Return Of The Santa Rosa Mile: We Talk To The Team Behind The Upcoming Three-Day Flat Track-aganza

Ballad Of The Bikester • Sisters Centennial Ride
R Nine T Custom Build by BMW Motorcycles of San Francisco
Higher Learning: Total Control Advanced Rider Clinic
A relatively new rider told me he wanted the most protective boots ever so that he could put a foot down in the twisties on Mount Tam. It was hard to explain to him that things didn’t necessarily work that way. But he persisted: “What about really tight turns?”

This is exactly the type of overconfidence that’s worrisome. He’s stoked, ready to take on anything, and bragging that his old boots have 15,000 miles on them. He reminds me of myself after I rode to and from Chicago. I was sure I had solved the mystery of motorcycling. It was time to hang up the proverbial spurs, was time to hang up motorcycling. It sure I had solved the mystery of a brain can muster.

A half-helmeted, chaps-wearing Harley rider named Mike gives an enthusiastic welcome. It turns out that he’s taking the advanced level two course for the second time. “I’ve taken both classes twice,” he explains. “Not because I don’t get it, but because I don’t get it!” With that he belts out a good guffaw.

The level two instructor asks what tire pressure I’m running and hands me an air pressure gauge. Last time I checked, Dr. Ninja’s tire pressures had been running in the high teens, but I’m ashamed to find that it’s a minor miracle that I’ve made it to Santa Clara—each tire is holding about 10 psi. So that’s why I was getting front end wash… ahhh… learning already.

We walk past flowers and concrete columns and across the green lawns of the Mission College of Santa Clara. The classroom contains eleven other would-be students of corner-ology, hoping to glean insights and abilities from the course designed by Lee Parks, based on his book Total Control. We go through introductions: name, bike, experience and expectations. Bike-wise, the room is weighted heavily with BMW riders: there are three R1200 GS riders, an F650GS and an F700. There are two American cruisers, two Honda sport bikes, a Triumph Street Triple, a Ducati Monster and my oily Suzuki dual sport.

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The Total Control Advanced Rider Clinic At 2 Wheel Safety Training

By Sam Devine
Photos by Bonnie Kellogg and Max Klein

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in fact. Darth Vader’s voice rings in my head, “Sho, the student has become the maestro.” Or is that Sean Connery saying it?

We return to the classroom and focus on mentality: how we get scared, why we get scared. “Being honest with each other about all being a bit uneasy was helpful,” says Dougherty. It is good insight, but we’re spending a lot of time in the classroom—and only about 30% drilling. “It would be nice to have a longer stretch to try the trail braking and exercises like that,” says Kruse after the course.

Thinking now about the lessons we received on how the brain works, though, it seems that spending focused time imagining riding could actually be more beneficial than a lot of hard riding exercises. We’re told that survival and fear reside in our lizard brain while creativity and planning come from our frontal lobes. All the discussion and concentration on the ideas of riding are getting our frontal lobes warmed up so we can practice riding outside of our tense, survival-oriented lizard brains.

We practice an interesting trust fall that simulates a motorcycle lean. And to practice being physical aware of our turn-in points, we walk out and pick up objects with our eyes closed. We discuss meditation, inner quiet, and the importance of a positive attitude. “Whether you think you can or whether you think you can’t, you’re right,” says Sepulveda, riffing on a quote attributed to Henry Ford.

After breaking for lunch, we return to the classroom to get the ten points of turning according to Lee Parks, then back out to the range again to run drills that incorporate everything we’ve learned for the day. I look across the parking lot to see Mike killing it on his Harley in the Level 2 obstacles course. We wrap things up with a brief but effective lesson on suspension adjustment.

As I ride home, I think about how we’ve all been given advice on cornering: body position, traction, shifting, trail-braking, mental thought process, staying loose, staying focused, looking through the turn. But this course put it all in sequence, particularly the step-by-step breakdown of cornering. It was like hearing a good version of a familiar story—like the myth of Hercules or Batman’s origin—and all the way through for a change. And we didn’t just hear the tale: we played it out, more focused intent. Dougherty confirms, “At the end of the day I was feeling 100% different, excited and more confident.”

Hopefully I can stay humble and continue practicing and seeking more information. Total Control’s next riding clinic is Saturday, September 14. The cost is $325, which, if you can afford it, is a small price to pay to unlock a lifetime of riding skills. For more information, go to 2WheelSafety.com or TotalControlTraining.net.

Sam is our SF-based columnist. Between writing roughly half this here mag and chasing the dragon of improved riding skills, he’s working on an article about not sleeping and "seeing what happens."