



PRO RIDER

FEMALE RIDERS

Words: Karel Pavich



As a rider for quite a few decades now – eek, showing my age here! – it’s fantastic to see so many female riders out there doing it now. Until relatively recently, women bikers were rare – and regarded as creatures of curiosity. But, thankfully, motorcycling is one glass ceiling we have been able to punch through, with great success. This is probably thanks, largely, to a fellow female Antipodean, a true pioneer, who arguably paved the way for motorcycling to no longer purely be the pastime of men.

In 1934, at the age of 22, Australian-born Dot Robinson entered her first Jack Pine National Endurance Championship in Michigan. In 1940, she won that famous race in the sidecar class, becoming the first woman to win an AMA national competition, an achievement she then repeated in 1946. In

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“Quote here please.”

1940, while attending the Laconia National, Dot was approached by another rider, Linda Dugeau, about starting a women’s riding group. Within the year, the two women had founded Motor Maids, an organisation that encouraged women to try motorcycling. As time progressed, more and more started taking to the roads on two wheels.

When I started riding in the seventies in NZ, we were definitely a minority, and I got pretty tired of the old cliché “what’s a little girl like you doing on a big bike like that?” It was true, however, as an 18-year-old, I WAS hooning around on a big Suzuki GS 1000, so I can’t blame them. When I started racing in the late eighties, you could count the female racers in NZ on one hand, so things have developed there with a lot more female participation now.

Happily, us female riders are now commonplace. Even in cultures where women’s rights are severely hampered, women of all ages and all walks of life are riding machines that once were strictly a male domain. And they are loving it!

Whether it’s a sports bike, a cruiser or a sit-up-and-beg, women’s tastes in what they want to ride are just as diverse as men’s. Manufacturers of bikes and safety gear have recognised the burgeoning female market and have been quick to respond, offering a range of bikes to suit all tastes and riding abilities, and it’s not hard to find a pink riding jacket or helmet these days in any of the stores that sell riding gear! Women’s bike clubs, too, are springing up everywhere.

There are still challenges to getting taken seriously though, especially when it comes to getting things fixed, or making purchases. If

you need to get a diagnosis on something that’s wrong with your bike, doing a bit of homework before you take it into a shop will pay dividends. Reading the manual or googling your bike’s symptoms will offer an idea of what may be wrong. It helps, too, to talk things over with other riders, for advice or suggestions. That way, when you take your bike for diagnosis or repair, you can confidently give the mechanic an informed description of what’s wrong, and what you think it might be.

Also, asking for the cost of the parts (and researching that for yourself), finding out what the hourly labour charge will be and obtaining an estimate of the total cost before you agree to anything will help prevent you being ripped off. Get more than one quote. **If you can afford it, it’s always better to get a qualified person to fix a problem.** A “handy mate” might do it cheaper for you, but there’s no comeback if issues arise from the repair.

Before purchasing a bike, trying out different styles will help you understand your abilities and limitations and what feels safe and comfortable for you, especially if you intend to do a lot of riding. That way, when you’re ready to buy, you’ll know exactly what you want. In responding to growing demand, by supplying bikes and accessories for female riders, manufacturers are reshaping retailers’ attitudes. Most dealers now welcome female customers. They’ll have safety in mind when giving advice, so it’s okay to ask. And if you’re buying privately, knowing what’s right for you and what it should cost can save you from

making a big mistake. Confidence in handling any machine is critical to safety. Riding skills courses are a great way to build skills and confidence; women’s bike clubs offer great support and social opportunities, and online forums can be a great shared resource. Joining the AA can provide good peace of mind, especially if you do much solo riding.

Sadly, there will always be narrow-minded folk who have something negative to say about a woman on a motorbike. However, their comments and attitudes tell us a lot more about what kind of people they are than they do about the women they sneer at. There will also be patronising people who won’t be able to resist communicating the fact that they find it amusing to see a woman on a bike. Such small-minded mentality helps nobody and is best ignored. Remember, if those people are in the business, you don’t have to give them yours. If anyone you seek help or advice from doesn’t treat you with respect, keep walking. Someone else down the road will. ■■■

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If you are looking for reviews and news from a female perspective, check out www.twista.nz which is run by BRM’s resident female tester, Kerry. With her opportunity to test many different styles of bikes and gear, it might surprise you what bikes she thinks are great for female riders. Check it out.