

Rare Honda helps bikers get the Country Mile message

Motorcycle enthusiasts could be forgiven for wondering why a rare and desirable Sports bike like the Honda CBR 600RR Carbon is currently sharing garage space with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary's front line fleet of 1200cc BMW machines. Though an expertly ridden, fully liveried police specification BMW is far from slow - as criminals across the south west will testify - the limited edition Honda is nimble, lightweight - and about as quick as a Porsche 911.

The piledriving performance, finely honed image and £7500 price tag involved in ownership of this race-bred but roadgoing Honda are - for sports bike enthusiasts - key elements in its magical allure. With price and scarcity putting it tantalisingly beyond most riders' reach, just hauling a bike like this onto its stand is often enough to start crowds gathering.

This, indeed, is the principal reason why the Honda has a vital part in the DfT-funded Devon Country Mile project. Provided at no cost on a long-term basis by Newton-Abbot based Torbay Motorcycles, the machine is making crowd-pulling appearances at shows and bikers' meeting places in the region - as a focal point in helping to deliver safety messages - very close to home...

MPC Paul White is one of the officers using the bike to get those messages onto the radar of motorcyclists not best known for communicating with the Police - except in acrimonious roadside circumstances. He says: "The Honda is a real draw, providing opportunities to strike up informal conversations with those whose life revolves around the magnetism of powerful bikes. These people - though they probably don't appreciate it themselves, can be definite risk takers when they're riding. With three fatalities in the Country Mile area already this year, we're putting forward an alternative view, offering advice on improving skills, maybe pointing riders towards further training through Bikesafe, the new Max Rider programme for south west riders, or other advanced riding schemes..."

The Honda and MPC White have also made appearances at some of the best known bike clubs in and around the Country mile area. Amongst these is the Phoenix Bike Club in Bideford, which has been particularly receptive to the work of MPC White and his colleagues in the Devon and Cornwall Police motorcycle wing following the loss of a highly regarded member in one of those tragic fatalities earlier this year.

As a group motorcyclists account for just 2% of road mileage - but are massively over-represented in some 30% of fatalities and serious injuries on Britain's roads. Some might argue using high performance machines just to grab attention is hardly a direct route to reducing that toll - yet Country Mile partners the Police, County Council and Fire and rescue services agree that communicating safety-related messages to motorcyclists is notoriously difficult. MPC White is convinced the sporting Honda has opened doors

previously locked and barred. We're coming to the end of the season," he says, "...but I'll wholeheartedly recommend something very similar next year. Sure, we've learnt a few lessons, but we've found motorcyclists everywhere genuinely prepared to listen. Myself and my colleagues all have first hand experience of picking up the pieces following collisions. All we're asking motorcyclists to do is think about whether their riding standard could be improved... before its too late."