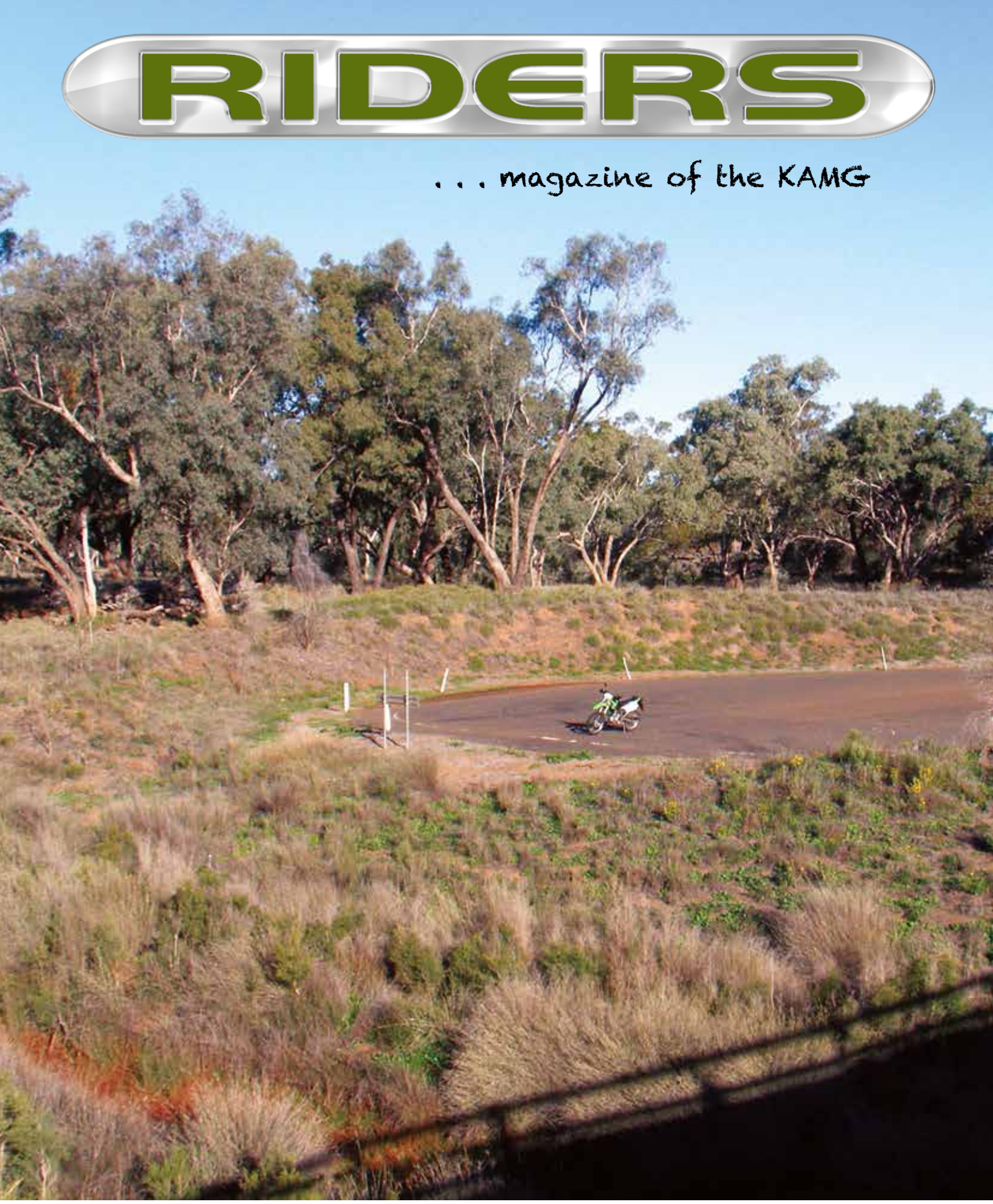
RIDERS

. . . magazine of the KAMG



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THIS EDITION INCLUDES . . .

REGULAR FEATURES:

3 Forthcoming Events
4 Editorial
5 View from the Chair
7 Test Passes
29 KAMG Merchandise
30 IDCAM and MCD dates
31 Contacts
32 Young Riders Campaign

NEW FEATURES:

8-10 Chinese Bikes
11 Another Scorcher
12 To Overtake or Not to Overtake
14 The End of an Era
16 Let Us Not Forget
18 Wallonia . . . Where?
20 Touring with TT Wannabes
24 Giles Introduces Himself

Page 14

Page 20

Page 24

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

August

Sun 30th	Training and social ride Waterside Café Arundel

September

Wed 10th	Fish and chip run: Maidstone Services to Lenham chip shop
Sat 12th	4 Corners charity ride: Paddock Wood garden centre 2800 miles over 12 days
Sat 12th	Machine control day: Ebbsfleet International
Mon 14th	Committee meeting
Sat 19th	IDCAM: Kent Fire and Rescue Centre
Sat 19th	Ladies ride: Maidstone services to Perry Court Farm
Thu 24th	Group night: Kentagon
Sun 27th	Training and social run: Lullingstone Country Park to Birling Gap

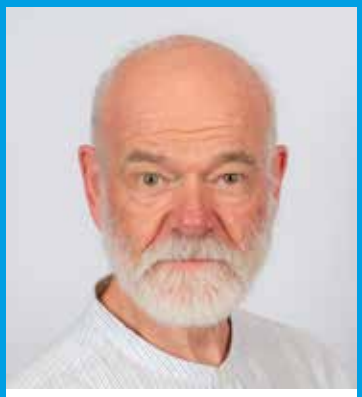
October

Mon 12th	Committee meeting
Sat 17th	IDCAM: Kent Fire and Rescue Centre
Sun 25th	Joint training & social ride with EKAM: details TBA
Thu 29th	Group night: details TBA

November

Sun 1st	Training and social ride: Maidstone services to Airport Caf√©, Sellinge
Sun 8th	Remembrance ride: Maidstone services to Capel-le-Fern
Mon 9th	Committee meeting
Sat 21st	IDCAM: Kent Fire and Rescue Centre
Tue 24th	Annual Observer meeting
Thu 26th	Group night: details TBA
Sun 29th	Training & social ride: Teston Bridge Country Park to Hamstreet Garden Centre

This list is correct at time of going to press. Check all KAMG dates on Tracker to ensure that there are no changes. Details of contacts for IDCAM, Machine Control Days and Ride-outs are on pages 30 and 31.



Giles Green, Editor

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Every article that appears in this magazine has been written expressly for this magazine and has not appeared in any other print or electronic medium before, and none of the material in this magazine may be reprinted elsewhere without the express permission of the KAMG.

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

This is the first issue of Riders I have edited and the first issue of any publication at all I have edited and it comes after ten years of Nick Farley's stewardship, a hard act for me to follow. Undaunted, I have set about it with a confidence borne largely from ignorance and with considerable help from Nick and John Gardiner, to whom I proffer heartfelt thanks for that, but before I go on, I would also like to record my thanks to Nick for being editor for the last ten years.

I get MAG's bimonthly magazine, *Open Road*, read the gags page straight away and the campaigning articles by dipping-in over the next few days. I ogle the pictures of bikes and I always overlook the events news. I receive *Bike* each month (my bank, for reasons I don't really understand, give me a free magazine subscription) and I usually put it aside to read later and only get round to doing so on the plane when I visit family in Australia. This means that at any time I might have up to an inch-and-a-half stack of glossy pages prattling about the purported benefit of an extra horsepower in addition to the unusable one-hundred and odd available from the otherwise indistinguishable other bike and (yet another) piece about the BMW R1300 GS and how it compares to a rather similar quarterton behemoth whose seat is a millimetre or so higher (or lower) or whose wheelbase is a millimetre or so longer (or shorter) and therefore transforms it from (or to) a vastly superior (or inferior) proposition… except that one of the other writers disagrees. I have always read *Riders* from cover to cover as soon as I get it.

As many members will not know me, I have included a piece about me, which is really just an outline of my biking career; please do not feel obliged to read it because there are many much more interesting things in this issue. Rob Lawes writes (twice) about his discovery of Chinese bikes. Martin Ford has contributed a cautionary tale and one we might all take a moment to consider, as it pricks the conscience in many ways. Trevor Payne went on a trip to enjoy some mountain roads in France, Belgium and Luxembourg with David Leigh and me for a week at the end of April and into May. Helen Wass tells of a trip with the perfectly wonderful philosophy of picking a few roads she fancied, riding them to places she likes to visit and doing whatever she fancied when she got to them. David Dickson tells of an experience which calls to mind the old gag about the bloke falling past a tenth-floor window muttering "So far, so good" (you'll see what I mean when you read it) and Geoff Curtis, contributor of several pieces to past issues of Riders has added another.

On the subject of contributions to your magazine (and it is yours as much as mine or anyone else's), there is a long-term problem of getting enough material to create it. If you look back, you will see Nick filled in a lot of the gaps in past issues with pieces he had written and it became evident to me quite quickly just how significant that was when he and I spoke about taking over the role; I would really like to change this and to get more members involved by producing pieces I can put in. Note that I said producing pieces, not writing them, and this is because I know many people will find it a mighty bother to write a piece, so, if you have the germ of an idea but little appetite for essaywriting, give the matter some thought, write down a few points in order, shut yourself away on your own so there is no audience and say what you want to using speech-to-text software to create a written version. You can then either tidy that up yourself, or send to me and I'll do what an editor does and edit it. If possible, add a few photographs, but make sure they are the highest resolution possible, separate attachments rather than embedded in the email and that they are your own originals which you a happy to have published, so we don't have the risk breaching copyright, which we did by using third=party photographs a while ago.

On the back cover you will see a poster advertising KAMG's Young Rider Programme; for anyone unaware of this, it is a campaign we are running to try to engender some interest in advanced riding amongst younger riders. Whilst it would be preaching to the converted to expand on the advantages of advanced training here, many new riders (and this might be particularly the case for young riders) do not realise what is on offer and what they are missing. I am not suggesting you try to promote KAMG's Young Rider Programme by telling potential new members they will learn how to ride faster, but we all know from our own experience that riding using The System is more efficient than tearing up the tarmac at every opportunity and slamming on the anchors as each opportunity comes to an end, so please, pass on the facts and emphasise this is something we, KAMG, are paying for.

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

August has come around quickly again this year and we can pretend, for now, that winter is not on its way. The excessive hot spells have made biking rise to a whole new level, tea bag jackets, cooling scarves and frequent water breaks have been essential to keeping cool and hydrated.

However, behind the scenes we have all been working hard to keep momentum going in this year's events in hand.

I have attended several skills days at Mallory Park and am off to Thruxton for the young riders course and introduction to advanced riding. The IAM have really worked hard this year to make a great impact on the young riders and drivers that will mould the IAM's future.

The CIO arrangements are in full swing and both Nigel Clibbens and Matt Pounds are still liaising with IAM and the Charity Commission on your behalf . We are nearly there!

The KAMG BBQ was a great evening with Carol and the team pulling out the stops to allow us to run these events. When we support the food, BBQ and Christmas parties it not only strengthens our social group by introducing our husbands or wives, girlfriends or boyfriends, partners and friends, but helps us to support the running costs of Brands Hatch and the Kentagon, which is kindly extended to us for our group evenings free of charge. We will start planning our Xmas event really soon.

KAMG are thriving and staying strong, thanks to a team of really great people behind the scenes, who work tirelessly to make things happen. Please continue to bring your enthusiasm to us and consider joining the team to help us continue to grow and be as successful as we are. We are always happy to consider new ideas / speaker suggestions and events to keep you the members happy and engaged.

Tina Underwood

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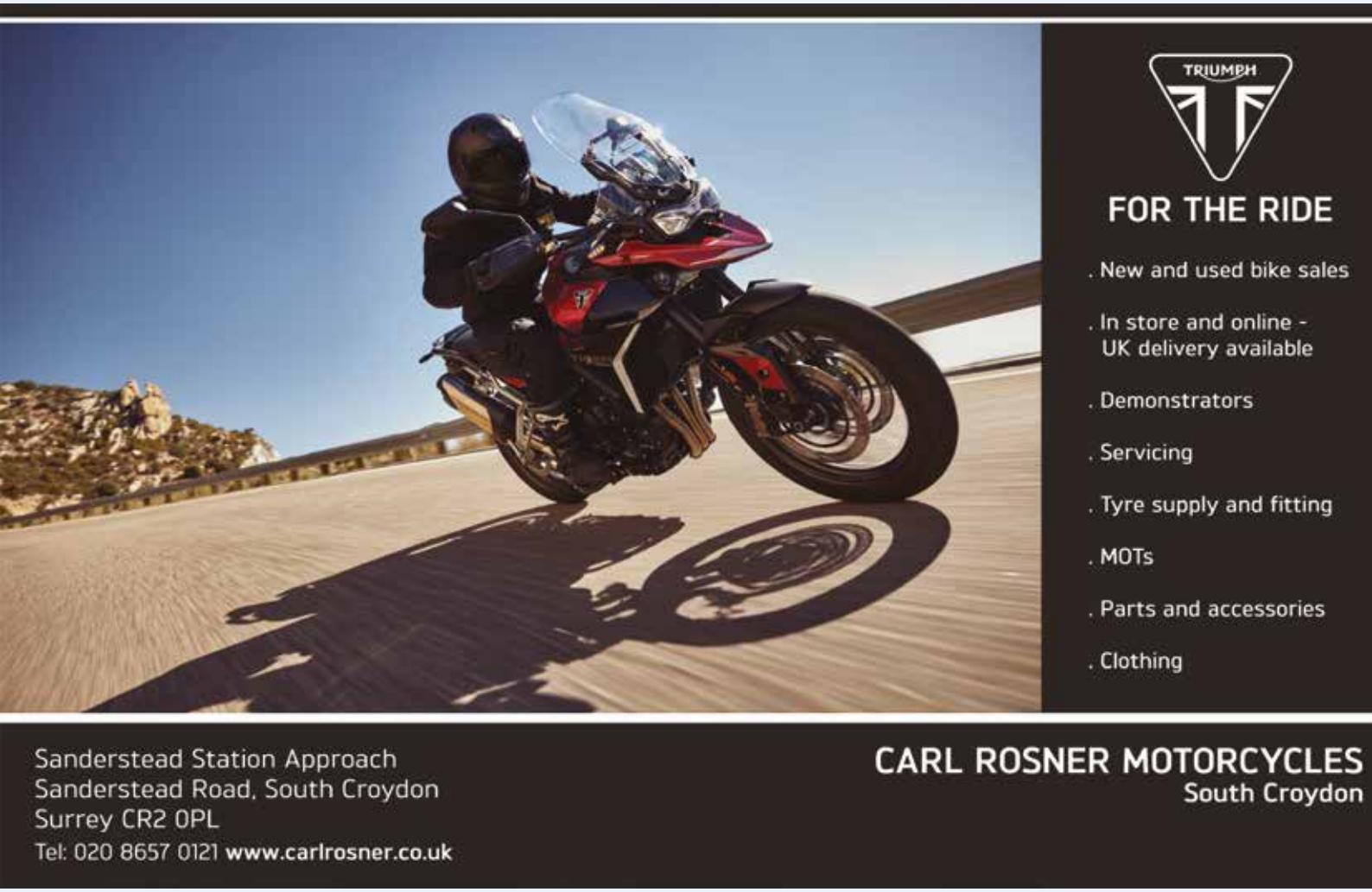
TEST PASSES

Since the last edition

Peter Bowles receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from his observer Nigel Clibbens

Bill Delieu receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from his Examiner Steve Turner with observer Paul Aspinall



CHINESE BIKES

Rob Lawes gives his opinion . . .

I started looking for a different bike for a very simple reason: my Ducati 950S had become increasingly heavy to manoeuvre in and out of the garage.

Sadly, the problem wasn't the Ducati. It was the advancing years and the alarming disappearance of both my strength and body weight..

So the search began.

I looked at used bikes from around 600cc to 900cc, but every model I really fancied still seemed to command "you must be joking" money.

That's when I widened the search to include Chinese bikes.

There are *a lot* of them now, adventure bikes especially!. Most come extremely well equipped and represent remarkable value compared with equivalent Japanese and European machines - heated grips, luggage racks, TFT dashboards, rider modes — things that usually cost several thousand pounds extra, once you have finished consulting the options list.

Of course, not all were ideal. Some were still quite heavy, some needed servicing every 3,000 miles, and others insisted on E5 fuel like they were fine wine rather than motorcycles.

Another consideration was dealer location. Some brands seemed to be sold exclusively in places requiring an expedition to get to the dealer.

Then I discovered PK Powersports at Cross in Hand.. They had a large selection of Chinese bikes alongside Yamahas, which somehow reassured me that I hadn't completely lost my senses.

I test rode their demo CFMOTO 800MT-X and immediately liked it. Comfortable, well equipped, easy to ride, and importantly, I could wheel it around without too much effort. ...unfortunately, so had everybody else! (The waiting list was already over three months long.)

This was slightly awkward because by this point I'd already sold the Ducati and had become officially 'bikeless' — a condition known to motorcyclists for causing irritability, compulsive YouTube viewing, and random browsing of Auto Trader.

So I began trawling the internet to see what could be found. Eventually I found what was possibly the last available 800MT-X in the country at Magnet Motos, a small but excellent dealership specialising mainly in electric bikes and CFMOTO machines based in Datchet near Slough..

The owner, Ivan, was brilliant! No drama, no nonsense, no mysterious "admin fees." In fact, he could probably have had me riding away the following morning if I'd wanted. It was all refreshingly straightforward which, after years of premium European motorcycle ownership, felt faintly suspicious.

And so this is how I became the owner of a Chinese adventure bike.

This is my experience thus far..... There's a certain look you get when you roll up on a Chinese motorcycle... you know the one — polite smile, slight head tilt, followed by: "Interesting… what is it?"

At which point I announce that it's a CFMOTO 800MT-X and wait for the inevitable rolling of the eyes.

Now, I'll admit I've owned some very respectable machinery over the years. A few of BMWs, a Ducati,... all excellent bikes in their own way, all carrying huge price tags and then you start adding option packages, luggage, cruise control, quick shifter, riding modes and the list goes on, occasionally optional reliability.

The CFMOTO, meanwhile, appears to have taken the opposite approach: "What if we just fitted everything in the first place?"

And the awkward truth is… in my experience it's very good!

For considerably less money than its European rivals, the bike comes with impressive specification, plenty of performance, comfort, electronics, and enough standard equipment to make you wonder whether somebody in Austria, Germany or Italy might be getting nervous.

Of course, among certain motorcyclists there remains a deeply held belief that if you aren't paying top dollar, you aren't getting a premium product. Ask yourself, are we not paying over the odds for these bikes? My belief is that the Chinese are proving that we have been paying too much; bear in mind that many of these premium bikes are made in China.. (CF MOTO make some of the KTM's) The service intervals are good and reasonably priced as well....all CF Moto's come with a four year warranty.

So far, inconveniently, mine keeps starting every morning. It hasn't exploded, or shed important components, In fact, so far it has been entirely reliable, which is more than I can say for some of the expensive European machines I've owned.

Naturally, this creates discomfort among seasoned bikers. They peer suspiciously at the CFMOTO as if trying to spot the hidden flaw. "Yes, but what's it like long term?" they ask....

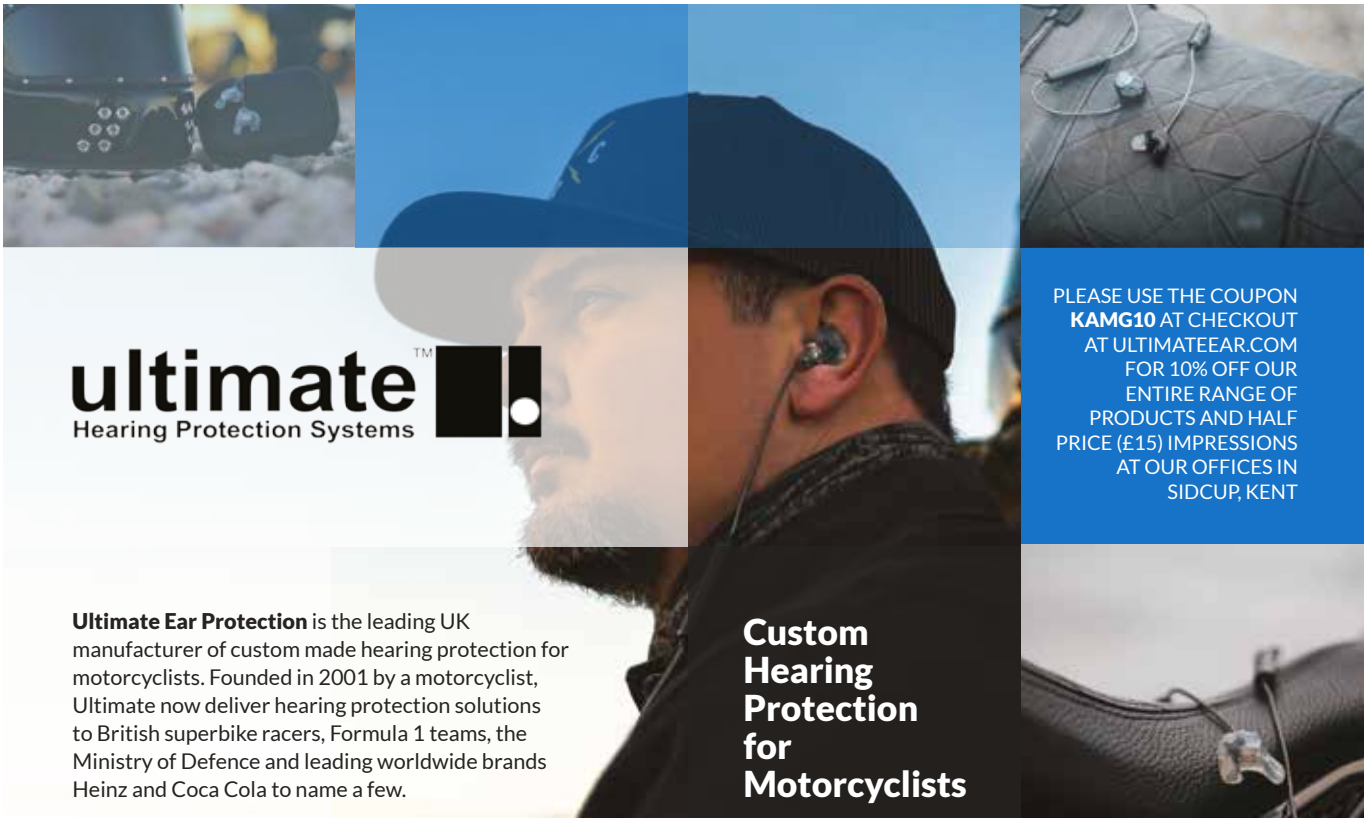
I don't know. But I do know what a long-term final drive failure costs on a BMW and the top box central locking solenoid that failed on my RT.

The reality is that motorcycling has always attracted a certain amount of badge snobbery. Yet once you're out on the road, enjoying the ride, the logo on the tank matters rather less than the grin inside the helmet.

And if I can get that grin with heated grips, cruise control, quick shifter, modern electronics, etc. and money left in my wallet for fuel and trips away, I'm perfectly happy for the traditionalists to keep looking concerned.

Besides, every time someone dismisses the bike before riding it, I gain a small amount of smug satisfaction — entirely free of charge! What's not to like?

Rob Lawes



LIVING WITH THE CFMOTO 800MT-X

4,000 miles in and still smiling

There's an old saying that you get what you pay for. Well, after 4,000 miles on my Chinese bike, I'm beginning to think that saying needs updating.

So far, the bike has been absolutely faultless: no breakdowns, no gremlins, no unexpected dramas—just fuel it up, press the starter and ride. That's exactly what a bike should do.

Of course, no motorcycle stays completely standard for long, half the fun is making it your own. I've added a few sensible bits and pieces, including a lower front mudguard and a fender extender, (AliExpress) which help keep some of the road grime at bay. Beyond that it's largely standard. One of the things I really like about the 800MT-X is that it's relatively light for an adventure bike, and I don't want to undo that by hanging unnecessary weight all over it.

When it comes to accessories, AliExpress has become my go-to place for all the cosmetic bits and bobs. I needed a bikespecific Sat nav mount, which they had. For servicing parts and genuine spares, "Uncle Wang's" has proved to be an excellent source and the prices are refreshingly sensible.

The online community deserves a mention too, social media groups and owners' forums are packed with helpful people sharing tips, modifications and solutions. If there's a problem, someone has almost certainly solved it already—and they're usually happy to tell you how.

Now, before you think this is turning into a love letter, let's be realistic. The 800MT-X isn't perfect; then again, show me a motorcycle that is. Every bike has something that owners want to tweak, improve or personalise.

One of the most talked-about issues is wind buffeting and like many owners, I found the airflow around the screen somewhat annoying. The culprit seems to be air travelling up behind the front forks, creating turbulence around the helmet, but fortunately, the cure cost me absolutely nothing: a quick search online uncovered a clever little 3D-printable deflector, my son kindly printed it, one bolt fitment and: job done.

After 4,000 miles, my opinion of the CFMOTO hasn't changed—if anything, it's improved. It has proved reliable, comfortable, enjoyable and the best bit incredibly good value. Yes, it's made in China, but gone are the days of cheap Chinese tat.

Will it still be as dependable at 40,000 miles? Only time will tell. But if the first 4,000 miles are anything to go by, I'm looking forward to finding out.

And that's probably the biggest compliment I can pay it—I keep looking for excuses to ride it.

The bike regularly returns really good fuel consumption figures in the high 70s mpg. On Sundays ride, distance showing on the bottom left and consumption on the right

ANOTHER SCORCHER!

Words of wisdom for this extraordinary summer from Chief Observer Nic Walker

This summer, we've seen heat records tumbling as the mercury regularly breaks above 30C and heatwaves come round more often than a London bus! Riding in hot weather brings with it its own unique challenges, both to rider and machine.

One of the biggest impacts is to us, the rider. In warmer weather, heat can have a detrimental effect on the human body causing dehydration, heat exhaustion and, in the worst cases, heatstroke. If you're out on a ride, be it an observed ride, training ride or social ride, make sure you stay well hydrated and drink plenty of water through the day (don't wait until you feel thirsty!). Take regular rest breaks, ideally in shady areas, and apply sunscreen to any exposed areas (back of the neck, wrists, face). Ideally, wear well-ventilated summer kit to stay cool and use technical base layers or cooling vests and neck towels. Be aware that blinding sunshine can limit our vision, especially when using sunglasses or tinted visors and moving between areas of sun and shade with strong contrasts.

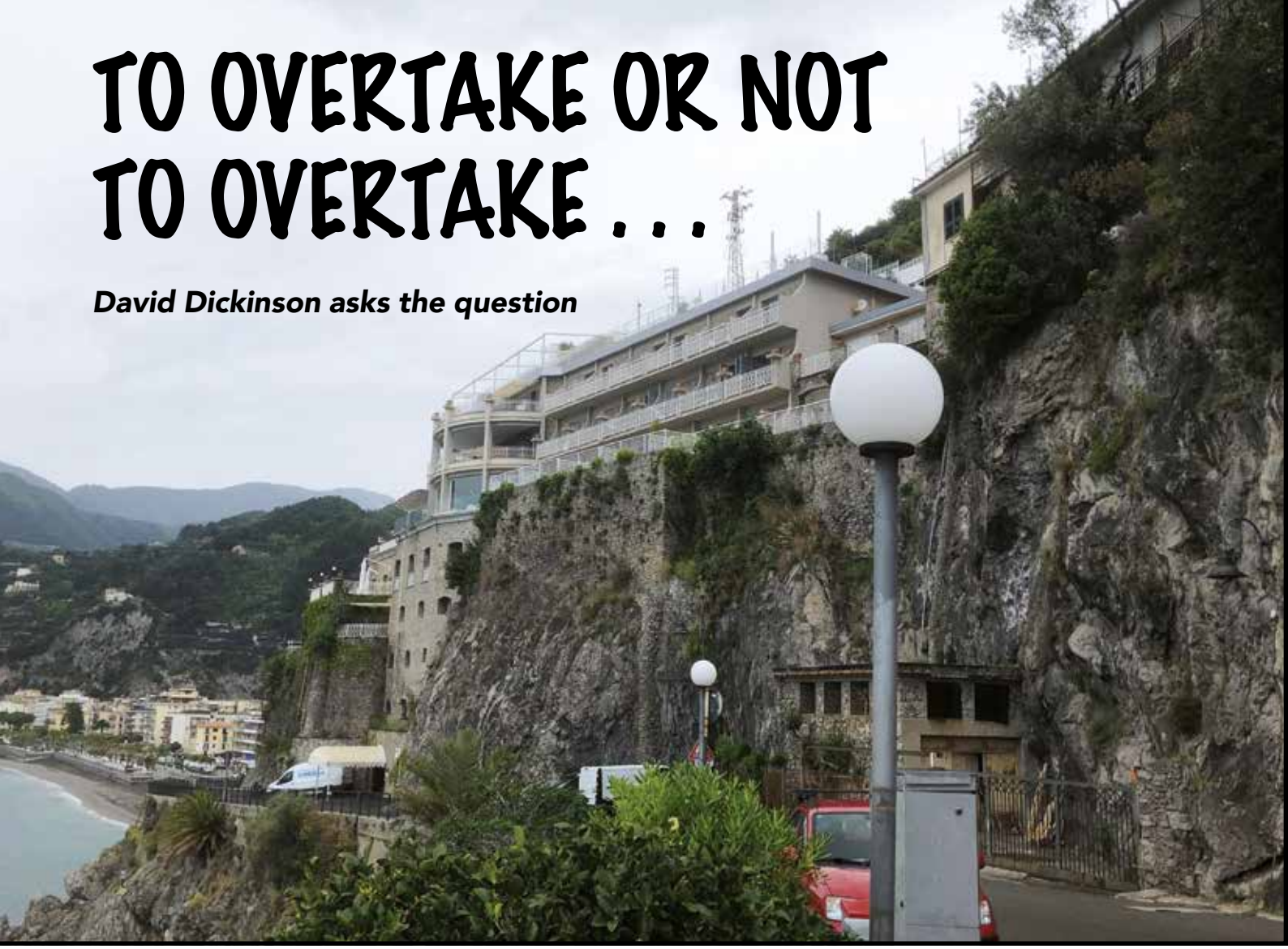
It's equally important to stay on top of machine maintenance in hot weather including checking your tyres for degradation, your tyre pressures and fluid levels. If you can, try go out in the morning or evening when the weather is cooler, and avoiding the hottest parts of the day or very busy areas where you may get stuck in traffic.

In extremely hot weather, the effects on us and our bikes can be more severe. In temperatures above 35C, it's often better to wear non-vented motorcycle gear to trap moisture. This is because hot air can act like an oven - it evaporates sweat too quickly to allow the body to cool down and accelerates dehydration. Look out for heat exhaustion - dizziness, nausea blurred vision or confusion. In severe heat, some tarmac surfaces can also start to melt, or "bleed", creating a slick, shiny layer that significantly reduced grip. Look out for "tar snakes" too - these are notoriously slippery and behave almost like ice - and always carry a sidestand puck… to avoid having to pick your bike up after the stand has sunk into soft tarmac!

Summer is a great riding season - but always consider Human Factors and prepare well for the journey, especially when it gets hot. Let's enjoy the bright and dry weather while it lasts!

TO OVERTAKE OR NOT TO OVERTAKE . . .

David Dickinson asks the question

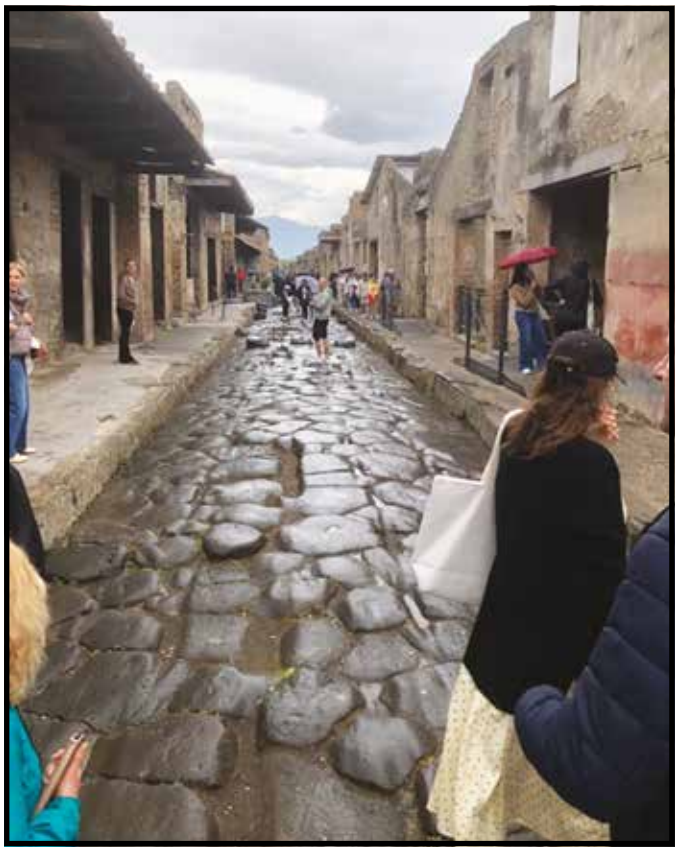


Swerving would bring its own difficulties

I was recently travelling in a medium sized tourist bus returning from Pompeii along an extremely windy coast road. There were about 15 of us in the bus, our tour guide and the driver.

Unfortunately, the driver of the bus was becoming increasingly annoyed with one particular car which was being driven sensibly by a young woman who may not have ever used this road before. Behind the young woman were three following cars and then us in the medium sized bus. The topography of the road was such that there were high cliff faces to our right and sheer drops to our left with beautiful sea views.

The driver of the bus obviously knew the road, so he started sounding his horn as we emerged out of each right hander which exposed the view ahead of a Z bend, first left, then right (all of which were ninety degree bends). The hooting was repeated several times, which was obviously causing concern both to the young woman and also suggesting that the following cars should be considering an overtake. At this point the tour guide started telling us that the driver was very experienced and had been driving large busses for decades, so he was to be admired for his excellent driving. It was therefore no surprise when exiting the next right bend that the bus driver decided to overtake all four cars before negotiating the next right hander.



Pedestrians, wet cobbles, two rider favourites

So off we go, steering into the left lane as we approach the left hander, overtaking the first car on the bend which left us what he considered to be enough clear road to carry on overtaking the remaining three cars before reaching the approaching blind right hander. As we drew alongside the young girl in the lead car, however, the bus driver's psychic capability failed him and, lo and behold, an oncoming car appeared exiting the right hand bend ahead of us. No doubt it was our driver's years of admirable experience which came into play, as he slammed on the brakes.

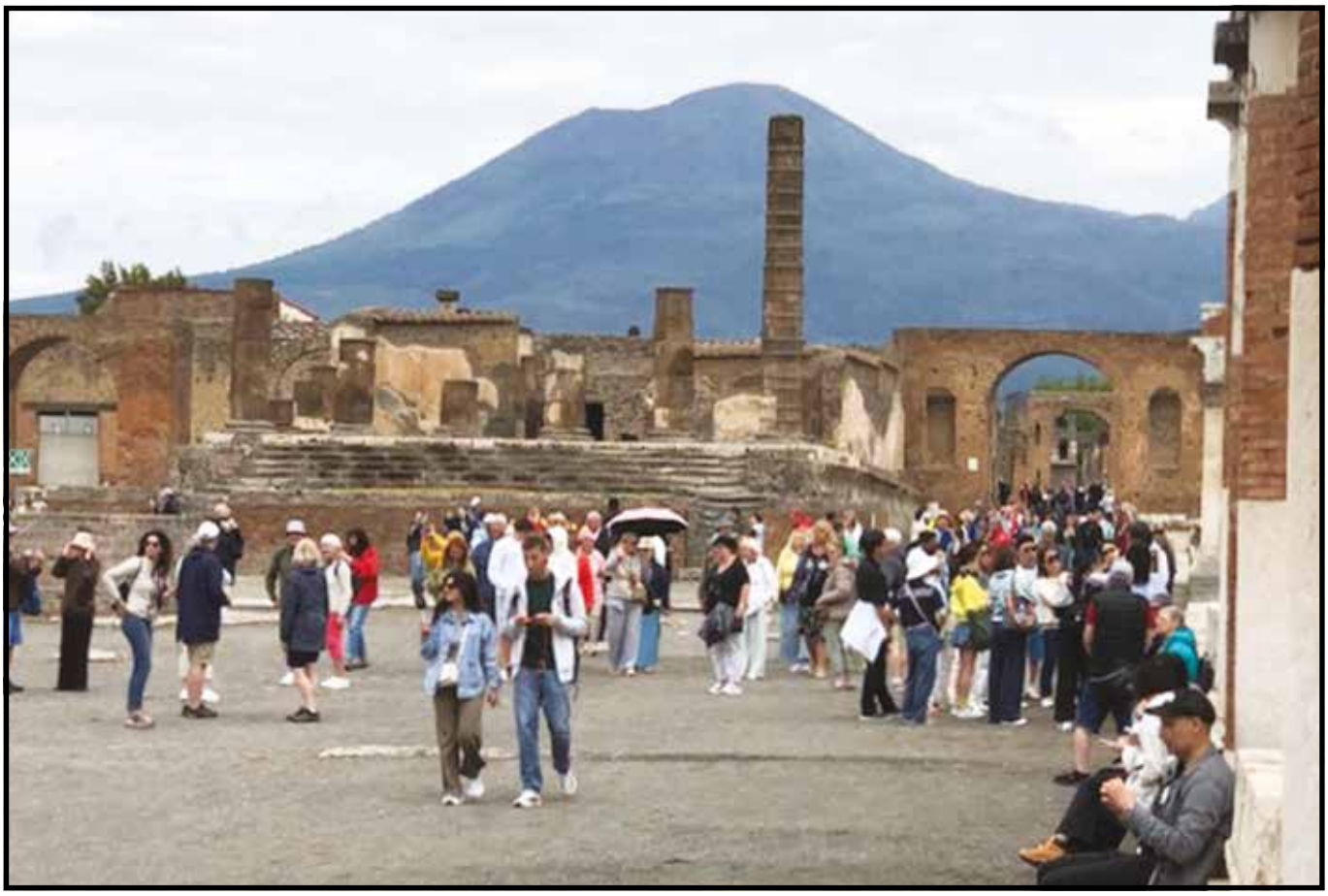
At this point, however, two superior minds leapt into action… the young woman braked to a halt and the oncoming driver also stopped, thus enabling our bus to steer right across the young woman's bows, back onto the right hand side of the road narrowly missing the oncoming vehicle. The forward observation of the oncoming car driver and the young woman's anticipation of the situation had saved the day. Whilst I support the principle that sounding the horn is for alerting other drivers and never a rebuke, I was so pleased to hear the sound of her little car's horn as we disappeared around the bend.

Raised crossings, Roman style

Whether in sheer shock or admiration, our tour guide praised him for his quick reactions and there was a round of applause from passengers behind me!!

So, what have we learned? Aggressive driving, making an overtake in an underpowered vehicle full of passengers, causing four vehicles on our side of the road and a fifth to perform emergency stops is to be "admired," but does it bode well for future holiday makers wishing to visit Pompei on the Amalfi coast road?

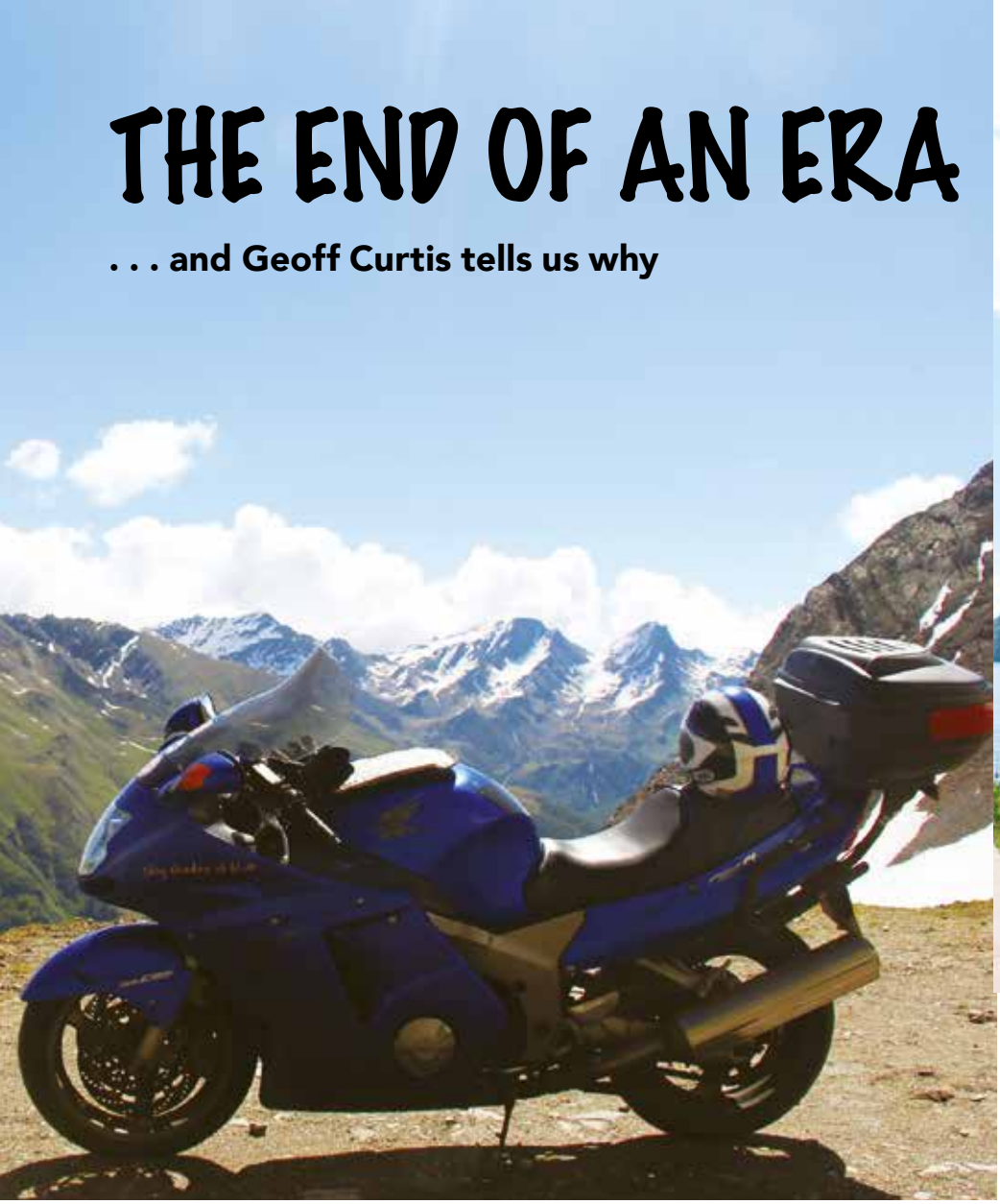
In twentyone years as an ex DVSA examiner of I never witnessed such an appallingly dangerous drive and you will not be surprised to learn that, on this occasion, he did not pass his test… or perhaps I just misread the experience.



And if you survive the roads, there's always the volcano

THE END OF AN ERA

. . . and Geoff Curtis tells us why



My old Blackbird (Fifty Shades of Blue) in the Dolomites in 2017

After not riding for twenty years and despite a growing family the day arrived when the household budget allowed the purchase of another motorcycle. One of my most sensible ideas was to join KAMG straight away and learn how to do things properly. Much sage advice was received from my observer John Davison and even more from my examiner, the irreplaceable Terry Friday, who passed me at my first attempt in July 2004.

22 years of riding have passed since being 'born again' and things change. A few weeks ago and following much thought, I decided the time had come to hang up my leathers for the last time. Advanced riding requires self-analysis and recently I became aware of my inability (for many reasons) to maintain the qualifying standard.

Yes I have some regrets but can look back over a great time in my life with KAMG and others, while adjusting to just sitting following other traffic in a car. However, not all of my riding was enjoyable: such as overstepping my limit during a track day at Lydden Hill and causing a blues and twos run to Margate hospital where it turned out I'd got away with just bruised ribs; then there was the goat which jumped out in front of me on a mountain road and caused an off and a broken leg. Then there were the repeated failures of my old Blackbird's electrics and rides back home with recovery drivers. The thing I really won't miss is the bone shaking state of roads in the south east.

I'm pleased to say the negatives are far outweighed by the positives. I've covered over a quarter of a million miles on two wheels and visited numerous places here and abroad. Highlights are Italy with my son, the French Alps with friends, Norway solo, The Dolomites with group members, Vianden (thanks go to Dave Murphy) Spain and Gibraltar with Dermot plus Austria and the Czech Republic with Martin Brown.

Long-time readers of Riders will have read many a write-up of my adventures and misadventures but sadly I will have no more to write, other than the odd rant about roads or the IAM for example.

Though now without a pair of wheels, I can still talk the talk and you will see me for the foreseeable future hosting our group's welcome table yak-yak-yakking to anyone who cares to listen and extolling the virtues of KAMG and The System.

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If you have to play sardines, it's better for 35 minutes in le Shuttle than days in a car.

Other means of transport are available.

We have walled cities -Canterbury, for example, but somehow in France, they retain rather more of their original character.

Ed: and here is one such character.

Who remembers the wonderful Citroën DS? They are extremely rare on the roads now, so it was a delightful surprise to see three "goddesses" a DS 19, a DS 21 and a DS 23 one evening.

A detour into Belgium, indicate road surfaces nearly as bad as a Bouillon.

The beautiful Vercors plateau, south of Grenoble: accessible via roads which make for glorious biking in fine weather, but present a bit more of a challenge out of season…

… even for military vehicles, so it was just the place for a Resistance movement in WW2. This is the Musée départemental de la Résistance, a wonderfully down-to-earth museum of the local resistance movement in the heart of the Vichy region.

Almost everywhere you look, France is beautiful…

… but we took along some additional beauty of our own, just to be sure.

Sunday is a day of rest, not restaurants, but we found a café which was closed and hosting a private meal, so the proprietor rustled up quite a feast of cured meats and superb bread, rather than see three rosbifs go hungry.

ed by a sign at the border and at home. This is the castle at

Even after decades of peace and generations who have not experienced war, the past is not far away.

LET US NOT FORGET

Trevor Payne decided to extend a week-long trip though France with a couple of KAMG members with a solo week in the north, following his own interests.

The Last Post ceremony at Menin Gate, Ypres, attended by around 500 people

'WALLONIA' . . . WHERE?

"Look for a wiggly road and take it from there."
Helen Wass relishes not overplanning

Having randomly booked a crossing back in the January sales for a long weekend in June, we were inspired to explore Wallonia (*Bike* magazine published a tour) and the Ardennes. Three nights away, just enough stay somewhere new and ride some different roads.

So, off on Le Shuttle on Saturday morning, where we made the same comment we always do we live so near, we must make more use of it!

First stop Ypres, which has become a 'sporadic' regular breakfast/brunch stop on our trips to Luxembourg or further afield. If you haven't been it is definitely worth a stop and, of course, if you can stay the night then experiencing the Last Post at the Menin Gate at eight in the evening is a must.

We alighted on Chimay (population c10,000) for our base; for those in the know, there's a road race circuit there and this year it is celebrating its 100th year anniversary. We were there the weekend before a next race event (typical!), but we did get to ride the track, admire the tyre walls and braking markers and appreciate the new circuit building, grandstand and pits.

A "welcome" sign for motorcyclists is a welcome sign for motorcyclists.

Chimay proved to be an interesting place. The brewery (Brasserie de Chimay) is run by Trappist monks who crafted their first beer in 1862 in Scourmont Abbey, with the majority of the profits going to charities and local development. They have definitely perfected their art and are the main sponsor for the race circuit, but if you want to enjoy the roads the next day beware, the alcohol content of some is 10.5%.

The Queen Mary pub is a recommended evening pit stop full of motor racing memorabilia from SBK and MotoGP, including leathers, helmets and bits of bike, from the likes of Scott Redding, Regis Laconi and Dani Pedrosa.

Cheers!

A day trip to Dinant, home of the inventor of the Saxophone, Adolpho Sax (look him up, a fascinating story of survival and perseverance) through the gently winding rural landscape full of forestry, pastures and along the River Meuse proved to be a relaxing ride with time to take in the scenery and on a sunny Sunday in June the river front seemed to be a biking destination.

The roads were so very quiet and in better condition than at home. At least they are if you don't ignore the 'local access only' sign through a village high street… local access if you were driving a tractor, we belatedly realised. I will forever be grateful for the

Wiggle there and wiggle back.

On your marks . . .

If I have to explain, you probably won't understand anyway.

Church of our Lady Dinant, Notre Dame de Dinant

slow riding training as the mud, gravel and crevasses were successfully navigated. We did wonder why the group of locals stopped and stared at us as we went through.

We also need to appreciate the many things that 'road closed' can mean when it's across only one part of the carriageway, in the middle of nowhere and without any diversion option; they meant it, alright: more offroading for the ZZR and the Ninja across a road that was prepared for a full resurface. Hey ho!

Another day of riding through the Ardennes National Park to Bouillon via the pretty village of Fumay, following the winding road along the banks of the Rivers Meuse and Semois, crisscrossing between Belgium and France.

At Bouillon a snack stop in the town square and visit to the church with some fabulous, new stained glass was enjoyed, as was the conversation with the couple living their retirement out on a barge. They had a different perspective of the landscape …

Will we be back? Definitely. Will we research a bit more? Probably not, we'll just see what looks like a wiggly road and go from there.

TOURING WITH TT WANNABES

Why the most important skill on a motorcycle tour is knowing your own limitations: a lesson in strength through wisdom from Martin Ford

Recently, over a cup of tea, I was told about a KAMG member's disappointing experience on their first third-party organised tour, three days they'd been eagerly anticipating. The tour was nothing to do with KAMG, but would you have made the same courageous decision this member did when group riding with strangers? Let's leave your decision until the end.

Most of us like to think we are independent-minded individuals. We ride because we enjoy the freedom, the challenge and because it provides an excuse to spend an incredible amount of money on accessories and bling that we tell our loved ones are essential. However, place a dozen fiercely independent souls together on a motorcycle tour and a different dynamic can emerge. Suddenly, a tendency can develop for everyone to ride at the pace of the quickest riders in the group or grimly keep their numberplates in sharp focus.

So, it's the eighth right, seventh left and then nail it!

Every group seems to contain at least one TT Wannabe. They are usually a perfectly pleasant bloke (women don't seem to have this misplaced ego-fuelled trait), but to him every stretch of open road represents an opportunity to demonstrate by his prowess that Peter Hickman isn't the only riding god. Unlike the TT, however, our touring roads aren't a closed track with lots of marshals and parked up ambulances. The reality is that one of the most important qualities any rider can possess is the confidence to ride within their own limits, regardless of group peer pressure, even Moto GP racers.

Choosing the Right Tour

The best tours are not necessarily the fastest or longest ones, they are the ones where everyone returns home safely, still speaking to each other and having collected lots of individual and collective memories; investing in the right tour needs homework. It needs knowledge that must gathered and understood up front, so do your research, check reviews, ask people who have ridden with the group before. Check the hours in the saddle, daily mileage, timed breaks, road types and terrain, likely costs etc., etc. Riding "interesting roads" can mean scenic sweepers with lots of time to take photos or eight hour days devouring all the gravel and gnarly mountain passes this side of the Himalayas. Whether joining an organised tour or riding with friends, expectations must be clear from the outset; hoping it'll all be like the advertising photos and blurb may not be enough, perception is not reality.

If the trip involves riding abroad, local laws and customs must be explained. What is perfectly acceptable in one country may confuse road users in another, or even attract unwanted attention from the law.

Riding for long hours and days at a time takes physical and mental endurance. We need to be match fit and so do our bikes. Most bikes can do most things, but some are happier about it than others: riding two-up on a heavily laden touring machine may not be ideal for days of eternal switchbacks, just as eight hours motorway riding on a wrist and neck knackering sports bike is not a combination made in heaven.

Group Size Deserves Consideration

Experience suggests that once numbers creep much beyond ten riders, the challenges for everyone increase significantly. Junctions become complicated, fuel stops become lengthy affairs, and the group begins to resemble one of the long, wide pelotons of Lycra clad cyclists we love so much. Smaller groups generally move more smoothly, require less management and create fewer opportunities for on-bike confusion and cosy off-bike social cliques.

The Importance of a Good Briefing

No one has ever had an observed ride or joined a motorcycle tour because they love briefings. Nevertheless, a good briefing remains one of the most valuable parts of any ride with two or more bikes. The route, planned stops, fuel requirements, weather conditions and contingency arrangements should all be covered, as should as planned breaks, what to do if an issue arises and how to contact the right person or service if there's a significant problem. In the UK we are unique dialling 999 to summon help; different countries have different

It isn't really that difficult to do it properly.

emergency numbers, and many have separate numbers for police, ambulance and fire! Riding abroad without knowing them and not having Google Translate on your phone is tempting fate; Google Translate has got me out of problems in Morocco and Japan, as well as nearer to home. Thank heavens for technology.

Country	Police	Ambulance	Fire
Andora	110	116	118
Austria	112	144	122
Belgium	101 or 112	112	
France	112		
Germany	110	112	
Ireland	112 or 999		

A few minutes spent discussing practicalities can save hours of delay and confusion. If the route involves being out of reliable phone signal, a dedicated GPS unit is a good idea -unless you are a talented old-school map guru. Everyone doesn't need to carry a full roadside tool kit and puncture repair kit, but it's important to know that all the essentials are somewhere in the group. The value of having a mini Red Cross parcel secreted away with favourite energy bars and water can't be overstated if things go wrong.

Leadership Matters

Know your leader's qualities. No matter what the group ride is, be it a two person IAM observed ride or a behemoth transcontinental expedition, the character of the leader is often more important than the route. A good leader understands that every group contains riders with different expectations, talents, and riding experience. Some enjoy brisk progress whilst others a more measured pace and want to spend some of the day appreciating the sites and scenery, they've signed up to enjoy.

The best leaders know that they are there so the group can enjoy themselves, not necessarily the leader. Less effective leaders occasionally appear to regard the group as the audience to marvel at their GOAT riding and flawless organisational skills, whilst considering anyone who is not as capable as a moving roadblock when riding and as a bit of a muppet to be mocked when off the bikes.

Beware of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is not always obvious. It rarely arrives accompanied by direct encouragement to ride faster than competent or comfortable. It tends to be more subtle. A rider notices the group disappearing into the distance; they become concerned about delaying others, they begin riding slightly faster than normal, then a little faster still and before long, the safety margin that existed at the start of the day has quietly disappeared.

We always need to protect our safety bubble. Once the bubble begins to shrink, good decisions are more difficult because the time to make them shrinks. The stats are clear; a lot of crashes that occur on group rides are due to peer pressure and the herd mentality which erodes the group's individual safety bubbles, a classic being taking the multi-bike overtake when the lead rider can see their landing spot, but the following bike(s) can't. Maintaining safety, legality and courtesy to others is essential. More can be more but less can be more too; we tour on public roads. Group riding is not the same as bumping fairings to fight for the same four inches of track as the Moto GP boys.

A Different View of Courage

The objective of a motorcycle tour is not to prove anything. It is to enjoy the roads, the camaraderie and the overall experience.

Motorcycling often celebrates the decisions and courage to extend boundaries, have adventures and improve confidence. However, genuine riding maturity sometimes involves making a less glamorous decision. It

Last one in is a big girl's blouse.

Er, parlez vous anglais?

may mean backing off, increasing a following distance or simply allowing the quicker riders to disappear around the next bends. At the end of the day, nobody receives a medal for frightening themselves trying to keep up with the group's TT wannabes. Getting home safely, having enjoyed the ride and looking forward to the next one is achievement enough.

Real-World KAMG Courage in Action

Day One of our hero's planned three-day tour began with the following very brief briefing.

"We all know how to ride, we know where we're staying tonight. We'll be using the buddy system so pair up and let's go." With that, the group set off.

Our hero found himself paired with the tour leader and dutifully settled in behind. At the first coffee stop he was told he needed to "buck up", because the leader's ride was no fun, and that he was too slow and causing a rolling roadblock. This feedback was repeated rather more publicly at lunchtime, and he was told to ride at the back of the group. Quite what problem the tour leader's flawed thinking was intended to solve remains a mystery. The obvious consequence was that our hero would now arrive last at the planned halts ensuring that he'd get no break, as everyone else, having had their rest and cup of tea, would want to get going again. A brilliant leadership solution I don't think!

Day Two brought a welcome change. Our hero paired up with another rider who, as fortune would have it, happened to be an Observer with a different group who had recognised the dynamics at play. Rather than criticising him, he provided support and encouragement throughout the day.

By the evening, our hero's confidence and on-road ability had stopped declining and was recovering. Group riding was, however, only part of the challenge: during the evening meal he found himself increasingly isolated from the banter and the group's prevailing derring-do culture.

What would you have done on Day Three? Some might try to ride faster than their level of competence so that they could fit in, that is unless they ended up lying in the back of an ambulance listening to wail of two tones whilst gasping in lungsful of Entonox. Some might have decided to keep riding at their safe pace that held everyone else up and endured the evening time mockery. My reason for writing this piece is to celebrate the decision of our hero, who will remain anonymous, which was to do neither of these.

Recognising the group dynamic was not for him and that continuing to ride with the tour would mar his and everyone else's enjoyment, he made the bold decision to stop riding with the group and enjoy the area on his own. Fortunately, the tour was in the UK so any difficulties with language, ferries, etc., were avoided, but many of us tour outside the UK and it's worth having a think about what we would do if we were in a group of widely differing riding abilities and undue peer pressure was evolving, intimidating us - or others - out of their riding and/or social comfort zones

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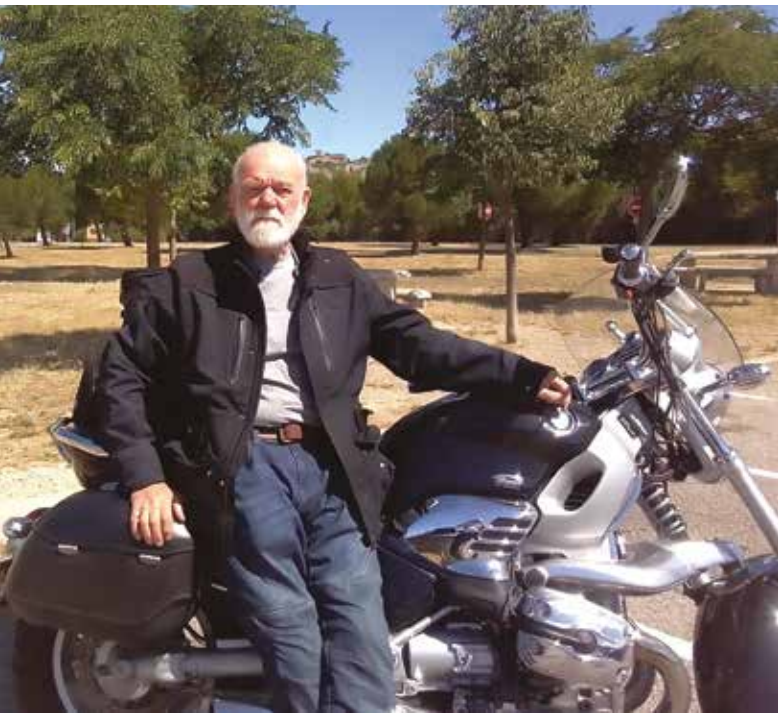
PLEASE ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF

The new editor goes on at tedious length about himself, apparently under the delusion that someone might be slightly interested

My name is Giles Green, I look a bit like the bloke in the photograph below. As you can see, I ride a BMW R1200C, that's C for cruiser, one of the type product-placed in Tomorrow Never Dies, though mine is the last version (other than a limited edition made "special" by a two-tone paint job) that comes without the rear-facing pillion straddling the petrol tank who graced agent 007's in the movie.



"The photograph below"

I passed my bike test aged 17, riding a Yamaha 50 step-though I borrowed from the schoolteacher mother of a schoolfriend and I gave her a bottle of sherry by way of thanks (memories fade, but, ahem, I suppose I must have roped-in a grown-up to buy it). I caught the bus home and detached the sidecar from my Norton Dominator 600.

There is no photograph of my first big bike, the 1959 Norton Dominator 600, but this is some potholes to make you feel at home

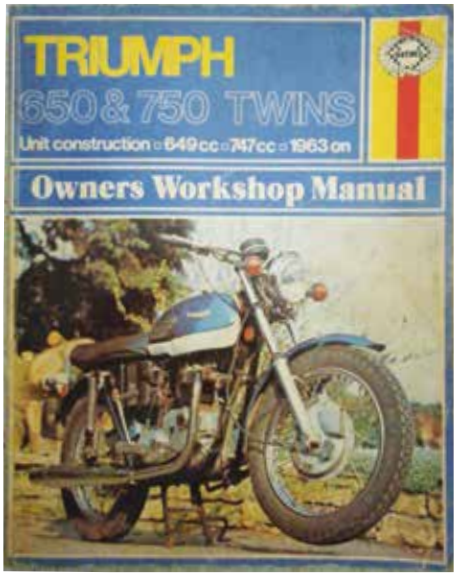
The next spring, I had met the Girl of My Dreams and the dommie was replaced by a BSA 650 Lightning and within a month, the longest, hottest and driest summer on record (at the time) started and it ran and ran, more or less without rain, for about six months. I have never carried a pillion like that girl; perhaps because she did not ride, or because she had the fearlessness one has at sixteen, but it was as if she were a part of the bike. We went everywhere on it together until one evening in early October when I parked it as usual at the kerb, facing the right way under streetlamp and a bloke in a Rover P6 3500 drove straight into it and wrote it off.

Shortly after that, I discovered that not every practitioner of the law is as quirky yet brilliant as those on the telly and I had to battle the fool of a solicitor I was paying, who said I did not have a claim for loss of use. Seven months later, (yes, seven months), cheque for a smashed bike and loss of use in the bank, the BSA was succeeded by a blue and white Triumph Trophy 650, the one with conical hubs. That summer it seemed as though all the rain missing from the one before had to be delivered, but the bike was my only practicable means of transport, so I learned to ride in the wet and the exact angle to set the visor to keep rain out of my eyes 70 mph (honest!).

I kept the Trophy and supplemented it a couple of years later year with another BSA Lightning 650, a combination with a single adult sidecar this time, as the Girl of My Dreams and Best Pillion Ever had become Mrs Green and a more convenient vehicle was required. I was aware of an urban myth prevalent at the time, which held that a "combo" was the safest type of vehicle on the roads and had always rather doubted this, but when I started using one, I realised Darwin had a point; not only is a combo comically asymmetric, it is dynamically so misbegotten it will kill you if you make a small error or take liberties.

At 21 I passed my car test and soon afterwards the bikes gave way to a car and fatherhood and I can't say the absence of a bike really played on my mind, but I never got over it either; I would stop and look at parked bikes and watch them pass on the road, just as I had from my early teens… until one day, at forty, I relapsed. I shan't here and now go into the incident which precipitated my recidivism, but

1968 BSA Lightning 650 with a rather wellnourished 18year old me, taken by the GirlofmyDreams and best pillion in all the world ever.



There is no photograph of my 1973 Trophy 650 either, but it looked just like the one on the cover of the Haynes manual

when I mentioned to the Girl of My Dreams that I was considering getting a bike, rather expecting at least some reluctance and needing to explain I was a helpless and genuine victim of an actual force of nature, she just said, and I quote, "Why don't you?" but did add what I have to admit was a sensible proviso that there could be only one bike at a time. Enter a somewhat venerable BMW R100R, nineteen years old, rather lived-in and scruffy, but not really worn out.

The first thing which struck me when I got my new toy was just how much my youthful strength had dwindled; the thing weighed a ton and it was some years before I looked up how much it and my old Trophy weighed and found it was not me getting puny in middle age, the Beemer was heavier than the Trophy by the equivalent of an adult. Never having enjoyed fixing bikes (let alone tinkering with them), whenever servicing was due, I took the Beemer to a friend who ran a local independent garage and rode a Fireblade and whenever it needed something replaced, it was replaced with a new part, so the bike gradually improved whilst remaining, in a sense, original. The one exception was electronic ignition, just because it was so much better than the old mechanical unit.

I forget now what the royal event was (from which you might gather I'm not much of a royalist) but a few years later, there was a bonus bank holiday Tuesday, making a four-day weekend, and the weather forecast was (oh frabjous day!) for it to be fine. Early on the Saturday, I wheeled the Beemer out and checked it over, attired myself for a ride and snapped the clutch cable trying to engage first gear to set out on a ride. An urgent call to the

1970 BSA Lightning and single adult sidecar combination, always ready to kill me

1977 BMW R100R. I really don't know why BMW stopped making them, I've heard of them meeting TfL's ULEZ standards

(long gone) dealer on the Southborough Road in Tunbridge Wells (or perhaps the Tunbridge Wells Road in Southborough, I never did know or bother to find out), confirmed (callooh! callay!) there was one in stock. I leapt into the horseless carriage and hastened to Southborough Road in Tunbridge Wells or Tunbridge Wells Road in Southborough to collect the new cable, only to find it was the wrong part. Not only was it the wrong part, it was so much the wrong part there was no possibility of making do. The chap on the spares counter checked with other dealers and found there was one of the right sort in Bexley or Bexleyheath (or perhaps Bromley), but the shop was due to close at midday, slightly more than a quarter of an hour. As I recall, that was the only time that bike actually let me down.

Imagine my disappointment when I contacted the IAM in the spring of 2003, a little more than five years into my biker reincarnation, in the hope of taking advanced training, as I was aware I was not as proficient on two wheels as I might be and was told in unequivocal terms that there was no such thing as rider training in the IAM, it was for car drivers only, and advised I contact RoSPA. I now know this was not so and that KAMG had been founded 23 years earlier jointly by Terry Friday and Mike Knowles, the latter of whom had taught me to ride on a RAC/ACU course in Maidstone twentynine years earlier. I attended a twoday RoSPA training course and found it to be a revelation, though I did not sit any tests.

My oldest friend bought a new Yamaha TDM 900 a couple of years later to replace his BMW G650 and I felt something inside me stir. BMW had been making cruisers, no doubt and sensibly, trying to get a share of the extraordinary market Harley Davidson was enjoying (about a third of a million new bikes in their centenary year, I recall), but the BMW cruisers had not flown off the shelves as they might have done. This was greatly exacerbated when the blubbing luvvies made their famous series *Long Way Round* on GSs and it became evident that these buttugly variants (GSs, not Messrs. McGregor and Boorman) was where the company was going and they discontinued the cruisers. I bought a nearly new one in 2005 while there were still some around and that is the one against which I am leaning, 21 years later, in the photograph below.

I have to say, for a top of the range bike from a prestigious manufacturer, it has had its fair share of problems. A completely flat front tyre was traced to a valve fitting which perished in only 13 years and just six years after that, the ABS unit had had enough and needed to be replaced. I considered taking this up this appalling record with BMW, but the traffic on WhatsApp suggests I might just find myself quite a long way from the top of their to do list.

2003 BMW R1200C Montauk, in my vast opinion, the second best looking bike of all time

I live about six miles outside TfL's ULEZ so, when that was introduced, I looked up my registration number, only to find my bike is not listed as complying with the requirements and advising I would have to pay handsomely to enter the newly green and pleasant land which is Sir Sadiq's realm. Having had LV declare they could not quote for insurance because they have no record of my bike's model and knowing of old airhead BMWs which are individually certificated and that the cost of doing that is a bit steep, I looked up the emission levels required for entering the ULEZ and found the type approval for my bike beat one parameter by a factor of three and the other by a factor of five. I wrote to TfL, pointing this out and requesting they allow me in FOC and they responded with two of those three initials. It's not really an issue, because riding in London does not appeal, I just wanted to avoid a penalty if I wondered in, but I do feel annoyed out of all proportion by what seems to be a misdirected, and probably misinformed, refusal.

In 2012, I found there was such a thing as KAMG and joined, gaining my green badge in 2013 and was so impressed I took the car version in 2016 and gained my red badge. You will notice I referred to the car version, not the car equivalent and I shall say no more than that I did so deliberately.

2017 Kawasaki KLX 250 S. Less than a quarter of the engine capacity and about half the weight of the R1200C, but nimble on sand and over rocks

Anyone with enough stamina or tolerance of my vanity to have reached this stage will recall my reincarnation was subject to a proviso that there should only be one bike at a time in my life, but in late 2017, on the approach to a milestone birthday the following spring, I was granted a derogation and came into possession of a Sakakaki KLX 250 trail bike, which now lives in a shed in a garden in Queensland and is exercised whenever the Girl of my Dreams and I visit our daughter and her family there.

Although the KLX is both tiny and puny in comparison to the R1200, it is just the tool for the job of poking around in the bush, of which there is approximately three million square miles, or 250 times the size of Belgium, where it is routinely as dry as this summer has been. The two downsides, however, are that the roads are mostly straight and the bush has many, many ways to kill a rider. We all know about snakes and spiders in Australia, but there are dozens of species of scorpions, some with industrial strength venom, emus which run away and lull you into the secure feeling they know to keep out of your way before changing direction right into your path. Rabbits do the same and zigzagging is a good way to escape a less agile predator, but running over a 1kg bunny standing about ankle high is far less disruptive to a ride than hitting 60kg of emu at body height. Kangaroos seem content to keep right out of the way, which is good because they are even heftier than emus and seemingly as daft, but the real killer is the climate.

We have had some experience this summer of hot and dry, but where I ride my KLX, six months without measurable rainfall is unusual, but not exceptional and daytime temperatures in the low to mid forties are quite common; these, combined with heating from being in direct sunlight (just think how hot the patio gets here), can lead anyone into serious trouble in literally a few hours. Then there is the topography: it is quite easy to get lost in an environment where the sun is so high in the sky for much of the day it is not readily evident which way is which and where there are no hills or other tall features, and where 360° scrubby vegetation limits line of sight to a couple of hundred metres, making it quite possible to be close to the way home, but not to be able to find it. People have lost dogs in the bush, when they have chased a after something and, though they are within earshot, they are not visible and are never seen again except, I imagine, by vultures and meat ants.

On that cheerful note, dear reader, I shall end, in hope that you know me a little better now and feel moved to support me in the role of editor of your magazine by putting some of your thoughts into words and sending them to me.

Rutland Water
Aug 29th – 31st (Bank Holiday)
Rutland Water is a gentle 3 day tour staying in the same hotel for both nights. It's an easy but still very enjoyable tour for all levels of riders. It's the last one of the year to Rutland. It's a great tour, or a relaxed practice.
Cost for rooms £280/£300
13 spaces available.
Day 1-180 miles, Day 2-138 miles, Day 3-180 miles

2027 TOURS

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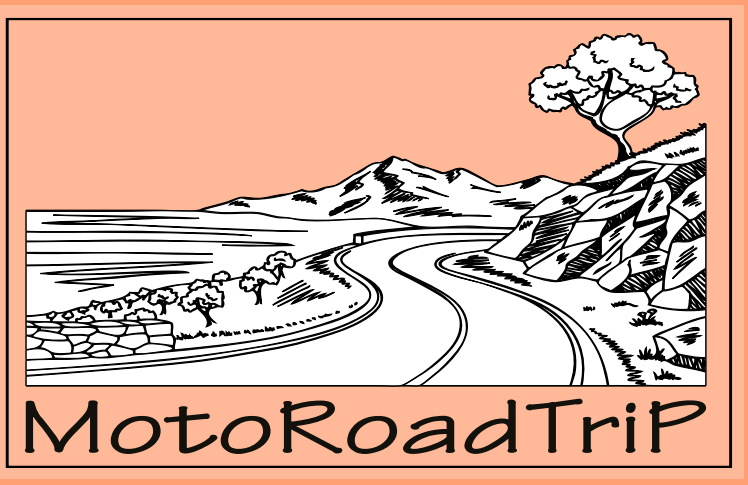
Taking the NC500 route helps you to discover the best the Highlands has to offer, from magical and mystical castles, sample amazing local produce, with fresh from the sea and land specialties. The North Coast 500 offers a truly unique touring experience, quite unlike anywhere else in the world and many of those who have done it have said it was life-changing for them.

Bringing together a route of just over 500 miles of stunning coastal scenery, the North Coast 500, naturally follows the main roads along the coastal edges of the North Highlands of Scotland, taking in the regions of Western Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Easter Ross, the Black Isle and Inverness-Shire.



Its not just Scotland , its so much more through the rural British isles.

This may be the last time I run this as the hotel costs are unbelievable.

£1500 single occupancy £1550 Double occupancy for this outstanding 9 Day tour.

NORWAY

Starting on Monday 21st June its going to be 14 to 20 days (the planning will not be finished until I have finished it in 2026. It will be expensive, it will be hotels, it will be great, limited numbers.

Please register your interest, further information will follow.

PLEASE LOOK AT THE WEBSITE FOR THE FULL LIST OF TOURS FOR 2027

www.motoroadtrip.co.uk 07786 592845 steveriches12@gmail.com

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IDCAM

INTRODUCTORY DAY COURSE IN ADVANCED MOTORCYCLING

2026 Dates

- Aug 15th
- Sep 19th
- Oct 17th
- Nov 21st

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

2026 Dates

Sun 23rd August **Sat 12th Sept**

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

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YOUNG RIDER PROGRAMME

HELP US ENCOURAGE MORE YOUNG RIDERS TO JOIN THE KAMG

Dear KAMG Members

As part of our ongoing efforts to encourage more young riders to get involved with Kent Advanced Motorcyclists Group (KAMG), we are asking all our members to help spread the word about our Young Rider Programme.

If you know any motorcyclists under the age of 30 who you think would benefit from advanced motorcycle training, we would really appreciate you recommending KAMG to them.

We currently offer a 100% subsidy of the Advanced Rider Course fee for eligible young riders.

The subsidy works as follows:

- You pay for the Advanced Rider Course up front via the IAM RoadSmart website.
- KAMG refund 50% of the course fee upon completion of the IDCAM.
- The remaining 50% is refunded upon the successful completion of the IAM test.

You can find out more about KAMG here:

or kamg.org.uk

SCAN ME

KAMG will also partially cover the fuel contribution to the Observer for every observed ride, helping to further reduce the cost of the programme for the rider.

Our aim is to make advanced motorcycle training as accessible as possible to younger riders, while helping them develop their riding skills, confidence and awareness. We also hope to encourage the next generation of riders to become part of KAMG and the wider IAM RoadSmart community.

If you have a friend, family member, colleague or fellow rider under the age of 30, please encourage them to get in touch with KAMG or pass on the details of the programme.

Even if they have only recently started riding or are simply considering advanced training, please let them know about the opportunity. A recommendation from another rider can make all the difference.

Thank you for your continued support and for helping us attract and develop the next generation of KAMG riders.