



GETTING

Heading down to the California Superbike School to re-learn everything I knew about cornering

CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL

'M GOING TO BE HONEST HERE. UNTIL not too very long ago, my relationship with motorcycles was slightly dysfunctional. I loved them, no doubt about that, but the relationships were strained — not effortless like I'd wanted it to be. You know that saying about holding a handful of sand? I think I was holding on too tight. I knew that I'd have to fix things, and so I signed myself up for a three day session where professionals would teach me how to treat my motorcycle right. And boy oh boy, has it worked wonders! Our relationship has significantly improved, the motorcycles respond much better to everything I

say (and do) to them and we're much happier spending time alone together. I even went down on one knee, something I didn't think I'd be doing for a while!

Okay, I'm done making corny comparisons of the California Superbike School to a counselling centre for broken relationships. But I have to admit, three days under their guidance and I have never felt more comfortable or more confident riding a motorcycle fast. Now I'm not here to write a glowing report on why CSS is a must visit. Ten minutes on the internet can tell you that. Instead, I'm going to tell you how the school helped me polish my riding, and how it has helped me personally as a rider.



SCHOOLED

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Right, before we can get to how they got me to ride well, let me tell you what I was doing wrong. How do I put this succinctly, erm... everything. Throttle control, steering, body position, where I should be looking, where I should be going, you name it — I wasn't doing it right. I'm honestly surprised they managed to clean up the mess that my riding was in just three days! But to be fair, they've got an extremely well-designed curriculum, some superb instructors and a good balance of classroom and track time. Keith Code, the founder of the school has been training people for the better part of three decades. They bloody well have got my riding fixed.

So the school works like this — they take you in for a classroom session, explain the theory of the drill you're about to do, why you need to do it and the physics behind it. Then they send you out on the track, where an instructor shadows you, observes what you're doing, and if need be asks you to tail him and instructs you on how to do the drill right. Every drill has a very specific focus, so you can individually focus on that aspect of your riding, and get comfortable with implementing the correct technique. Once you're done with your riding, and the post-ride debrief from your instructor, it's back to the classroom.

Right, so what did they fix? Let's take it from the top. They trained me to look for reference points. On my first few laps of the track, I was essentially just winging it. I was taking whatever lines I pleased, with a consistency level of naught and my brain was a muddled mess when it came to having a mental map of the track. After the

From top to bottom:
The steering drill got me to fix my horrendous technique; classroom sessions were essential in understanding the theory of riding motorcycles; post-ride debrief sessions take place when your impressions are still fresh in your mind

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session where they teach you reference points, I began to pick out stuff on the track — imperfections, prominent kerbs, trees — to help me keep track of where I was and where I needed to go. I'll admit, I didn't map out the track in that one single session, but applying what they taught me for three days got me pretty sorted with my lines and entry, apex and exit points.

Then there was steering. I had read enough about motorcycling to know what countersteering was. But the correct technique? I wasn't even close. You see, I was pushing the correct bar — right bar to turn right, left bar to turn left. But I wasn't pushing the bar correctly. Instead of pushing the bar forward, which was the most efficient way to turn the bike, I was pushing them in a slightly downward direction. This was making me tense up on the bike, and forcing me to put in extra effort to

steer. The steering session and a dedicated drill to practice steering technique sorted that out. Once you've got the technique right, they teach you how to steer with intent so you can tip in to corners faster.

The drills that helped me the most, by far, had nothing to do with the bike, they were the ones that worked with our eyes. A mistake that most people make, and I was guilty of it too, is not looking far enough ahead. Turns out, you've got to be looking at the apex even before you hit your entry marker, and at the exit before you hit the apex. This is essential in reducing your sense of speed, and giving you the confidence and the space to go faster. Apart from looking ahead, they also train you to keep your peripheral vision open, so you don't develop tunnel vision. I felt my riding progress the most when I started consciously implementing these techniques.

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I instantly felt faster, had a better idea of where I was going, carried more speed through corners and felt way more comfortable on the TVS Apache RTR 200 I was on. And it isn't just riding that these visual skills apply to, you can apply it to your driving, rallying or any sport which involves speed.

Getting your body position right may be the first thing you want to learn (looks cool in photos, doesn't it?) but it's the last thing we learned, only after we got all our basics in order. I wasn't sticking my butt out enough, leaning forward enough, or positioning my legs correctly. But at the end of the day, we'd managed to correct most of it. I was hanging off well, leaning forward well but I still needed to work on my legs a bit. My inside leg is pretty sorted, I even managed to scrape my sliders a couple of times (though that isn't really the fastest way around). What needs work is my outside leg, and how it grips the tank. At the moment it is still a couple of inches in the air, something that needs to be worked on.

The California Superbike School gave me such vast improvements in such a short span of time, it stunned me. It doesn't matter what level of rider you are, the coaches will always catch something you need to improve upon and help you work on it. Whether you're a noob who has just picked up his first set of wheels, or a seasoned racer, there is always room for improvement and the coaches will see to it that you do. The best part? This isn't a racing school, it's a riding school! Sure it took place on a track like the MMRT, but everything they taught us over the weekend can be applied to road riding to make you quicker, safer and more confident. ✕



Above: All lined up before heading out for a session. **Left:** The coaches bring you back in to the pits mid-session if you aren't doing the drill correctly