

Well autumn is here already, if anyone has any idea where summer went please let us know. So here's the autumn edition of Bimble. As the nights are drawing in and the weather is deteriorating we've got some words on conspicuity (the art of being seen), news of a regional rider safety campaign you can take part in and an update of what's happening with bus lanes.

If you've got any comments, suggestions or enquiries about an event or you just want a natter please feel free to contact us at; qualityyorkshireriders@gmail.com or ring 0113 24 75804.
Or you can follow us on Facebook if you're that way inclined.

Bike:

This time of year it's a good idea to give the bike a good going over. Hundreds or thousands of sunny summer miles often tend to invite a little neglect (who wants to be tinkering in the shed while it's sunny out after all?) and all too soon it'll be dark, wet and miserable and you wont want to be outside doing it then either!

So while there's still some daylight around have a good look over all the important bits. Give the bike a good wash first – amazing what you can miss under a layer of dead flies and chain lube. Check the tyres – are they likely to need replacing before winter properly sets in? Have you picked up a puncture or lost a few psi? Scrubbing in new tyres in wet or near freezing conditions isn't much fun.

Have a look at the brake pads, again it's better to replace them now than bedding in new ones in December. Pistons and callipers might want a good clean before winter salts gets in there too. Chain and sprockets may need cleaning, lubing and adjusting.

Check all the bolts and fasteners, they can vibrate lose or rust over. Have a look at the coolant, if it's not been changed in a couple of years it's worth doing that too. Especially if we're going to get another winter like last year.

Check the bulbs, it's getting darker earlier now and you might not have noticed a blown bulb.

Stock up on cleaner and chain lube now too, ready for when the salt comes out.

Dates for the Diary:

General:

15th/16th October, Classic Bike Show, Staffordshire
30th October, Leeds MAG Halloween Party, Stanningly
11th – 13th November, Footman James Classic Bike Show, NEC, Birmingham
19th – 27th November, Motorcycle Live, NEC, Birmingham

Conspicuity:

Conspicuity is all about how easy you are to see. Sticking out like a saw thumb or blending in like a chameleon. An important concept for those of us on two wheels.

It's not just about wearing a day-glo suit or Harry Potter's invisibility cloak either, it's about putting yourself in a position and behaving in a way that makes it easier for people to see you. If you're sat in someone's blind spot then it shouldn't come as too much of a surprise when they cut you up.

What's conspicuous in one situation could become camouflage half a mile down the road too as back grounds change and you move from rural to suburban to city centre. When you set off as dawn breaks your hi-viz bib should allow people to see you coming from miles away, but by the time you get into town in broad daylight the effect is has will have reduced significantly. And by all accounts hi-viz clothing is far more effective at a distance than it is up close and personal, so on a dual carriageway in moderate traffic you may well have greater conspicuity than you do in busy high street or city centre loop.

One study suggested that riders with white crash helmets were spotted more easily than those with multi coloured or highly patterned lids, but perhaps this is just because you look like a traffic cop if you wear a plain white lid and black leathers. If you're sat on a big BMW it completes the look!

Also riders tend to be 'lost' from a drivers vision once they're at an angle of 40 degrees to the car or less which puts you pretty close to the vehicle that's about to pull out on you, this might be due to the door and roof support pillars or it might be the way the human eye works, or a combination of both.

I guess the moral of this tale is that what you wear is perhaps less important than what you do. Expect people not to see you, allow for them not to, but make it as easy as you can for them to spot you – use good road positioning, don't sit in blind spots or out of sight (especially important around HGV's) and give other road users time to spot you and react. Blatt through a tiny gap at 20mph above the speed limit and you really will seem to appear from no-where to most drivers.

I've done some independent small scale research into this during some commutes with having a headlight on or off, wearing hi – viz and not and all the combinations of both. I found that having my headlight on seemed to make the biggest difference as to whether I was seen in a wing mirror. Having hi-viz on with no headlight seemed to make little difference. But I can't comment on whether this made any difference to whether I was seen by pedestrians, cyclists or people waiting at junctions.

Wearing hi-viz will be of benefit in poor weather conditions, low light and where there's a lot of shadow on the road. But don't rely on it to make you seen. The best protection you have against the actions of other road users is the mush between your ears and the best way of ensuring that is at it's most effective is use, training, and practice.

Yorkshire Enhanced Rider Scheme:

Would you like to earn yourself an insurance discount? Would you like a free bag of biking goodies? Would you like to be certified as a 'Quality Yorkshire Rider'?

If the answer's 'yes', then get in touch with your local approved trainer (find their details here) as we have some **free** and subsidised places to give away on the new Yorkshire Enhanced Rider Scheme. You'll get time with a DSA approved trainer who'll take you for an assessment ride, then you get a good debrief and, if required, you'll get some pointers on where you could improve. When you're up to scratch you get a nice certificate, a bag of goodies (including a Buff™, ear plugs, puck).

You might also get to be part of a major national study that's evaluating post test rider training and development schemes so you'll be helping other riders in the future too.

Someone's Son:

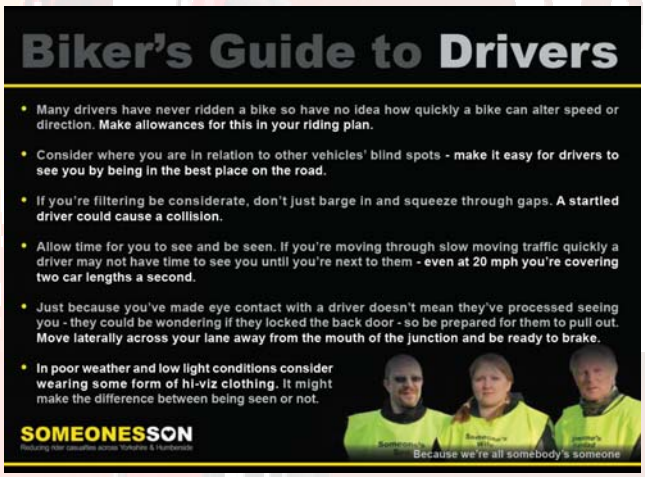
You may or may not have heard of 'someone's son', it's a rider safety campaign currently in operation across Yorkshire and Humber. It was born out of research which suggested that drivers who were, or who had a close relationship with, a motorcycle rider were less likely to be in collision with a motorcyclist. In addition one report found that riders were seen as inhuman by drivers as the crash helmet and riding kit hides away the features which defined their humanity – the face.

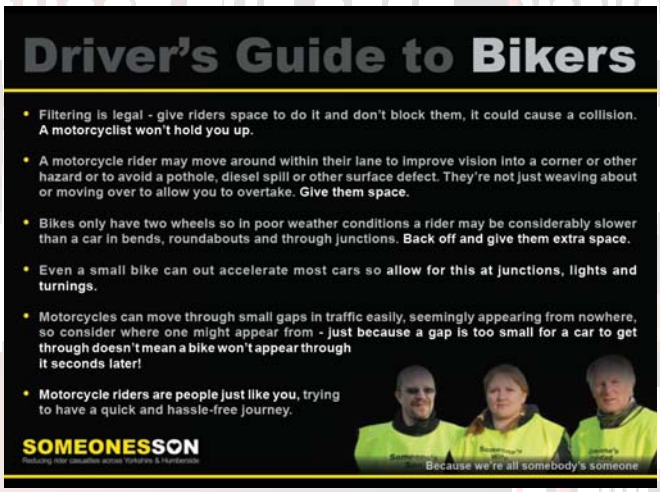
When you consider a lot of the baddies in films often have helmets, masks or made up faces (think Darth Vader, Jason from Friday the 13th, the death eaters in Harry Potter or even the enemy pilots in Topgun) you can see why the association with hidden eyes and faces is a negative, inhuman one.

So 'someone's son' aimed to personalise riders to drivers and other road users, to remind them that those of us on bikes are people too with friends and loved ones, just like them. Hopefully this building of relationships between drivers and riders will reduce the number of collisions between them.

We also know it's not that simple and that drivers need some additional information about bikes and their riders so they can understand them better. And there are many riders out there who also need to consider the difficulties they cause themselves when it comes to being seen by other road users in terms of the positioning they use and the way they ride. It's give and take.

So, someone's son has come up with a new idea. Drivers and riders guides have been produced along with some flyers which riders and drivers can download from the website (www.someones-son.co.uk). These flyers have space on the back for you as a rider to put a little information about yourself on and then pin up somewhere that drivers will see, be it the office, pub or gym. There's also some tips on there for drivers to help them look out for you.









In addition to these there are radio ads going out at peak commuter times (which you can listen to on the website) and hi-viz vests available if you want to carry your own reminder around with you. There's even a facebook page where you can up load a photo of you putting your flyer up or wearing your hi-viz vest or just comment on the campaign. Have a look, do your bit, befriend a driver.

Bus Lanes:

One question that tends to come up fairly often is when are motorcyclists going to be allowed to use bus lanes in places like Leeds and Bradford.

Not in the near future is the short answer. While some local authorities such as Sheffield, Bristol and areas of London are allowing motorcycles into bus lanes there's no definite guidance on the issue coming from central government. This means that many councils are simply choosing to adopt the default position of 'wait for official guidance'.

Part of the problem is that the trial in London conducted for Transport for London (TfL) hasn't drawn any firm conclusions resulting in the extension of the trial. The initial scheme saw an increase in motorcycle casualties – not good news – and an increase the number of motorcyclists exceeding the speed limit whilst using bus lanes. The trial was extended to see if these issues could be dealt with. The good news here is that there was a willingness to extend the trial and deal with the issues and not just end the trial and say it wasn't successful.

Another thing to consider is that not all bus lanes are suitable for allowing motorcycles access – some aren't wide enough to allow a bike to get passed a stopped bus and some are perhaps only a few tens of metres in length. In addition where traffic lights control the merging of bus lanes and normal traffic (like the one by Kirkstall Abbey) there could be issues where a rider comes into conflict with vehicles while trying to rejoin the main carriageway before the lights. Allowing bikes access to some lanes and not others causes problems with consistency and can confuse people.

And finally there are issues around rider safety. What has been seen in the TfL trial is that the nature of motorcycle collisions changed where riders were using bus lanes. Previously the 'traditional' motorcycle collision with another vehicle involved the other vehicle turning right either from or into a side road from a main road. What has been seen in London is a change to motorcycles being in collision with a vehicle turning left across a bus lane. Educating drivers to look for motorcycles on their inside may take some considerable time (as many haven't got the idea to look for them on their outside yet, or even right in front of them) so perhaps this is a step too far at the moment.

From the point of view of the highways authority allowing motorcycles access to bus lanes would also give more weight to the campaign by private hire vehicle drivers to have access to them too which would end up meaning there wouldn't be much difference between the bus lanes and normal traffic.

There are arguments for and against allowing motorcycles into bus lanes, some of which stem from the behaviour of riders and some of which come from more practical origins. I think the basic question is 'would it make that much difference to your journey?' and I have to admit that it probably wouldn't. The TfL study found that over a half hour ride it might cut 3 minutes off your journey time and that's in central London, in central Leeds that would be more like 30 seconds…

So overall while many riders think being allowed to use bus lanes is the solution to all their problems in reality it's unlikely to make a huge difference to their journey or the chances of being involved in a collision. And if cutting a minute or two off your journey time is that important perhaps it's time you re-evaluated your life. Commuting by bike instead of the car has saved you far more than that already.

If you want to read up on the trials in London then follow the link below:

http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/redroutes/10151.aspx

It is worth bearing in mind though that things do change and the latest trial in London is due to end in January 2012. It's currently anyone's guess as to what the outcome will be but if riders in London have stuck to the code of conduct and safety concerns are put to bed then perhaps we'll see it made permanent.