

ADULT EDUCATION

No matter how old and experienced you are, it's never too late to learn as **Tony Foale** discovered when he visited a rider training school

Education is a wonderful thing. Without it we would be unprepared to face the challenges of life, including work and recreational activities. We are never too old to learn and education isn't something that should cease once we leave school or university. I started riding and racing motorcycles nearly 50 years ago, and I remember thinking that motor racing in general was unique in that unlike most other sports there was no coaching available, no education for riding.

Riders learnt their skills just by doing it themselves and consequently most developed some bad or non-optimal

techniques. Last year I started racing again (in classic events) after a 30 year gap and it was obvious to me that my skill set needed updating to the modern era.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I joined a two day camp with the Californian Superbike School, run by coaching guru Keith Code. I have known Keith for a number of years and had often joked that I wanted him to teach me to ride, but until early August the timing and location of his schools never fitted with my own schedule. At the end of July I was giving a seminar to the Segway company in New Hampshire, just



ABOVE The author (left) with school founder, Keith Code

BELOW First day instructor Greg Gorman leads Tony to show how it should be done (etech photos)





ABOVE Chief instructor Cobie Fair shows trust as he follows close behind, on the second day, watching for both good and bad technique (etech photos)

one hour south of Loudon Speedway where the school was running a two day training camp on the days following my work. Perfect timing at last.

Code started the CSS (Californian Superbike School) over 25 years ago and since then other riding/racing schools have followed the example. The CSS has grown into probably the largest and most

14 students and there is one riding instructor allocated to every two students.

The course is divided equally between the classroom and the track. Students are divided into two groups, one group riding while the other group listens to either Keith or his son Dylan in the classroom. Over the years Keith has broken down the riding act into small increments and each

this was performed using fourth gear all around the track without using brakes, as were several other exercises.

The following exercises on the first day were focused on turning, lean-in points and achieving a rapid lean-in motion. The second day was mainly devoted to the visual aspects of riding. For example, seeking out reference points to help locate your position of the track, avoiding target fixation and learning to use peripheral vision to take in the wide view. One unexpected exercise but very informative was to ride slowly around the left side of the track then next lap around the right side and lastly in the middle. This gave an additional perspective to the whole course and proved useful later when passing other motorcycles.

When doing the exercises on track, your own instructor would follow at times to observe your riding but he would lead at other times to indicate lines and turn-in points. After each track session there was a de-briefing with the instructor. He

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widely known throughout the world and has permanent bases in Australia and England as well as the original in the US.

The size and facilities of the school are impressive. Two massive trucks with 30 motorcycles and 15 staff travel for 200 days each year moving from circuit to circuit all over the US. Nine of the staff are on-track instructors. They run single day courses and two day "camps" that are limited to

track session concentrates on one main subject and gradually builds towards integrating them into one.

Each of the seven riding sessions, per day, is preceded by a talk describing a particular riding aspect which will then be the focus of the on-track exercises. For example, the first exercise was to concentrate on throttle control to steady the bike in a turn. Much to our surprise



would emphasise strengths and point out weaknesses with suggestions to improve in the next riding session.

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Towards the end of each day every student was given two laps on the camera bike. This had a tower mounted behind the rider which held a video camera aimed at the rider's upper body and right arm. There was no hiding any mistakes on this bike – it was all recorded for the instructors to assess.

Much to my annoyance and embarrassment I made a complete mess of one turn. Probably a lapse in concentration but I was in totally the wrong part of the track as I approached a corner and I clipped the apex and went wide coming out. All of which was faithfully recorded and viewed by the instructors.

I didn't know what to expect from the other students, I imagined that most

would have been fast riders, either racers or those who often go to track days. In fact, most were road riders on a race track for the first time. There was one pro AMA racer who was very fast and some were interested in trying track days in the future. I questioned why the fast guy was there and it was to re-establish the basics. He felt that it was a worthwhile exercise.



ABOVE Tony Foale in 1963, note the straight arm which tends to lock the steering. A bad technique which the school has helped to correct

Many champions have been coached by the school and in general they all attend the normal school sessions open to any rider. There are four levels of training available. One day of training equates to one level, nobody regardless of experience skips a level. Even the pros start at level one. Those of us at the two day camp graduated with level 2 and so



ABOVE & BELOW Applying the lessons from the course during the last on-track session. Arms are more relaxed than before (etech photos)





if I attend the school again I'll be eligible for level 3 and then 4. Some riders return and repeat the lower levels to get a refresher course in the basics.

Strict safety procedures are emphasised and enforced. All passing of slower riders must be done with at least two metres clearance. Anyone not obeying this directive is brought off the track and admonished for his sins. Therefore, even the most inexperienced rider need not be frightened of joining in the fun on the track. Although I thought that I passed

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slower riders safely, I must confess that I was flagged off the course and reprimanded after somebody complained that I passed them too closely. I didn't recall the incident and suspect that it was a rider unused to track riding who was surprised by the speed differential, and underestimated the space between us.

In addition to the motorcycles for the track the school has developed a number

of machines for training specific aspects of riding. For example, one has hydraulically damped outriggers to reduce the rate of fall of a bike used for teaching riders good body positioning and to reduce the fear of extreme lean angles. Unfortunately, that bike had an engine problem and the body positioning was done with an unmodified machine. Another was fitted with cushioned outriggers to teach control under front wheel locking from excessive braking. Perhaps useful to those who had never locked a front wheel but I found it


unrealistic. When I rode it the front tyre was worn flat across the thread with the internal cords showing through in places. The forks and whole bike

juddered badly when the wheel locked, not at all like what I've experienced in practice. Some of this may have been due to the tyre but I think also to worn or mal-adjusted steering head bearings or wear in the forks. It was hardly surprising because this machine had spent its life doing heavy braking and little else. Probably with a new tyre and some maintenance it would be more representative.

The school carries numerous sets of riding clothing and helmets in a multitude of sizes. You can use your own leathers if you have them or borrow a set out of the truck. Food and drink is available throughout the day but there are specified breakfast and lunch times. Keith's wife Judy is responsible for the catering and does an excellent job of keeping everyone well nourished and hydrated throughout the course. It was around 36 deg C when I was there and so it was important to keep hydrated.

At the end of the two days everyone whom I spoke to considered it worthwhile and indicated that they would do it again if the opportunity arose. Most claimed that they had achieved major insights which had lifted their riding level greatly. Certainly, all will be better and safer riders, whether it be on the track or the road. It was the second day's visual exercises which got the most credit for these improvements. I was surprised to learn that many riders do not look far enough ahead as a general rule and tend to fixate on perceived hazards nearby.

For me, I got what I expected and hoped for out of the course. That is, no

major breakthroughs but several incremental improvements in various areas, and ideas for specific exercises that I can practice when riding anytime in the future. Throttle control and the visual skills seem to have been my strong points and I don't think that I improved much in those areas. On the other hand at the school I certainly improved my corner entry speed and achieved quicker lean-in rates and learnt to relax my arms more, resulting in a lighter touch with the steering. Back when I started riding most riders kept their arms straight when cornering and this tends to lock the steering, so I had a long term bad habit to overcome. Another aspect of my riding that needs updating is body movement, but that is part of the level 3 course and so I'll have to wait until next time for that. 

CHAMPIONSHIPS WON BY RIDERS TRAINED BOTH PRIVATELY AND AT CSS. WORLD CHAMPIONS

2005 MotoGP 125cc World Champion Thomas Lüthi

2004 World Superbike Champion James Toseland

2003 World Supersport Champion Chris Vermuellen

1997 World Superbike Champion John Kocinski

1993 World Endurance Champion Doug Toland

1993 World Superbike Champion Scott Russell

1990, 91, 92 World 500cc Champion Wayne Rainey

1988, 89 World Superbike Champion Fred Merkel

plus many AMA (USA) champions



ABOVE The lean and body positioning bike with hydraulically damped out-riggers. Unfortunately out of action during the course days (Tony Foale)

RIGHT Spring cushioned out-riggers give confidence to riders experiencing front wheel braking lock up. On the day the author did not find that this machine gave a realistic feel (Tony Foale)

TOP LEFT No error escapes the eye of the video camera high up on the tower of the camera bike (etech photos)

