

Wheels

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Mom and daughter go to school

Motorcycle rider training a hit

Pair learn skills and good attitude

CECE SCOTT
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's not the first time my family and friends have declared me nuts, but telling them I'd signed up for a motorcycle course with my 21-year-old daughter left them shaking their heads.

Why would I take the risk of learning how to ride a bike at this point in my life? Didn't my Mustang convertible run enough wind through my hair?

But I believe the rider can control the risk factor of riding a motorcycle, especially if she has the right attitude, the right training, the right gear and respect for the bike, the road and the other drivers.

But Day 1 of the hands-on experience was way more of an eye-opener than I'd anticipated.

The group of 100-plus riders — ranging in age from 21 to older than 65 — was split into groups, with a minimum of two instructors per 10 riders. The course is designed with the absolute novice in mind and, as the day progressed, I held on to that thought.

Personal safety is first and foremost with all exercises and manoeuvres, although being relaxed and having fun also tops the list. So as I moved off on my third exercise of the first day, I planned to chart that course, oblivious to the challenges around the next pylon.

The personal challenges of being not particularly co-ordinated — coupled with having never driven a standard shift — are two small details I should have

taken into consideration.

With motors disengaged, riders paired up taking turns to push each other along a short stretch, ending with a sharp right or left turn through the pylons. My second right turn introduced me to a piece of well-maintained pavement and I was down on my side in seconds flat.

The ratio of guys to girls was 70 to 30 and I wanted to take my knocks like a man. One person, however, had the dubious honour of being the first "incident" report filed. And this was before the first morning coffee break, at which daughter Jacqueline and I looked at each other aghast and asked, "Who's idea was this, anyway?"

But the instructors are a dedicated team of enthusiasts — many of them have been around the Humber College instructional program since the early-to mid-'80s — and their passion for the sport, absolute patience and bountiful good humour motivated us to return from the break.

Seeing the difficulties I was having changing gears, managing the clutch and running the throttle at an even speed, a roving instructor spent time with me to hone these basic skills and instill confidence, all with a friendly, fun, and non-threatening attitude.

Attitude is key and is, in fact, the most important ingredient on a bike. It can be your biggest ally or your biggest enemy.

"It's not about how well you ride," says Andy Hertel, the manager of Humber's motorcycle rider training program. "It's all about having the right head on your shoulders."

Day 2. Mother's Day, and it's pouring rain. I pull on my rain



RENE JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

Daughter Jacqueline leads mother Cece Scott through practice at Humber College motorcycle training class. Both were unable to pass their ministry test, but are planning to try again soon.

gear over my leathers and ask myself why I couldn't have tried something nice and simple, like knitting. First-hand experience tells me that dropping a stitch is much less painful than dropping a bike.

By 8:40 a.m., we're on the bikes and moving off, practising our curves as well as learning how to maintain consistent speed

through a slalom course. Evasive manoeuvres, sharp turns, stops in curves, quick stops in a straight line, and higher speed manoeuvres are all skills taught to help prepare us for the road.

We practise and practise and practise as the rain keeps coming and the thunder rolls. It is certainly a lesson in appreciation for the skills needed in in-

cident weather, doing sudden stops on slick pavement, choosing how best to use the brakes. I can tell you, when it's slippery the choice is not full and abrupt usage of the front brake lever. That became my second "incident to pavement" report in two days. (Jacqueline followed with her own front brake incident later that afternoon.)

As I watched, listened and rode, it amazed me that anyone would get on a bike without taking a rider safety program. I firmly believe that a motorcyclist's greatest investment is knowledge.

Another benefit of a rider program is a reduction on the cost of insurance. Completing a safety course often earns the rider credit for a year's experience — a big deal for motorcycle premiums. (For other rider programs, check out www.ridertraining.org.)

Sunday's final test for our M2 licence, as laid out by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, was a combination of the curves, sharp turns, controlled speed and stops we had learned throughout the course.

Everyone starts with a zero score and, if you accrue 12 demerit points, you are asked to park your bike. That didn't take Jacqueline and I very long at all. There isn't a sense of failure around not passing this first time out, though, since the goal is to make you, the rider, not only ready for the road, but also safe for the road and other drivers.

Jacqueline and I go back for a three-hour refresher course and our retest soon (you are allowed two retests at \$50 per test). After all, when you've become a keen motorcycle enthusiast, it's hard to gear it back down.

Papers and gear you will need for course

The "Basic Rider Program" is offered over 27 weekends at Humber College North Campus (Etobicoke) as well as the North York satellite location, 480 Gordon Baker Road. Three-day courses, Tuesday to Thursday, are also offered.

The next available opening is on the first weekend of July.

To register, call (416) 675-5005. Cost is \$335.

Intermediate and M2 Exit courses, for riders more advanced in the provincial graduated licensing program, are also available.

For information on other motorcycle training courses go to www.safety-council.org (click on motorcycle training) or check out www.ridertraining.org.

An M1 permit (the basic motorcycle licence, available by passing a written ministry test and good for 60 to 90 days) is required to take the rider safety course.

Here is the gear you will need for the course:

Helmet: DOT/CSA-approved motorcycle helmet is mandatory. A reasonably decent helmet runs from \$150. If you want to look around before you buy, you can rent DOT-approved full-face helmets from Parker Brothers Power Sports, 416-234-5750, for \$25.

Gloves: A good pair of leather gloves that cover the wrists works best. Cost is about \$30.

Boots: Must cover the ankle. A small heel is preferred — cowboy boots and construction boots are okay. Absolutely no running shoes.

Pants and jackets: Leather (not fashion leather) is preferred; heavy denim is acceptable.

