

WORCESTER AND HEREFORD ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS



July 2023



EDITORIAL

Welcome to the July edition of the ever-popular WHAM newsletter. I have taken the batten from Jim Rolt this month as guest editor whilst Jim embarks on a sailing trip to complete the Jester Challenge which runs every year. This year, Jim has sailed from Pwllheli to Baltimore in Ireland, some 250nmiles, solo which is no mean feat, so well-done Jim.



Above – One of Jim's photos, so not so sure it was solo.

We also have several great reads in this edition, including our brand-new revised 'Group Rider' policy which is the product of some of our more experienced members who formed a working party. They tasked themselves with encouraging our associates and newly passed members to come and join in with our Sunday rides and other club events. More on that from Alex Hoyle and Tony Reusser later in the newsletter.

There is an interesting piece from Mark Bonnes, entitled "The Dark Art" of Bike Suspension, it's a great piece well worth a read.

We have news of some recent test passes towards the end of the newsletter. I apologise if I have missed anybody and please let Jim or myself know and we will include you in next months edition.

Also, we have some great events coming up over the next few weeks. Check out the WHAM website, and as always please come and join us on our Sunday ride outs. Further details can be found on our website and Facebook page.

16th July – I am so pleased we have the return of the Rutland TT. This is a great day out in and around Rutland Water, don't miss this one!

19th August – WHAM Annual Go-karting event,

26th July – WHAM Evening Ride 3

5th August – Slow Riding Day at Madley near Hereford, more details to follow shortly.

30th August – WHAM Evening Ride 4.

Andy Chambers



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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

WHAM – Chairs piece June 2023

June being the hottest month on record since records were kept has seen members new and old enjoying organised and impromptu ride outs this month. The hot weather saw me return from the WHAM Welsh Railways Day ride thinking a new mesh jacket was to be purchased.

A purchase was duly made, Halvarssons of course, via web from Bike Stop in Stevenage. Whilst I have no affiliation with Bike Stop, they do seem to carry stock for anything I have needed, with an added bonus of providing a 10% discount to IAMRS members upon supply of a copy of your IAMRS membership card. If you are buying expensive clothing and/or helmets that discount is soon worth every penny. You also get loyalty points and so for me this meant a £49 discount on my new jacket.

At the risk of devoting too many column inches to mesh jackets I have been quite surprised, naively I guess, at the benefits these items bring when worn in 'the right' weather conditions. You sweat less, and so you dehydrate less, and so not drinking water every 30 minutes does not result in a headache at the end of a long ride. I have also been feeling less fatigued in the early evening after a ride. Lastly, combine with an EDZ 'bin bag' and you have flexibility down to about 15C.

Anyhoo; this year's Adventure Bike Riders Festival was a huge success. Jon and Tracey Powell took the prize for expert campers on the weekend enjoying the whole thing from Friday thru Sunday. Tracey even remembered the joke she told on the last WHAM Betws-y-Coed weekend trip (ask her directly as it is too blue to print here). The IAMRS stand saw much footfall and its placement next to 'Motorcycle Funerals' drew much ironic comment from visitors. I think "spend some money on a riding course and delay the funeral spend" was a much-quoted comment. Thanks to the members of WHAM that came along for stand and Observing duties. I can see this event being bigger than the Winter NEC show. ALL manufacturers were there with their entire bike ranges ready for longish on road test rides. Talking to folk that came back from these, much progress was made...

Another outcome from WHAM teaming with our friends over in Redditch RAMG is that Alex and I are going to meet-up with our opposite numbers at Redditch to explore sharing events. This may mean both clubs have access to more ride outs, more training events, more variety etc. etc. Watch this space.

In terms of our events, we've the slow riding day on the 5th August for your diary, and on the 19th August we have the Go Karting event. I am booked in for that already and given that 20% of available seats have already gone I would advise you get online and sign-up ASAP. I am also going to spend less time on the grass this year...

My very best!

Richard Hewitt

WHAM

Chair



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WHAM Group Riding Policy - Foreword

By

Alex Hoyle Chief Observer

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tony Reusser and the team for taking on the task of revising and tweaking the WHAM group riding policy.

The purpose of the group riding policy is to allow new associates and those who have recently passed their test to come out with us on the WHAM group rides, whether it be on the Sunday morning rides, or the longer all day rides that WHAM puts on for its members.

We fully understand that group riding for some of the newer members can be quite a daunting prospect. So, the aim of the group riding policy is to explain the best way to go about this, and to discuss with you on a one-to-one basis the procedures and practises which will hopefully help the newcomers enjoy their group riding with the rest of us.

For those of you who have never been on a group ride, our aim is to try and provide a group of experienced riders who will chaperone you if you like, on your first few group rides out with the rest of us. We know that some of you may also be concerned about speed and what to do in certain situations. The group riding policy explains all of these topics and will hopefully help to put your mind at ease.

Group riding is a great way to enjoy motorcycling with like-minded people, share experiences and learn from each other. However, group riding also requires some skills and discipline to ensure safety and smoothness. The group riding policy covers topics such as preparation, communication, formation, overtaking, junctions, roundabouts, hazards and breakdowns. It also provides some tips and advice on how to deal with different road conditions and situations.

All the current WHAM observers have now been briefed on the updated group riding policy, so if you are an associate your current observer should be able to answer any questions that you may have.

However, if you have recently passed your test, or have never been out with us on a group ride, then either Tony Reusser or myself will be more than happy to speak to you in person, and hopefully make you feel welcome.

We hope that by having a clear and consistent group riding policy, we can enhance your enjoyment and confidence on the road when it comes to riding out in a group.

As WHAM group Chief Observer, I would encourage all our associates and newer members to read the group riding policy carefully and follow it when joining a WHAM ride-out.

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My sincere thanks go to: Tony R, Ant, Phil, and Gary.



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WHAM Group Riding a Skill for Life

By Tony Reusser

About six months ago I sat down with four of our WHAM Observers including our Chief Observer (all masters qualified) for our first Group Riding (GR) workshop.

We are now at the point where our Group Riding framework can be rolled out in what I believe will add another set of skills for us to proudly include in our Advanced Riding knowledge. We hope it will do this by making us all more aware of the skills, discipline and concentration required to avoid some of the GR hazards, to keep us safe whilst enjoying WHAM Group Rides.

Additionally, right at the top of the list of our objectives is the need to coach new riders who have just passed their Advanced test and encourage them to join in with our Sunday, summer evening and event rides.

GR has been a long time coming. If you ask any of our current members who ride regularly with WHAM, they all have stories of the steep learning curve that they invariably went through before starting to feel comfortable riding in our typical groups of four riders.

So, the time was right to try and improve things. So how do you resist the pressure to keep up? How do you avoid the hazards of “following focus” and “tunnel vision”? How do you re-join the group safely if you find yourself delayed by traffic? How do you “overtake safely” when riding in a group? etc, etc. As thinking riders you will say, we ride our own ride and make our own decisions. Yes of course, however, a Group Ride might be difficult for some, especially for new members who want to demonstrate their recently acquired advanced skills to their new buddies on a club ride.

Most of the established WHAMer’s learnt GR the ‘hard way’, but there had to be a better way!

My light bulb moment happened when someone who had been on a police bikesafe course (and a number of members have), showed me part of their instruction video covering, group riding. It immediately resonated and I wondered why the IAM didn’t include the same elements in their observer/rider training. Naturally most of us ride either in pairs, or in groups of three or four with WHAM, or larger groups using the second man drop-off system. It really doesn’t matter which multiple of riders you ride with, the additional skill, discipline and concentration you need to be safe is the same.

My favourite analogy is one relating to RAF Pilot training. Pilot training is predominately on a 1:1 basis, much like observers and associates, but clearly in three dimensions rather than two! Bear with me please, but on qualifying do they immediately say, ‘now we’d like you to jump into those nice Red Hawk planes and fly around together, you don’t need any training, nothing will go wrong’! I suggest there is great deal of training undertaken that needs skill, discipline and concentration for them to be safe in formation. I hope you agree. So, what have we produced for WHAM members and how will Group Riding skills awareness be coached and rolled out?

There are five steps:

1. Brief our WHAM Observer team.

So they can then coach their current Associates just prior to their test, manage GR expectations, identify the key elements of GR and encourage them to join in with our club rides. The initial rides will be sympathetic to the GR learning journey everyone is on. This will start soon and continue over the rest of the year in-line with the spare time that’s available to us all as volunteers.

2. Completion of the WHAM GR Run-Sheet.

To complement and assist Observer coaching a basic A5 run sheet has been produced for observers to talk through the aspects (skills, hazards etc.) of GR, to brief their associates or newly passed full



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members, ticking of each area covered. Associates will then retain the run sheet and on a self-assessment basis tick off each skill or experience as they encounter them over the course of several rides. The A5 sheets are designed to fit into both the observer & associate black portfolios.

We stress that these are not assessed criteria as with our advance test run sheets. The 'Coached' & 'Participated' columns adjacent to each line are either ticked or not, when coach and participant are satisfied that a particular point is understood.

In this way it is hoped that the knowledge transfer will be simple (for both parties) and taken on board at a pace that suits everyone. As always there is no substitute for time on the bike riding with a group, but it is hoped there will be a greater awareness of the skills, discipline and concentration required to ride safely together.

3. WHAM Web Site & WHAM Library.

A new Web Site brief has been produced building on the existing summary. This provides a quick accessible reminder for all members.

4. GR Video.

A Group Riding video extract from the Bikesafe Course is being obtained through our police contacts to be shown at 'natter nights' in the Autumn.

5. Natter Night Presentations & Newsletter Updates.

A concise set of documents has been produced for the Observer team and Committee to use to brief existing members. These can be emailed, are in paper form (for observer coaching) or the dreaded slide show. The highlight of which are some superb cartoon diagrams to illustrate and clarify on the road GR situations to be considered.

We also hope to identify key aspects of GR from time to time in the newsletter and would welcome your feedback, to continue to improve our GR with your assistance and enjoy riding safely together.

The 'Dark Art' of Bike Suspension, a brief introduction

Far be it for me to pretend that I am an expert when it comes to suspension on two wheels, I am not. I know enough to know what I don't know if that makes sense, but I am fortunate enough to have got to know a few industry experts pretty well over the years and a little of their knowledge has paid off at least... I hope!

So why is it that suspension, (given it is arguably the second most important part of the bike after the tyres, and everyone has an opinion on those), is so often overlooked with the rider giving far too much credence that the manufacturer "knows what they are doing" more often than not?

Confession time, I am a little "princess and the pea" about bike setup. I have experienced far too much disappointment with stock bike suspension setups over the years, and recently was even pushed towards an expensive suspension upgrade on my Ducati Streetfighter V2 to fix the issues with the stock suspension on the bike. Much more than a more powerful engine, stronger brakes, or a fancy badge on the fuel tank, properly setup suspension can really transform your riding experience. Don't believe me? Well let me explain.



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Simply put, the greater the influence that the individual (or individuals) has over a vehicle's dynamics, the more important it is to be able to tailor the suspension setup for its intended use. A 1.5 tonne family car doesn't care whether it has one occupant or two, in fact even if you put five people in it, it only recommends that you increase the tyre pressures very slightly to compensate. A full suspension mountain bike is at the opposite end of the scale, where the static weight of the bike (typically 10-15kg) has very little dynamic effect on the suspension compared to the rider, and almost always the suspension will have no static sag whatsoever under the bikes own weight as the rider is typically 80-90% of the overall system weight... Notice I said "setup for its intended use" at the beginning of this paragraph though, and didn't just talk about the riders' weight?

Simply put, riding style often has as much of an effect (sometimes more) on a required suspension setup than weight does, especially as the bike gets heavier and the rider becomes a smaller proportion of the overall system weight. In many cases, a more aggressive rider can put significantly more strain through a suspension setup than a smoother rider does, even if the smoother rider is significantly heavier... Either way, it's worth considering that your suspension setup might not be ideal for your weight or your riding style currently and it could potentially be improved with proper setup or customisation.

Now to bust a few myths about bike suspension (there are many more, it is not my intention to cover everything exhaustively, hopefully these will prompt you to do your own further research into the topic).

'The manufacturer knows best, why should I mess with it?' Now this is a good one, because it has so many angles, but be under no illusion, bike manufacturers exist to make money, and if they don't, they go bust. They care about their customers for sure, but they care about their shareholders more, and they care about not going bankrupt even more than that! Short of buying a Ducati Panigale V4R for £40k, the suspension on your bike is built down to a price... Read that again... The suspension on YOUR bike, is built down to a price! Whether the suspension is unbranded and non-adjustable, or it says 'Ohlins' all over it and has electronic adjustment for every conceivable parameter, your suspension has compromises built in because it has been built to a price.

Most people won't care, but no matter how good you think the stock suspension on your bike is, I would readily bet my house that it could be improved upon. Be that just getting it setup by someone who knows what they're doing, a full custom re-valve and re-spring of the stock hardware, or entirely new hardware, it can be improved upon for sure.



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See this video by Dave Moss Tuning he has a wealth of knowledge, and it is well worth watching more of his videos for more enlightenment, he that touches on some detailed examples here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOWQKPhuv_0

“My bike has fully adjustable suspension, I don’t need to upgrade it”. Whilst I’m sure that for a number of people that do not know better, properly adjusted, their stock suspension is “good enough” for them, Just as your bikes suspension is built down to a price as I highlighted above, EVERYTHING in life is a compromise, and there aren’t many greater compromises in life than your bikes suspension.

We should stop to consider that even if the suspension is designed perfectly around the 50th percentile rider, that any deviation from this will provide a situation where the suspension is potentially being operated out of its optimal operating environment. Then if you add some luggage to the bike, you’re at the top end of the acceptable operating window, if you are said 50th percentile rider, and again if you add a pillion on and you are way beyond it.

The fact that manufacturers very rarely get their stock suspension setup right is almost immaterial because many of us are either too heavy or too light for their settings even before we entertain putting luggage or a pillion on the bike. Add rider preferences and or rider ability into the mix and we go way beyond the realms of what the manufacturer can offer with their “one size fits all” approach to their stock suspension offerings.

I am sorry to be the barer of bad news, but the claim that “My bike has electronically adjustable suspension, and it’s as good as it gets” is unfortunately, incorrect. Electronically adjustable suspension exists for one reason and one reason only, convenience. It’s far easier to press a button to alter preload and damping settings to cater for a pillion than it is to get the C spanners and allen keys out, it also gives the user a false sense of ‘added value’ too, we’re all guilty of it.

Electronic suspension has come a long way, I have firsthand experience as my KTM 1290 Super Adventure is awesome and I wouldn’t swap it for mechanically adjustable suspension. However, that said, I understand I am swapping convenience for outright performance in said application. On sports bikes, which are normally only ever ridden solo, or a bike dedicated to track day use for instance, I wouldn’t be so compromising. If we know the operating window is quite narrow, I.E. the bike is only ever ridden on track, with no pillion, and the rider is consistently the same weight within a few kilos, then there is little to no need for electronic adjustment as it only adds weight and complexity and brings no actual performance benefits.



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“My Ohlins suspension is much better than the (other brand) suspension on my mates bike”... Anyone familiar with the concept of OEM tyres (yes, sadly, they still exist, though they’re less of a problem than they used to be) will understand where I’m coming from here... If you can’t buy the EXACT same product aftermarket (not just one that looks broadly similar), then it isn’t the real deal... I know the UK Ohlins brand manager professionally, and he won’t mind me saying this either, but most of the Ohlins suspension fitted to production bikes is nowhere near the same quality or performance of aftermarket equipment. The same is probably true about other brands too, I use Ohlins as the example here as arguably they are seen as No.1 in the market. Certainly, their aftermarket stuff is top class. Their WSB and MotoGP factory kit will be beyond the realms of what you or I could imagine quality wise. But when you pay a premium for the Ohlins equipped model of a production bike vs the cheaper brand suspension of the lower spec model, only a tiny percentage of the premium you are paying goes towards the suspension upgrade, a hell of a lot of it goes towards the bike manufacturers profit margins... Everybody has heard tales of £15k bikes coming fitted with shocks costing £10 or less from the factory. I don’t have any hard evidence to back these claims up, but have enough anecdotal evidence from those I trust at the top of the suspension game to suggest the ballpark figures are true...

“I don’t ride hard enough to benefit from improving my suspension setup” This couldn’t be further from the truth... You’ve paid for all of your suspension travel, so why not use it! Many years ago the Mountain Bike market circumvented the issue of different spring weights for different riders on different bikes by using air as a spring medium (which brings with it its own inherent problems, but that is another topic altogether), air being easily adjustable with nothing more than a high pressure hand pump. Suddenly Mountain Bikers had very little excuse at least for not getting their spring preload settings correct on their bikes, if nothing else. Motorbikes are different of course, coil springs are more difficult to change than air spring pressure, but not impossible. Damping can be re-valved to suit on most bikes for a heck of a lot less than the average rider spends on an aftermarket exhaust, guilty as charged, and will have a much greater impact on the ride experience for sure.

“I only ride on the road, I don’t ride on track, therefore wouldn’t benefit from improving my suspension setup” Another fallacy! Which do you think puts more demands on a bikes suspension? Being ridden in a uniform manner (no matter how hard), on a very smooth surface, or having to



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cope with a wide range of scenarios from being comfortable in town, to being supportive and controlled whilst 'pressing on' on surfaces varying from the excellent roads of North Wales to the agricultural rural Herefordshire roads.

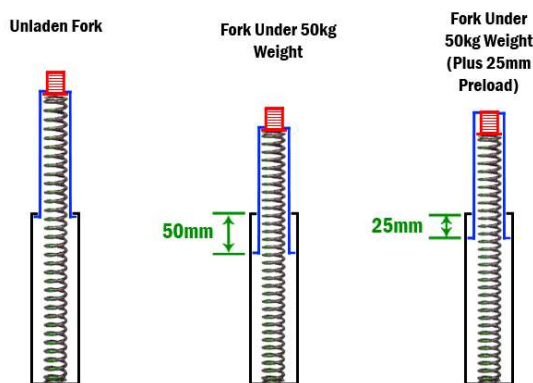
A track bike operates within a very narrow operating window, where typically, a road bike does not. Consider also that when your average manufacturer is building a bike, they deliberate over how it is most likely going to be ridden, and where they can readily cut corners... My recent experience of purchasing my Ducati Streetfighter V2 being an absolute case in point. Many people who buy this bike will use it primarily as a track day toy, most people who buy it will bumble about on the roads from one bike meet posing opportunity to the next, using a fraction of the bike's capability. Not many will push the bike at all on challenging roads.

With that in mind, the stock suspension is designed to work reasonably well on track with enough adjustability for those pushing the top end of Intermediate track day group pace, whilst those bumbling about on road won't come close to noticing its shortfalls. Only those troubling the fast group pace on a track day might feel the need to upgrade, that kind of person is expecting to upgrade any stock hardware anyway. Or perversely, riders who might actually be using more of the bikes potential than they typically would on the road.

I experienced some terrible harshness with my stock setup on the bike, I spoke to a trusted suspension expert that I have used before. Tillits in Bishops Cleeve, near Cheltenham, Darren has an absolutely mind-blowing wealth of knowledge and experience he explained the pitfalls of my stock fork and shock, and how and why they weren't up to what I wanted, that they were built to a price, and what my options were going forward. Needless to say, correcting the issues I had, wasn't going to be cheap. Arguably it was far more preferable than putting up with the stock setup or selling it on and chalking the whole thing up to experience.

Fortunately for me, I looked out and found exactly the equipment I was after 2nd hand, saving myself a bit of cash in the process, but even still it wasn't cheap to replace the inadequate stock suspension... But so far it has been absolutely worth it!

"Adding preload makes my suspension stiffer", Well sadly, that's not how physics works, preload adjustment is a rudimentary way of adjusting suspension ride height. In many cases it is all we can do to counter for adding additional weight onto the bike, but it does not make the suspension any stiffer. It merely alters the initial force required to get the suspension to move, but thereafter it will move the same amount for the same amount of force applied to it as before the preload was adjusted.



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There are many more, my intention has been to promote the reader to question their own status quo and not take their own bikes suspension for granted. Debates over the relative merits of the fabled BMW Telelever suspension setup verses a conventional fork and other hot topics are best saved for another time. In the meantime, I hope this has prompted your curiosity to read up a little more on the subject, and not take the stock suspension setup on your bike for granted, but to at least think about getting it optimised for your own use.

Associates becoming Full Members

Congratulations – We have recently had three more test passes, two of which were Firsts.

Mark Quayle (Will Morgan)
Terry Pickering (Chris Lawton-Smith) First
David Townsend (Andrew Culley) First

Very well done to you all, I look forward to seeing you all out on our Sunday rides and club events.

I still have certificates for Mark & David please let me know when you are out on a Sunday ride.



Above: Terry Pickering (Left) receiving his certificate at the Falcon Hotel following the evening run on Wednesday 28th June.



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