



THE WAY I SEE IT BY GENEVIEVE SCHMITT

Men And Women On The Road

Having the opportunity to ride with all-male and all-female groups through my motorcycling work, I always find myself in observation mode pondering why men do what

they do, and why women do what *they* do. Take, for example, when I ride with my husband. He's always checking the weather forecast to make sure the day we plan to ride is going to be nice. Then the morning of our ride, he checks again to ensure it's predicted that we'll have a nice day. Weather forecasts are not always accurate. Weather people have the most unaccountable job on the planet. When a meteorologist wrongly predicts the weather, do we hold him accountable? Do we call the TV station and say, "Hey, Joe Blow said it was going to be clear and sunny on Sunday, and now there's a storm coming through." No, we don't. We accept the weather for what it is when it arrives, regardless of what Joe Blow predicted. Joe Blow can always find some scientific atmospheric reason for why the weather he didn't predict just rolled in and get off scot-free with the wrong prediction. So, when I know I'm going on a ride, like a big trip to Sturgis, I glance at the forecast a few days before to see if there's a graphic of a sun or a cloud in the five-day forecast, but really any riding decisions are made the morning I plan to ride. I simply look up at the sky to see what the weather is, like the Native Americans used to do.

It turns out that a lot of men are weather junkies. My mom in south Florida tells me my dad and brother-in-law are glued to the Weather Channel every morning and evening. They love watching the radar. They gaze at it like my 5-year-old nephew marvels at cartoons. Doesn't that radar graphic repeat itself after a few seconds? There goes the green blob (simulating rain) passing over Orlando. There it goes again. And there it goes again. Same green blob looped over and over.

The other thing my husband does that I think is such a guy thing is he always wants to know how many miles we just went, how many miles to the gallon he's getting, and how many miles before we reach our destination. I joke that he's such the statistician, calculating this and calculating that. When I pull into a gas station with my female riding friends, we're not talking about how many miles to the gallon our motorcycles are getting. We're chatting each other up about how good we feel after riding the cool road we were just on. I know my motorcycle gets more miles to the gallon than my car. How much, I don't know. Do I care? No, I don't. It varies all the time anyway based on riding conditions, speed, etc. Too much information to process! Yes, I set my tripmeter at the start of a ride as I like to know how many miles I rode that day, but I'm not doing it to calculate anything.

Through my work writing this column and managing my web site, www.WomenRidersNow.com, I receive a lot of letters from both men and women, and they're so different. When commenting about a particular motorcycle I reviewed, women's comments and questions are usually about how the motorcycle fits them, and how it makes them feel.

Comments and questions from men always cover details of the motorcycle, like how much horsepower the bike has, and that all-important-to-them miles-per-gallon number. Here are two comments from a man about a motorcycle I reviewed: "Even with both of us and all our stuff, there's plenty of power without sacrificing fuel economy; we still get 45-50 mpg." And "My only complaint is that since we live on a gravel road first gear is a little tricky because of its high gearing, and the gap to second is a bit high, meaning I usually end up riding between 15-20 mph in first gear." And this comment sums up the type of feedback I receive from women, comparatively speaking: "The ride is so smooth. My husband loves the way it fits him. The front seat and back seat are comfortable for both of us."

Those who study gender differences will tell you that men are competitive by nature, while women are communal. Generally speaking, men look for ways to one-up each other, or best the competition. Hence, their nature to track the progress of the fuel economy, or dial in the transmission gearing ratios so they can compare it to another motorcycle, either the one they were thinking of buying (and confirm in their minds they made the right decision with the bike they did buy), or their friend's motorcycle (and share those numbers, while kicking the tires at the gas station, subtly implying my bike's better than yours). Women are communal in that they look for ways to bring people together, finding similarities rather than differences. They do that through how an object or experience makes them feel.

I feel blessed that I have a great man to ride with all the time, as well as some wonderful female friends to join me on the road. The experiences are quite different depending on who's accompanying me that day, but that's all part of what keeps motorcycling interesting and exciting.

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