

## Keith Code 2003: The Epic Interview

"Aardvark" ... That's what you'll find on page one of the Encyclopedia Britannica. On page one of the Encyclopedia of Motorcycle Cornering Knowledge though, you'll find that it begins with "Keith Code." His books, including *A Twist of the Wrist* Volume 1 & 2, and *The Soft Science of Road racing Motorcycles*, have been the bibles of motorcycle racing since they first began appearing on shelves in 1982, and have since been translated into several foreign languages, as well as produced in audio tape, DVD, and CD-ROM editions.

Since 1980 when his California Superbike School was founded, over 100,000 riders in schools on four continents have trained in Keith's techniques (including yours truly), and he has coached 15 National Superbike Champions including Doug Chandler, Sean Higby, Tommy Hayden, Eric & Ben Bostrom, have I dropped enough names yet?

Keith is a constant tinkerer as well and has developed several innovative teaching aids such as the Lean Bike, Slide Bike, No BS Bike, and Wheelie Trainer. Indisputably one of the most fascinating, and historically significant people in the sport, this rather extensive interview is being published verbatim, in its entirety, as a unique glimpse into the world of Keith Code.

**EB:** It would seem that devoting a lifetime to finding ways to ride a motorcycle around a track a fraction of a second faster would get old after awhile to most people. Not to mention, after hearing that you spent three days straight doing laps in 6th gear with no brakes, I was wondering what is it about motorcycle racing, and cornering specifically, that captivates you so deeply that you've made it your life's pursuit?

**KC:** Well, I think that the fact that I used to make mistakes with all the things that I now have figured out solutions for was really the original reason that I began to research the area of riding motorcycles. I had problems and I knew I had problems. You know, I was racing and people were faster than me. No data was available. There was simply no information, but now there is information and people kind of take it for granted but you know in the seventies there was no data.

We're talking... when I say no information, it's maybe hard to believe. There weren't for example, "how to" riding articles in magazines. They simply didn't exist. Nobody had even taken it up as a subject. The best you could get was good advice from somebody, and often times it wasn't really good advice at all, it was actually bad advice. And even the people... especially the people who knew how to do it were the worst sources for information. The best you could get is, "More throttle on, and less brake, and you'll get around the track faster". That was about the level of sophistication that was available in the 1970's and any time before that.

**EB:** Interesting. Sometimes as we watch the dominating performances of a Kenny Roberts historically, or a Valentino Rossi today, we forget that a long time ago in a galaxy far far away, they were newbie once too, and went through the same learning curve as the rest of us. They just kept going a whole lot farther than most of us. Could you go back to your formative riding years for us, and talk about the strengths and weaknesses, trials and tribulations, and perhaps any memorable moments of your early riding years. What did your learning curve look like?

**KC:** Well you mention Roberts, you know, Kenny told me the first time he rode a road race bike was up at Kent, Washington at Seattle International Raceway, and he crashed and didn't make a complete lap. It took him three tries to make one complete lap around Seattle International when he



was riding for Yamaha! Rossi, he was a whole different guy. He started riding when he was a little kid and his Dad was a racer, so that was a nice, sweet start.

My situation was completely different. My parents knew nothing about motorcycles, didn't want to know anything about motorcycles, thought they were extremely dangerous and I would be crazy and so on if I even considered it. But I still did get myself a motorcycle when I was 12. I got a little 125cc, they used to call it Harley Hummers. There's one sitting in the office down at Cycle World. I look at it and go, "Man, I used to have one of those!"

It was like a 1953 bike and I got on the bike and I rode it. All I did was I asked the guy who I got it from where the controls were. He asked me if I'd ever ridden a motorcycle before and I said, "Sure, of course I have, just refresh my memory on where the controls are". And he looked at me kind of like, you know a 12 year old kid standing in front of him down about waist level and he told me where the controls were and I got on the thing, and I rode it down the street. I asked him to bring it to my house and then the next time I got on it, I rode it. And I rode it again the next time, and I rode it again the next time. And I just had a feel for it, and I didn't crash it or anything like that. I just rode it.

As time went on and I got more motorcycles, I still wasn't interested in learning anything, right. When I was 15, I got myself a brand new single-cylinder Ducati. It felt good. It was a real, genuine motorcycle. Certainly for those days, it was probably one of the ultimate sport bikes of the day, really. I began to get interested in racing. I mean I already had been interested in racing, and I started to pay attention to what was happening when I was riding it. And I didn't really discover much, except I did discover counter-steering. Although I was afraid of it, and I didn't want to tell anybody because I thought they'd think I was crazy!

**EB: Did you discover that consciously or...**

**KC:** Yes, I was going through this corner. It was three corners away from my house where I lived out in the country. It was a nice corner, a left hand corner, double-apex turn. It's still there. And I was coming into it, and I rode into the corner, and I poked the bar right, and the bike went... I poked the right bar and the bike went further right and I went, "Whoa, what was that!" And I did it again, and it went right and I went "Whoa! That's really weird!"

**EB: So did you think you had a special bike that steered the wrong way?**

**KC:** No, I didn't know. I had no idea. I just went, "Hmmm, Wow! That seems to work." And then I didn't really think that much about it after that. There wasn't any particular sense of discovery or anything like that. I got it, and I went, "Oh, that kinda works. Interesting." And I just continued riding.

**EB: As you explored the science of riding, were there any teachers, peers, books, that you found particularly influential or effective to your process?**

**KC:** Honestly, as I said before, there was no information. It was a vast desert. There were two paragraphs in a John Surtees book that kind of gave you the idea that there might be something to know about cornering a motorcycle. And he had been World Champion and all this stuff, right. But I hadn't even seen those. One of the things that spurred me on really was a comment that Kenny Roberts made. And I think that it was in an article in a cycle mag. We're talking 1975 or '76, something like that. And he said something about... I had already had the idea that you could learn something about it, but he said something like, "I could teach anybody how to do this". Well whether he could or not, it didn't really make any difference, he had the sense that he could teach anybody how to do it right, and I went, "Huh, well uh, I don't know what he means by that, and maybe he doesn't know what he means by that, but there's gotta be a technology to it." When you come down to the realization that it's not just a bunch of haphazard motion that gets you through a corner, that there are specific things that you have to do, and you pretty much have to do them in the right sequence, that there must be a technology. There's a technology for everything else. There's a more correct way to do everything else that has anything to do with machines. So that got me going. That got me interested in discovering what it was all about. That's one of the things.

**EB: Let me ask you a couple of specific questions here. At that basic level, what are some of the things that a novice rider can do that you would designate as being the fundamentals of beginning to go faster than someone who just hops on a bike and is responding on intuition?**

**KC:** Well, you can ride on intuition. And there are riders out there on the World Championship level who just mainly ride on intuition. And you can see that there are a number of things that they just don't understand. But there isn't a simple answer to it. There's a simple answer to it for one person in certain kinds of corners. So okay, you follow this guy through the corner, you see what they're doing. If they're making a technical error and you know what the tech points are, you can say this rider is making this technical error. This is an error in throttle control. This is an error if the rider isn't turning at the right place, or at the right rate. All these things we do in level one. They have no idea where they're going in the corner before they start the corner, right. Or you can see them just so tight on the bike to the point the handle bars aren't even round anymore. They're oval shaped because they're squeezin' them so hard!

**EB: So you were watching me out on the track then!**

**KC:** Yes I was watching' you! And you see that these are technical errors, right. So you can correct that guy on that point, give him some information on it. Say well this is what happens with the bike, this is why it happens with the bike, is that what you want? Nobody's gonna say, "Yes". You hear, "No, I'm having trouble with this, it's not going my way". So you can

correct individual points like that as you bring the person along with a little bit of understanding. You don't have to go through text books and physics books or anything like that. You just say, "What do you want the bike to feel like? What should it feel like to you? What's gonna make you happy?" And you follow that line on down and there's the technical point that goes in that will correct that for that rider.

**EB: So it's all individual is what you'r ...**

**KC:** Yes, it's very individual in the sense that you can't just take all the tech points about a motorcycle and just drop 'em on somebody and hope that they get it. They're not going to get it. It doesn't work like that. Nobody does that. You knock them off one at a time and you start fitting them together into your riding. Is there a major error that most riders commit?

Looking at all the errors continuously in most cases, if they don't have some sense of what it is that they want to get from the bike. Even riders who've been doing it for a really long time.

**EB: This actually leads into my next question. What are some of the primary differences between teaching at the novice level, and teaching some of the premiere riders in the world? What are some of the fundamental differences that you find across that spectrum?**

**KC:** The differences are... well there's no difference when it comes to the technical aspect of it. This error will create this problem, whether the rider is dog slow, or whether the rider has already won a World Championship. The same error will create the same problem. The same technical error creates the same problem. There is no difference. Most of the things that we teach at the school today have been the result of many of the guys that I've worked with. You take someone like Scott Russell, or Doug Chandler, or John Kocinski, or Wayne Rainey, or any of these guys, and the things that they battle with are exactly the same things. They have it tucked away and hidden pretty well because they're willing to go out there and go around a corner fast. They're getting paid to go around corners fast to hold up the name of their sponsors and so on, so they'll just tuck 'em away and they won't think about them, but they'll trip on the same things. So novice, amateur, or expert, World Championship caliber rider, the things that go wrong are still the same things that go wrong. There is a technology to cornering a motorcycle. It isn't all just on feel. There are those guys who have come along, and they have done it, because they have feel for it with enormous repetition. You look at the guys, our heroes from the past, like Kenny Roberts, Eddie Lawson, Wayne Rainey, these kind of guys, and they started racing when they didn't even come up to your belt buckle, literally, and they did it so many times that its, you know, they made so many errors, and they got help from their parents, or their friends, or they didn't get help from their parents or their friends, but they just whittled it down to whatever it is that they came up with. But how many guys float to the top? How many guys should be there? A lot more than there are now, right? How many guys are at the top now compared to where they were 15 or 20 years ago? There's an enormous quantity of people who are at a high level of riding skill in the racing business, way more than there were in the past. Way, way, way, way, way more!

**EB: So now you're talking about hundredths of seconds between the top tiers. Let's talk a little about some of the top riders, and the influential riders historically. And I'll just throw that out to you. Anyone who comes to mind as a great natural talent or overachiever, or someone who came a long way in terms of their skill?**

**KC:** Well anyone who got to the top came a long way in terms of their skill, didn't they? Now whether they know what they're doing or not is another subject. Currently, a guy like Ruben Zaus for example. He's fast, he's courageous, and he crashes... all the time. And any one of my instructors can look at him... any of my instructors worldwide, any of the guys in Australia, any of the guys in England, any of the European schools, and any of the guys in the United States can look at Ruben Zaus go through two corners, and they'll go, "okay, here's how we can save Ducati \$500,000 this year in parts, right?!". Not that he isn't courageous, again, you can't say that he's a bad rider. He gets on the box all the time, or close to it. Well, better this year because of the situation in World Superbike, but the point is that we know what's wrong with that guy's riding. Could we fix it? Don't know. Would he be willing to fix it? Don't know. What he's doing feels right to him. We know why he's crashing the motorcycle, right? I mean I've taken money off of pro riders, watching them on a TV show, watching them come into a corner, and knowing what their history was, and seeing them for many years, or whatever it was, and I'd look at what they're doing and go, "Okay, I can fix that guy". And I've gone and said, "Write me a check for \$500 and you're not going to crash again this se-

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ason". You get a funny look from the person. You know, they trusted me just enough to write me a check. And I've sat down and given them a 30 minute briefing on what was wrong. Nothing different than what you were experiencing out there. Or what anybody else who's ever ridden a motorcycle goes through. Nothing different, same technical point. In this particular case, the guy didn't crash again, alright? And he was crashing like, all the time! Just that simple.

**EB: In terms of the pros, and you bring up that point, there are some guys who are known as "crash or win" types of guys. Is there a particular error within that style of riding that causes those guys to crash so much, or is that all individual too?**

**KC:** No, there are common errors that most guys who crash a lot commit. And there are some really good examples of that in the past. Some of them are my competition, so I'm not going to say anything about them! There's a category of errors that fall across that "crash a lot" thing. Or looking at it from the same perspective, you see riders over the last 20 years, and maybe the riders migrated from Team Honda to Suzuki, to Yamaha, to Kawasaki, or whatever it was, and it's funny that you hear them complaining of having the same handling complaints on the motorcycles no matter what they climb on. This has happened in the past, right? Or they always blame the tires or something like that, right? And it's easier the closer you are to some of these people, or the better the press is if they just did an interview, to find these threads of the same guy having the same problem, no matter what he's riding. And you watch the riding, and you see, well, I can see, and all my instructors can see, the exact technical points that the guy is violating, and why he's having a problem, and why it's never going to go away. Because there will never be a motorcycle that will correct for it. You can't build one. At least they won't look like they look now. So, again, when you violate the technical points, you will run into a problem. And the faster you wish to go through a corner, if it's speed that you want, the more dramatic the situation will be, and the more adrenaline you're gonna have. You're gonna have to get sorted in there just to ride at the level that you want to.

**EB: Okay, I'm going to take a little change of tack here. Recently, you started a wheelie school.**

**KC:** Yes

**EB: Doesn't that involve traveling in a straight line? What prompted the master of cornering to start a wheelie school? How'd that come about, and how's it going?**

**KC:** Two things on the wheelie school. We call it, "On One Wheel". On One Wheel is... the reason I did it is because people asked. They wanted to know, "When are you gonna teach us how to wheelie?" And it was sort of written as a joke in our surveys, right? But you'd see it over and over again, and then you go, "This isn't a joke. These people actually do want to learn how to do this!" And the fact that I never was... you know, I didn't mind wheelies on the race track, when you'd go up over the crest or something like that and you're on the gas, and so on and so forth. I never minded it, but I never was any good at it. So I thought, "Oh, I can kill two birds with one stone here". If people want to learn how to wheelie, well, you know... I talked to guys who run other schools, same thing. You got a World Champion running the school, and then you go around the corners and they go, "Well, but when are you gonna teach us how to wheelie?!" And it's like, "Oh man! Aaaaugh!" So the wheelie thing, which I started five years ago, I started building a device, and it turned out to be just an extremely complicated thing. You know, it's a computer, it's a machine thing, it's got all these dials in it, and gravity indicators, and solid state gyros, and all this kind of stuff. And finally, a year or so ago, I went, "Aah, we can do this much simpler". So my designer friend, Mark Kessinger, and I got together and we came up with the one we got right now, which is all super simple. So, that was the reason. People requested it, and I couldn't do `em! So I figured, if I could solve it for myself, if I'd be willing to ride this thing, then other people would probably ride it too. And so besides that, people have fun doing them. And then, you know, the people who are coming to the school, who are they? They're 44 years old. Are they gonna be lofting it with Vegas Extremes? I don't think soooo! Absolutely not! They want to do it for their own personal satisfaction, end of story.

**EB: So would you consider expanding that concept into other kinds of classes like doing burnouts, or stoppies, or a street safety class, or even drag racing? I was recently reading an article about how Go-bert spent some time with Ricky Gadsden and improved his start. So that might even be a legitimate racing extension to the curriculum. Are any of those things possibilities?**

**KC:** Not really. There are guys... Ricky's out there, you know, and there are other guys out there who are pros at this. They don't need me. I'm not a drag racer. I always got good starts when I raced, but I'm not a drag racer. So why should I even... really, the only thing that really interests me

about motorcycles is going around the corners. Now, at our race program, the racing competition experience, which is a totally different program than the Superbike School, we do starts. We stand next to the guy, and we watch him, and we critique him on his starts. We go round robin until the guy can get a decent start, and we critique him on it. So the race school is for that. So we do it, alright? Could Ricky get a better result with our students if they spent a whole day with him? I'm sure he could. We wanna get the guy off the line without bogging the thing, or without getting himself into a wheelie with flying "W"s down the straight away kinda starts! That's all we're interested in, is just to get the guy off the line. So we're not interested in really pursuing that, you know? Again, the wheelie thing was just a total "guy thing". I have fun inventing things. And I knew I could invent that, and I came up with the idea and my inventor friend and I put it together, and it works great. That's all I'm gonna do on that. I mean we've got a stoppie thing too, that we're working on, but you know, again, this is just my own personal amusement. I just like to create stuff!

**EB: Yes, if I ever see you walking towards my motorcycle with a torch and a welder's mask on, I'll definitely be getting that thing out of the- re in a hurry!**

**KC:** Well, I'm not the world's best fabricator, you know, as far as that goes, but just like you rode up on that V-Rod this morning, and that clutch thing. It's like... my original touch on something like that is... I don't like the way that feels, the way they have that clutch lever in there.

And it doesn't truly make sense to me. It could have been designed a little bit differently. They could have gotten a more even feel on the clutch lever, right? And it would be annoying to me to ride that motorcycle for that reason. If I liked everything else about it, that would annoy me, and I wouldn't want it. I'd build a lever for it if I had to have one, and it wouldn't be the one that it came with. I like to fit things, and make them work. Not just for me, but you look at things and say, "Well if that's uncomfortable for me, could that be uncomfortable for somebody else?" Well, then you may look at it and say, "Oh no, that'd be fine for other people, it's just me that doesn't like it". Or if it's a real true point, there would be some basic thing on it that was wrong with it. So, why doesn't it feel right? Well it doesn't feel right because it doesn't fit your hand. So I notice things like that all the time, and then I want to do something about it. Or I notice somebody going through a corner and they look raggy, or they've got the wrong turn entry speed, or their throttle control's crap, or something like that. Even at the pro level, I want to go over to their pit and say, "Hey, you know what? I'm not asking for a check, just go, "Hey you know what? I can fix your riding today, `cause this is what's going on out there". Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Not every pro is receptive to that sort of criticism.

**EB: Sure, and it's interesting, because you really just sort of began answering the next question I was going to throw at you. You seem to be someone who has the ability to perceive things in an "outside the box" way of thinking about them on a pretty regular basis. I was just curious as to whether that comes from a deeper paradigm of how you investigate the world around you and what some of the fundamental principles are of the way you think about things and look at things.**

**KC:** Well, people on some forums and stuff, they nail me all the time for being a Scientologist, but the fact is that Scientology is all just information about how the universe works, and how the mind works in relation to it. There's so much information that that guy, Ron Hubbard, wrote and I haven't ever found anything about it that's wrong. And I can look at almost anything he's ever written and apply it to motorcycle riding. When I get stale for an idea, I'll just go through something he wrote back in 1952, or listen to one of the tapes that I've got from him from over the last 40 or 50 years.. and I'll come up with something, and I'll go, "Yes, this applies to motorcycle riding". Because it's all about man, and the fact that everybody's got a mind and what it is, and how it works, and how you interrelate with the physical universe. You know, with stuff, with motorcycles, with roads, with things. And so I've got that whole background of training and courses and stuff that I've done in Scientology, and that's really the reason that I actually started training other people. Because I saw that if you followed the basics of understanding from a Scientology course I took, I thought if I just followed those things, that I could get definite and immediate results with somebody one on one and that would translate into the school. People don't come and do Scientology at my school. That's not it. It's just that the concepts apply to riding. That's all. Just as there are physics concepts that apply to riding, right? These concepts apply to riding, and they apply to people. So, that's been a big inspiration for me. And originally I said, "Hey, if this guy can figure out how the mind works, I can figure out how to ride a motorcycle!" Plus he was a good motorcycle rider and had lots of them!

**EB: Keith, you are widely respected as a world-class teacher. I am cu-**

**rious as to what Keith Code has learned. So I'm going to throw out a subject and we'd love to hear as concisely as possible, what you feel you've learned about it, okay?**

**KC:** There's only one thing that's important about being a good teacher and that's remaining interested in the subject.

**EB: What do you think you know about being a good student?**

**KC:** A good student is, for me, a rider who shows up at the school with a desire to want to improve. That's the bottom line for me on that.

**EB: What have you learned about champions?**

**KC:** Well, one of the things I've learned about champions is that no matter what they sound like in interviews, no matter whether their grammar's any good, or whether they can spell, or speak the language very well, they're all very intelligent people. Every single one of them that I've ever spent any time with. Their actual level of intelligence, their ability to embrace ideas and concepts is very high, very high.

**EB: What have you learned about success?**

**KC:** Well, what I've learned about success is that it's personal. I don't have any success that's valuable to me except for how it impacts me. How I feel about continuing to do what I like to do. Success is personal. I mean somebody else could measure success by millions of dollars, or pictures that they've made, or whatever, but in the end for anyone who's serious about their life pursuit, their art, it's all personal. It's all about you gaining what you thought was what you wanted to do. Success is all about putting that future there, and then achieving it. It's all about, once you've got there, transitioning over into the next one. Success is all about continuing to want to improve, to create more in your area. That's what success is all about.

**EB: What would you say you've learned about happiness?**

**KC:** Well happiness, okay, there's a certain joy that comes from discovering something, and then being able to translate it into something that's useable for yourself, and for others. Happiness for me is the process of discovery, and the process of translating it into something that makes sense. Well there's a lot of ways of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is happiness is knowing that you can help.

**EB: What would you say you've learned about drugs?**

**KC:** Oh, I've learned a lot about drugs! I know an enormous amount about drugs! Fortunately, I don't know much about a lot of the new ones. But since I spent a lot of time taking drugs before 1971, I pretty much spent the previous ten or eleven years taking drugs, and as many of whatever I could get my hands on, and as much of it as I could possibly get, so what I've learned about taking drugs is that you don't learn anything by taking drugs! The promise is that something's going to be better, or that it'll be easier, or you'll be smarter, or more aware of things. That was the PR in the sixties when I got into it. I mean we had Harvard graduates telling us that if you took LSD that you would become more and more aware, and more of a spiritual being and all this kind of stuff, and it's all absolute, 100% bullshit.

**EB: What have you learned about failure?**

**KC:** Well, I kind of like to fail every once in awhile, to tell you the truth, because it gives me a good contrast to the things where I'm successful, measuring success from what we've talked about. So I personally don't mind failing. I personally don't mind being wrong. It doesn't impact me personally, because I'm still looking. I'm still trying to figure out what this game is all about. Not just life, which goes along pretty well for me, but in my chosen area, in motorcycle riding and teaching. The times that I've failed, I have just enough grasp on what I can do to translate it into a non-failure. I don't have any failures that bother me. I don't have any failures that continue to come up in my world. They're handled. I don't have to push them away. They're done. I've fixed them.

**EB: I actually came across an interesting quote by Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, and he said something like, "I'd rather lose money and know why I lost it, than make money and not understand how I made it."**

**KC:** Yes, that's a good one, and Jack Welch is a bright guy. Definitely a bright guy. Yes, well recently there's been a lot of traffic in the last three and a half years on my "No BS Bike", the bike that has two sets of handlebars, one set moves and the other set doesn't. Jabs back and forth on forums about, you know, can you really body steer? Is counter-steering the only way? And all this kind of stuff. Some people say this, and some people say that. It really doesn't make a whole lot of difference. Some people say, well, it's a failure, and it doesn't show you everything. And one guy on one forum was really bright, he said, "There has never been an experiment that has ever failed. Whatever was attempted, showed what it showed." I don't know if he came up with that on his own or if somebody

else did but it's absolutely true.

**EB: Cool. What have you learned about religion?**

**KC:** All religions have something to do with the idea that man is a special spiritual being, that you're not just an animated piece of hamburger. And I'm sure that that's true. I don't feel like a bunch of brain cells and body organs that are running through this universe on some chance deal. I have thoughts, and I'm "Me", and it doesn't have anything to do with this thing I carry around that people identify me with, called "Keith Code" that helps them recognize me. I'm me, and I happen to have a body, you know, and its okay. But the one thing that I'm really sure of is that when you approach somebody from that perspective, that they really are, "themselves", that they are a spirit, a soul, a being, an entity . . . that you make enormous progress with any kind of communication, whether it's for teaching purposes or just being friends. And that the other way, you just end up drugging and beating people, which is what the whole psychiatric thing is all about. You're not a soul, or a spirit, or somebody, you're just a good set of chemical responses or a bad set of chemical responses to them. And their solution in that area of psychiatry to trying to "fix" somebody is basically like disconnecting the hot lead off your battery, right? Your car or your bike still looks okay, but it won't run. So that's what those guys are selling. It's kind of anti- any idea of a soul. So what religion for me is the confirmation that people really are beings, that they're not just a bunch of chemical responses, and that they can experience life and joy. Not because their body was doing well that day, but because they themselves as a spirit, being, soul, whatever, were pleased, happy, creative.

**EB: Tell me what you've learned about parenthood.**

**KC:** I'll tell you one thing in relation to what we're doing here, it's a lot cheaper when your kid decides he doesn't want to race anymore!

**EB: Is that what happened?**

**KC:** Yes. He was good. Dylan was a good racer. He started, his first time on a race track for a real race was when he was 12, I think. And he raced for about four or five years. He was always on the box, whatever he rode. And he's an excellent rider, and he just said, "You know, I don't think I want to do this anymore". So he stopped, and I went, "Phew". It saved me a lot of dough! But he still likes to ride, he rides all the time.

**EB: Good. What do you think you've learned about aging?**

**KC:** I haven't really noticed!

**EB: Then I'll have whatever your drinking, or eating for breakfast, or whatever!**

**KC:** I really don't have much attention on aging really. I notice that I'm not willing to maybe ride a bicycle, or exercise as much, and as often, and as hard as I used to.

But at the moment, I don't have a reason to do it. If I all of a sudden decided I was going to go racing again at 58, then I would rearrange my life completely and start doing enough so that I would feel good enough to do that. You know, the thought crosses my mind. But I actually kind of enjoy it, because the amount of time that I've spent around here... earth. Things go better and better for me. I have different goals than I did when I was 20... or 25, or 30, or 35, or 40, or 45, or last year! So, the aging thing is... nobody wants to get old and doddering where people have to take care of you, and you're drooling all the time, or anything like that. But the personal sense of being composed and focused is better. If I had the sense of being as focused now when I was 20 or something, you know, 18, 25, 30, whatever, it doesn't make any difference, younger than I am right now, then I could see that my life, you know... even if I didn't do all the stuff that I thought I had to do that was all testosterone driven... that I would have made an enormous amount of progress in my life, and would have achieved happiness, my own personal success, and joy, just that much sooner.

**EB: What have you learned about love? (Important to note that Keith's wife Judy is making brunch for him within earshot as I ask this question. Not that I put Keith on the spot or anything! - EB)**

**KC:** (long pause)

**EB: Better be careful with this one, Keith. She's standing right behind you, with a frying pan in her hand! I'm not joking either!**

**KC:** Our wedding anniversary is coming up in a couple of days, two days. Its... you have to create it. It doesn't sort of strike you like a lightning bolt. I mean you do get that if you have a terrific amount of affinity for somebody, you like 'em a lot, and so on and so forth, or whatever the attraction is. It might be on a lot of levels, it might be on just one level! Whatever, in order to create that, in order to put that into a perspective where I would call it love, it takes a continuous willingness on your part to put it the-

re, to create it, you know. We create our own emotions, and love is sort of like a side thing. It's sort of like a conglomeration of a lot of emotions, and a lot of things, a lot of aspects about the day to day things that are living and life get sort of rolled into the same thing. You know, you don't like your spouse because they don't lock the door, or something like that, right? They're messy, or whatever it is, well that's the day to day stuff that can creep into it. So, love itself, it's not just a single emotion to me. It's a whole package of things that you have to continue to create. And then it just gets better, and better, you know? I mean I've been hanging out with her (Judy) for 33 years, and it's better than its ever been!

**KC:** There's another point to it too, and that is that, "honesty counts"... a lot. People split up because they do something, and they don't tell the other person about it, and that kills it because you can't create over that. You already have this thing where you know you did something that wasn't quite right. It might not be a big, big, huge thing, but just enough to catch your attention, and then you tend to distance yourself away from that person. And then as soon as you start distancing them away from you, then you start creating things in between you and that person, and then you're not creating with that person any more. So, it's that stuff, unfortunately, that's the solution to just about every relationship that busts up. It's you did something that you shouldn't have done. And you've already agreed that you shouldn't have done it so... and that stops the creation. And creating is... that's the key.

**EB: What do you think that you've learned about loss?**

**KC:** I really have a hard time experiencing any losses. I mean, you lose a person, that's a whole thing. Then you miss the fact that you can communicate with that person. You're not going to get a chance to say something you wanted to say maybe. But aside from the actual... or you could lose a friend, you know? I think to me, that's more of a loss than losing a whole person because they don't have a body anymore, it's losing a friend. To me, that's the only kind of loss that bothers me. I could lose my wallet. I could lose all my money. I could lose my car, you know? I wouldn't want to lose my wife! But they don't impact me very much because... this is something that Ron Hubbard said, and this is a slight paraphrase, "The only way you can lose anything is if you don't think you can create it again". And if you can't create it again, then it's a loss. But usually it's gonna be your own perspective on it, your own viewpoint, your own consideration that you can't create it again. So, if you can create it again then I guess you didn't lose it!

**EB: How would you define the purpose of life on earth?**

**KC:** The purpose of life? There is no purpose to life. There's only the purpose you put on it. That's the only one there is. You look around here, and you say, "What's the purpose?". Well, what are your purposes? They're different from mine. What's that guy's purpose over there? Well, it's different from mine too. If everybody was in perfect condition, and didn't have anything dragging them down, and on and on, and they sat down and really figured out what their own individual purpose was, right? You wouldn't have any lawyers first of all, because nobody would be in conflict with each other. If you actually narrowed it down to really what it was for you, you would not be in conflict with any of the other six billion people on this planet. You would be off doing your thing. It might be similar to somebody else, but it'd be just enough different, so that there really wouldn't be a conflict. Or else there'd be a healthy game that was connected to it, where you'd go, "okay, I can do better at this than you can". And, you know, that would be okay too, so there isn't any purpose for what you come up with.

**EB: Well, anything that gets rid of all the lawyers, I'm all for, so I'll vote for that! Getting off the topic a little bit, I've seen you sprinkle some surfing references into your writings here and there. At least one thing in particular that I read on your website. As someone who does surf, I find that riding a wave is a very unique experience in that it really provides an intersection of mental conscious, and physical, and spiritual aspects all sort of going on simultaneously at once that seems very instructive to the kind of harmony you find when you corner a turn properly and find that effortlessness where you're not even trying anymore at the same moment where you're doing something that involves an incredible physical component, and also a cerebral component of how you chose your line, brought on the throttle, and things like that. What are some of the parallels that you have drawn? I don't know what your experience with surfing might be, or how you perceive that unifying principle of what that experience is like, in either a motorcycle-related form or surfing-related form.**

**KC:** ... the answer to the question is, or the observation is a good one. Anytime that you can get outside of yourself, when your focus is good, and you have enough control to be able to create the situation that you want to create in that thing. Whether it's surfing, or whether it's taking a bike around a corner, whether it's playing tennis, or whatever it is, the mo-

ment that you can get outside of yourself, you become... you are at that moment, God in your own universe. You are creating what is going on. You are the creator. And I think that's as good as it gets. And it feels wonderful. So the whole thing of doing what you're doing when you're doing it is a miracle all on its own.

**EB: Because I sort of had a revelation during the last session we went out, or maybe it was the next to last, at your school, where you had instructed us to take at least one turn, but as many as possible, and just once your in it just totally relax, let your arms go loose, and just go with the turn. And as I was doing that around the big, banked, double apex sweeper (at Streets of Willow), one of your instructors had pulled in front of me to have me follow him and was looking back at me, and I took my left hand off and was waving at him as I'm leaned over pretty nicely going around this bowl, and I'm thinking that's exactly the feeling I get when I've dropped into a big wave and found trim, where you're planing across the surface at a consistent speed. And even though it can be a really big wave spilling enormous forces of kinetic energy, and mass, and volume, I've found that harmony with it, and I can take my hand and just stroke the face of the wave, and just relax, and observe it because I've found that spot where I don't need to do anything. You are in harmony, and anything you do can only screw it up. And that was exactly what I was doing when I was taking that turn, was taking that same feeling, that same principle, and realizing, "Okay, I've got the line I wanted. I trust Keith when he says that the bike will do the work if you've got it set up right". So there wasn't anything left to do, except enjoy it, and be there, and feel those forces doing their thing, and wave to the instructor!**

**KC:** That's it! The whole reason why I say, "discover the art". It is an art, and art should be satisfying to the person who's doing the art, you know? Not necessarily the spectator, you are your own spectator. When you can become your own spectator, and you're happy with what you see, right? You've gotten outside of yourself just that amount, because you know the technical aspects of what it is that you're doing are good enough, that's when you can separate off, and away, and out of the thing just enough to really be in command of it, you know? That's just a little taste of being in the zone. It's a little taste of how powerful the mind really is, that it'll actually take a situation like that and allow you to experience it as though it was happening at one fifth the speed that it normally happens to you. You see things you never saw before, you experience it in a whole different way. Because you have enough technical expertise at the level that you're doing it, at the speed you're doing it at, you are able to get outside of yourself enough to really truly enjoy it. That's why we teach the technical parts of riding, so that we can get those out of the way in order to have fun doing it. Go fast, go slow, and be in control, right? That is the goal. That is a definite goal.

**EB: And it's something you notice in the premiere riders, surfers, athletes, is not just their ability to do amazing things, but the smoothness, and grace with which they do them. I was watching a King Kenny video and he was talking about how at the World Championship level, it was all about taking a bike designed to provide incredible control at the most extreme speeds, beyond the point of control, past the threshold of traction, and still controlling it. And to see how smooth those guys are under those circumstances is just awesome!**

**KC:** Yes, the grace comes. An ultimate would be ballet. You try to do some of those things and you feel like somebody's just tossing a lead balloon up in the air, if you don't know how to do it. But even when you get the actual skill to do something, it's still hard up to the point where you can get outside of yourself and be in command of whatever the operation is that you're doing. And that's 100% You take one ride on a motorcycle and have that sense, whether you know how to ride a motorcycle or not, and you go back, and you go back, and you go back, even if you have that for just a split second, it'd be enough to wanna go back and do it again, right? Just to see if you can experience that moment one more time.

**EB: You make it seem like a golf analogy, because that's one of the things about golf, is that you're out there for 18 holes, taking maybe four, five, six shots a hole, and even if you're lousy, you're gonna get those one or two shots where even if it happened purely by accident, everything went just right, you nail a drive, or drain a long putt and you go, "Wow, that felt great"! And it makes you wanna come back and hack your way through another 18 holes!**

**KC:** Exactly, yes! That's a perfect analogy, sure. Yes, and that's the same thing with motorcycle riding. It's the very same thing. It drives a hook into you, and the problem we get with students who want to improve their cornering is that they try too hard to get it, and motorcycle cornering is one of those things that the harder you try, the further away it gets, the more elusive that goal is. It comes from really being, you know, in that groove, in that slot where it's going right, you know it's going right. That's the only

time you can get outside of yourself and have that great experience.

**EB: So, this is about as open ended a question as I can ask. What's on your mind these days? What's sort of the state of the nation for Keith Code?**

**KC:** Right now I'm working on more of the bulletins. We train our instructors with uh... I write down how they interact and what we look for, and how we go about correcting it in our students. And there's a fair amount of information that is assembled in their instructor training packs, and we have courses for them. The great thing is that the more training that our instructors get, the better the reviews from our students. So we know that that works, and that's what we do worldwide at all of the Superbike schools.

So I'm working on some new instructional techniques, and we'll pilot them for awhile and see how they go. I don't think I'm right all the time, so we have to try them for awhile to see if it really works out. As I work on the "Twist of the Wrist: Volume III" book, and do some experimenting with the students at the school, I try to get the feedback and see exactly how the things that we're doing... 'cause we change things every year. Well, we improve things. We don't change things dramatically. We don't throw things out, because all the stuff that we've got is basics, but I keep breaking it down into smaller and smaller, finer and finer, more and more bite sized chunks, so that somebody who wants to get it can get it without being overburdened with either too much information, or too many things to do at one time. That's something I always try to avoid. So, right now, the part of the "Twist of the Wrist III" book I'm working on has to do with rider stability, and how the rider relates to the motorcycle, and what happens.

I've generally covered it real nicely in the second volume, and we have drills at the school. Level three, that's what it's all about. The end of level two and the beginning of level three. What I've discovered is that the moment anybody wants to do anything more than just sort of cruise around the corner, that how they relate to bike becomes real important. So, I'm working down that research line right now. And the problem with it is that I get too many good ideas, and then I write myself notes, and I go back later, and I go, "What was I thinking?" So if I come up with a final two and a half, or three, or four pages of something that'll go into the book, I've worked through a dozen, or twenty pages of notes to myself to get to it, and then experiment to see if it works. I use my instructors, and I'll take one of my instructors and I'll say, "Hey, so you know what I want you to try today? I want you to do this". And I'll do it with somebody who I know will give me really good information, really good feedback off the bike. I have a few instructors that are very good, very perceptive about what they are feeling. All my instructors are good at seeing what the students are doing, but it's a special skill to be able to do that same thing, to get outside yourself while you're doing it. To not only do what you're doing while you're doing it, but also to be able to see what you're doing, and see it accurately. So, I experiment with my instructors. I listen to what they have to say, and I go, "Oh yes, okay, alright, you know". And I think about it some more, and I whittle it down some more, and see whatever it is. So, that and the visual skills. I made an interesting discovery over the winter, and started using it in the level two classes, because the level two schools are all about visual skills. We realize, and all the instructors realize that no matter what the error is that the rider's making, if they can ride a motorcycle okay, that the errors come more from their visual skills than anything else. It's the rock bottom foundation for anybody's riding skill level. So, I observed something one day, when I was out on a twisty road, on how you determine where you turn into a corner, and I've been experimenting with it now for thousands of corners, and I've given it to some of my instructors to try, and now I've introduced it to the school as well. It's a street riding technique on how exactly to tell where to turn into a corner. You know, what's that place that's in that zone for when you can turn into a corner and get that clean line into a turn. So far as I can tell, it really works, but my opinion doesn't always count. It's nice that I have an opinion, but can all the students who come to the Superbike School, can they go out and do the same thing and actually do it. Is it real? So, I'm still in the process of discovering whether it's real or not.

**EB: And that's one of the interesting things too about teaching at different levels, where if you've discovered something fundamental, it really should apply to everyone at whatever level they're at, as opposed to some rarefied technique that only a really, really skilled racer is going to be able to incorporate.**

**KC:** Yes, yes, definitely yes. I mean there are some specialized things that... I mean I see Rossi sometimes, and he's got his finger on the brake, he's got the gas on, and he's got the back end coming around, and he's on the front brake, and I'm like, "Wow!". And he's like lining the thing up and starting to turn it, and I'm like, "Am I going to teach that at Superbike School? I don't think so". You would already have to have a rider that

was extremely confident in what they were doing to even try something like that, and it would be a mistake to try and teach it as a beginning skill, or to talk to club racers about it, you know? Would it improve their lap times? I don't think so. I know it wouldn't. But it would be fun to be able to do it. So yes, there are techniques, that's exactly what I meant before about there being a technology to cornering a motorcycle, not just good advice. The technical points of riding are the technical points of riding. Not because I say they are, it's because that's what they are. I didn't make up the rules around here, not all of them for sure! I certainly didn't make up the rules of physics, and how motorcycles operate. You have to take what we're given, and we can modify that, but it doesn't make any difference what the bike is, the technical parts are the technical parts. My opinion, or anybody else's opinion aside, it has nothing to do with it. Does it work like that, or doesn't it work like that?

**EB: And I guess you've chosen a very empirically demonstrable field to work in where you can very readily see, did the person go faster? Did they go slower? Did they crash? Were they more stable? Less stable? You can test your theories against results pretty concretely.**

**KC:** Yes, sure, it's great because it's like we have a laboratory. We can have twenty riders, or ten riders, or whatever, and have them go out and do this, and when they come back in I'm surveying them every single time. I'm like, "How did that go? Did it make any improvement? What happened? Did it feel better to you? Were you in more control of the motorcycle? Did it make a difference?". And everything that we've got at the school now, I know it makes a difference. I'm not guessing anymore about this stuff. We have 100% certainty that these things make a difference. You could say them with different words, but they're irreducible things. It's an irreducible idea that there is a certain line through the corner that will straighten the turn out. It has nothing to do with me. That's the way it is. Does it work better than the other ways? Yes! You can demonstrate that it does work better. But, just because I discovered it... simple things like getting your bike quick-turned. I didn't know that you didn't have to lean the bike over as far if you got the bike turned quicker. There was no data on it anywhere, but I figured it out, right? I just duplicate everything, and duplicate it exactly, and then I just change that one thing, and see what happens. And I go, "Well, I'm no special case. That worked for me". Now then, the physics of the thing, I'll look into that a little and go "Yes, that's how objects work that have wheels and so on. Not because I said so, just because that's the way it works". So those things are just so fun to discover! Cause they really make a difference. They make a difference in a rider's ability to control the bike, and that's what everybody would like.

**EB: Do you consult with the manufacturers of the bikes, given that you have such a detailed understanding of the interaction between the human and the machine, in terms of the changes and modifications that we've seen over the years?**

**KC:** No, I don't. I don't have any position like that, and I don't really want to. My area is riding the motorcycle. Those guys are designing and selling motorcycles. They're two different things. I would make suggestions to somebody if they asked me, if it was strictly about riding, and the rider/motorcycle interface. I mean I would certainly answer the questions. And I have a good idea of what I would do if I was building a motorcycle to fit me, right? But not just fit me, there are other aspects to riding a motorcycle. You can come up with universal points where the bike will make not everybody, but lots of people better. And they'll be able to do the job of riding better. I'm not sure exactly what the manufacturers actually use as those criteria. You know some of it's simply styling. I know that. I mean even within the last couple of years, they built what they thought looked good, or what's kinda flash, or edgy, or whatever it is. But do they fit riders? No, they don't fit riders.

**EB: And that was actually something that came out of a topic we threw out to our readers in our News section. We said, "Well, given that 99% of the riders out there don't even have the ability to ride the bikes that they're on the way they could really be ridden, and that giving us an even higher performance bike is not necessarily going to directly benefit our riding experience as the teeming masses, what can the manufacturers do to genuinely improve the real-world consumer's riding experience". And one of the things, among many others, that came out of that was the idea of more ergonomically adjustable bikes, or even bikes that are built for people of different sizes and shapes, because there are certain tall people, or short people, or heavy people that love to ride and don't feel that there are many good options for them out there. You know even from one person to the next who may be the same height, the length of their arms and legs could be different, their personal preference of riding position could be different, although they may both covet the same performance attributes of a particular model of bike. It's an area of opportunity for the manufacturers to think outside the box and break free from the Tim Allen "more power!" school of design. There are other areas they can**

**explore that would probably help them to sell more bikes.**

**KC:** Yes, well it's easy to be satisfied with the kinds of motorcycles that are being made nowadays, because of all the modern fabricating techniques. A manufacturer can change the frame, the engine, the body design, and all that stuff of a motorcycle from one year to the next, and even in relatively small quantities of just thousands of something. Ten years ago, nobody wanted to do it, because it was just too expensive, and now it's getting less and less expensive, and you can change all that stuff. They can do more with computer animation, and better tools, and materials, and techniques for fabricating stuff, and I think it's awesome! I'm happy that it's going that way. We've got what, 365 lb, 600 cc bikes now over 100 hp. That is so awesome! That is so cool! That they don't fit everybody is a small price to pay in a way. If it doesn't fit you too well... like our new 636s, the new ZX-6Rs that we got, for me, I would take that seat, and I would take a half inch of foam out of it, right? Or three quarters of an inch of foam out of it, not because I can't touch the ground, but because it would be better for me in a full tuck riding position for my cornering, to have it three quarters of an inch lower than it is right now. Well, I can take that seat apart, and I can cut three quarters of an inch of foam off that thing, you know, I have the wherewithal to get that done. I'd like to move the foot pegs a little bit, now that's something else. Now you have to buy a set of rear sets. So the stuff is available out there, it's just, what's the purpose of the bike, you know? If you're just going to ride it up and down the street, then does it really make any difference? If you're out there really doing some cornering with it, or if your just sport riding with it and you're willing to put up with the freeway to get to where you're going to ride, then yes, it'd probably be worth it to find a set of rear sets that really work for you, you know? But it'd be nice... sure, it'd be awesome if they were adjustable from the manufacturer. Are we gonna get that? Well, Ducati's got some stuff like that don't they? Like they've got some eccentrics in the foot pegs and other controls. That's really nice!

**EB: I believe there are five different foot peg configurations that they have in the 999.**

**KC:** Yes, up, down, forward, back or something. Yes, that's great! One of those would be better than all the rest of them for a given rider. And that's wonderful to have that stuff, or have it as an accessory. You can have the bracket as an accessory where you can move it around a little bit. That kind of stuff... I that'll start to happen at some point along the line. That kind of stuff... I that'll start to happen at some point along the line. You know, offering an accessory seat that was three quarters of an inch lower on one of those ZX-6Rs, I don't think they're gonna do that. It wouldn't be that much of a problem for them to do it, but it's easier when they're all the same. But I don't hold that against the manufacturers. Their stuff is so good. Can you buy a bad bike today? I don't think so.

**EB: No, not for the most part. And that's one of the things we bump up against as moto-journalists, where you don't want to just keep saying how great all the new bikes are, but the truth is that there's not a lot of stinkers out there. Some are certainly better than others in different areas but...**

**KC:** That's right, that's all you can do is you have to judge them in relation to the other things. And then when you judge them in relation to other things, you take the worst one, and it's a thousand times better than anything you could buy five years ago. Well, not a thousand times, but it's significantly better than anything you could buy five years ago. So you can't make a bad decision. You like 600 cc sport bikes? I mean how can you make a bad decision?

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## OMM BULLETIN SPECIAL ISSUE

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This Bulletin is edited by **Paolo Volpara** [volpara@homeemail.com](mailto:volpara@homeemail.com) with contributions from bikers around the world. From November 2002 we also distribute a version of the bulletin in Turkish. You may have friends who ride with you and who would like to get included in the Bulletin distribution list: go to OMM web site and register online.

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**EB: We just did our 600 cc comparison about a month back, and they're all wonderful bikes.**

**KC:** They are! They're great bikes.

**EB: The Kawa 636 actually won for the track portion of our test. The consensus was for street riding, that the Yamaha R6 was a little more ergonomically forgiving, but either way, I wouldn't argue with anyone who chose either of those two, or even some of the other bikes we tested as well. It's a good time to be a motorcycle enthusiast.**

**KC:** It's great! It's phenomenal! There are no truly bad bikes out there.

**EB: Well, now that we've heaped our praises on the motorcycle industry, let me throw something else out there. What's your take on the situation involving Kato at the Suzuka track?**

**KC:** Well, I don't really know what happened, but racing isn't exactly what you'd call safe. In fact, there wouldn't even be any reason to do it if it were safe. Why would you be interested? So that's part of the whole thing about riding motorcycles. It's inherently got its risks. But the risk to the reward ratio is high. So you say, "Yes, okay, I can fall off my motorcycle... I can fall off my bicycle at 15 mph and land on my head and die"! You could. For sure, you could! So, it doesn't take 140 mph accident, right? I mean, I've done 140 mph crashes and I've gotten up and walked away and had nothing. Well, except scuffed leathers and a bad looking bike! And I've had some other ones, you know, where I high-sided and I broke a bone or two so, whatever. It's inherently risky to do it at any level, in any circumstance. But that's one of the things that drives you to where you wanna be able to get outside yourself. You wanna be able to control the bike, and be able to do what you want with it. And so you're willing to take the risks that are inherent in it. But I mean, it's not safe living. Life is everything but safe! You don't need a nuclear war, or germ war, or something like that to wipe out all the people on the planet. I think it's a pretty well proven fact that if six of the world's major volcanoes erupted, that they would blow enough dust up into the air that it would block out enough light that life on earth would cease. So, it's a risky deal! It's just taking the risks that you wanna take, and again the risk to reward is high.

And it's accessible. You've got a motorcycle sitting right out here in the driveway. All you have to do is put that jacket on, put your helmet on, put those things away in your pockets, put the key in the ignition, and you're off on an adventure. You could be at the crest in ten minutes, grinning ear to ear... you could also get a ticket! **OMM**

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**Keith Code 2003: The Epic Interview**

By E. Bass, 8/15/03 [www.motorcycle.com](http://www.motorcycle.com)

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