

BRIDGESTONE

STAYING ALIVE

*Chris Moss's real
world guide to biking
survival*



**IF YOU'VE GOT NINE LIVES, THEN YOU DON'T NEED TO READ THIS
(UNLESS YOU'RE ON YOUR EIGHTH ONE OF COURSE!)**

Nobody likes being told what to do – and I’m not pretending to do any of that in this booklet.

Instead, my guide to ‘Staying Alive’ is simply an account of my own experiences on a motorcycle, including plenty of the bad ones. It’s designed to give you a chance to take on board the stuff that’s happened to me during the thirty years I’ve been on (and off) bikes, so that you can get an insight into how to live with them a bit more safely. Hopefully it’ll serve as a shortcut to getting the job done properly and help you to avoid some of the many pitfalls I’ve encountered along the way during my biking life.

I’ve learnt to ride the hard way, simply because I didn’t have any guidance to do it any differently. That resulted in a fair few scenarios I’d rather forget – and to be perfectly honest, a few I’m lucky to have survived. If I’d had this booklet at my disposal back in my earlier days, I’m certain the number of those darker times would have been a lot less.

All I’d like to achieve with this guide is to make the route to becoming a more confident, competent and safer rider, a painless one.

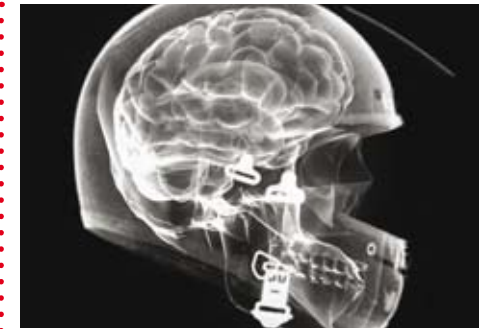
Have a great time on two-wheels. There’s nothing quite like it.

All the best,
Mossy



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It's all too easy to go over the top if you're not careful

Looking back, just being able to write this, let alone still ride, is a major miracle.

Back in my early days I rode virtually everywhere as fast as I could.

The problem with that was, I didn't really know how to ride properly. I couldn't, no one had taught me to.

How I survived those first years of biking I don't know. Sometimes I'd crash once a month, sometimes more. I'd often arrive at work with ripped clothes and flesh, having to go straight to the medical centre to get patched up. I was lucky things never got much worse.

Then I went racing, and though my experience on a bike grew, so did the frequency of my crashes. On a good day I'd do well and sometimes even win. More typically I'd be the gravel trap, wondering why.

To fund the racing I was despatch riding in the capital. Whizzing through the streets of London every working day certainly honed my 'skills'. Dealing with the dangers of riding through dense traffic was a talent I had to pick up pretty quickly.

The good fortune with bikes continued until what was probably the darkest day in my biking life. While I was away racing

at Mallory Park one Sunday, my Spanish girlfriend had a fatal accident on her scooter in London.

It was a very difficult thing for me to deal with, and underlined the ultimate price you can pay for making a mistake on a bike - especially when you're riding in town.

I was lucky to get out of the courier game when I met an editor of a motorcycle magazine and was offered the job as a journalist. Getting to ride a variety of bikes, and a chance to ride them in such different environments was a real advantage. It really boosted my confidence and ability. Moving to work at MCN shortly afterwards stepped things up another gear, and because I didn't have a licence for four wheels until 2000, my biking mileage continued to rocket.

Mossy crash story 1

Four days after buying my first ever new bike, I was riding through town in the wet. Suddenly a parked car pulled out in front of me from the side of the road. Inexperience made me panic brake, lock the front wheel, crash heavily and instantly wreck my RD250 Yamaha. Had I had some more miles under my belt and anticipated such an event, I would have been easily able to deal with it. But riding far too quickly for the weather and traffic conditions caused much regret and lots of expensive damage.



Ron has been, without doubt, the biggest influence on my riding

I had another big setback in 1996 when I had a massive off while racing at the TT. But though my head and leg injuries meant I couldn't ride for nearly a year, with the knock to my confidence ruling out a full psychological recovery for another year on top of that, I learnt a really crucial lesson. It suddenly dawned on me that my body was just as fragile and vulnerable to injury as anyone else's. Up until then, I'd never really been hurt.

That day in June made me realise I wasn't the indestructible 'Captain Scarlet' type of character that my multitude of previous escapes had given me time to think. I was curtly reminded of my mortality. It was probably the best (though hardest) safety message I've ever received.

Four years later another real turning point in my biking life came along. At a bike launch at Almeria in Spain, I met Ron Haslam. The former Grand Prix rider helped me with

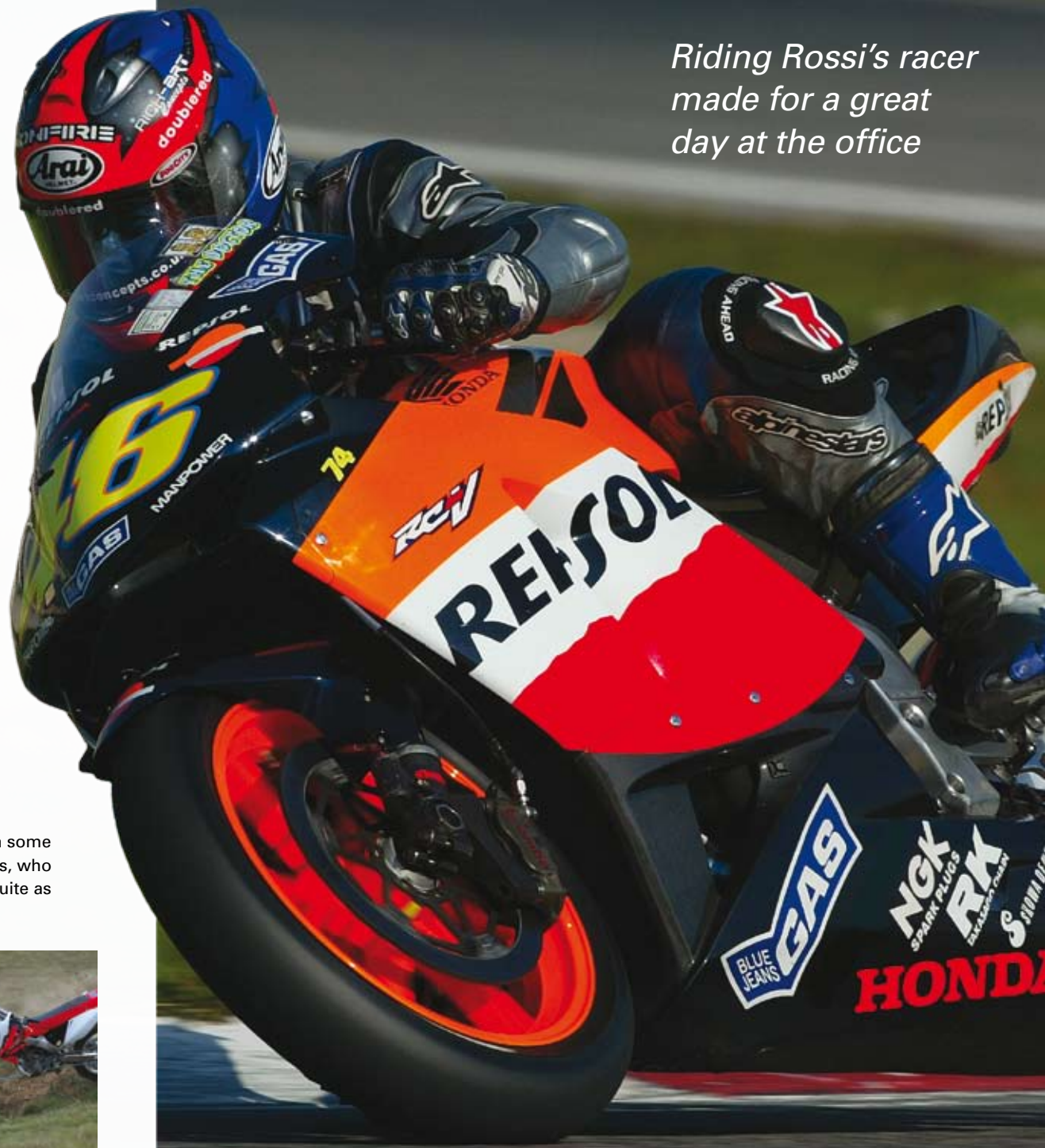
a handling problem I was having with the bike. But more crucially he pointed out some errors with my riding.

Within a single hour he improved my lap time by over two seconds, and better still helped me to go faster with far less chance of crashing.

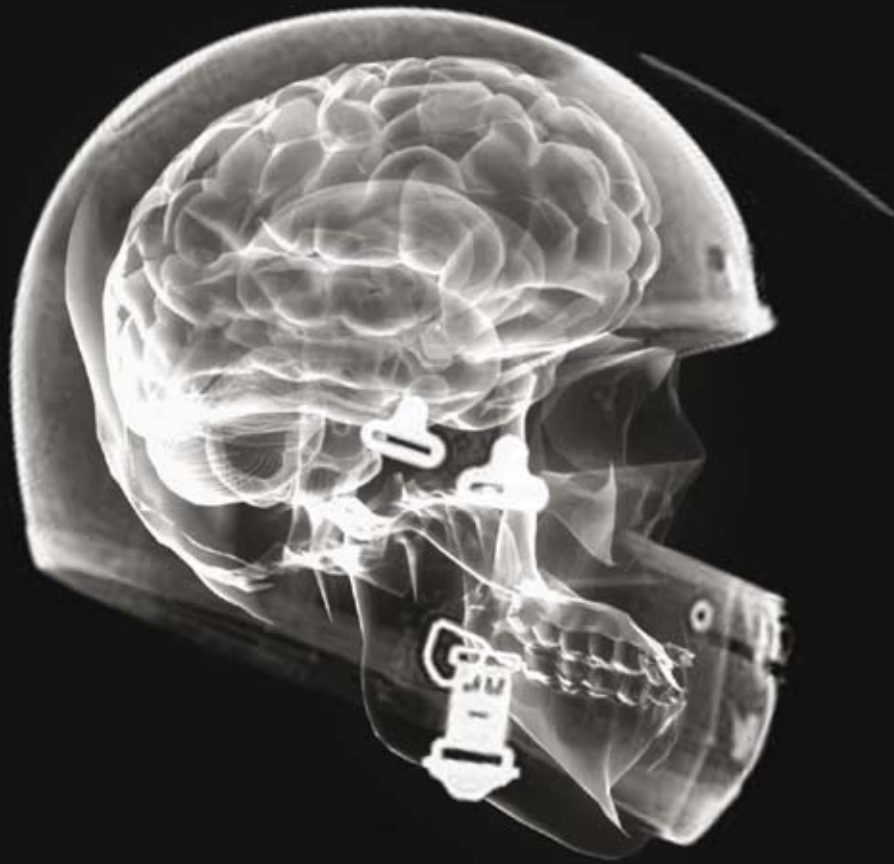
Since then I've benefitted hugely from Ron's massive experience, at last understanding how to get the best from myself and a bike. I can honestly say until I met Haslam I didn't really know what I was doing. Suddenly I could, at long last, understand why the hell I'd fallen off so often when I was racing. Just as importantly the tips and advice I picked up helped me to ride a lot better on the road too.

It's something I still benefit from to this day having become an instructor at his race school at Donington.

It's a job I really enjoy, not least because I get a chance to pass on some of Ron's valuable lessons to riders, who like me before I met him, aren't quite as aware as they could be.



Riding Rossi's racer made for a great day at the office



Before you go

Your brain is your very best tool for risk reduction, so use it constantly. Let it trigger your eyes, ears and nose to assist you too.

Before every ride it's a good idea to prepare yourself mentally. Get your head sorted, and adopt the right attitude to what lies ahead and you'll be massively better off.

Riding a bike is a risky game, it's as simple as that. Recognise that fact and you'll stand a chance of survival. Ignore it, and things will inevitably go wrong. **Don't ever forget, you can die on a motorcycle – hundreds of us do just that each year.**

Don't think it can't happen to you

The good news is that there's a very good chance you will stay alive – all you have to do is use your loaf and take things seriously.

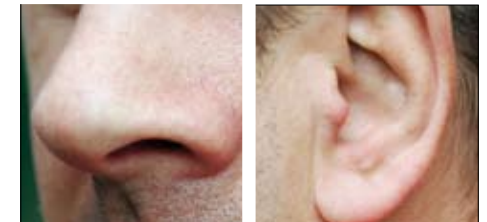
Your brain is your very best tool for risk reduction, so use it constantly. Let it trigger your eyes, ears and nose to assist you too. Being aware of exactly what's going on and what's likely to happen is your very best defence against danger. You're gifted with some pretty fancy biological equipment – use all of it at all times.

Concentrate on the job in hand and always have your head in gear

If it drops into neutral and starts thinking about non-biking stuff like what's for dinner, which pub's best tonight etc, then you're not going to be on top of your game.

Being realistic is also crucial

Road use is dangerous, simply because roads are inhabited by humans. As long as they're involved, then things can and will



You're gifted with some pretty fancy biological equipment – use it at all times

Mossy crash story 2

Riding really quickly down my most favourite country road which I knew like the back of my hand, I had a massive scare on my Rickman Kawasaki Z1000, I rounded a blind corner to meet a combined harvester followed by two cars travelling really slowly. I had no choice other than to overtake them, but oncoming traffic then made it one of the closest shaves I've ever had. Total stupidity and no forward planning at all very nearly cost me my life. Remembering that one terrifies me to this day.

go wrong. People's mistakes can prove fatal – for you as well as them.

All sorts of people use the roads

Most are decent, many are not. They range from being ignorant and inept to callous and downright dangerous. Look out for them. They are your enemies and they can kill you.

Life on the roads is not always fair and just

Be prepared for that. Realise in the traffic food chain, you're right near the bottom. Look after yourself and treat everyone and everything with a healthy level of suspicion. And do your very best to avoid getting wound up when someone compromises your safety. It usually just aggravates the situation. Besides, anyone with a steering wheel is armed with a life-threatening weapon.

Be honest about your ability

There's only one McGuinness or Rossi, so don't get ideas above your station. Confidence is a friend, conceit is a foe.

Accept the bike-riding game is a learning process, and no-one has got it totally sussed yet

I'm still discovering new stuff after thirty years of riding, and I don't mind admitting that. If you're newer to biking, don't be too proud to consider some training. It might sound a bit 'Sam Browne belt and traffic cones' but there are some good and experienced people out there who can give you some potentially life-saving tips.

Knowing your bike and the route you're going to take will serve you well

All bikes are better at doing some things than others. Being aware of their strengths and weaknesses can be a real advantage. Big heavy tourers aren't always suited to rush hour city traffic in the wet. Fast and focused sportsbikes aren't either, but they can also be a handful on a really tight, twisty and undulating backroad. Know your horse, and know your course.

Knowing what to expect from the weather aids biking life

Many riders don't like the wet, everyone hates the cold. Being ready for all of it with the right kit and frame of mind can lighten the load.

Biking is a thinking man's game and with the right mental preparation and attitude you'll stand a much better chance of dealing with all its challenges. Without it, you won't.

And always remember, it's easy to die. Staying alive is the hard bit.

Mossy crash story 3

Riding with another rider at speed on a BMW R1200GS along a very twisty and challenging road in Spain, I lost the front end and slid straight across the other side of the road into a rock face. I was a bit unlucky to hit the slippery section of road but previous experience of the notoriously risky route should have warned me that was possible. Ego and impatience to keep up with the other rider resulted in a catalogue of broken bones and a 15-day stay in hospital. It was three months before I could ride again

Always look as far ahead as you can for the unexpected. And always expect to see it





The challenge ahead, the environment and its inhabitants

As well as having your head sorted before you ride off, it's handy to know what lies ahead and what sort of challenges you're likely to face.

People are the most unpredictable part of life on the road. The Queen's highway is the biggest melting pot of all. There you'll find those from all sorts of social and financial backgrounds with a catalogue of different attitudes towards road use and its users. None are quite the same.

In fairness, you have to say that given the millions of people using the UK's roads, the number of accidents and deaths are actually remarkably few. The trouble is, because you only live once and because you ride a bike it's easy for that factor to alter and for you to become one of those statistics.

By the same token it should also be clear there are plenty of bike fans out there who'll do all they can to help you along. I'm waving thanks to so many people these days for moving out of the way and letting me by. But along with the good guys there are the baddies, the ones that will compromise your safety.

Few want to harm you deliberately, though there are some who despise bikes and don't mind making life difficult for you. "The best place for bikers is under the front wheels of my car," is a quote from a listener of a popular radio show I heard recently. He is not a man alone. And it's this sort of person that needs to be spotted and coped with.

Go to any major petrol station at a busy time and sit and watch the sort of people paying at the till for a while. You'll spot virtually every type of person from the cocksure, impatient exec to the frail old



"The best place for bikers is under the front wheels of my car," - listener to Jeremy Vine's radio show

lady who struggles to count and hand over the money. People like that and all those in between use the road. Some shouldn't be allowed anywhere near a vehicle. But they are, and they're out there. Remember that the next time you're giving it some on your Hayabusa.

Do your best to identify the sorts of vehicles that might pose problems for you. Truckers are usually pretty considerate, but they do tailgate traffic and as they are big and heavy it's wise to respect them.

Do the same with the young oik and his mates trying to break the lap record in his hot-hatch. Keep an eye out for the fast car owners who'll see you and your bike as a red flag and do everything they can to beat you. The classic white van man is another to pick up early on your radar. Vans are very fast



Not all drivers using roads take the job too seriously, some don't even know what day of the week it is. But that's how it is, so deal with it.



these days and one that doesn't belong to the driver has to be seen as a risk.

Drivers on their mobiles, playing with their sat navs, distracted by their kids, not using indicators or headlights need to be viewed with suspicion as do those with door mirrors hanging off or damaged. Not all drivers using roads take the job too seriously, some don't even know what day of the week it is. But that's how it is, so deal with it.

Understanding how you appear to others is useful. Some are wary of bikes and many don't even see that you're following them. Bikes, even with the headlights on aren't always easy to spot, and the speed at which they accelerate and change direction can be way too much for some to take in.

The condition of the road and all its attendant furniture needs some serious consideration too. Most major routes are in pretty good order but there's still a chance of finding a pothole or series of ruts just where you don't want them.

Road markings in urban areas can upset the handling of your bike if they are raised too much, and they can be very slippery when it rains. Out in the sticks you're always likely to come across some slow-moving agricultural vehicle, mud from its wheels or waste from some animal. And debris from drinks cans to full exhaust systems can be found anywhere at anytime.

Take extra care when you're riding on unfamiliar territory. All those tricky bumps, junctions, cambers, blind corners etc that you know the location of on roads you're familiar with, can also be in evidence on roads you're not. It's impossible to predict what lies around the next corner.

Just because a stretch of road you've ridden through 100 times without issue, doesn't necessarily mean it will be clear and safe the 101st time.

Take nothing for granted. Treat people with a healthy level of suspicion and you'll have a head start to growing old.



Mossy crash story 4

At the last Ron Haslam race school of the season I volunteered to chaperone a student who'd been parted from his instructor out on the circuit. Rather than try to catch him I toured round slowly and waited for him to catch me. By that time, he'd been picked up by another instructor who then waved me on past the pair of them. I upped my pace, flew under the Dunlop bridge and crashed spectacularly as I braked for the Fogarty Esses seconds later. I then learned the Hornet 900 I was on had been parked in the pitlane for a few hours before I got on it, so the tyres were freezing cold and had very little grip.



Riding in towns & cities

Without a single doubt, **THE** riskiest place to be on a bike is in town. It's the most demanding and unpredictable environment of all, and you need to be as sharp as a fighter pilot to avoid trouble.

A lot is happening, and much of it can change quickly. It all needs taking in, and to do that, you have to slow down and pay full attention. At some points of a journey through busy towns, 30mph can be way too fast. Take it dead easy.

Do it long enough and you'll develop a sixth sense for what people might do or what might happen next. In the meantime realise that many hazards can be hidden until they present themselves right in front of you.

Pedestrians can be one of the worst offenders. They can suddenly walk out between parked cars, sometimes looking the wrong way. Drivers can also emerge from behind doors flung open without warning.

Children and animals are the most unpredictable, expect them to do ANYTHING. Delivery vans, taxis, buses, and any other commercial vehicles using city streets can often be in a hurry and have different priorities to you. Look out for them especially.

Gaps in lines of stationary traffic you're riding down the outside of should be treated with plenty of suspicion. T-boning an emerging car that another has let out isn't pleasant.

Keep an eye out for slippery sections of road. Junctions where traffic stands still or brakes hard can be covered in oil and rubber. A piece of debris like a flattened tin can may well prove to be your undoing if it's right on line mid-corner.

And never expect your route to be guaranteed clear if traffic lights are on green. Have a peek at the junction to make sure opposing traffic has stopped first.

Ten years despatching in London taught me just how risky city riding can be. It can make racing at the TT look safer. Believe me, I've done both.



Mossy crash story 5

At the end of a long day's testing I wanted some wheelie shots before the light faded. I barked at the photographer to hurry up and get in position. I then promptly flipped the GSX-R1000 right in front of his lens and got the shot you see on the cover of this booklet. I'd been impatient, got cocky and careless, and then janked the throttle hard to lift the front wheel. Trouble was, I was in first gear and not second as I thought I was. The GSX-R reared up far too quickly for me to control it. A little more care and thought would have easily prevented the ensuing chaos.

Upping the pace

Riding faster can either be fantastically thrilling or life-threateningly dangerous. It all depends on your skill and experience, and when and where you do it - even top racers think riding fast on the road is dangerous

But before we get into things in greater detail let's understand some basic fundamentals. Firstly, riding above the speed limit is illegal and you can get nicked for it - seriously, with punishments including disqualification or even a custodial sentence. Obvious maybe, but a fact nevertheless. Everyone speeds at some point and I mean everyone from your mother to the coppers and magistrates who prosecute you for doing it. But rules are rules and whether you think they're unfair or unrealistic is beside the point. If the ref points to the spot, it doesn't matter what Rooney or Ronaldo think. It's a penalty.

Secondly, riding fast needs everything to be in place. All your senses and skills should

Mossy crash story 6

My very first ride on a bike was a memorable one. A mate let me have a go on his Honda SS50 moped. But as I'd never ridden a bike before, when I got to the first corner I didn't know what to do. I panicked, ran off the road and fell. With no previous experience or clue of how to cope, diving to earth was an inevitable conclusion to my maiden ride. Luckily I wasn't hurt and my faux-pas couldn't stop me from becoming addicted to biking.

be at their very sharpest. Your bike ought to be in top condition with tyres, brakes and suspension warmed and ready for action. And you have to be in the right place. Unless you're in a safe environment to do it, where you'll encounter less hazards like traffic for example, then don't even think about going faster. Charging down the King's Road on a Saturday afternoon is just asking for trouble. Getting a move on down a quiet backroad on a Wednesday morning can be much safer.

Trying to go faster than you're able to can be very risky. Peer-pressure from mates to keep up during a group ride is a good example of this. Drop out of that sort of competition and take the flack down the pub later. It's much better than taking it from a hospital bed. And if you're knackered for whatever reason, take that into account and either don't ride or ride more slowly and carefully.

Your frame of mind is very important. If you are worrying about something, just had a row with your missus, do what you can to stay calm. Riding full of emotion can be risky as the heart is nowhere near as skilled as the mind.

Be very careful with booze. Long before it starts to affect your reactions and become illegal it can change your attitude, boost your confidence and make you feel like you are as good as Rossi. I've done drink-riding tests on private grounds for the press, and after I'd had a few I actually wanted to crash for the camera just for a laugh.

Town riding should never be done too swiftly, but just because you're riding in the summer sun down your favourite road doesn't mean you'll be safe. Tractors crawling along at walking pace leaving behind a trail of mud are very difficult things to stop for if you don't see them well ahead. And vision is reduced in the countryside in

the warmer months because the vegetation flourishes and blocks your view.

If you want to ride fast, then only do it when it's safe. Have the sense to back off when it isn't, and save your speed hunger for another day. And if you want to ride really fast then go on a trackday. Circuits are designed for just that. Depending on the track there's usually plenty of run off so mistakes don't have to have the same consequences as they do on the road.

Everyone's going the same way and there are no police. Race schools are safer still. You get tuition and good overtaking etiquette makes life much more predictable and safer.



Just remember speed itself doesn't kill, it's inappropriate speed that will catch you out.



Night riding

Riding at night needs a different view. Some say it's like riding in a clear fog. All I know is, I absolutely hate it!

No matter where you ride, visibility levels are always reduced to some extent. It's trickier to judge speed too.

Choosing your route really helps; main ones are usually brighter. But what you see, and how well you see it can be very different to the view in daylight. Spotting things at dawn and dusk is even harder. If it's wet or foggy you might want radar! In any event, it's often cooler and be can less grippy.

Stuff you can view miles ahead in the day can stay hidden at night until you're right on top of it.

Try riding a superbike fast down a dark, unlit, undulating backroad and

you'll suddenly realise just how far ahead you need to see to stay safe. At night you can't, so knock off the pace.

Adjusting and cleaning your headlight will give you a better chance. The vast majority of bike lights are pretty poor. That's not helped by the beam suddenly shooting off in a different direction when you brake, accelerate or throw the bike into a corner. Holding onto the pass light to power both filaments together can help. Just be careful when you go back to a dipped beam and have to face the much darker view. And don't forget, at night your headlight blends in with all the others.

A clean clear visor is an absolute must. Wearing brighter or reflective kit and keeping a clean registration plate helps being seen, as does being in the right place on the road.

Many people are tired in the darker hours. A fair few can be drunk too, especially out in the country where you'll also need to be prepared for wildlife jumping out in front of you.

When you're in the dark, do everything you can to improve the view ahead.

Riding in the **wet**

Riding in the rain can be a huge psychological battle for many riders. The reality is, wet weather motorcycling doesn't have to be that daunting. Or that risky.

OK, there's less grip available and you need to take extra care. But there's tons of stuff to learn from riding in the wet, and once you know what you're doing you can enjoy it a lot more and feel at ease.

Patience is an absolute must. Experience is essential to recognise where you and your bike's limits are likely to be. As long as you approach those limits progressively, then you'll stand a chance of dealing with them when they arrive. Rush up to, and then go over them even momentarily, and it could be too late to save things.



Mossy crash story 7

After cleaning out the brake calipers of my Laverda Jota I set out for a test ride. Joining a dual carriageway and getting up to speed was easy enough. Stopping wasn't. I flew down a slip-road and pulled the front brake lever only to have it come right back to the bars. I instantly knew I needed a 'plan B', but only good fortune meant I ended up in the middle of a field rather than the middle of a car. Had I known I needed to pump the brake to restore its pressure I wouldn't have had the huge scare or the two buckled wheels I suffered from bouncing up the kerb.

Think of tyre grip like lifting a weight with a strand of cotton. Pull it up gently and you'll manage it. Yank it suddenly and the cotton will snap. Being smooth and progressive is the key. Every movement has to be gradual and not sudden.

Try to realise what sort of forces you're putting your bike under when you brake, accelerate, or turn into a corner. It has two ends, sometimes one is doing all the work.

For example, braking transfers most weight to the front tyre. When it's loaded up, it will grip better. At the other end, the rear tyre is unloading and can't grip because there's no weight on it. Some riders never use the rear brake at all in the wet.

When you're cornering, hang off the side of the bike like racers do to keep it more upright. That way there's less lean angle created and less force pushing the tyres off line. If it stays on the fatter, more central part of the tyre, the bike is less likely to slide.

Knowing how to recognise slippery sections of wet roads is vital too. On a good, clean, well-surfaced road there can be much more adhesion than you'd think. On Shell Grip surface, grip is good enough to get your knee down.

However, in town where oil and diesel are constantly deposited it can be like ice. Junctions where vehicles are frequently stationary are especially prone to this. Avoid running over manhole covers and large road markings while using the bike hard.

Out of town, shiny worn out surfaces should also be given a wide berth where possible, or at least run over in an upright position with a neutral throttle.

If it hasn't rained for a while it will be very slippery when it first gets wet. On the other hand, deeper sections of water can cause aquaplaning and instant reduced control. Look out for oncoming cars using their wipers or with wet wheels to give you a hint of what lies ahead. Checking weather forecasts can help too.

Keep your bike's tyres at standard pressures, and make sure they have a decent tread depth. Note also that some sports-biased tyres which offer brilliant dry grip may become lethal in the rain.

Abrupt engine power or braking characteristics or snatchy brakes themselves won't help either. Understanding your bike's likely behaviour will help you understand what it's capable of.

Wear good kit too. A wet rider is usually an unhappy and apathetic one who'll lose concentration. A good clean, clear visor with a demisting device will prove a godsend. And a wiper on your glove to keep it that way is just as useful.

Needing to ride in the wet is more than likely at some point in the UK. When that happens, riding well and confidently will pay crucial safety dividends.



Mossy crash story 8

In my first month of despatching in London I approached a junction in the wet on my Honda CX500 thinking I had right of way. The arrival of a car soon showed that wasn't the case and down I went. I went mad at the driver thinking he was to blame, but the policeman who arrived shortly afterwards soon put me to rights. The bike and body-battering incident quickly taught me to be careful at confusing sections of road and not to take anything for granted – even if you think you're in the right.

Motorway riding

You wouldn't think riding along in a straightline would present too many challenges, but motorways can be one of the most demanding places to ride.

There are many reasons not to use motorways on a bike, but if you want to make a longer trip they have to be considered.

The main thing to take on board is the extra speed. It's dead easy to think you're riding at a lot slower pace than you actually are, even when you're getting a move on. But if something goes wrong and you need to react to it, you'll soon realise just how quickly you're going - possibly too fast.

Lane discipline is appalling on UK motorways. Do your best to stay calm behind lane-hoggers. Overtaking on the inside of normal moving traffic is illegal, but it's becoming more common. So expect it on both sides.

Staying alert and extra vigilant is a real key to keeping out of trouble on motorways. That in itself can be tricky, especially after a long spell running along a three-laned route. It's all too easy to become mesmerised by the monotony of a motorway. They can and do put people to sleep, so be especially careful on them late into the night or very early in the morning.

Use your mirrors regularly. Tailgaters are common on motorways and can cause serious pile ups. Look well ahead to give

yourself a better chance of dealing with changes in pace or direction of traffic, and not just what's directly in front. Always be on the look out for the start of congestion - it can rush up on you quicker than you think. A line of brake lights gives a good clue. If you see debris in the carriageway, don't stare at it, otherwise you'll hit it. Concentrate on an alternative line and miss it.

Motorways are rarely empty these days. Think of yourself as a jigsaw piece and move yourself around to fit into safer gaps of the puzzle. Don't stay at the same speed for mile after mile.

Filter through slower moving traffic very carefully. A sudden lane change by someone can be hard to avoid. And when traffic has been at a complete standstill for a while, watch out for people getting out of their cars. Hitting an opening door or an emerging occupant rarely has a happy ending.

If you need to use the hard shoulder, then park your bike on the inside of it as much as possible. Drivers hitting stationary traffic is common, not to mention extremely destructive.

As long as you look at the whole picture, anticipate and observe carefully when you're riding on motorways you'll be fine.



Riding with a pillion passenger or luggage

Carrying a passenger needs even more thought than riding solo. It alters the way your bike performs thanks to the extra weight and where it's sited.

And of course there's another person's safety to consider. I've lost a pillion through my own negligence, and it ranks as one of the most shocking bike experiences I've ever had.

Take a ride on the back of any big sportsbike, and you'll know they are barely fit for the purpose - something worth bearing in mind when you take someone onboard such a bike, especially at speed. In saying that, with the right approach and understanding there's no reason why a pillion can't have as much fun as the rider.

The first consideration to make is for their welfare, which will be affected by the sort of bike you have. Riding on the back of a Goldwing is both secure and sumptuous. The seat is as big as a sofa and there's plenty to grab hold of. Something like an Aprilia Tuono is a very different matter. With virtually nothing to hang onto, the already wheelie-prone bike becomes a liability for a passenger if it's used in just a spirited fashion, never mind hard.

The pillion's experience matters greatly too. If they've been doing it for years they'll know what to expect and what's expected of them. If not, then a few tips from the rider about the importance of keeping still and bracing themselves against forces of braking and acceleration won't go amiss. I always tell someone new to pillion riding to make it quite clear if they're unhappy. And make sure they're dressed as well as you are. They're at as much risk in a fall as the rider.

Biking for two isn't for everyone, but done right it can be twice the fun.



Routine maintenance

Bikes start to wear and go out of adjustment from the day they leave the showroom.

Keeping them running smoothly, reliably and safely takes time and effort. Periodically it needs money too. Trying to cut economic corners with maintenance is never a good idea.

The level and frequency of maintenance very much depends on the sort of bike. Robust, low revving tourers won't need anywhere near as much attention as some high-spec, high speed sportsbikes. But the fact is, all bikes need looking after.

Servicing is getting more and more complex to do at home, so decide what you're able to do, and what should be left to an expert. Missing services and checks can lead to problems and inconvenience at best, and accident and injury at worst.

Washing your bike often is a good place to start. Getting into the nitty gritty of a machine will help you spot wear and tear early, giving you a chance to sort it quicker. Keep your eye on chain and sprocket wear and lube them as often as they need it – sometimes more than once a day. Tyre pressure checks are a chore, but can make the difference between a good and evil handling bike. Tread depth checks and complete all-round visual inspections for cuts and debris are vital too, as is choosing just the right sort of tyres for your bike. Bikes need the appropriate sort of rubber to help them perform at their best. Make sure your valve caps are air tight to stop deflation through centrifugal force at very high speed.

Correct oil, water, and brake fluid levels are essential, and monitoring brake pad and disc wear is crucial. Checks can be inconvenient and messy, but they're better than a mechanically-induced crash.

If you don't know what to look for then ask a dealer. It might cost you a bit of time and money, but it's always worth keeping your bike in order.

The importance of wearing the right kit



Legally, you only need to wear an approved helmet to ride a bike. In reality you need to be much more safely dressed.

Budget normally decides what you can choose, but if you value your skin then buy the very best you can afford. And cover as much of your body as you can.

Try to wear your most protective kit for every journey you make. If you can't, then take things even more carefully. Though don't

forget even the very best kit can't ultimately prevent injury.

Leading brands are pricier but you do generally get what you pay for. Helmets can be very expensive, yet as your head is your most important bit to protect then it's a price worth paying. Make sure the fit is snug, but comfortable. Wearing ear plugs reduces noise and the chance of damage to your hearing.

Leather is the best material for protection. Textile clothing is almost as tough and has the bonus of being fully weatherproof. In either case choose clothing with body armour and the best possible fit. Loose kit will not protect properly. Boots and gloves need to be tough and durable. Hands and feet are often the first things to touch down in a crash.

The latest, most fashionable gear can cost thousands (literally), but there are ways of saving money without compromising safety. Buying slightly outdated clothing will be much cheaper. Don't however buy cheap quality stuff that will fall quickly apart or be unsafe.

Try to wear something bright and do your best to keep dry and warm.

Bike clothing certainly isn't cheap, but neither is a few weeks or more off work.



Returning to biking

Biking is fashionable and plenty of riders are returning to ride again. A fair few of them are also coming back to bikes and getting hurt.

If you haven't ridden for a while then be prepared to face some changes. The pace of bike development has never been as high. And though there's no doubt bikes are safer and more capable than ever, the overall performance of them is in a different league to how it was as little as ten years ago. And the amount of traffic using the roads has increased dramatically.

To stand a chance of getting through the earliest days of your 'comeback' it's a good idea to take things easy. It doesn't matter how good and experienced you thought you were back in 'your day', the combination of

being rusty and jumping on a much different sort of bike to what you once were used to can be fraught with risk.

Adjusting to your new world takes time and getting some help can be a good idea. Be realistic and don't for god's sake think that being up to the job in your younger days is enough to cope with riding after a break from it all.

Training will help you to familiarise yourself with the new challenge. Don't be too proud to take some.

If I don't ride for a week I need a little time to get back into things fully. After my TT crash, I couldn't ride for nine months. It took me over a year to feel as confident and able as I was prior to the accident.

If you've had a break from biking, be patient to avoid having another very different break!



If you haven't ridden since the Kawasaki Z1B was the king the of the roads...

...then be prepared for the totally different biking world that exists today



Mossy crash story 9

En route to a bike launch in Germany another journalist and I stopped at some services to shelter from the rain and have lunch. He was quite a bit slower than I was, but over the meal he baited me by saying he could beat me any day. Rising to the challenge, when we left the restaurant on the way back to the motorway I went to overtake him to show him who was boss. But in my haste to get past, my bike slipped momentarily on a wet patch. By the time I saved the slide I was heading for the kerb. As soon as I touched it the front end of the BMW R1150RT tucked and I went straight down. He laughed as much as I blushed with embarrassment from his easy provocation.

Riding abroad

Riding abroad, especially in Europe, brings another dimension of pleasure to your biking. Compared to the UK, motorcycling can be far more enjoyable.

Positives include emptier roads, a greater pro-biking attitude and, if you visit the right spots, an abundance of brilliant routes, weather and scenery.

Life is of course different overseas and you need to be mindful and prepared for this before you set off. Having problems miles from home in a non-English speaking nation can be much more difficult to cope with. Doing your very best to prevent them occurring in the first place, or at least reducing their impact is important to enjoying biking in foreign zones to the full.

Getting used to driving on the wrong side of the road is quite straightforward, but it's also dead easy to resort to your default setting and switch back to riding on the left. Some sort of reminder can help with this. Be patient getting used to different driving habits and styles, and be especially observant in busy cities where there's a bigger chance of making a mistake. Bear in mind that some roads can be very slippery, especially in the wet.

Planning a route well can avoid hassles, and leaving home with a fully serviced bike, medical insurance cover, breakdown cover, a few spares (bulbs etc.), and all of your bike and riding documents will make life much more convenient. Many roads in Europe are of the pay-as-you-go variety, so have change or cards handy – also essential for on the spot fines from police, who can be much more strict than ours.

Think ahead and plan as much as you can, and the inevitable fun you'll have will be increased accordingly. And be prepared to never want to come home!



Round up

This booklet is only a guide to getting through the challenges you need to face when riding a bike.

Trying to cover every single issue you'll face at some time or another would have taken a volume of hundreds of pages.

However, I'm sure sharing some of my knowledge and experience with you has helped you to appreciate some of the risks involved with biking, and that with the right approach and attitude can dramatically reduce those risks.

It's a thinking man's game and the more you put into it, the safer it will be. I made a huge number of mistakes during my early days on bikes simply because I didn't think about things anywhere near enough. I rode everywhere on a wing and a prayer – sometimes that was enough, often it wasn't.

I hope my guidance can steer you well away from the sort of experiences I had and help you get through it all with plenty of smiles and a lot less crashes and injuries.

Have a great time on two wheels.

Mossy crash story 10

Riding through Northampton on a damp Saturday morning a car ahead of me on my offside slowed to turn right. As it did so, the driver stopped to let an old man cross the road in front of me. I braked hard but couldn't avoid hitting him and knocked him over. It was a terrible thing to witness, and he was taken to hospital. To my relief he recovered fully by the next day. It reminded me of the care and observation needed whenever you ride in town. It might have been negligent of the car driver to allow him out, but it's something I should have foreseen and avoided.



30 top tips

- 1 Always sort your attitude out before you start; riding bikes is dangerous
- 2 Approaching a side road, look at the waiting driver's eyes and wheels as a clue to his acknowledgement and movement
- 3 If you can't see over a crest of a hill, stand up on the footrests for a better view
- 4 As you pass them, look down side roads, back up slip roads and under bridges. That way you'll know what might follow you and what you're about to catch up
- 5 Use hand signals as well as indicators to show your intentions
- 6 Don't feel pressure to perform from others. Go at your own pace
- 7 Wash your bike regularly and you'll spot wear and tear early
- 8 If you see what you think is diesel on the road, inhale sharply to confirm it by smell
- 9 Take note of road signs and markings to 'see' the way ahead
- 10 Try to wear the brightest and most protective kit you can every time you ride
- 11 Training and safety aren't boring and are better than a hospital visit
- 12 Be assertive with oncoming traffic in towns, don't let it push you around
- 13 Towns are the riskiest zones to ride in. Don't speed in urban areas
- 14 If you want to ride faster, pick the right time and place to do it
- 15 Learn to spot risky drivers by their habits and vehicles they drive. Be suspicious of everyone
- 16 In the morning be aware of sleepy drivers peering through their misted or frosted windows
- 17 Low level sun can make it difficult to see and be seen
- 18 When riding with a pillion make sure they understand your rules
- 19 Using your mirrors lets you check others' movements. Using your indicators lets them know yours
- 20 Looking well ahead lets you anticipate things earlier
- 21 Distractions in town are numerous, keep your eyes on the road
- 22 Don't make a move before you've planned it. When you move, don't have second thoughts
- 23 Don't be scared to accelerate to safety
- 24 Use your brake light to warn others of hazards ahead
- 25 There's no substitute for experience – riding as often as you can has many benefits
- 26 Use lower gears in town to keep rpm higher and help you to appreciate your speed more
- 27 Be sympathetic and patient with others – we ALL make mistakes
- 28 Take extra care on left handers; mistakes can lead to head-ons with oncoming traffic
- 29 Fatigue is one of the biggest causes of error – try to ride only when you're alert
- 30 Try to anticipate what might happen as well as what's actually going on

Stay relaxed and
never let things
get on top of you!

