tools. I'm not saying ABS is a bad thing. I'm sure many riders, whose standard of riding has been less than excellent, have found themselves braking firmly when they haven't been travelling upright, in a straight line, on a good surface, and the ABS, although giving them a sphincter tightening moment, has saved them from a trip to A and E. Interesting thing about ABS, or not, you decide. I was a traffic patrol



officer in the Met Police for 12 years and attended far too many fatal and life-threatening collisions involving motorcyclists and in a large percentage of those collisions the tyre marks on the road revealed that the rider hadn't braked hard enough to activate the ABS. If the rider had just braked harder the collision may not have been avoided but certainly the impact speed would have been less. For some reason motorcyclists don't like to brake hard, something that I believe is addressed on a Machine Control Day.

Traction control is not a bad safety device either, but is it reducing the skill level of riders? I'll give you another example: the M25 junction with the A20, that I'm sure we all know. Well, I regularly go around it and head off Kentbound down Farningham hill towards Brands Hatch, and the exit

off the roundabout always seems to be extra slippery, especially in the wet. I don't know why, maybe a build-up of diesel, but as I exit the bend I have to gingerly feed the power in and I seem instinctively to know when the back tyre is about to say "bollocks to this" and let go, and I'm not saying that I'm a motorcycling god (I am), but it's a skill that I, like many of you, have built up over 40 or more years of riding. If you've always had traction control then it's a skill you won't ever develop, in fact you may not even be aware that your tyre is fighting for grip as your traction control sorts everything out for you.

I think as technology evolves even more in the future, the amount of input required from the rider actually to ride the bike will become even less. We already have adaptive cruise control so that you don't even have to

look where you're going; automatic gearboxes are only going to become more common, and I was reading the other day that one company – using camera and laser technology – is developing a tool that will be able to see the road surface you are approaching and will automatically change your suspension settings accordingly.

It may eventually be that a motorcycle will become like the Typhoon fighter jet. The computer on that aeroplane apparently makes an average of 102 adjustments a second to compensate for what the pilot is doing, and apparently if you turned the computer off the aeroplane would crash in spite of the pilot's best efforts.

Anyway, happy motorcycling, and remember the rubber bits stay at the bottom.



Ride to the East

May 3rd to 5th
(Bank Holiday)

This is a gentle 3 day tour staying in the same hotel for both nights. This is a great new ride around Norfolk and Suffolk. Including a day around the coast.
Room cost £280/£310.
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Cost for rooms £260/£280
15 spaces available.
Day 1-180 miles, Day 2-138 miles, Day 3-180 miles

Wales

June 2nd to 6th
Mid week 5 Day Tour

A medium level tour around the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia. 2 nights in each hotel, total of 1000 miles. Leaving from Paddock Wood and returning via the M25 through Essex. The scenery and stops are great.
10 Space available, £660

Yorkshire Dales and Moors

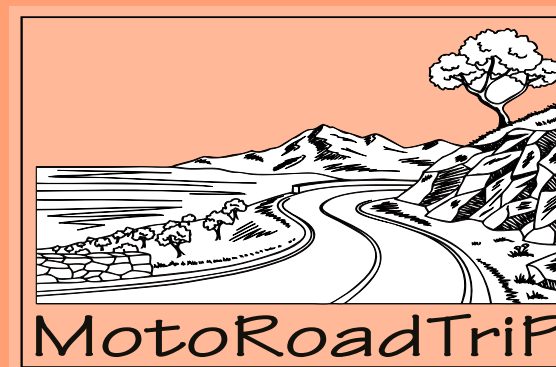
June 20th to 23rd
4 Day tour

A great ride up to Yorkshire, in the middle of the country. A Day around the Dales and a day around the Moors.
15 Spaces available.
Single occupancy £450

Southern Scotland

July 19th to 26th
8 Day Tour

A medium level tour around the Southern Scotland and Northern England. If you have never been to Southern



Scotland its an absolutely great 1700-mile tour of which only 200 miles on the motorway. There is an option to go into Beamish Living Museum, great sweeping roads, empty most of the time, great cafés, wonderful views, what is not to like.
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Single £— Double £— includes access to Beamish Museum.
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(Bank Holiday)

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24 space available.
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A CIRCULAR ARGUMENT



A good example of a big modern roundabout showing the angle of the feeder roads relative to the circle.

There was a time when we Brits invented all sorts of good stuff that other people copied, although some of the copyists – notably the French and the Americans in the example I'm going to talk about – were a bit slow on the uptake, as you'll see. But we are not clever all the time, because we, having thought of the clever stuff, often (in fact, usually) go on to screw it up or give it away. We're like that: quick and stupid at the same time. The quick folk are the commercial and clever ones, while the stupid ones are the civil servants and the politicians; and it was some of the clever folk at our Road Research Laboratory back in the 1960s that invented the 'traffic roundabout', and a jolly good idea it was, and still is.

I know it seems unlikely that the roundabout was 'invented' as recently as the sixties, but it's true. Of course there were 'roundabouts' well before that – Piccadilly Circus, for example – but that particular 'roundabout' sort of happened incidentally for street planning reasons and for providing somewhere to put a statue, rather than specifically for speeding up traffic. Ditto Trafalgar Square. If you just ask traffic to meander willy nilly round a big showy stone you finish up with something like Trafalgar Square or that brilliant French chaos at the Arc de Triomphe, which is always very exciting to drive or ride round, and spectacular to look

at, but which is not in any sense a modern roundabout.

Oddly enough, and given that Americans haven't taken to the modern roundabout, it was there that you would have found many of the very early ones, which they actually called 'circles' rather than roundabouts. These 'circles', like The Arc de Triomphe, usually came into existence only incidentally and for non-traffic, town planning reasons rather than specifically for traffic flow reasons. We had some circles here too and indeed our first one was built in Letchworth Garden City as long ago as 1909, but it was definitely not a recognisable modern roundabout.

Perhaps the principal and most obvious difference between the old fashioned 'circles' and a modern roundabout is the angle at which the roads feed into the round bit in the middle. On an old fashioned 'circle' the feeder roads crudely seem to just bump into the circle itself at a robust 90° angle like the spokes of a cart wheel joining the hub, whereas the feeder arms on a good modern roundabout are a bit like miniature versions of motorway feeder lanes in that they are angled slightly to merge more subtly with the central round bit, and it is that merging thing that is the essence of the Road Research Laboratory's idea for the modern roundabout and which is designed to get traffic into and out of the roundabout quickly.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until 1966 that this excellent layout was 'officially' adopted for all of our roundabouts.

The idea of a roundabout is – and although it seems obvious it does need re-stating, because the local councils have forgotten it – is to ease traffic flow and to allow traffic on conflicting paths to cross each other's path safely and speedily and, most importantly, *continuously*, if possible. Simple crossroads are the alternative to a roundabout, and crossroads are inherently dangerous because, as the name implies, the roads cross each other. At a cross-road junction, one road will often be deemed to be the major road and the traffic on this major road will not expect to stop, leaving the onus on the driver/rider on the secondary road to judge when it is safe to pull out. Result, SMIDSY collisions. To prevent accidents the busier crossroads are controlled by traffic lights. And there's your problem straightaway, because one of the lights is red and its unequivocal job is to stop traffic, and stopping is the very opposite of what we want. Traffic lights, having stopped the traffic, then release the pent-up queue in batches, when what we want is for all traffic to be *moving* all the time. Good roundabouts are specifically designed to help traffic move all the time. Bingo.

You would think wouldn't you, that such were the manifest advantages of a good roundabout that

the world would have installed them everywhere long ago, but the world hasn't. The highly motorised Americans have got hardly any roundabouts and they don't like them. Instead, America is full of crossroads and traffic lights. Worse, it has zillions of minor crossroads where there are no lights and where no road has obvious 'major' status. At these junctions nobody knows when to go or when to wait and it's where, consequently, they crash a lot. In some American towns roundabouts are beginning to be installed and where that has happened there are some interesting accident statistics. The US Department of Transportation says (presumably based on all changed crossings) that where crossroads without traffic lights have been changed into roundabouts there has been an 82% reduction in fatal and injury crashes and that where traffic-light-controlled crossroads have been changed to roundabouts there has been a 78% reduction in fatal and injury crashes. Those are big reductions. In the few American towns where roundabouts are being installed people like them, but most Americans find them confusing and

difficult to use, and they don't like them. There are only 9000 roundabouts in all the vastness of America while tiny GB has about 25,000 and the French have 30,000 or so. The French, of course, had to do roundabouts in their own particular Gallic way. In France – it could only happen there – they decided that roundabouts were a super idea but that the vehicles entering the roundabout should have priority over the vehicles already on the roundabout. That insanity was because of their need to comply with that other French traffic madness *Priorité à Droite* (Priority to the Right), and it wasn't until 1983 that they joined the rest of us in requiring the entering traffic to give way to the traffic already on the roundabout. Before that, driving in France had its amusing moments (I speak from experience.). However, still be careful today because small *Priorité à Droite* roundabouts can still be found in some parts of rural France. So, we Brits invent the things and eventually the rest of the world adopts them and joins us in being jolly sensible. Ah, you think, game set and match. Job done. But no,

no, sadly not. Now we come to Act III, the bit where we screw it up. The bit where some bright spark in some council office decides it would be a super idea to control the entry to roundabouts with traffic lights, and so now we are beginning to install the very device that clogs traffic on the very clever device that we built specifically to free traffic by making traffic lights unnecessary. As part of a recent road 'improvement' scheme in Cambridge 'they' (guess who) installed 36 traffic lights on one single simple four approach roundabout. **36** new traffic lights where actually there need be none at all. Some spokesbloke at The Greater Cambridge Partnership, which runs the city's roads, said that the traffic lights around the junction were part of a wider scheme aimed at keeping cyclists safe from cars. The French might be quirky and the Americans might be backward, but we are just plain daft. Unfortunately, installing traffic lights is not the end of the meddling with the excellent roundabout concept. Now that we all have to worship at the altar of The Saviour of the Blessed Cyclist, it has been decided that roundabouts are not for easing the flow of traffic at all; free-flowing traffic has nothing to do with it and is in any case a bad thing. It has been officially decided that roundabouts are jolly dangerous things whose sole purpose is to harm pedestrians and cyclists, and they must, therefore, be tamed. And the way to tame them is to stop them doing what they were designed to do. Councillors have scratched their heads very hard and have even thought about stuff, and under the pretence of climate control and getting the population into a sleek and healthy condition, it has been decided that *Thou Shalt Ride a Bicycle* and henceforth all roundabouts shall be thy playground. Which means, in turn, that we cannot have vehicles rushing round roundabouts scattering cyclists to the four winds. Vehicles must be stopped. And we shall do that not only by installing 36 traffic lights all over the place, but if that's not enough we shall also introduce our ultimate weapon the glorious Dutch-style roundabout. Hallelujah, Praise the Lord.

A Dutch roundabout, in case you are wondering, is a very jolly affair where the feeder roads have reverted to being crude and clumsy 90° spokes, designed deliberately to slow everyone down as they enter the roundabout, rather than the slightly angled merging spokes of a modern roundabout. And, by the way, in a Dutch roundabout bicycles have priority over everything else. Naturally, in the fairytale videos that you can see on *YouTube* they work very well: the sun shines, there's only one car every half-hour, and the entire population of Holland pedals happily on its way to do whatever Dutch people do if they ever get off their bloody bikes. Imagine though, the same sort of roundabout on a black winter's night somewhere in a large city in England. The rain is absolutely hissing down; it is rush-hour; the roundabout is very busy with every approach road full to bursting point, and you are driving an enormous artic. You are new to the area; you are not sure where you are going and your eyes are peeled for direction signs. If you're lucky most of the cyclists will have lights,



A Dutch style roundabout. It is a very small roundabout and the vehicular traffic is very light, yet it took the lorry 1 minute 37 seconds to enter the roundabout and leave. Think what would happen if every car at every roundabout took, say, one minute to enter the roundabout.

but not all will; perhaps some will have high-vis clothing too, but none will ever have read *The Highway Code*, and whether they have lights or not you can't see any of those cyclists that are inches away from your wheels hidden in the dark down on your nearside between you and the gutter, let alone give them priority, and yet they expect priority because they have been

told that you *definitely* can see them and the law says that you must allow them to go wherever they like, and they've also been told that you will definitely stop for them, because that too is the law. Oh dear. And it all seemed such a good idea once upon a time.

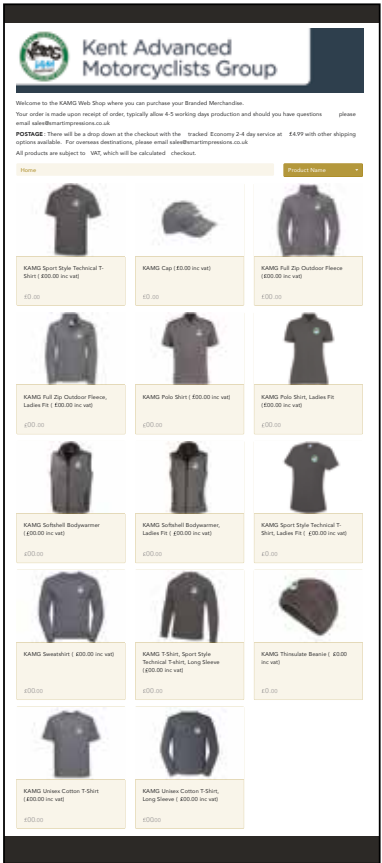
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The Columbus Circle in Manhattan, which was possibly the first roundabout in the world.

KAMG MERCHANDISE is here now . . .

There is a big range of excellent stuff including fleeces, bodywarmers, sweatshirts, polo shirts, beanie hats, caps and, of course, T shirts – including 100% cotton, long sleeve T shirts. How about that? Everything comes in a wide range of sizes ranging from XS to 4XL, and in ladies versions too. And everything is branded with a choice of two KAMG logos. How about that, again!



END OF YEAR REPORT 2024

Colin Billings, Chief Observer

Once again, I found myself mulling over how to present an end of year report, and my thoughts started to wander. What is it for? What does it tell us? What do we want it to convey? In reality most end of year reports are written to illustrate the success of an organisation, but we then have to ask: how do we measure success?

For example: are the riders who have undertaken the Advanced Rider Course with KAMG, safer riders as a result? Are the roads a safer place because of our actions? Have we prevented any deaths or serious injuries on the roads?

One would hope that the answer to at least one, if not all, of those questions, is yes; in which case we have to consider our efforts are successful. So that should be the end of the report.

But now comes the inevitable question for the more inquisitive amongst us: how did last year compare to previous years? But then how do we measure one year against another? At this point we need to start looking a little deeper and almost inevitably we find ourselves sliding down that slippery slope toward statistics:

- How many Associate Members do we have?
- How many Full Members do we have?
- How many Master Members do we have?
- How many Observers do we have?
- How many Test Passes have been achieved?
- How many Observed Rides have been undertaken?
- How many Social Rides have we run?
- How many Meetings are held?
- How many attend those meetings?
- How many Trips do we run?
- What is the bank balance?

All are valid areas for comparison and the order of importance will depend upon your point of view.

Benjamin Disraeli is identified by many people as the person who coined the phrase “Lies, damned lies, and statistics” when describing the persuasive power of statistics to bolster weak arguments. I hope that the following will not be considered weak in any way, but I should caution that they are a best attempt, using the data available, to provide as accurate a picture as possible of the rider training activities of the Group.

The information has been derived from Tracker and although Tracker is a wonderful tool with a wealth of data, the information has to be filtered and inevitably there are numerous factors that can affect the numbers of rides undertaken – the enthusiasm of the Associate Members and weather conditions, to name just two. Before we start looking at the detail, it is worth noting that the number of new members was down in 2024 compared to 2023 – it was 57 against 74. Why? Again, I am sure there are a number of factors, including the economic climate.

Who has been observed?

As a Group we endeavour to spread the road safety message as widely as possible and very much believe that being an Advanced Rider is a continuing process. In 2024 we conducted the following observed rides:

	Taster Rides	Associate Members	Full Members	Trainee Observers	2024 Total
No. of Observed Rides	35	567	153	31	786
No. of Individual Riders Observed	35	97	40	8	180

The overall number of observed rides of 786 is marginally down from the 836 of 2023. In 2024 there was an increase in the number of Full Members who were observed, and this is almost certainly due to the popularity of the Peterborough Training weekends, and reflects our belief in continuous training.

Introductory Day Course to Advanced Motorcycling (IDCAM)

Now let us look at our primary role of providing the Advanced Rider Course. Every Associate undertakes an IDCAM at the start of the course, so let’s begin here.

IDCAM attendance

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
No. of New Members	57	46	46	57	74	57
IDCAM Attendees	45	31	37	45	54	41

It should also be noted that every year we welcome new members some of whom are already Full Members and some who do not undertake any training.

Machine Control Days (MCD)

The Group provides the MCD not only for Associates, but as part of the continuing training process for Full Members and guests, and they were once again a great success in 2024.

MCD attendance 2024

	May	June	July	Sept
National Observers	11	6	10	11
Trainee Observers	2	1	0	0
Full Members	6	7	9	9
Associates	13	7	13	9
Guests	6	2	1	3
Total	38	24	33	32

Observed Rides

We have ridden miles and miles.

As you will have seen from the previous information, we completed a total of 786 observed rides in 2024: but what does that mean other than we have a very busy Observer Team?

786 rides involved two riders, at an average of 50miles per ride (home to home), making a total of 78,600miles (we’ll ignore third person rides for this calculation).

Let us consider this in a slightly different way. Based on a 6,000mile service and new tyre intervals, that equates to a little over 13 services and 13 sets of tyres and somewhere in the region of 7,000 litres of fuel.

Putting our Observers expenses to one side for a moment, that means our Associates and Full Members spent roughly £30,000 developing their riding skills. In terms of time that’s about 114 days or, if you prefer, four months. It should be noted that these figures do not include personal practice runs or most of the Masters Training that members also undertake.

An interesting statistic for the local cafés and garden centres is that if we assume that on every ride the Observer and Associate each drink one cup of their chosen beverage (a conservative estimate for sure) we have consumed sufficient to fill three baths. As to cake, that is probably best not calculated.

Test Results

Test passes were up 36% in 2024.

It is a great headline figure, but it should be put into perspective. As previously mentioned, we had quite a dramatic increase of new Associates in 2023 (+20%). It is therefore understandable that the number of Advanced Rider Tests taken by Group members in 2024 should reflect this. However, it is good to report that

the number of test passes was over and above what we would have anticipated from the increased number of 2023 Associates.

If we breakdown the test results into more detail: of the 38 test passes, one was a Fellow’s three-yearly test; two were members striving to achieve a F1RST (which they did) and five were quick retakes (within a month) after making basic errors on their first attempts. The nett result is that the Observer Team contributed to 35 newly qualified Advanced Riders, helping to make those riders and our roads safer. Congratulations to them and the successful trainees.

Analysis of Test Results

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
First	2 12%	8 26%	8 33%	6 22%	7 23%	13 29%	44 25%
Pass	11 70%	17 55%	10 42%	18 67%	21 64%	25 55%	102 58%
Fail	3 18%	6 19%	6 25%	3 11%	4 13%	7 16%	29 17%
Total Passes	13	25	18	24	28	38	146
Total Tests	16	31	24	27	32	45	175

In conclusion, KAMG benefits from having a great team of volunteers and National Observers, and the results of their activities are testament to their hard work and dedication enabling others to achieve their goals.

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RIDERS' RANTS

And Geoff Curtis is Hot Under the Collar . . . Again

Geoff occasionally (I suspect it's more a case of 'frequently' rather than 'occasionally') biffs off an agitated letter to the IAM magazine and copies it to Riders. His latest is reprinted below. Whether the IAM uses it or not Riders will, and I agree with every word. Why are we waiting for some research report to see what's blindingly obvious right now?

Dear Sir,

I am interested to know why our [i.e. the IAM's] Policy Manager, Mr. Porter, [see following] is still dithering on the matter of touchscreen technology, having known the danger years ago. [See newspaper extracts below.]

How is it that all our current focus on road safety seems related to speed limits and road design while we apparently ignore human factors? While waiting to see what happens, how many people need to die to confirm what tests and the obvious distraction of mobiles have already shown? How many tragic stories in the news before there are enough statistics to justify banning this [touchscreen] technology?

William Porter says, "We'll have to wait to see if the car makers take heed or if cost and aesthetics win out." Surely no prizes for guessing what will happen if everyone just waits to see.

Given the dangerous distraction that touchscreens pose it's a wonder car manufacturers gained type approval for vehicles [using it]. Who exactly is in charge: the manufacturers chasing sales with trendy gimmicks or the Government with support from safety advisors such as the IAM? It seems the last two lack any clout in, or enthusiasm for, affecting commercial decisions. Safety is not a great selling point, so manufacturers must be forced to comply, by regulation.

Geoffrey Curtis, member no. 330054

James Foxall said in The Daily Telegraph 23 January 2025

Touchscreen dashboards have finally taken over and ruined driving. Researchers at independent British consultancy Transport Research Laboratory did some work on the impact [the effect] on drivers of using touchscreens. It found the biggest negative impact [effect] on drivers' reactions to hazards came when using Apple CarPlay by touch. Reactions [were] 57 per cent slower than when not using a screen [and] were nearly five times worse than when a driver was at the drink-drive limit, and nearly three times worse than when high on cannabis.

One glimmer [of hope] on the horizon is that the safety ratings body Euro Ncap [European New Car Assessment Programme] has said that any car that doesn't have easy-to-use tactile controls such as stalks or buttons for controls such as wipers, indicators and hazard lights, won't be able to achieve the top five stars.

William Porter, the policy manager for safety charity IAM Roadsmart, added: "While we welcome Euro Ncap's approach, we'll have to wait to see if the car makers take heed or if cost and aesthetics win out.

"We know distracted driving kills a lot of people, but there are no figures to say exactly how many and what the distraction was. Touchscreens are a relatively new technology and we'd like to see some more in-depth research into them and the effect they have on driving."

30th of April 2020, Alastair Walker writing for Insurance Edge

The UK's Transport Research Laboratory, has recently published a report – commissioned by IAM Roadsmart, FIA Road Safety* and Rees Jeffreys Road Fund** – into the effects of in-vehicle infotainment systems, such as Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, on driving performance. Evidence shows that driver distraction levels are much higher when using touch screen technology compared with voice activated systems. However, further research is necessary to steer [development in the direction of using] spoken instructions as the safest method for future in-car control.

**The FIA Foundation is an international charity whose aim is to help achieve safe and healthy journeys for all, whether it is the daily walk to school or the final lap of a Grand Prix. It was established in 2001 by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, the body that runs Formula One.*

*** Rees Jeffreys Road Fund is a charity with the following objectives*

To assist the provision of educational activities and access to studies that would lead to improvements in the design of highways

To promote engagement, co-ordination and the interchange of ideas between the designers and manufacturers of road vehicles, the land use planning profession and highway engineers

To encourage and promote improvements to the design, efficiency and safety of highways

To conserve and enhance the visual and environmental quality and diversity of the roadside environment



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NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

By order of the Group Committee notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Kent Advanced Motorcyclists Group (Registered Charity No: 1060837) will be held at 20:00 on Thursday 27th March 2025 at The Kentagon Restaurant, Brands Hatch Circuit, DA3 8PU.

All full group members, associates and friends are invited to attend the AGM, however only full group members are allowed to vote.

Meeting Agenda

1. Opening and welcome	Dave Murphy	Chairperson
2. Approval of the 2024 AGM Minutes	Gerhard Lottering	Secretary
3. Annual Report	Dave Murphy	Chairperson
3. Update on Modernising KAMG	Nigel Clibbens and Matt Pounds	Treasurer and Committee Member
4. Approval of the Financial Report	Nigel Clibbens	Treasurer
5. Chief Observer's Report	Colin Billings	Chief Observer
6. Election of Officers	Gerhard Lottering	Secretary
7. Election of Committee Members	Gerhard Lottering	Secretary
9. Any other Business	Dave Murphy	Chairperson
10. Meeting Close	Dave Murphy	Chairperson

Whilst it is not required by the Group's constitution, all current Officers and Committee Members will resign their position on 27th March 2025. They will stand for re-election unless otherwise indicated.

Dave Murphy, the current chairperson, will be standing down from the Committee after 25 years' service to KAMG in various roles. Paul Jessop will also stand down from the Committee after 7 years' of service.

For the continued success and future of KAMG it is vital that all members consider how they can best help and if they could serve as a Committee Member or volunteer to assist in any other way. KAMG needs members to promote KAMG to attract new associates, members to play active roles at Group Night, to assist in managing our social media communications and to manage our website and related IT. If you have a skill that could assist in the running of KAMG, please contact any of the committee members. Not all roles of support require being an Officer or Committee Member of KAMG.

All full members are invited to make themselves available for election to any post by submitting their name which must be proposed and seconded by full group members. A Committee election proposal form is attached to this notice, and any member that wishes to stand must return a completed copy to the current Secretary, Gerhard Lottering at secretary@kamg.org.uk no later than Friday 21st March 2025.

By Monday 24th March 2025 a complete list of candidates standing for election will be sent by email to all members together with a voting form for members unable to attend the AGM. Voting forms must be returned to the Secretary at secretary@kamg.org.uk by close of business on Wednesday 26th March 2025.

If any member requires any details on a specific Committee position, such as responsibilities, time commitments, experience needed etc, kindly contact the Secretary at secretary@kamg.org.uk whom will gladly provide the necessary information.

Submission for election to the Committee of the Kent Advanced Motorcyclists Group (please tick which, or all of the roles listed that apply).

Committee Position	I Confirm I wish to seek election to this position.
--------------------	---

Chairperson	
Vice-Chairperson	
Secretary	
Treasurer	
Membership Secretary	
Group Night Team Leader	
Communication Team Leader	
Marketing Team Leader	
Member without Portfolio	

Candidate Name	Signature
Proposer Name	Signature
Secondee Name	Signature

There has been a change in the roles of three of Committee Positions to help improve the way KAMG is run, once appointed each team leader will be looking for volunteers to help deliver their areas of responsibility:

- Group Night Team Leader – responsible for organising Speakers, the Venue, Welcome Area, Raffle, Food and Equipment
- Communication Team Leader - responsible for the Magazine, e-news, regular communication emails, Website, Social media administrators
- Marketing Team Leader – responsible for leading a team of volunteers for the promotion of Road Safety / KAMG in our area, attract advertisers and sponsors. Merchandise

SERVING ON THE KAMG COMMITTEE

Gerhard Lottering



Back in 2023, with the world starting to return to normal after Covid, and while having to deal with some personal challenges in my life, it occurred to me that being able to get back on the road on the trusty iron steed, and being able to join group rides and socialise with my fellow KAMG members, greatly helped me cope with said challenges. So, I had the bright idea that maybe I could give something back to KAMG. But what would that entail?

Being one of the accountants (please attend this year's AGM if you missed our performance last year, and if you did attend last year, please do still attend this year anyway), I originally volunteered to be the Group's Treasurer, but Nigel Clibbens beat me to it, and so Martin Ford, our former Group Secretary, convinced me that being Secretary was an easy job and I should take over the relevant responsibilities from him. No hard feelings Martin.

But he was right. For me, it mostly involves checking the KAMG Secretary email inbox every few days, drafting the agenda for committee meetings, attending committee meetings, contributing the odd insight on a subject being discussed, preparing the minutes of the meetings, review of documents and the electronic filing of documents. Exciting stuff, I know. But the point is that it only takes me a few hours a month, it provides me with the satisfaction of knowing that I am doing something in return to help out KAMG, and I hope I am contributing to its continued existence. And I get to spend more time with fellow KAMG members.

The wonderful benefit of being a volunteer, is that you can donate the time that you can personally afford. I know that many of the committee members, observers and other volunteers spend far more time on KAMG matters than I do, but with all of us volunteering and donating some of our time, KAMG remains, in my humble opinion, the foremost advanced motorcycling group in the UK.

At the upcoming AGM, we'll present our proposals for the future structure of KAMG as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and we'll be asking members to vote on it. But we don't only need people to volunteer to be trustees and serve on the committee, we need volunteers to take on other responsibilities. Whatever skills you may have in addition to being an advanced motorcyclist, there will be a role for you. We are now looking for members to promote KAMG in order to attract more new associates; we need members to play active roles on Group Nights; and we need help with our social media communications and to manage our IT and our website. So, if you have a skill that you think could help KAMG, please do get in touch.

The committee, the observers and the other volunteers, are all trying their best to serve the members and the interests of KAMG. What binds us all together is a love of motorcycling. But we need your help. If you can spare a few hours a month, please consider helping out KAMG.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
- Helen Keller

A READER WRITES AN APPRECIATION

It was a KAMG Social Fish n' Chip run on the 22nd of August last year. Steve Riches was the run leader and, as always, he had picked an interesting route to Folkestone. The return route was more of a night ride, but again good roads were chosen. It was on the return run as we entered Harrietsham on the A20 that my 'engine management light' came on, and the V twin became just a / single – or perhaps it was a \ single. The bike managed to find its way onward until we reached the roundabout for the Maidstone Services, where it decided to stop completely. Luckily, Steve had noticed my headlights turning on and off and decided to turn around and find out what was wrong. He said that he would follow me home and all I could say to him was 'thank you'. Unfortunately, the bike only moved for another couple of hundred yards and

stopped again. I said I would ring the RAC, but Steve told me not to bother, he said that he would go home and come back with his van and trailer and collect the bike. Well, what can I say? What a wonderful and helpful man. He turned up about an hour later, during which time three motorists stopped and asked if I needed help, although a police car just motored passed – not a good advert for Kent Police – and finally I got home and off-loaded the bike.

Steve is a National Observer and Masters Mentor and I am fortunate that he will be the mentor for my Masters. KAMG should fully appreciate this man and be proud that he is a long-time member.

Mark Brewster

IDCAM

INTRODUCTORY DAY COURSE IN ADVANCED MOTORCYCLING

2025 Dates

- March 15th
- April 12th
- May 17th
- June 21st
- July 19th
- August 16th
- Sept 20th
- Oct 18th
- Nov 15th



Our IDCAM is held at the Kent Fire and Rescue Road Safety facility in Marconi Way, Rochester, ME1 2XQ. If you wish to attend, please register your interest via the calendar on Tracker. Attendees are asked to arrive at 08.45 for a prompt 09:00 start. The morning session consists of a presentation about IAM RoadSmart, about KAMG and the aims of the course, and how to check that both the rider and motorcycle are fit for the road. This is followed by a coffee break.

The second presentation is all about the system of motorcycle control and, if time permits, a *Highway Code* quiz. The morning session will finish at approximately 12:15.

Please note that lunch is not provided. You may bring along your lunch or, if you wish, your allocated Observer can take you to a local café.



The afternoon session consists of an observed ride with a National Observer, and includes a pre-ride briefing and post ride debrief. The finish point is at a mutually agreed location that is usually closer to home than the start. The afternoon session lasts around two and a half hours.

If you would like to attend as an Associate, please contact associates@kamg.org.uk.

MACHINE CONTROL DAY

Our machine control days are organised by David Austen. If you have not yet signed up then do it now – simply log on to Tracker and register your participation or contact email below:

mcd@kamg.org.uk

Held at: Car Park D, Ebbsfleet Station,
International Way, Gravesend, Kent DA10 1EB

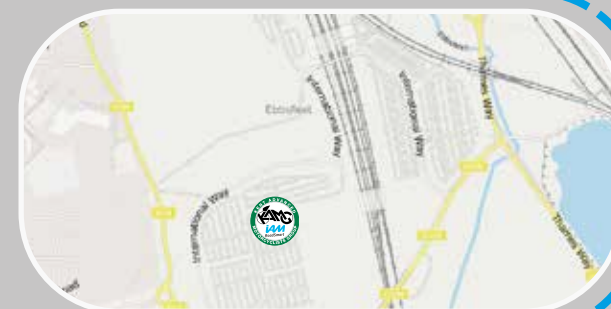
2025 Dates

Sun May 11th Sat June 14th
Sat July 12th Sat Sept 13th

Non-KAMG members will be asked for a small fee of £10.00 contributing to the running costs.

Arrival time: 08:45 for 09:00 start

Finish Time: approx 13:00 Hrs



Vice President Dave Murphy
Honorary Life Members Kevin Chapman
Christine Botley
John Leigh
John Lemon
Brenda Vickery
Ian Burchell
Sue Mills
Tina Underwood
Tony Young
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