

CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL



Level 3

After a fortnight's break, of practising skills learned during Levels 1 and 2, BJ and Andy swap Brands Hatch for Silverstone for Level 3

Words by: Benjamin Kubas Cronin & Andy Saunders **Pics by:** Jason Critchell

As you're no doubt aware, the position of one's body upon one's motorcycle has huge implications on the handling of your riding. In the first two levels, we learned how effective positive steering and vision can be when focussed. Level 3 moves to the body side of things, and how to turn it into a proper tool.

And we're constantly fighting our bodies' own predispositions too. Most of us will hang off differently on either side of the bike. With one side being accompanied by a severe twist of the head. This is usually your weaker side,

Level 3 is where it gets trickier for that rider type. But no less revelatory by the end of the day, we're sure.

Brands Hatch was interesting enough to ride around, without having to think about drills at the same time. To complete the final two levels, we were at Silverstone. But not really. We were at Silverstone's Stowe circuit, the place Richard Hammond couldn't drive an F1 car around. Its flat nature and short lap time meant that concentrating on what we were there to do should be far easier. At least, we thought it would be.

LEVEL 3 IS ALL ABOUT USING YOUR BODY PROPERLY AS ANOTHER TOOL

so you keep your head more level with the bike's centre. That's not necessarily wrong all the time, but to go faster it's a hindrance. How you hang off the bike is also important, but further still is how you keep yourself stable during cornering. Some riders never hang off, usually BMW owners. That sit-up-and-beg riding position promotes positive steering as the usual way of riding one, just look how Coppers shift their mammoth jam sandwiches about so effortlessly. Same thing. So while they're already a step ahead at Level 1,

BJ's Experience

What is it with us and hotels? The Brands Hatch Thistle's room refused to let me through the door for two days, and now this? A hole with no air-con, on the hottest two days so far this year, and a 32° room temperature at 2am. Nice.

So for the third time in a row we got there just after 7am (ffs!), completely knackered and already three litres of tasty liquid for the better, after leaving most our mass in the bedsheets. No, not like that.

You know the drill by now. Sign in; ➤



Below: the lengths some people will go to for a shag. Hasn't he heard of AFF? It's got to be safer than this



All together now; heads, shoulders, knees and toes...

get your kit checked out, have breakfast with voucher, take bike to be checked, stock up on fluids, sit down for the briefing until you are finally split into groups. Level three'ers all gathered, Glenn Rothwell (CSS Director) sits us all on a static R6 and makes us demonstrate our riding positions and how we usually hang off. Not bloody easy on a static bike, and even now I can't properly replicate it at a standstill. This was setting us up for the Hook Turn; a way of altering your arc mid-turn, to tighten up your line.

No brakes and fourth gear only rule was once again for this first session. But the differences in rider speed, even under these rules, around the tight Stowe Circuit, meant the anchors were being hit all over the place. It was hugely frustrating, if I'm honest. There were times that there was no other option but to brake, which rather spoils your rhythm.

That said, somewhere in that melee I discovered the Hook Turn, essentially moving your upper mass and head closer to the ground while at lean. Making the arc of the turn tighter without drastically increasing lean angle. It can make for beautifully tight exits, especially matched with Level 2's Pick-Up drill.

Grande Queso instructor Jonny is checking out my moves for the day, and he seemed happy enough. Like Level



Left: Andy & Beej get a good dressing down for pinching some arse in Turn 6



1, he queried me on my riding gait, leaving me to concede a slight back issue which does hinder me on the left hand side a tad. Cutting me some slack, it was time for lesson two and our first class with Andy Ibbott (who'd just like to remind Paul 'Hollywood' that he's been on TV 'more than yaow').

The next drill was the Pivot-Turn, which relies on getting your outside knee firmly wedged against the tank, and lower leg tight against the bike.

Wrong drill, soldier.

Andy Ibbott showed us another way, known as Knee-to-Knee. Our outside leg is already braced, as per the previous lesson. So, by applying pressure on that knee you sort of slide your arse across until your other knee locks in, rather than lifting and shifting.

You know, it feels pretty good when you get it right, and damn tasty when combined with the penultimate drill. The Hip-Flick is something you'll

“I STARTED USING MY KNEES PROPERLY FOR THE FIRST TIME”

Back out on track and in action, a pivot is exactly what you'd think it might be, though I found it easy to forget that at first. What actually happened was that I eventually started using my knees properly for first real time. Including bracing under braking, taking all the pressure off my arms. By this point I was rabidly enjoying this day, though Jonny was quick to remind me to concentrate on that drill even behind traffic. Will do.

How do you normally move across your bike, through a chicane for instance? I've always used pressure on the pegs and force through the bars, to essentially lift myself from side to side.

recognise from watching racing, and which many of you probably already do, as did I. However, using Knee-to-Knee to initiate the Hip-Flick, where you set up your body before turn, the added stability made an enormous difference, and every chicane became a delight.

The last lesson, and session, of the day was about discovering new lines into turns, and giving them a go. We'd actually been doing this most of the day already, as it was the only way to keep a steady pace through all the traffic, but it was good to consciously look for other options.

Oh, and I was totally bushed!



Andy's Experience

I'd only ever really heard bad things about the car park that is Stowe Circuit. But if I'm honest, by the end of the day I'd come to the realisation that it wasn't actually that bad. It was certainly ideal for what we needed to do - learn technique - and even better to practice the forgotten art of lefties.

The Hook Turn was the first drill on offer, and was practised at a gentle pace as I learnt the track, then I gradually sped it up. It's amazing how much your body inputs affect the attitude of your bike. The Hook Drill reinforced this from the start. Even at slower speeds, using my weight by dropping to the inside of the bike tightened my line dramatically.

Everything at the school is taught as a linked progression of information and technique. So after the Hook Turn we were shown how best to get our weight naturally forwards, and to the inside. Standing in the classroom like we'd all been arrested, helped us to realise that our legs play a big role in this. So out on track we worked on the Pivot Turn. By tensing my outside leg to shift my weight, I could instantly turn tighter with fewer inputs. This made everything more stable, leaving me and the bike to get on with it.

Too much input through the bars, is the most direct cause of instability, so finding a way to move around on the bike without doing this is key. The next two sessions; 'Knee to Knee' and the 'Hip Flick' tackled this element of fast riding. The Knee to Knee drill demands that you keep a knee in contact with the tank at all times whilst changing direction. So Mr Ibbott wanted us to bring our



“I COULD GRIP LESS, WHILE FEELING SECURE”



Above: Andy writes a last note to his Mum, just in case the heat does for him



Below: Correct brake pressures are vital for consistent and controlled cornering



inside knee into the tank prior to moving away from it with the other and our bodies. Once again with this extra locking into the bike technique, I could grip less with the bars whilst still feeling secure. The Hip Flick is a follow-on method, but this one allows setting up for the next turn earlier. This tactic is especially useful for changing direction quickly.

You basically set yourself up for the second turn whilst coming out of the first. Still being leant over from the original bend and moving across the bike took some getting used to. Moving my hips from one side of the bike to the other at the same time as utilising the knee to knee, demonstrated how quickly I could get into the next turn. With this empowerment I started to change my line into a particular tight section, simply to allow me to use this new technique to best effect. This technique takes some practice, but it's a valuable tool in the arsenal.

The last drill of the day was all about lines of attack. It's all too easy to get a bit heady and blast around thinking you're hitting your lines. But there's probably always one section that feels a little slower than it could be. Going too fast into the first turn of close-knit section can ruin the entry, and thus exit, of the last bend of the complex.

So, we had to go out and find the best lines to create a smooth and fast line throughout, using all the tools we'd picked up so far.

Selecting the drills required while riding was great, a Pivot Turn going into a Hook Turn to set up the attack for the next bend. A Hip Flick into the tight stuff, and perhaps the Pick Up drill out (which was taught in Level 2).

Managing to find a gap in the traffic ➤



and getting a few fast flowing laps under my belt, really demonstrated what I'd learnt. It was yet another truly inspiring day, this priceless tuition will pay dividends for anyone.

Conclusion - BJ

While Level 3 was every bit the wake-up call as both previous courses, I still think Level 2's vision drills, slowing things down, has been the most effective of the bunch for me so far. However, my newly raised confidence on road and track is

The only difficulty you can encounter - beyond your own attitude - on a school day is the disparity in skill levels on track.

Being the decent chaps we are, both Andy and I tried hard to not put any sketchy moves on people. It can ruin someone's day and we saw it happen, when a rider is baulked by too close an overtake. This was made worse by the size of Stowe, admittedly. Brands Hatch wasn't nearly as frustrating.

Next month we'll take you through

Andy Ibbott wonders if he can afford enough deodorant to make the class smell a bit sweeter



“CSS HAS BEEN THE BEST THING THAT'S HAPPENED TO US SINCE WE STARTED RIDING”

mostly down to Level 3. I may not be that much quicker due to natural cowardice, but I'm able to control the bike much better and aren't afraid to grab it by the horns and put the effort in. It's far safer, for one thing, and stops you getting sloppy.

The whole Knee-to-Knee / Hip-Flick routine is brilliant and, again, an example of how CSS operates. It's all stuff many of us already do, just refined into a skill set. But I found I needed to take it really seriously to get the best from it.

Level 4, which is one-on-one tuition with video filming.

So far, our CSS experience has been the best thing that's happened to either of us since we started riding bikes. It's also turned my rapidly dying interest in road riding into something fresh and new; my own workshop, if you will, to improve on what I've learned so far.

It all starts at Level 1, people. Everyone's experience at CSS is personal, to truly discover it, you need to do it yourself. **FB**



Left: Andy S was long-ago dubbed 'Colin Edwards', and CSS hasn't dampened his style - he's just going much much faster while he's at it



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.