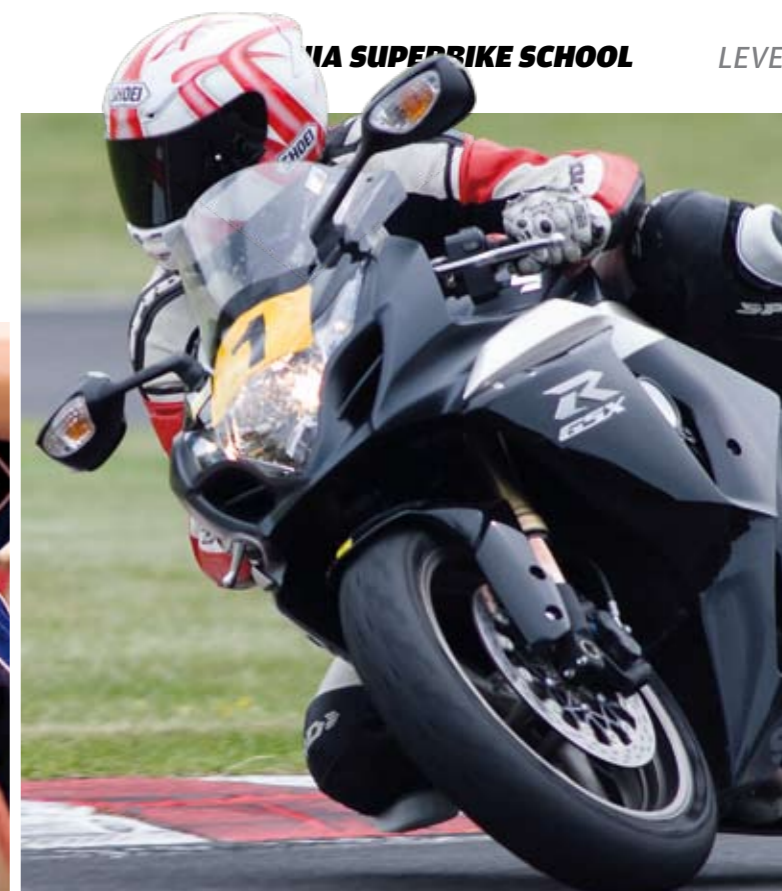




Level 2



With a Level 1 certificate already in their sweaty pockets, BJ and Andy go back to CSS to put it all to effect, and get some vision with Level 2

Words by: Benjamin Kubas Cronin & Andy Saunders Pics by: Phil Steinhardt

Last month we began by berating school-life as a bit of an example of how we don't like being told what to do. Now, if you need training there are few ways around that, and if you want to improve your riding, even fewer places worth spending your hard-earned. Being older and wiser, we all realise that sometimes other people really do know better. We discovered during our Level 1 drills that simple exaggeration or refinement of things we already do can make a huge difference to our road and track riding. Both Andy and I found improvements on our first day which helped our pace on track no end. Now, it's time for Level 2, and slowing things down. What?

BJ's Experience

After discovering the joy of a hotel room you, and the hotel staff for that matter, can't open, I awoke at 6am feeling a little ropery. My first thought is that 'this is crazy'. This is far too early to get up after an evening spent wrestling with a door lock, following a blisteringly hot day on track at Brands Hatch. So I'm actually glad that it'll be our eyes getting a work out today, rather than our bodies. Wrong again, Kubas!

CSS like you to be there very early, 7am is preferable. This is so you have enough time to sign in and raid Tash's supply shop for energy products, do anything that needs doing to your bike, and get generally settled before the bell

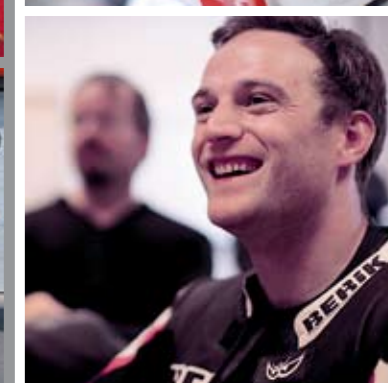
LEVEL 2 IS ALL ABOUT VISION, AND THE EFFECT IT HAS ON YOUR RIDING

Well, kind of, because Level 2 is all about vision, and the control it has over your riding.

It's about using your eyes to maximum advantage, and by making things seem slower by combating target fixation, and increasing spatial-awareness. It certainly doesn't sound the most exciting of subjects, but like many good students, we're both here to learn - and boy did we learn.

rings for class. Ok, it's a charming lady on a loud-hailer, but you'll get grief if you're not where you're supposed to be. Even the school bell never did that!

We sit through the identical briefing from the level before, until the time comes to split into groups. Our first lesson is taken by Hollywood (Paul), where he sits us down in front of a whiteboard and queries exactly what we think of as 'vision'. After a brief



Above: This is why you should never, ever, get BJ out of bed before 7am

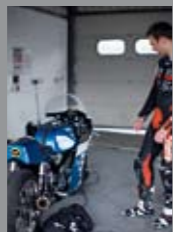


discussion, he challenges us to find at least one reference point for one corner on the circuit. A reference point can be used to help with braking and turning, though they can change dramatically as you get faster. For our first session, we once again had no brakes, and fourth-gear only. This meant getting used to Paddock Hill without any brakes, again, but I enjoy the discipline of having no anchors.

After finding a rhythm, which takes a while as everyone around you is also acclimatising, I began to search for reference points. As I'd spent the previous day whizzing around the same track, it gave me a bit more scope for concentrating on the task at hand. As such, I was pretty pleased to find a point at almost every corner. Whether it was the third straw-bale to the left, or a tree, I'd found one that I was comfortable with at the pace we were doing.

Session over, my instructor for the day, Hollywood, has a bit of a chat about the session, and is pleased that I seem to get it. The next classroom session is back with Andy Ibbott, where he now challenges our preconceptions of what parts of the track are safe, and just how much space we actually have. Our eyes lock on to the space we think we have available, especially at places that are unknown to us. So for the next lesson, we all ride out line-astern, firstly to the very far left of the circuit. Next lap, we switch to the far right, and the next the dead centre. The session

Below: Andy gets a mild case of wood over a gorgeous Triumph Trident



Below: Ibbott used to be a road tester for 'the comic' - so he's prone to bullshit



continues as normal, until Hollywood finds me. Ibbott instructed us to follow our tutor, no matter where he goes. He goes up a rumble strip, you follow, and so on. Thankfully I'm not too afraid of rumble-strips, but bouncing over the

“IT TEACHES YOU THAT UNKNOWN PLACES AREN'T ALWAYS BAD”

huge blobs at the inside of Druids was interesting! But it's a good drill, because not only does it give you plenty of new information about the circuit, it also teaches you that unknown places aren't the bad spots you may think they are.

By the time we're back in the classroom, the temperature really soared. Andy Ibbott now shows us how our vision works, and how it can restrict our actions. So for the next session, we're asked to widen our vision, kinda without widening it. It's all about taking notice, not concentrating, but taking notice of everything in your field of vision, rather

than what you're locked onto. For me, it worked straight away, the upshot being that I suddenly had more time on my hands than before.

Fresh from this revelation, our next drill was based on vanishing points and

whether turns had them, or not. Much like the Two-Step Turn from Level One, this is more Three-Step, the third step being looking ahead of the exit. Just not too far, like Hollywood berated me for after the session; must rein in my rubber neck! The last session of the day is something of a treat, in that it's a pick-up drill for good exit drive. Basically, you leave your body position pretty much in a cornering position, and as you begin to feed the throttle, you stand the bike up exiting the turn. This really helps drive out of turns, and is a wonderfully fun way to end a rather enlightening day.

Andy's Experience

So it was back to Brands Hatch for the second time in as many days, to complete Level 2 at CSS. This meant that the track was still fresh in my head, and far less daunting. Even Paddock Hill, my favourite place to crash, had begun to flatten out a little.

The first drill made me actively look for reference points. Anything on a track or road can be used to help you get into, and out of, a corner. Sounds obvious, but it wasn't until I started to pick the RP's up for many, if not all bends, that things started to flow.

Even when things flow well, we perhaps only ride the lines we know. Take your favourite stretch of road; how many times do we venture off our preferred line? Not that often - unless we're in trouble.

of bends, and generally all over the place. What this did for me was to demonstrate how I can use the space, but also that there's a lot more of it than you think.

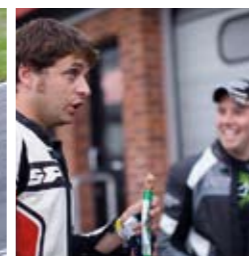
We all tend to panic and go a little rigid if we stray off line, but keeping calm under these conditions is the key to not letting it ruin your lap. This drill allows you to get used to the level of grip on the dirty areas of track, kerbing, and white lines. At the end of the off-piste tour it had already sunk in that getting off your chosen line needn't equal getting into trouble, or an imminent 'off'.

Another drill that really opened my eyes was 'wide view'. Andy Ibbott talked about using our peripheral vision to good effect. He told us that the more we allow our brain to take in

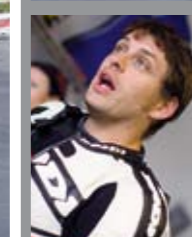
“MORE TIME MEANS LESS PANIC, AND IT'S THE KEY TO GOING FASTER”

So the next task was to demonstrate just how much space there was out there that can be used safely. Our instructors for the day led the way. Mine, Squirrel, lead me a merry dance up and over rumble strips for fifty yards at a time. Weird lines in and out

what our eyes are feeding it, the more in control we feel. He demonstrated this in the classroom by coming up and sticking his face in mine. Rarely have two such large noses occupied such a small amount of space. Holding his position he asked how comfortable



Above: never before have two such large conks inhabited so little mutual space



Above: BJ's shocked by his instructor's truly shite 'Superman flying' impression

I was and how much I could see. Not very, and not a lot, would be the answers there.

Back out on track it works amazingly. I wasn't seeing or looking at things differently, I was just processing the information differently - allowing my grey matter to see extra stuff beyond just Tarmac.

Things like the grandstand, pit lane garages, and the port-a-loo's on the infield at Paddock Hill - of all things. Comedy crappers aside, this is a very useful tool that will take time to master. With it though comes more spacial awareness, and perception of what is going on, which reduces tunnel vision, and gives you more time. More time means less panic and better corner planning, which enables smoother more flowing riding. This is the key to riding faster.

Andy asked us, 'what if you can't see the reference point you want to?'. Or 'what if you can't see your apex when you're about to turn?'. We've all heard of chasing your vanishing points, and so this drill was a natural progression. But linking this drill to everything else we'd learnt suddenly cemented all the elements into place. I found the information on offer to me was abundant. There's so much out there to aid you with smooth speed, you've just got to know how to unlock it.

The last session was the most enjoyable. I've always feared losing traction exiting turns, so have never really pushed it. I covered this feeling in last month's issue during the throttle control sequence in Level One. The 'Pick-Up Drill' offered bags of confidence in the grip on offer, as you quite literally pick the bike up and gas it hard out of the corners. I took to it fast, keeping my body weight off the inside of the bike, which allowed the bike to finish the rest of the turn.

I did pick it up too early one time and ran wide onto the rumble strip, but because of the earlier drill it didn't ►

faze me, and I just kept the throttle open as I looked for my new exit point.

Vision is a huge part of technical riding knowledge, a discipline that requires discipline itself, but once cracked it's enlightening, and the transformation in your riding, phenomenal. It's a real eye-opener.

Conclusion - BJ

I'd thought that the skills learned in Level One couldn't be bettered in wow-factor. But I was very wrong. While the first day works mostly on the mechanics of riding, any scepticism I'd harboured about what working with my vision could possibly do for me was completely banished on Level Two.

De-restricting my vision was a big wake-up call for me. The reason being that everything slowed down; I suddenly had so much more time and space to complete my turn, and apply myself to bring together all the lessons I'd learned. And that didn't stop for me. Rather than work on each individual drill at a time, I tried really hard to utilise everything I'd

been taught. When it starts to come together, and become subliminal, you can really feel the benefit. All those individual steps combine, and cornering suddenly becomes a rewarding art form.

The real clincher is using these skills on the road. If you know your normal routes well, you can put them to work just like being on circuit. On roads I don't know so well, I limited my inputs to just the steering and vision drills. But, it's made both Saunders and I far more cerebral riders. We both found that the first time we went on track afterwards, we were far more competent, and safe, than we had been before.

I discovered that on lapping an unfamiliar track I'm actually looking for reference points, and scouting the outer reaches of the Tarmac. Neither of us can wait to complete the school with Levels 3 and 4, and maybe some personal tutoring.

CSS has already made both of us better riders, and you really can't argue with the value of that. **ES**



HOW MUCH FOR HOW MUCH?

TAILOR THE CSS EXPERIENCE TO SUIT YOUR POCKET

Cost all depends upon where, when and what options you'd like. Everything from leathers to bikes can be hired if you don't want to risk binning your own. A day will cost between £340-£415, going up to £2,000 for the rather exclusive foreign school trips.

Yamaha R6s are hired with a deposit of £500, which is all you'll pay if you write it off. But if you just break a lever, they'll only charge you for it on top of the £230 hire fee. Could be two ton well spent. Leathers are £35 per day with a £50 crash damage fee; which is pretty good value as they'd cost far more to replace your own.

There are also books and DVDs for sale written by Keith Code, CSS' founder, for brushing up your skills. But there's nothing like actually attending one of the four levels listed below.

Level 1: It's all about stability, via throttle control, steering and vision. This is the level that impacts most on the majority of attendees.

Level 2: Two concentrates on vision and awareness, with a nice treat thrown in at the end of the day. This level makes your riding world a whole lot bigger.

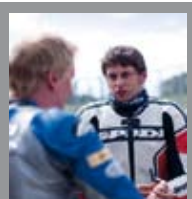
Level 3: Body position is the key to this exercise, using knees and the upper body to greater effect when attacking corners.

Level 4: The final step highlights any weak points in your programme. No classrooms, just intense focus on where you can improve further with a senior coach. This is the most repeated level, according to CSS.

THE TRANSFORMATION IN YOUR RIDING IS PHENOMENAL. IT'S A REAL EYE OPENER



Left: Andy S does his best Toni Elias impression on the way out of Graham Hill bend at Brands Hatch



Below: Beej can't believe he got to meet Mike Dirnt from Green Day at a CSS day

