

Somewhere in the middle of his busy schedule, cluttered with annoyances like riding Valentino Rossi's bike (tough life, ain't it?) Neale Bayly made some time to pay a visit to the Ed Bargy Racing School. Here's his exclusive report for all of you at Bikeland...

A year of living cautiously. A trip to the Ed Bargy Racing School...

*Story and pix - Neale Bayly
for Bikeland.org*



Scientology, kinesiology, proctology, forget the lot, you are about to get some of the most practical, down to earth, hands on advice on how to go racing available. So turn off your I-pod, lose your cell phone, power down your laptop, and get ready to go, "WFO, Hell bent for election and Full-tilt-boogie." You are entering Ed's world and you'd better be hanging on!

Sitting in the wood paneled meeting room, marveling at the circa 1988 motorcycle posters on the wall, Ed Bargy is in sixth gear and at the redline. Blackboard chalk's flying, words are coming at us at a mile a minute and everyone in the room is hanging on to every one. Attending the Ed Bargy Racing School, being held at Little Talladega raceway in Alabama, myself and a dozen other students are here to learn the secrets of going fast on a track for the purpose of racing: We are not here to learn how to successfully navigate our way round our local track day. This is the real deal; this is

about learning the fastest, safest way round a racetrack with the one and only goal being arriving at the checkered flag first.

Having had a nasty high-speed faux a while back, I have defiantly been lacking in front-end confidence this year. Booking a trip to the Bargy race school seemed like a great chance to help get it back, while learning some proper techniques while I was there. By basically taking one advanced riding technique at a time, and breaking it down to its component parts, Ed Bargy helps takes the mystery out of road racing. Combing classroom sessions with alternating track time to put the theories taught to test, students end the day with a mock race, a written test, and a certificate that qualifies them for a novice racing license. For the unbelievable bargain price of \$350 you aren't getting a five-star catered lunch and a track photographer, but you are going to leave with all the skills you need to start club racing and you will be a better rider.

Joining me in class was an eclectic group, ranging from young local hot-shot, Sarah Irvine, a very quick expert road racer who campaigns an ex Aaron Gobert Yamaha R6, to 52 year old Paul Freeman on a Kawasaki 636. Paul, who has been riding for two years now, is a professional boat racer, and has no real desire to go racing on two wheels. He is just interested in learning how to be faster and safer though so he can better enjoy track days. Before we made it to the classroom though, Ed had given us all an introduction out on pit lane, and then taken us on a track walk. Well, a ride to four points on the track to simulate a track walk in the interest of saving time so we could observe the many details that you don't see at race speed.



Firstly the texture and condition of the pavement, which allows us to notice tar banding, cracks and grooves that could be on the race line. Then, how the track cambers, what sort of banking is available and where the various reference points are. Moving to a new corner, Ed spends some time pointing out runoff areas, and what to do if we end up taking a trip off the pavement. It is pretty cold in the early morning Alabama air, so no one is too unhappy when we blast back to the warm classroom for the first lecture.

Diving straight in with a full explanation of the various flags used in racing, we soon move on to race lines. As a mechanical engineer and race track designer, Ed is very technical about this subject, and with the use of diagrams to accompany his words, he breaks down the basic types of corners we will experience on any given racetrack, not just here at Talladega.

Ed's basic theory is "wide-tight-wide" and, as with everything he teaches, this is to maximize throttle time, because as we hear many times throughout the day, "throttle time wins races." Entering the corner you set up wide, run tight through the turn and exit wide. Using fancy techniques like backing it in don't impress Ed, as a skidding rear wheel adds no component to forward motion. Going over all types of cornering situations from Bowl turns to S turns it is soon time to hit the track and put our first lessons to test.

The track is still damp in places, but a dry line is developing and tucked in behind my instructor and couple of fellow students I am closely watching as they enter each of Talladega's many turns. I am riding my own Triumph Daytona 600 that has been set up for Ed's school, with the lights all taped, the required safety wiring



and a nice sticky set of Pirelli race compound Super Corsa's in place. To keep the cost down, and make sure everyone is familiar with their equipment, students bring their personal bikes. I actually haven't ever ridden the Daytona before, but five laps into it that was quickly forgotten.



Rolling around the 1.35-mile circuit, working on our lines at a nice conservative pace, I can feel myself relaxing and thinking about where I want to position the bike for the corner. These new lines are most defiantly different from my normal track day ones, and it feels a little alien but not uncomfortable.

Minutes later, a checkered flag signals it is time to head back to classroom to get some warmth back in our chilled digits.

For our next lecture, Ed deals with shifting techniques, and in particular blipping the throttle during downshifting to help steady the bike and correctly match the engine and rear wheel speed. He also gets into

downshifting too early and relying on engine braking: One of my bad habits. By shifting later, and going down one gear at a time we are protecting ourselves from hitting a false neutral, and learning to rely on the

brakes. Exiting corners we need to make sure we are in the power band to take advantage of our engines power, and a full explanation of correct gearing is next. Then it is time to get back on the track.

This time I find myself behind Ed and quickly picking up speed he is extremely smooth. Going late and straight into the last corner, and braking hard before my downshift everything from the classroom makes perfect sense. Where, as Ed would put it, I am usually "romancing the turn," now we were flicking in from way outside my usual line.

The result of this meant we were driving back onto the front straight so much harder than I had done here before it was quite the eye opener. This was the status quo for the

next fifteen minutes as we made some pretty fast, comfortable laps. I still wasn't getting the downshifting where I wanted it, and talking with Ed after the session, he could hear my engine revving way too high, and told me to keep practicing. The trick is to be consistent and keep working on the techniques.



Back in class, we were immediately on to the next technique, which would build on what we have learned, and this was the order for the rest of the day.

Unfortunately, a couple of sessions

later I had a small mechanical problem that could have ended my day if it weren't for a young man by the name of Dallas. Kindly offering me the use of his Honda CBR1000 I was able to continue.

With the winter day rapidly coming to an end, we prepared to leave the classroom for our last track sessions.

We would go out and work on all the techniques we had learned during the day, and then line up on pit lane for a simulated race. Feeling extremely comfortable, I worked on another of my bad habits that Ed had isolated in class, and practiced braking later into

the turns. Where as a road rider I brake hard and then coast to the turn, I was now leaving it later and wasting less time. Paying close attention to my brake markers, I could hear





another “Edism” ringing my ears as I forced myself to leave it later and later: “Braking separates the men from boys, or the men from their motorcycles.” As probably not the most PC comment in the world, especially with Brandy Lowe and Sarah in the class, it did raise a good laugh.

Feeling faster and smoother than I have ever been at Talladega, the checkered flag signaled it was time to start our race. As an exact simulation, we lined up on pit road as the course controller showed us the five-minute board and we took off for our warm up lap. Rolling back onto the start line, I took my position and locked my eyes on the starter. As engines revved and the flag dropped we took off into turn one, bikes everywhere. Not wanting to do anything stupid with Dallas’s bike, my second row start left me



in fourth for the first turn. Not ashamed to take advantage of the big one liter four’s monster power, I had soon reeled in all of my class mates, Sarah Irvin excepted, and was running as hard as I could. One of my classmates had given me some trouble on his Buell, but with him behind me it was head down and wait for the checkered flag.

Crossing the line in second place, I was buzzing in my helmet. At no time had I felt threatened, the bike doing just what I asked and I know I have never lapped faster.

Back in the classroom, we just had our written test, which everyone passed with flying colors and we were all free to leave as qualified racers. In one day we had gone from track day riders to racers, Sarah excluded, and while we have to wear our novice t-shirts for our first two races, we are certainly now equipped to make that leap safely and properly.

Find out more at
www.edbargyracingschool.com