

If you want to ride a motorcycle these days, you'll need to jump through many hoops. It starts with a Compulsory Basic Training course which permits you to ride a bike up to 125cc. If you want to progress, it gets rather complicated which I won't break down in detail here, save to say there is an A1 test, an A2 test and there's the Direct Access scheme. Fair enough one might say when one considers how extremely powerful the big sportsbikes can be.

But it was somewhat different in the 60s. I was able to buy an 85 mph 250cc bike with no training or testing whatsoever; just simply stick a pair of L plates on it. I took my test a few months later in small town North Wales. I parked the bike outside the test centre, found the examiner and answered a couple of questions on the Highway Code as we strolled back to the bike. This was in the days of no electric starters. I 'kicked it over' many times but nothing doing. I was facing downhill. "Is it ok if I bump start it?" No smiles. Grudgingly "Go ahead." The bike often failed to co-operate so I was quite adroit at the business of bump starting. It fired straight away. And it was loud. And wouldn't tickover. The examiner walked down to where I had come to a halt with my noisy bike. His mouth was opening and closing but I heard nothing. Obviously I had my helmet on. I shrugged and shook my head. He signalled to turn the engine off. He didn't look particularly amused by my efforts thus far. He remained straight faced as he primed his robotic Department of Transport voice of officialdom. So far, not so good.

"The test will consist of riding around the block and back to the test centre. Ride down the hill and keep turning left. Somewhere on route I will be concealed and then

suddenly appear in front of you holding up my hand. This is your signal to perform an emergency stop. Continue the test". I remembered to make a big deal of looking over my shoulder then bump start it again. For those of you of a certain age, it was almost an impression of the start of the Isle of Man TT race. Off I went, albeit slower. Assuming he was watching, I gave an exaggerated left-hand signal (no indicators in those days) and again at the next turn. Now I was starting the climb which was parallel to the hill I had just come down. About 200 yards away, the tester was concealing himself behind a tree which was narrower in girth than he was. So, no concealment really. I was only doing about 20mph when I eyeballed him. My hands and feet were already hovering over brakes and clutch controls. He then stepped into the road and started to raise his arm when I was about 150 yards away. I immediately came to a halt, let's say, 140 yards from the examiner. An instant emergency stop. Indeed so urgent that even from that distance, he seemed to be a bit confused as to what to do next. Then he beckoned for me to start off again. As I approached him, he waved me past to complete the squared off loop. He slipped through the 'secret' alley and was outside the test centre as I pulled up. I had passed. Not long after, I replaced the 250cc bike with a 500. It started off the kickstart every time. Things were different back then.

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