

**TAKING  
the PLUNGE**

# GETTING STARTED

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PICTURES: Racing Line Photography



» **Gerrard Spear gives his guide to getting started in racing for anyone taking the plunge this year.**

Firstly, congratulations for deciding to step into the all-consuming world of motorcycle racing. You will discover things about yourself you never knew and meet the best people from all walks of life. You will hopefully come to call the paddock home and for sure wonder where all your money has gone, but none of that will matter when you are on the start line, hunched over the bars, engine on full song and the only thing in your world is waiting for that red light to go out.

It is likely that you are already a track day rider, but regardless the following guidelines still apply:

## **SET A BUDGET**

Racing bikes is not a cheap sport and some classes are more expensive than others. Initial bike cost and tyres are your two big ticket items, not accounting for the inevitable get-offs that will happen when you start pushing harder. A modern litre bike will chew rear tyres



like a sulking rottweiler over a race weekend and can set you back £400 or more a meeting, whereas the MZ class runs with a control tyre that can last half a season.

Your typical costs, assuming no crashes and one set of new rubber per meeting, will be

- a) Entries @ £250,
- b) Tyres @ £250,
- c) Test day fees @ £175,
- d) Fuel @ £100
- e) Food and beer.

Once you have set a budget be prepared to blow it.

### CHOOSE YOUR CLASS AND CLUB

The amount you can throw at it for the season will help you decide a class. A front-running, fire-breathing ex-BSB Superstocker may set you back upward of £25k or a Minitwin or CB500 closer to £10k, including the bike.

Many clubs have a Rookie programme for your first season, some better than others. If you intend to use your existing bike then get onto the websites of various clubs (listed at the end of this article) to determine whether they have a class that you can enter. Modern 600s and 1000s are not an issue, but some of

the other machinery may not be eligible or may need to meet power to weight regulations. Your best bet is to speak to someone in a club directly regarding compliance and whether you will be on a competitive bike, or get onto some of the racing forums for advice. You will be pleasantly surprised at how much help is available to you.

There are many race classes and your budget will determine what you choose and whether you will be doing a full season. All the information is out there and I recommend you speak to as many people as possible to make the right choice.

Remember, the more exotic and rare your bike, the harder to find and more expensive the spares will be, not to mention the lack of help that will be available in the paddock. An SV650 or R6 will most likely get back out after a crash but an RSV4 may not.

To get your Autocycle Union (ACU) licence, the governing body of racing in the UK, you will first need to be a member of a club. You can either choose to race at circuits local to you only and join all the clubs that race there, or join a club that races all over the country. Some have a bias towards the south or north and some only race at one track. Again your choice, but my recommendation in your first year

would be to race at as many tracks as possible. You will learn more this way and develop faster.

The ACU licence is mandatory for any road racing in the UK. It is a classroom lesson that brings everyone up to the same minimum standard when it comes to understanding flags and procedures. It is not hard to pass, but you need to take it seriously. The ACU runs courses all the year round at their HQ in Rugby, or through your chosen club. I recommend the latter as you will get to meet your fellow rookies.

You will be wearing your orange Rookie bib until you get your required 10 signatures at three different circuits.



#### PREPARE YOUR BIKE

The technical regulations for each class will be available online somewhere, but typically you will need the bike's sump plug, oil filler cap and oil filter lock-wired, shark-fin chain protector, rounded footpeg ends, a watertight bellypan and water only in the cooling system as a minimum. The bike must function properly and the bars have adequate lock stops and not get within 20cm of the fairings. The more time you spend on the bike getting it fettled the more reliable it will be, and the better you get to know each other the quicker you can effect repair if she ends up down the road.

#### PREPARE YOURSELF

Racing is mentally and physically taxing. If you are tired at the end of a

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### USEFULL WEBSITES

[www.bemsee.net](http://www.bemsee.net)  
[www.thundersportGB.com](http://www.thundersportGB.com)  
[www.hottrax-motorsport.co.uk](http://www.hottrax-motorsport.co.uk)  
[www.ngroadracing.org](http://www.ngroadracing.org)  
[www.derbyphoenix.co.uk](http://www.derbyphoenix.co.uk)  
[www.auto66.com](http://www.auto66.com)  
[www.nemcrc.co.uk](http://www.nemcrc.co.uk)  
[club.knockhill.com](http://club.knockhill.com)  
[www.acu.org.uk](http://www.acu.org.uk)  
[www.motoforum.net](http://www.motoforum.net)  
[www.darleymoore.co.uk](http://www.darleymoore.co.uk)  
[www.prestondmc.co.uk](http://www.prestondmc.co.uk)

Prepare to crash. Motorcycle racing is not a knitting circle. If you have not left a motorbike at speed yet, believe me you will. There are a few injuries in the club each season, some bad ones, however the vast majority are a roll around on the gravel or grass and a trip back to base in the van of shame. Still, you need to be aware of the risks. It is not for some people.

Get the best protection you can, good leathers, gloves and boots, a back and chest protector and a good gold ACU-stickered helmet. Do not skimp on this stuff. Cheap leathers are made up of more pieces and so have more seams to part in a crash, also the leather is thinner so they may only be a one-use item. You will not pass scrutineering if your gear is damaged and unsafe.

Keeping yourself in good physical shape will protect you more and speed any recovery required, even just bruises.

track day you will be a basket case after a race weekend. Work on your cardiovascular fitness and flexibility as a minimum if you want to be as sharp for the last race on Sunday as you are for the first on Saturday.

Be comfortable. A van and a caravan is the ideal set up. Having somewhere to make tea, sit comfortably, sleep well and shelter from the elements is vital for both enjoyment and staying alert. You are going away for a weekend in a race paddock. There will be a canteen and showers, but you'll probably want to take everything else yourself. 99% of racers sleep in the paddock at meetings as the craic and general piss-taking is a major part of the enjoyment.

Take a friend. A second pair of hands to sort the bike with fuel and tyre warmers when you are buzzing after a

race is worth its weight in gold, not to mention a shoulder to lean on as the adrenalin-fuelled highs and lows of the weekend are not be underestimated. Support and help from your friends and family can make or break a weekend, unless you are an island.

Prepare to be frightened. Racing will have your adrenal gland on full afterburn and is normally worth two seconds a lap. You need to be entering every corner slightly scared as a rule of thumb and be ready for passes that take a layer of paint off. If you are not crossing the finish line coin-eyed and blowing like an old cart horse you are not trying hard enough. Remember, you are not circulating around your favourite track with a 6 foot passing rule anymore, you are racing. It's unlikely you will ever feel more alive.

### ENTRIES

Your club will have these either online or send them through the post. If it's last minute you can fill one out on the day but bear in mind if you are in a popular class the grid might be full and you may only get on as reserve. Get them in early is my advice. That's it then you are committed. Go racing.

The first meeting will be a bit of a whirl but remember to get there early to get a good spot, keep breathing, listen for your races to be announced, don't drink too much in the bar on a Saturday night and eat and drink little and often. Most of all enjoy. You are now one of the select few.

**rocer**