

“How to start racing”.

This is an introductory note only designed to encourage people In to racing. The article does not go in to specifics but is designed to encourage people to use the Clubman’s Forum. Any specific queries or any general questions please use your Forum and members will respond promptly.

When Derek asked me to do this piece I was flattered but unsure as to whether I was qualified enough to elaborate properly. Having thought about it I realised that having started racing in 2004 at the ripe auld age of 52 and with my son Robert 15 a racing novice this year, that perhaps it made sense after all. Motorcycle racing is an extreme sport but with good machine care, quality protective equipment and a stepped approach to learning, risks can be mitigated or reduced substantially though not eliminated. Where else can you match the adrenalin rush associated with this fantastic sport other than perhaps at the wheel of a Formula one car, scuba diving in waters frequented by great white sharks or landing an F18 on an aircraft carrier in choppy water.

Racing is challenging and exciting but it also requires considerable time and personal commitment as well as moderate resources. Depending on the extent of your involvement, it is possible to get going or to dip a toe in the water for sensible money. Tap your savings account, or your Bank Manager and if that does not work have a chat with family and friends. Think ahead about why you are doing this to best position yourself when making your presentation to them for funding. What are the benefits for them?

Obtaining a racing license

Now the practicalities need to be addressed. The first thing you will need is a race licence. To get a licence you must first join an affiliated Club. Once this is done you can then obtain the licence application forms from the club or you can download these from the respective Irish MCUI websites.

If you live in the North of Ireland you must according to the GCR (General Competition Rules) sign up with a club affiliated with the MCUI Ulster Centre and if you live in the Irish Republic then you

must sign up with a club affiliated with the Motorcycle Union of Ireland formerly known as the MCUI Southern centre.

Both organisations in turn are affiliated with the FIM which is headquartered in Berne, Switzerland. The FIM lays down the rules and regulations and the local centres must adhere to these. It will be necessary to get two small passport sized photographs to be signed on the back and in the cases of youth riders you will need a copy of your birth certificate and parental or guardian approval has to be obtained.

For first time licence applicants it will be necessary to get a medical and have your eyes tested. Most Doctors will do both but you may need to go to the Opticians as well. Make sure that they sign and stamp the application document, confirming that you have been medically approved and that your eyes have been tested.

To complete the licence formalities the applicant must attend a flag seminar which covers the different flags used for different circumstances and emergencies. Training courses are provided each year and are advisable for all novices regardless of road riding, mini-moto or motocross experience.

Insurance

Once you have the licence you should consider insurance cover. While no insurance company provides insurance cover for race bikes there is insurance available to support you if you are unfortunately injured or in extreme circumstances, if you had to be repatriated from abroad by air ambulance etc. The insurance premium is reasonable and to be recommended.

If you want to race outside the island of Ireland the FIM dictates that **you must** obtain permission to do so from your MCUI centre. This normally takes the form of a letter and is easy to obtain. If you wish to race across the water the ACU insist on insurance cover.

When you get your race licence you should also receive a copy of the MCUI rules. This is an important document as it informs you of the various applicable rules and regulations associated with your racing. Please read the Sporting code.

When you join your Club, the Registrar will add your name to the list to whom Rules and Regulations, as well as entry forms will be sent.

Different Clubs host different races so it is best to ask around amongst your racing colleagues or look at Derek Clegg's racing calendar to see which club is hosting which race and then if necessary contact the respective club for a copy of the relevant documents.

Pick up the phone and make the enquiries early. It is best to get your application form and cheque away early. This way you can focus on getting yourself and your machine ready for the racing. In 2004 races were cancelled in part due to lack of entries or the submission of entries being left until the last moment by racers. This helps everyone, especially the organisers.

Rules & Regulations

Derek plans to make the Rules & Regulations as well as race entry forms for each clubman's race available in the downloads section of the Clubman's website during 2005. Thanks Derek for making life a lot easier!

When you get the Rules and Regulations documents for each race as well as the entry forms, please read them carefully and understand them.

Pay special care to the filling out and completion of the race entry form as if they are incorrect or the race entry fee is incorrect the documents may be sent back to you and you could miss the closing date for entries and possibly miss the race altogether.

Please note that entries have to be with the secretary of the meeting at least 14 days prior to the event complete with the correct entry fee. If asked please make sure that you enclose a stamped addressed envelope (minimum size A5) as you will receive a set of final instructions which will include confirmation of your racing number and your passes to gain admission to the circuit 7-10 days prior to the event.

Race day

When you arrive at the circuit, the first thing you should do is go to race control and sign on for the meeting. There you will be issued with a copy of the race day programme and your scrutineering ticket.

Scrutineering

From there you immediately go to the scrutineering area with your machine, helmet, gloves and wearing your leathers and boots. Please make sure that your bike is properly prepared for racing and that the essential items such as the sump plug, the filter, the oil filler cap and all other items including the dipstick and the calliper bolts if they have been drilled, have all been lock wired. There must be nothing loose, no pieces of fairing or anything else flapping around. Check all nuts and bolts, please don't take any chances. If in doubt get your race supplier or dealer to advise you.

Racing puts tremendous stress and strain on things mechanical and if something is loose or damaged and it fails during a race you endanger not just yourself but other competitors or spectators around you!

Please listen carefully for the paddock announcer and be ready for your practice and qualifying sessions. These take place in the morning with racing usually taking place either just before or immediately after lunch depending on the schedule and how busy it is. Racers must be ready for their practice and qualifying sessions.

Which race bike?

The choice of race bikes today is excellent. Depending on you age and experience there is a good range of machines out there. If you are a junior rider you may wish to spend a year or two on mini motos or junior motocross and then move to the Aprilia challenge cup. That's the way many of our top racers have gone.

Older and or more experienced road riders, or ex motocrosser's sometimes start in the 125GP, the 400 or 600 classes. It is not really advisable to start off on a modern 750 or 1000cc bike as they are just too fast and powerful these days.

Give yourself a chance and find a reliable 600cc machine to learn

the ropes on and maximise track miles. It takes at least a year to learn the tracks and the increased pace of racing compared with trackdays or quick road riding etc.

Protective equipment

Please do not skimp on protective equipment especially crash helmets. Remember you have only one head, one back and one pair of hands and knees. Helmets must be approved for racing and not more than 3 years old. Anti fog spray is a useful little tool in our climate especially early on in the season.

There is a wide range of high quality one piece race suits, boots, gloves etc.

Please allow a few quid for the essential back protector. Skin is a lot more expensive than cowhide so be safe and buy quality.

Other key items to consider include transport to and from the track. If you have access to a van that's great, if not you could consider hiring a van or trailer and avoid recurring maintenance, insurance costs etc or simply buy a small trailer. This is how we managed last year and it worked well enough. Ultimately a van is the way to go if you can afford it.

Other key essentials are a transponder, tyre warmers, a good tool box, a jerry can and a generator. Make sure that the generator is a good one and capable of warming at least two sets of tyre warmers fully and at the same time. A Gazebo is a welcome addition and they are not expensive but provide a lot of comfort especially on wet and windy days.

A set of spare wheels with brake discs is really useful too. We can only recommend new wheels for safety reasons.

Shop around for prices on race tyres. These can usually be bought at the track but buying in advance makes life a lot easier as you will be busy on race day. It is important for the racer to have as much time to prepare mentally for the race as possible and not be distracted by loose ends or panicking over tyres.

It is possible to do all of this on your own but it is much better to involve a mate, particularly one with a bit of mechanical

experience. A friend who can take the pressure off you, so that you can focus on your racing. This is a luxury of course but many ex racers and racing enthusiasts like to get involved and can offer archives of advice and practical experience.

All in all this is how we got started last year with a minimum of fuss. We kept a website from early on and recorded our race experiences including errors. We made so many simple errors in our learning year that would effect championship positions. Let's hope we have learned from our experiences in 2004.

Simple things like arriving at the track with an uncharged transponder. Turning up late at the gate prior to the warm up lap and being excluded, parking too far away from the public address system and not hearing the call up for timed practice etc.

If you can put up with all of this, then go for it. I can safely say that it has been one of the best experiences of my lifetime. The paddock is a friendly place and people are always ready to help out. Have fun!!

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Useful Contacts:

Please have a look at these contacts for further information about affiliated clubs, contacts, rules and regulations, downloadable forms and documents.

MCUI Ulster centre

Realroadracing the well known road racing website appears to be hosting the MCUI Ulster Centre web information in 2005.

http://www.realroadracing.com/mcui_uc/index.php

Motorcycle Union of Ireland

Incorporating the Motor cycle Union of Ireland Southern Centre Limited.

<http://www.motorcycling-ireland.com/>

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For race numbers North and South.

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Ulster Centre

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Damien Tolan esq for race licence information

Southern Centre

Telephone: 00353-1- 8411 852

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Irish Clubman's and Irish superbikes website

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<http://www.irishbikeracing.com/>