

ANY QUESTION

ANSWERED ✓

If we don't know the answer, we'll find the person who does

OWNING & RIDING

Q Am I ready for a BMW S1000XR?

I've had a succession of off-road/adventure bikes over 25 years, including a Suzuki DR650, BMW F650 Funduro and BMW F650 Dakar, and finally my current 2013 F800GS. They have all acquitted themselves well on my 15-mile Barnet to central London commute.

I assumed the next obvious step for me would be a BMW R1200GS, but then I caved into a request by a friend to join him and some other bikers on a trip to France for five days, where I was surprised at the ease in which my 800GS was able to keep up with sportsbikes through bends, although it did feel out of puff elsewhere.

So now I am thinking I'll get the new BMW S1000XR instead of another GS. But has my steady 25-year journey from 40bhp to 85bhp prepared me to cope with a tamed version of a 200bhp engine 'limited' to 160 and slotted into a road-orientated frame? **Shahar Kochavi, Barnet**

Answered by: Michael Neeves, MCN I think the XR could be easier to ride than the F800GS, and certainly more manageable in London traffic than an R1200GS because it's much narrower and more nimble. The XR is really smooth with great grip, handling and brakes – and all the electronics that you can programme

to 'soften' it off. There are four electronic riding modes, so if it feels like it's too powerful when you first get it, simply select 'rain' mode and it will knock the power right back. The XR won't be as big a step as you think, especially with one of the most advanced traction control systems on the market, too.

The XR's amazing electronics mean it's seriously easy to get on with



Replacing a bent or lost key can be easier and cheaper than you'd think

Q Where can I get my keys replaced?

I've just bought a secondhand ER-6 and the ignition key has a bend in it that makes it hard to insert. It's only about 10 degrees off, but I don't want it to snap and leave me stranded. Can I straighten it, or should I get a replacement? **Pat O'Brien, Gosport**

Answered by: Chris Dabbs, MCN Like quite a few other bikes, the problem with the ER-6 is that the ignition key doesn't need to go all the way into the fuel tank cap but people think it does, so they force it down and twist it at the same time, bending it out of line.

There is a really good auto key cutters, Express Keys, in Orpington, Kent (www.express-keys.co.uk). They can cut simple keys from a decent-quality email picture for £7.95. If you have lost all your keys, send them the ignition switch and barrel and they can analyse the tumblers to create a replacement.

Modern ignition systems with transponder keys are more of a challenge. Some systems allow them to get the chip out of a broken key and marry it to a new blade for £15, while other bikes from the same manufacturer may require the whole bike to be sent to them in order to get you back on the road again, but it should be a lot cheaper than a replacement ECU and assorted locks.

Q Why is my Versys 650 overheating?

My 2012 Kawasaki Versys 650 is running hot in traffic because the fan isn't cutting in. I've checked the fuse and it hasn't blown. Where should I look next? **John Lester, Exeter**

Answered by: Chris Malliber, Cornwall Kawasaki Sometimes stones flicked up by the front wheel will get caught between the radiator and the fan blades, stopping it kicking in as it should. The fan is easy to get at and once you've checked it can spin freely it would be worth bypassing the thermo switch to run a live feed through it and check the fan motor hasn't burnt out. The fuse should have blown first, but it's not always the case.



Fireblade connectors can burn out

Q Why won't my Blade fire up?

My 2002 Honda Fireblade won't start and there are no dash lights either. I have replaced the battery, but with no joy. Should I buy a regulator/rectifier next? **Tom Moore, email**

Answered by: Nick Meredith, Seastar Superbikes

First check power is getting through to the ignition switch and ECU. Start with the battery to main fuse feed, then to the ignition key block, then from the ignition key to the ECU. The connections in the ignition key block can burn out. It's easy to check on an '02 Blade as the relevant connector blocks are under an inspection panel on the right-inside panel of the fairing under the handlebar.



Basic maintenance skills and a bit of resourcefulness are all you'll need when travelling



TRAVEL & TOURING

Q What skills should I learn before I go travelling?

Answered by: Andy Davidson, MCN staff writer Even if you don't know the first thing about mechanics, you'll manage. Whatever you don't know and need to know, you'll soon learn. Take Benka Pulko, who was the first motorcyclist to reach all seven continents in one solo journey, setting two World Records and becoming the first woman to ride solo through Saudi Arabia and

Antarctica. One month into her trip she couldn't figure out why her bike was handling so badly. "It was only when someone asked if I had checked my tyre pressures that I realised I should check them more than once a year," she said. Point is... you'll get by. But, if you have time to learn some basic skills you will be better prepared. So the three most important checks are fluid and oil levels, chain

maintenance and tyres. Take your manual with you and learn the basic servicing procedure. Keep an eye on your oil level. Figure out how to adjust and lube your chain. And stay on top of tyre pressures and practise using a puncture repair kit before you go. And that's about it. There are bike mechanics the world over who are there to help. The most important thing is that you go.

TECH WATCH

Q Why did bike firms stop at four-valve heads?

Answered by: Simon Hargreaves, MCN technical editor

Because it's the best compromise. More valves flow more gas than fewer valves, and are individually lighter so they can use lighter springs. They also need less lift which means the cylinder head can have a shallower form, allowing higher compression and compromising the shape of the piston crown less. The downsides are squeezing them all into a limited area, and the extra complexity of the valvetrain – which costs money.

Four valves currently deliver the best all-round performance. All manufacturers have experimented with alternative valve numbers over



In 2007 Yamaha's R1 went back to a four-valve cylinder head

the years; Yamaha tried seven-valve and six-valve inline four racing engines in the '70s, before settling on the famous five-valve Genesis head (three intake, two exhaust) on the FZ750 in 1985. They stuck with it through the '90s until the 2007 R1 went back to a four-valve head and everything else followed suit.

At present it's hard to see anyone moving beyond four-valve heads because with litre engines developing 200bhp, more power is not the current concern for engine designers. Meeting emissions and cost targets is what interests them, and increasing the number of valves won't help with any of that.

Q What jacket can I be proud to wear down the pub?

I'm looking for a jacket with decent protection that doesn't make me look like a Power Ranger down the pub. **Sam Byrne, Leicester**

Answered by: Chris Dabbs, MCN

Ideally you want a jacket that has enough room for an armoured vest or shirt, but doesn't look too baggy when you remove the armour. The

dual-fit system in Knox Studio Collection jackets has a zipped section running from wrist to hip on each side so you can open it up to leave room for protectors, then zip it shut once you are off the bike and don't need armour. A waxy finish like that on the Dainese Mike and Weisse Thruxton gives their jackets a retro look. Expect CE-approved protection at the shoulders and elbows.



MCN LAW

Your legal questions

Q Can you help me decipher this legal jargon?

My claim has been going on for nearly three years following very serious injuries including a number of fractures – and now I'm finding myself lost in the legal jargon. I don't remember much about the accident itself but a witness told police that the guy pulled out on me but I had gone along the outside of a slow moving line of traffic, slightly on the other side of the white line. He says I was going at high speed, although that would be unlike me.

Another witness has been found more recently who my solicitor says does not help my case in any way.

A trial is set for this summer and my solicitor is suggesting that I make a "commercial" offer and if they don't accept that then a "drop hands" offer. Can you explain this to me please so I can work out what to do for the best?

Dean Beaumont, Malmesbury

'A commercial offer enables the opponent to buy off the risk of losing in court for a low price'

If your solicitor is recommending such tactics this close to trial then he must consider that your chance of winning is not good. I cannot comment on liability or the value of the claim but I can explain these terms. A commercial settlement is when an offer is made to the other side that is on the low (usually very low) side and as such enables the opponent to buy off the risk of losing at court for a low price. This provides certainty to the defendant and often works unless the claim has very poor prospects indeed. A drop-hands offer is one where the parties agree to conclude the claim with no payment of compensation and with each party bearing its own legal costs, where usually the loser pays the winner's costs.



Andrew Campbell
Solicitor and author of the MCN Law column for the last five years

Andrew Campbell, Bikelawyer.
Visit www.bikelawyer.co.uk or email andrew@bikelawyer.co.uk or call 01446 794169

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