



MISTI HURST

CALIFORNIA SUPERBIKE SCHOOL

It's 5:30am and the alarm rings for the 5th morning in a row, fiercely interrupting my dreams, sounding like a train wreck rattling my brain. I bury my head under the pillow and groan, and then the phone rings for the wake up call jarring me once again. I heave myself out of bed and like a robot go through the motions of getting ready for another day of teaching at the California Superbike School.

The air conditioning is cranked as I get ready but I still feel hot with the humidity of Alabama seeping through the crack under the hotel room door. As I step outside in my polyester green and black uniform the heat attacks, "It's going to be another hot one," I think to myself. I climb in the rental car with my half asleep co-workers and we drive in that dazed morning silence to Barber Motorsports Park for the last time. It's our fifth day in a row teaching here and tonight after a full day of riding and coaching we will pack up the two large trailers with our hefty amount of gear and head off to Virginia International Raceway for more school dates.

At promptly 6:30am we arrive at the track, sign in at the gate and marvel at the usual one or two eager students who have shown up early for their day of riding. Giddy and excited they wander around and watch with keen interest as the morning routine is executed by the 15 superbike school staff. It looks so choreographed it's almost like a dance, each staff member fulfilling the duty of the morning with grace and ease, working together to produce a flowing series of events. All hands work to unload the two massive trailers, tire pressures on all the school bikes are checked and snacks for the day are made and laid out neatly (complete with flower arrangements and garnishes). The mechanics area is set up, a large area for sales is nicely put together, registration opens, instructor assignments are made, each student is greeted personally by a member of the staff and students who are riding their own bikes (not the rented ones from the school) are told where to park their machines. I'm assigned to technical inspection so I get straight to work, taping mirrors and headlights and setting tire pressures on the students' personal bikes and inspecting them to make sure they are safe and ready for a day on the track,

The students register then mingle while enjoying coffee, fresh fruit and morning snacks. They admire the track and the organized set-up as they watch the dance unfold. Seventeen green 2005 Kawasaki 636's are the pivotal point of the students interest. Lined up in a perfect crisp straight line, they glitter in the morning dew. Behind them are 10 or so instructor bikes, 2005 ZX 10's, 636's and 600RR's and four unique training bikes that Keith Code has developed including the Lean/Slide bike, the brake rig, the BS steering bike, and the Control trainer.

At promptly 8:00am the students all gather in the classroom and each staff member is personally introduced, the morning seminar and flag briefing begins. There are

three groups of students who rotate throughout the day; seminar, on-track riding, rest, seminar, on-track, rest etc.... There are five



litre of water, jump on the bike and do the same thing again with groups two and three.

The most amazing thing

seminars throughout the day for the students and five 20-25 minute riding sessions. Each student is assigned an on-track coach who will follow them and note specific areas of improvement and areas that need work. They will lead them for a lap or two around the track and will then take a few minutes at the end of each ride to debrief them about the session. Each coach is assigned 1-4 students in each group and must ride every session, that's 15 sessions per day.

At 8:45am I head to the student services trailer and put on my leathers and boots and gather up a snack, a hat, lather up with sunscreen, and guzzle some water. The track gets hot at 9am and it's going to be a whirlwind day.

Suddenly the school bell rings and I grab my helmet and gloves, get on my Kawasaki 600RR and head to the start/finish line. I'm doing the orientation lap this morning so I patiently wait as the first group of the day lines up behind me, a short instruction from course control is given and off we go in a slow, single file line around the track. We pull back up to start/finish line and I jump off the bike, I'm already sweating from the heat and the humidity. I locate my students in this first group and introduce myself to them.

The session starts and the first group of students goes through the first drill of the day, I find them on the track according to bike number, follow them for a while, and then lead them by giving them a hand signal and demonstrating correct technique. I take note of their strong points and notice areas for improvement, even specifics such as what corner they do well in, or more so what part of the corner they do well with. At the end of the session I pull into the pits, meet with my students, guzzle a

about working as a coach, is seeing the improvement of the students over the course of the day. I get to know the nuances of their riding, their fears, their concerns and aspects of their personality. I have the opportunity to encourage them, to teach them, to watch them grow and change their riding dramatically. Sometimes when leading a student around a particular corner that they have been having difficulty with I'll look behind me and see them charge through it with a grace and ease that they have never exhibited before and I'll throw my hands in the air giving them a triumphant thumbs up. I often see the grin on their faces glowing from inside their helmets.

Sometimes I'll be following a student and I'll say to myself "look into the turn, look into the turn," and then as if by magic I will see their head turn for the first time and look towards where they are going, their line will tighten up and they will run through the corner better than ever before and I'll beam in my own helmet, ecstatic that I have seen improvement in the student's riding, grateful that I have been a part of that positive change.

By mid afternoon after a quick lunch and a refuel, I'm exhausted as I head out for a few more sessions. I always manage to find the energy, the enthusiasm, and the concentration to go out and do a good job. I think it's the adrenaline rush and the absolute high of working with such a varied group of people while riding a motorcycle that keeps me afloat. The majority of students are men in the 40+ age category but we still get a nice mixture of all ages, male and female, racers and street riders. Sometimes I'll ride my bike hard chasing and leading a local road racer

who's ridden the track dozens more times than I have and I'll feel proud when he tells me that he learned several

next destination. The rest of the crew grabs a bite to eat and returns to the hotel for some much needed rest before



new things throughout the day. Sometimes I'll ride slowly with someone who is nervous and anxious about riding on a track for the first time. The encouragement they receive from me and the skills they learn in the classroom are the perfect combination to help them feel more and more comfortable throughout the day.

At 5pm the riding stops, the students have their final debrief with their coaches, gossip with their friends, and share stories about who was faster and who passed who, before returning home to the various states and countries from where they came. They thank us profusely, sometimes exchange contact information, sometimes tips and they always leave smiling.

I change out of my stinky sweaty leathers, throw on my uniform once again, take a moment to grab a snack, rest for a moment and then get back to work. The dance resumes as we set to work riding the 30 odd bikes into the mechanics trailer, loading up all the tools, wrapping the extension cords, heaving boxes, and somewhat magically tucking away a small city's worth of tools and equipment into two large trailers. At 6:30 the dusty, dirty and tired crew sit down together to share our stories of the students' accomplishments and our own personal experiences of the day. Dusk settles in and the trucks drive off into the sunset, heading towards the

catching a flight to the next track the following day.

The days are long and tiring but they are always challenging and always interesting. The tracks are fun, the riding is varied and interesting, the students unique and personable. I have the opportunity to constantly work on my own riding skills as I practice the techniques taught and work to demonstrate and teach the fundamentals of riding. The perks of the job are rewarding, meeting new people, riding at different tracks, traveling and riding motorcycles all day, but the most amazing aspect of all is the ability to positively influence someone's riding and to teach them something new. I worked with a man in his 60's at one of the schools who said to me at the end of the day, "Young lady, with your support and encouragement on track, and with the exceptional classroom instruction, I've learned more in one day than in my entire 40 years of riding. Thank you, thank you." **MMM**

Misti Hurst is an avid motorcycle rider, professional racer, instructor with the California Superbike School, and freelance writer. www.mistihurst.com

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