

ADVANCE AND RETARD



NAME: ALASTAIR 'A-FORCE' FAGAN
EXPERIENCE: BSB-level track rider, lots of track training and experience, but only 7 hours of road training, coupled to about 150,000 miles of experience. Shitting himself about this day.



NAME: TONY LOCKHART
EXPERIENCE: Er, lots. The screen stickers give it away a bit, but 'Fluro-Tone' has done it all, and works for 90-One Rider Training, who run the courses for Take Control. He's pretty handy, too.



NAME: RICHARD 'MOBY' NEWLAND
EXPERIENCE: Eight hours of formal training, 15 years ago, followed by about 250,000 miles of road riding in all weathers, some track time, and lots of following talented gits like Alastair.

Words by: Richard 'Moby' Newland & Alastair 'A-Force' Fagan Pics by: FLOW Images

Riding fast is what we live for, but doing it on the road can easily end in a hedge excursion – unless you've got the right skills

The obsession to ride faster is an exhilarating and dangerous companion. The more often we carve through our favourite set of bends just that little bit quicker, keep our knee on the deck that little bit longer, or humiliate our mates just that little bit more convincingly – the more addictive it gets. It's what makes us feel alive. This quest for the holeshoot is what motivates most of us to get out there after work to masturbate our skills. But it can easily go sour when adrenaline overcomes our skills, and suddenly our playground is scattered with metaphorical turds. You can dramatically reduce the odds of throwing shapes, though. It takes almost no effort, time, or money – and

you might enjoy it, too. The only thing you've got to overcome is your own preconceptions. The advanced riding brigade have almost as strong a rep' as we do as sportsbike riders. They're all dull as shit, aren't they? They wear fluro jackets, only socialise with other IAM or RoSPA qualified dullards, and haven't broken a speed limit since they last jumped in a taxi. There might be a few like that out there, but our man Tony here certainly doesn't conform to the stereotype; fluro jacket and qualifications excepted. I've been riding bikes since I was 8 years-old, have held a full bike licence for 15 years, and have probably ridden something approaching 250,000 miles on bikes. My total formal

training amounts to about eight hours. That's it. Alastair's not much different on the road front – although he's had plenty of track-based training, and is clearly a dramatically faster rider than I am, having fought his way up to a BSB ride in 2009. So it seemed apt for me and Al to find out just how good we are in the eyes of the elite, to see how much knowledge we've assimilated over the years, and how our backgrounds and skill levels translate into our road ability. We hooked up with Tony Lockhart from 90-One Rider Training, who instructs for 'Take Control', a series of rider training courses subsidised by Warwickshire County Council. We were both absolutely bricking it too.

“WE WERE BOTH ABSOLUTELY BRICKING IT”



'Fluro-Tone' looks on in wonder as Moby and Al look back in wonder at how one man can smoke so many cigarettes in such a short period of time. Incredible...



You know as well as we do that our 'normal riding' isn't what most people would consider to be 'normal riding', and we were concerned about what Tony might find. But, once we'd overcome the near-unassailable problem of getting Alastair out of a McDonald's, we headed off into the countryside with to find out.

I was nervous. I hate being followed, and was trying to be whiter than Jacko, sticking exactly to the speed limits and making a show of checking everything in my immediate environment. I was so preoccupied with not being a twat that I got us all lost. I'd never been to Chipping Sodbury before (well, why

would you?), and couldn't work out how to escape from the shithole.

After a few laps of several roundabouts, I finally sussed it, and as we got out onto national speed limit roads, I allowed myself a bit more of a breather. It actually looked like Fluro-Tone was getting bored and impatient, so I decided to ride a bit more normally and damn the consequences.

As it turned out, I just got a lecture about not riding like we were on our DAS test. Tony wanted us to get on with it, and show him what we actually ride like. Discretion is the better part of valour though, so fast riding was ok, but we guessed that wheelies and

If you have to ride with a fat mate, remember to put him at the back, so you can still see the road ahead

stoppies might not be.

The next 30 miles went fine, but then I nearly wiped Tony out on an overtake. It felt closer than it was, but when you're doing 70mph and pull into the path of the bike rapidly overtaking you, a 2ft gap feels significantly less. I blame it on being a tubby bitch. I can't see anything in my mirrors except my own bulk, and have to lift an arm to see behind. I'd just done that, and spotted Tone on my nearside, I checked the road ahead, and moved out to see around the car we were gaining on. I could see that it was clear, and went for it. Unfortunately, that was the same moment that Mr T had decided that I

Right: 'As as I went by, I just reached out and tweaked one of her tattybojangles like this.' Tony may look like a copper, but he doesn't behave like one



wasn't gonna bother - but he was.

This was the first time in the day that I was aware of something I could be doing, but wasn't. I knew about 'off-siding' from advanced driver courses, but I almost never do it on a bike. You do it on left-handers when you want to overtake something you can't see around. You position yourself on the wrong side of the road, as far over as necessary, to give yourself a line of sight beyond the rolling roadblock you're looking to pass. If it's clear, you nail it; if it isn't, you pull back in or stay



“I HAD TO SIT THE BIKE UP TO AVOID A SCANIA ARTIC’, AND RODE UP A GRASS BANK”



out there until you can blast through.

Sounds a bit lethal doesn't it? It gives me the shits too if I'm honest. I can't really think of many times when I've been in such a dire hurry to get past the car in front that I need to hang out on the wrong side of the road round a blind left-hander. It's obviously an entirely valid technique, but I really don't feel comfortable doing it. It makes you look like a right tosser in the eyes of other road users too.

Amusingly Tony was reticent to lay into us. I guess he was expecting the usual journo egotistical shroud of invincibility to blind us to our weaknesses, but we wanted to learn.

Unsurprisingly, me and Al were taking quite different lines in places - especially on right-handers. My line was more 'experienced road rider', Al's was far more 'sickeningly talented racer'. It's something I still have to think about all the time though - and it's the problem I see most often in other riders. Ideally you should be positioning yourself as far left as you can, without getting crossed-up in the gutter, then stay out wide until your view of the exit is clear, giving you an apex you can clip, if you want to.

What I used to do, and what I see 90% of riders do, was take the 'racing line', hugging the white line. This is all peachy until something comes round the corner and decapitates you. I've had two heart-stopping close calls in this scenario. In the first I hit an oncoming Vectra SRi, in the second I had to sit the bike bolt upright to avoid a Scania artic', and ended up riding up a grass bank. I wouldn't advise either.

The most serious issue Tony picked up on is my propensity for riding far



'Off-siding' gives you a clear view of the road ahead when something is blocking your lane



too close to other vehicles. It's often feet, and sometime inches, and I leave myself no room for error – mine or theirs. Beyond that, a bit of laziness when overtaking and my almost total ignorance of the back brake were the only demerits. I was pretty pleased with that. I'll let Al tell you his story.

which is what the day is all about.

The majority of his analysis was based around the amount of road I was using – or rather the lack of it. I tend to hover around the central white line, using it as a guide, almost a comfort, and occasionally drifting out towards the kerbs for extreme right-handers.

A-Force may be on the fastest line, but this is track skills fecking with road sense. If your head's over the white line - you might get it knocked off

“I TEND TO HOVER AROUND THE CENTRAL WHITE LINE, USING IT AS A GUIDE, ALMOST A COMFORT”

Alastair's Bit

Moby stated that we were bricking it, and we really were. I was so scared that I had a constant botty-weep. With near-zero training previously, I've learnt by riding with mates and other excitable riders, and never really concentrated on technique. Having a bloke in a fluro-rave jacket studying my skills made me feel like a very naughty boy.

I needn't have worried though. Tony isn't a copper and thankfully doesn't act like one either. I soon loosened up after he led for a while, and may even have exceeded the speed limit once or twice. I felt less rigid, more flowing.

After the brief initial ride, Tony kindly praised my riding, but also added some constructive criticism,

After Tony's 98th fag of the day, we gave it another crack. This time I was consciously using all of my allocated lane, and a little bit more. This allowed more corner speed, as I wasn't having to use as much lean angle. Doesn't sound radical, but it's useful when you're trying to lose someone.

I second Moby's opinion of 'off-siding' though, and I'm still not comfortable hugging the hedge all the way round right-handers (just in case of diesel and gravel), but I am doing it now far more frequently.

California Superbike School has helped with my use of vision, but the training does lean towards a track bias. This little outing with Tony has refined my skills rather than teaching an old twat new tricks, but after years

Don't be fooled by Tony's upright stance - he's a deceptively fast and smooth rider

of self-contained riding and thousands of miles, I'd be worried if he had considerably altered my riding.

I've already booked the missus onto this course, and I'm waiting to see if Tony will have me back for a more intense session. Highly recommended – do it or lose it.

Conclusion

So, was it worth it? Of course it was. It's ridiculous to even debate whether or not it's worth your time – you might get a piece of feedback that'll save your life, and at the very least you'll be a faster, smoother and better rider as a result – and who doesn't want that?

I took tangible improvements from the day, which have positively improved my riding, and so did Al. Through increased use of our vision, and by taking Tony's advice on positioning, we've both become faster, smoother and safer road riders. This isn't about top speed, or breaking speed limits, it's about being consistently rapid because we can read the road ahead, and the challenges, earlier and more accurately.

Go and do it, then revel in your mates' confusion as they wonder why they can't keep up with you anymore. **FB**



WHAT HORSES FOR WHAT COURSES

For scooter riders:
Defensive Moped Riding - free half day courses for riders wanting to learn more advanced riding skills and techniques.

Moped to motorbike:
Free half day courses for riders who want to progress to a 125 but have only ever ridden a moped.

For 125 riders:
Defensive 125 Riding - choose from a free half day course, or more extensive full day course for £30. A confidence boosting defensive riding session.

For riders of more powerful bikes:
Skills enhancement course - a day long skills enhancement course that introduces advanced and defensive riding techniques - for just £30.

Cheaper Insurance:
If you take a course and meet the Driving Standards Agency 'Enhanced Rider' standard, you will be given a certificate that qualifies you for insurance discounts from the many insurers who support the scheme. If you don't quite meet the standard, take further training. The Enhanced Rider Scheme is open to all bike riders who have a full motorcycle licence, no matter what size of bike you ride. Go to www.direct.gov.uk/ERS.

Thanks To:
Tony Lockhart for putting up with us, and improving our skills - to arrange a course, email info@90-ONE.com or call 0845 370 9191.