

RIDING SCHOOL RATED

RAPID TRAINING ROADMASTER

Rapid Training's new Roadmaster courses aim to give you the skills to become an elite road rider

Words Laura Thomson Pictures Adam Shorrock

WHILE SOME LOVE the rules and discipline of traditional advanced-riding courses, they aren't for everyone.

However, Rapid Training does things differently. There are no 'high-viz' vests here, nor any strict assessments or hard-and-fast rules. Instead, Rapid offers a unique take on advanced riding... and one that really resonates with me.

We're here to try a version of its two-day (three if you train with a partner) Roadmaster Level 1 course. Introduced recently, the three levels of Roadmaster courses are designed to help you improve all aspects of road riding, from observation and road position to the detail of machine control. At £795 a go, they aren't budget options but the aim is that after completion of the courses, you'll have the skills and the knowledge to be an elite road rider.

"We take the best parts of the performance advanced-riding side of things and apply the best, most-relevant bits to the way you ride, rather than turn you into a robot," explained Rapid's National Operations Manager Ryan

Decarteret, my coach for the two-day Roadmaster course, when we met at our start point just outside Reading.

The wealth of experience within the team is unparalleled; all are police class-1 qualified riders, and many have raced competitively for decades.

"What we're about is riding the bike well and, as a by-product, your safety and your speed will grow with it," say Ryan. "It isn't about riding fast," he added. "It's about making you as good as you can be in as short a time as possible."

In order to do so, Rapid tailors the tuition to the rider's own strengths and weaknesses, which are identified with a background brief before the ride.

We set off, Ryan on his S1000XR (he's done nearly 18,000 miles in four months on it) and I aboard a Kawasaki Versys 1000. The roads were greasy, the temperature low and the sky overcast. But immediately, the difference to other rides was stark.

The two-way intercom was like a window into Ryan's thought process, as he explained what he could see and, more importantly, the implications of that



THE LOCATION

Rapid operates across the UK but coach Ryan's patch is Berkshire. He generally avoids motorways in his instruction and instead we took A and B-roads as far as Chippenham, covering 125 miles on day one, and slightly less on day two

THE RIDER

Laura has been riding for nine years. After dabbling in sportsbikes as a teenager, she found her calling off-road, which has improved her road riding too. She has done both a Bikesafe and IAM course previously

THE COACH

Ryan has an incredible motorcycling CV that he estimates has seen him cover more than a million miles. He has learned both from coaches and from 'getting it wrong' and fine-tuned his riding during a stint as a surveillance rider with the National Crime Agency. He is a police class-1 qualified rider

Briefs and de-briefs can take place at any convenient, safe spot



The Roadmaster course starts with the instructor observing your riding

THE FACTS

- What is it?** Rapid Training Roadmaster.
- Price?** £795.
- What's included?** One-to-one training with a Rapid Pro Coach.
- Where is it?** Anywhere in the UK. Rapid Training covers 15 locations across England and Wales, so can use roads near you.
- Where can I stay?** If you're not doing the course locally, Rapid can advise on the best places to stay.
- Duration?** Two days.
- Do I need my own bike?** Yes.
- Contact?** www.rapidtraining.co.uk

information. The analytical monologue was eye-opening and before long, I found myself subconsciously replicating it.

"There's bins out, that means there will be a bin lorry," he remarked with the brevity of Sherlock Holmes. Interspersed are anecdotes of his local experience, his friendly demeanour putting me at ease.

For the first half-hour I lead the way, following Ryan's directions. This is his assessment, during which he instructs to 'do your thing, ride your ride'. Then he overtakes and introduces the concept of 'explanation, demonstration, imitation, practice.' First, he explains the method, either with a drawing at the side of the road or through the intercom, before demonstrating and instructing me to imitate. It's like a game of follow the leader.

With the basics mastered, it is time to break down the ride into the three fundamentals: reading the road, planning and machine control.

I was aware of the concept of looking as far ahead as possible while riding but often found my field of view narrowing as I reached the point that I had focussed on previously. By introducing a more dynamic approach, I was able to break that habit.

Planning, meanwhile, introduced an elasticity to my ride – an ability to adjust a



◀ Instructor Ryan favours rural roads over motorways

▼ Simple diagrams can help to explain a concept, like positioning



pre-made plan was a lot easier than making it up on the fly – but more importantly, slowed everything down. While I was riding at the same speed, I felt less rushed and as a result, the bike was more stable. I began thinking about overtakes as soon as I saw a car in the distance, and using the information on my road positioning, speed and gear, enabled me to seize the first safe pass.

When it came to machine control, my experience off-road meant that naturally I covered the clutch and brakes. Ryan advised me to remove my hovering hands in order to make braking more of a physical action. Instead of feathering the brakes anytime I felt a little hesitant, it became a thought process that would ultimately inform me I didn't need to brake, and instead I could scrub speed by rolling off the power. It made me smoother.

As the day progressed, we unpacked more of my riding gremlins – it was like a motorcycle therapy session. In each instance, Ryan suggested adjustments to make my riding smoother and faster.

After 124 miles we found ourselves back at the start point, where he reeled off the

topics we've covered – everything from forward observations to late apexes, overtakes, braking and bend assessments.

Day two was about tidying up the loose ends and consolidating and developing the skills learned the day before. We took a similarly scenic route, drilling the techniques and perfecting them through a variety of road conditions. We went in search of overtakes, stopped to break down the limit point and even covered trail braking – a 'great skill to have, but not the best plan for every bend'.

We later debriefed over a coffee. "Your homework will be to keep that vision, read that book, after every junction, every hazard," Ryan instructed. "Learn the signs and what they mean, so you know what's coming and can build it into your plan." It's made me eager for more learning.



▼ Training is relaxed but formalised

We've done it too!

RiDE readers share their experience of Rapid Training

'Ryan's training instilled confidence'



JEREMY BANKS, 54
Bike Ducati Multistrada
Years riding 3

"After an introduction course, I did a Rapid training course. From the start, Ryan's approach put me at ease and his training instilled confidence, riding on great roads while continually focusing on road awareness and 'maximising the view'. My riding is now at a different level in terms of confidence, positioning and safety."

'My confidence outweighed my skills'



LUKE JOHNSON, 34
Bike BMW S1000R
Years riding 3

"I'd only done around 850 miles but I knew my confidence outweighed my skills. Working with Ryan gave me direction, confidence and skills I needed to enjoy my bike as I wanted to. Rapid's coaching style is friendly, professional yet never demeaning and this was echoed by the whole team. I can't recommend Rapid enough."

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Progress from Roadmaster 1 onto the second and third levels of the course, or take the parallel track-focused pathway with the Bikemaster courses (level 1 (road) is £795 and level 2 and 3 cost £1195).

Or, if you're not yet ready to commit to a full course, try one of the Rapid Ride Outs, and join three other riders for a half-day group ride. Costing £125, it promises an excellent introduction into the school's methodology. Bespoke training is also an option.

THREE THINGS I LEARNED...

1 Reading the road like a book

I can be guilty of failing to progress my vision at the same speed as the ride and, on occasions, have found myself looking only into the middle distance, and catching up with my focal point before I know it. Ryan's dynamic approach, and the metaphor with which he uses to teach it, was invaluable. "Your vision has got to be early, it's got to be thorough and detailed, it's got to be continuous," he explained. "Like reading a book; once you've got to the bottom of the page, what do you do next? You flip over the page and start on the next one."

2 Have some restraint

Overtakes are essential for making progress on a motorcycle. While I have previously been guilty of hideous flip-flop manoeuvres, Ryan has taught me to plan, hang back, have patience and break them down. "Treat it like an airplane flight," he said of the three-stage pass. "With a take-off, the flight, and the landing. And always have a crash-landing spot." For momentum overtakes, I learned to consider my passing speed, and not be afraid to hang on the wrong side of the road if visibility allows.

3 Going to the extremes

Fundamental to the Rapid concept is using the whole lane, or carriageway where appropriate, in order to maximise your vision and keep the bike as upright, and stable, as possible. While my automatic inclination was previously to ride well within the comfort of my strip of tarmac, the Rapid Training course has opened my eyes to a wide variety of road positions I didn't realise were available.



▶ Your vision needs to move forward as you do



▶ Overtakes are a part of motorcycling so you need to do them safely



▲ Use your road position to help stabilise your bike

THE SCORES

Challenge 7/10
Theory skills 9/10
Practical skills 9/10
Value for money 7/10
Enjoyment 8/10

Total score 40/50

While not challenging in the conventional sense, the Rapid Roadmaster course is neither staid or boring. Ryan opened my eyes to how you can ride well, fast. It's not cheap but the lessons learned could well be priceless. **R**