

## A Guide for Young Motorcyclists: Things you need to know

Motorcycles are becoming increasingly popular amongst those looking for a different driving experience or for those who don't want the costs associated with owning a car. Whether you intend to use a motorbike for pleasure; for your commute to work; or even for travelling overseas, this guide will help to prepare young and beginner drivers for life on two wheels.



### Getting Your Motorcycle Licence

Once you complete your Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) course there are several routes you can take to your licence, depending on your age and what you want to ride.

- With your provisional licence in hand and a CBT course under your belt, you can ride a moped on the road with L-plates.
- The first of four full licences is known as the AM. To achieve this you need to be 16 and first take a theory test, followed by two practical tests, one off-road and one on-road. However, at this age you can still only ride a moped even once you have achieved AM level.
- At 17 you can get your A1 licence. With CBT, theory and the two practical modules passed, it means you can ride bikes up to 125cc without L-plates.
- At 19 you become eligible for the A2 licence category, which means you can ride bikes up to 47bhp.
- Finally, there's the full A licence. If you are starting from scratch you need to be at least 24 to try for this licence or if you have held an A2 licence for 2 years, you can try for it at 21. This licence demands CBT, theory and the two-part practical test.

- For experience drivers over the age of 24, and have held an A2 licence for over 2 years, it is possible to take a direct access course and test. This will allow you to be unrestricted in riding a motor cycle of any size.

It's important to remember that while motorcycle training can be given by friends or family members, riders who go through a training course from a qualified safety school have a lower accident rate.

### Road Safety: Become Risk Aware

It is vital to become aware of the risks involved with riding a motorcycle so you can protect yourself and other road users.

- The fatality rate amongst motorcyclists is much higher than for car occupants. Bikers are 38 times more likely to be killed in a road accident.
- In Great Britain alone in 2013, 4,866 bikers were seriously injured in road collisions and 331 bikers died. These figures were substantially lower than the ones recorded in 2008, but they are still high when compared to other road users.
- Young motorcyclists particularly are at risk and thus their insurance premiums are high. Those aged 17 to 24 are at higher risk of being involved in a serious or fatal collision. This can be put down in some part to rider inexperience but it's also because motorcyclists in this age range are more likely to speed and drive under the influence of drugs or drink. However, these are avoidable actions, so to keep safe be aware of your own personal responsibilities.



### Buying Your First Motorcycle

It's important to carry out in-depth research to find the right model for you within your budget.

- Looks are important, but this is a bike you may drop a few times as you improve, so it needs to be sturdy.

- Don't buy a bike that is too old as you will spend more on repairs than on the initial outlay.
- Buying new can be great and if you can afford it, go that route. However, if your budget is more limited, it's advisable to buy used. First, because you won't get that hit of initial depreciation and second you will have more flexibility to strike a deal than at a dealership. If you can, get a bike which has less than 40,000 miles on the clock, as wear on a bike is harder than on a car.
- If you know little about bikes, take along a friend who is an experienced biker or even better a mechanic to check the bike over for you.

### **New on the Road: Prepare for your First Month of Riding a Motorcycle**

When you first purchase your motorcycle, either ask an experienced rider to take it home for you, or arrange to get it delivered. Don't navigate an unknown route on your first time out.

Before you ride your bike you will need to ensure you own the proper safety gear. If you are involved in a collision you are more likely to receive less serious injuries if you are dressed appropriately, it may even be the difference between life and death.

#### **You will need:**

- A full face safety helmet
- A motorcycle jacket
- Leather trousers, over-pants or biker's jeans
- Riding gloves
- Sturdy boots which cover your ankles.

### **Start Close to Home**

When you are first getting used to your bike, it can be a good idea to go to an empty car park and practise. Then progress to slower, less busy streets and only move on to faster paced roads once you feel ready, always adhering to the limitations of your current licence. When you ride a bike, you feel every bump in the road and are exposed to the elements. This can be a scary feeling at first, so take your time until you acclimatise.

Once you get through the first month, you should start to feel a little more comfortable, but don't let this lull you into a false sense of security. Even experienced riders need to remember their safety training.

### **Motorcycle Maintenance**

Being responsible for the maintenance of your vehicle is imperative, as this helps keep you and your fellow road users safe. This applies for all vehicles, so whether you are driving a car or motorcycle, it is important to regularly follow a maintenance checklist.

- Check your tyres are inflated to the pressure stipulated by the manufacturer. If tyre pressure is incorrect, you won't be able to manoeuvre the bike properly.
- Ensure the tyre has sufficient tread and check there are no cracks in the rubber.
- Always keep oil at the correct level.
- Check your lights regularly to ensure they are working.
- Make sure your throttle and brake lever cables and your chain and sprocket are in good working order.

### **Essential Maintenance Tools**

The number of tools you will need will depend on whether you will have your motorbike serviced by a garage or whether you will undertake the work yourself. You also need to be aware that if you are going to do the work yourself, you need to learn how to do it properly so as not to put yourself at risk. Seek professional help, and consider undertaking a further maintenance course to further ensure your safety.

Here are the tools you will need for basic maintenance:

- Heavy duty nitrile gloves to protect your hands
- Wrench and socket set
- Hex driver bits
- Oil filter wrench
- Oil drain pan
- Motorcycle stand
- Torque wrench
- Tyre pressure gauge
- Air pump
- Chain lube.

These can be expensive, so shop around online to find the best deals, buy second-hand or even agree to share the expense with a biker friend.

### **Staying Safe on the Road**

When you ride a bike, there are certain safety aspects you need to keep in mind:

- Always ride assuming that other drivers haven't seen you.
- Leave plenty of space between you and the vehicle in front and at your sides. The more space you leave around you, the better you can see hazards and the more time you will have to take evasive action.
- Take particular care at junctions and try to position your bike so you are visible to other road users and avoid getting too close to other vehicles.
- If you are out with other more experienced riders, don't exceed the speed you feel comfortable at to keep up with them. Know your own limits.

- Be careful at bends in the road and vigilant to the fact they may hide obstructions.
- If you are being tailgated, it is safer to let the vehicle pass you as a bike has a shorter stopping distance than other vehicles.

Preparation is key for safety on the road. Good vehicle maintenance, the right protective gear and staying calm when you are out in traffic will help to keep you out of trouble. It is also worth learning all you can from more experienced riders, whether from books, online or in person.

Bio: Joe Thomas is a writer from the UK who loves motorcycles and is enthusiastic about promoting their responsible use and safety.

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