

Broadford Track Day Mk II



I was planning to do a track day for two months. Winton is very soft with restrictions on rider, bike and gear, but it's soooooo far away. Just getting there would be enough of adventure, require overnight accommodation, meal and so on. Phillip Island is world class, but it's more expensive and really hard with restrictions. Broadford is cheap, and it's got shorter straights and tighter turns (so I heard). Just as I like it. So Broadford it is.

Every time the event date would come it would be a rainy forecast, so I would skip it to another week... I almost accepted the fact it's going to be rainy the whole winter. Then the long weekend came with a dry forecast on Monday. At the same time Glenn on Facebook called for Broadford accomplices... Of course I was in!

That would be my second track day for a life. I am sure you've read the report from the first one a year ago. What a difference, I should tell you!

The day for me started at 6 am, dark, gloomy and cold. I decided to ride to the track on the bike with full backpack of supplies. Being Russian, I underestimated cold and darkness. By the time I made half the way I was almost frozen to the point of stopping to make a fire with bike's petrol. My jacket has really tight neck opening (or I have really thick neck), so I could not fasten the upper strip. It turns out heaps of heat can escape through a small patch of bare neck at 110 km/h. The simple scarf would resolve the situation. When I managed to get to the service station I couldn't press the buttons on Eftpos machine properly - so frozen were my fingers.

That small ordeal didn't prevent me noticing how many trailers with racing bikes were on the station. Literally - all the spots! That is my flock! These are my friends!

Got to the complex. Paperwork, leathers for hire, very brief scrutineering. Very, very brief compared to last year. I think that was because I washed the bike the night before. Having shiny clean bike greatly reduces the number of questions to its mechanicals!

Glenn, Rod, Paul and Pierre were already there. Scott was also seen there, although occasionally. All bikes on wheel stands, tyres in tyre warmers, mine humbly on centre stand with bare rubber. Hmm. What's the point of tyre warmers? I can get tyres up to temp by first lap on the track. They don't allow overtaking on the first lap anyway. I would understand for slicks, but for road tyres? Need to ask. Maybe I am missing something.

And the number of participants - amazing! I think it was about 100 riders. These are my people! These are my tribe! I took the Red group in the hope of sharing the track with less people. Pierre, Rod and Glen took Blue. Paul was in Yellow. And all the groups were crowded.

Practice really makes difference, I should tell you. The last time I did the track - I was battling with skidding rear, downshifting, running wide, etc. This time I never skid the rear. I didn't use rear brake at all. I put my feet higher on the pegs to avoid scratching and never bothered to bring them back. That is when I realized I could do the whole loop in just one gear. That was THE finding! That frees so many resources for other things like lines, braking, cornering! And the added benefit of exiting the corner at 9000 rpm, which is so easy and fast transforms into 13000 rpm.

I was very, very confident at the track. Very comfortable and confident. People in my group disappointed me. They would usually overtake my 600cc on straight line, then really, really slow past the corners. I had to hold back and wait their slow manoeuvres. Rules don't allow overtaking on the inside in the red group. Soon I was able to overtake them on the outside on half of all the corners. But then there were straight lines again...

As I have so much "free" attention I tried to play again with body position, lines and braking. Braking was very easy. As soon as I understood (couple months ago, thanks Steve, Ben and other guys), that trail braking is not evil, it is as good as other techniques to pass the corners - I could easily control the cornering speed. If I felt I was too fast, I just continued braking bit more into the corner, then smoothly progressively release the brake and roll on the throttle. And I never run wide because of that.

The tyres, Pilot Road 2, felt really good on track. I lost traction only once on hard acceleration exit, but bike corrected itself momentary.

The other thing I played with was body position. In general - I don't like shifting the body. But it does some kind of magic. If I hang half a cheek before the corner, I usually pass it better. But I don't think it has something to do with body. It is just the preparation. If I am prepared for the corner, I am controlling myself and I have time to play with body position - I am well prepared, so better the pass. Is it what they call "commit to" the turn? So for me shifting the butt is more like a trigger to a number of other reflexes to prepare for the turn.

Despite all these smoothness and consistency, judging by the photos from the track - I wasn't even close to dragging the knee. I tried, but couldn't do that. Not enough angle. However, after a little bit of thinking, I realized I shouldn't pursue this goal. Smoothness, consistency, looseness are the main priorities. If I can easily pass the guys on the inside, smoothly, fully prepared, in control, and still having heaps of space between the knee and the ground - isn't it the best thing to wish? I'd better work on looseness - so many times I found my arms locked.

I cannot give feedback on Paul's ride as his session was right after mine. But I've seen Rod, Pierre and Glenn a lot. These guys are fantastic. Very fast, very smooth.

Being so confident at some point I was frightened the track day may become boring for me. Right at that point I saw the ambulance going in to the field. And the bike hearse (you know, the trailer to remove trashed bikes from track) right after it. That was a good reminder of dangers of motorcycle sport. Then Glen crashed. Not sure what happened. He told us he was almost stopped at the point of incident, but the left knob was all bent and damaged. Fairings took a very minor damage. Glenn was able to repair it just before the next session.

The ambulance went again to the field. And the bike hearse. All in one (1-2) corner, the one I am the most comfortable in. Then Glenn crashed again. On the left side again. The knob wasn't there now, so fairings suffered. Thankfully, Glenn was okay. Look how experienced he was - cold-hearted collected all plastic pieces, calmly waited for the end of the session, and rode back.

Then the third time ambulance went to the field with three bikes lying on the ground. I took a look at the bike when they brought it in. The damage wasn't too bad, all repairable and easy, but... it was an inch-hole in the subframe. I cannot imagine how could this happen. The subframe would bend, scratch, skew, whatever - nah. Clear, accurate inch hole right in the middle of the subframe arm.

WTF? Were there couple of SUVs up on the hill just above the track? Maybe these guys shoot the poor rider with armour-piercing bullet? Anyway, the guy said he "nicked" the other rider on overtaking. Again - the same (1-2) corner.

Better not to look at these crashes, as my next session was jerky and poor. Maybe I was just tired - 4 o'clock already. So I packed up and went home with great feeling of fulfilment, joy and peace.

P.S.: instead of "track" recommended 30/30 tyre pressure I used 32/38, which is -4/-4 to 36/42 recommended by Honda. Instead of "full leather" gloves I used light textile with knuckle protection. The difference in protection is not as big as difference in throttle control.

Roman Biaroza