



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

## Encourage Her The Right Way

For a woman, learning to ride is all about feeling confident and in control.

**WHEN A FEMALE PASSENGER** wants to become a rider, sometimes her male companion takes it upon himself to “show her the basics.” Letting a woman straddle the front seat while he’s perched on the back holding the bike

up, encouraging her to ease out the clutch and saying “Just give it some gas, honey” is a bad idea. For a woman, learning to ride is all about feeling confident and in control. If her first experience in the front seat of a moving motorcycle is with a big guy on the back telling her what to do, that does nothing for her confidence, much less control.

A woman’s first time in the rider’s seat should be pleasant. Just sitting on the bike and lifting it off the sidestand is nerve wracking enough. Those initial feelings in the saddle can shape any future desire to ride and impact how she approaches the learning experience. So, guys, don’t feel like you have to teach your wife how to ride, or help her “get a feel for it to see if she’ll like it.” That’s what a motorcycle training class is for. It not only teaches people to become riders, it’s also a good place for people to find out if they want to ride. So, encourage your lady to take the Motorcycle Safety Foundation Basic RiderCourse, and let the experts show her how to ride.

### START BIG OR SMALL?

Some men will pass their older, midsize bike down to their wife for her first motorcycle so he can get a new one. Wrong! It’s also not smart for a guy to suggest that his wife buy a bike that would make an ideal second bike for himself. The only motorcycle a woman should ride as her first is one that works

best for her and only her. Cliff Brown, an MSF instructor and owner of Learn 2 Ride in Ozark, Alabama, says to the guys, “Remember when you were anywhere from 12 to 26, and [you owned] a small, underpowered, yet fun, motorcycle that you rode until it blew up? Then you went on to bigger bikes, gradually increasing in power and engine size. Now you have a big-man bike, yet by some twisted logic, you think that your 45-year-old wife standing all of 5’3”, weighing between 100 and 150 pounds, is just going to throw her leg over that 883 Sportster you just bought and ride off with you into the sunset. Are you crazy?” He adds, “Why would you deny her the opportunity to start small and grow into a bigger motorcycle?”

A question I’m asked by women fresh from the MSF class is if they should skip the small bike (Rebel or similar) and buy a Road King (or other large cruiser), since that’s what they eventually want. I can’t think of a good reason to do that unless the woman has at least 1,000-plus miles under her belt and is a confident rider. I say this because of the letters I get from women who tell me they bought that big bike initially, and all they did was drop it over and over again. One woman in particular put that big bike in the garage after dropping it several times, then bought a used Rebel 250 and rode that around for several months before she felt comfortable enough to roll out

her bigger bike again. She spent a lot of money in cosmetic repairs to that bigger bike that could have been spent on a used Rebel.

The key factors determining what size is right for a woman’s first bike are her physical size, confidence level, and skill level. For most women to be comfortable on their first bike, they must be able to put both feet flat on the ground and have enough leg length left to maneuver the bike backward and forward without losing control of it. They must also have plenty of arm length to maneuver the bike comfortably. For beginners, this means a smaller, lighter bike. When skill and confidence are lacking (which they are in beginners), one must be physically able to control the bike.

Some women may never envision themselves as riders. They’re so accustomed to their man dominating the motorcycling experience that women relegate themselves to being uninvolved passengers. Unless her guy says something like “Honey, have you ever thought of riding your own motorcycle,” the thought may never enter a woman’s mind. Guys, if you’re comfortable with the idea of your woman riding side by side with you, go ahead and open the door. Encourage her to take the class. It’s amazing what riding one’s own motorcycle does to a woman’s spirit and attitude toward life. You’ll benefit more than you know. Wink, wink. **AIM**

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