

## Bigger Doesn't Mean You're Better

AS I GRADUALLY GOT BETTER AT RIDING, I thought I could handle a bigger bike, one with more power, more ground clearance, more weight and size. After two years on an '80s Honda Shadow 500, then a

1993 H-D Sportster 1200, and with 2,000 miles under me, I thought I was a pretty good rider. I felt I could handle anything. My attitude was quickly adjusted the day I brought my Harley in for service and the nice guys at the dealership gave me a loaner bike for the day. "Here you go," one smiled as he rolled out a Harley Electra Glide Classic. "You can handle a dresser, right?" "Sure I can," I confidently shot back.

As I mounted the large touring motorcycle, my senses quickly zoned in on a different center of gravity than what I was used to. "This motorcycle is high," I thought. Way high. And there's a lot of weight in the handlebar area. "Heck, I can handle this. Just apply what I've learned and it should be easy," I mused to myself.

Well, you know where I'm going with this. As I rolled out of the driveway to make the right turn onto the street, I turned the handlebars and dumped the 800-something-pound beast. How embarrassing! I felt like an idiot. I was shaking and nervous because I'd made such a dumb mistake. The mistake wasn't dropping the motorcycle, but in overestimating my abilities. I wasn't confident enough as a rider to be able to hop on any motorcycle and take it for a spin. I didn't have enough saddle time to easily transfer the skills I had learned to a whole different set of ergonomics. I was still thinking of turning the handlebars instead of leaning the bike to turn.

What's the moral here? First, don't overestimate your abilities. You might be thinking, "Well, she dropped that bike because she was an inexperienced rider, and she's a woman." Plenty of men have dropped motorcycles that were too much for them to handle. I always tell women riders to listen to that little voice inside their heads. Women know what I'm talking about — that inner voice, some people call it a gut feeling, or women's intuition. I think men have that little voice, too, but, with all due respect to the male population, it's often muffled by the male ego. Men often feel that, because they *are* men, they should be able to handle any motorcycle. Well, those of you who've dropped a bike because it was too much to handle raise your hands. Aha! I'm sure that after your own embarrassing mishaps, you realized you'd gotten in a little over your heads. Listen to that voice at all times. Don't let ego or peer pressure convince you you're a better rider than you are.



The second moral of my dropped bike incident is this: Just because you might be able to handle a bigger motorcycle, doesn't mean you are that much better a rider. Can you take that big bike through its paces? Can you zigzag through a straight line of cones? Can you ride a tight figure-eight formation? Can you safely ride over obstacles? Can you slam on the brakes and stop short in a controlled fashion?

New riders especially need to be aware that just because a motorcycle is low to the ground and feels comfortable doesn't mean they can perform the above listed maneuvers. That's why so many new riders drop their motorcycles. They're not completely comfortable with the weight of the bike in all situations.

So, here I am 16 years later, a fairly proficient rider able to handle any motorcycle I'm presented with. The reason? Seat time. I have lots of miles on my tires, and through my job as a motojournalist, I've had to learn how to hop on any motorcycle. While bigger doesn't always mean you're better, sometimes you do outgrow a bike and bigger is what you need. I could use a lot more storage space on my 1994 Dyna Low Rider. I also want a bigger bike so I don't feel so winded at the end of a long ride. A bigger bike rides much smoother and feels more planted than my aging Dyna. My significant other, whose first-ever bike is his 2000 Road King, switched bikes with me on our way home from Sturgis last year. He was shocked at how "rough a ride" my Evolution Dyna was. He wondered how I rode the thing for 500 miles that day. He's used to his "Cadillac" Road King. I laughed while feeling both tough and cool that my 6' 3" man wondered how little old me handled the "rough" ride on a long day's journey. I likened his remark to something I might say if I rode a Shovelhead for the first time. He's right, though. I've been eyeing a new Road King because I'm now skilled enough to handle the bigger bike in any situation — gravel, off-camber turns, up-hill turns, etc. I'm definitely ready for it. Even my inner voice agrees with me. **AIM**

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