



PROJECT FIT-TO-RIDE

THE PROBLEMS COME FROM WITHIN

Craig Finlayson has had five months of riding courses, dietary help and fitness advice to get his riding back on track. Now it's time to look inside his head

Words and Pictures **Matt Hull**

THE STORY SO FAR

Meet Craig Finlayson. He's a handy rider, but he says he's not as sharp as he used to be. And he knows he's not as fit as he was. So we've put Craig through cornering, better riding and handling courses, as well as formulating a dietary and fitness plan for him. All of which, we hope will improve Craig's riding

→ So many things affect your riding. When you're unfit, worried, tense or indecisive you never ride as well as when you are relaxed, feeling positive and in good physical shape. In fact, riding a bike well is more about your mental activity than your physical ones. Previously, Craig had told us he sometimes lacked confidence in his tyres and his riding skills, so we sent him to see sports psychologist Lee Spelzini.

R1-owner Lee has been involved in personal enhancement for 10 years, helping sports people unlock their potential and minimise any weaknesses. He uses hypnosis and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). The "neuro" refers to how the body and mind interact, "linguistics" is the study of what someone is saying to get an insight onto his or her thinking and "programming" is where behavioural patterns form. Top competitors use it to stay focused and successful.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Seeing a sports psychologist is not the same as seeing a psychologist. Lee explains: "This isn't about a 'cure' - there's no illness." Lee and Craig talked about bikes and about life in general issues, as this can have a profound effect on people's riding. Lee explains: "If you feel tense about other things when you're on the road you can feel that in your chest or your shoulders, so it's a physical feeling and it will be transferred to the bike. But if it's physical, it can be changed."

Neuro Linguistic Programming focuses on the mental part of the process, analysing the way someone talks and the words or phrases they choose to use. "What we do is provide options for relieving anxiety or confidence issues," says Lee. Confidence does not have to manifest itself in being cocky, just having the certainty to trust your own judgement. 'I think', 'perhaps' and 'I'll try' are phrases he hears a lot - and they all indicate uncertainty. Try monitoring how you talk to yourself as you ride: if you eradicate these uncertain phrases you can improve confidence.

Lee explains how language can have an impact on confidence: "If you're hard on yourself, this will dent

confidence. For example, once you start believing you're rubbish at left-hand bends, it will only get worse. So try talking to yourself in the voice of Homer Simpson and then try to take your negative comments seriously - you can't. You still tell yourself you could have gone in quicker, but it doesn't chastise you and doesn't dent your confidence further." Avoiding negative language can help as well. Rather than saying something like 'don't forget to look up', telling yourself 'remember to look up' is much more positive.

WHAT ABOUT THE HYPNOSIS?

The idea of hypnosis is to relax your body and mind so you open up more. Hypnosis could also make you more susceptible to any suggestions, such as to feel more confident, or happier with yourself, or more focused - all of which could help when riding.

To find out what hypnosis feels like, I volunteered to go first, followed by a sceptical Craig. As Lee placed me into a trance I felt totally conscious but mentally and physically relaxed. He made suggestions about feeling happier and more confident in myself. While I could hear everything, I did feel very sleepy. Once Lee brought me 'back up' I said I'd felt so sleepy I thought I hadn't concentrated on what he was saying. "That's good - your subconscious was over ruling your conscious," he explained. Has it worked? Since the hypnosis session I'd say I have felt significantly happier and a little more confident.

Others have noticed its effectiveness, which is why it's so widely used in sports. Lee sums it up. "You tune your bike and prepare it, so do the same with your mind." The power of suggestion a very powerful tool.

WHAT DID CRAIG THINK?

What Craig and Lee spoke about must remain confidential for professional reasons, but while he was initially sceptical about visiting a sports psychologist, and especially about the hypnosis, Craig admits he got something from the session. In fact, he's such a convert he's already booked a follow-up session.

He explains: "Lee was laying the foundations so he knew what areas to focus on in our next session. But when he put me under with the hypnosis. I felt really relaxed and the pain in my knees [a big discomfort to Craig] disappeared. When I was going under I could feel the relaxation working down from my head to my shoulders. On the way home I felt really alert and switched on - something's definitely changed in me and it's got to be down to the sports psychology."

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