

TRACKTIME

CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL

Get your degree from the school of cornering

Straightaways are easy. If that's all motorcycle riders had to deal with, we would all be experts. And we would all be immensely bored. Thankfully, there are corners, which make riding a bike at speed a thrilling, challenging art. Now in its 30th year, Keith Code's California Superbike School promises to teach you that art.

The CSS curriculum revolves around the Four Levels, each of which consists of five basic skills that are explained in the classroom, practiced on track, and then discussed again in class before moving on to the next drill. The two-day school I attended at Las Vegas Motor Speedway covered Levels I and II, with five classroom and track sessions per day plus two "free" track sessions in the afternoon, so there was plenty of riding time. To make things interesting and drive home the skills, we ran the track backwards the second day.

Class started at 7:00 a.m. with a hearty breakfast dispensed from the back of the school's Kawasaki-green 18-wheeler. The student body consisted of 25 riders (one less than the maximum), with attendees from all motorcycling disciplines. Admittedly the \$2250 tuition is steep (the \$450-per-day, ride-your-own-bike option is less expensive), but that price includes everything you need: full AGV track garb, a Kawasaki ZX-6R, sticky

A few stationary exercises in the pits and some seat time on the Lean Bike helped sort out my body position and steering inputs.

Dunlop tires, fuel, food and one of the most experienced staffs in the business.

A 2:1 student-to-coach ratio means riders get plenty of personal attention, and everyone is focused on improving your riding. Even the corner workers were told which drills we were working on and communicated with the coaches. Mixed in throughout the two days were jaunts on the Lean Bike and the Brake Bike, both designed to accelerate your education in those respective skills. Also slipped in was a round on the Camera Bike,

which videotapes over your shoulder via its elaborate passenger-seat scaffolding. Back in the pits, the footage is reviewed and discussed with your coach and used as a tool to pinpoint problem areas. (Log on to www.motorcyclistonline.com to watch an excerpt of my video.)

My coach, James Toohey, didn't miss a thing. I thought I had the Level I exercises just about nailed. James thought otherwise. Like a skilled and patient psychiatrist, he was able to expose and unravel my difficulties. My throttle roll-ons were a split-second late, but I had no idea why I lacked the confidence to turn it on sooner. James' superb observational skills and a few pointed questions got to the root of my problem: I didn't know where I was going. I hadn't selected an exact turn-in point, which was causing all my subsequent decisions and



My coach James Toohey was a skilled observer, able to pick apart my riding and offer valuable insight and instruction.



The California Superbike School is a live version of Keith Code's canonical *Twist of the Wrist* series, complete with his cartoon-like sketches.

actions to be vague and inconsistent.

This spatial ineptitude served as a perfect segue for the visual skills taught in Level II. These were—for lack of a better phrase—eye-opening. Code's highly developed visual techniques broaden and sharpen your awareness, giving you a better idea of where you are on the track. During the Alternative Lines drill we explored the edges of the track, running out onto the rumble strips and clipping the curbs so we could come to terms with our on-track fears. Once these danger zones are experienced in a controlled manner, they lose their control over you. After this exercise I found myself making confident passes using lines that would have freaked me out before, maintaining my cool when things didn't go exactly as planned.

I was blown away by the precision with which I was being taught to ride. The old adages trotted out by some other riding schools are shelved for Code's unique brand of education. He and his crew reveal the bedrock basics of motorcycle control in a simple, easy-to-understand manner, and then build on that solid foundation of understanding layer by layer with explicit lectures and focused track drills.

Code knows from experience that his team of professionals can coach riders to a higher skill level. "The coaching isn't just rote drill," he says. "Our procedures are very exact, and are designed to elicit understanding from the students. My coaches know they can get a specific result from the students by applying my techniques."

The student body unequivocally agrees. "There's so much to think about and learn that it's easy to get overwhelmed, but the coaches manage to distill each lesson down into an easily digestible serving," says Jawad Minhas, an optometrist from Toronto, Canada, back for his fourth (although he says not final) schooling session.

Don't be fooled by the name: Although the California Superbike School was founded in the Golden State, it hosts events all over the U.S. So no matter where you live, odds are you're within range of some of the best tutelage on earth. Check out www.superbike-school.com for their extensive schedule, and get ready to discover the art of cornering.

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