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14 Questions For A Speed Guru

By John Ulrich

Roadracing World: Has there been an evolution of rider training since you started in 1976 with your first one-on-one courses?

Keith Code: Huge evolution. All there was back then was follow me, do what I do and you'll be faster. No one spoke of the "basics" of racing, everything that existed, except for one paragraph in John Surtees' book, was word of mouth and very general opinions about riding. You know, you'd hear a little saying from some good rider and think about it for a week trying to figure it out. It was frustrating for me and I figured it must be the same for others. Anyhow, there was no reliable information on the basics or skills or the techniques of racing. There was wisdom on race strategy but nothing on how to do corners. It hadn't been viewed yet as a discipline.

RW: You were the first to teach step-by-step technique. Has the Superbike School's curriculum changed in the 25 years its been operating?

Keith Code: Oh yeah, and it's still changing. I'd call it an ongoing, in-depth, 25-year research project. Most of what we did in the beginning was correct but now it's in smaller, more bite-size chunks, less general, more specific skills and techniques. It's easier now, I get feedback from our schools here and in Europe and Australia. Just in the last few years, when Chris Vermeulen came to school in Oz we learned; same with James Toseland in the UK and Roger Lee (Hayden) here. We learn how to learn from talented riders. But, the technology of riding isn't fully catalogued yet, I see a lot more to come. I've been working on "A Twist of the Wrist III" for nearly five years, that tells you something.

RW: Bikes have changed dramatically in 25 years but do sportbike riders and racers have different needs now than they used to?

Keith Code: Yes, they need to understand the basics of riding even more now. This is the golden age of motorcycling, any sportbike does exactly what you intend it to do, that's both the good and the bad news. You have to know what the bike wants and what you want out of it. Riding has become very exacting as bikes become more sophisticated. Valentino Rossi has flawless application of his basic riding. He understands what the bike needs, he understands what he wants, he's very exact with those points. What you see is nothing dramatic, few crashes, no pyrotechnics, just super-clean, simple riding. Without the other riders out there to compare, you'd never know how fast he is. So yeah, as the bikes improve we're accelerating back to basics in riding.

RW: You say "basics," you use that word a lot. What are we talking about here, how to let out the clutch?

Keith Code: That's sub basics. No, for most riders it's a blend of just enough understanding of the mechanics of the bike, just enough under-

standing of the science and enough theory on riding to be able to think through a problem and solve it. Basics are the glue that holds the riding package together for the rider. You make mistakes, you hit a wall of improvement, you can't go any faster, you aren't smooth. Where should you look for the answers? It won't be backing the bike into turns. It won't be getting sideways like Garry McCoy. It won't be how pretty your wheelies are. It will be flawless throttle control, understanding lines, knowing how and why you turn the bike, what inputs are needed and what is not, confidence with speed and traction and stabilizing the bike and with debugging chicanes, that's what is going to solve it. How to approach these things are what we generalize as the basics. It's a very exact technology and it's done step-by-step by everyone. There is creative riding but no way to bypass these basic points. It's these points that develop it into a real discipline.

RW: When you say "creative riding" are you talking about more advanced techniques?

Keith Code: Yes and no. You take something simple like a head-shake under acceleration. You see it one or two laps and then you don't and realize the rider lifted the front wheel off the ground and it went away. Brilliant solution. A front end off the ground can't head-shake. It shows a great understanding of bike dynamics and uses the bike to overcome its own problem. That's a creative use of basics. Does it make the rider faster? Not necessarily. Will it go away with a better bike or better settings? No.

RW: Your schools are the only ones to run on five continents and 13 countries. You don't go to all of them, so how does that work?

Keith Code: Training our instructors. No matter what country a student went to I know that he would get the same help, the same information, the same treatment, the same professional care that we give here. Our internal instructor courses are difficult, we have a high standard and the train-

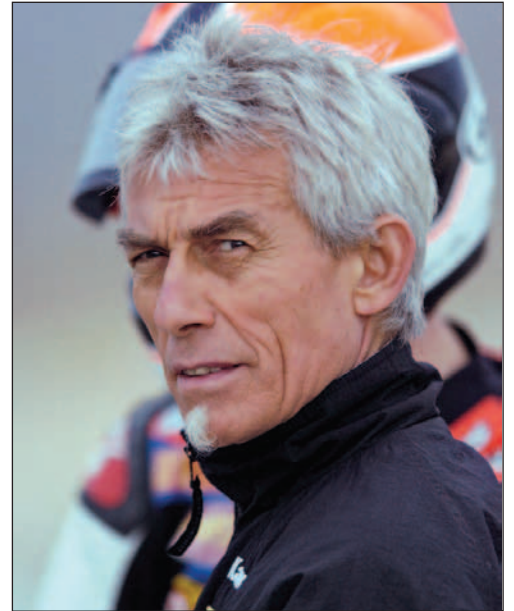
ing is exacting. Over the years we've only been able to find one out of every 25 applicants that makes it through the tryout phase of the training. The training is everything. The internships. The testing. The recorded audio and video we use to maintain our standards are all part of it. Plus, we get great results so people come back, that's the formula but it's just common sense really.

RW: What led you to invent your training devices like the Lean And Slide Bike, the No-BS Bike, the Control Trainer and the others?

Keith Code: Solving riders' problems. What do riders fear, what stops them from achieving their riding goals? The inventions are hands-on solutions to those problems. They let the rider find out how the bike works and how they should work the bike and they reduce the usual risks. They're all about approaching and expanding limits.

RW: When did you start riding and racing?

Keith Code: Riding, 1957. Racing, 1961 was my first race.



2004: Keith Code at age 60, during a California Superbike School session in Almeria, Spain.

Photo by Picture Management.



2004: Keith Code and his instructors pose with a fleet of Kawasakis at the Streets Of Willow course.

RW: In the 1970s your training techniques were very new and unique. You've always said much of your program was based on things you learned in the very controversial subject of Scientology.

Keith Code: It's only controversial to those who haven't read the books or used it. I learned how to observe and think for myself and how to teach others to think for themselves. Ron Hubbard's work is responsible for the world's most effective detox, drug rehab, education and criminal rehab programs. No one else has these answers. Controversial, sure it is, but Scientology is all about practical solutions anyone can learn and it actually works.

RW: You were dubbed the Guru Of Motorcycle Road Racing back in the 1970s for your mental approach to riding and since then you have worked with racers of all skill levels with obvious success. Riders like Scott Russell and Doug Chandler have publicly acknowledged you for the help. What have you learned from them and has it translated across to your current methods?

Keith Code: Yes, yes and yes. Like I said, we learn from talented riders. I learn how and what they think about and what they notice. I'm always comparing what things I know work with what this caliber of rider is asking or telling me. Do I have it covered? What is he talking about? I started out with a list of 14 things that riders notice while riding and especially racing and the list grew to 48 and now it is at 70 things.

I spent a day with Arnaud Vincent, the 2002 125cc World Champion, several months ago in France and just asked him things off the list. Every rider I have used the list with can answer these 70 questions. Some of the things on it I learned from Wayne (Rainey) back in the early 1980s while I was training him. Some I learned from Chuck Graves, some from Kocinski, Russell, Chandler, Cooley, Merkle, the Gobert boys and others and some I discovered myself. I'm still working on it. Like I said, accelerating back to the basics.

RW: Your original "A Twist of the Wrist" book was the first of its kind. You presented riding as a mental activity and began the process of breaking it down. Your other books went into more detail and you just said there is another "Twist" book coming. Is that going to wrap it up for you? Will there still be more to research?

Keith Code: I don't know yet but I think there will be more. I think of new riding projects every week. Here is the real point, no matter what famous racer you talk to you are going to get the same answer—it's a mental sport. What does that mean? Nothing. It's just another of the great buzz phrases of racing. Nevertheless, you and I could both retire on the gym equipment owned by pro racers. Where is the mental gym equipment? You hear these grand generalities spouted off by some guys about mental prep. I think Rossi hangs out with his friends a lot in English pubs. Maybe that's his men-



2004: Keith Code with former 125cc World Champion Arnaud Vincent at Ales, France. Photo by F. Lheritier/Sport-Bikes.

tal gym or relaxation or what have you. I know that tampering with a good rider's head is tricky business.

The one thing I know is never, ever tell them how to think about their riding or to use someone else's technique. It doesn't work; you only get short-term gains. Now, when you can teach someone how to think for themselves, bang, you have done your job as a coach. Rainey told me he never quit making drawings of the track. I remember the first time I had him do it, he looked at me like I was telling him to go to his room for being bad. So the books are a combination of the technical data about riding and hints on how to come to grips with yourself and your own riding. How to think for yourself.

RW: We remember you winning AFM races but only getting top five in AMA Superbike. If you knew so much why didn't you do better as a racer?

Keith Code: Hmmmmm, brilliant question. I was trying to solve my lack of experience by understanding riding. I mean by the time I had a Superbike license in 1976 I was 31 and had participated in maybe 15 club races at the most, the research moved me forward fairly quickly. I didn't crash much, I got in the winners circle my first Superbike race, not too bad when you figure it was all happening with my head and heart. I hadn't gotten the feel part of it...the experience part was missing. That's about it on my excuses.

RW: Who inspired you and influenced you to start and continue your research into riding and racing?

Keith Code: The usual suspects from that era. Kenny Roberts was the first person to vocalize that

road racing was simple and he felt he could teach anyone to do it. True or not what I got from that was he could think through a problem and solve it, at least for himself. After that it was Eddie Lawson. He was already a hero racer and when we started the Superbike school in 1980 he used to come out and sit through my seminars. He told me he learned something every time he listened. That was a nitrous boost right there. After that it was the success of the racers I worked with that kept me searching. I took Wes Cooley on as a project for Rob Muzzy when he was riding Kawasakis. They hired him but he was running seventh, eighth. I got him back in the winners circle in one race. Big psychic boost for everyone involved. There are a dozen more stories like that I could tell you.

RW: What is the future for schools, now that everyone seems to be getting into the act?

Keith Code: Having schools is good. Having track days is good. Almost any help is better than no help at all. But I'm going to qualify that: When I started, club racing events were one day, no track days existed. You showed up Sunday morning and got two 15 or 20-minute practices, if you were lucky. Every lap, every corner counted. Your whole attitude had to be different, you had to be on every second to get anything out of it. Most riders today waste track time practicing their bad habits and that is one of the main reasons schools are so beneficial, they really help short-cut the process of translating the ideas and desire to go faster into real skill. Absolutely, go to school, look at what the schools have to say and pick the one that you like.

RW



1981: Keith Code with son Dylan and racer Dave Emde during Kawasaki pre-season testing at Riverside Raceway. Code was coaching Emde.

Photo by Lori Tyson.