

# Reflections of a life-long learner

Home / 2016 / August / Opinion piece / Reflections of a Life-long Learner



The NZ Curriculum vision calls for ‘young people ... who will be confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners.’ Recently, I’ve been challenged in my own learning, and have reflected on how this vision relates to me as a ‘not-so-young’ life-long learner.

I’ve been riding motorbikes off and on for over 40 years. My current enthusiasm may be a desire to relive the glory days. Maybe just an expensive late-life crisis!

For us ‘mature’ riders, there is a dark side to this return to youth. Although motorcycles make up only 5% of all vehicles, motorcyclists account for 15% of all fatalities, and 10% of all road users injured. And the over 40s are disproportionately represented.

It was my desire to keep myself intact and to continue enjoying my riding career that prompted me to enrol in a [Ride Forever Gold](#) full-day course run by [Roadsafe](#).

As a younger person, I had considered that I was a competent rider — after all, I had survived several decades largely unscathed. But, attending this course challenged my assumptions and caused me to question my own competence. It was my response to this challenge that prompted me to think about my approach to learning in the context of that NZC vision.

A key aspect of the course was to identify the bad habits that had become ingrained in my riding, and to focus on, ‘Why’ new ways of approaching our riding were needed.

Some of the key skills being taught and practiced include:

- Emergency braking from speed — working to reduce braking distances through focus and practice
- Controlling the bike at slow speeds — including being able to do a controlled full-lock turn within a single lane
- Choosing the optimum, safest line on unfamiliar roads — delaying the entry into a corner and hitting the apex only when the exit can be seen
- Position your body, especially your head and eyes, to focus on where you need to be going on the road — not on the danger you are trying to avoid
- Above all, it was about understanding that, if things go wrong, you need to trust your brakes, your suspension, and your tyres

Thinking about my responses to these challenges in light of the NZ Curriculum vision:

**Confidence:** As a young rider (and like many of my contemporaries) I had plenty of this! But, by challenging my abilities and assumptions, this false confidence of the youthful rider soon disappeared. Bad habits were exposed and new skills learned and practiced. The most powerful learning came from understanding why those bad habits were not keeping me safe. Without understanding the why — I had just been lucky to survive intact.

The other key confidence builder was, understanding the need to practice specific skills every time I got on board the bike, and reflect on my progress until the skills become ingrained and automatic.

**Connected:** Obviously, my first priority here is for me to stay connected with the bike!

With most of the course participants being fellow members of the Wellington Ulysses Club, there was a fair amount of well-intentioned ribbing going on. But, by watching, copying, and discussing other riders' techniques, an environment of connected learning developed through the day. This collective, shared understanding of our learning continues as we meet up for weekend or longer rides.

**Actively involved**

It's easy to be actively involved when you are passionate about a subject. For me, the passion comes from the thrill and freedom that motorcycling brings — the call of the open road, and the satisfaction of mastering a new set of riding skills.

**Lifelong learner**

For some of my contemporaries it is difficult for them to acknowledge that they have anything more to learn about riding a motorcycle. Surely, 40 years and still being here is testament to that? And for many, the older we get, the better we were! For some returning riders, an admission that they still have more to learn would be bruising to their aging egos.

I thought about my own attitude to learning as a young person at school. My learning was framed by chapters and bookended with exams. Learning was something that finished once I had mastery (or at least a Pass).

As educators and parents, I believe it is vital that we model what life-long learning looks like. Just like our motorcycle adventures — learning is a journey, not a destination!

Although I can no longer fit the NZC vision as a young person, there is no doubt that my new skills and understandings will help to keep the young person alive in my soul.

Long may we ride!



## **Ross Alexander**

[Ross Alexander](#) comes from a primary school teaching background. Since 2000 he has worked on a number of TKI projects, including the development of the Enabling e-Learning website and the e-Learning planning Framework. He is currently programme lead on the TKI Channel Support project.