



CSS helps achieve better control, so you can gradually go faster and faster

# DO IT RIGHT!

Unlearn the myth and get the fundamentals right; that's the only way you can go faster. We do just that at the California Superbike School 2013

Story: Sarmad Kadiri Photography: Gary Bailey & www.picman.co.uk



Coach, Dylan Code, emphasizes on getting the basics right before moving to the next level of riding

**H**OW CAN I BE FASTER, safer on my bike? Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Hasn't your heart leaped to the mouth while avoiding a crash, as you try too hard to keep up with your faster biker buddies? Yes, it has happened to me too, just like most other mortal bike riders. The other nagging concern for us is not being able to get the best out of our bikes. It's about time we did something about it. The ideal thing is to go back to school (the California Superbike School in this case), get the basics right again and, while you're at it, learn a few new tricks too. Sadly, there are no magic potions that one can drink to attain biking nirvana and overcome these evils. Lord be praised, as CSS comes to the rescue by teaching you the dos and don'ts of riding, which help you achieve better control and you can gradually go faster and faster.

So, I decided to get out of my comfortable office chair and leave the air-conditioned office behind for three days and make better use of them at CSS. And, believe me, it has been, to date, the most beneficial three days for my entire riding life. Sweating it out riding on the track, lap after lap, to understand the racing line and then improving on it, with the help of professional coaches is something absolutely special.

The riding course is divided into four levels, each taught by trained, professional riding coaches. My classroom coach was none other than Dylan Code, son of the legendary Keith Code (founder of CSS); while on the track I was under the guidance of the very fast on track and equally patient off

it - Andy 'Spidey' Peck, from the UK. Your previous track experience is irrelevant, as you have to start with Level One and gradually climb up the ladder. Beginning on Friday and subsequently carry on through the weekend, with everyday dedicated to one particular level.

Chatting with Dylan about CSS in India, he emphasised the important role played by T T Varadarajan, Managing Director of Maya Appliances, and how the Indian brought the school to the country. "Whenever motorcycle becomes popular in one area, it's always born out of passion. T T [Varadarajan] is just one of those people who are passionate about motorcycles. I think a lot of people are lucky because he is so interested in promoting motorcycles in India."

There were many students from the last season, 'repeating' the class and they help break the ice for newcomers like me. So, following their advice I quickly took a bio-break, squeezed into the leather racing suit and was ready for the first session. The flag briefing had the usual explanation of the yellow, red and chequered flag and other safety rules and, subsequently, the 60 odd students were divided into three groups. Every group first goes through a class session followed by track stints. The curriculum concentrates on very specific drills and techniques that not just build confidence, but also understanding of how to get around a track. More importantly, it helps make your bike do what you want it to.

Each level begins in the classroom with a theoretical explanation of the



Coach Spidey helps Sarmad overcome the tricky C10-C11



Track coaches keep a keen eye on the students



Age isn't a bar if you have the will to learn

## COME ALL

'You're never too old to ride; you are too old only if you don't ride'. The school is for every one right from youngsters in their early twenties who ride every day, to more mature riders, who somehow manage time for riding from their busy schedules. Farokh Anklesaria, the 58-year-old Mariner and bike enthusiast from Mysore, says that the school has helped him a lot.

"I waited two years to get a seat, because when I had tried earlier, the slots were all sold out. But the wait has been well worth it. I have been riding for 40 years and after coming here I realised that I knew nothing. More than that, I have become a safer rider, which is most important for me. Earlier, I was capable to use only about 20 per cent of my Suzuki GSXR1000's potential. But after the training here I think now I can get the maximum out of my bike. And, yes, I am coming back next year too," said this old-timer.



The coach transfers classroom lesson on the track via hand signals



You become faster around turns and more aware of what you're doing on the bike

## JOE ROBERTS

This year CSS India had attracted the phenomenally talented Joe Roberts on board as Guest Coach to help local riders at the school. Joe is a 15-year-old racing prodigy personally coached by Keith Code since 2008. The young lad started competing at the age of seven and is now a front-runner in the Red Bull MotoGP Rookies Cup, a series designed to discover future MotoGP racing talent that runs as a support series at Grand Prix events.



At the end of day three you become a more confident rider, and most of the techniques apply even on streets



Team CSS 2013 basking in glory at the end of the successful India session



Sarmad joins the dots: Turning point, apex, exit point

riding drill, which is later put to practice on the track. Your coach keeps a keen eye on you and even transfers the classroom lesson on the track via a range of hand signals. During the track session, Spidey, riding a BMW S1000RR, would come past and direct me into the pit lane to offer on-the-spot advice, which I applied in the remaining part of the session. You even get a post-track feedback from the coach and then it's back to the classes for some more instructions.

Dylan explained that the coaches come from various backgrounds. "They just need to be good riders, excellent communicators and spot-on observers. There are many good riders, who are also good at communication, but, maybe, aren't good observing problems of others. Our coaches are selected and trained for a fairly long period of time to really help the riders achieve their goals.

I started from Level One, which covers about half-a-dozen common riding errors and why we tend to make them. After the classroom session, we hit the track to understand and correct errors such as corner entry speeds, why the bike becomes unstable, intermittent traction, improper riding position, inadequate steering and poor rider-bike interface.

Day two began with Level Two, which builds on the fundamentals taught in the first level and trains students to improve their peripheral vision and how to process the information rapidly. Day two on track teaches the importance of target fixation, corner definition, how to get familiar with a track or road and

methods to approach a corner. The final day is of Level Three, the most strenuous of all the three days, as it focuses on body positioning and how it can affect your cornering and improves rider-bike interface.

One has to complete the first three levels to qualify for the ultimate Level Four. Since it was my first time at CSS, I have to wait until the next session to qualify for Four. But essentially, in Level Four coaches assess every student's skills and, accordingly, chalk out a unique programme designed for each student. Having said that, many students who had participated in CSS earlier were repeating Levels One, Two and Three as they wanted to perfect the fundamentals before proceeding to the next level.

Frankly, there is a lot to take in, that too in a short span of time and there was a point where I could almost hear an alarm and flashing 'System Overload' sign in my brain. Probably that's why the school has been broken down into various levels, over three days, to work through. But the good part is that you work on one drill per session, as the school is aware that every student has a lot going on in his head.

There were dozens of steps that groom you in perfecting the art of cornering. If you're hoping to read them all in this article, then I'm sorry to disappoint you, because I honestly can't remember all of them. But I do remember enough to put them to good use every time I throw my leg over my bike.

If CSS could do wonders to an

average rider like me, I couldn't resist asking Dylan when his school would produce the next MotoGP champion from India. "CSS can definitely help. To be honest to ourselves, there is just one world champion a year in MotoGP premier classes. Virtually every world champion started young, when they were just four or six years old, and they raced pretty much every week or weekend, year on year." Dylan adds, "I think CSS will develop passion in riders and they, in turn, will take their children and raise them in racing. Maybe, we may not get a world champion racer in this generation of riders, but in the following generation, if we can make racing accessible to them." Highlighting the hurdles in our country, he said, "Racing is relatively not that accessible in India. For instance, it's not hard to find a cricket field in any city, but I'm told that there are currently just three race tracks in India. Of which there are just two that are suitable and the third one is a bit too tight. That doesn't make it conducive to breeding a world champion, but it is usually fuelled by parents' enthusiasm rather than the rider's urge."

Over the three day, I tried to link all the lessons that I had learnt in the past few days as I rode on the track. There was also no scarcity of track time either, which I made full use of. This also meant aching body and discovering muscles you never thought existed in your body, thanks to the constant effort of riding. Not only did I become faster around turns, but also became more aware of what I was doing on the bike and how it reacted. I was more

## INTERVIEW: T T SIDDHARTH, Director (Operations), Maya Appliances

*"You know, we are not even going to recover half the cost of this school from what we charge. But at the end of the third day the smile on the faces of the student that we have trained says it all."*

*After a blistering fast lap around the Madras Motor Race Track, T T Siddharth, Director (Operations), Maya Appliances, walks into the pit-lane, greeting the people around and seemed as composed as ever. This young entrepreneur talks about his passion for motor sport and his desire to take the California Superbike School to the next level by making this world-class motorcycle training accessible to more bike enthusiasts.*



**BIKE INDIA:** How did you get hooked to motor sport?

**T T SIDDHARTH:** My family was always interested in motor sport, right from my farther (T T Varadarajan) to my uncles, who have been interested in rallying or motorcycling. I grew up in that environment, with bikes around me and it got ingrained into me. Right from a very young age, I always wanted to get into racing. I ride and drive a lot. (A BMW S 1000RR roars past from the pit lane to the race track, almost making him inaudible... Goosebumps!)

It was in the early nineties that my dad went to California for the first time and did the California Superbike School and realised that something like the CSS would do huge wonders for the talent we have here. There are a lot of skilled riders around, but no real platform or foundations upon which they can build their skills further. They do well in the domestic circuit, but don't seem to do so well in the international space. So, it comes down to providing the right background and training.

**BI:** How has CSS been received in India?

**TTS:** When CSS came to India back in 2010, it was, in fact, their first time in South-East Asia. I think the school has been very successful. The first year was a very focused effort, as we didn't have any students who paid to ride and we sponsored India's top 24 riders. Some of them went out to do really well. We had Sharad Kumar, who went on to ride the MotoGP 125 class; Rajni did exceeding well both in domestic and international space and guys like Rohit Giri and others are doing really well.

The second year we had 90 students and the following year we had 124 and the same number this year. We cannot accommodate more than that as it dilutes the quality of the school. The school has evolved over the four years and now organising has become a bit easier, because it's a huge logistical nightmare, not to mention it's a huge financial burden as well. But, you know, we are passionate about the sport and I don't think there is anything that can keep us away from doing this.

**BI:** How many months of planning does it take to make CSS happen?

**TTS:** To do an event in January we begin our planning some time in September-October the previous year. It takes a good four months to get everything together. This year we have been working on a lot of sponsors as well, because as much as we would like to fund it, it does become too expensive to do so. We've been lucky to have Motul this year, who, being associated with motor sport, have recognised the importance of a school like this. Then TVS Motor have supported us from day one by providing bikes for the students (including the one I rode). BMW Motorrad have been a fantastic help with their support with the coach's bikes (yes, we noticed, one of them did zipped past a minute ago). Eventually, we are going to need a lot more involvement from manufacturers and lubricant companies, people who can take this school to the next level.

**BI:** Is the fee justified?

**TTS:** Even at Rs 40,000 a weekend that we charge, I don't think you're gonna get that experience anywhere else. If you do a two-day school in the States, it would cost anywhere between USD 2,000 and 2500, which is a lot of money. People who come here get world-class coaching, they get a bike if they don't own one, we give them food, petrol and almost everything

they need; they just need to show up. It's not that we want to make money out of this school, but you have to look at financial viability too. You know, we are not even going to recover half the cost of this school from what we charge. We are passionate about it, but we also have to be realistic about it. In fact, at the end of the third day the smile on the faces of the students that we have trained says it all.

**BI:** How can the manufacturers help?

**TTS:** You know, Yamaha and Honda in India are companies that can really help. Firstly, they are already present in the Indian motor sport scene with their one-make races and they also have their own racing schools. CSS is widely recognised as the world's best school and if one of them can recognise the importance of working with us, then they wouldn't need to work with the second best.

The other way they can really help us is talent scout. The manufacturers have a lot of riders that they pick up year on year and we can work with them in identifying talented riders between the age of 12 and 15 years. Put them through the school and, maybe, pick the top two riders of the season and send them to California to get further training at the Code Race School. And then with their help in sponsorship send them to FIM Asia cup. With this international exposure it would be like baby steps towards MotoGP for the riders. **BIKE**

