

HARDER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER

How do you unlearn bad habits learnt over decades of road riding? California Superbike School comes to the rescue and helps you become a better rider

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If you have picked up this copy of **Fast Bikes India** and are reading this story then at some point in life, you must have ridden a motorcycle. You may not have been a great rider but who actually can judge that? After all, nobody can really gauge your performance until you go out on to a track and prove it. However, going fast does not prove that you're an able rider. There are certain methods that should be followed to become a better and safer rider, but there is nowhere you can learn these methods. Usually, you pick up your father's bike or get pushed into motorcycling thanks to peer pressure. And unless you're Valentino Rossi with god gifted skills, you start learning as you go riding on road. But knowingly or unknowingly, you tend to pick up a lot of bad habits and at most times you won't even be aware of your shortcomings in order to find a permanent fix. And that is where California Superbike School comes into the picture.

You see, CSS has trained more than 65 world and national champions since their inception over 42 years ago. Whatever your level of riding is, be it amateur to advanced, CSS helps you shave off seconds in corners where you thought none existed. And shaving speeds obviously equals to doing the right things on the saddle; you can't just pin down the throttle and expect the bike to corner itself, can you? The

course takes you back to the basics, analysing the physics of motorcycling thereby learning how to control your ride. And of course, get faster. Held at the Madras Motor Race Track near Chennai, CSS has been conducting three-day sessions over two weekends in the first quarter of each calendar year in India, for the last eight years. The first three levels are packaged together while Level 4 is for experienced riders who need specific solutions. There are 63 slots every year and you may bring your own bike to train or opt for the



Day 1 picture. Don't mind the riding position

“THERE ARE CERTAIN METHODS THAT SHOULD BE FOLLOWED TO BECOME A BETTER AND SAFER RIDER”



Why so serious?



'That's [not] how you grip the bar'



We toast to Fast Bikes buddy Vicky Jaising getting faster still



That's how we roll

race prepped TVS Apache RTR 200 4Vs and get going. But how do you unlearn years of self-taught lessons? You see, brushing your teeth is a habit. If somebody tells you that you've been doing it wrong, would you be able to change it? Now you know how big a task CSS has cut out for them. But trust in Keith Code and just let go.

Day 1

It all starts with a classroom session. Gary, the classroom coach tells you the basics of track riding. He also tells you to recite the mantra 'smoothly, evenly and constantly' for the day as it is going to be all about throttle control. Like me, several other riders were expecting to be hanging off the bike on day 1 itself but that's the last thing you're taught at CSS! With five, 20-minute sessions in a day, it all equates to a lot of track time.

Session one gives you the basics about when to open the throttle and by how much. As you open the throttle, black

magic happens and suddenly all the weight is transferred to the rear. There is a reason why you are asked to sit at a fist's distance from the tank. The rear tyre on a bike is wider than the front and has more grip. When you open the throttle too much, chances are that you'll understeer and head into the barriers or the front will wash away and you'll end up getting your knees down, one way or the other. Shut the throttle and you might oversteer and miss your apex completely. Hence, the mantra to keep it smooth, even and constant.

But what is the correct method of implementing it all? It's logical and extremely simple too. You roll off, steer into the corner and as you approach the exit, get back on the gas. Jumble up the steps and you'll end up being spit out of the seat any which way. Why do this you ask? When the throttle is shut, the front tyre is provided with the grip that allows you to turn in the direction you want to go. Once you've tipped in, the correct throttle



"That's how you go fast"

input balances the front and rear suspension and you remain on two wheels. You hit the gas at the exit and the weight transfers to the rear tyre and you're set for the upcoming tasks. That is it.

When Gary asked the class about counter steering, at least 75 per cent of the attendees had no clue about it and imagine, these are the same bunch of people who ride superbikes that have at least 75bhp at the rear wheel! Counter steering is the method of pushing the bar on the side you want to go. It may sound ridiculous to you the first time, but keep trying it and you'll learn how much safer and easier it is to control the bike when

you push on the left bar when you are turning left and so on.

Next up is to 'quick turn' into a corner. Remember, the less time you are leaned into a corner, the faster you will actually go. Quick turning allows you to dive deeper before you are actually turning in. Pushing the bar is slightly terrifying but the coaches insist on doing it and will keep following you until you do it correctly. This allows your eyes to settle into the horizon and gives you more insight about the corner; precisely what you require to get there faster and safer.

Now gripping the tank with your knees is common knowledge but there's a genuine reason why CSS asks you to ape them MotoGP men. The more your body is in contact with the motorcycle, the greater the bike's stability. Which means the bike is more stable when your knees are



Trying to be attentive

YOU ROLL OFF, STEER INTO THE CORNER AND AS YOU APPROACH THE EXIT, GET BACK ON THE GAS



Corners are your best teachers



I'll get you someday C7

Dressing up for the ball

gripping the tank than otherwise. This rule applies even when you're cornering. So instead of keeping your knees wide open and swivelling against the petrol tank to hang off the bike, CSS tells you to sit slightly away from the tank and then keeping the outside knee locked into the recess as you go into corners. It makes a significant difference to the bike's behaviour. Beyond stability, there's another reason why gripping the tank with the knee is important. Once your knees are locked in, you're essentially holding the bike with your lower body. This keeps the upper body loose and the pressure off the handlebars, which makes it easier to turn the bike into corners and also prevents accidental inputs from a handlebar that's being held too tightly.

IF YOU AREN'T LOOKING FAR, CHANCES ARE THAT YOUR BRAIN IS BEING FED AN OVERDOSE OF INFORMATION

We're getting there, aren't we?



Day 2

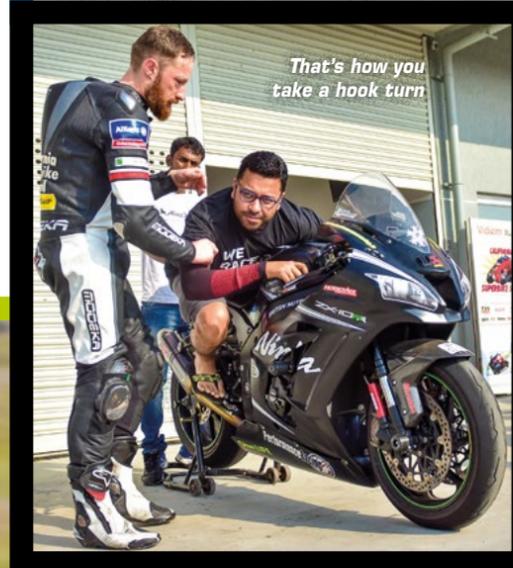
Having learnt to tip into a corner, grip the tank and use the throttle correctly, we move on to the next task for the day – Vision. The drill begins with spotting reference points to gauge corner entry and exit. Your mind limits you when you spot danger and when you are looking at spots on the track or even road, your instinctive reaction is to get away from that object. And that puts you in more danger. Just look where you want to go, and you'll get there, Gary tells us.

If you aren't looking far, chances are that your brain is being fed an overdose of information and going at fast speeds is definitely something it should not know. The farther you look, the more information you gain about the surroundings and that keeps you from fixating on the hazards. So the plan of action is to find a reference point on the track that tells you what exactly is to be done at the specific spot. The coaches mark the entry and you're left to decide the best line out of the corner, which includes hitting the apex in the straightest line possible (remember, the lesser you lean, the faster you will go).

Peripheral vision is not really a difficult task for us in India as we are conditioned to look out for hazards on the roads from all sides, including in the rear view mirrors. This also keeps you from focusing on just



Plethora of bikes to choose from



That's how you take a hook turn

one aspect at a time, making you a better rider in every possible way. We are also given the choice to take incorrect lines for one whole session for improved peripheral vision, that is how important it is.

Day 3

Level 3 is all about getting your body position correct. One of the biggest preconceived notion about CSS is that it helps getting your knee down. Everybody wants to do it because it looks cool in photographs. You eventually end up getting your knees down but it all happens in an organic manner. Knee down actually serves a purpose for two. When you're hanging off a motorcycle, the centre of gravity is reduced, keeping the motorcycle stable in the corners. Also, it helps you keep the bike more upright than if you were to try the same corner without hanging off. This means that a bigger patch of tyre is in touch with the ground, allowing you to open the throttle sooner making you go faster. How do you get off the saddle you ask? Simply move one butt cheek off the seat while you grip the tank with the outer knee. This will steer the bike into the direction of the corner, reducing the pressure on the bars, while maintaining the centre of gravity.

The hook turn is especially engaging because it works almost like magic. The manoeuvre's main task is to tighten the line if needed after tipping the motorcycle

in. Let's say you're approaching a corner fairly quickly. You've tipped it in only to realise you're going to run wide on exit. That's when the hook turn comes in handy. You basically move your head a little lower and forward. What this does is shifts the weight bias a smidge further ahead, compressing the front suspension. The moment the front suspension compresses, the wheelbase shortens a bit. It's the shortening of the wheelbase that tightens the line just enough to help you recover from running wide and stay on course instead. This recovery manoeuvre can be extremely handy if you're riding relatively quickly on an unfamiliar twisty road and found yourself at the wrong end.

Years of riding brings with it a lot of self-taught hacks and when your brain is telling you that you already know a certain thing, you do not actually strive to learn. But CSS breaks it down to the basics and helps you unlearn and learn the correct methods, all thanks to a proven technique. Classroom sessions drum in the theory to apply on the track. After your track session, a personal coach gives you feedback on your riding. Still unable to hit the sweet spot? The coaches help you overcome all your issues by following you out on the track in the following session! Some say that CSS is expensive, but we don't think there's any other motorcycling school that comes close in helping you become a better rider. **EB**



Did I leave the cooker on?



These Apaches can actually whoop big bikes' asses



Congrats! You may now kiss the apex



Not all classrooms are boring