

# Transform your riding in a day

MCM reader Steve Lamb had lost the pleasure of biking, but a bit of instruction and training in a safe, controlled environment made him a different rider...

Photography: John Milbank



Before



After

WE'VE all been there, but how many of us would admit it? That moment when your confidence drops – maybe thanks to a wobble on a roundabout, or a moment of panic as some dozy driver pulls out in front of you. Too many of these might lead you to question the joy of biking. And it's not just a problem for new riders. Fortunately, it is something you can fix.

Steve Lamb owns a 2003 Yamaha FZ6 Fazer. He's been riding since 1996, but has found himself in a rut of congested commuting, struggling to see the joys that biking really holds. It's been a vicious circle for him, and when we met at a bike meet, he'd clearly started to fall out of love with riding. But we love a challenge.

Having heard good things about the British Superbike School (www.britishtsuperbikeschool.co.uk), we arranged for Steve to get a day's tuition at the Blyton, Lincolnshire track, worth £289, and hopefully give him back the buzz we all know is there.

The transformation in his riding was truly amazing – during the first couple

of sessions he looked awkward and, frankly, scared to be on the bike. But by the afternoon, his body language was utterly different with him clearly far more relaxed in the bends and enjoying his bike.

Track lessons aren't just for sportsbike riders – they will benefit everyone by giving a safe and controlled environment to learn what your bike can do. It's not about 'exploring the limits' – that brings to mind MotoGP levels of lean and braking – it's about knowing that, on the road, your bike is probably a lot more capable than you realise! If you're still not sure, here's what Steve had to say about the day...

## How one day changed my biking life

A generously filled bacon sandwich and a cup of strong coffee were doing nothing to settle the butterflies in my stomach, but I had a feeling I'd be needing plenty of sustenance today. And besides, it was too late to back out now.

I hate to admit it, but I'd stopped enjoying riding, and after 17 years on



Outer Circuit

The circuit used by the school has a good mix of slow and fast corners.

## 28 KNOW HOW

the bike, I still lacked confidence in coming and braking. A chat with MCM's editor at a local bike meet convinced me that some track training would help.

After the usual signing-in formalities, all students met for the kick-off briefing. I say students purposely, as it was soon stressed that this was no trackday. "It's pure instruction, in a safe and controlled environment," Mike Abbott, ex club racer and RoSPA instructor told us.

Feeling a little reassured, it was time for my group's first session (all riders are assessed by experience and needs, and grouped accordingly, with a maximum of nine riders per two instructors). I was teamed with MCM's Carl-Ann Smith on her KTM 390 Duke, and told we were to be taught by Dan on a Kawasaki ZX10. Dan Linfoot, currently seventh in the British Superbike Championship. The butterflies were back with a vengeance.

The first session was simply 'follow the instructor', to get us acclimatised to track riding, and to try and learn the circuit. Dan

showed us the best lines to take and highlighted various tip-in points, apex cones and exit points. This flew by in a series of missed apexes, panic braking and general frustration...

A debrief from Dan, along with words of encouragement, then it was back to the classroom for our next assignment: "Accelerating...; Hmm that seems easy – I can do that, "...without using your brakes, and in a single gear, get to the apex, then accelerate out to get the feel of the bike". Oh.

Back on track I picked a gear – third seemed a good idea – but my mental bandwidth was soon exceeded, and panic set in on the two right-hand bends, resulting in me grabbing the brakes, standing the bike up and running on at the corner. This was going to be harder than I had possibly imagined; I was almost glad when the session ended and we returned for the debrief and next assignment. Dan was full of great advice and observations, but most obvious was that I was tense, stiff and very nervous, which was showing in my riding.



MCM reader Steve with BSB racer and instructor Dan Linfoot.

Our next session on track was all about turning in the corners – the bit I dreaded most. I was convinced that most of my panic in the last session was due to my speed being just above my comfort level, so for this session, I chose to stay in second gear rather than third. This would hopefully give me a little bit more thinking time and take away the panic of "oh my god, here comes a corner – brake... Brake... BRAKE!" This session was a little better with my Fazer quite happy to stay in one gear and performing well throughout the rev range, but the panic braking was still there, and the dreaded right-hander at Abotts was still unsettling me, with one more excursion on the grass (thankfully again without incident). The debrief with Dan was much of the same again – tense riding, sitting upright, no body movement and me allowing my mind to stop me doing what was needed.

Steve's confidence grew throughout the day.



We stopped for an hour for lunch in the cafe before the next assignment: Braking. Another of my demons! After a run through of the physics of braking, some great tips on front wheel braking and some reassurance and guidance from Mike and Dan, it was time for another track session.

It may have been the words of wisdom from Dan, it may have been the lunch break to allow things to sink in, it may even have been the cheese roll, but in this session it all seemed to come together. This time, staying in third gear, and braking firmly on the straights before tipping in confidently with a smooth and relaxed style, my riding was transformed. I was looking further up the track, hitting apexes with regular rhythm, clipping the track edges on exit and affecting my line with throttle alone. Best of all though, it was addictive! More laps please!

In the final session of the day, which was centred on consistent positioning and lap times, it was more of the same. Confident, relaxed riding, that was naturally much faster than it had been in the morning sessions when, in hindsight, I was clearly trying too hard. The panic braking had gone, the fear had gone, and the excitement had returned.

In conclusion then, was the day useful? Absolutely! I am sure that many of my internal riding demons were exercised and that my riding is not only safer, but also more confident and much, much more enjoyable.

*Do you have a biking hang-up, or are you really struggling with a side of your riding? We can't promise to help everyone, but send us a photo and tell us what you're struggling with and how you believe you could improve...*



BSB star Dan Linfoot gave Steve all the advice and encouragement he needed.