

Taking the Mystery out of Mystery School

By Budman

Photo's by Budman, Rich and Karin Oliver

I have attended quite a few different schools/trackdays etc over the course of my adult life. The Official Suzuki School of Motocross, Jimmy Weinert Motocross School, Keith Code advanced racing school and recently Danny Walker's American Supercamp, were the only others that I would say are really into teaching real world techniques that apply to a motorcycle racer. Rich Oliver's Mystery School does that even at the fun camp level and does it extremely well. Rich does not push it hard at this level, but all of the tools are exposed from eyesight to nutrition, to balance, to throttle control, balance and on and on. I can only imagine how intense the 4 day Pro Camp must be.

Having gone to the schools I mentioned, I could pick out those things easily and certainly listened to one reflective and intelligent human being / racer. I listened so well I won a Megan Award for best listener..(More on that later).

For me Mystery School was about getting myself and my son Kyle on his 24th birthday out for a good time on two wheels. What I came away with was that and so much more. A rekindling of the thought, focus and dedication it takes to be a successful racer along with the smiles, fun I was looking for and a determination to lose a few of the old man pounds too. Mystery School does a little more as well, teaching some basic knowledge about living well.

Kyle and I jumped into my car and headed to Fresno on Friday night to get a good meal and a good night of sleep before heading the 35 minutes into the mountains. We slept a little too well missing our alarm, thus breakfast and Starbux, but leaving us enough time to get up to the meet spot for Rich to guide the group to his ranch home. There we met our fellow riders and the group was diverse ranging from the 10 year old to the old man (me). Pulling into the Ranch you find several courses complete with hay bales and Yamaha banners etc. We stopped at the garage area to unload gear and then up to his home to park and get our intro into what laid ahead.

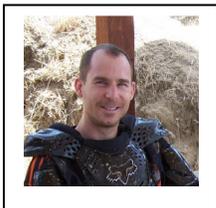
After the quick talk by Rich and introduction to his wife Karin and the kids, Megan (11) and Matthew (13) we started by Megan leading us in stretching. Then down to the garage area to gear up. The gear is provided and seeing a few people with their own gear always leads you to believe some experience is there. Checking out Rich's trophy room was very cool. A bike on display, trophy's, awards and memorabilia that is worth the trip alone.



The Mystery Ranch Track

A little talk between the participants at this point, gave me some insight into the other players who were there for the weekend. It is always good to get some idea of who you are going to be riding with and in the Mystery School format you do some major riding with them.

The Players:



Doug – A seasoned veteran of Rich’s program, former AFM racer and current track day teacher. 30 something and looking extremely fit and stylish in his gear.



Patrick – Current WSMC/WERA road racer and very fit. He rides dirt bikes for training. He is also young (20 something) and looked to be pretty serious about the deal.



Elaine – A petite 20 something lady who races a 125 in the AFM and had no real dirt bike experience. She definitely would have a weight advantage on the guys.



Andre – A 40 something street rider with no dirt bike experience. He was tall and lanky, probably still giving up at least 25 pounds to Pat and Doug. He did not look like a man who was in his 40’s.



Jordan – A full of energy 10 year old, who had attended the school before and appeared extremely confident.



Kyle – At 6-6” he was about the same height as Andre and he weighs in around 215 lbs. He was likely giving up 100 lbs. to Elaine and 50 to Pat and Doug.



Me – oh crap. Fat = The heaviest at about 220 lbs. The oldest = 49 years old. Only 6-1”, but with a knee that makes it damn hard to squeeze on the little bikes.



Rich giving us a few words before we hit the track

Basic instruction began with seating position, arm position, throttle control, braking, etc. After some follow around we did some basic braking drills and then to the little oval to take a few laps. One at a time we entered until we all stuffed onto the little track. We circled the course with Rich watching. Cycling in and out was easy and it got all of us through it quickly. The opposite direction was in order and then the chicane course, the big oval and the TT all with discussion about our good and bad in between. We stayed busy. Then the three kids did the same.



After a busy couple of hours in drills we headed to the house for a great / healthy lunch. Homemade and just what you need to keep the tank full for the day. After lunch a little more discussion and then back to the track. Cornering drills, tight ones to exaggerate the balance, body position and throttle control to get through without being sent back to the line for a mistake.

Rich was always keeping an eye on the track and often watering it with a well thought out system. We talked about simple things like color of the dirt for traction analysis. Body weight application on the bike and traction, just cool stuff. After one of the breaks we got the low down on the rest of the day and the next. Time trials were in order on multiple tracks. 3 Lap sprints to see who was where and to gauge our improvement on day two. This included starts as they are a super important aspect to the race. Yes the race....!!



Pat was looking fast



Rich downloading some knowledge

After some real mud fun and a second round of time trials we would grid up for more than fifteen - 5 lap sprints and a 25 lap main event for the grand finally and the big bucks. Sweet!

Now we would see where we stacked up against each other, but I had the feeling Doug was fast and Pat was not far behind. We began with the practice starts. I figured lighter the better with the little bikes and that swung the advantage to our light AFM Roadracing lady Elaine. It also gave the kids a shot.. I thought.

After several runs the results were announced and I lost out to Elaine by a mere .06 of a second. Cool. We were all close though.

Next the mini oval. This time I took the fast time. This also brought Jordan just ahead of Kyle and Andre. This was the beginning of a beautiful thing. Each course after, Doug would be the fastest with Pat close and me leading the rest. Jordan continued to out pace my son and now a little smack talk was developing.



Budman working the mini oval

We would be racing the TT course in the final. Doug and Pat were both strong holding at least two seconds over the 3 laps on me and more on the rest. We ended the day tired and inspired looking forward to some good grub and rest. All the gear was tossed into a tub, even our personal stuff and would be washed up for day two.

Before we even got out of the driveway Rich was on the tractor with Matthew driving preparing the course for day two. He really does this right. A quick trip to Elephant bar for some grub and a beer, and then we headed back to the hotel for a good action movie and some riding talk with the son made for a good night.