

# ***RIDING WITH THE OLD BLOKE***



## **GOING BACK TO BASICS**



Sometimes it's good to go back over the basics of riding. Yes, of course, we all

know the basics; but some things might get forgotten. Or there can be new ways of doing things.

[This video](#) covers **basics of how to get on and off, and move your bike around, park it etc.** Yes, you know how to get on and off, don't you! But is there a better, easier way? The good thing about this video is that it shows **how to do all these basic things with the least amount of contortion and effort.** It wasn't particularly aimed at older riders,

but all the tips in the video make it easier for us old blokes to get on and off, move the bike around, park it etc. Good for people with crook hips, back, knees and so on!

The getting-on-and-off part might be a bit controversial. I don't generally do it the way he shows, except when it is in the garage. Due to lack of space my bike is parked with the left side against the wall, and not much room between the right side and the car. So I get on and off this way. Yes, on the right side, but I know my weight won't tip the bike so it's okay to do it this way. I did try getting on (from the left) this way a few times, but I find it easier to do it the old way – with the left foot on the ground. Because the bike is leaning over, the foot-peg is further in; so you end up with your left leg reaching in a fair bit – as can be seen in the photo above. It's probably good for bikes that aren't as tall, and people with shorter legs. Anyway, the video is well worth having a look at.

## **RETRO MINI**



I first saw this mentioned by Guy Allen in his AllMoto newsletter. Then it popped up on BikeSales. So maybe it's worth a mention here, because you're likely to see videos and news of it; even though there are no plans to bring it to Australia. Which is fine by me. That it won't come to Australia.

It's the **Honda Dax**. Basically, from what I can tell, it's a Honda Grom with 1970s bodywork and one less gear. (The Grom now has a 5-speed box).

I'm sorry if anyone has one, but I just don't get the Honda Grom. I've only ever seen one on the road twice; and both times it looked ridiculous! Okay, I admit they must have something going for them – 'The Bear' had

one and apparently loved it; but I still think they're silly little things. And don't tell me how economical they are – so are scooters, like the one at the start of last month's edition. And scooters makes a lot more sense!

I don't think Australia ever got the original Dax, but they came out in 1969, as a 50cc and then in 70cc form. Maybe they made some sense back then – like a Monkey Bike but bigger. The latest version, which has just been introduced over 40 years after the original died out, has a 125cc engine. But it is built around the same pressed-steel bodywork they used to use back in the 60s and 70s. There's an ad – which the photo above is taken from – but [this video](#) will tell you more about it and its predecessor. At this stage it's only for Europe. They're welcome to it.

## **IN BETWEEN SHOWERS**

We really have had a lot of rain along the east coast of NSW. The average March rainfall for my area is around 107 mm. The wettest March on record saw 376 mm fall in March 2016. This year we've had 577 mm in just the first 19 days!



When a drier day came along, with a break forecast in the early afternoon, and with no other commitments, it was an opportunity to go for a short ride. There were patches of rain showing on the radar, but it didn't look too bad in my area. So I got the bike out (*exactly one month to the day since my last ride!*), and headed off. For those who know the area, my plan was to go through Jamberoo to Kiama, and return.

There was soon **evidence of how much rain we'd had**. Macquarie Pass was closed (again!) due to a landslip; and when I rode past Swamp Rd it was closed too. Cresting the hill just past the turn I could see why – the whole area was, literally, a swamp! All flooded! (*Unfortunately there was nowhere to stop and take a photo of it*).

There's a roundabout just before Kiama; I turned around at that and came back the same way. It's a good ride; nice flowing twisty roads, with a bit of highway cruising at the end. I was out for just over an hour; and about 30 minutes after I got home it started raining; so I timed it well. **It was good to get out on the bike again!**

## **OVERTAKING – THE MAIN COMPROMISE; OR JUST DIFFERENT**

I have often said that I mostly don't miss the power of my previous bike, the Yamaha XJR1300. Only on those odd occasions when there's nothing around and I feel like giving it a good blast. Or perhaps when riding up a really steep hill that the XJR would just cruise up almost like it didn't exist; feeling that V8-like grunty torque. However there is one area where I do feel the compromise of less power, and that is overtaking. On the XJR there was mostly no need to even change gear, just give the throttle a twist and the bike would jump around the slow vehicle in no time at all; and do it in minimal distance. The Tracer, however, needs a bit more room. It sometimes needs thought and judgment on whether there is enough road to do it. On the XJR, if there was any length of vacant road ahead it was just grab a handful of throttle... and it's done!

On the way back from Kiama, on the ride I mentioned above, I came upon a Lexus sedan going very slowly – about 20km/h under the speed limit, especially around corners. The road leading into Jamberoo is mostly winding and has double-lines. But there is a short straight section not far before the town. On the XJR it would have been an easy overtake; just give it some throttle and it would jump past. But it's not very long,



and the car tended to accelerate a bit on straight sections; so probably not enough room, I thought – especially if something popped around the corner coming the other way. So I hung behind. There was no opportunity to overtake (winding road and double-lines) until a long straight uphill section with a 90-degree sweeping corner at the bottom. By this time there was quite a queue of cars forming behind us. The Lexus had dropped to about 50 around a couple of the tighter corners, and I was in 4<sup>th</sup> gear following behind. As we got to the corner before the uphill straight there were no cars coming up ahead, so the overtake was on! I was doing about 60, still in 4<sup>th</sup> gear, as we came out of the corner. I expected the car to accelerate, but I knew I'd get around it easily. 4<sup>th</sup> gear would give good acceleration, and I knew I had plenty of rev-range so wouldn't even have to bother about changing gear. I pulled out and twisted the throttle. The car was quickly dispensed with. I was doing about 110 when I pulled back in, with the revs just over 6,000. Easy. Click. Click. Into top gear, and the Lexus and its trailing queue of cars were just spots in the mirror!

**One of the things I love about the Tracer is the high – relative to mid-size 4-cylinder bikes – gearing.** That makes for very relaxed open road cruising, even on expressways; and also gives a good range of speed in the lower gears. From 50 to 110 in 4<sup>th</sup>, still with it nowhere near the red-line. Had I really wanted to go for maximum acceleration, I could have even gone back to 3<sup>rd</sup> and performed the same overtake at the same speeds, and still been well under the 10,000 rpm red-line. Which brings me back to that first overtaking opportunity. Had I gone back to 4<sup>th</sup>, or even 3<sup>rd</sup>, I could probably have jumped around it fairly easily in the distance available (3<sup>rd</sup> would have done it quickly). But I didn't. It's not the way I naturally ride. Sure, I enjoy giving it a blast and winding it out (*see previous comment on the XJR!*), but my general riding style is to use the mid-range, not so much the top-end. But I'm going above mid-range more often now.

So the point is that overtaking doesn't have to be so much of a compromise on these types of bikes – it just means changing down and using more of the available revs; rather than simply leaving it in top and just giving the throttle a good twist, as I used to do. That low-down grunty power was one of the things I used to love about the XJR!

## **SPORTS-TOURING – THE HONDA WAY**



**Sports-tourers are back!** They kind of fell out of popularity for a while, with people tending towards big adventure-bikes, like the BMW R1250GS, for their long-distance travels. But, increasingly over the past few years, sports-tourers have been making a comeback. But they're different. Rather than strike a sort of middle-ground between sports and touring – like the Triumph Sprint ST I featured last month – today's sports-tourers seem to be going in one of two ways. Either they focus more on the “sports” side – like the Suzuki GSX-S1000GT, which looks like a sports-bike with panniers – or they take the Adventure bike concept and turn it into a sort of adventure-bike / sports-bike hybrid. This is the sort of direction Yamaha took with the Tracer; first with the 900 (now 9GT), then the 700; with both being classed as sports-tourers, but with a bit of adventure-bike character thrown in.

Now Honda has gone this way – and **I reckon they have created a good bike!**

The new bike is based on the **Africa Twin** – which is a great bike in its own right. That’s the basis of the new bike, but they’ve changed it a lot. They lowered it, fitted 17” wheels, and gave it a whole new bodywork with a decent half-fairing. So **an Africa Twin that is more manageable, more practical, and more sporty**. That’s a recipe for a good bike in my book!

It’s been criticised as looking “plain”, or “unexciting”, but I think it looks good. It is fairly heavy, at 238 kg, but tourers mostly are. This bike, like the Africa Twin, also comes with the semi-automatic transmission as an option (which adds another 10 kg). Reports say it is very comfortable (I’d think it would be, using the Africa Twin as a base). Performance and handling are right up there too. I don’t have pricing yet, but in the UK they’re comparing it to the Yamaha Tracer 9GT. I reckon this would probably be the better bike – as a comfortable sports-tourer.

For a full run down on it, including a road-test, by British online magazine Motorcycle News, click [here](#).

## **UNDERSTANDING THE YAMAHA YZF-R7**



Replacing an iconic 4-cylinder super-sport 600 with a twin-cylinder machine that looks more pedestrian, more “sports” than “super-sports”, and has way less power, (despite having a larger engine) seemed like a silly idea. Yamaha already use their (nominally) 700cc twin in a lot of different style bikes – naked sports (MT-07), retro (XSR700), sports-tourer (Tracer 700), and adventure-bike (Tenere 700), so this seemed like just another excuse to throw the

venerable CP2 engine at a different set of clothes. But there’s more to it, apparently.

Sales of that iconic super-sport were falling; mostly because to get the most out of it, to ride it as it was designed to be ridden, you had to be on a racetrack. There was a market – indeed a need – for something more practical to ride; something that could be used as a commuter, but also fanged through some twisties on the weekend. That was the genesis of the R7. I’m still not totally convinced that it shouldn’t have been a more user-friendly version of the old 4-cylinder, but [this report](#) answers a lot of questions and clarifies the understanding of what it is.

## **A LOOK AT HELMETS**

I went into a bike shop recently – the first time for ages that I’ve wandered through a bike shop! COVID has kept me staying away from shops unless absolutely necessary. It was good to wander around some bikes again!



**I also had a look through their range of helmets.** My Shoei is at an age where it is past recommended age to replace – although not riding all that often (as opposed to someone who rides every day in all weathers) it wouldn’t deteriorate as quickly; so I intend getting just a little bit longer out of it.

Unfortunately the finances now won’t stretch to a Shoei or Arai – which have been my preferred brands. (Mostly Arai). So I just browsed the racks generally. The salesman (actually part-owner of the business, who I know) came over and started

showing me through some different ones. There was a big range, from a couple of hundred dollars up to \$1,500; for anything reasonable. The cheaper of those are plastic of course, and not the same quality. (Although they meet all the relevant standards, of course!). He pointed out that another consideration is that plastic deteriorates in sunlight more than carbon fibre, so will need replacing sooner.



One he drew my attention to was the **AGV K6**. That was impressive. Good quality (carbon fibre / Kevlar construction), well padded, and **very light!** At around 1270gms (1220 for the smallest size), it is lighter than most other helmets in this class. Having problems with my neck, light weight is a major priority.

It's AGV's top of the range in normal road helmets. At just under \$800 it's still an expensive lid, but I always think that it is worth paying that extra for something that is good quality and comfortable to wear.

Later when I got home and started doing a bit more research, I found I'd come across this before and saved a link to a review on it.

I personally wouldn't buy an open-face, but I saw a Shoei one that was impressive. The visor was very thick – at least 2 or 3 times the thickness of a normal visor. The sides of the helmet extend forwards for a bit more side protection, and the visor clips onto the extended sides to keep it firmly in place and to form a kind of thin shell around the front; so it does offer some protection. At about \$400 they don't sell many of them though.

He then showed me one helmet that he said they do sell quite a few of – a **\$69 open-face**. No visor, and no snap-on studs to allow one to be fitted. *"It's rubbish!"* he said. But it's matte-black and plain open-face. (*No prize for guessing who buys these!*). "They come in here on a \$30,000 motorcycle and buy a rubbish \$69 helmet!" He said, shaking his head in amazement. He tries to talk them into buying a better one, but mostly they don't. Incredible!

## **AWARD-WINNING LOCAL FUND-RAISERS**



Congratulations to [City Coast Motorcycles](#) and to these two guys and their teams. What a great achievement! They placed **2nd and 3rd in the world!!** Fabulous effort! And they each won a bike! Enjoy your new rides! **Well done!**

And also **well done to City Coast Motorcycles** for organising and hosting this event again. They've had success – on the international level – before too.

They've hosted the event for the past 5 years and in that time have raised **\$350,000** for men's health charities. Click [here](#) to read the story of the ride and their win).

## **FEEDBACK**

A few people commented on my feature last time on the **Triumph Sprint ST**. Some thought that the prices I quoted from Bikesales were excessive. For example, Con wrote, *"Eight grand for a 17-year old bike? Tell him he's dreamin'!"* (To quote that famous line from 'The Castle'). I should have clarified this a bit more. The bikes I referred to were from later years (still the exact same model – but around 2008/9 as an average), and claimed to have just 40,000km to less than 60,000km on the clock. At that,



if they were in good condition, they'd be worth the money – or the money you'd pay if you haggled the price down a bit.

A reader confirmed his experience with reliability. He said that he had one for a few years and it ran fine until it got into the 40,000+km range and then, "It just started falling apart!" As I said, others I've heard about gave good service.

There were a couple of comments about the items about **me not having ridden much, due to weather and physical ailments** (crook neck the main one at the time). All were glad I had been given the ok to keep riding. One reader wrote, "This 'season' (*referring to both the physical trouble and the bad weather*) will pass and you'll be able to ride more frequently again soon enough." Yes, the rain has to ease up sooner or later! And flare-ups of things like my back trouble or neck problems do settle down. Although the distance I can ride is probably being reduced by these issues (*and increasing age!*).

Doug suggested an open-face helmet. "I stopped wearing a full face helmet some time ago and bought a quality open face with a full clear screen that flips up. Half the weight, huge increase in visibility and cooler in summer." He said he copped some criticism for going to an open-face, but accepts the risk; adding that you can be over-cautious with any activity. Most cruiser riders wear them all the time. No disrespect to you at all, Doug, and I thank you for the suggestion, but for me though I don't think I could change to an open-face. Apart from slow trials riding, I've always worn a full-face – even when I was trail-riding off-road. In my early years of riding I saw a rider crash outside the office where I worked. He was wearing an open-face and hit the ground head first. He smashed his teeth and jaw. That was a very convincing illustration to me of the benefits of a full-face helmet!

## **THE FINAL SNOWY RIDE**



A wet day for the final **Snowy Ride**. That's disappointing, but I suppose it comes with the territory – there have been some very up-and-down weather conditions over the years! Hopefully there will be a lot of people who – like me – registered and also bought some merchandise, who didn't go, but in doing so still donated the money and helped the cause. That's the main thing! Click [here](#) for a video of the mass ride at the end.

**Well done to all involved in organising and running this event over the past 20+ years. Fantastic effort!** So much money (**millions of dollars!!**) has been raised and donated to help fund research into childrens cancer. Congratulations on the incredible work you have done to make this such a successful event!

For a bit of nostalgia, click [here](#) for my story of first attending the event.

Well, that's it for now. I hope you enjoyed the read. Stay safe, and enjoy the ride.

*Elwyn*  
(The Old Bloke)