



TOP TRAINING

Pappy samples Bernie Hatton's advanced rider training school... Story by Pappy Photography by Top Rider & MDTC

I HAVE BEEN A PRETTY BIG SUPPORTER of track courses for a long time and the many people that I have convinced personally or that have written in to thank *Rapid Bikes* has been surprising to say the least.

I enjoy the track so much more now I rarely ride on big trips and prefer track days instead. The level I have attained has exceeded my initial goals but as my skills have improved so has my thirst for more knowledge and track time. Not that I want to become a racer or go racing but the enjoyment and adrenalin factor coupled with the safety the track has to offer is without a doubt intoxicating.

So off I go again now on my next learning phase but this time I am sampling some of Bernie Hatton's Advanced Rider Training courses and see where I wind up after a few of those. The plan is to start off with Marulan, then do The Farm which is catered more for the experienced rider plus hit the dirt as well to help hone my sliding and wet weather techniques.

Many of you have heard of Bernie Hatton either through *Rapid Bikes* as a columnist or through his 25 years of coaching thousands of riders from learners to elite racers the likes of Anthony West, Chris Vermeulen, Broc Parkes and Jamie Stauffer to name a few. I have known Bernie for a long time and have a lot of respect for his ability and teaching skills.

Bernie is now offering a more tailored and elite service to those who need expert tuition or are looking at answers to their riding problems. The groups are kept very small from one to four students per instructor enabling Bernie

to offer a more specialised and focused service that you cannot find anywhere.

The course I attended is the level one, which is aimed at the individual looking to hone their track skills. There were five of us students on the day ranging from a track virgin to track junkie. Bernie had everyone fill out a questionnaire prior to the event so he could tailor the lessons specifically for each of us before the day. My concern was getting my body position better so if he could accomplish that I would be more than happy with the day.

The venue was the Marulan Driver Training Centre near Goulburn. This is a newly completed track that has great facilities, which are very clean and the staff are very pleasant and helpful. During the course of the day Bernie made sure we were all well hydrated putting emphasis on this throughout the day, drumming it into us to keep our fluids and sugar levels up etc. After every session there was plenty of fruit, juices, coffee/tea, biscuits plus we had a great lunch.

The track itself is not a long high-speed track, which makes it perfectly suited to training in this small group scenario. You get to do lots of laps and more importantly the instructors can see more of you on the track at any point. The run-off areas are not very big but are not needed with the kind of speeds attained. It is quite different to The Farm, which is very difficult to master and can bite the inexperienced.

As a learning track I rate it ahead of any I have been on and cannot wait to get there again to cut some laps.

Our day started with a walk of the track so that Bernie could explain the effect different surfaces and camber changes have on the bike and the steering inputs needed. This was invaluable as not many of us ever have a chance to do that on a busy track and get an understanding of how our approach to each corner and at what angle that approach is can affect the outcome. Without doing that, we would not have had an intimate knowledge of the surface, especially the surface change at different approach angles to corners on the track.

We had a discussion on what lines we would all take and how we thought they would be affected if the approach was different and Bernie would explain his ideal line, gearing, braking point and the reasoning behind it.

After that, Bernie let us all out on the track so he could observe our riding and see where he would start working with each and every one of us and see if we were honest or like fishermen about our abilities in our questionnaire. He also photographed and videoed us at this point so he could see the changes later. With five students he would be looking at working on different aspects for each of us.

We were all back in the class after that and it was apparent to him straight away that the first thing he needed to work on with the lot of us was braking and needed to re-educate us on how to do it properly and set-up for a corner. He went on to explain proper braking and gripping the lower body to bike and the importance this has to getting in deep under brakes and turning the bike in properly while feeling front end grip.



This is the beauty with Bernie's courses as he evaluates on the spot what direction he needs to go with the group as everyone is obviously different and at different levels so he needs to react quickly to fix those problems first before he goes to the next lesson. His use of analogies and the way he breaks down these techniques is very easy to understand.

So out we went and did braking drills on the main straight and looped back through pit lane for more runs. First up was rear brake only with clutch in followed by clutch out to see what distance we could brake without lock-up and how it felt. Bernie and his other instructor, Max Enklaar, would pull us up after each run for pointers. Then we did the same with front brake only and after that with both brakes. I had a good idea after that what the K9 Gixer and I were capable of and how far I could push it so an invaluable lesson that would greatly affect the rest of my day. I was braking so hard I was chirping the front tyre with total control and had intimate feel. It was fantastic to see the results by doing the drill and then work on posture etc and see the effects straight away. He had us braking like demons after these drills.

Back in class, cornering techniques and body position were discussed. Bernie went on to explain many myths about handling, body position etc and how they affect the bike and

stability. He went in-depth into the importance of trail braking and the proper use of the rear brake and weighting the pegs and turning the bike in with these.

We went out again and this time I was on the school's silver CBR600 as the Gixer's front brake lever position would jam the throttle open as I hit the back straight under real hard braking. I found I could brake so much harder and deeper now that I could feel more grip through the bars and also turn the bike better especially through transitional changes with the pegs. The hire bikes Bernie supplies are well finished and presented and highly recommended if you don't have a bike. I couldn't fault the bike; neither could Terry our track virgin who ended up buying one at the end of the day from Bernie!

Back in class we worked more on peg weighting and using core muscles. We worked more on trail braking and putting it to use, plus throttle control and drive into and out of corners with brake modulation.

We went out again and the difference was amazing. I was back on the K9 and just didn't brake on that back straight – just rolling off the throttle momentarily instead. I was braking hard into corners carrying rear brake and modulating the rear grip, feeding the power on the exit. At no time did I feel worried about dropping the

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE: Pappy's posture is looking better now; (l-r) Pappy, Terry Papas, Stephan Lofting, Jurgen Mennel and Bernie Hatton; Bernie following Pappy on the track; Bernie explaining the track to the students; Bernie working with Anthony West at Philip Island in the Supersport championships during 2009; aerial view of the track, direction is normally clockwise.



Terry followed by Jurgen practicing their eyeline exercise.

bike – I was totally in control and I could finally feel front and rear end grip like never before, especially how they were affected by throttle closure and opening. I had the bike on such a fine edge and felt really confident at the same time. Bernie followed me for a while and then let me chase him as we upped the pace, which helped me get sharper and quicker as I tried to copy his racing lines and braking points.

After that we were back in class and worked on fine-tuning body position for all of us. Back out we did a small loop of the bottom of the track with Bernie and Max trackside to point out and help us. This was great as we could practice peg weighting and body position at slow speed and get a good feel for the changes. It was the perfect speed and scenario for practicing body position, knee out and down, looking through corner etc. We did many laps and turned around and did the opposite direction. With Bernie so close pointing out what to do, it was easy to correct and adjust and have immediate results. I benefited so much from this slow speed exercise especially reversing the sequence and doing the opposite direction and seeing how the track felt that way. The way Bernie can pinpoint weak spots is amazing and I could feel improvements

with every one of his suggestions and believe me there were many...

Again in class we worked on our exit and getting the power to the ground plus other areas students wanted to refine or needed help with.

On the track again everything started to gel and I could see a marked change with all the other students as well from the morning. I could now back the bike in totally sideways into the corner under brakes with confidence and have the bike bucking and weaving for grip coming out and shaking it's front with a slight wheelie and it was exhilarating – I felt like Biaggi with a hard-on! I am totally surprised with myself as I had no expectation that I would be doing this for a long time so somehow Bernie has unlocked and pushed my skills further ahead than I could have imagined. You cannot put a price on that!

I wish I went down this path 10 years ago and I urge you all that it is never too late. The most important thing of all is how much safer you become and how much ability in reserve you have especially on the road if anything goes wrong...

Stay tuned now for The Farm and you never know I may even go racing!

For more information call Top Rider on 1300 131 362 or visit toprider.com.au



(l-r) Terry Papas, Jurgen Mennel, Pappy, Bernie Hatton, Stephan Lofting, Garry Willmington and Don Campbell.

MARULAN DRIVER TRAINING CENTRE

The heart of the Marulan Driver Training Centre is the specially designed, and professionally constructed training loop. The circuit complies with and exceeds Industry Standards and has a state of the art noise monitor and recording system to ensure that participants vehicles are kept under the 90db limit.

The track is 1km long and averages eight metres wide with nine corners. The track was opened in February 2009 and is situated in Marulan aprox 26km before Goulburn and is quite easy to find. Bike track days cost \$110.

It boasts a skid pan area, and a 360 metre dirt oval, and can be reconfigured quickly and adapted to suit a massive range of training situations which perfectly suit Top Riders' Advanced Rider courses.

The facility lecture rooms and administration building are of the highest standard and have been designed to provide an inviting and comfortable viewing area for visitors.

The Marulan Driver Training Centre, owned and built by Garry and Natalie Willmington, is part of a nationwide development plan with Safe Drive Training to establish dedicated purpose built driver training centres along the East Coast.

For more information on the centre go to www.mdtc.com.au or contact Garry on 02 4841 1422 or garry@mdtc.com.au.



Stephan, Pappy and Jurgen fine tuning their body positioning.