

TRACK TIME



CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LENS

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It's 7:00 a.m.—magic hour in photography terms. I'm standing on the skid pad at the Streets of Willow staring down a 100-foot row of track-ready BMW S1000RRs. The coin has finally flipped: I've spent the last 20 years photographing some of the world's best motorcycles and riders, but these next few days my right hand will be working a throttle instead of a camera. I'm attending two, two-day sessions of Keith Code's California Superbike School—Levels I & II followed by Levels III & IV.

Because I've ridden mostly off-road for 35 years, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little nervous. But there's no backing out now. They just swiped my credit card to cover any "mishaps."

The two-day camps are open to riders of all skills. Levels I & II are for new students; Levels III & IV are for the more advanced. The classroom sessions are

split between Keith and his son, Dylan, who provide us with building blocks of information to apply on the track. They explain ideas and concepts using a chalkboard, TV monitor and stationary motorcycle. Both command attention, engaging the students in an ongoing dialogue. It's immediately apparent that most students are familiar with Keith's *A Twist of the Wrist* books and videos. The teaching is entertaining and focused. Everyone is encouraged to participate.

We're split into groups that alternate between the classroom, track and debriefing with an instructor—a process that repeats until day's end. We start with the S1000RR in its most forgiving Rain mode. After a few sessions, we can toggle up to Sport.

We're assigned to a series of specially equipped bikes for specific drills. The Lean Bike: Locked in with lower body, we hang off almost hands-free. The Panic-Braking Bike: Lock the front wheel repeatedly and roll out

of it without touching down the outriggers. The Video Bike: Equipped with an over-the-shoulder camera, everyone has their video reviewed each day, and goes home with a DVD. The Slide Bike: Practice proper technique when the rear tire breaks loose; your instructor grants access to this one only when you're ready.

Each instructor is paired with two students, so there's plenty of individual attention. And with just 14 students total, there are few riders on the track at one time. There are seven riding sessions per day.

Levels I and II include drills on throttle control, turn-in points, quick turning, rider input, two-step turning, reference points, changing lines, the three-step, wide view and pickup. Level III adds work on hook turns, pivot steering, knee to knee, hip flick and attack angles. In Level IV you spend time fine-tuning what you've learned in Levels I through III. The final day includes more one-on-one attention from a personal classroom consultant plus a track coach.

California Superbike School sessions are held all across the country, with prices varying depending on the track. Two-day camps cost \$2250-2450 on one of the school's BMW S1000RRs, while single-day classes cost \$390-490 on your bike or \$675-690 on a school bike. Also, twice a year at the Streets of Willow there's the Code



"The one on the right is the throttle, right?"



The day begins with a riders meeting and staff introduction. If you include the mechanics, cooks and secretaries, there are as many California Superbike School staffers as students.



The school's previous Kawasaki ZX-6R Slide Bike has been replaced by a shiny new BMW S1000RR. With 150 bhp it's a whole lot easier to spin the tire, but the principles of control remain the same.



Keith Code's coaching techniques are legendary. With literally hundreds of thousands of hours of instruction to his credit, he observes things in your riding that you'd never even considered.

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R.A.C.E. school, which costs \$1600 on your own bike or \$2200 on a BMW.

I was amazed that students—as well as instructors—came from as far away as Australia, South America, the UK, Canada, Hawaii and the East Coast. And this was just within my small group. Keith's reputation is literally world-renowned.

After completing all four levels, my confidence was through the roof. The BMW even

cracked a smile once or twice. Keith teaches you to relax and focus, especially when your mind wants to go into survival mode. The drills instill a deep understanding and importance of visual skills, body positioning, ideal traction, suspension sweet spot and choosing accurate lines. Equipped with all the right tools, you will accurately be able to dissect a corner. Did I nail a perfect lap? Not even close, but my technique is better than

ever. Instructor James Toohey suggested I try the race school, where the pace is pushed a little harder to see where you unravel. I may have set the track record for unraveling.

Is it worth the time and money? Yes. Check your lap times at the door and be a factory student. Quality instruction lets you shed bad habits like tear-offs. While the self-taught route might be cheaper, investing in Keith's school lets you ride at your personal best sooner and safer. I learned more in four days of track riding than in the past 20 years of recreational riding. Two days after graduation, I found myself entering a sandy corner. I locked the front brake, then tucked the front end. But rather than crashing, I stayed calm and loose and regained front-wheel traction.

Priceless! **MC**