

Gerotek – 07/10/2012 by Ian Dewsbury

HOG Pretoria had their annual Advanced Rider Skills Training at Gerotek, presented by Clinton Pienaar, a professional motorbike racer and editor of Super Bike.

The day started off with 19 apprehensive and excited individuals ready to test themselves and their steeds, and of course some just there to play...

The banter amongst the non-hooligan riders was certainly more apprehension than anything else, but about different exercises. These views were mainly imposed by our own minds trying their utmost to make us stop, while our steeds stood there, parking off in the sun with not a care in the world. After some coffee and a chat it was off to the briefing by Clinton. The majority of the people present were there to learn new skills, unlearn bad habits and get used to their overweight beasts and a few were there to jol. The experience ranged from 8 months to "many years" which is where the HOG spirit came in to play as the day progressed. After the discussion and briefing it was off to reality, we now had to do this thing.

In good HOG fashion we proceeded off to the oval for a braking demonstration. Without waffling on so people don't use this as sleeping material it was proven that a Non-ABS machine can stop as quickly or even quicker than its ABS counterpart, the difference is the rider....Probably not applicable to 90% of us mere mortals. Another one which would not have you passing your K53 test - most of us should have by now. Keeping 2 fingers resting on the brakes is not all bad when you see the reaction time difference between the test with fingers on and with the hand fully on the grip. Only maybe a couple of car lengths pending the speed, but as many will know, that can be the difference between a fast heart rate and maybe a little less rubber or hospital food and maybe even worse. Clinton also proved without any doubt that the front brakes are a KEY element in stopping the beasts we enjoy so much.

Now it was time to get the blood coursing through our veins on the oval. For those who have never had the joy of it, it is a weird and wonderful thing, even though the concept of this cambered track is initially not evident. First lap lead by Clinton at a mere 100 on the inside lane, second to 120km/h and then after that it was full taps. At 160km/h plus you are still riding straight even round the 1km corner... Joy of clever engineers. A couple of the "hooligans" were clocking 200km/h, which goes to prove a beast can move.

Off to the straight track to see that one can also stop the raging beast when you have to. Now for the ABS guys it was more a case of getting used to the feel of standing on the brake and taking a handful and letting your faith rest in technology. For the rest of us, our technology was our own little processor and "feel". Again not one the K53 guys like much, but using the front brake certainly stops the overweight steed very effectively. The thing is to let the front suspension take load before grabbing a handful and then to release the pressure just before locking, of course back brake applied too. Some laid some more rubber on the concrete, one of which was a brand new set of tires... From this we progressed to manoeuvring. What? Have these monsters behave like a ballerina? It involved cone weaving at around 40-60km/h (counter steering practice) and then a slow U-turn at each end. Well now, myself especially have seen this done and know it is possible but somewhere there is a learning problem in my circuitry. All went smoothly bar the fact a couple of cones were sent flying, the majority did well and got the beasts to move quite well. The slow U, well the concept is fine, the practise still eludes me.... Practice makes perfect and others getting it right proved to me I am the problem.

The dynamic handling track was next on the list of 5 to conquer and people were beginning to get the heart rates down and be more comfortable with the whole thing. We did a sighting lap with Clinton on his Muscle loaned from Pretoria Harley Davidson which was just as well, turn 3 caught most of us out, tight climbing right hander, but awesome when you got it right. Now we were to apply all the various skills learnt and off we went at our own pace. It was an amazing little track that is so like street riding compared to the likes of Kyalami throwing an amazing assortment of curves at us. It was great watching the people's confidence grow lap by lap, getting their steeds lower at increasing speeds. Now everyone adorning smiles that have been so deserved, they throw the wet track to us. Now for those who did the touring rally this was not scary, but for some it was hard psychologically, but all overcame their fears and did it. This was the way to finish off the morning and to a huge lunch. Gerotek can put a great spread on, then it was maagies vol, ogies toe...

However Clinton had other ideas for us and it was off to the incline start and the decline... Well when you first see this monster in front of you your heart sinks. So as the first brave souls climb up, stop and pull off some of us begin to chill a bit, others were still not so convinced by this concept. Roads are not even permitted to be constructed at these gradients. Ok so off I go, stop and pull off, not so bad. Come the decline well that's another story for someone who is kak bang for heights. As you approach you see nothing under and then its everything visible. To the bottom and relax for a second round. Off we go and all are doing well on the climb, then came the decline again. Now being the one in favour of familiarity I thought I could sneak down the same descent again but Clinton was one the wiser to my tricks. Well jelly legs and heart in the throat we went down after some tips and convincing words by Wesley who was playing on the much steeper gradients. Few of the riders conquered major fears and personal difficulties and Wesley proved that a Harley is capable and could do the 32deg.....both ways. Eish, not for me and my steed.

After conquering the mountain of terror it was off to apply everything on the Alpine track and wow, it throws everything at you in a fairly short distance to round off the course in an entertaining way. Sighting lap again by Clinton on his muscle and then we were on our own for an hour around the 5km circuit. Really good fun from sharp bends, slow ones, opposite camber, varying radius, sharp descents and accents etc...

To finish off the day it was a debriefing and some cold ones. All had an amazing day, conquered fears, learnt new things and techniques in order to take on our roads and the cage drivers now better and safer riders. A necessity in today's time and something I wish I had done years ago rather than now.

Thanks goes to Monique (Registrar)and Marius (Training officer) for the organising on behalf of HOG, the Dealership to loan Clinton the Muscle and Clinton from SA Biking Academy on a well presented and handled course and the Gerotek on a great job catering and service. Lastly thanks to all who attended and the way we all helped everyone in different facets to overcome whatever the respective fear or lack of skill was. It went to show how the group will always help the weaker and show a good spirit. For those who have not done it, make it a date next time it comes around.