

USGPRU

United States Grand Prix Racers Union

BACK TO SCHOOL!

By now, it's common knowledge that the USGPRU offers its members an arena for some of the most intense Grand Prix racing in North America. A lesser-known feature of the **USGPRU is the vast amount of excellent series-sponsor-donated swag** that gets raffled off at the last round during the Sunday afternoon awards ceremony. Items such as a brand new Honda RS125 from RS Cycles, a set of Marvic magnesium rims, a set of RevIt leathers, Motion Pro Tools, Repsol Oil, Bridgestone and Dunlop tires, gear from PowerStands, and tons of other cool stuff.

Well, this year's final at Mid-Ohio had one last-minute raffle prize package added: a handful of slots in the **Penguin Roadracing School's Advanced Rider Class at Jennings GP racetrack in Florida!** This school was started in 1973 by Jerry Wood and Joe Ziegler and prides itself in being the oldest racing school in the nation. The advanced class would be led by Jerry's son, Eric Wood, a multi-time Formula USA national champion, and would feature one-on-one critique and instruction by both himself and his multi-time ASRA/CCS national championship holding brother, Jeff.

Now, I've shared the track with Jeff many times in the past couple of years, and I can honestly say that his ability to ride a bike at its limit is so stunning that it has literally left me stupefied. **Any opportunity to receive personalized instruction from someone of his caliber should be considered utterly invaluable.** When the time came to draw the names, I held my breath and prayed to the universe that my name would be chosen. . . and it was. Thanks, universe! Now, November couldn't arrive fast enough for me.

After two long months of anticipation, the day finally arrived and I packed up the truck and rolled south out of Chicago. 15 hours, 1000 miles, and about 3 liters of **Red Bull** later, I finally pulled up at Jennings and set up my pit.

8:00 am the next morning found me and my fellow USGPRU prize-winners walking the sinuous curves of Jennings with our headmaster, Eric, and the rest of the advanced class. **Eric's vast expertise combined with his reason and clear explanations had us dissecting corners, discussing various lines, and deciphering the track's secrets.** We finished up the track walk and suited up to ride, eager to execute our newly acquired knowledge and ideas.

The first two sessions were of the 'follow the leader' type, designed to get everyone warmed up and learn the track layout. The next two found us riding alone at our own pace, while being scrutinized by instructors both riding on the track and standing trackside.

We took a break for lunch before receiving our personal critiques by Eric. This was the part of the day I had been most apprehensive about. All kinds of self-criticism raced around inside my head. I figured that he'd just tell me I was so bad that I should simply give up and consider a different activity altogether - like needle point, or making civil war dioramas.

He opened his notebook... the world fell silent...and **here are the major points that I learned.** First, my form is ok, but I have to get off the bike a bit more. Second, is that there are parts of the track where it seems like I'm just cruising around. And finally, I totally suck in turn 13.

Ok, so it wasn't as bad as I thought, but I have to admit that hearing it still bruised my ego slightly - especially since I've been racing with relative success for 11 years - but he backed it all up with concrete examples, and was totally fair and correct on all counts. Besides, **I didn't drive all the way down to Florida for a friendly pat on the back.** So, I

took Eric's critique to heart and got ready to hit the track again.

I devoted the remainder of my afternoon to the destruction of old/bad habits and the sting of that critique was my motivation. I worked on body position, breaking later, getting into the corners deeper and faster, and getting back on the gas sooner. By the second-to-last session I had shaved six seconds off of my best lap time from the morning session.

While I had made some significant progress, I still had some issues with a couple of fast turns that really needed to be addressed. So during my last break of the day, **I approached Jeff, explained the problems I was having, and asked for his assistance.** He enthusiastically agreed and told me that he'd seek me out during the last session and show me what to do.

The final session began, and after two laps **Jeff came past me with his front wheel pointed at the sky.** He gave me a wave, dropped the front wheel, and threw it into the next turn. I tucked in and followed. The next two laps were epic for me as I tried hard to stay with him. After showing me the right way around, Jeff pulled in and left me alone for my last lap of the day. I put my head down, and tried to apply the 780 things I learned that entire day toward one final, killer lap time. I triumphantly returned to the pits to discover that I didn't get any lap times that entire session thanks to a couple of dead batteries in my lap timer. Aaaaah!

Then the day was over as quickly as it had begun. I thanked Eric and Jeff, loaded the truck and started the long trip back to Chicago. As I drove, I tried to recount and catalog all of my new knowledge. **It was a truly great experience and I learned more spending one day at the Penguin School than I had the previous 11 years trial and error.** If any of you have any desire at all to become a better rider, you need to reserve a spot in their next school. You won't regret it.

Special thanks to the USGPRU, Red Bull, and the Penguin Roadracing School for the amazing opportunity. I'm so ready for the 2008 season to start!

by Chris Manfrin
USGPRU #23



Photo by Wendy Mellinger-Zweifel

2008 Schedule

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www.USGPRU.net

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