



# Learn to Ride

Teaching young people the skills and art of  
Motorcycle Road Racing



## **Junior Racer Introductory and Training Programme 2022**

### **Coaching of Junior People and Creating Effective Coaches**

**These documents are offered to parents, caregivers, coaches, clubs and riders for the purpose of developing junior motorcycle racers and trainers/coaches of junior racers. The overall goal being to help develop new cohorts of racers and trainers to become the expert racers and trainers of the future in New Zealand motorcycle road racing.**

**Please note that these documents are provided to, and supported by, Motorcycling New Zealand Inc, but do not represent any official statement by Motorcycling New Zealand Inc.**

#### **Introduction**

This section is a reflection on the experience and conclusions about coaching of junior people to ride and race motorcycles that Moto Academy NZ has reached over more than 15 years of coaching.

These conclusions have been reached by distilling knowledge and influences from many outside suppliers of wisdom such as other rider coaching organisations, coaching courses and other sports coaches. The conclusions also distill personal thoughts and conclusions drawn from experimentation with different coaching methods and the observations made from those years of coaching of junior (and not so junior) motorcycle racers.

This primer to the coaching of junior people is not offered as the final word on coaching or the coaching of junior people. Nor will there be information contained within, with which everyone will agree. But these are the observations and conclusions of Moto Academy NZ and we hope they will at least provide a launching pad from which we can develop a new generation of rider coaches/trainers and new generations of competent and skillfull junior racers. We hope that the information and knowledge presented will not be cherry picked, but rather worked through systematically, but the primer is offered to you to work with as you see fit.



One thing we do need to keep in the back of our minds while teaching our junior racers, is that motorcycle racing is a competitive undertaking for individuals, but at the same time, not ignoring there is a team behind the rider. But motorcycle racing is not the same team-based cooperative competition that football or rugby might be. Tennis or cycling might be better comparisons. Therefore riders should be reminded from time to time, but NOT constantly, they are learning to be competitive athletes, it is not the objective to simply spend time riding around a circuit. This lesson might perhaps come at a time somewhere along the journey rather than early on. But if junior riders are not taught that lesson at some early stage, they will not readily develop the mental and riding skills needed to be strongly competitive as they grow their racing careers.

Please note however, that this does not mean that riders should be taught that winning is all that matters and to then do 'whatever it takes'. Those are attitudes for riders at very different stages in their careers and can be developed at later stages. But they can only develop the winning attitudes if they have been taught to understand the competitive nature of the sport they have chosen. At junior ages the lessons around competition should initially be about being safe and fair, while remaining competitive at a fun level. This is a balance, but one that is definitely possible to achieve.

Young riders, and their supporters, need also to be taught early the values of respect for the team around them, for the people running events for them, MNZ and other officials and the people who run the sport in general. People do not always agree with one another over issues, but the key is for young riders to treat others with respect at all times.

Please therefore, take the time to read, consider and digest the lessons offered here and think about how you might apply them to your junior rider and your own coaching methods.

## **Coaching - Personal approach**

Our experience has shown that the coaching of junior riders is quite different to the coaching of teen or adult riders. Coaching junior people is as much about providing an environment of pastoral care and encouragement as it is about imparting information and knowledge. Tasks need to be changed frequently for junior riders. As the junior riders reach their teens the approach can become much more direct and information laden. The instruction will begin to take increasing amounts of time to master new skills or knowledge. So the type and amount of patience required with older riders differs to that of junior riders.

For junior riders, the uptake of knowledge and development of new skills will be rapid, sometimes very rapid. However, the ways in which that knowledge is imparted into the junior rider is different to the older rider. The coach and rider should seek to form a bond wherein the rider is able to trust completely the knowledge, skills and personality of the coach (more on this later).

The learning environment for junior riders that should be created is one:

- of encouragement;
- of fun; where activities and practices are fun, not a drag and changed often;
- where not too much is tried to be done all at once;
- where there must be no fear of failure, for failure is where the biggest lessons lie;



- where there might be strong sense of reward for success; incentivisation;
- where parental input lies on a parallel path with the coach so that the parents are as big a part of the progress as is possible and can see for themselves the rider and coach performing and growing.

Therefore, in order to achieve this encouraging and fun environment/atmosphere, we have found it very important to become a pastoral carer for the junior rider, alongside their parent(s) so that the rider becomes happy to listen, learn and discuss their riding with their coach. In that way also, the parent(s) are included, learn that the coach has their child's best interests at heart and that they are striving for success for their junior rider. The parents should also be included in learning how to coach some of the techniques so that they may coach the rider to practice at times when the coach/trainer is not present.

### **Junior riders learning methods**

Coaches must be aware firstly that people fall into different types of learner, but also that young people learn differently to people who are older, e.g. teens and adults.

Coaches must discover quickly what type of learner their junior rider is, i.e. do they need pictures, can they read and learn, do they respond better to stick or carrot, do they need deep demonstration or can they work it out for themselves? These are only some of the questions the coach can ask themselves, can observe, and can ask the parents for their impressions.

Junior riders also tend to respond better to 'gamification' of their learning. So it works well for the coach to find ways to gamify the skills lessons. This is possible by making the lessons competitive between riders or between the rider and the task itself, depending of course on the lesson being taught, setting tasks that have a gaming aspect to them and setting a risk/reward aspect to the lessons i.e. a reward for achieving a set goal, which you might decide to award regardless of the achievement because the rider is there to have fun, not to be disappointed.

Junior learners also tend to have much shorter attention spans than older riders, so the amount of time that can be spent working on any given task will be shorter than it might be with an older rider and the task should be changed to a new one more frequently. 15 minutes at a time is more than sufficient for any given task before it is time to rest and switch to the next task. The session might then cycle around a selection of tasks, for example: front braking, rear braking, body position, emergency braking; then cycle back to the start and cycle through that list two or three times in a coaching session.

As the rider, coach and parents develop their coaching/learning relationships more deeply, the lessons will begin to become increasingly deep and more results driven. But this will be learned and understood by the coach and parents as to how and when the change in approach should begin and to what level.



## **Safety**

The rider must be at the core of a safety first approach and the coach is the leader of that approach. The coach must ensure that the motorcycle, that the riders safety gear and the site of training are all safe and fit for purpose. The coach must also ensure that riders have the correct motorcycle for their physical size and skill level.

Coaches must ensure that the space chosen for rider practice to be undertaken is completely safe, and under their control. If rider training is to be undertaken at large racetracks, it must be done with only the junior riders on track and in a controlled fashion. Remember, these are training and practice sessions, not races. The junior riders will of course progress to training and practice of racing itself, but safety and control must also be maintained at all levels.

Coaches should have at their disposal, from one source or another:

- high-visibility vests for riders and for coaches who venture out into the coaching space,
- sports cones for setting out of training spaces and activity spaces,
- flags or indicator devices of some description to communicate with riders and,
- perhaps a first-aid kit for addressing minor injuries in the case of riders tipping off their bikes while practicing (because this will definitely occur).

It must be made clear to everyone involved, that the coaches and coaching assistants if any, have full control of the coaching/training space during training sessions, especially if the space is being used by multiple different users.

It is good practice for junior riders to wear their safety gear any time they are on the bike.

Certainly, any time they are on the race track, either Kart-track or big-track, they must wear all of their safety equipment. If riders are practicing low-speed skills in the driveway for example, coaches and parents as trainers might use some degree of leeway as to what safety gear the riders can use. But it is VITAL that riders use a minimum of: helmet, boots, gloves and heavy clothes to avoid injury should they fall over.

The overall recommendation of Moto Academy NZ and MNZ therefore, is that riders wear their safety equipment whenever they are on the bike and at MNZ permitted events, it is mandatory that a helmet is worn at any time the rider is on their bike when it is moving, especially with the engine running.

## **Community**

Coaches should do the best they are able to include the junior riders community of peers, supporters and caregivers (e.g. parents) in their training/racing endeavours. Young people are strongly encouraged to do well when they have a community of supporters around them. It is much more difficult for them when they are, or feel that they are on their own. Coaches should encourage riders to talk to their peers and schools about their sport and their achievements when possible. This will also help the sport to grow through word of mouth.



## Training spaces

The training programme workbook and the templates contained therein will be available *via* the MNZ website, from the Moto Academy NZ website, from your local club and from approved trainers. Everyone, including prospective coaches and rider, parents and clubs will at least then have a standard place to at least start from and a set of standard learning modules to work from and through.

Moto Academy NZ and MNZ make no representation that the information and methods contained with these modules is the end of the story or the only story. However, the modules have been created with the best of intentions and on the understanding that if coaches and riders use the modules correctly, they will arrive at a good level of skill and ability. Different coaches will have different ideas about the best way to approach teaching with a given rider, but the Moto Academy NZ/MNZ modules provide everyone with a good starting point which can be adapted.

It is the opinion of Moto Academy NZ that early Learning to Ride skills development are best undertaken in free and quiet, closed spaces such as tennis courts, closed carparks, cul-de sac streets or best of all, closed Kart racing circuits. Early skills development is undertaken by doing repeated 'skills drills' by riders repeating a specific skill over and over (for a short period of time as suggested earlier) without any danger of interruption or anyone else getting in the way, at any time. There is no need to wait to go to 'the track' to practice these skills if other spaces are available.

As rider then progress towards the 'Learning to Race' modules, access to a Kart track is almost vital. Kart tracks provide the space for junior riders to challenge the riding skills they have learned, constantly and at low speeds. The importance of challenging their skills constantly, on the low-speed Kart track, is so that their learning curves continue to remain steep. Training slow, learner riders on 'big-tracks' is very sub-optimal as they can end up going too fast, the corners are too big to learn much, there is too much space so they don't learn good braking techniques and the tracks are too big so they can end up getting lost on the track. Kart tracks are designed for lower speeds and rapid presentation of one corner and challenge rapidly, one after another, and riders do not get lost on the smaller circuit.

If a Kart circuit is not available and a big circuit must be used, Moto Academy NZ suggests that clubs and trainers use only a section of the circuit and cone off a 'track within a track' or a training space on the main straight, or something of that type. Information about access to Kart tracks across New Zealand can be obtained MNZ, your local club, or by approaching your local Kartsport club or Bucket Racing New Zealand. Bear in mind that some clubs are good with bikes, others can be not so keen on having bikes on their tracks, and some have resource consent issues precluding bikes and bike noise. So tact, diplomacy and respect are all very important. Bikes do not have rights to be at Kart tracks, but if approached about using the space for junior training, they may be more sympathetic. Bear in mind also all of the restrictions and requirements they will place on use of bikes on their track (e.g. noise, track protection parts).



## **Use of the Training Modules**

The training modules have been designed to be a step-by-step guide for coaches, parents and riders to use at different times and entirely at their own pace. One or more module might be demonstrated by a professional (or lead) coach or by a skilled parent to the parents and riders, who can then take the module and work on them over and over at their own pace, before being revisited by the lead coach to move on to the next set of modules.

The coaches, trainers or parents as trainers can then work through the different lessons contained within the modules with riders either one on one, or in groups. Lead coaches can assess the riders and their development against the modules to ensure that the riders have become competent at the skills set out in each module, or whether they need to continue working on different areas.

The programme makes no apology for focussing on the use to the KayoMiniGP150 and on the development of modern riding skills and styles. Moto Academy NZ has observed junior riders being taught 'old school' techniques and missing important skills (such as rear brake use). If a junior rider has ambitions to higher glories such as international racing (e.g. Red Bull Rookies Cup, Asia Talent Cup and the like) it is vital they learn new riding and racing methods. If they have old-school techniques they will simply be left behind and indeed never be selected for those programmes. Moto Academy NZ has been involved directly in these processes, so has first-hand knowledge of them.

## **How to use the modules**

The anticipation therefore is that prospective coaches/trainers or parents as trainers will download and either print out a set of programme modules for use with each different junior rider in their charge, or store them on a portable tablet/laptop device. The trainers will then prepare by reading and understanding the modules for themselves and become familiar with the steps provided. Most of the initial stages of the training programme are very 'hands on' type of skills development and coaches/parents should be in close proximity to riders to provide assistance as and when required and also to provide rapid and constructive feedback, guidance and encouragement. As indicated earlier, the early modules can be undertaken in appropriately sized driveways, quiet streets, carparks, tennis courts (as appropriate) or at kart tracks and there is no need to wait for access to the 'big tracks'. At the early stages of training, rapid feedback, on the spot, is important so that junior riders can link immediately what they have just done to what they are trying to achieve.

Parents as trainers with little or no previous knowledge will be best placed to engage a club member or a professional coach/trainer, like Moto Academy NZ or others that are found across New Zealand. We have found that adult Learn to Ride professionals are not well equipped to teach juniors and that many of the skills are not ideal for racing development. But there is no reason why individuals might not approach a Learn to Ride coach to get started.

Depending on how often riders are able to practice their skill development, it is envisioned that this early part of the training might take several weeks or even months.



## **Repetition**

It must be understood that most riders will need to repeat some of the lesson steps many times before they can be considered competent. It is not sufficient to expose the rider to a skill just once and consider they have therefore gained that skill. It must be understood that the aim of this training programme is to develop well-rounded, skilled junior riders. It is not the aim to simply work through the programme as quickly as possible and just tick the boxes! Riders who have done that will be found out very quickly when it comes time to progress to the 'Learning to Race' modules. Of course, some riders will gain the skills more rapidly than others and can move

through the modules more quickly, but all riders need to gain the skills and become competent riders before we expose them to the road-racing environment.

The better skilled our junior riders become at actually riding their bikes at a good level before they start racing, the more enjoyment they and their parents will get from the sport, and the more successful the riders will be.

## **Training Camps**

One of the plans we would like to put into action is the concept of Motorcycle Racing training camps to be run for 2-4 days during school holidays. Logistically, this would most likely be best done at one or two locations in the North Island and one or two in the South Island. Riders would be able to attend as many of the camps they wish to or are able to. Spring/Summer would be the best time to hold such camps, with the hope of fine weather for all 2-4 days.

It will be recognised that there will likely be riders of all abilities attending said camps, so different trainers may be required and riders broken into different groups.

The camps would be best undertaken at karting circuits, or suitable spaces such as the track extension at Manfeild.

If the timing is suitable, we may be able to organise for New Zealand Junior World Championship Moto3 and Red Bull Rookie racer Cormac Buchanan to be a part of the training team.

Please watch the MNZ/Moto Academy NZ Facebook spaces for more information as the year progresses.

## **Vetting of suitable coaches**

One of the aspects of the programme that exists outside of the coaching itself, is that we identify and encourage suitable coaches and that we identify those who are not/might not be suitable people. We have not as yet identified where the responsibility for this 'vetting' might lie and to what degree of intrusion this vetting might need to go.





## Conclusion

Overall therefore, it is important that coaches:

- form pastoral care relationships with junior riders,
- form collaborative relationships with their parents/caregivers,
- do not put undue pressure on junior riders,
- maintain safe standards and environments at all times,
- find ways to gamify lessons to maintain the focus of the junior riders
- ensure the riders are competent at the different skills before progressing to the next
- teach new, modern riding techniques
- maintain a safe, fun and fair environment for they junior riders.