



GO BETWEEN

Oxford IAM Group News Letter
May 2008



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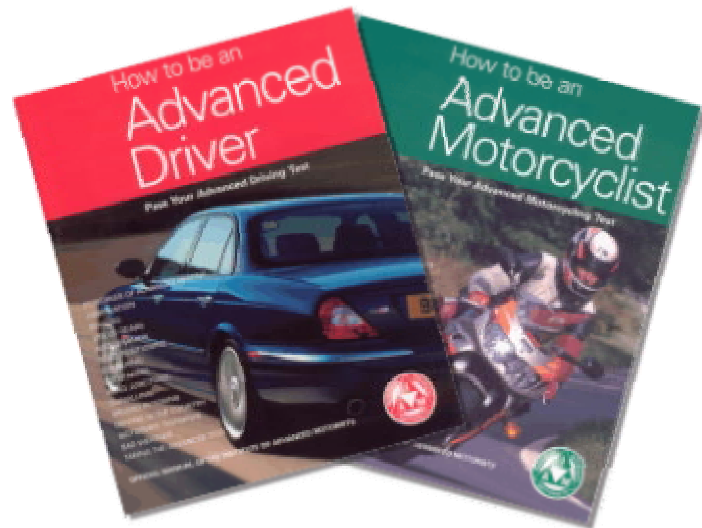
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From the Chair...



When was the last time you did any training?

I'm not talking about the modern 'jobsworth', 'makework' stuff like being trained to use a sharp instrument like a biro safely at work without breaching health and safety guidelines, I mean driver or rider training.

Advanced driving is not about passing a test (large as it looms when you're an Associate). The test, in my opinion, is nothing more than a check that you've reached a recognized standard. The real value of what we do is in the training that comes before the test. But, to paraphrase a well known ad slogan, training is for life, not just for the test. You should never stop training, because you can always be safer - always be smoother and always be more progressive.

Mind you, there are those who think training is a waste of time. Sadly, the Chairman of the hugely influential Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety (PACTS) is one of them. He's said that there is no point in training drivers and riders because trained drivers and riders "simply kill themselves faster." Let's assume you think a little differently...

OK, if you're an Associate you should be getting all the training you can eat. But

what about the rest of us? Training shouldn't stop once you've passed your test, your Senior Observer test or any other test - it needs to be ongoing. Training is a little like a house - you can't expect to move in, do the place up once and just leave it. To be safe and effective on the road, stuff what Mr PACTS says, you need to be training regularly.

Why? For a start, training 'goes off' after a while. It needs refreshing. Everyone slips, gets into bad habits and loses their edge. Training hones it back again. Then there are new techniques to learn.

I spent a day training at Millbrook with Ian Jeffs last week. Ian's one of our two Deputy Chairmen and the MD of Roadcraft Driver Training. Apart from being utterly terrified on the hill circuit (not Ian's driving I hasten to add - I'm just a very, very bad passenger) a days' training really got my edge back. As well as that, I learned how to use a raft of new techniques - trail braking, pedal delay and compliance steer for a start. I now know what happens when you need to change lane on a motorway instantly but safely. I've also got a much better grasp of things like single input steering too. But perhaps more importantly, despite the best attempts of some people to turn driving into a joyless, puritan, miserable series of compliance tests, I've got my enthusiasm for it back again. (Thanks Ian.)

I started training with the IAM way back in 1990 when at this time, I was the Oxford Group's youngest member! I don't think I've ever stopped training since; and if you're looking to keep up your skills and enthusiasm, it's the only way to go.

Mark McArthur-Christie

(Chairman)

Chief Observer Writes .

Group Motorcycle Training Rides



The Oxford Area Group of Advanced Motorists (OAMG) have over the years, organised many successful social rides, usually lasting half a day on a Saturday or Sunday morning. These have always been social ride-outs for the benefit of members and Associates near to test standard.

Unfortunately, a number of recent events have been poorly attended and have been cancelled as a result. It is felt that these ride-outs provide more than just a 'jolly' they also provide members with a guide to how well their riding compared to other advanced riders. As a consequence we felt it important to encourage as many members as possible to attend them, to do this we have decided to make future rides less ad-hoc and more structured.

Our aim will be to advertise rides at least a few weeks in advance using the club evenings and an email list of as many motorcycle members as possible.

Members and recommended Associates wishing to come on a ride-out will need to 'opt-in' by contacting the organisers 24 hours before the ride. It is hoped that a calendar of rides with venue, theme, meeting time & place will be generated to give as much notice as possible. In the event of a cancellation every effort will be made to give members 24 hours notice.

When we consider that OAMAG's role is primarily to promote safety through Advanced Roadcraft and to encourage its members to maintain these high standards, it is surprising that many members undertake no further refresher courses or training after completing their advanced test - we all know how easy it is to slip into bad habits! With this in mind and to encourage greater attendance to weekend ride-outs we have decided to theme a number of future rides to deal with different element of advanced riding.

Skilled elements covered will include:

- **Road positioning**
- **Cornering**
- **Motorway riding**
- **Overtaking**
- **Observation**
- **Anticipation development**

To maintain a safe ride, the group will consist of at least two Observers, one at the rear of group, the other midway with a Ride Leader who will probably have designed the route and whose sole

role will be to safely guide the group. Towards the end of the ride a refreshment stop will be made where discussions about the skill used can be had. Members can ask the Observers to comment on their individual riding techniques, but obviously in a positive and constructive way!

We would strongly encourage members to attend at least one of these rides per year. Don't forget that riding to the system is not something that can be switched on and off when it suits. We need to constantly develop and practice our

skills to be safe. In addition to these structured rides we will continue with social rides to include day trips to places of interest. (Any suggestions welcome).

Please support YOUR Group
OAMAG Motorcycle training ride organisers.

For further information contact:

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Welcome New Members

New Car Members

<u>New Member</u>	<u>Date Passed</u>	<u>Observer</u>
Mark Bosley	20/02/2008	Liz Challiner
Allen Gardner	29/03/2008	Martin Thomas
Sarah Green	13/04/2008	Mark Reddin
Adele Hambidge	04/12/2007	Liz Challiner
Nicholas Krohn	07/01/2008	Bernard O'Leary
Gillian Oldfield	07/04/2008	Tony Chalky
Jasmine Pander	04/12/2007	Peter Ingram
Alun Pritchard	30/03/2008	John Lang
Elizabeth Rockett	13/01/2008	Martin Thomas
Robert Whiting	09/03/2008	Tony Chalky

New Bike Members

<u>New Member</u>	<u>Date Passed</u>	<u>Observer</u>
Kevin Mortimer	09/02/2008	Dave Bissell

Speakers Corner

Automatic Number Plate Recognition



Nigel Welham of Thames Valley Police visited the group on March 5 to tell us about the Automatic Number Plate Recognition scheme up & running in Oxfordshire. Surprisingly, the technology isn't that new- it was first developed in 1976, at the Police Scientific Development Branch, with prototypes being used from 1979. The 1st arrest for a detected stolen car was in 1981!

The system works using cameras with optical character recognition to read number plates & compares them against several databases. The databases used include the Police National Computer (PNC) several DVLA ones (no tax/ keeper etc) & the Motor Insurance Bureau. These checks can alert a traffic officer to a vehicle that may have no valid insurance, tax or MOT, that it may be driven by a disqualified driver, or that it may be stolen; the vehicle in question can then be intercepted & the driver questioned. The cameras read an astonishing estimated 1.5 million plates every day, at a rate of 3 per second. About 15,000 of these will result in a hit on one of the databases. A different alert will sound for each reason, allowing an officer to prioritise between, for example, a stolen car or a vehicle with

no valid excise duty, and decide which vehicle should be intercepted.

The same technology is also used to help enforce the congestion charge in London by monitoring vehicles travelling through the city. The camera images can be stored, and some images show the driver of the vehicle as well. Information gathered by these cameras can also be used for investigation purposes, and gathering information on the movements of known criminals. It should mean an end to being given a producer - if the documents are all in order there will be no alert on the system and no reason to stop a driver (provided they are driving sensibly and within the law!). However, as a result of a car triggering alerts, police have been able to stop and search a vehicle occupants and make arrests for possession of drugs or firearms, and apprehend criminals.



There are currently 29 Road-Policing vehicles in the Thames Valley region, equipped with the technology, 10 of which are unmarked. Two vans are deployed every day, one with intercepting vehicles (often motorcycles). In addition, there are links in with fixed CCTV cameras in the towns of Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Newbury, Slough, Windsor, Reading, Banbury, Chipping Norton and Newport Pagnell, and on the M40. The long-term aim is to equip all cars with the ability to send and receive data via GPS and allow access to live information. It also tends to operate on a regional basis, so there is scope to make it more national and share information over a wider area.

The talk was well-attended & over-ran-
yet another fascinating subject!
(Information supplemented by
Wikipedia & Thames Valley Police
Website).
Helen Deeley

Bikers' Corner

The Joys of Advanced Motorcycling:



When a friend from Munich suggested that I join him and a mate on a tour to play on the mountain passes in Austria and Italy (South Tirol) I jumped at the chance. Last year we had spent a week riding along the coast and in the hills around Barcelona. It had been my first bike tour, I'd passed my test less than a year earlier, owned a bike for less than 3 months and hired a bike in Barcelona. It had been so much fun I was keen to repeat the experience. Also I had time on my hands and had already been pondering a short trip into France. Now I would have the chance to make an extended tour and it would also give me a chance to address the "Needs more practice!" comment made by a Senior Observer on my last ride-out as I prepare for my **IAM test**. My plan was to enjoy the journey to Munich, take the opportunity to catch up with friends there, have a tour of an area that I'd heard was rather special, and of course enjoy return trip. We

agreed on a long weekend in the middle of August as the set off date and I set down to plan a route and to work out the logistics.

In Barcelona we had stayed with friends and luggage was not a big issue. This time I would have to carry everything, I initially considered 'throw-over' panniers but opted instead to fasten an expanding tank-bag to my rear seat with bungees, and to strap a rucksack on top with things that I might need access to en route (e.g., waterproofs). I restricted my clothes to t-shirts, socks, undies, jeans, shorts, trainers and sandals. In addition I took maps, 'Roadcraft' (bed time reading) and French books, plus biking essentials such as chain oil, visor cleaner, etc. I packed my luggage, strapped it to my bike, and with a map holder on my tank made a couple of test runs to check that everything was secure and that the handling was fine. I worked out a system of what went where, including in the pockets of my biking jacket and trousers, and stuck to this for the duration of the tour.

Next I sat down to plan a route. The motorway to Dover, to get there as quickly as possible, but once in Europe I wanted to avoid motorways as much as possible, opting for roads that appeared to have many bends, went through mountainous areas or were marked as scenic routes. I settled on a route that went through the Ardennes in France and Belgium, and then through Luxembourg. Then followed three rivers in Germany, the Mosel north to Koblenz, and south via the Rhine and the Neckar. I had recently read a biking article that enthused about a road numbered 500 that threaded a way through the Black Forest from Baden-Baden in the north to Waldshut in the South which sounded like fun. From there I would

go along Lake Constance and then follow the Deutschalpenstrasse (German Alpine Route), briefly dip into Austria and then head to Munich. I estimated this to be 1300 miles and that I could manage this in 6 days. I allowed 5 days for the return journey, thinking that I would take a more direct route back, and on that basis I booked my ferry.

Bike packed and securely fastened on the ferry



Looking down on Frahan sur Semois in the Ardennes



In the event as a result of intentional detours, map-reading errors and diversions courtesy of many roadworks, this leg of the journey was 1478 miles. Much of the scenery was very beautiful, I encountered many interesting towns and villages along

the way, and had a lot of fun on many of the roads, especially in the Black Forest where the combination of hills and sweeping bends was exhilarating and put to test my Advanced cornering skills. It had rained for most of the last day of my journey, but otherwise I had enjoyed lovely weather.

In Munich I had a couple of restful days, visited friends etc. I also made a visit to a bike accessories shop where I bought a very useful visor wiper that fitted on my finger, and a first-aid kit and fluorescent vest mandatory items in many European countries. Because my friend had often toured in Austria, Italy and Switzerland so I largely left the route detail planning to him. He has a satellite navigation system that would prove invaluable when finding some of the minor roads and threading a path through towns. We had been keeping a close eye on the weather forecast, riding mountain passes in rain would not be much fun, and thankfully it improved as it got closer to our departure date. Taking the motorway from Munich, in about a couple of hours we were on the old Brenner Pass heading into South Tirol. In Germany motorways are free but we had to buy a 10 day sticker to use them in Austria and there are tolls in Italy. We headed into the Dolomites over the Sella pass and stopped overnight at the Pordoi pass. We awoke to discover that it had snowed overnight, but more worryingly it was now raining, this made us change our route opting for Bolzano where the weather was much improved. Thankfully the next morning the sun was shining again, we took a spectacular route over the Palade and Mendolo passes, and had a thrilling run over the Pennes pass. Reluctantly we then took the motorway back to Munich. We had covered 612 miles in three days.

Pordoi pass



I had another day resting and visiting friends. I also started to plan my return route. I was feeling fit and there were several places that I wanted to visit. I decided that as I might not get the opportunity again I would extend my journey and rebook my ferry accordingly.

I headed towards the Königsee as several people had said it was very beautiful. In the event I was delayed getting there and did not have time to take the boat trip necessary to see it in all its splendour, neither did I have time to visit Hitler's favourite mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden. I went over the Großglockner-Hochalpenstraße with some trepidation given the overcast skies and its altitude of 2595 metres, but only encountered slight rain.

A bit foggy at the Giovo pass



Next day I headed over the Giovo and Timmelsjoch passes. These were not rides for the faint-hearted, although it wasn't raining it was very gloomy and the mountain tops were hidden by clouds. There were many challenging hairpins and as I neared the tops I was negotiating hairpin bends with less than 50 metres visibility, extremely grateful for the white lines at the roadside, without which I may have gone flying over the edge. Even some of the tunnels were filled with fog. Once over Timmelsjoch though the skies quickly cleared and I finished the day with blue skies and stunning scenery on a scenic route via Silvretta.

A bend that would be tricky without white lines



Foggy too at Timmelsjoch



That night in a biker-friendly hotel I borrowed a map of Switzerland from

the manager and he helped me plot a route through Lichtenstein, which brought my tally of countries to 8, to Vevey on Lake Geneva. I'd hoped to do this in a day but discovered that I'd need two days. In Switzerland an annual sticker is needed to use the motorways so I decided to avoid them completely.

Once through Lichtenstein I headed along the Walensee and then over the Klausenpass. The claim that there are almost 100 bends between Linthal and the highest point of the pass at 1948 metres was believable. I often came across cyclists on mountain passes but this was the only place I saw someone going over a pass on roller-blades. I then headed for a figure-of-eight of passes and scenic routes. I had plotted an 'S' shaped route through them: Sustenpass, Grimselpass, Furkapass, St Gotthard Pass and Novena pass. Taken as a whole these had everything, long straights, steep climbs, sweeping bends, tight hairpins and wonderful scenery, including spectacular views of the Steingletscher and Rhone glaciers. Unfortunately they also bring their dangers and I was delayed for an hour at the scene of a biker accident, two bikes were involved and the riders were taken away in two helicopters.

Next day I revised my route and decided to take the 6th of the 7 roads that made up the figure-of-eight that I referred to earlier, with its sweeping bends that became tighter and tighter as the road climbed through a steep gorge. I then went back over the Grimselpass and headed to Meiringen, passing the Reichenbach Falls, and then under bright sunshine through some typical gorgeous Swiss mountain and lakes scenery alongside the Brienersee to Interlaken. At Interlaken the weather changed and as I rode alongside the Thunersee it was

raining so hard I could not even see across the lake. Thankfully, as I headed along the Niedersimmental valley the rain slackened off, and then stopped, almost as suddenly and mysteriously as it had began.

I enjoyed the mountain scenery, bends and hills as I went over the Jaunpass, via Gruyeres, over the Col des Mosses towards Aigle. From Aigle I headed towards Montreux and followed the edge of Lac Léman into Vevey, where I stayed overnight with a friend.

The Rhone Glacier from Grimselpass looking across at Furkapass



I wanted to see the Norman Foster bridge at Millau. It would be a lengthy detour but the weather forecast was good. I called the ferry company and they agreed to make a note on the booking to leave the date and time open. No promises, but there was a good chance that I would be able to get on whatever ferry was next to depart whenever I reached Calais.

From Vevey I followed Lac Léman through Lausanne, Nyon and St Cergue to the Col de la Givrine, a pass from Switzerland into France. From there I took the Col de la Faucille through the Jura mountains to St Claude and on to Oyonnax. I may no longer have been in the Alps but the

scenery was still very beautiful and the roads were fun. I then took a route that took me cross-country via Bourge-en-Bresse, Villefrance and Montbrison to Ambert, thus avoiding the major towns of Lyon and St-Etienne. The last bit of the route from Montbrison was very pretty and with some nice bends. I stopped overnight at St Paulien.

The next day I headed via le Puy-en-Velay to Mende and followed the Tarn valley from Ispagnac. This was a spectacular valley with ever-changing rock formations, pretty villages clinging to the hillsides and the river itself flowing through the Gorges du Tarn. Finally I reached Millau and had my first view of the bridge. I took a scenic route through St Beuzely and St Rome de Tarn that went in a big loop around and under the bridge. From underneath looking up at one of the massive pillars it was possible to appreciate the scale of the project. With a height of 343 metres the Viaduc de Millau is the world's highest road bridge. Finally I rode over the bridge and stopped in the viewing area to see it close-up. It had been worth the detour. I left the Autoroute at Seveac-le-Chat, headed towards Espalion and then along the beautiful Gorges du Lot to stay overnight in Entraygues.
Close-up of the Viaduc de Millau



For the penultimate day I headed to Aurillac and took a minor road to Puy Mary. The volcanic remains were soon visible and it was an exciting ride to the highest point at Puy Mary. A few miles north of le Mont-Dore in the Parcs des Volcans d'Auvergne there was a viewing point overlooking two spectacular, rocky outcrops, the remains of two volcanos. I rode past the Puy de Dom, and then through Clermont-Ferrand and Nevers to Varzy.

Two volcanos in the Auvergne



I estimated that it was 350 miles to Calais, and not wishing to get there too late I headed as quickly as possible through Clamecy, Auxerres and Troyes, then took the Autoroute to Calais, where I was quickly booked on the next ferry.

It had rained for most of the last day and as I sat under my umbrella waiting for the ferry I'm sure the motorists around thought me mad and miserable. But no, it had been a fantastic time and an hour in the rain was a small price to pay. I was not even bothered by the water in my boots, maybe my Senior Observer was right when he said that I had 'duck feet'. Once at Dover I was soon on the motorway and was home in little over 2 hours. During the final leg of my journey from Munich I had covered 2234 miles in eight days. In total I had covered 4360 miles in 20 days and visited 8 countries.

Sheltering from the rain at Calais



My general impression from all the countries I visited was of a biker-friendly environment, most cars would move over to let bikers pass and many cafes, restaurants and hotels sported “biker welcome” signs. I also discovered it common for bikers to swing out their leg as a way of saying thanks to motorists and other bikers. It was rare that a biker passed in either direction without some kind of acknowledgment. It had been a huge amount of fun and I felt that my skills had improved. My hands, elbows, knees and bum ached, and the bike would soon need another service and new tyres. I look forward to my next trip!

In the News

Source: BBC News 20 Feb 2008

Driving test fee to rise in April



The cost of driving tests will rise on

1 April, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) has confirmed.

A theory test will increase in price by £1.50 to £30, while practical tests for car drivers will go up by £8 to £56.50. The biggest increase will be for motorcycle riders, who will see the more wide-ranging practical test rise on 29 September from £60 to £80. The price rises were first proposed last summer, but have now been rubber-stamped by the DSA.

Rosemary Thew, DSA chief executive, said: "The Driving Standards Agency has to cover its costs in providing driving and riding tests to learners throughout the country.

"We are already planning to make efficiency savings of £4.8m this year and a further £6m in 2008-9, but to make sure we continue to offer an excellent service, the fees we charge must match our costs."

A new off-road element to the motorcycle test is being introduced in September before riders will be allowed to progress to the on-road exam.

This means a new network of test centres are being built.

Source: OxfordMail April 2008

THE closure of Oxford’s motorcyclist test centres could spark an increase in illegal riders and casualties on the road, claim an instructor and learner riders.



From September 29th 2008, motorcyclists' licence tests will no longer be held in Hollow Way,

Cowley, with learners having to take tests in Newbury or Swindon.

The move coincides with the launch of a new motorcycle test, which includes off-road exercises. New "**Supercentres**", where car and motorcycle tests can be taken, are replacing existing sites - but the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) has been unable to find a suitable location in Oxfordshire. It means learner riders will have to travel at least 20 miles on busy roads to reach test centres, which is causing concern among instructors. It has also prompted a surge in riders wanting to take their test before September.

One long standing motorcycle instructor said it was causing "hysteria" and could have serious consequences, he said that due to the lack of test centres in the Oxford area Riders are panicking and are rushing to take their test before the new date."

A DSA spokesman said: "The centres are being developed to provide a safe environment in which to carry out the new and more demanding motorcycle exercises required by European Union legislation. They are being introduced in response to alarming motorcycle casualty statistics. "We have been looking high and low to try to find a site for one of the new centres in Oxford, but to no avail, so we have had to extend our search."

Figures from the DSA show almost 1,000 people took motorcycle tests in 2006-7 in Oxfordshire - 439 in Oxford and 543 in Banbury

Source: OxfordMail April 2008



Fuel Theft on the rise:

Thieves are drilling through petrol tanks and stealing fuel in a new crimewave hitting Oxfordshire.

Police believe thieves lucrative black market as the price for unleaded petrol in Oxford has hit an average of £1.15 a litre. There have been 17 reports of fuel stolen from cars parked in the city since December 2007. Most of the thefts happened in the Headington area at night, but police believe more have gone unreported. The fuel thieves are believed to be highly organised criminal gangs. The Police said "We can't directly link it with the fuel rise but obviously there is supply and demand and there has been a marked increase in the price of fuel. "It seems as long as someone is able to get rid of it they will keep stealing it. "Vehicle owners should vigilant and tell us of any suspicious activity".

Between January and December last year there were 10 reports of fuel theft in Oxford. The thieves can drill through the fuel tanks and drain the petrol in just a few minutes. Nine of the reported thefts were from Renault cars, possibly because most of the vehicles had plastic petrol tanks.



It strikes me that there is another less obvious hazard associated with this hazardous activity, particularly involving diesel fuel thefts carried out in the same manner and reported from a number of lorry parks around the country; This hazard involves the spillage or leakage of fuel on our roads. As a motorcyclist I know only too well the devastation effect riding over even a small patch of Diesel oil can cause. It is sufficient to class the discovery of a diesel spill as a 999 call. It seems there is little we can do to avoid this except park in a populated area, and check under our vehicle on our return.

Committee Members

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