



LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

What happens when you take your own supersport rocket to the track to learn a thing or two about riding better?

In pursuit of the elusive knee down



used to watch motorcycle racers and marvel at their skills of hitting the line every single time, smoothly and effortlessly, lap after lap. It would make me doubt if I'd ever be able to come to even five per cent of their abilities.

Right off the bat, I admit I have been riding bikes for a long time, having owned a Ninja 300, Himalayan and a Yamaha R1. I currently own a Triumph Daytona 675 and have been to the racetrack a few times, for races as well as for open track days. Still, the question of whether I was riding to my full potential was always on my mind.

Which way to hook turn?



Coach or not, I don't like being touched bro

Going fast on a straight open road is easy but changing direction at speed, that too at a certain lean angle cannot be learnt from merely observing others do it, and contrary to what others say simply being in the saddle (for going from A to B without analysing what you're doing) can never make you a good enough rider. It requires guidance in a controlled atmosphere with the chance to practice it, all the while being

judged impartially on the mistakes you're making. This innate desire for both self-improvement and self-realisation brought me to California Superbike School. The CSS is essentially a weekend at the racetrack where one goes, firstly, to unlearn the bad habits that become second nature when riding on the streets. Once that's done, the coaches guide us (both on and off the track) to grasp and implement a lot

more of what may seem counter-intuitive and plain bizarre, but which ultimately makes a massive difference in our riding. Of course, I had to face my own demons and get rid of them, while getting faster on every lap.

I even decided to take my own Daytona. The truest potential of this particular motorcycle, they say, can only be unlocked on a racetrack and I had been dying to ride it at the MMRT. With CSS techniques at my disposal, I couldn't wait to finally tango with my beloved!

I HAD TO FACE MY OWN DEMONS, AND GET RID OF THEM, WHILE GETTING FASTER ON EACH LAP



Let's settle it on tarmac huh!

Can't wait to go out hooning again!



Lean it like you mean it!



You're fast. Real fast. But as long as I'm around you'll always be second best...



The USP of CSS is that everything bike-related is broken down clinically into easy-to-grasp, bite-sized bits. They literally tune your brain to be a faster, safer and most importantly a smoother rider. It doesn't matter which bike you ride, as long as you pay attention (and practice) what you learn in those three days at CSS.

Day one

The weekend begins on a Friday and from the get-go my group was under the hawk-like gaze (both on track and off) of our coaches Siddharth Trivellore and James Toohey. Day one deals more with unlearning some bad habits (or reactive riding, in CSS parlance) and focuses on smoothness in terms of both the throttle and the brakes. Paramount, of course, is the old adage of "where you look is where you'll go" so keeping track of the correct points on the tarmac (braking points, corner apexes, corner exits) is emphasised upon. The coaches expect you to lap the track in a specific gear without using the brakes, improving your throttle inputs and helping you understand the machine better.



Looking further, going faster

THE CSS IS ESSENTIALLY A WEEKEND AT THE RACETRACK WHERE ONE GOES TO UNLEARN BAD HABITS



Roll it evenly and continuously through the remainder of the turn. Not the joint bro, the throttle

Day two

On day two, we're taught to counter-steer. The drill goes like this - "If you're turning left, on which side of the bar should you push?" asks Gary Adshead, the director and chief riding coach. Everybody says right (well, most of them) and that's what is wrong with us, the riders! It's physics you see, pushing (instead of pulling) on the handlebar is the easiest way to turn without unsettling the bike, something that's paramount at high speed corners. So, want to tip the bike into a corner? Just nudge on the bar a little and you're sorted!

We were grilled on this new (for some) technique for most of the day, first via small drills around cones placed closer and closer along the pit lane and then during laps around the track, while being followed, as well as observed from the sidelines, by the coaches. I could feel the 'tightness' of my lines along the track being transformed into a smooth, flowing sequence of flicks from apex to apex.

Day three

I was itching to get my riding posture correct from the very first day. However, the coaches have incorporated the 'body position' classes on the very last day. Getting a knee down, they say, is the coolest thing you can do on a motorcycle. However, it serves a purpose. When you are leaning into corners, hanging off is necessary to reduce the centre of gravity allowing the bike to stay on its feet. And it's important to keep the bike straight to improve your speed. Why you ask? It

allows a bigger patch of rubber to stay in touch with the tarmac so that you can open the gas. Getting off the saddle is easier than it seems. Get one butt cheek off the seat while the outside knee holds the tank recess. This not only keeps the weight balanced but also reduces handlebar inputs, keeping you stable. Finally, it was time to learn a thing or two about the 'magical' hook turn. It allows you to keep the throttle pinned and change direction in a corner!

All this put together worked wonders by the end of the day. My riding and lines were completely different than they were earlier, giving a big boost to my confidence.

Conclusion

Three days of CSS, combined with the theory sessions and the 400-odd km we rode around the track were the most fun I've ever had. Although riding all these years has made me faster for sure, but I can

testify that CSS has made me smoother, more knowledgeable and more aware.

By now, it might be clear that there's always scope for improvement, and it's all about learning, grasping and implementing what you've been taught.

Riding modern motorcycles, with electronic this and computerised that, may be enjoyable, but having full control over both your mind and body as well as the machine you're astride is a reward in itself.

If you want to be smooth, safe and fast on two wheels, I would highly recommend the CSS as the lessons learnt on track naturally lead you to be faster and safer on the road as well.



Low flying missile (read: moj)



Oops, front tyre looks like it's done for



Lessons in vision. Look ahead