

MOTORBIKE RACINGSEIZING THE CHANCE TO DRESS FROM HEAD TO TOE IN LEATHER, **SPENCER REEVES** TAKES TO THE RACETRACK

Lapping it up in the fast lane

As I wasn't nervous enough about having a go at motorbike racing, the CTC (Competence To Compete school) racked up the tension. A few knuckle-biting videos of racers getting it wrong were enough to scare anyone.

The CTC is designed to make sure you're safe enough to go out on a racetrack. Besides being taken through all the aspects of a race meeting, from morning scrutineering (where your bike and safety equipment are thoroughly checked) and track practice, you also have a few classroom sessions and a multiple-choice test on safety, with questions such as: 'What do the different-coloured flags mean?'

The instructors lay heavy emphasis on safety gear: a back protector – the instructors had high praise for the Forcefield Pro L2 I was wearing – is the No.1 thing to get right. Two of them had broken their backs but were still walking, so they knew what they were talking about. No-one advises cutting corners in anything, from boots and gloves to one-piece leathers and helmets. The message was clear: it seemed certain that, at some point, I was going to come into contact with the road. They weren't wrong, as I was soon to find out.

Ready to roll

I'd joined the budget-class Yamaha Past Masters Racing Club, which races Yamaha two-strokes from the 1980s. You can pick a competitive bike up for about £1,000 and, having got my racing licence, I was soon ready for my first race at Brands Hatch.

It was awesome to be sitting on the same grid as the motorcycling gods that ride in World Superbike and, funnily enough, I didn't feel that nervous as I watched the other riders line up. As the red light went out, 37 two-strokes went hurtling off in a cloud of blue smoke all vying to be first through

Paddock Hill Bend. The first lap was a blur of chaos: I had no idea what position I was in but I was catching the bikes in front of me, slowly but surely.

Then, as I went to pass two bikes at Druids Hairpin, my luck ran out. I felt the bike's front wheel tuck under me as I hit some oil. I hadn't intended to test the back protector quite as early, or dramatically but it hit hard as I bounced off the track at 80mph.

Back in the paddock, I checked my leathers. They had taken a beating but my back was unmarked – amazingly, no bruise. The palms of my hands stung from the friction of trying to slow myself but my HG Carbon Pro gloves were also unmarked.

Damage control

The bike was not so fortunate. The fairing and controls had taken the brunt of the crash and bits were hanging off all over. Although the YPMRC is highly competitive, there is a family feel to it and the other racers rallied around. The paddock was a hive of activity as spare parts appeared, bits were



taped up, welded back on or bent back into shape on my bike and those of the 11 others who had joined me in the crash zone.

Once my bike looked semi-respectable again, it and my kit had to be scrutinised once more. They both passed and were soon ready for round two. But I wasn't so sure about myself. My body may not have been bruised, but my mind had taken a knock.

Once you crash out of a race, you have start at the back of the grid. I was a bit less aggressive but I managed to get up to 20th position, after sliding all over a wet track for seven laps.

On Sunday morning, I battled for an



The need for speed: Spencer (main picture, left and below) is put through his racing paces at Brands Hatch

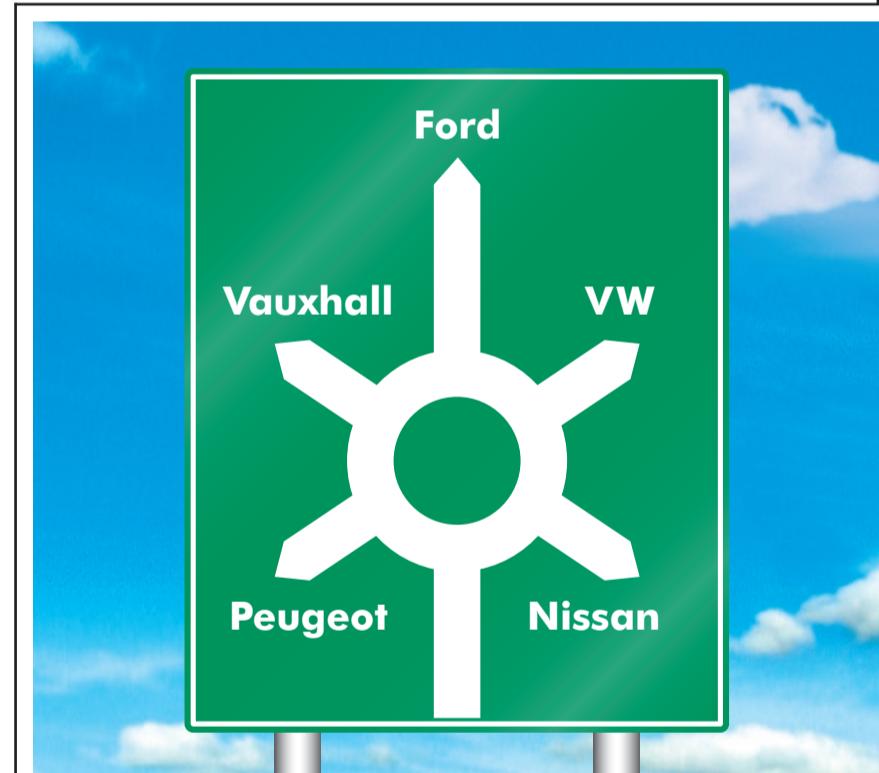
entire race with two other riders and, even though I was still in 20th position, I was pleased with myself. It was exciting to be swapping positions every corner, trying to out-brake or streamline someone down the straights. For the first time, I felt I was racing, rather than riding round and round.

A braking boo-boo

For the last race on the Sunday, the track was again wet but my close-quarter tussle had restored my confidence. Back I trotted to spot No.20 but an excellent start saw me pass at least eight riders by the first corner. I then knocked the back brake on accidentally, leaving the field to scream past me, as I cursed my incompetence. Pressing on as fast as I dared, I picked off a few riders going through Surtees Bend and finished 12th, with four championship points.

Heading back to the pits, I felt ecstatic that, no matter what else, I'd ridden to my limit and survived.

You can see Spencer in action at Silverstone on May 24 and 25. With thanks to Hein Gericke (www.hein-gericke.co.uk) and Davies Odell (www.daviesodell.co.uk)



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