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Ticket to Ride

BY ELISA SOUTHARD



So you want to ride a motorcycle? There has never been a better time—or possibly worse—to get on a bike. While motorcycle safety classes abound, so do alarming statistics about motorcycle accidents. Be prepared to wear personal armor when you throw a leg over your dream.

During a recent evening walk, I caught the fever after catching a glimpse of three glistening Harleys in a neighbor's garage. Back at home, I said to my husband Will, "Let's ride!" Soon turning sixty-two, he smiled and said, "I'm ready." The next weekend I throttled, shifted, swerved, and prayed at the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) course range. (You bring gloves and shoes; they provide helmets and bikes.) By Sunday night, I had earned my stripes, passing the riding-skill evaluation. Then it was off to the DMV! A few weeks later, Will clicked open the garage door to reveal a sleek, silver Honda 250 road machine. "Happy 31st Anniversary," he whispered.

Before facing the streets, I spent a week clutching and braking in the driveway. Then trial runs around the block and up hills. Curious drivers now nod at my pink jacket gliding through Pope Valley, down the Silverado Trail, and across the Napa Valley.

But let's not beat around the bush, motorcycle riding can be very dangerous. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), "Per registered vehicle, the fatality rate for motorcyclists in 2007 was 6 times the fatality rate for passenger car occupants." Does this mean you should never get behind the handlebars? Contra Costa Times financial columnist, Steve Butler, has ridden his Honda VFR 700, accident-free for twenty-years and over 60,000 miles. When asked his secret to safe riding, Butler said, "Motorcycle Safety

Foundation training. Many things about riding a motorcycle are not intuitive, such as watching the wheels of a car at a stop sign or light to predict its direction. Experienced riders show you how." Indeed. Without MSF training, I would travel with a hardtop over my head, instead of the heavens

May is designated Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month by the NHTSA to advance riding and driving safety. Highway signs promote "Share the Road. Look Twice for Motorcyclists." Check your mirrors and blind spots for motorcycles before switching lanes. Use Safety Awareness Month to see action up close!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Download a ten-step guide to get started at www.motorcycles.org

Find out about training at www.msf-usa.org

Enjoy motorcycles and music at www.rockmoto.com

Get connected locally: Bay Area Rider's Forum at www.bayarearidersforum.com

Join the national community at www.ama-cycle.org

Explore it as a woman rider and go to www.helmethairmagazine.com

So you want to ride a motorcycle? Decide today to make May your personal motorcycle awareness month: examine the scene, educate your sweetheart, and as a car driver, share the road with riders. Soon, that rider could be you.

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