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BORN TO RIDE?

Harley-Davidson's Rider's Edge Course

WORDS AND PHOTOS: NICK SCHULTZ



Our herd of Buell steeds.

Chris and Len hold court with their tales from the road.



Born to ride!" is the credo Harley-Davidson Rider's Edge instructor Leonard Applebum has his students declare on the first day of class. "Nothing could be further from the truth," was my initial thought. Whereas all eight of my classmates introduced themselves with tales of childhood glory on dirt bikes, peer pressure from bike-inclined friends and acquaintances, even vintage bikes being passed from grandfathers to fathers, my story included no such mysticism. I'm just a nerdy English major who likes sports, video games, and happened to land a job proofreading motorcycle articles for *HOT BIKE* and *Hot Rod Bikes* nine years ago. No one in my family or circle of friends away

from the office rides. Born to ride? More like, born *not* to ride.

Harley-Davidson's Rider's Edge New Rider Course is a 25-hour program taught by Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) and H-D certified instructors that select Harley dealers offer to break in potential future clients to the two-wheeled way of life. These 25 hours are split between five consecutive days of both classroom study and hands-on riding on a private range, culminating in an MSF Basic RiderCourse Completion Card, an exemption from the riding portion of your motorcycle license test (depending on your state), and even a possible break on your motorcycle insurance rate (check with your insurer). Given my less-than-extensive background in the saddle, I was intimidated by this undertaking, but

comforted in the fact that I was in the hands of professionals.

While day one of the course at Orange County Harley-Davidson piqued my interest, this two-hour, 15-minute classroom-only session also curbed it with all of the waiver forms, safety warnings, and acronyms you'd expect. Yes, S.E.E. (Search Evaluate Execute) and A.T.G.A.T.T. (All The Gear All The Time) are invaluable lessons, but I also quickly learned to fully respect this foray. Little known fact: you can seriously hurt yourself on a motorcycle. What had I gotten myself into?

On the bright side, it turned out there was no need to worry about an intimidating instructor. I'd imagined someone like Clay Morrow from *Sons of Anarchy* indoctrinating me into a life of gunrun-

"To ride a bike, you have to be yay high."



Chris breaks down our next exercise. Flannel shirts optional.



“It’s safe to say that by day five’s one-hour, 45-minute class, we were over the trappings of being biker noobs.”



Dy (the guy in our group who bought his Harley a week before class started) navigates the course with grace.



My study group, “The Mecha Seahorses” (don’t ask), listened intently in class.

ning and bad-assery. With more than 12 years of MSF-certified instruction under his belt, Len was a welcoming tour guide into the world of riding. He was engaging, extremely approachable, and had a great sense of humor; and it turns out the gunrunning is optional. With the weight of this venture applying a proper amount of apprehension, Len did well to relieve it. A couple of fun facts: in Len’s estimation, his classes consist mostly of men in their late 40s, though about a

third of his students tend to be women. My class was all male, most in their 20s or 30s, so all comers are welcome.

Day two was another two-plus-hour classroom session at the dealership. Group learning is the preferred methodology, with our class being broken up into three groups of three to tackle the 54-page textbook collectively. We dove in, learning the tools we would need to navigate the practice range and outside world on a hog, or any motorcycle for

that matter—the course is not biased towards Harleys, cruisers, or otherwise. With safety precautions and fundamental riding basics drilled into our heads, I nervously anticipated our next two days (gasp!) on the range.

Day three saw the rubber literally and figuratively meet the road as we dawned dealership-provided Buell Blasts on a private local parking lot. (A little tip here: short of dropping hundreds of dollars to get fully geared up, you’re going to want to invest in a long-sleeved shirt, jeans, ankle-high boots, sunglasses, and leather gloves if you don’t already have them in the closet. DOT-approved loaner helmets are provided.) It was time to apply all the theory we’d learned in class over this extensive 10-hour day. Joining us on the range was our second instructor, Christopher Veal. Adding his six years of MSF instruction experience to the course, Chris worked masterfully in tandem with Len—one explaining exercises while the other demonstrated on a Buell. As we ran through the exercises, both Len and Chris observed and provided feedback on how we were navigating the layout. There were also regular breaks between exercises to get out of the sun, rehydrate, and log our

thoughts in our Roadbooks—private journals provided for us to jot down our innermost thoughts on all of these new experiences.

Progressing through the exercises in this manner for two consecutive days on the range works. Whereas many of us started off stalling out our bikes regularly (me being one of the biggest offenders), we gradually began to settle into a nice rhythm where we broke free of our early limitations and really began to pick things up at a greater pace. By midway through the eight-and-a-half-hour second day on the range, we were brimming with confidence (again, me being one of the biggest offenders). At day's end, we headed back to the dealership and really began to check out the rides on the showroom floor in a new light, kicking legs over many and offering our "expert" opinions on each. I felt like a bull in a China shop in the showroom on day one; now I was grabbing a Road King and sizing it up for *my butt*.

It's safe to say that by day five's one-hour, 45-minute class, we were over the trappings of being biker noobs. We wanted our licenses, our bikes, and to get on the road already. Ahh, but despite all of us passing the range test the day before, we still had to pass the written test to make it official—"official," meaning getting our completion cards and saying sayonara to our desks and chairs.

Once we passed the finish line and the classroom lights were switched off for the final time, we all exchanged contact information and promised to ride together as soon as we all had the means to. And as confident as we all felt, something Len said rang true for me: we were officially experts at riding Buell Blasts at low speed in a closed parking lot. It was a great journey from day one through five, but I still know there's a whole other "real" world out there to conquer, and yes, I'd like to conquer it. That's right, I left the Rider's Edge New Rider course with something more than my completion card: I knew I was indeed born to ride.

You can search for nearby participating Rider's Edge dealerships and register for class at harley-davidson.com. Class fees are \$299. Skilled Rider and Group Rider courses are also available for experienced riders. Sign up quick because space is limited. **HB**



Noob no more! You've passed the Rider's Edge course.



Studying up for the big written test on day five of class.

As their sleeves so eloquently state, our instructors, Chris and Len.



Brendon ready to launch from the staging area.



SOURCE:

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