



SCHOOL'S OUT



The 2016 edition of the California Superbike School (CSS) saw over 100 riders participate over two weekends to hone their riding skills on track. *Bike India* was there, of course, to experience things first-hand

STORY: **JIM GORDE**
PHOTOGRAPHY: **ADITYA BEDRE**

THREE YEARS I'd been waiting to attend the California Superbike School. When my boss told me I was going, it was like receiving my letter from Hogwarts. It's something that has been growing

around the world with more and more riders across diverse groups magnetically being drawn to the school simply because everyone who genuinely wants to learn the finer, deeper aspects of riding have the opportunity not just to learn some techniques from the masters, but also apply them in the best way possible: on track.

Founder Keith Code enlisted the support of several ace riders from around the world, including Gary Adshead and Glenn 'Lord R' Rothwell, my classroom coaches, and Richard 'Badger' Brown, my riding coach for the duration of the school. Held over three days, all of them track-side, with five drills followed by their respective 20-minute track sessions, there was much to look forward to.

The essence of the school is simply to

get comfortable with your bike and how it behaves with you doing what you do on it. It isn't about racing, or even going as fast as possible. It's about riding well within your limits and fine-tuning every conscious action, while recognising and re-aligning or applying conscious effort to otherwise involuntary actions.

DAY ONE – LEVEL ONE: INPUT

Safety is paramount, and the first thing we were made to do on day one was ensure our leathers were up to the mark. Suit, gloves, boots and lid inspected (and marked safe with an elusive sticker), we got set for the first safety briefing. Safety, as always, is enforced and strictly. Passing too close and not heeding the warning flags, in particular, are a one-way ticket to the pit-lane.

There are several facts we know and are aware of in theory, but understanding where that comes into play on the move makes a lot of difference. Understanding the implications of every input the motorcycle gets from you, whether voluntary or involuntary, can affect the whole balance of the bike and its behaviour.

Essentially, we have six controls: front

brake, rear brake, throttle, clutch, gears and handlebars. Five of those control speed, and only one, the handlebars, controls direction. Stabilising the bike to behave as you want it to is key to not just enjoying the ride, but also getting the bike to go where you want to and at the best possible pace. Modulating the throttle is thus a critical aspect. You simply can't whack it open or close it suddenly without facing the consequences. Understanding how important throttle control is leads into the next aspect. When do you turn in? ▶

DAY ONE DRILLS

- Throttle Control – One gear, no brakes
- Turn Points – Two gears, no brakes
- Quick Turning – Two gears, light brakes
- Rider Input – Three gears, light brakes
- Two-step Turning – All gears, normal brakes



FEATURE

California Superbike School



completely change how a bike behaves in the straight and in the corners. Day three was all about using your body to achieve a tighter result than what would normally be the case simply with rider input and involuntary weight shifts. Being aware of your movements on the bike and consciously inciting a manoeuvre at the time it is needed can lead to much better results and improved time and speed.

The focus is not just to move right, but to sit right. Being well-connected to the bike doesn't need Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, just two feet firmly planted, two hands gripping well and a torso and hip ready to go with the flow of the corners. Once you get the rhythm of the track, it's better to get alternatives sorted. Change lines and entry points, turn in later or earlier, and experience the difference. These are noteworthy points that can truly benefit everyday riding too.

Lifting your body slightly off the seat on bumpy tarmac, getting your knee out while keeping the other one firmly connected to the tank, and bending into the corner to lower the centre of gravity all lead to a smoother experience with less drama. And the result is the ability to carry more speed through one corner while being better prepared to tackle the next one.



GEARCHECK

Rider: Jim Gorde
 Helmet: Sol Unicorn II
 Racing Suit: Teknik
 Gloves: Figo
 Boots: XPD



Learning the track helps no end; takes a few laps but is absolutely critical

All in all, it was a magnificent three days, especially considering that it was the first time on track for me, as well as many others. The CSS also has higher levels. Level four, for instance, brings in a personal coach on track and in the classroom, which expands to providing feedback based on video footage of your time on the bike. If you've always to understand your bike better, or, more importantly, understand how you can be better on your bike, this is where you sign up! **BIKE**

Coach Profile: BADGER

→ The California Superbike School has a very strict control on who gets to be coach. You don't just walk in and sign up... well you do, but there's a learning curve between signing up and being signed on as a coach.

Richard Brown, 'Badger' to us students, has spent 10 years with CSS. He confirms that most coaches have been students of the school. He's spent two and a half years learning



from the school himself. Time spent on track can range from 30 to 60 days in a year. Come sweltering heat or pouring rain, the school must go on. Richard has coached students

in the USA and the Philippines.

Most coaches during this edition of CSS were English or Greek. Some coaches train at the CSS in as many as 23 countries.

Finding the optimum turn point and how quickly you turn the bike in decides how much speed you can carry through and how stable the bike remains. Learning to relax is also equally important. Riding too stiffly can hamper the bike's abilities. Loosen up, but stay focused and involved. Finally, locating the apex, or the closest to the inside of the corner you can get while maintaining a

smooth curve, is key to getting in and out at your best pace.

DAY TWO – LEVEL TWO: VISUALS

It was all leathers and adrenaline on day two as a quick attendance check was followed by a light breakfast track-side with everything from a race-spec TVS Apache RTR 180 to a BMW S 1000 RR going past, sticking to the pit-lane

DAY TWO DRILLS

Reference Points – One gear, no brakes
 Change Lines – Two gears, no brakes
 Three-step – Two gears, light brakes
 Wide View – Three gears, light brakes
 Pick Up – All gears, normal brakes

DAY THREE DRILLS

Hook Turns – One gear, no brakes
 Power Steering – Two gears, no brakes
 Knee-to-knee – Three gears, light brakes
 Hip Flick – Three gears, light brakes
 Attack Angles – All gears, normal brakes

speed-limit.

Day two was all about building on day one with greater focus placed on focus. Peripheral vision is probably the most underestimated skill needed to successfully take care of corners. Look ahead, identify the turn point, locate the apex, look for the exit, back on the throttle. Sounds simple enough. Locating reference points is easier with objects helping out: it can be anything from a bush at the kerb to a change in the colour of the tarmac on track. These are particularly important when dealing with turns after a crest or a zenith. Tighter turns don't let you see the entire corner; so you have to mark out a reference before the 'vanishing point' or the farthest visible point from the corner's entry.

The key here was not to fixate on any particular point. Stare at it and your sensation of speed goes up and you end up losing speed, besides going where you were looking. The eyes and brain end up telling the bike where to go, and it isn't always necessarily on track.

DAY THREE – LEVEL THREE: BODYWORK

Getting more involved physically can

TVS Apache RTR 180 Racer

→ Stripped out, bare-bones racer it is indeed. The Apache RTR 180 race bike looks and feels nothing like the street bike. The lightweight fibre-glass fairing, welded handlebars, a fraction of padding for a seat, compact free-flow exhaust, and the absence of any instrumentation make it good for just one thing: focusing on getting the best performance on track. With a 90/90-17 TVS front and 110/90-17 Michelin rear, the phenomenal grip was a pleasant surprise. Needless to say, the bike probably weighed as much as I did, perhaps, even lesser.

