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Conquer your fears with California Superbike School

Leigh Godson, bikechatter.co.uk

If you have ever had an accident on your motorcycle you will no doubt carry a little baggage from the experience whether that is toward certain vehicles, road surfaces, weather conditions - basically anything that you feel might have been a contributing factor to your incident. When this happens you try to adjust your riding or even back it off a little to add a buffer zone in case of a problem, my day at California Superbike School was all about seeing if this could be altered or removed.



In my case it was simple left hand bends and corners which on occasion caused me to feel 'not quite right' coming up to them which really is just plain stupid as I have ridden the same corners on other days and felt great, riding your motorcycle on the road is certainly a cerebral experience and you tend to trust your instincts much more than driving a car or even off roading and therein lies the main problem that your brain is simply

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overloading with reactions to keep you alive - often the completely wrong reactions too as I found out one beautiful sunny day at Silverstone's Stowe circuit.

As someone who has ridden for a few years and gained the experience of all weather riding I would have hoped that I could overcome my need to back off when things did not feel right, some days the bike would feel great under me and others I would feel totally exposed and under pressure and no amount of me telling myself that I am being stupid was sorting it out, I had the fortune to be invited along to Silverstone by California Superbike School to see if they could change the way I thought about these reactions on their level 1 training day. Normally here you would expect to hear that I did not expect a massive change from one day and I suppose to some degree this is true but CSS has an excellent history of training racers who then become champions and with thousands upon thousands of riders passing through the school's doors each year so you know they are doing something that works - how this will apply to my silly fear I do not know.

The day you have planned, regardless of which of the four levels you are booked on, are long and have an early start so to get the best out of the day I opted to stay in a local B+B overnight and arrive fresh in the morning. First up you arrive and register for the day which provides you with a natty little coloured number relating to your level which makes identifying you out on track a simple task - it also looks cool too and mine is still stuck on my screen even now.

After you register you leave your bike to get checked out for safety which is really reassuring that the other bikes out with you are not going to drop bits in front of you, I had just had some brand new tyres stuck on to review and as it turned out the front wheel had been fitted backwards - a rather silly mistake but one that the kindly chaps at CSS sorted out for me without me even knowing (until I got back to it of course) during this time I was fed and watered with a light breakfast and a drink in preparation for the day ahead.

Everyone on the day gets to sit in to the classroom briefing first up which goes through safety points, your day's structure and introductions for the staff and riding coaches, at first, as you would expect this early in the morning an entire room of motorcyclists is difficult to rouse but the introductions seem to get everybody alert and ready for the next stages which generally consist of 30 mins downtime followed by a track session and once back to the pits you have a classroom session, in all you have 5 sessions on track which focus on specific riding drills outlined lower down. At this point in the day you are given your riding coach who tends to only a couple of riders, I had the oddly monikered Matthew (everyone else seemed to have a Top Gun style call sign) for the day who blasted after me to point out when I was not doing a drill properly and most importantly to give thumbs up when I nailed it which helped me stay consistent.

The theory for the training is that you start with a limited drill - no brakes and fourth gear in my case - which makes you aware of what is happening on the bike and with you, after which you then change a single technique on each session that highlights the difference, for anyone thinking that getting on your bike and lapping a track with no brakes and a single gear is easy - erm - well it absolutely gets your attention. Each of the

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drills builds on the last and after each session your debriefing with your riding coach helps you realise which areas you struggled with and others you found easy.

Drills

1: Throttle Control

Seems simple and obvious doesn't it? Good throttle control is the basis in keeping the bike stable - remember that because I can guarantee after you have done level one the phrase 'keep the bike stable' will be etched into your subconscious forever, the limitation of no brakes and fourth gear means you are having to read into the upcoming corner more and in order to get the best traction you apply a smooth throttle on the exit or the bike feels rubbish. In itself this is eye opening enough and really shows you that when you misjudge your entry speed it makes a huge difference to the way you are going to bring the bike out the other side. Andy Ibbott's classroom seminar introduces you to 'Survival Reactions' which put plainly are the things that make you stop riding normally and do all or the wrong things that actually accentuate a bad situation rather than resolve it - each trainee that mentioned feeling odd on the bike noted they performed one of the survival reactions - simply going through the theory of why we do this and how it is counterproductive opened our eyes.

2: Turn Points

One of the most apparent issues you find during drill one is that without a predetermined point at which to initiate the turn you get a slim chance of a decent corner entry which then translates to a shonky (at best) throttle control, drill two shows you that when you pick a turn point you can concentrate on keeping the bike stable with greater ease. The coaches handily place markers out for you to follow and the difference is instant! In the classroom you are guided through the theory and practise of why we automatically choose to try and turn in early, why a later turn is actually preferable and how creating a later turn point overrides the onset of these survival reactions. You can tell that Andy has a lot of experience in teaching the classroom seminars as his method of connecting with the group is brilliant - each time you learn something new it is done in an engaging manner which opens you up to really think and get to trying it out on track which ultimately leads to you learning faster than you would expect.

3: Quick Turning

This put simply is a way of getting deeper into a corner, making the turn faster and ultimately keeping the bike more upright which keeps the bike stable (are you getting bored of this yet? It is such a repetitive phrase but underpins the entire training day). We all naturally counter steer to be able to ride our motorcycles and we do this without thinking but by making us think about how and when we do this we can force a faster input and as a result initiate a quick turn, one of the survival reactions we have all dealt with at some point is the feeling that space is too short to get round but by being able to quick turn it takes the edge off and makes deep corner

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turning much more fun and as a result - safe.

Lunch (and downtime sessions)

When you finish your track session you get a period of downtime in which you take in liquids, snacks or a bit of relaxation all of which are provided in with your day and helps to keep you on your game, lunch is also provided in the cost of your day and the food is very good indeed, my preference was lasagna and a side salad (yum) which hit the spot and did not overload my stomach meaning I could get on with the second half of the day feeling as comfortable as the first. During my lunch I was directed out to the off track area to go through a steering drill which helped nail the quick turning a touch more - TOP TIP - You can also go and fill up again in the paddock at lunch, I forgot and thankfully had enough juice to finish the day but really didnt notice until late on in the day.

4: Rider Input

Excessive rider input causes more problems than you might think, hanging off the bars accentuates bumps on the road surface for an example which stops the bike being able to self correct - something it does automatically and it comes free with the bike - apparently! I think we have probably all done it where we feel nervous and grip the bars tight which didnt help, there is a full classroom session based on the causes of locking up on the bike, how this affects our general handling and how this links to all the previous drills which inevitably leads to less control over the motorcycle. At this point you are amazed by the difference you have noticed in your riding but starts to feel like you are remembering loads - the solution? Just relax which ironically is the point of the drill - cool eh!

5: Two Step Turning

Your last classroom session and drill which is the glue that binds the whole day together, by this point you will probably be a little tired, if not physically then certainly mentally. Perhaps you even feel like you are going backwards a little, I know I did early in this session but a lap or so in and something amazing happened - I felt comfortable with it ALL coming together and was hitting corners with more speed and aggression than I would have though possible at the start of the day. The process is simple though and links nicely to choosing a turn point, before you enter the corner you have picked a turn point which helps you to take the line you want and keep the right throttle control, you now let your peripheral vision deal with this process in the run up to the turn and use your eyes to choose a point mid-corner to use as your apex - the net result is a smoother corner and the ability to read further up the road or track which leads directly to going faster, cornering better and generally feeling like a riding god.

During your day with California Superbike School you learn an incredible amount in what seems to be 5 very simple lessons, within the level one group we had riders of all ages, skill levels and different machines and everyone I spoke to at the end of the day shared the same opinion that the difference in just a single day was

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massive. In my case the big difference was the way that the classroom sessions made me think about every time I reacted badly to a situation and made matters worse which absolutely built on my existing cornering gremlins, during the end session you are told once you leave to forget everything you have been told which seems an odd approach but I can confirm that what you have learned stays firmly embedded and you just find yourself practising each drill on general rides.

Conclusion:

Well as I said before I was expecting results but thought that after just one level it would not have sorted the majority of my riding gripes, in actual fact it has been the biggest improvement to my riding that I have had and I now have the feeling of much more room and thinking time going in to corners which has really affected my confidence in a big way, since my day at the school my riding has been much more smooth and I actually cannot wait to see if I get invited back to see how each of the remaining 3 levels change the way I ride. I would urge every rider to get themselves booked in to level one at the very least and would love to hear from you guys that have already been through the school to see what you made of the respective levels you have done (let us know in the comments box below)

Finally I would like to thank Andy and Donna Ibbott for the opportunity to come down and see what the school is about, Dan for making the arrangements and Matthew for the on track coaching. I hope to see you guys again in the future!

About CSS:

The California Superbike Schools are dedicated to discovering, improving and refining the art of cornering. Corners are the challenge when you are riding a motorcycle. Corners are why we ride, corners are fun, corners are exciting, corners are where time is won and lost.

We have been teaching and coaching the art form for over 25 years to road riders, track dayers and racers alike. We have taught over 100,000 road riders, thousands of track day enthusiasts, and just as many racers at all levels including several World Champions. The Schools operate on a truly global scale, with courses in America, Australia, UK, Ireland, Holland, Spain, Sweden, Norway, South Africa, Dubai and Greece.

The techniques we teach are all about cornering, nothing more, and nothing less. Everyone who rides will confess that corners are the key and we can unlock for you a new level in your cornering skills.

If its cornering confidence on the road you crave, we can satisfy it. If its moving up a group or to the front of the group on track days we can get you there. If its reduced lap times and race wins you desire we can coach you to that success.

All we need is a day, to start. A day and a willingness to learn and we will make your corners better.

To get yourself booked in to the school click the link below and choose your preferred location and date, as the school is so popular it is best to book early.

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