



Female-Friendly Bikes

Women look for comfy ergos, a low seat and reliability

A recent poll posted on my online magazine, WomenRidersNow.com, asked, "When shopping for a motorcycle, what is the most important aspect to you?" There were six choices. More than half the respondents, 52 percent, responded ergonomics. Thirty-three percent cited seat height; 7 percent indicated price; 5 percent said horsepower; 2 percent voted ability to accessorize; and 2 percent said color. I did not ask the gender of the respondents; however, I can guarantee that most if not all were women because my site is about women and motorcycling.

This very unscientific study confirmed what I already know and what you hopefully already know, too: that women want a motorcycle that is ergonomically friendly, i.e., comfortable. Seat height is of primary importance in that comfort. Comfort equals confidence for women, and confidence comes from feeling safe.

Last November I was at a press intro attended by female journalists only to test the 2006 Harley-Davidson motorcycles and the 2006 Buell Ulysses adventure sportbike. When the women were first presented with the array of new models, their first words were about the height of the seat and the size of the bike, and whether the motorcycle was one on which they could reach the ground.

We were offered the opportunity to ride the Ulysses with its 33-inch saddle height. I spotted only three out of about 15 of us (yours truly

included) who felt confident enough to ride a motorcycle where our feet didn't completely touch the ground.

Judging by the model that OEMs say is their best seller among women, it's safe to assume seat height is a top reason women choose a bike. Yamaha indicates its No. 1 seller to women is the V Star 650 (seat height: 27.9 inches);

I want a bike that will get me to where I want to go, be it to the grocery store five blocks away or grandma's house five states away.

Kawasaki's most popular bike among women is the Vulcan 500 LTD (seat height: 28 inches); Honda says women choose the 600cc Shadow VLX the most (seat height: 25.6 inches); and Suzuki cites the Boulevard S40 (seat height: 27.6 inches) as its best seller among women.

It's interesting to see the choices that rated least important on my poll: price, horsepower, ability to accessorize and color. I think a better way to phrase the question would have been: "When shopping for a motorcycle, what are the characteristics you deem important?" If I'd asked this way, color probably would have rated in the top five.

I've learned through other surveys that color, styling and appearance are three top factors cited by women. That's what steered me to two out of the three motorcycles I've owned.

Handling

A woman will want to know that the motorcycle has a low center of gravity, that it's easy to maneuver, that it doesn't have a top-heavy feeling, and that she can back it into a parking space on her own.

Reliability is another factor that rates high. Many women are riding on their own or with other women. They don't want to deal with breakdowns. Women want a bike that's reliable day after day. You don't see a lot of ladies rushing out to buy one of the custom-built motorcycles that are all the rage. Those motorcycles are often one-offs or come from small production lines with zero track record of reliability. Sure, these bikes look good, but how do they stand up to rider abuse day after day? I want a bike that starts every time, and will get me to where I want to go, be it to the grocery store five blocks away or to grandma's house five states away.

The next time you're speaking to a female customer, ask her what qualities she deems important in a motorcycle, then be prepared to show her a bike that meets the criteria I've outlined. **D**

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