

INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS

# THE NEXT STEP

Words: Paul | Pics: Two Creative Photography

The Ride Forever training courses are an excellent tool for giving your riding skills a WoF, but what if you want to take your training further? Paul recently caught up with the IAM and discovered Roadcraft.



ACC is invested in reducing our crash statistics simply because we cost the organisation so much money, and the Ride Forever program is being watched with interest by overseas safety organisations to see if the subsidised rider training program they implemented back in 2009 is having the desired effect. There's no denying that the Ride Forever Bronze, Silver and Gold courses offer riders an excellent opportunity to develop their skills, learn new techniques and hopefully reduce their chances of becoming one of the statistics, but where is there to go after you've done them a few times? Well, it was on one of the Ride Forever courses (I do them annually as a refresher) that I happened across a group of riders lunching at the Nikau Caves Café southwest of Auckland wearing IAM jackets. What was this, I wondered? Within a week, I was about to find out...

## GROUP ON A MISSION

The IAM or Institute of Advanced Motorcyclists, was originally founded in the UK, with the Motorcycle Roadcraft handbook the group use as the basis of their riding standard initially designed to train police motorcyclists in the fifties. With more police riding motorbikes, the handbook was designed to set standards for the training of new recruits, with a marked decrease in incidents recorded after the implementation. With the results so good, it was only a matter of time before the program was made available to regular riders, with the

UK now recording over 82,000 members who have been through the course.

The IAM is a charitable organisation, and all the volunteers are, well, volunteers. So this is not a substitute for official motorcycle lessons from an accredited instructor. If you want to learn to pass your test or control a motorcycle properly, go and see one of the official motorcycle training companies. But once you've got a solid grasp of riding a motorcycle, have been through the Ride Forever courses and still want to improve your riding skills, then the IAM is a great next step.

The IAM doesn't solely cater to motorcyclists, with their commitment of promoting better driving and riding extending to car and heavy vehicle users. In fact, some businesses that have employees who drive for work will put their staff through the IAM course as workplace training, which is pretty cool.

The IAM system is designed to produce 'advanced' riders (or drivers), with the focus on making you think about your surroundings and what is approaching/unfolding in front of you so you can react with plenty of time. At its heart there are three questions: What can be seen? What cannot be seen? And what might reasonably be expected to happen? An advanced motorcyclist is monitoring the ever-changing circumstances in any ride and continually observing, anticipating, prioritising, deciding and acting early. The learning process can take a reasonable amount of time,

If you ride a motorcycle legally, you'll be aware there's a standard you need to achieve to obtain your licence, and the NZ Road Code sets that standard. Chances are you'll do some instruction (maybe from your mates), you'll take a test, answer a few questions and then get let loose on a motorcycle. It's the same process that's been happening for years, but does getting your licence automatically make you a good motorcyclist? Well, I think we can tell from the crash statistics, especially the fact that 60% of open road incidents involve a rider and no other vehicle, that the answer is a definite 'no'.

Monthly meet gives the opportunity to practice



Mid-ride  
debrief



**“As an IAM rider, you must be mature enough to sacrifice progress for safety, with the ability to exercise restraint differentiating a disciplined rider from an average (and this is the key bit) ‘reactive’ rider.”**

with monthly rides encouraged with an IAM observer who will assist you with following the Roadcraft process. But first, you need an assessment from one of the more experienced observers to get an understanding of your current riding ability, with a report card sent to you afterwards on areas you're nailing or lacking. With an invite to join in on one of the Auckland IAM Sunday rides where I'd have my riding 'assessed', I was slightly nervous as I loaded up the BRM V-Strom and jumped on the Hamilton Expressway early in the morning aiming for Manukau.

## SEASONED RIDERS

Pulling into the car park of the Mitre10 Mega in Manukau, South Auckland, it was easy to spot the row of bikes parked up and riders assembled, although I was slightly surprised with the mixture of machines and ages. Yep, the guys in the fluoro IAM vests all looked like seasoned riders of a more mature age (sorry, guys!), but the assess-ies (like me), were younger and riding machines from a trendier genre (unlike me). And it was good to see it wasn't just old farts (like me) who were interested in improving their riding skills.

With a pre-ride coffee in the Mitre10 café allowing the IAM guys to sort out the number of instructors and attendees that had turned up (this isn't a book it/organised thing, like Ride Forever), we were soon split into groups with myself and one other newbie assigned to one observer. In fact, I was the real newbie with the other rider in our group having been on another ride already with the IAM team. And I took some encouragement that he was now back for more.

The recommendation is that you hopefully have your own intercom (either Cardo or Sena) so that the observer can tell you where to go (in the nicest possible sense), although if you don't at the beginning then they have a couple of units to loan. As I already had the Sena SRL-2 fitted into my Shoei Neotec II, the three of us connected with ease, kitted up and headed off.

And that was the first surprise – the group split off into separate directions. Rather than a social ride where the group would stick together, as there were a number of observations going on, the IAM team prefer not to get tripped up over one another and all chose different routes. So, with the three of us heading off towards Auckland airport for a bit of town work, it wasn't long before I got my first taste of being observed.

## LEARNING AGAIN

It's been a long time since I've done my motorcycle test, but thankfully the Ride Forever

Silver course I went on with my son a couple of weeks before had filled in a few blanks when it came to the intricacies of riding within the confines of the Road Code. That means head checks aplenty, as the Roadcraft system advises (quite rightly) that you shouldn't go anywhere that your eyes haven't already been. But how many of us move lanes or turn across intersections simply presuming there isn't going to be another vehicle there? Yep, it's these sorts of things that we all tend to forget after we've been riding a while, yet they're fundamentally important in ensuring we get home safe.

With the other member of our group in the lead to begin with, our IAM observer Alan Denness gave directions with plenty of advance warning so as not to trip the rider up. The first point I struggled with was sticking to the speed limit, as it took real attention (and a bit of luck) to actually ascertain what the limit was on certain roads. With the recent reduction in limits across the Auckland region, it's meant that roads you'd usually expect to be 100km/h could be reduced to a painful 60km/h, which seemed to jump up and down erratically within short distances. And then there was the signage, which was often scarce or obscured by foliage, so you needed to keep on your toes so not to fall foul. Not that it's an 'official' following you who will cancel your test in an instant. But to pass the IAM test you need to have an acute awareness of speed and speed limits, and that includes getting up to the limit quickly if the conditions and environment allows.

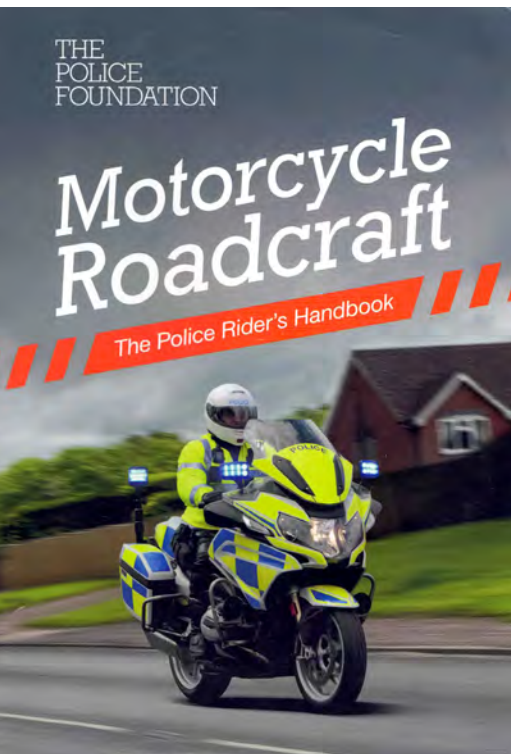
With a bit of zigging and zagging around the airport area, we stopped in some shade to debrief and chat about any issues or questions we might have. Alan also ran through a couple of points he'd picked up on our ride so far, with speed being one of the comments. The IAM system encourages riders to make good progress in a seemingly effortless manner, something that is achieved through anticipation and planning. But as an IAM rider, you must be mature enough to sacrifice progress for safety, with the ability to exercise restraint, differentiating a disciplined rider from an average (and this is the key bit) 'reactive' rider.

Have you ever followed someone and noticed a hazard up ahead which has caused you to react by, say, slowing down while the rider in front continues at the same pace, seemingly oblivious? Many riders (and drivers, especially) focus their attention on the piece of road directly in front of them, meaning it's too late for them to do anything other than react in a panic at the last minute. Looking way ahead allows you the time to assess what's happening and plan your response



way before you reach the hazard. And as Alan demonstrated when he took the lead and gave us a commentary of what he was noticing ahead of him, it can be down to small techniques like not arriving at an intersection at the same time as another vehicle. Instead, adjusting his speed to either get there before or, more likely, backing off so the car has stopped and seen him, reducing the chances of the car driver turning across in front of him.

Road position for maximum visibility is also an important part of the IAM training, although there is the caveat of safety, stability and view (SSV). With one of the roads on the route taking us up a snaking



Getting comms sorted



Mid-ride chat



Paul doesn't look too nervous!

twist of a climb, trucks had broken up the very edge of the road, making it better to stay slightly in to keep safe, which reduced a bit of our view around each turn. But it's better to be safe and stable first, even if that means reducing a bit of speed due to a reduction in view.

**FRIENDLY FUN**

Unlike taking your motorcycle test, where you feel everything is on the line should you do something remotely wrong, the day with IAM was much more relaxed. The observers are encouraging, offering plenty of advice along the way to assist their 'prospects'

with the process of becoming an advanced motorcyclist. You've got to like training and learning to want to give it a go, as there's no use sitting and arguing points with the observers. Instead, it's a great opportunity to suck up some more information, maybe ride to some places you've not been before, and also work towards a goal. For me, I'm always keen to improve my riding and observation skills. This job means I'm quite often riding unfamiliar bikes, often in unfamiliar places (and countries), usually with a group of unfamiliar people. Anything I can do to make sure I get back from 'work' in one piece is a bonus. The others on this day all knew someone else who was attempting to

obtain the IAM standard and had witnessed their riding improve, which encouraged them to come and give it a go. If you've done all the Ride Forever courses and are looking for the next challenge, then maybe IAM is for you. They have volunteers in most of the main centres who will willingly guide you through the process, although remember, they are all doing this for free. There's a small membership fee, and some areas like the Central North Island, are slightly low on observers. But check the website out, and if it sounds like something you'd enjoy, drop the team a line. There's no doubt it will make you a better motorcyclist. ■■■