

INTERVIEW

T T Varadarajan and Siddharth T T

Comprehensive and Well-oiled Coaching

Bike India sat down with T T Varadarajan and his son, Siddharth, who offered India her first superbike school complete with international-standard coaching. We speak to them about their journey thus far and the future direction

INTERVIEWED BY:

ASPI BHATHENA AND JIM GORDE

Bike India (BI): What inspired you to bring the California Superbike School (CSS) into India?

Siddharth T T (STT): My father, Vardu, attended the CSS for the first time in the US in the mid 1990s. From the very first time he was hooked and realised the value of what was being taught at the school. Since then both him and I have attended several schools in the US and the UK. The CSS is by far the most comprehensive school for the motorcycle enthusiast and young kids who aspire to be future world champions.

India at the time had plenty of talented riders but none of them had access to professional coaching and track-time. While they were successful at the national level, they were never competitive in the international motor sport arena.

Being motorcycle/motor sport

enthusiasts, we wanted to provide a platform for talented youngsters in India to further their skills on a motorcycle, and the CSS was an ideal way to do so. So after 15 years of persuading Keith Code, the CSS founder, to bring the school to India, we finally brought them to Chennai in 2009. The rest is history.

BI: Has the response been as expected?

STT: The response has been overwhelming. From the very first school in 2009, our slots were almost always fully booked within a week of opening registrations.

Students saw the school as an eye-opener in terms of how they approached riding a motorcycle. We only offer 126 spots over two weekends every year and it's always a struggle to balance new students

versus those who want to come back year after year. Since 2009 we have trained over 650 students.

BI: Has there been a change in the diversity of riders attending the school?

STT: Yes, I would say so. The first year we sponsored India's top 24 riders and limited the school to the pros. The next five years, we've had students from very diverse backgrounds — professional racers, enthusiasts who are doctors, accountants, engineers, and entrepreneurs, et al. We've had kids as young as 15 and even old riders above the age of 60. They come from various backgrounds but they all have one thing in common: the passion for riding motorcycles and wanting to improve their skills.

BI: What is needed for a rider to qualify for level four?

STT: The only requirement is that you complete levels one, two and three prior to registering for level four. The levels are very well-thought-out and are designed to deliver a progression of skills from one level to the next. If you're a first-time student,

regardless of whether you are Valentino Rossi, you start at level one.

BI: Do you see any changes or additions to the drills involved?

STT: Keith Code is constantly working on the technology which is always evolving. I say technology, because technology is the application of knowledge to a practical end. That's exactly what the school is about, understanding the science of how the rider interacts with the bike and how that interaction affects the motorcycle.

So, yes, while the drills more or less stay the same, the way the technology is delivered is constantly evolving thanks to Keith's tireless research. Every once in a while new drills are added as well. The coaches are required to constantly keep themselves updated and trained through the technical briefs that are issued to them by Keith.

BI: You've been there at the school yourself. What were the things you learned that made sense owing to the difference in approach?

STT: As I said before, no other school in the world approaches riding the way the CSS does. Keith Code was a fairly successful racer in the 1960s and '70s. What he realised when he was racing is that riders, no matter where they came from or what they rode, committed certain common errors. These errors were classified by Keith as "Survival Reactions" or what he refers to as "SR's" in his books.

Survival reactions are involuntary reactions that are committed by the body when it senses danger or fear, and they are almost always the opposite of what a rider should actually be doing when things get a bit hairy on a motorcycle.

Keith started the school in the late '70s in an attempt to teach racers/riders skills that would help them overcome these SR's and, in turn, become faster, smoother and safer riders. The skills learned are very tangible and the results are immediate. The best part is that the skills taught are as applicable for street riding as they are for the racetrack and can be applied no matter what bike you ride.

When I first went to the school in 1997, I believed that I was a very good rider. Once I went through the levels, I realised how little I knew about how to handle a bike! I came out of the school a massively improved rider and it was an eye-opener for me.

Level one teaches you about how to keep the bike stable using the throttle,

relaxing on the bike and learning how to turn the bike more efficiently. Level two is all about vision and how it affects your riding. Level three is about the physical interaction between you and your bike. The most important part is how the information is delivered. You have classroom sessions which explain the theory, on-track sessions where a coach trails you and observes your riding while correcting your mistakes, and off-track debriefs where you have a one-to-one personal interaction with your on-track riding coach. I don't think any other school approaches coaching in such a comprehensive and well-oiled manner.

BI: Siddharth, you're a coach with the CSS. Do you plan to add another venue? Maybe, have it more than once a year?

STT: I went through a coach selection programme and some coach training at this year's CSS. I am not a fully fledged coach yet because I still have some training to undergo in the UK at Silverstone. Since the CSS is the best in the business, they are extremely selective about whom they train as coaches and I had to pass a grilling session to be even considered to be trained as a coach. I passed the test along with another coach tryout, Vicky Jaising, and the success rate is only one out of every 200 coach applicants. We will be the first coaches from South East Asia.

The idea behind having Indian coaches is to bring the cost of running the school down. A big part of the expense of running the school concerns the international coach fees, their air fare and accommodation, etc.

Yes, the international coaches add immense value to the school and we will continue to have them. It is the 'California Superbike School, India', though, so having at least four coaches from India is the goal.

In addition to this, if we can get the motor sport authorities in India to subsidise some of the costs related to track rentals, etc, motorcycle manufacturers and tyre manufacturers to come onboard and support us, we could really bring our costs down and, in turn, make the school more accessible and run it more often.

Today, because we primarily fund the school privately, the cost to a student is also fairly high. We don't want to be an elitist school catering only to wealthy riders; we want to be accessible to every motorcycle enthusiast. For this to happen, we definitely need some help from the authorities and manufacturers. **BIKE**

