

CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL



Level 4



Andy and BJ reach the end of an enlightening period of their biking lives, by completing Level 4 of California Superbike School, at Silverstone

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So, you've done the right thing and passed the first three levels at CSS. You've mastered some new skills, and retrained existing ones. Good on you, so what's next? That would be, wait for it, Level 4.

It's a far more personal training programme despite still sharing the track with other riders. You have one-on-one coaching, working on areas you believe you're still weak in. You get a lot of time on track with your coach too, and there's a video-bike which films your skills, or lack of. This way, your coach can graphically demonstrate

about us, baby. Bring it on.

BJ's Experience

Sweat, roll, sweat a bit more, shout curse and swear, keep on sweating. Our second night in the sauna of a hotel, after finishing Level 3, resulted in even less sleep than the night before. A stupid 32 degrees and no air-conditioning made for a slippery, restless night, and the pair of us looked like zombies as we pulled up to Silverstone's security gate next morning. Van parked, and heading to

LEVEL 4 GETS YOU ONE-ON-ONE COACHING FOR YOUR WEAKNESSES

what you might be doing wrong, or right, which should increase your understanding of what the hell's going on, and how to improve it.

Andrew Saunders.com and my dear self have been on a journey of discovery over our visits to Brands Hatch and Level 3 at Silverstone's tight Stowe circuit. From shite hotels, to looking like the living dead, and learning all about how to ride a motorcycle better. Now we've come back to Silverstone to hone our mojos on a more personal trip. No more large classes, it's just all

sign on, we're both really suffering. If you needed any reminding, a 6am start for a 7am arrival doesn't help matters one bit. Damn you, 'Idiot'.

During the briefing I'm really struggling to concentrate as Andy Ibbott introduces everyone we now know all too well, bar the new Level 1 guys. But the only thing I can see when I look at his enormous head, are sheep jumping over it!

Pretty soon we're split in our respective groups once more, and head off to the VIP Level 4 office. Well, the



Below: Track-side liaisons are frowned upon, but when it's love, you just can't help yourself. Gay-ers



You're a shit ventriloquist



still adorn the Suzuki even now. Good thing he was there, bad that I had to miss an entire session. Cheers though big fella, hope you're feeling better.

When I eventually got out and had scrubbed in the GP Racers, the suggested remedies showed a marked improvement.

However, my first session over, it still felt uncomfortable, and I was still getting that weird pumping action from the fork. So for the next outing it was conceded that I needed to hang off. Not quite as much as normal, but also, to try and get my feet more firmly on the bike, and control it with my legs more. Main Man Jonny had been following with the camera, and during one of our very enlightening debriefs was able to add to how I could change things.

By god, what a marvellous session. It did appear to give me more control while carving through the tight Stowe traffic, and helped me to get myself out the way of anyone coming past me without ruining my drills. My Jedi Master was pretty pleased when he saw me grinning like an idiot, and decreed more of the same for the final twenty CSS minutes. So, for that last blast I was able to do what I'd originally wanted but with a different twist, and it was mint.

What an experience.



Above: the Mexican wave didn't take off, despite three spirited attempts



portacabin in Stowe circuit's pit, at least. Head honcho track-master Jonny welcomes us, and begins a briefing, before asking us what we'd like to work on and introducing us to our individual coaches. The night before, we'd been asked to fill out an assessment form on our time so far, highlighting areas we'd like to work on. Now, think very carefully about what you want to work on when you do this. What you choose will define your entire day. In

help the bike manoeuvre. I imagined it as a bit like the Hook Turn from Level 3. Subject to the rules of no brakes and minimal overtaking, it didn't take long to work out this still wasn't comfortable for me. My main problem was that I was loading the front so much that the fork began to buck in a very unsettling way. I persevered with it, but to little avail, and was swiftly becoming unhappier. The last couple of laps felt extra wrong, out of the blue. Chirpy, I was not.

THE SUGGESTED REMEDIES SHOWED A MARKED IMPROVEMENT

my case, I initially thought I'd made a mistake. One option I'd chosen was body position, because I really suffer on the left side due to a back impediment. Picking up on this, my coach suggested we begin with that.

What I really wanted to do was work on blending everything I'd learnt into one fluid, instinctive motion. But I had lingering doubts about my posture, that it would eventually create a barrier I wouldn't be able to cross. So after checking out my seating position, it was suggested that I try the first session keeping my knees a bit more in, my arse on the seat and use my upper body to

Expressing said concerns to my wise sage for the day, he suggested I stopped being a whining pussy and to try sitting back a little further, while making good use of Level 1's counter-steering drill. And I would have loved to have tried, but as I fired up the Gixer a sea of pointing fingers meant I hadn't noticed what everyone else had. My rear Michelin was completely flat. No wonder those last laps felt so screwed!

However, as some may have read in a previous longterm instalment, Dunlop's Bryn Phillips just happened to be sunbathing at Silverstone. He offered the very set of GP Racers that



IT ALL GELS, AND THINGS START TO SLOW DOWN, BECAUSE YOUR MIND IS IN CONTROL

The school is all about constant feedback, coaching and development



Would you want to disappoint this man? This is happy face, believe it or not



Andy's Experience

With the final level of the CSS program being all about the individual, I wanted to brush up on a few areas I felt I was still weak on. A big one was gaining more speed exiting corners, another was to get used to using the 'wide view' technique, and to generally feel at ease and relaxed on the bike.

You feel a bit special on Level 4, like you've really come a long way. You are in a much smaller group of people, which is better for communication whilst off the bike. But you also get one-to-one tuition, with personal issues quickly identified and talked through to a deeper level.

Translating these scenarios out into session plans for what I needed to do on track helped me focus on improving, at the same time as utilising all other CSS techniques.

Working on the 'Three Step' to aid with exit acceleration, my instructor, Matthew, got me to look much further up the track after hitting my apex. This enhanced my cornering greatly for two reasons: firstly because you generally go where you're looking I felt like I could never run out of track, and, secondly, because of that I had the confidence to twist for more gas earlier and quicker.

I also spent a session experimenting with my vision and when I looked into a bend. Looking earlier and still hitting my turn-in point helped my mind digest what I was up against to get round each bend. I found by the end of the session that I could look into a turn around twenty bike lengths earlier than before, and still hit my turn-in point. With this comes greater speed, and less stress.

Another direct link to this is the 'Wide View'. Seeing is believing, and

the more I allowed my mind to take in, the more at ease I became. This is something that will need practice before it becomes second nature, but it is a very powerful tool, and one that will make you faster.

I struggled to relax on the bike at times around the Stowe circuit. Quite often my upper body was tense, and I had to really focus on gripping with my legs in order to let my arms drop.

While cornering, your outside arm should really be rested on the tank. Keeping this in my mind I can crack it, but like the wide view it needs time and effort to make it one hundred percent right, and instinctive.

Matthew had me follow him on a couple of occasions during the day for some quick laps, and believe me they were quick. He wanted to demonstrate that by keeping things smooth, the bike will do so much more for you. It was an eye-opener I can assure you, and felt great to be skimming around the circuit in tandem. Getting to the point when it all just gels is the key, things start to slow down because your mind is in control of what is out there.

I've got an awful lot out of doing this course and can't recommend it enough. If you want to improve your ability then give these guys a call, it's well worth the money even from a road ►





safety point of view. You'll have a great time, learn a shed load and surprise yourself at the same time. Your limit is a lot further away than you think; let these guys help you unlock it.

Conclusion - BJ

So then, we're at the end of our

bike. I'd thought my coach was a madman at lunchtime, but a top man by tea-time. Now, I think he's a bloody genius.

The quality time with Jonny and his video camera was really helpful too. Jonny's got the beans and the brains to work through any problems

Most children didn't understand the point of the CSS episode of The Borrowers

“I THOUGHT MY COACH WAS A MADMAN, BUT NOW I THINK HE'S A BLOODY GENIUS”

CSS education. There's only private tuition, or refresher courses, left - other than practising it all ourselves. I can see myself begging for the odd top-up. Regularly.

There's no doubt whatsoever that all four levels have been a life changing experience for both of us. For me, Level 4 was a mixed bag of sheer frustration and sparkly exultation. And there's a final twist to the story too. That more static riding position, which I hated on track, turns out to be stupidly useful on the road. It actually allows me to really boss the Gixer about, way more than I would have before.

When I thought I was going backwards, in actual fact I was just learning a new way of handling a

you can think of, and Andy's a terrific classroom teacher too - always willing to help.

It just shows that CSS really can improve your riding in all areas. Well, it definitely did for me and Andy, and we were hardly slouches in the first place. I've come out of CSS with two distinct styles of riding for both disciplines. I've not turned into Rossi, and Alastair is still faster than me, despite the the world's largest collection of Happy Meal boxes collecting under his desk.

But I'm far happier for it, even if I do slip into bad old habits occasionally. And for the final time, I really can't stress enough that you need to go try for yourself - even if you can only stretch to Level 1. **EB**



BJ knits it all together for a near perfect lap aboard the Gixer. Knowledge is everything - so long as you use 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.

