

# GETTING STARTED RACING MINITWINNS

» How do you get started in racing if you're not in the first flush of youth? If you're in your teens, the classes like the National Junior Cup and Superteens are aimed specifically at you, but the choice isn't so straightforward if you're getting on a bit in years.

The Suzuki Gladius in race trim



PICTURE Jenny Triker Wells



PICTURE Racing Line Photography

## INTRODUCTION

Let's face it, starting out in racing is a big commitment. If you're a bright young thing with stars in your eyes, your parents stump up the money for everything and drive you to each event, the only downside is that you'll need to take the occasional day off school to contend a championship.

But if you're married with children and a full-time job, are old enough to have an inherent fear of camping and loathe sitting in traffic jams on the M6, fretting about how much the petrol you're using is costing, you've got an awful lot of reasons to NOT take up racing.

The season schedules for many of the UK Club Championships take in a broad range of circuits up and down the country, to appeal to as many people as possible, and so that members get to experience a wide range of tracks. That in itself can make the working man or woman's heart sink; the four to five hour trip from Northern England to Brands Hatch, for example, means a return trip is longer than a working day; and that involves taking extra time off work and a hefty petrol bill.

Fortunately, there's another option! Locate your nearest circuit and go to every race meet there that you can, regardless of the club or the championship. That means joining several clubs, sure, but because each one strives to keep their membership fees as low as possible, you'd save far more in petrol over a season than you could ever pay out to the clubs. Oh yes – and there's no extortionate tax on membership fees either.

You'd miss out on experiencing the delights of a variety of UK tracks, certainly – but you would get the benefit of being able to focus on improving your riding technique, rather than having to learn your way round a new track at every race meeting; a real plus

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point in your first year of racing.

Of course, you need to then find a race class that is hosted at as many club meetings as possible – one that accommodates beginners and which won't break the bank. If, during your first year of racing, you discover that you are indeed the next Casey Stoner, you can always revise your budget accordingly for your second season!

In our minds, the Supersport 600 and Superbike/1000cc classes are probably not the class to start with if you're a novice on a limited budget. Some – but not all - clubs run a newcomer Supersport class specifically so that you're not obliged to race with the axe murderers in your very first season, but even so, selecting the right bike and setting a budget isn't that straightforward.

Fortunately, most clubs run a Minitwins class of one form or another and, if you opt to start your racing career on a pizza bike or shopping trolley, as these bikes are so rudely referred to, you'd definitely be able to enter lots of race meetings, but there are other benefits.

Firstly, whilst Minitwins are not the cheapest race machines, they are pretty economical and the technical regulations are designed to keep costs down. That results in a second benefit – the horsepower of the bikes and the modifications you can make

are limited which means level and competitive racing.

And then there's the fun factor, as racer Gerrard Spear explains: “Anyone who has thrown their leg over one of these bikes and ridden it in anger will know what I am talking about, and if you haven't and still look down your nose at a 70-odd bhp shopping bike, then get a ride on one. These are one of the few bikes that make you smile every time you ride them, and those that have moved on from the class to 600 or 1000cc machines still come over and lay a sentimental hand on the Minitwins when they get the chance. The emphasis is different, as you don't feel like you are sitting on a racehorse that would happily kill you and gallop off into the distance on its own. It's more a polo pony that can turn on a sixpence and loves to play.”

“We were testing at Brands GP this week, with Dan Couzens in the 1:39's and me in the 1:43's. There were only a handful of litre bikes going past us and they were all Stock 1000 racers. They make superb track bikes too and will make you ride faster as you will need to maintain corner speed and momentum. There were bikes making almost three times the power of ours, but we were lapping faster than them all day.”



PICTURE Racing Line Photography



#### THE HISTORY

Minitwins as a race class has been around for a decade now and that means that there are a lot suitable bikes around. They're not necessarily dirt cheap, but there's a wide variety of price ranges to choose from and parts are plentiful and cheap for the main bike of choice, the Suzuki SV650. Not only that, but there are lots of people around with the experience to advice and help you.

In the beginning, former Bemsee racer and track day instructor Tim Jones, who owned a Suzuki SV650, was taken with the idea of racing it – as a cheap but fun way to introduce more people to racing and provide a class that experienced racers could enjoy too. He went to Bemsee with the idea, and the club saw the potential of a class that gave a cheap way into racing as an alternative to two-strokes. The 600 class had got intimidating as the bikes got more powerful and the other possible classes for starters involved LC250s and 350 two strokes. But with a Minitwins you got a bike that was easy to maintain, didn't need any tuning, didn't eat tyres and wasn't scary to ride – and which didn't need a new set of pistons every two weeks.

The initial race in early 2003 had 18 entries but, by the start of the next season, there were 60 – and the series has had strong grids ever

since. Other clubs have introduced the class over the last decade too, so there are plenty of race meetings which a Minitwins racer can contest. But it's fair to say that Bemsee has the biggest and most competitive Minitwin grid this year. Grids are full and the quality is outstanding. As a true Minitwin fan, Gerrard Spear, says "it's the place to be if you want to make a name in Minitwins, and the only club I know that doesn't run mixed grids. Your bike is also eligible for the Bemsee Thunderbike class if you want to do more than four races in a weekend."

"Other clubs that race the Minitwins are North Gloucester (NG), Derby Phoenix, Darley Moor and Thundersport but, as I said the entries are smaller, hence the mixed grids, and the lap times are not on a par with the Bemsee racers. The grid has really stepped up a level since 2010 and lap records are broken at almost every meeting."

Gerrard's team mate Dan Couzens just missed out on the Minitwin Championship win last year, after missing a race meeting to attend an important wedding (his own!) and this year he's set for a full-on charge at the title – but youngsters like 15 year-old Jesse Jones on his Gladius are can – and do – win races too.

As retired racer Mike Edwards

who pulled together the technical regulations for the class explains "it's great grounding, on very basic bikes. These are cheap commuter bikes. The brakes aren't fantastic, the power isn't fantastic, but it all works well together! Dan Couzens is leading the Championship, without the best bike – he's a great example of someone who is just doing it for enjoyment."

But that doesn't mean Dan's not got the desire to win, as Gerrard explains; "the Minitwins class may not have the power and panache of 600s and 1000s but by God it's competitive! Dan carries good corner speed, he understands the tyres and has a really good feel for the bike – but he's also really competitive!"

#### THE BIKES

At least 90% of any Minitwins grid is made up of SV650s, the Suzuki twin-engined commuter bike that has now been discontinued. As it's been raced over the last ten years, there are lots of bikes about – and lots of cheap parts. The new Suzuki twin, the Gladius, also qualifies although, as it comes with 74 bhp, 2 above the agreed limit for the class, it has to be down-graded before it can race.

Then there's the Kawasaki ER-6 which Ryan Farquhar rode to glory at the Isle of Man TT in the new lightweight class – but that was in



PICTURE Racing Line Photography

the Supertwin class which takes these same Minitwins machines and relaxes all the tight technical limits and regulations.

The Gladius and the ER-6 are both a bit heavier than the good old SV, but not enough to make a significant difference when it comes to racing. The ER-6 is more revvy than the torquey Suzukis – which means it is better suited to Supertwin duties and it seems you need a good reason to opt for the Kawasaki in this class. As with the Gladius, parts are less plentiful too.

We met up with Dave Matchett at a recent NG Club meeting. He's been a massive Kawasaki fan since childhood and reckons that his blood runs green! Three years ago he looked at competing in the NG 450 class, but opted to get a Minitwins because he hoped that the North West 200 would run a twins class at some point and that gamble paid off this year. "It was a childhood dream of mine to see my name printed in the North West 200 programme and I achieved that this year – at the age of 50. Mind you, with 73 bhp on the straight there, my top speed was 135 mph, compared to the 96 bhp Supertwins at 150mph." Still, a lifetime goal achieved!

But the majority of Minitwins riders are on the faithful SV 650s and we asked Gerrard Spear to talk us through the options. "There are two models, the 1999-2002 carburetted SV650 which handles beautifully but has a slightly smaller frame, and the post-2003 injected bikes. The black frame came in after 2005, and late 2008 saw the

introduction of a twin-spark motor that is more expensive to maintain and has not proved popular.

"The bikes have to remain pretty much standard, engine wise you can recut the valve seats, refresh the pistons and rings and - if you have the money - blueprint the engine, but all parts have to be as homologated and there is a 72bhp limit for the class, so tuning does not really pay dividends. The power limit is hotly policed at Bemsee meetings – the club is very stringent about the class rules, so everyone is on a level playing field."

"Fork externals must remain the same, we run Racetec Emulators, stiffer springs and 20W oil in ours but you can get a cartridge kit to fit - although care has to be taken to make them satisfy the regs.

"The rear shock can be changed and this is advisable, as the standard Suzuki one is not designed for racing. I have seen anything from GSXR 750/1000, WP and Ohlins rear shocks fitted but we run the Nitron Race shock, which works superbly.

"The rear and front subframe can be replaced with lightweight alloy ones, and the rather heavy standard exhaust system can be replaced with lighter, better breathing items that develop more power, from M4, Hindle or Akropovic for example and you can re-map but as I said the key is making sure your bike doesn't exceed that 72bhp limit.

"Wheels, brake calipers and radiator are all as standard. You cannot run total loss, but you can change brake



and water hoses, clip-ons, levers, rearsets etc. but they must fit onto the bike using standard mounts.

"You can use a lightweight battery (saving around 1kg) and many people cut down the loom and move the battery up front on a tray behind the radiator on the front right of the bike, and put all the ECU, tilt switch etc. up under the clock mounts. The airbox must remain as standard although you can change the filter. Carbs and injectors can be balanced and set up properly but must be original equipment. You can run an injected engine in a carburetted frame as all parts are interchangeable between homologated models.

And Gerrard concludes: "the



The Kawasaki ER-6 in race trim

## “THE MINITWINS CLASS MAY NOT HAVE THE POWER AND PANACHE OF 600S AND 1000S BUT BY GOD IT’S COMPETITIVE!”

bikes handle like whippets and I am cornering so much faster than on the old Fireplace. The racing is hard and close and I am loving it. I am learning real racecraft and it is a budget class, so a crash is measured in hundreds of pounds not thousands like with 600's and 1000's."

So how much does that shopping list cost? We asked Sarah from Steve Jordan Motorcycles to give us a rundown on what you'd get for two Minitwins budgets - £3000 and £5000 and here's what she had to say.

### A £3000 MINITWIN

"For this budget I'd suggest the easiest way to keep costs down is to try and source a bike that is already race prepared, or half way there. For this money you will be able to source a very good carburettor (year 1999-2002) model SV650 with enough spares to keep you going throughout a season. A well set up early model SV can be just as competitive as the later models and some say the chassis is a little more forgiving in race trim. A vital modification though would be to ensure the earlier model has the later injected model camshafts fitted (Minitwins legal) and the jetting set to suit, as the bike will then be very close to the series 72bhp limit.

If you want to build your own bike into a racer, costs do start to add up very quickly and most people will more than likely start with just

a few modifications and then add more during the season as they can afford them. For this budget though, I'd certainly recommend sourcing a bike that is already track/race ready and then tidy it up to your own specification."

### A £5000 MINITWIN

"I'd start off with a Cat D late model injected SV650 for around £1500 and add the following components:  
 Nitron Race shock £698.40  
 Full race specification forks to our race-winning spec £299.50  
 Hel Braided Lines £84  
 Silkolene Pro Race brake fluid £16  
 Performance Friction Brake Pads £102.50  
 Sharks Fin £10  
 Active Quick action throttle £110  
 Double Bubble clear race screen £40  
 Full custom fueling remap direct to ECU £160  
 K&N Air Filter £45.97  
 Full Yoshimura Race System £630  
 Race Subframe £140  
 Race Clock Bracket £110  
 Race Fairings £299  
 Race paintwork £300-(350 design dependant).

That leaves £400 to source a good pair of secondhand wheels, fit a pair of race tyres and lockwire the bike to ACU regulations. Generally though, most builds are done to a very personal specification, taking into account the rider's own requirements and budget

– for example, they may want to run the bike unfaired or already have some parts fitted to the bike.

The Gladius is starting to appear now on the grid. They are a very strong alternative to the SV650. They're a little heavier and need converting to a faired bike if you prefer. The engine though is a lot stronger, offers better midrange and doesn't need a full race exhaust system to be on the power limit."

### A KAWASAKI MINITWIN

Rick and RLR Motorsports costed out modifying a Kawasaki for racing too: Base unit used ER650 (ER6) from 2008 onwards £2,000

Rear shock Nitron race unit £570  
 Front fork kit spring and shim kit £270  
 Brake lines and race pads £90  
 Race tyres pair £210  
 Handle bars and rear sets fairing/clock brackets £350  
 Steering damper and fitting kit from £250  
 Race Chain and sprockets kit £90  
 Power commander £275  
 Race air filter £60  
 Wire loom mods £110  
 After market clocks £145  
 Race exhausts system from £375  
 Race fairing and seat unit kit from £275  
 Dyno time to setup motor @72bhp class limit £175  
 Total: £5245  
 Turnkey minitwin ready to race built to order from £5750  
 Conversion to customers ER650 from £3750

### THE FUTURE

Our conclusion? The spotlight these days may be on the Supertwins but does that mean the Minitwins will be superseded any time soon? We think not – the significant increase in budget (possibly double) that you need to get a Supertwin to race will mean that the people the Minitwins class appealed to in the first place certainly won't automatically make the step up. But what it does mean is that, once you've achieved what you set out to do in the Minitwins class, you've got a fairly direct upgrade path to a class running a more powerful machine – without you needing to sell you current bike, buy a new one – and then learn how to ride it from scratch!

Contact Rick at RLR Motorsports on 01694 751 754 and Sarah at Steve Jordan Motorcycles on 01372 453 322 and [www.stevejordanmotorcycles.co.uk](http://www.stevejordanmotorcycles.co.uk)  
 For more info on the class go to [www.minitwins.co.uk](http://www.minitwins.co.uk) **racer**