

How this Aussie could save British riders' lives

► Australian uses datalogger to improve learners' braking, turning and cornering ► Most rural accidents due to lack of these skills ► MCN readers prove new techniques work

by Rupert Paul

An Australian-built device could teach new riders the life-saving skills which current UK training neglects.

The electronic box, used in the Australian state of Victoria since 1993, combines with a marked-out grid to provide an objective score of a rider's ability to brake, turn and negotiate a bend. As reported in MCN, police accident investigators agree that the most common form of fatal crash - on country roads - is caused when a panicking rider makes a braking, steering or cornering error.

The training grid fits on an area of just 60 by 40 metres, and a simple series of exercises taken at 15-20mph focuses riders' attention on the basics of handling a bike to a much greater degree than the current Compulsory Basic Training syllabus. "I'm 100% for it," said UK

trainer Sean Hayes, who watched Smith's demonstration, which used seven MCN readers as guinea pigs. "This is bare basic stuff that should be in CBT, and it integrates with the new swerve test, for which some trainers clearly seem to have trouble preparing clients."

A second observer, Andrew Freeman, who has trained riders in America, Aus-

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ANDREW FREEMAN,
INDEPENDENT RIDER TRAINER

tralia and the UK, was equally impressed. He said: "I think this system has huge merit, especially in countersteering and braking, which are not particularly well covered officially in the UK. To pull these skills out of the bag in an emergency, you need to be taught like this. It's a great tool to give a base level of skill."

MCN readers were unanimous in their praise for Smith and the day's training he provided. Their comments also provided a worrying snapshot of current CBT standards in the UK. Phillip Owen said: "I don't think I learned that much on my CBT, especially braking. We just went through it once and went out on the road." Audrey Boshell agreed: "What we've learned today would really have helped me a lot during my CBT." "We just did two hours on a school playground and were out on the road. Doing this instead would have given me much

more confidence in handling real-world situations," added Peter Francis.

Smith, who has spent 30 years as a motorcycle safety consultant, believes nothing is more important than basic skills: "If you think of learning to run and learning to walk, all this is doing is saying, 'Can you walk?'," he said. "After that, you can go on to improve. The first row of bricks is down."

Smith estimates the set of lights and control box which gives riders a score for each manoeuvre would cost a training school around £2500. It's a cost few will be able to afford at the moment. But Sean Hayes is convinced of its value: "It would be criminal not to introduce Rob Smith's ideas. The training area markings are a fiver's worth of paint. Using them and his training methods would be a low-cost way to introduce something useful, and benefit clients."



Smith (left) demonstrating his training techniques to a group of MCN readers



WHO IS ROB SMITH?

Motorcycle safety consultant Rob Smith has been a motorcycle trainer for 30 years. He's the chief instructor in Victoria state, Australia, and has also been an accident investigator. He has just spent three months setting up a bike training and testing system for Dubai. He can be contacted on fcg4d@yahoo.com.au



The system is based on a day of low-speed manoeuvres within a designated area

How the training system works

MCN's panel of new riders agreed Aussie-style training was a fun, positive and very valuable experience. This was partly due to Smith's expert delivery. A typical example:

"A motorcycle will comfortably outperform you. BUT - it's denser than a plank. A lot of crashes happen because people give up: 'I give up, bike - you're in charge!' And the bike says: 'I dunno what to do!' Boom! So from that we deduce that it's always best to be in charge."

The exercises start with simple stop/go and slalom, then move on to countersteering U-turns, countersteering swerves, cornering and braking. Because the speeds are so low (the layout is designed to fit inside a training school's area), riders

can walk through corners, discuss lines and see front wheels steering left to initiate a right lean, and vice versa.

The day ended with a test for cornering, braking and swerving, using the marked-out grid. In Australia, riders have two goes at each task. An 'ideal' manoeuvre scores zero, and mistakes mean penalty points. 'Ideal', MCN reckons, corresponds roughly to 70% of the bike's potential. Any score under 40 is a pass, with most riders managing 30-32.

THANKS TO

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NEW HELP FOR NEW RIDERS ONLINE

MCN's website motorcyclenews.com has launched a new section which is dedicated entirely to learners and new riders. If you want to know the answers to questions such as how do I pass my test? What bikes are worth considering? Or How do I improve my riding? Go to motorcyclenews.com/mcn/newrider