

The Right Lane

BACK IN THE MARCH ISSUE OF *AMERICAN IRON Magazine*, Buzz and Genevieve both touched on a topic with the same core idea — education. When it comes to learning how to properly ride a motorcycle, I couldn't agree more with what

they discussed. Granted, I might be a little biased as an MSF RiderCoach, but I do see that schooling works, and, with most riders, it works great.

Lately, I would estimate that almost 50 percent of the classes I teach are attended by women. Some have decided to move from the passenger seat to the handlebars because of their own desires, while others are motivated to do so by their partners. No matter what is driving them to ride, my female students all have one thing in common: These ladies decided to learn from experienced instructors who can correctly and responsibly train them to ride motorcycles. The interesting thing is that a lot of them tell me that their boyfriends or husbands asked them to take the class, but when I ask if their significant other has ever taken riding courses himself, the response is usually something like "Why? He knows how to ride." Perhaps so, and we'll look at that in a moment, but let's stay with the ladies for now.

Another comment I typically hear is this: "You must have nerves of steel to teach a class with that many women who don't know how to ride." The truth is, I'd much rather have such a class than one with men who have riding experience. Now, this may tick off a few of my fellow male cyclists, but the ladies lack something that the guys have: the male ego! Female students, whether they have little or no experience, will listen to an instructor and ask questions when they don't understand an exercise. They will normally go about the drill with their best effort, even if they are a bit stiff at first, but they keep trying and normally work things out, as opposed to the guy who's been riding for the past 15 years with a learner's permit and knows everything about riding. He will sometimes challenge the instructor about information and always has that great road story that involves him narrowly avoiding a life-threatening accident, only to wind up looking worse than the woman with no experience. This happens a lot. Those who are "riders" when entering the class fare well during the first day of exercises, since the demonstrated skills are designed for people with no experience and are basic in nature. But once day two rolls around and the skills are more developed and involved, their bad



habits (or lack of understanding) really start to show. I consider the second training day to be "The Humbling." Egos start to get checked, and the seasoned riders start to listen and learn as well. Some of the histories that these men present may be embellished a little (that's the ego thing again), but what about everyone out there who's been riding for years without incident? They know how to ride. Or do they?

Several studies show that, although the so-called experienced rider may know how to operate a motorcycle, he may not have the best skills. With some estimates showing an excessively high percentage of those involved in motorcycle accidents having no proper riding education, the numbers seem to prove the point. There is also research that shows that the groups of riders who do the least to improve their riding skills (the "I know how to ride" faction) have been riding for a while or are returning to the sport after a long absence. New riders, especially women, make up the highest numbers of those being properly trained and educated. The result? Women who learn to ride correctly are becoming better riders than the men they used to sit behind. How's that for an ego crunch? Hey, guys, time to step up to the plate.

I've heard some other excuses from the "experienced" crowd: "I don't have time to take the class," "What they teach seems too basic," and "I don't want to take the chance of dropping my hog and causing some damage." As a RiderCoach, I would much rather see someone drop a bike in a parking lot in a controlled environment than out on the streets. You can always pick up the bike and fix it, but you may not be able to if you do something wrong out on the road.

Sure, there are thousands of uneducated riders who live to old age without any major riding incidents, but are you willing to play the odds? Instead of spending those dollars on that new chrome accessory, consider checking out an MSF riding course, and perhaps you'll become as good a rider as your previous passenger riding next to you in the Right Lane. **AIM**