

Phillip Island Track Day with Troy Bayliss

On 16 November I collected the best birthday present I'd ever received: a track day at Phillip Island with three-time World Superbike Champion, Troy Bayliss, and 19 other riders. There could have been a few more participants but the track day part of the event hadn't sold out (I think 24 was the maximum). The first session would show if we needed to be sorted into groups, but apparently it wasn't a concern, so we all got to ride four 40-minute sessions. Troy rode with us each session.

The idea was for Troy to ride laps with the group as a whole, demonstrating his lines and techniques, and then spend one-on-one time to personally assist each rider. (He told me I needed to hang off the bike more, but I kind of knew that.)

Between the track day sessions, Troy took pillion passengers on a Ducati superbike for the ride of their lives. Many two-up laps were in the 1:40 range, and one was 1:39 (less than 10 seconds off the WSBK lap record). Holy crap! As scary as this might seem for a passenger, many people who did the pillion ride in the morning (at \$295 for three laps) immediately booked a spot in the afternoon. So did it twice! I figured the \$995 cost for the day at the track with Troy was frightening enough without the extra cost for a pillion ride. However, I'm kind of regretting it now.

Troy was way more accessible than I'd expected. In fact, he was the first person I met when I pulled into the pits. He saw me rock up on my BMW F800ST (fitted with panniers and top box) and said, "Hi, are you here for a pillion ride?" I corrected his misconception. It might not have been the bike that fooled him: most people who arrived by bike did the pillion ride. I think that I was the only track day participant to ride there: most others were better prepared with vans or trailers, tyre-warmers, etc. (Nobody arrived with luggage fitted.)

Plenty of people were lapping quicker than I was, since I am kind of precious about not crashing my commuter bike. I was riding at a comfortable pace, but still managing to pass guys with massively expensive machinery who were maybe even more precious than I was. I was chuffed to stay in front of a BMW S1000RR, and to pass a Ducati 848 on the straight. (I don't want to talk about the bikes that passed me.)

It was really interesting being on the track with a rider of Troy's calibre. The first time I saw him was when he passed me at a ridiculous pace and caught the riders ahead of me, darting between them and pulling up behind another with bugger-all to spare (or so it seemed). At the time I thought I was witnessing an accident in progress, and then I realised who it was, and that the traffic that he was dealing with was nothing like he's learnt to master in World Superbike races. It was like watching a whippet running with a pack of bulldogs.

The day was run by Champions Ride Day staff, so all Troy had to do was ride his Ducati superbikes (one of which was fitted with fake handlebars for the passenger to hang on to). No wonder he wore a permanent smile (but then that seems to be his nature). The \$995 was worth every penny in my opinion.

Dave Chisma