



Size doesn't matter

This month young Carli took the Duke to the British Superbike School to find out whether you needed a big bike to have fun on track...

In detail

Rider: Carli Ann Smith
 Bike: 2013 KTM 390 Duke
 Miles this month: 319
 Miles in total: 1581
 Cost when new: £4499
 Highlights this month: Getting out on track
 Lowlights this month: Hayfever

Riding into the car park and seeing GSXR and R6s I began to wonder whether attending the British Superbike School at Blyton Raceway in Lincolnshire was a good idea on my little KTM 390 Duke – did size really matter? There was only one way to really find out... and it wasn't a fight in the car park.

The British Superbike School is a circuit based motorcycle rider development day, with tuition from police rider instructors, ex-championship winners, TT riders and qualified advanced riding instructors. I was partnered up with Steve, a Fazer rider from Cambridgeshire and our instructor for the day was British Superbike racer, Dan Linfoot. I was booked on to the Level One course, aimed at road riders, it works on a number of skills that are transferable to the road, including throttle control, corner entry and exit and braking.

Heading out on to the smooth track for the first time I was really excited. I'd been on trackdays before but the prospect of having just nine people out on the session at one time was great – almost like having the track to yourself. I was interested to see how well the KTM handled, I knew it was nimble, as I was used to weaving in and out of traffic in town and making the most of

twisties on my way home, but here was its ultimate test.

Three of the sessions require you to ride round in one gear and not to use your brakes – which is easier said than done – it's a great exercise for learning about throttle control and thinking ahead, as you have to plan how much to accelerate and for how long before the next corner. The Duke excelled at this – if I do say so myself. The engine braking came in handy as I'd simply come off the gas and it would slow down instantly, meaning I could stay on the throttle longer giving me a slight edge on the bigger boys.

In the penultimate session we were encouraged to brake hard and feel what it was like to use your front brake progressively.

"Some people have admitted they've never used their front brake before. It's useful because many people don't experience what happens until they're in a situation on the road where they have to grab a handful of front brake and then they're shocked," said Mike Abbott, course leader.

Having nothing coming the other way, a grippy surface and knowing there was a clear track behind me meant that I could really slam on the brakes. Knowing how hard I could brake on the 390 gave me confidence that should I need to perform an emergency stop then I could. After never having to use them as hard as I did on track, I was seriously impressed with the disc brakes on the front and rear and knew that should I ever need it, the ABS would jump in and help me out.

There is classroom based teaching before each of the track exercises and you are fully debriefed by your instructor after each session – with just two of us in our group, there was nowhere to hide.

Dan said: "You're really good at changing direction quickly – I can tell the bits of the track you enjoy!"

He was right. Through the straights admittedly my orange best friend lacked a bit of oomph, I knew that I wasn't going to be the fastest on track

and didn't expect to be as everyone else had 400cc more to play with than me. But through the corners the KTM was a delight – I couldn't wait to get to the next one.

I thought that the riding position would be a strange one to get used to on track, but I had plenty of control over the bike and could flick it in and out of corners like 'The Wiggler' with ease. It's a light bike too – with a dry weight of 139kg – meaning I could manhandle it around without too much effort.

The final session puts all the building blocks together. I found myself winding round the track a lot quicker and with a lot more confidence than when I had started the day. I made the most of the 42bhp offered by the 373.2cc lump and utilised the six-speed gearbox, especially along the straight – the gear shift indicator was helpful too. The bottom end power pulled me out of corners instantly and using the higher revs meant that I got as much as I could out of the engine – it was fun to ride the bike hard – very different to my daily commute.

The day hadn't been about speed or who could get their elbow closest to the floor, it was more about bike control and riding skills – with the chance to go fast. It's given me more confidence riding on the road after having pushed the bike and myself to the limit on the track. Not only was it a fantastic day out, there were some valuable lessons to take back out on to the road with me and on this occasion it proved – size doesn't matter...

FANCY A GO YOURSELF?

That's a good idea if you do! For more information visit the website: www.britishsuperbikeschool.co.uk

I jumped on another KTM this month too as I went to the Motorcycle Off Road Experience organised by the MCIA – I joined Enduro and Supermoto Superstar Ady Smith and climbed aboard a Freeride for a few hours. I ended up with a big smile – and lots of dust – all over my face. Will definitely be doing it again.



It felt like it was time to take the little katoom out on track...