

# Transforming Riding: An Evaluation of Advanced Motorcycling



# Executive summary

This report shows clearly that preparing for and taking the IAM Advanced Motorcycle test bring positive and lasting benefits for motorcycle riders. The vast majority of people who take our courses say it makes them feel safer, more confident, more attentive, more observant and more decisive in their riding. By doing so it also adds to their enjoyment on the road. IAM bikers report smoother progress and a much more conscious approach to their on-road behaviour. 61% of those surveyed even said that they had avoided being involved in an accident since they passed the test. Awareness of other road users including pedestrians and cyclists was raised as was knowledge of hazards and difficult conditions. 81% of those who had taken our training passed on what they had learned to friends or family and would recommend us.

Improving the safety image of motorcycling is a key component in promoting its role as a solution to congestion and other transport problems. It is clear that the IAM approach works but we need the support of central and local government, the emergency services and other agencies to promote our message to as many bikers as possible.

## About the IAM

The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) is the UK's largest independent road safety charity, dedicated to improving standards and safety in driving, motorcycling and cycling. Best known for the advanced test the IAM has more than 100,000 members and is supported by a local volunteer network of 200 groups in the UK and Ireland. We provide driver risk management solutions to businesses through our commercial arm, IAM Drive & Survive, and driver retraining through IAM Driver Retraining Academy. The IAM's policy and research division offers advice and expertise on road safety, and publishes original research on road safety issues.

**We would like to thank our members for responding to the survey and providing such insightful comments.**

# Introduction

We promote advanced riding as a way of developing motorcycle riders' skills and experience. While aiming to reduce accidents and casualties, the advanced test is not exclusively about safety. It also encourages the rider to feel more confident on the road, to make better progress, and to get greater enjoyment from the experience.

Although we receive regular feedback from our members and groups, we wanted to know more about what motivates people to take the advanced test and how it affects people's riding habits. Do advanced riders consider themselves safer? Does the IAM have a long-term impact on riding?

# Context

While riding a motorcycle has become significantly safer over the last ten years motorcyclists are still overrepresented in road casualty figures. In 2011, there was an 8 per cent increase in the number of motorcyclists killed and seriously injured, up from 5,183 in 2010 to 5,609, while motorcycle traffic increased by only 1 per cent in the same period. IAM research is currently underway to identify the causes of these accidents and will be published later in 2013.

Police contributory factors data suggest that errors and mistakes by rider's cause 46% of crashes so there is a clear need to help riders fix bad habits and get more on-road experience. The IAM supports rider development through its Skill for Life course which teaches the principles of safe control, observation and anticipation. The course involves preparation by local IAM volunteer observers and a final test with a qualified examiner. Currently the IAM has over 18,500 motorcycle members.

# Method

We conducted an online survey of IAM motorcycle members in late 2012. The survey received 3,338 responses, giving a response rate of 24.8 per cent (or one in four). The sample is representative of our membership profile including age, sex and geographic distribution.

## Reasons for taking the advanced test

The top five reasons for taking the advanced test and the percentage of respondents who gave that reason were:

- To improve my general standard of riding – **86.4%**
- To become a safer rider – **82.7%**
- To reduce the risk of being involved in an accident – **71.7%**
- To become a more confident rider – **59.2%**
- For the achievement/challenge – **55.8%**

Less popular reasons were gaining insurance discounts (chosen by 21 per cent of respondents), improving fuel efficiency (chosen by 6 per cent) and 'for my job' (chosen by 6 per cent).

Women were more likely to say that they took the advanced test to increase their confidence, 74 per cent of women gave this as a reason, compared to 59 per cent of men.

Men were more likely to say they took the test to eradicate bad riding habits, 44 per cent of men said this compared to 28 per cent of women. Men were also more likely to say that they wanted to 'refresh their riding skills', 'to demonstrate to others that their riding is of a high standard', and 'to influence other peoples' riding than women.

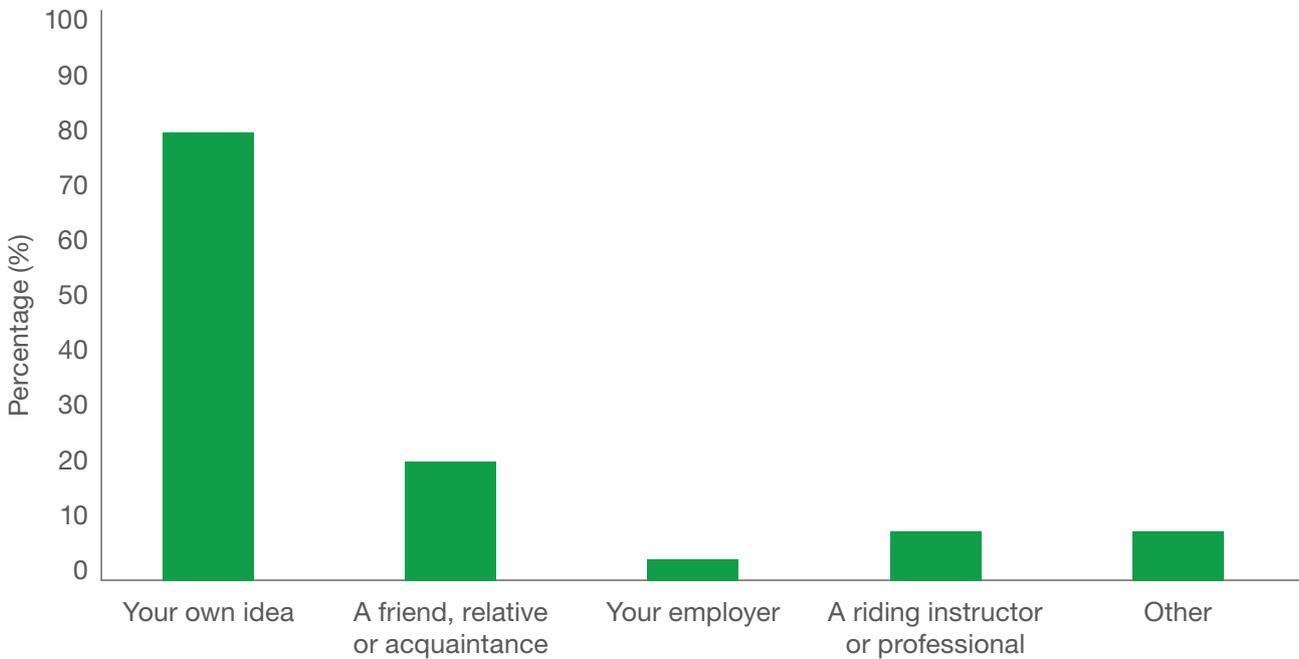
Riders under the age of 30 identified 'improving my general standard of riding' as a reason for taking the test. Riders under 30 were far more likely to say they became an advanced rider to obtain cheaper insurance.

They were also more likely to select 'to demonstrate to others that my riding was of a high standard' and 'to influence other peoples' riding' as reasons for taking the test.

45 per cent of riders under 30 gave 'eradicating bad habits' as a reason for taking the advanced test, this suggests that riders may be aware that they have picked up bad habits even if they have not been riding for many years.

78% of riders said that it was their own idea to take the test. Women were more likely than men to say that a friend or relative had encouraged them to take the test, 27 per cent of women said this compared to 15 per cent of men. Riders under 30 were also more likely to say a friend or relative suggested taking the advanced test (26 per cent said this).

### Whose idea was it that you should take the advanced IAM motorcycle test?

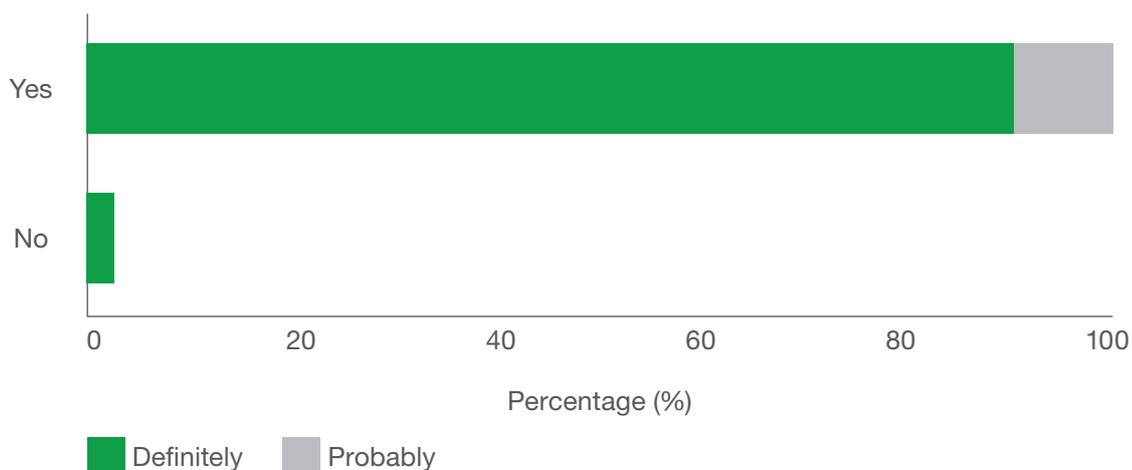


Eighty-nine per cent of people trained for the advanced test with an IAM group. A significant proportion (44 per cent) had taken other forms of advanced motorcycle training at some stage.

# The benefits of undertaking the advanced test

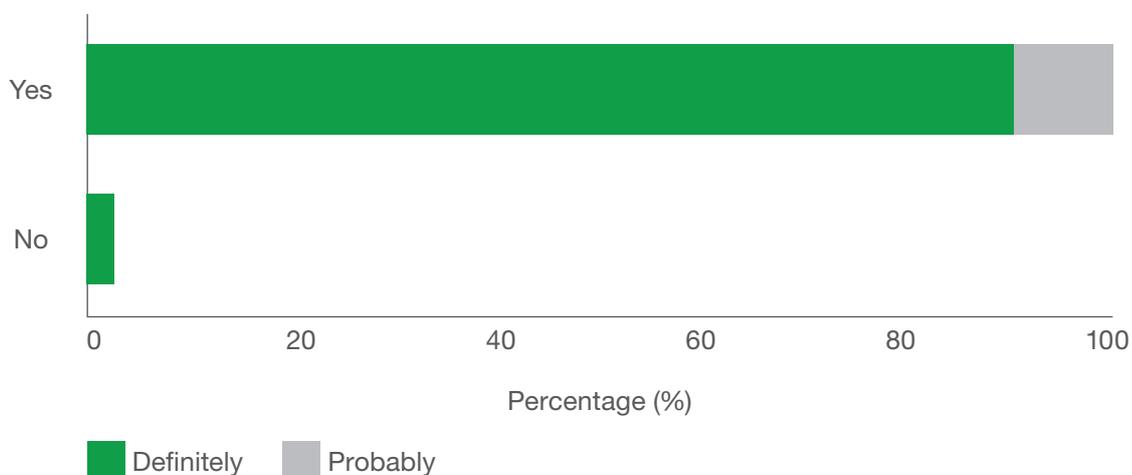
The results of the survey were extremely positive. Ninety-nine per cent of riders said the advanced test had a permanent positive effect on them as a rider, 90 per cent (2,824) of respondents said 'definitely', while 10 per cent (286) respondents said 'probably'.

## Has preparing for the IAM advanced test had a permanent positive effect on you as a rider?



Ninety-seven per cent of respondents said that the IAM advanced test had increased their enjoyment from riding. With 83 per cent (2,606) saying it 'definitely' had and 14 per cent (436) saying it 'probably' had.

## Has the IAM advanced test increased the enjoyment you get from riding?

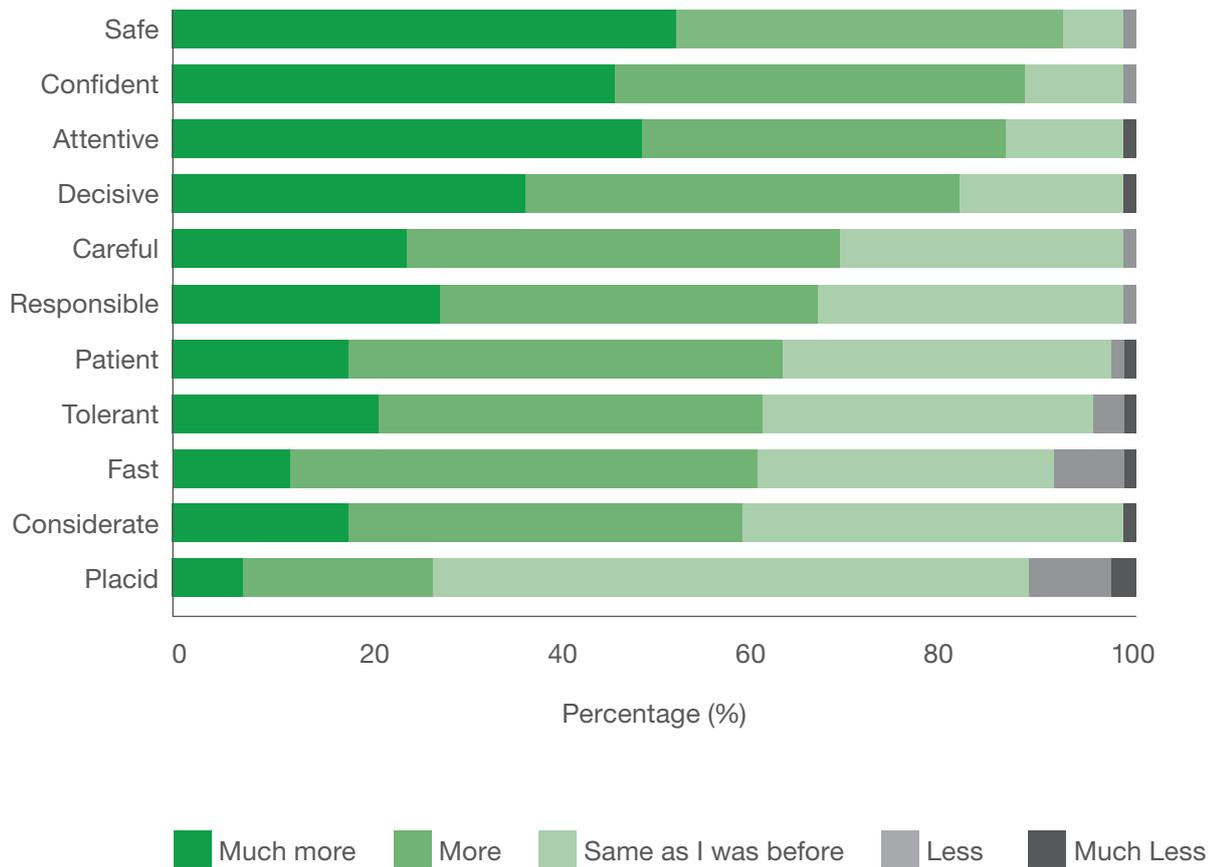


It is clear that preparing for and taking the advanced test is an overwhelmingly positive experience for most riders, increasing both their confidence and enjoyment of riding.

# Changes in riding behaviour

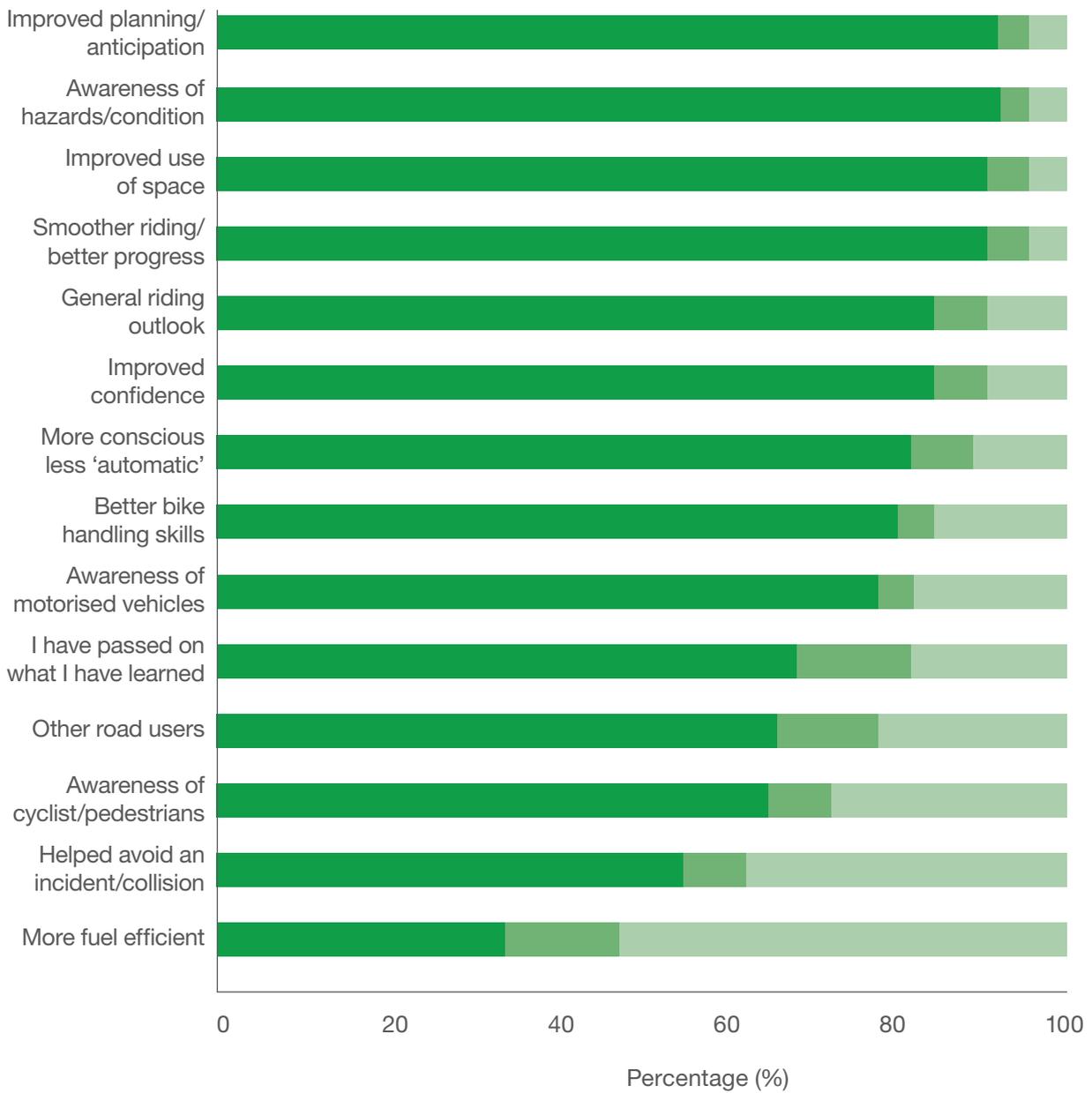
We looked into how the test affected different aspects of riding behaviour and attitudes. The biggest changes were in safety, confidence, attentiveness and decisiveness. We will discuss these in more detail in the next section.

## How have these aspects of your riding changed since taking the IAM test?



We also asked participants about any positive lasting impacts from taking Skill for Life. The most commonly reported lasting impacts were improved planning and anticipation, awareness of hazards and conditions and improved use of space.

**Do you think that it has had an impact on you riding in the following ways?**



- Yes, it has had a lasting impact
- Yes, it had an impact for a while
- No, not really

# Participants' comments

The survey included an open-ended question for participants' comments, it asked them to describe the ways, if any, that preparing for the IAM advanced test changed them as a rider.

There were 2,384 responses to this question, which gave a variety of descriptions and views about the IAM and the advanced motorcycle test. We analysed and coded the responses looking for key themes using widely accepted qualitative research methods.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive with 99 per cent of respondents saying the skill for life course had been beneficial in some way. Only 0.4 per cent of responses could be categorised as negative, while the remaining 0.6 per cent were either neutral or contained both positive and negative content.

The high level of positive responses reinforces the survey findings that the advanced riding test is a useful experience for the vast majority of motorcyclists.

We used the responses to generate a word cloud on preparing for the IAM advanced test. The word size increases each time it is used.



## Word Cloud

**TAUGHT** VISION **ROAD USERS**  
 SMOOTH **SPEED LIMITS** ALLOWED  
**APPROACH CONFIDENCE** DANGERS  
 ENABLED FOCUS **FURTHER AHEAD**  
**IAM TEST IMPROVED** IPSGA SYSTEM  
**LEARNT MAKING PROGRESS**  
**OBSERVATION** OWN ABILITY  
 PLAN AHEAD **POTENTIAL HAZARDS** REACT  
**RIDER RIDING SKILLS**  
 RIDING STYLE **RISK ROAD CRAFT**  
**ROAD POSITIONING**

**There are clearly key themes in the responses; the words confidence, improved, skills, observation and positioning are mentioned repeatedly:**

- Confident/confidence – mentioned 613 times
- Improve/improved – mentioned 361 times
- Skill/skills - mentioned 338 times
- Observation – mentioned 287 times
- Position/positioning – mentioned 277 times

Most responses talked about how advanced riding had made them significantly safer and more conscious of hazards. Below is a selection of comments which touch on these key themes.

‘My observation skills have increased which, in turn, gives me a much smoother ride. I also have the confidence to slow down when I perceive a hazard’

‘It trained me to look ahead more and plan my riding taking into account hazards etc.’

‘I found that I have more time to react, manoeuvre and see which enables me to react quicker to any given situation...greatly improved my riding skills.’

‘The IAM test preparation gave me confidence, improved my awareness hugely, helped me become a much safer and happier rider and I learned skills and tips from everyone’

Negative comments were generally from riders who had experienced other forms of advanced coaching and therefore did not find the IAM course helpful. However, this view was balanced by respondents who found that Skill for Life complemented their other forms of training. Many respondents recognised the benefits of continuous development, for example:

‘I was an advanced police driver but always feel that there is more to learn. I understand more about why a bike behaves as it does.’

**From the responses to the open-ended questions and the survey results, we found key themes and areas for discussion. These were:**

- Safety, confidence and decisiveness
- Planning ahead, anticipation and awareness
- Difficult conditions
- Enjoyment from riding
- Family and social commitments

The next sections look at these different areas using both the quantitative survey results and respondents comments.

# Safety, confidence and decisiveness

Ninety-four per cent of respondents said that the advanced test had made them safer riders; this was the most commonly reported change, with 53 per cent reporting that they felt much safer.

**Only 0.2 per cent of riders described themselves as less safe than they were before taking the advanced test. Other key results were:**

- 94 per cent reported improved use of road space
- 94 per cent said that their riding was smoother and they made better progress
- 90 per cent said that their riding was more conscious and less automatic
- 61 per cent of respondents said that taking the advanced test had helped them to avoid a specific accident or incident

All demographic groups gave similar results for overall safety. However, this manifests itself in different ways. For example, men were more likely to say that their riding was now more conscious and less automatic, 90 per cent of men said this compared to 86 per cent of women.

Women and riders under 30 were more likely to report improved use of road space, 99 per cent of women and 97 per cent of riders under 30 said this, compared to 94 per cent of men.

Riders under 30 were also more likely to say that their riding was smoother and they made better progress with 97 per cent of them reporting this.

Participants' comments also suggested that safety greatly improved after taking the advanced test. This selection gives an illustration of this.

'Whilst I'm sure it has made me a more decisive and smoother rider, it has also enhanced my overall safety.'

'Increased alertness and attentiveness to situations as they develop and anticipating their arising much sooner than before, thinking to safely, smoothly and efficiently navigate through them as they do.'

'I'm now a rider who thinks.'

Ninety per cent of respondents said their confidence improved, with 85 per cent agreeing that the advanced test had a lasting positive impact on their confidence when riding. 82 per cent said that they had become more decisive riders.

We have already mentioned that women were more likely to take the advanced test to increase their confidence. It appears that the advanced test helped to achieve this, as women were far more likely to say that taking the advanced test had improved their confidence as a rider with 95 per cent of women saying this (compared to 89 per cent of men).

Riders under 30 were less likely to say that they were more confident (84 per cent said this). However, this may be a positive result, as it is possible that confidence was not an issue for young people. The advanced test aims to prevent over confidence and make riders aware of their limits. This research project does not allow for an evaluation of confidence before and after Skill for Life, however it is possible that not increasing the confidence of all advanced riders is a positive thing.

Riders under 30 were most likely to say that the advanced test had made them more decisive, 87 per cent said this.

Respondents' comments reflected improvements to confidence and decisiveness.

'The IAM test preparation gave me confidence, improved my awareness hugely, helped me become a much safer and happier rider and I learned skills and tips from everyone I rode with.'

'Confident and safe – Made me aware just how much information there is to see and act upon.'

'My observer was able to point out faults in my riding, which I had never even noticed, and was able to change my road positioning in such a way that was not only safer, and allowed a much better view of the road ahead, it also made my cornering smoother and more confident.'

# Planning ahead, anticipation and awareness

**Ninety- five per cent of advanced riders said the course had a positive impact on their planning and anticipation; other key results were:**

- 87 per cent of respondents said that they were more attentive
- 82 per cent said that they were more aware of motorised vehicles
- 72 per cent of respondents said it had a positive impact on their awareness of cyclists and pedestrians
- 68 per cent said they were more careful and 68 per cent said they were more responsible riders.

**These findings are highlighted in the qualitative findings:**

‘Increased alertness and attentiveness to situations as they develop and anticipating their arising much sooner than before, thinking to safely, smoothly and efficiently navigate through them as they do.’

‘Observation skills. Before I did not even see hazards let alone have the ability to negotiate them. Also learned a lot around road positioning and where to look through the bends. Road awareness, observation and anticipation skills are all very increased.’

Riders under 30 were much more likely to say they had become more careful (81 per cent said this) and more likely to say they had become more responsible (71 per cent said this).

Men were more likely to say that they had become more aware of other road users and they were also more likely to say that they had become more tolerant (62 per cent of men said this, compared to 42 per cent of women. This quote from a male respondent illustrates the change in attitude to more vulnerable road users.

‘The inevitable pedestrians in the road get to cross, dance or do whatever they want while I slowly approach and patiently wait for them to finish and then glide past. Before, I would have arrived at the scene too fast, stopped, exchanged “greetings” and accelerated away hard.’

Respondents were less likely to say they had become more placid, with only 27 per cent of respondents reporting this. However, this may have something to do with riding style before the test, as 43 per cent of young people said they had become more placid while only 14 per cent of women thought they had.

## Difficult conditions

Ninety-four per cent of respondents said there had been a positive impact on their awareness of hazards and difficult riding conditions.

Respondents' comments highlighted this key theme, showing that advanced riders feel safer in specific conditions and settings. These examples illustrate this:

'I moved to Cornwall where the riding was very different - faster with a greater variety of road conditions. Taking the IAM advanced test increased my confidence on country roads, improved how I approach and take bends, and helped me sharpen awareness of speed limits'

'I also have the confidence to slow down when I perceive a hazard (e.g. when riding with others I will decide the right speed for the conditions).'

'I now look further ahead for anything that may happen. I ride at a more steady pace without ringing the bikes neck. My awareness has increased 10 fold and my confidence in the rain is so much better.'

## Enjoyment from riding

Ninety-seven per cent of respondents said that the IAM advanced test had increased their enjoyment from riding. This positive change was reported by all demographic groups.

Participants' comments really showed how in some cases the advanced test had been transformative by increasing safety and enjoyment of riding.

'Rejuvenated the fun in riding by eradicating some bad habits and enabling my riding to flow again.'

'I became aware, after an accident that I didn't cause but now could have avoided, that in order to enjoy my motorcycling I needed to improve my standard of riding. The IAM appeared and has since proved to be the best way to do that and make some valuable like-minded friends along the way.'

'It has helped me to enjoy many years of safe happy motorcycling and transfer that knowledge onto others.'

Some respondents also mentioned that the advanced test had given them the confidence to travel further on their bikes, including trips abroad. For example:

'It has helped me become a much more confident rider and I feel very much safer and in control on the bike. It has also given me the confidence to do some long distance touring (to Spain and back through France and also a solo trip to Switzerland).'

# Family and social commitments

We also found that members connected passing the advanced test to their family and social commitments. Eighty-one per cent per cent said that they had passed on what they learned to others. Qualitative examples of this included feeling that there was a responsibility to share their knowledge with family members and friends, often buying Skill for Life for their children.

Other riders said they took their advanced test to ensure that they were safe for their family, which this quote illustrates.

‘My decision to take my advanced test came about because I am a mother of two and had just inherited a RD350LC in 2008. I had passed my test many years before but hadn’t ridden a “big” bike. I was very apprehensive and knew my skills were lacking. Everyone was telling me how dangerous riding was so I used to say to people I was doing the advanced test so I can live as long as possible!’

Some responses also talked about carrying pillions and a noticeable increase in smoothness that benefited their passengers.



## The impact on different groups of people

We looked into the impact of taking the advanced test for different groups of people, which we discuss in the following sections, these cover.

- ‘Returning riders’
- Gender differences
- Riders under 30

## ‘Returning riders’

The analysis found an emerging pattern from responses from people who either had taken a break from riding or had began riding later on in life.

Seventeen per cent of respondents said that they took the advanced test because they wanted to retrain after a break from riding. Men are far more likely to choose this as a reason (18 per cent of men said this, compared to 7 per cent of women).

The qualitative responses show that taking the advanced test helped ‘returning riders’ gain the confidence they needed.

‘I returned to biking after 15 years absence. I remembered being a good rider when I was young but struggled to find the enjoyment I had previously. My lack of confidence had caused me to develop new bad habits such as braking in corners.’

‘I undertook my IAM training and test to improve my skills after a break from riding...the IAM training helped me understand that you did not have to potter about to be a safer rider. In fact, IAM requires you to make good progress, where it is safe to do so. But safely.’

‘After a break of over 45 years from riding a two wheeled powered vehicle I was surprised how nervous I was and how vulnerable I felt... It took many months, lots of practice/miles in all weathers coupled with huge amounts of support and patience from my local IAM Group’s Observers, Senior Observers and Group Secretary to prepare me for my IAM test.’

## Gender differences

In this report, we have touched on some of the differences in responses between men and women. The impact of taking the advanced test is broadly similar for both genders. However, women were more likely to say that taking the advanced test improved their confidence and their use of road space. While men were more likely to say that their riding was now more conscious and less automatic, and that they had become more tolerant and aware of other road users. It is clear that there are benefits for both genders and that the advanced test meets the needs of different groups of people.

Women were more likely than men to say that a friend or relative had encouraged them to take the test, 27 per cent of women said this compared to 15 per cent of men. Nine per cent of motorcycle licence holders are women, but only 5 per cent of IAM motorcycle members are. This suggests a potential new market for the IAM to explore to attract and retain female riders by appealing to them directly.

## Riders under 30

We have mentioned the differences in young riders opinions throughout this report. We know that riders under 30 have slightly different reasons for taking the advanced test, more frequently choosing cheaper insurance and a desire to demonstrate to others that their riding was of a high standard.

They reported similar or higher levels of overall safety and enjoyment; 100 per cent of riders under 30 said that the advanced test had increased enjoyment while 97 per cent of young riders said that it had permanent positive effects on them as a rider.

There were some key differences with riders under 30 being more likely to report that their riding was smoother and that they had become more placid, careful and responsible riders.

While they are less likely to report an increase in confidence, it may be possible that the advanced test helps resolve some of the commonly reported issues with young riders' attitudes.

Interestingly, riders under 30 were most likely to say that they had passed on what they learnt to others, with 84 per cent saying this. They were also more likely to choose this as a reason for taking the test.

It is not clear from the survey whether they passed on what they learnt to other riders under 30, but it is interesting to note that riders under 30 are readily sharing what they have learned with other riders.



# Improving the IAM

There were a number of suggestions for improvements to the IAM. This feedback is crucial for the IAM to improve its offer to motorcyclists.

The major suggestion was re-testing, either on a compulsory or voluntary basis. There was a feeling that riders could pick up bad habits a few years after they passed and that further coaching or assessment could prevent this.

Our survey suggests that most people feel a permanent positive impact from taking the test; however, there may be some riders who would benefit from additional coaching.

Also some respondents said that they would like to complete an additional qualification for the challenge, or because they found the initial experience so enjoyable.

There were a number of suggestions about the IAM's image, most of these suggested that the IAM failed to appeal to younger riders and that it would benefit from modernising its image. While riders under 30 themselves did not comment about the IAM's image there is a general acceptance that not enough riders under 30 are aware of the IAM or consider taking the test.

Other suggestions included a need to focus on the value offered by membership and retention of members. A number of responses also identified a disconnect between the IAM's groups and head office in terms of understanding riders needs.

**A number of these suggestions complement plans already in place, and we will look into how we can best respond to the others. We are currently:**

- Looking into additional courses or qualifications for advanced riders so that there are options beyond the advanced test
- Improving the consistency of coaching and advice among groups and observers
- Refreshing our website, modernising our brand and increasing our use of social media in order to improve our appeal to a wider audience
- Planning to increase the representation of motorcyclists within head office, either through a 'motorcycling champion' or through greater consultation with riders and the IAM Motorcycle Forum.

## Conclusion

These results show that the IAM advanced motorcycling test delivers significant benefits to the vast majority of our riders. Improving the skills and attitudes of motorcyclists offers the best avenue to allow them to enjoy their leisure and commuting bike use in safety. However, the IAM are concerned that our ability to get that simple message across to riders is being compromised by public sector spending cuts to road safety officers and the emergency services. Motorcycling has a positive role to play in reducing congestion and emissions and should not be held back by safety concerns. The IAM is ready and willing to work with government, manufacturers, dealers, police, road safety officers and engineers to promote the many benefits of safer motorcycling.



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