

## Courting The Woman Rider

ONE WAY TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO RIDE IS through articles. If a woman is scanning a motorcycle magazine and sees a female rider in the photographs, she's more likely to read that article. If there's a female

byline, she's even more likely to read. I can't quote any specific research to prove this, but I'm a woman who rides bikes and reads lots of motorcycle magazines. When a woman writes an article, I'm more interested in reading it. I suspect other women feel the same way.

I recently attended a new motorcycle introduction for the press put on by Harley-Davidson and Buell, and the invited journalists were all women. This is the second year in a row that Harley introduced a new model to an audience of only female journalists. Normally, men dominate the mastheads of motorcycle magazines, and it's rare to see a female journalist in attendance. When I headed up *Woman Rider*, I, or one of the freelance writers representing the magazine, was often the only woman at these press launches.

Harley-Davidson is the second manufacturer to hold a press event targeted to female journalists, as Kawasaki has also held women-only press events. So why hold court with a bunch of women? According to Kathleen Lawler, Harley-Davidson's vice president of communications, "The women in this group are leaders and are influential to other women. We think it's really important to get them together and share what we're doing. We feel like we're all colleagues working toward a similar goal, which is to get more women inspired about riding."

Women account for 10 percent of new Harley-Davidson motorcycle sales, on a par with the national statistic that approximately 10 percent of motorcycle owners are women. Harley appreciates the significance of this 10 percent, so the Motor Company has put some of its marketing muscle into courting women to its brand. Harley executives recognized certain barriers women perceive that inhibit them from getting into motorcycling. Those barriers are: 1) Confidence — "What if I drop the bike?" 2) Product knowledge — "Where are the controls?" 3) Pricing — The perception of a motorcycle's cost to own and operate; 4) Skills — "How do I learn to ride?" 5) Life stage — "But I just had a baby." By identifying those barriers, Harley's executives have now targeted their marketing to help women overcome such concerns.

The first initiative the company undertook was offering Rider's Edge. These classes are for new and experienced riders, and held at participating Harley-Davidson and Buell dealerships. The course uses its



own curriculum developed with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, and has trained 70,000 people since it started in 2000. Most notably, 40 percent of the graduates are women.

Additionally, Harley has created advertising campaigns specific to women. In the past, advertising has been gender neutral. The company produced a television commercial that ran on Speed Channel and other networks, and bought advertising in mainstream magazines that cater to active-minded women like *Shape*, *InStyle*, and *Self*.

Harley continues to include courses on selling to women at its dealer training seminars. Lawler developed a class called "Listen, Mister: Women Mean Business." A second class is titled "New Faces in Your Dealership." Another program Harley is offering to dealers is called Garage Party. The program invites women interested in riding to the dealership or someone's home to learn things like the different gear they'll need, buying a bike, and customizing a bike. Lawler explained, "We think it's a unique idea for women and is a way for dealers to bring more women into the Harley-Davidson family. It's more social than educational." After piloting the program at dealerships in Tennessee and Pennsylvania, Harley is set to roll out Garage Parties nationwide this winter.

In 2005, Harley conducted a satellite media tour at Daytona Bike Week with Karen Davidson, the director of Creative Design and Merchandise Development, and the great granddaughter of one of the founders. Among the information she shared with the 20-plus TV markets interviewing her was the growth of the women rider demographic.

The Motor Company will sponsor a contest, Saddle Up For Sturgis, designed to encourage women to learn to ride. Also, the company announced it has signed on as presenting sponsor of the AMA's International Women and Motorcycling Conference this summer.

All these initiatives are indications that Harley wants to get the attention of women contemplating riding motorcycles, then have customers for life. Smart thinking, Harley-Davidson!

**Editor's note:** If you've got press releases, story ideas, or anything worth mentioning with regard to women and motorcycling, e-mail them to Genevieve at [G.Schmitt@WomenRidersNow.com](mailto:G.Schmitt@WomenRidersNow.com). You can also visit her web site [www.WomenRidersNow.com](http://www.WomenRidersNow.com).