

Superbike School

Level One

Monday morning and back at the Island: this time for my first California Superbike School. Early start, 7am at the gates, and first things first – the scrutineers' station to check over the Trumpy. Then to registrations, the day's safety brief, and upstairs to the classroom by 8am sharp.

In the classroom there were between 25 and 30 students but it felt like Steve, the teacher, was speaking to each of us one on one. He started off the day by telling us a bit about himself, the riding school, his riding history, and throughout the day he made jokes with the class about his experiences and in doing so lightened the atmosphere of the classroom.

Our first session consisted of a group discussion of what we as a whole thought were the most key attributes that make the bike stable and therefore safe in general and around corners. The class, with a little help from Steve, came to put stability through good throttle control as number one on our list. Once we had the discussion on how to use this information there was no time to waste – green group (my group) was out second and it didn't seem like long before I was sitting on my TT waiting at the entrance to the track.

After the first classroom session I was really looking forward to trying out our new technique. When I first got out on track I was a bit unsure about trying it until Aaron, my on-track coach, led me through some corners and let me know through the use of hand signals how and when to use the throttle. The best things about on the on-track coaching are the time given to you to really give it a go, and the coach staying with you until he can see you are comfortable in doing the new technique.

At the end of the first track session Aaron's students gathered around. The three of us were asked how we felt about the ride and what we thought of the new technique, which corners we had trouble with and which ones felt really good. Aaron gave good positive feedback of what I had done correctly and what I needed to work on.

As soon as the debrief was done it was back to the classroom – no time to waste, there were still four more Level One drills to go. They consisted of:

- Entry Points
- Quick Turn
- Funky Chicken (my favourite)
- The Two Step

After each classroom session we headed out on track to put theory into practice.

I didn't used to think too much of entry points when I was riding, I just thought 'I'll hang on and lean through the corner'. I found I always felt rushed, and didn't really know what to do. After having the entry point explained and putting what I was told to use on the track it was like I was in control of the TT and not just hoping it would somehow find its way through the corner.

The Quick Turn was the biggest eye-opener for me. I was amazed just how much control you can have over the motorbike. When I was asked for the first time if I counter-steered around corners I said as a mumble 'Yeah...' because I wasn't 100% certain that I was doing it correctly. The Quick Turn consisted of pushing on the handle bar in the same direction as you wanted to turn – not gradually, but quickly. In doing this the bike will act within milliseconds and begins to turn. The first couple of corners I attempted to do this, I found that it was not very smooth but worked really well and I was not wasting time 'finding the line' as they say. I was making the corner straight.

When I was out on the track practising my throttle control, entry points and quick turning, I found I was starting to concentrate just that little bit too hard, you know, holding onto the bars just that little bit too tightly... I was really trying to get the corner perfect and get the best exit leading into the next corner or straight. I felt tense and not relaxed at all.

I was told once, you can watch your average Joe going around the track and he looks like he's really pushing it, looking a bit uneasy on the bike. Then you see a pro on the track and he looks as if he's just going for a casual ride down the road, he makes it look really easy, but he's going about ten times faster...

The next stage was the Funky Chicken, oh yes this was my favourite. The on-track coach would ride behind and observe you to see if you looked relaxed or not. Once the observation was done the coach would then overtake and move his arms in a flapping motion – this letting you know to relax a bit and loosen the grip on the good old handle bars before you rip them off. I found at one stage I was overtaken by Aaron and yes, he did the funky chicken just at the corner I was having the most amount of trouble with. So, against my body's will to rip off the handle bars I loosened my grip just a little... That was all it took, and as I went into the corner I did the Quick Turn, opened the throttle, and it was great - I've never felt the TT so smooth through a corner. I couldn't believe it. Again in the next corner I did the same and the Trumpy felt like it was doing all the hard work and I was doing just about as little as possible. I also noticed after a lap or two that I was entering and exiting the corners quite a bit faster and with more ease than before. Well, I guess you could say I was wrapped!

Everyday Joe.