



The BMW Club
United Kingdom & Ireland



The BMW Club Southern Section

Rider Development Tour - Wales

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RIDER DEVELOPMENT TOUR – WALES

Six days in Wales, in the unpredictable “Welsh sunshine”; bring it on!

Why do this course?

There's always room for improvement in everyone's riding, whether you ride every day, just on sunny days or touring. There is always something new to learn or something you have forgotten, depending on when you last attended any improvement courses.

Why this particular course?

This course is run by RoSPA qualified Advanced Tour Leaders and is a rider development tour; learning enhanced riding skills on beautiful roads in Wales. This course only runs once year, in Wales in May. Having toured with both the tour leaders on this course, we knew we were in good hands as they are professional, caring and fun.

What to expect from the course?

This will depend on the reason for signing up for the course, for me it was to polish what I had learnt on a previous Bike Safe course, but specifically improving handling of the bike whilst slow maneuvering a turn in the road. Whatever your issue is, they will cover it, no embarrassment and no one gets left out!

What's covered?

“Opportunities to improve your observation, road positioning, throttle control and gear selection, as well as developing your confidence with corners, unknown roads, overtakes and braking – all at your own pace. Small group sizes are guaranteed – with a 2:1 coaching ratio and a full group of 4:1 riders, allowing equal time to learn, relax, and ride.”

“With a choice of rider development tours in the UK or Europe, each tour will provide a unique backdrop packed with winding roads, spectacular landscapes and historic landmarks. We'll cover the theory that underpins the fundamental riding skills of being a safer, better rider, before putting them into practice”.

What's included on the course?

- Pre tour pack including tour information, Michelin maps, route notes and GPS routes in Garmin/BMW format.
- Commemorative Polo Shirt for all riders and passengers.
- All accommodation as listed on itinerary
- All breakfasts and dinners (excludes beverages)
- The protection of booking with a fully bonded tour operator
- Motorrad tours expert coach, giving expert advice and support throughout the tour.

Other participants on the tour and their chosen steeds

Ian – K1600, Anil - R1300GS, Stephen and Catherine - R1250GS, Neil - R1250GSA, Peter - R12 NineT, Paul and Rob Tour Leaders -GS1300s and myself Nicole -R12.



Tour members (inset Christine took the photo). L-R Background Rob (Tour Leader), Anil, Stephen, Peter, Paul (Tour Leader), Nicole. L-R Foreground Ian and Neil

Course Report

Arrival, meet and greet

After a leisurely ride all day to arrive at the Cawdaw Arms in Llandeilo; unless arriving from a Scottish island as one member did, taking a couple of days! Navigating the barrier code of the car park, we unloaded and lugged our bags down many steep steps to the front of the hotel to book in.

The rooms were spacious and roomy with a seating area so we settled ourselves in. Then a WhatsApp message arrived from one of the tour guides, Paul *"I'm out the front in the sun having a drink. Feel free to join me"*.

We make our way downstairs to meet him, greeting everyone on the tour, with a drink and chatting as some have met on previous tours and toured with Paul before; us included. The day ends with a lovely meal in the restaurant, discussion about the tour and chatter of many other tours people have been on and many funny stories.

Classroom, headsets and a figure of eight ride

Day two back down for breakfast altogether and meeting the second tour guide, Rob who we have toured with before too. Then off next door to the classroom for the morning, to cover the finer aspects of an enhanced course and to find out what everyone wants to learn, or to be able to improve from the course. It was heart-warming to hear that what appears to be very capable riders' (having at least ridden to Wales) still had niggly issues they wanted to iron out of their riding habits to experience a smoother, safer ride. Everyone, including the pillion, wrote down what they wanted to learn or be able to accomplish in their riding from the course and some had similar issues.

Over lunch we sorted out the myriad of Sena versions and Cardo headsets to be able to talk to the tour guides, so that we can be in touch for the riding. We all rushed off excitedly to get our bike gear on and waited pairing with the tour leaders in the car park with the bikes. We rode off in groups of 3 with a tour leader, which would change on the next ride.

Our group with Paul consisted of Stephen and Catherine on their R1250GS, Peter on his R12 NineT and my R12. Our group set off first as we rode out of the little town riding a figure of eight circuit along various A and B roads in the Brecon Beacons. Each rider took it in turns to listen to the Tour Leader's advice via the coms, instructing us on the finer points of positioning for the up and coming situation, albeit a roundabout, bend, navigating obstacles etc. The assessed rider and Paul were the only ones to speak; the others listened awaiting their turn as we all learnt from each others ride.

The route took us over a mountain pass over the Black Mountain, which was spectacular along single track roads and through villages with 20mph speed limits. We stopped at Glenusk Services café sitting outside in the sunshine, mid-way before setting off again and were joined by the other group with Rob. Everyone took it in turns to hear their assessment from Paul. There were a lot of tractors on the roads on our way back that we needed to overtake, before we finally returned



to the hotel. Both groups sat in the courtyard having a drink in the sunshine, discussing our rides before getting changed for dinner.

Coms problems, goat tracks and a balance issue

Day three; after a hearty breakfast and packing our bikes up, we reset the coms as we were with Tour Leader Rob today and set off. I was first to be assessed

as we left Llandeilo along A40/A483, then Peter had his assessment until we stopped at a cafe for a mid-morning break and Rob gave us our assessments, which were favourable.

Steve and Catherine had their assessment on the way to lunch at the Cross Foxes on the way to Dolgellau. After lunch Steve and Catherine had coms issues and couldn't link their helmets to Rob, they changed to Paul's group and Anil on his R1000GS joined our group.

We set off again, fuelling up as the R12s have smaller tanks than the GSs. This time Rob assessed Anil first then Peter and myself in turn as we rode on A and B roads across to Festiniog and on to Bala. We fuelled up again for tomorrow and rode the last 10 miles along an unnamed road known to the tour leaders as the 'goat track'. Our route continued over a mountain pass which had spectacular views as we wound our way down, descending through an eerie dark pine forest with huge fallen pines at the entrance (reminiscent of Lord of the Rings), riding along more wiggly, narrower tracks to our hotel Vyrnwy (built in 1890) overlooking lake Vyrnwy and the dam.

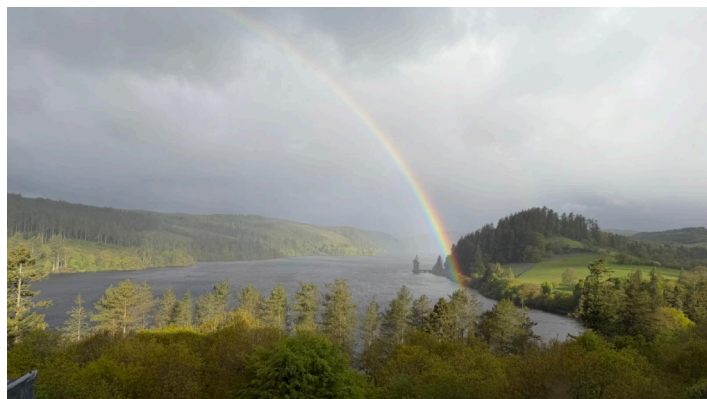


On arrival, Rob demonstrated how to balance my bike in order to be able to manoeuvre it manually in the car park. This was one of my points I wanted to know how to do, as I had seen mostly men doing it effectively. It was a bit of a struggle and Rob assisted me as I lacked confidence with the weight of the R12, albeit low down and although I understood the techniques he was demonstrating, it would take a lot more practice for me to achieve it. One for when I return home!

Peter had gone up to our hotel room and I joined him; it was a nice room with a quirky bathroom with a bath overlooking the breath taking views of the lake and surrounding hills. Once we changed out of our bike gear we went down to meet up with the rest of the group on the veranda, enjoying a well-earned drink in the sunshine, chatting and taking pictures overlooking the lake. We all returned to our rooms getting ready for dinner in the restaurant that overlooked the lake, eating a delicious 3 course meal, whilst reminiscing of the day's ride and other adventures we had all been on some with Motorrad tours and others not.

Faulty bike, mountain track fears and a long recovery

Day four and the lake this morning had a beautiful rainbow arced across it and the turret of the mini castle resembled colourful flags with the sun reflecting the colours of the surrounding hillsides off it. After a filling tasty breakfast we got our bike gear on and went down to the car park to set up the coms for today's ride. Overnight it had been raining very heavily and was still drizzling as we went down to our bikes.



To start with, Peter's R12 NineT would not start, tour leaders; Paul tried with a battery charger but the battery was full, Rob tried jump start it but it still died immediately. Peter contacted BMW assistance who would come to see if they could do anything, we all rode off leaving Peter at the hotel to await recovery. Whilst we waited I chatted with Anil who was worried about going down the goat track again in wet weather, as he does not like heights. I tried to allay his fears as much as I could, suggesting not look to the side that falls away, just ahead at where the bike needed to go. Eventually, the two

groups rode the goat track down in the rain out onto the track; despite the rain the views across the valley were stunning but bleak in low cloud. We waited for the remainder of the group with headlights snaking in and out of view across the narrow passes to regroup again. Once onto the main roads we split into two groups again, although our group was just Rob, Anil and I now.

Anil and I took turns at being assessed until we stopped at a cafe called Caffi Siabod in Capel Curig just as the other group were about to pull out. We sat in the warm dry café with a hot beverage before heading off again as the weather

improved. Anil and I laughed about the goat track not being as bad as he expected, including an arm cove barrier that we did not see the previous day! Unfortunately, with no phone reception we were unable to contact Peter to find out how he was getting on, deciding to try again at the lunch stop.



We rode on down narrow lanes and A roads, practising what we had been instructed and as we went over a mountain pass I stopped and took pictures in the sunshine then rode on to catch up Rob and Anil who were chatting around the next bend. During our lunch we heard from Peter, he was being relayed back home as they could not fix the problem, which was a real shame. It had started raining hard outside, so we decided to wait it out before moving on. Rob went through setting yourself up for approaches to roundabouts and we spoke about overtaking as essentially our overtaking was good but could always be improved. Rob demonstrated on his white board, how to perform a more effective and safer overtake which we would try out along the A5.

Now the rain had stopped we went to play at overtaking (Anil and I did appear as if we were playing). Fortunately the A5 was relatively clear, we were to pull out into the opposite lane, momentarily checking for hazards with a new enhanced view and if clear continue the overtake; if not clear pull back in again. We performed this with Anil and myself overtaking each other and Rob advising what to do to each rider in turn; the first person would ride at

45mph in position 2 in the lane; the second rider would pull over into the other lane if free to check then over take the first person and become the first rider with the second rider now performing an overtake. To start with Anil and I got too excited at what we were doing and our speed or positioning was wrong, Rob said we were like chickens! Eventually we got it nailed, smoothly piggy backing each other in overtakes and having fun. We fuelled up and Rob led us back to the hotel via a different route getting us back at 6.30pm. Over dinner the other group regaled us with their sightseeing of Conwy castle today. Between Rob and I, we heard from Peter. BMW Assistance recovered Peter and the bike and he eventually go home by taxi at 11.30pm.

All four seasons in a day

Day Five and still raining, well it is Wales after all! After breakfast we checked out and linked our coms before leaving in our groups. Miraculously all of us were linked to both tour leaders, as chaotic conversations ensued until the groups lost contact again riding out of the hotel and along the narrow lane in the rain. We rode over a pass which was very narrow and twisty, getting quite treacherous in places. We rode to the Cross Foxes and had a drink whilst dripping all over their floor.

We started off again and over the Cambrian mountain range in the only sun we had all day, I took photos of Devils Bridge from the top (*the location where the Devil was banished from Wales! It's also where 3 bridges are built on top of each*



other) and the views from Cwmystwyth lead mine near Aberwyswith, whilst Anil and Rob waited around the corner. As we rode on the weather worsened; the rain came down in torrents, then hailstones followed by white hailstones covering the ground in white pea shingle as we rode into Erwood station café. For the next hour, whilst we ate lunch, it rained biblically with some lightning thrown in for good measure. When it calmed down I went out and took photos then got cornered by an old couple talking to me about helmets. I had to dash out to get on my bike as the others were waiting.

We rode onward over the Brecon Mountain where at first I thought someone had spilt washing up liquid all over the road, but then thought it would have to be a lot, like a lorry load. It was snow! We rode down more carefully and the temperatures didn't rise above 5°C, I had my handlebar heated grips on setting 3 and it did not burn! We rode onward skirting Rhondda and Bridgend, eventually arriving at our destination in Cowbridge in glorious sunshine looking like drowned rats. After parking out the front on the road, we unloaded finding our rooms then went for a boot beer reminiscing in the day's events. With half an hour to spare to change for dinner, we sat down in a quiet area and Neil, Rob and Paul made some speeches and bought red wine for the table. The evening was entertaining with stories and laughter until we went off to bed.

Finale

The next morning we all said our goodbyes as we headed off to our respective homes. This was an amazing tour enhancing your riding skills in a stunning environment, meeting friendly like-minded riders under expert guidance of the tour leaders. What are you waiting for? Go book yourself a place for 9-14 May 2027!

