Learning to Ride—Women vs. Men

by Genevieve Schmitt

WOMEN LEARN BEST WITH encouragement and when their egos are built up. Men learn best when they are engaged in a challenging situation, i.e., when they get a reality check from what they're doing. These are just some of the fun and interesting conclusions that folks at the Motorcycle Safety Foundation gleaned from surveys they received from students after taking the Basic *RiderCourse*. These gender findings related to motorcycle training were presented by Sherry Williams, Ph.D. from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Quality Assurance and Research Department at a recent motorcycle safety conference I attended. Since May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, I thought I'd have some fun with this month's column and share with you some of the information she presented. Remember, this is all in the context of learning to ride a motorcycle.

Let's start out with learning styles. Women and men differ widely in this area. Women like to learn when there is a social component present, meaning a woman likes to do or feel the thing she is learning. A woman's learning is often enhanced when she's in a small group and everyone is learning together. On the other hand, men prefer to think and watch. That "doing" component is not as important; neither is the "feel good" group setting.

When it comes to gauging one's ability, women are more critical in evaluating their performance. I see this translating to fewer egos among female learners. Women have a healthy check on themselves as it relates to how they're progressing at learning the task at hand (learning to ride a motorcycle). Men, according to Williams, need a reality check when it comes to learning. They need to be challenged to accomplish what they need to learn. In fact, a direct challenge creates motivation for a man to work harder.

Women need encouragement and strokes that they're doing a good job so they will keep motivated when learning to ride a motorcycle. Men, on the other hand, just want to "get on with it, already." No ego stroking needed here. Men usually supply their own healthy dose of ego stroking from within. "Just tell me what to do and I'll do it," is his thinking.

The surveys discovered the qualities that contribute to an ideal learning environment. For example, a women-friendly classroom is a safe, comfortable, and welcoming place. A male-friendly classroom is loud and active.

Some other findings had to do with how males and females rated various components of the Basic *RiderCourse*. The following statistics bear out the conclusions above. For example, in rating the classroom part of the leaning experience, women rated the value of that aspect of the course higher than men. However, men rated the value of the range exercises much higher than the women. Women apparently like the comfortable and "safe" environment of the classroom as opposed to the "I'm so new at this, I don't know if I can do it" aspects of the range exercises. Remember, these are beginning riders. Many female students have often never been exposed to any kind of motorized recreation before taking this class.

In rating the skill improvement factor of the class (meaning did a student see himself or herself learning and improving during the class), the women rated this much higher than the men. Again, this indicates women are more critical of their performance and have a good handle on when they've improved and when they have not. A woman places high value on the fact she's learned something new, especially when she can see herself improving. Many men, on the other hand, don't view motorcycling as something completely foreign. Their learning curve is not as steep as a woman's. That's why they don't view the value of skill improvement as important as women do as it relates to motorcycling.

Both genders rated the value of the RiderCoaches very high. Both deem the quality of learning as taught by these experts as something very important to the overall motorcycle learning process.

When asked to rate what factors contributed to overall skill improvement, the choices were classroom, RiderCoaches, range, gender, and other. "Other" garnered almost half of the votes—41 percent. From this, Williams concluded that skill improvement is mostly determined by something other than what the Motorcycle Safety Foundation does, surmising that "other" means internal or personal reasons. I can see how this could be true. At the end of the day, a person's skill improvement is judged against that person's own expectations of self, not the expectations of the RiderCoaches. An example of this thinking is, "I did pretty well considering I knew nothing about motorcycles before I started this class."

One implication derived from the survey relating to the curriculum is that there is a need for self-directed learning. This type of learning is important for the internal processing of one's own skills. This is another aspect I could see that has merit. Students want to be able to take what they've learned from the training class and continue processing that information over and over as they develop their riding skills on their own. I remember the SIPDE acronym from the basic motorcycle class I took very well. It stands for Scan, Identify, Predict, Decide, Execute. That acronym stayed in my head for many months as I was developing my skills on my own. Over time, SIPDE becomes second nature, but initially I used it to gauge how I was processing information on the road. SIPDE (which has been changed to SEE—Search, Evaluate, Execute) is a good example of a self-directed learning tool.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation will use all this survey information to continue refining its learning environment and curriculum. The goal is to make the Basic *RiderCourse* the most effective it can possibly be in teaching men and women to learn to ride a motorcycle. **FZ**

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