

Getting started

» WANT TO GET STARTED IN RACING? RACER'S TOUR OF ROOKIE DAYS AT UK CLUBS REVEALS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.

What a wonderful time of the year it is. With the freezing winter temperatures and rain on their way out, (ok we're never going to compete with Dubai for the sunshine but it certainly feels much brighter to me!) that can mean only one thing – the start of the racing season.

If you're looking to get started in racing then now is the perfect time and, for many, Darley Moor is the perfect place. The club, now in its 48th season, has welcomed the likes of James Toseland, Cal Crutchlow, John McGuinness and Richard Cooper (to name a few!) as members, and that's not to mention all the 'Stars at Darley' winners over the years.

My trip to the Bemsee Open Day at Brands Hatch (in issue 148) whetted my appetite for racing, so I went to the CTC (Competitor Training Course) at Darley Moor Race Circuit to find out more.

The CTC is essential for novice racers to get their racing licence. It consists of a morning

in the classroom, learning about all the rules and regulations, flags, officials, equipment needed and what actually happens on a typical race day, followed by a test on what is taught in the morning. Then in the afternoon, the rookies get a run out on track to prove that they can ride to a reasonable standard.

Leading the classroom session in the morning was ACU Road Race Coach and former TT and European Championship racer of 15 years, Shaun Brown. "When I got my first licence, you sent your money in and got your licence back – that was it, there were no tests at all," he said. "Now it's a bit more organised and it's definitely safer, as you don't spend your whole first season making massive mistakes."

Shaun did a brilliant job in keeping the morning interesting yet informative for the 40 plus people in attendance, and here are just some of the invaluable golden nuggets of wisdom he shared:

» ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

A complete one-piece set of leathers.

The ACU don't have strict regulations on what material they need to be made out of, but they can't be too worn around the elbows, bum, hips and knees (there'll be plenty of time for you to get your knee down once you've started racing!).

Appropriate footwear, which is generally boots made from leather or a modern equivalent.

Make sure your boots don't have any metal on them that could cause sparks if they come in contact with the ground. Another important thing to note with boots is the comfort factor and, whether you can actually ride in them. It's all good and well being 'Robocop' in your brand new pair of rock-solid boots, but if you can't ride well in them then you're stuffed!



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PHOTOS Peter Iantorno

Gloves

Not those short ones that finish at the wrist, because in the event that you do come off and your leathers get rolled up your arm, a nice big overlapping glove can be a godsend.

A helmet bearing the current ACU gold stamp.

This is vitally important, as any other helmets have not been officially passed safe for road racing, and will not be allowed in competition. Also bear in mind that your helmet has to be a good fit, we know all too well the damage that a loose helmet can do, so make sure yours can't come off your head when fastened.

An identification disc or 'dog tag'.

Whenever you're out on track practicing or racing, you're required to wear an identification disc with your name and date of birth on a chain around your neck. Obviously you don't want anything sharp that could hurt you should you get in an accident - that's why a circle is an ideal shape. Also, make sure the chain you wear it on isn't strong enough to choke you if it gets caught around your neck.

Another crucial piece of kit for any novice is an orange vest.

This is the racing equivalent of an 'L plate', and it is a requirement that all rookies must wear them until they gain 10 signatures on their licence, from racing at a minimum of three different tracks. After this point your licence is eligible to be upgraded from 'novice' to 'Clubman' and you can shed the vest! Be careful with these, there are spot checks and if you do get found to be racing without an orange vest when you should have one on, you'll get 'black flagged' and pulled out of the race.

A transponder must also be carried on the bikes of all competitors at all times.

This simply helps the timekeepers identify who's who and make sure that everyone is in the right race.

And finally, you won't find this one in the handbook because it is not officially essential for racing, but Shaun did advise in the strongest terms possible, that you should wear a back protector at all times out on track.

» FLAGS

I couldn't possibly go in to the flags in as much detail as Shaun - I feel like I could have a full-blown conversation with a marshal if you gave us a set of flags each! However, the basics are relatively simple.

A yellow flag means there is some danger out on track - so no overtaking! A red flag is often used to stop competitors on the grid after their warm up lap. A black flag (usually accompanied by a lot of pointing and gesturing) is aimed at one rider and means 'pull in to the pits on this lap'. A black flag with an orange circle in it (usually accompanied by even more pointing and

gesturing!) is also aimed at a single rider, and means stop 'as soon as safely possible'. There are various other warning flags such as red and yellow striped (low grip on track), white flag with a red cross (safety car out) and blue flag, which hopefully you won't see too much because it means that you're just about to get lapped by a much faster rider!

If you are a first-time racer then I really do recommend the CTC. Apart from the fact that you have to do it for your licence anyway, it gives you a great basic knowledge of everything that you'll need to start racing.

And if the thought of a classroom test doesn't appeal to you, then don't worry - everyone who attended passed! One such attendee was 14-year-old Jonathan Trezins. Going in to his first ever year of racing, he sees Darley as the ideal place to start. "There's a real family atmosphere here, everyone seems to know everyone and I'm sure before long I'll be part of that too," he said. "Everywhere I look there are smiling faces and people always seem willing to help, so I can't wait to get started!"

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Chief Technical Officer Alan Cheadle has been a part of the furniture at Darley for years. He will again be on hand throughout the season to lend advice to racers, and he offers much more than the old-fashioned 'scrutineer'. "On the weekend of a race we start on the Saturday, helping to get all the bikes passed fit to race, then it's back in at 8am on Sunday to prepare for race day," said Alan. "We're not looking to catch people out and stop them racing, we just want to help everyone get on the grid and to make sure they have a good time, safely. 99 percent of the time the bikes are OK anyway, but we're just another set of eyes, which can come in handy, especially when you're not used to preparing a bike for a race."

And racing isn't just for the blokes either. Heather Barradell is another first time racer, and she's been impressed by Darley. "I did my very first track day on my GSX-R750 at Darley and I think that the track, and everyone who helps run it, is brilliant and full of character - I highly recommend it!"

With the likes of Alan, Shaun and Darley's Eddie Nelson, who was a very gracious host of the CTC, I get the feeling that anyone looking to get into racing at Darley Moor would be just as well looked after as I was. If you're thinking about it, then now is the time!

Visit www.darleymoore.co.uk for more information. *racer*



» BEMSEE INSTRUCTOR GERRARD SPEAR TELLS US HOW HE GETS ROOKIES UP AND RUNNING:

The annual Bemsee Race School took place at Brands Hatch at the end of February this year. It gives this year's rookies the opportunity to sit their ACU Competitor Training Course on the Saturday, and spend a day on track with instruction and advice from experienced racers on the Sunday - and a lot of the friendships and mutual support that develops between riders in their first season starts off at the school.

We were blessed with gorgeous early-Spring weather and, as usual, the event was full, with over 90 budding racers across all classes, ranging in experience from zero track time to ex-supermoto and motocross racers.

Saturday is spent in the classroom with lectures and the CTC test, but the Sunday is run as a pseudo race meeting, with technical inspection, sign-on and noise testing, to give the rookies a taste of what happens over a proper race weekend.

Turning up in my allotted garage around quarter past seven, I got set up and, one by one, met my four rookies, Tom, Joe, Steve and Karl; all wide-eyed and ready to go. I set about going through the day's itinerary and what we instructors wanted them to get from the day. I told them to apply thought, preparation and a methodical approach to their riding.

The day was broken up into five track sessions, where riders on bikes of similar performance were grouped together, such as the 600s and 1000s, Minitwins and 400s and Superteens and Ninja 250s.

The first session concentrated on racing lines and track position. As I said to my charges "you're racing now - and all that track day etiquette and passing law goes out of the window! That nice wide racing line into Paddock Hill Bend may be all well and good, but you'll find half a dozen bikes in the way when you turn in!" We focused on the 'reference points' to use when you pass someone (by definition you're usually off the racing line when overtaking), so new riders need to learn how far they can go and what's needed to make the pass stick.

Then we talked about smooth throttle control to keep the bike settled and drive cleanly out of corners. We then moved on to setting up for corner entry, speed and body position, spending time with each rider in turn and trying different things to find out what works for each of them.

As instructors, the point we try to drive home is to think and plan, which creates confidence, speed on track and gives you a chance to win!

Session four is the one everyone was waiting for: the practice grid start. As we all know, the start is crucial, not just because

races can be won or lost there but, from a safety point of view, it is the most dangerous part of any race, and things can go wrong for a lot of people very quickly.

So, each group lined up on the grid, and was sent off for their sighting lap, coming round to re-form on the grid and then each row of four was held on the red flag. They then waited for the lights to come on and - in most cases! - waited for them to go out again, before arrowing off the line. You could almost hear the nerves, as the riders lined up and, row by row, crouched over their bikes, watching the lights as if they were the only thing in the world. Most got off the line well, but there are always the huge unexpected wheelies, bunny hops, neutrals and stalls that make it entertaining for everyone. One poor lad had his right-hand clip-on snap as he launched his bike, but despite having the wheel pointing at the sky, he managed to save it and keep going to retain his honour - good on him!

The final session was a recap, and gave us some time focus on individual issues. I worked on getting one of the lads to ride a bit smoother on the bike, and explained the importance of lines and RPs with another. Then the last half a dozen lads were the chance for me to blow the cobwebs off and put in a few quick laps on my own.

Fortunately the medical staff, who are

always exceptional at Bemsee, had nothing to do all day and, apart from a couple of gentle low-sides, neither did the marshals. The most flag waving they did all day was the red flag race-stoppage drill at the end of one of the sessions!

The mobile Bemsee Dyno was in attendance for all to get their bike checked in order to meet regulations or for peace of mind, and the Try-Before-You-Buy Ninja 250 allowed lots of interested riders the chance to try the Junior Cup.

At the end of the day us instructors filled out an assessment form on each of their rookies. This was our chance to flag up any that are destined for greatness, or are in need of some more help. But we don't have it all our own way - the rookies get the chance to rate their instructors too! This actually provides valuable feedback to help us improve the race school year on year, so we don't mind too much. We act as mentors during the whole season, and we're there to offer guidance and advice throughout.

We're looking forward to seeing how this year's rookie crop develops over the season, and we were delighted to see the high turnout, despite the difficult financial climate. Starting racing is a life-changing decision, and Bemsee is proud to help grass-roots racing in this country go from strength to strength. *racer*

» DAVE STEWART, THUNDERSPORTGB RACE DIRECTOR, TELLS RACER ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CTC COURSE.

Safety in club racing has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years and a lot of that is down to the pioneer of the Competitor Training Course, Dave Stewart, Thundersport GB Race Director.

Back in 1997, the introduction of new 'smart' speed cameras on Britain's roads meant the number of people getting banned for speeding was on the increase and this, according to Dave (Race Director at Bemsee at the time), this was the reason for the huge surge of newcomers to racing.

With grids bulging, all looked rosy, but: "with this big influx of novices starting to race, I noticed that an awful lot of the accidents we were having during a season involved new-comers" Dave told Racer, "so naturally, we tried to fix it – simple cause and effect."

"So, in order to try and educate these new-comers, we put together a 'pre-competition training course' and insisted that any first-time racers had to take it before racing with us."

"The course aimed to teach novices all about flags, cornering, braking, looking after

the bike and of course, the all important race start. The race start is the most dangerous part of racing and, the fact is, before this course, the first race start a rookie would be involved in would be on race day."

And the course was an instant hit. "The first year, in 1998, we saw start line accidents fall by half. Now that could be a coincidence, but I don't think so."

This success obviously drummed up a bit of interest, as the following year, the series insurers sent someone to watch the course, and they reported back to the ACU that some sort of formal test before people starting racing for the first time should be made compulsory.

The ACU duly introduced the mandatory CTC written test, but UK clubs offer a lot more than preparation for the multiple-choice exam on their training days and weekends, hooking rookies up with experienced racers, providing on-track coaching and tuition sessions and helping with set up and scrutineering.

Dave explains the structure of the course that new Thundersport GB recruits have to

undertake which is more advanced, and goes over and above the required ACU test.

"Our course comprises of: one hour in the classroom, three track sessions, another 45 minutes in the classroom, another three track sessions and then a final session to go over everything that we've learned and take the ACU written test. If anybody doesn't get 20 out of 20 on the compulsory test, then I need to find out why, because it really is basic stuff."

Dave still wants to improve the Thundersport GB course in terms of including even more one-on-one tutoring, although he is wary that this would bump up the costs, and accessibility to racing for the masses is high on his agenda. However, the message behind the course remains the same as it was in Dave's days at Bemsee. "The main points of our course are to: save the competitors money in the long-run, and keep everyone involved safe." *racer*



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