

THE FACTS

What is it? A police-led rider-safety initiative

Price? £65

What's included? A one-day classroom session with light refreshments (Covid-permitting), assessed ride with a serving police officer and goody bag that includes a copy of the Highway Code

Where is it? UK-wide with each police force running its own course where it can

Duration? 9am - 3pm classroom session (times vary). Separate assessed ride

Where can I stay? There should be a course in your local area

Do I need my own bike? Yes

Contact www.bikesafe.co.uk

THE RIDER

Now 44 years old, Jon has been riding on the road since he was 16 and has spent the last 20 years road testing for various motorcycle magazines. Having previously avoided it, he has recently completed several advanced riding courses including the ERS and Rapid Training

THE POLICE BIKE

Every year, BMW makes a run of dedicated factory-built emergency service R1250RTs that are sold all over the world. This 2020 model comes without semi-active suspension to make it faster to fix and has a calibrated standard speed (the officer wears a body-cam to record evidence), sirens, blue lights, narrow panniers and a radio. It also has a very loud bull horn

THE COACH

PC Simon Burgin, 50, has been a serving police motorcyclist with Cambridge Constabulary since 2002 and works policing the roads as well as VIP escorting. During his work as an Forensic Collisions Investigator, he has attended numerous incidents involving motorcycles. A passionate biker, he owns an FJR1300 and is planning a month-long tour when he retires from the police next year

THE BIKE

Able to reach 60mph in less than three seconds, cover a quarter of a mile in under ten seconds and hit 186mph, the 2021 Suzuki Hayabusa makes for the ideal machine for an assessed ride with an on-duty police rider...

An observed ride, by a serving police motorcyclist forms the second part of the BikeSafe course

Classroom session not pre-empted by "You do not have to say anything..."

RIDING SCHOOL RATED

BIKESAFE

The police-organised nationwide safety program is aimed at cutting rider fatalities

Words Jon Urry Pictures Adam Shorrock

HERE ARE SOME statistics you need to know before I talk about the BikeSafe course, mainly because they are the driving force behind why it exists. Motorcyclists make up 2% of the road users yet account for 25% of the fatal collisions with an average of 60 collisions happening every day involving a bike. Male riders aged between 45 and 55 years old are the most likely to be killed; 98% of collisions are the result of rider/driver error; and the worst times for fatalities are Saturday or Sunday between 3 and 5pm in early spring. This is when riders dust off their bike after winter and go for that first 'sunny-day' blast. I know this is a shocking start to an article but this is the reality of riding in the UK and is why BikeSafe was formed. And if you fall into the category above, as many of us do, you need to know this.

BikeSafe is run and organised by regional police forces. It uses a fairly standardised syllabus that each force tailors to its own specific area or region. London, for example, will put more emphasis on filtering and urban riding while Cambridgeshire will concentrate more on bends and B-road riding. The course happens over two days with the first day a six-hour classroom session and the next part-day being an assessed ride, during which you will be followed on the road by a serving (and on-duty) police officer.

"The biggest targets for BikeSafe are engagement and a change of attitude," explains PC Simon Burgin, who is my assessor for the day and running me through a BikeSafe course. "Every officer who runs the course loves bikes and that's what we want to get across. We want riders to get out there and enjoy their bikes; that's what we love to do as well but we want you to do it safely. The reality is that while we can't condone it, we know riders will exceed the speed limit on occasions. We want them to do it safely and arm them with a skill set that will help them avoid becoming a statistic. As well as dealing with collisions, I have to deal with drug drivers, drink drivers and drivers who really are in no fit state to drive. As a rider, you need to be aware that you are



Modified police BMW R1250RT

THE LOCATION

BikeSafe is run by each individual regional police force. Our course was organised by Cambridgeshire Constabulary but due to Covid restrictions, our 'classroom' session happened outdoors. Most 2021 BikeSafe courses will happen in a police HQ and will be Covid-safe and socially distanced



sharing the roads with these idiots. Just because you have the right of way doesn't mean you are safe and you need to tailor your riding to take into account these factors." So how does BikeSafe do this?

A major part of BikeSafe is the classroom aspect. Concentrating on a wide range of aspects of motorcycling including behaviour, attitude, hazard awareness, filtering, junctions, cornering, group riding, overtaking and observation, the sessions are delivered in a really engaging way that actually makes you sit up, think and take notice. Using computer simulations, BikeSafe's instructors run through various scenarios and actively invite the pupils to chat through what they see, what they think about it and what they feel went wrong or how the collision could have been prevented. There are no right or wrong answers; it's all about starting a discussion and it really makes you think about the dangers out there. Especially when the officers recount real incidents.

For me, this was the hardest-hitting part as, while I thoroughly enjoyed watching and chatting through the scenarios, it is when the officer explains (matter of factly, not using scare tactics) an incident on a road you know that the vulnerability of riders hits home and how much your

▶ **Just a normal ride observed by an on-duty policeman – no pressure**



▼ **BikeSafe goody bag includes copy of Highway Code**



attitude on the road counts. They have dealt with the very worst of what can happen on the roads and is what traditional rider training schools can't offer. It really makes you think, which is exactly what BikeSafe is aiming to do. And then there is the assessed ride...

To be honest, while certainly interesting, probably because I have done some advanced training recently, for me the assessed-ride aspect of BikeSafe wasn't quite as informative or thought-provoking. Everything Simon picked up on gave food for thought and was 100% accurate and informative; however, I learned more through the classroom teaching than the assessed ride, although I am sure other riders will find it extremely enlightening – once they get over the fact they are being followed by a police bike. That said, his tip

of 'more white, more shite', which means the more white paint on the road, the more you need to be aware of an upcoming danger, certainly stuck in my head and is a great tip alongside his advice to use more of the road to increase your visibility to other traffic. "I can't train people to an advanced standard in such a short space of time, which is why we don't use intercoms," Simon says. "However, with BikeSafe and a taste of an assessed ride, hopefully we can encourage them to consider looking into advanced riding with the IAM, RoSPA or a school and we have found that 25% of people do just that, which is brilliant. And even if they don't, if they leave thinking more about their riding and hopefully become safer as a result, that's also a win. The whole target of BikeSafe is that in my role as a Collisions Investigator I don't have to deal with motorcyclists. I want to see them at a bike meet or out enjoying their bike and know they will return home safely."

You may have spotted I haven't used the term 'accident' here. That's because accidents aren't preventable but collisions are – think about that.



▶ **In possession of an offensive haircut**

THREE THINGS I LEARNED...

1 Classroom learning works

When you hear you have to sit through six hours of classroom-based tuition, the instant reaction is; "That will be dull". However, BikeSafe's course was really interesting and informative and not boring at all. The computer-generated 'incidents' were visually hard-hitting and made you think without going down the video-nasty approach of watching an actual collision, which none of us want to watch, and the fact that serving police officers then talk about genuine incidents in your local area on roads you know really hits home. It was informative, interesting and a real eye-opener.

2 Read the Highway Code

When was the last time you read, or at least skimmed through, the Highway Code? Like me, probably when you were trying to pass your test. Simon describes it as your 'get out of jail card' and it's true; if you know your rights, you can ride with more confidence. Did you know, for example, that filtering is 100% legal if done correctly. You are allowed to overtake on double solid-white lines in circumstances where certain vehicles are slow moving or stationary. It's updated every three years, so how out of date is your knowledge?

▶ **Hazard situations and analysis form classroom sessions – here outdoors due to Covid**



▶ **This has been updated nine times since Jon took his test**



THE SCORES

Usefulness 9/10
 Theory skills 9/10
 Practical skills 8/10
 Value for money 10/10
 Enjoyment 8/10

Total score 44/50

When you speak to a serving police officer who has dealt with the aftermath of multiple road collisions, it reinforces the reality that the emphasis is on you to keep yourself safe, not other road users. Add to this the fact that the people running the course are so passionate, about not only safety but also riding bikes, really comes across and, for £65, it is a bargain and something definitely worth doing. I genuinely can't recommend it highly enough. **R**

3 Use all the road

Motorists' brains are tuned into looking for a square box (car) and not a motorcycle, which is far thinner, and that's why you get 'sorry mate, I didn't see you' collisions. By moving over the road near a junction, you make yourself stand out more to drivers. Also, when on the open road, tailor your road position to take into account dangers such as oncoming traffic, junctions, farm entrances and the road's surface. And don't be afraid to slow down if you sense a potential danger; motorcycles get back up to speed very quickly so it is worth sacrificing a few mph to give you a greater safety margin.

▶ **Correct road positioning forms part of the observed ride**



We've done it too!

RiDE readers share their experience of BikeSafe

'It made me safer'



MARTIN WELCH, 61
 Bike 2018 Kawasaki Z1000SX
 Years riding 49 years

"I did BikeSafe in 2011 and it certainly helped my riding and my awareness of other traffic and potential hazards, stuff I didn't really consider while driving a car. I had returned to two wheels after a long break and this got my head back into 'bike' mode and I feel made me safer and more observant as a result. It represents excellent value for money."

'A yearly refresher'



PETER THURLOW, 55
 Bike 2018 Kawasaki Z1000SX
 Years riding 39 years

"I've done several BikeSafe courses in a few different regions and have loved every single one. They offer a real insight into rapid, but safe, progress and are recommended. My wife took up riding in 2003 and we now use BikeSafe as a yearly refresher as we are both more summer riders and it is nice to get a professional giving us pointers."

SAVE MONEY ON YOUR INSURANCE

As principle sponsor for BikeSafe, Devitt Insurance offers policy holders 10% off a BikeSafe course as well as a 10% discount on their insurance-policy renewal when they complete the course if purchased directly through Devitt (T&Cs apply). "There is nothing but benefit to be found from completing a BikeSafe course," said Tom Warsop, Devitt's Head of Marketing.