

# TRACKTIME



Slow and steady...

## STUDENT TEACHER

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**A**s the *Motorcyclist* writer perhaps most in need of tutoring, I've been enrolling in track days like a freshman with a double major. And like many ambitious students, I've reached the point where I've been asked to teach myself. With just a half-dozen newbies gridding for the novice group, I figured instructing would be a breeze. And it was—if you like your breezes choppy, turbulent and fraught with interruptions. Despite their lack of on-track experience, my students arrived carrying more baggage than a Gold Wing towing a trailer! With more tough love than a *Dr. Phil* episode, I was able to curtail some of their bad habits. Here are five tips gleaned from my first day on the other side of the desk...

### 1. Leave the gadgets at home

A rider on a late-model sport-tourer spent much of the day with his front tire nipping at my rear. Back in the paddock, I suggested he follow me instead of trying to pass me. "No way, dude," he remarked. "My uncle has done a 1:18 lap in his car and I've got to beat him." To back up the urgency of his mission, he had an on-board lap timer and a girlfriend with a stopwatch. Eventually I waved him past to watch his lines, and I could have slapped myself and a liability lawyer when Mr. Win It

nearly became Mr. Bin It! He later confessed that he was looking at his lap timer when he ran off the track. If you've got to splash out cash, invest in sticky tires. They'll go a lot further toward shedding seconds than a stopwatch.

### 2. Patience, Grasshopper

Track-day gods are not created via Immaculate Conception. Rather they are born of many sessions spent learning the myriad intricacies of the race track. If the pace of a novice session feels too slow—as nearly every student in my class complained—be patient. Instead of concerning yourself with tearing down the straightaways only to end up panic braking, try following the instructor's drills. Riding an entire session in one gear—third, for example—without using the brakes will help you develop an unstressed familiarity with the circuit. You might even notice that your pace hasn't changed much from a lap where you did the fast/slow routine.

### 3. Lone wolves hunt better

Though enrolling in your first track day with your usual Sunday-morning crowd might seem like a good idea, it seldom is. Too many riding buddies harbor long-held resentments about who was faster than whom on the way home from Hooters last weekend. And while the track is the best place to settle those scores, doing

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so during your first outing is just plain *stupid*. You'll end up endangering each other and the other riders in your group. Cause an accident and you'll likely be black flagged, sent home or, worst case, earn an ambulance ride.

### 4. Resist the urge

The last session of the day saw the intermediate and advanced groups ride together, and I watched from the sidelines. "Great," I thought. "Besides a few overzealous students running into the grass, there wasn't a single crash." Of course, that thought was interrupted by a corner worker waving a yellow flag! The reason for the crash: "It was the last session of the day, so I decided to go for it," the hapless rider said. File this under *Don't*. By the last session of the day—especially in hot weather—most riders will already have put in their best rides. No doubt their tires have.

### 5. Plan a return

If all of the above information seems daunting, take heart: Barry Bonds didn't hit a home run on his first day at the ballpark! Look at your riding as something to improve gradually, over time. At day's end, discuss with other riders which sections of the track were the most fun and which ones put your Hanes in a knot. Decide which areas of your riding need improvement—braking, body position, visualization skills, etc.—and plan on working on those next time. And thank your instructors for getting you back to the paddock safely. It's not an easy job.