

The Maturing of A Woman Rider

by Genevieve Schmitt

THROUGH MY JOB AS A motorcycle journalist focusing on the female rider segment of the population, I come in contact with lots of women new to the sport. A common thread between all these infants of the motorcycling world is the excitement that goes along with discovering a newfound passion. These women have stepped over the threshold and are now part of that exclusive group of women in the world who can say they ride a motorcycle. For many, riding and owning a motorcycle is literally a dream come true.

As I listen to their stories, I reflect back on when I first got involved in the two-wheeled lifestyle. I remember experiencing that same excitement that came with laying claim to the fact that I was now a motorcycle rider. I felt downright cool. As a result of having achieved this milestone in my life, I gained more confidence in myself, my work, and my relationships. I was happier. I had added a new dimension to my life.

My world was changing—I wanted to immerse myself in the motorcycling lifestyle full throttle. I wanted to do it all and see it all. I gained new friends, my vacation destinations changed, my weekend activities changed, my wardrobe changed. Even my identity changed. I had become a full-fledged rider and the motorcycling drug ran through my veins. It was such a huge thing in my life back then—that motorcycling addiction which began 16 years ago.

Over the years, though, a transformation has taken place. I call it the maturing of a woman rider. As the years ticked by and the number on my odometer increased, my newbie excitement diminished. It was replaced with an all-knowing calm about the fact that I'm a motorcyclist and I no longer felt the need to brag that I ride a motorcycle—that would be like bragging about the fact that I breathe. Riding is now woven into the fabric of my life.

A few years ago, I started uttering phrases like "been there, done that" when asked if I had attended certain motorcycle rallies. I've bought and sold three motorcycles and am now riding my fourth. I quit plunking down cash for new motorcycle gear—my closet is full. I've found myself in lots of different motorcycling situations over the years. I've even had my first (and last!) accident. I've taken advanced riding courses and have been on motorcycle tours in foreign countries.



I've done a lot of motorcycling "things" over the years, and now I am a "mature" motorcyclist.

What's mostly different is I no longer have the urge ride every weekend. I no longer ride just to ride. Don't get me wrong—I still love riding a motorcycle. It's just that my tastes have changed. I'd rather spend three or four days

in the saddle than suit up just for an hour's ride to the local café and back. I really enjoy overnight trips where I can immerse myself in all things motorcycling for several days. For me to truly enjoy the two-wheeled experience I need to shed my daily routine for several days and become a biker. I enjoy the preparation, the packing, and the planning. It's during those long rides that I can truly rid myself of the cares, routine, and monotony of everyday life. My mind becomes clear, making way for new experiences.

For new women riders, the act of riding is a much different experience. It's about seat time, putting miles on their tires, learning about the entire motorcycling experience from all angles. They crave the Sunday afternoon ride with friends. Then, when they take those first few overnight rides, the trips are so life changing. There are so many firsts to be had in the early days of riding, each one a new experience to add to the list.

It's fascinating to watch the maturing of a woman rider and how it plays out in one's life. One of my female colleagues, who has been riding for more than 20 years, recently asked me how she should respond to the question she would be asked in an upcoming television interview. The question was, "Why do you ride?"

She said to me, "I don't think I'm going to give the producers the answer they're looking for. They probably want a response about freedom, independence, that kind of stuff." She continued, "It's all that for me, but..." she hesitated, her eyes shifted toward her motorcycle nearby, "riding a motorcycle is just something I do, it's part of me, it's part of who I am."

I responded to her, "That's it! Say just that. Riding a motorcycle is part of what makes you, you. They'll love that."

And they did, because once you start down that life-changing journey and begin to mature in it, motorcycling literally defines who you are. **PZ**

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