



MISTI HURST

# LIFE ON THE FAST TRACK

## Women Specific Rider Training?

Let's face it; every one of us starts out as a beginner motorcycle rider, even if we don't want to admit it. Yes, we would all like to have started at age 3 like Rossi and ride a motorcycle as naturally as we walk and run, but for most of us, that just isn't the case. Riding and racing schools are abundant these days and are a great way to improve riding skills, safety, and confidence on the street and on the track. With more and more cropping up each year, and with more women than ever taking up motorcycle riding, we ask the proverbial question, is there a need for women specific rider training? And do women riders really make better students?

Keith Code, former roadracer, founder of the California Superbike School and author of *Twist of the Wrist* states, "in the area of rider training the motorcycle is insensitive to gender. The basics remain the basics, no matter who is sitting in the saddle."

As a female rider, racer, instructor, and motorcycle journalist, I agree entirely with Code's statement. The motorcycle is insensitive to gender and therefore women are equally as capable as men of riding a motorcycle and riding it well. The riding skills for the street and the track are essentially the same for all riders. The controls, the corners, the problems and the methods of instruction do not change with gender. Does that mean that there are no specific needs of women riders then? Not necessarily.

There seem to be two main things that female students struggle with more than their male counterparts. The first is confidence, and the second is physical size and comfort on the motorcycle.

Still predominately a male dominated sport, many women lack confidence in their riding ability and feel intimidated about going to a co-ed training school or track day for the first time. Those that do gather up the courage often arrive with the preconceived notion that they will not be as good or as fast as the male riders. Currently the only female instructor at the California Superbike School ([www.superbikeschool.com](http://www.superbikeschool.com)), I have been coaching both male and female riders at many different tracks around the world. Many of the women who do attend the school have said that they were a little scared or insecure about coming at first. Their fears usually included; being the only girl in a group of testosterone charged males, being too slow, holding up the guys, being passed aggressively or being on track with a bunch of super fast racers. Usually by mid morning their fears are replaced with mile wide smiles as they realize that it's not that scary on the track, they aren't the slowest, the other riders do treat them with respect and they are learning important skills while having an amazing time.



*Photo credit [www.picman.co.uk](http://www.picman.co.uk)*

*These photos were all taken at Almeria Racetrack in Spain. Misti was a guest instructor for the British arm of the California Superbike School*

For women who still aren't sure about taking to the track with a bunch of men, there are some female only track days and riding school options, such as Femmoto. In 2001 Aprilia USA backed the first women's only track day series with Femmoto. Robert Pandya of Aprilia USA said, "we wanted to help dissolve these initial barriers of entry by helping to create a non-threatening all female track environment that catered to the slightly different needs of female riders. We had spotters for the in-seam challenged and average height riders - that were often no longer needed by lunch time." In 2005 Femmoto continues to provide women only track days and is

a great source of information for female riders. ([www.femmoto.com](http://www.femmoto.com))

Women who are interested in racing now have an exciting new option, the Women's Cup in Eastern Canada is a unique series for women only, the only one of its kind in North America. The series was created for women who are looking to develop their racing skills on track in a competitive but friendly environment. In 2005, the Pro Honda Women's Cup Challenge is hosting a seven race schedule that will see the girls battle at three Parts Canada National rounds as well as four regional rounds in both Quebec with ASM and in Ontario with RACE. ([www.womenscup.ca](http://www.womenscup.ca))

Now, back to the previously mentioned aspect of being “in-seam” challenged. Many women riders do also face some physical challenges that can make riding a motorcycle slightly more difficult. Women are typically smaller and lighter than most men and often have difficulty just getting their feet to touch the ground. I’m 5’3”, 120lbs and cannot get both feet on the ground when straddling sportbikes. This makes slow speed maneuvering, parking and stopping a challenge. My suggestion to women who face this problem is to make sure the ground is even when you stop the bike, look for potholes or depressions in the ground, get used to shifting your weight to one side so that one foot can sit firmly planted to the ground, and don’t be afraid of asking for help if you need it. Another option to look at is adjusting basic suspension settings such as ride height, or looking into aftermarket options such as lowering kits or shaved down seats. Talk to your local dealership or mechanic about options for making your motorcycle more comfortable.

Now, do women riders really make better students than men? Stuart Smith, senior instructor at the California Superbike School says, “this is probably a fair statement. Women focus a bit better on the skills of riding as opposed to proving how fast they are. Guys sometimes have that macho attitude of just trying to go fast. In my experiences, women seem to rarely have any pre set ideas of how to do something on the

track. You tell them to go and do something and they just go and do it. More often than not, the female riders at our schools are the ones that make the most overall improvements.”

One of my favourite students was a 13 year old girl named Randi. As an accomplished dirtbike rider, it was the first time she had ever been on a sportbike or on a race track and she was initially terrified. After taking some time to boost her confidence and make her feel more comfortable, she went out on the track and just did the drills. She made awesome improvements, was less fearful, was willing to try new things and was definitely not the slowest rider on the track.

For men looking for ways on how to encourage their wives, girlfriends, mothers, sisters or daughters to take a riding school I would suggest encouraging them to participate, letting them know that there are some inspirational female riders out there breaking the stereotypes and mentioning other options such as women only schools and track days.

A friend of mine and fellow racer Kathy Hubble says, “once women realize that it is not so dangerous and quite safe actually (with all the gear and all the safety precautions), they love it, and then they become addicted just like we are.” **MMM**

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