

Chapter 1

The Allure of Motorcycling: Six Million Motorcyclists Can't Be Wrong

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the joy of motorcycling
 - ▶ Understanding the glamorous side of motorcycling
 - ▶ Fitting in as a woman in a traditionally male motorcycling world
 - ▶ Sharing motorcycling with children
 - ▶ Exploring motorcycle safety
-

“Motorcycles Are Everywhere.” That’s a popular bumper sticker that bikers like to hand out to car drivers to encourage them to watch for motorcycles on the road. Car drivers aren’t trained to look for bikes, so many times they don’t see them.

The fact is, motorcycles *are* everywhere. Motorcyclists cruise the highways and byways, ride along city streets, and tackle twisty roads in the mountains. Some 6 million motorcyclists drive in the United States today, including everyone from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to movie stars Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie; to TV talk show host Jay Leno; to doctors, lawyers, accountants, factory workers, and probably one or more of your neighbors.

Next time you’re driving on the road, make a conscious effort to actually look for motorcycles — you’ll be surprised by how many you actually see. And you’ll wonder why you didn’t see them before. Motorcycles *are* everywhere.

In this chapter, you discover why motorcyclists are addicted to motorcycling, why every ride on a motorcycle is an adventure, and why a motorcyclist laughs under his helmet when some hotshot in a Lamborghini pulls up alongside and revs his or her engine. You also get a taste of what it actually feels like to be a motorcyclist, and you get a look at the glamorous world of motorcycle

racing. Plus, you discover how women are making inroads into motorcycling, and why a chick who rides her own bike isn't just cool, but supercool. And, of course, you explore motorcycle riding techniques and safety, and how to have great motorcycling fun with your kids.

Are Bikes Better Than Cars? You Bet!

A car driver shouldn't even try to convince a motorcyclist that cars are better than bikes. There's just no comparison. You want basic transportation with a lot of cool factor? A motorcycle has it in spades. You want cheap transportation that's a lot of fun to ride? Yep, that's a motorcycle. You want plush seats, climate control, protection from the rain, and the ability to carry a lot of dogs and stuff? Okay, get a car.

Unless a motorcyclist needs to carry a lot of stuff or it's bitter cold outside with ice on the road, a motorcyclist prefers to ride his or her motorcycle. A motorcycle gives a motorcyclist a true sense of freedom, even when making only a short hop down to the grocery store for a quart of milk. That's true for a lot of reasons, and in this section, I point out a few of the best.



Just in case the reasons I list in this section aren't enough, here's one more: Under federal law, a motorcycle is allowed to use every high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in the United States without having to carry a passenger.

Motorcycling has a certain mystique

One reason motorcyclists prefer their bikes to cars is the long history of motorcyclists being seen as out-of-the-ordinary. They're seen as people who are willing to add a little adventure to their lives and who maybe are a little rough around the edges. Part of this mystique is the thrill of throwing a leg over a motorcycle and feeling the wind rush by as you ride. And part of it is just knowing that you belong to a motorcycling fraternity that includes not only some of the roughest, toughest guys on the planet, but also some of the richest and most glamorous people in the world.



Just about everybody drives a car. But not everybody rides a motorcycle. That alone makes motorcyclists special. Throw in how motorcyclists feel about themselves when they ride, the fact that a motorcycle gets two or even three times the gas mileage that a car does, and the exhilaration of controlling a nimble machine, and you have a combination that adds up to just plain fun.

And really, fun is what motorcycling is all about. How many people have fun when they get in their cars to drive somewhere? For most people, driving the

car isn't part of the experience of going somewhere; driving is just transportation. A motorcycle is transportation, but it's also recreation. Motorcyclists are fond of saying that when they have a rough day at work or just want to clear their minds of any troubles, they go for a ride.

Enjoying the outdoors, biker style, is great fun

Imagine that, one sunny day, you decide to take a little trip through farm country into the mountains. Should you take your bike or your car? Decisions, decisions. Not! You hop on your bike, start it up, and hear the motor roar to life. You feel the vibration of the machine, put it in gear, and head out of your driveway toward the countryside.

Cruising along country roads, you feel the warm sun on your face and a soothing, warm breeze rushing past your body, and you smell the sweet fragrance of wildflowers along the road. Cows graze lazily in pastures as you ride by, and you get a strong whiff of, well, cow manure. Okay, so riding in the country isn't always a party for your senses. But most of the time it is, and when you're boxed up in a car riding those country roads, the experience just isn't the same.

Getting off the straight, country roads, you find yourself starting to wind up into the mountains. The road gets steeper, the air cools, and you fall into a rhythm, leaning the bike left, right, left as you climb higher and higher, the strong smell of pine filling your nostrils. You get to a point when the road is just snaking turns with few straights, so you lean the bike over farther to make the turns. On the country roads you were just enjoying the scenery, sights, and sounds, but now you are focused on the road and mastering every corner. It's a challenge, but it's intensely satisfying.

Near the top of the mountain is a lookout, and you see that you aren't alone. Other bikers have also made the trip and have stopped at the lookout to drink in the view. You stop, enjoy the great weather and scenery, and chat. After all, motorcyclists are always instant friends. "Where are you from?" "What are you riding?" "Have you ever been to . . .?"

One by one, the motorcyclists hop on their bikes, click them into gear, and head back down the mountain. You wait, now alone at the lookout, basking in the sun and the silence. Too soon it's time to go. Heading down the mountain, you decide to take a little ride past the beach before you head home.

As you cruise along the beach, heads turn, people smile, and children wave. You slow to a crawl to enjoy the scenery. All is right with the world. Motorcycling really is a sensory experience that you just can't get driving a car.

Every ride is an adventure

Mount up and head out! Today's motorcyclists are modern-day cowboys, seeking adventure wherever they go. And the adventure isn't always the destination. In fact, most times it isn't. The adventure is the ride itself.

Besides feeling alive while riding a bike because all the senses are at work, a motorcyclist enjoys the satisfaction of operating his or her machine. Operating a motorcycle requires a lot of coordination, and operating one *well* takes a lot of skill. Motorcyclists hone their skills every time they hop on a bike, and they get better every day.

So where does the adventure begin? It begins as soon as you stick the key into the bike's ignition switch. You know that this is just the start of a lot of fun, whether the ride is for an hour or a day. Can riding in the city be an adventure? It sure can: You're dodging potholes, navigating traffic, and crossing railroad tracks. Car drivers usually don't think about all these situations, but motorcyclists must in order to stay safe. As a result, motorcyclists have heightened awareness not only of potential road hazards, but also of the traffic around them and the potentials for other danger.

Motorcyclists can have the most fun on twisty roads, even at legal speeds. For a motorcyclist, nirvana is navigating the twists and turns of a curvy road at a spirited pace. Being in total control of the machine, being one with the bike, is almost Zen-like. Having a heightened awareness is much more critical for a motorcyclist than a car driver. After all, if a car goes off the road, the driver has a lot of steel surrounding him or her in a crash. But a motorcyclist? Miss a corner and hit a tree, and the results can be deadly.



To make the ride really special, top it off with a great destination. Maybe you want to ride to the local motorcyclist gathering place to talk about motorcycling and great rides, or maybe you're heading to a giant rally of motorcyclists where you can meet like-minded riders, test-ride the latest offerings of the motorcycle manufacturers, and find deals on that new jacket or helmet you need.

And motorcyclists don't always ride alone. They're social animals; they like to share the adventure. Little is more fun than hooking up with a bunch of riding buddies and heading off to cruise the beach, explore small towns, or test your skills on some of the twistiest roads in the area. Even more fun is the good-natured ribbing that follows every ride when someone makes a mistake, like taking a corner too wide or braking way too early for a turn. Or even getting lost.

Car drivers might get annoyed when they get lost, but bike riders generally don't seem to mind it. After all, getting lost is part of the adventure of motorcycling — exploring new roads and new towns. Who would have thought that getting lost could be fun? A motorcyclist.

Can you say C-H-E-A-P?

Motorcycles attract a lot of riders because they're a lot of fun packed into a small, nimble, inexpensive package. After all, you can get a great new motorcycle for \$7,000. And how much is a new car? You want state-of-the-art technology? Okay, maybe you'll have to spend around \$10,000 for a new bike. How much is a new car, again? If you just want cheap, reliable transportation, you can get a good bike for around \$1,000. What kind of car can you get for a grand? Probably not much more than a junker.

Plus, with gas hovering around the \$3-per-gallon mark, a motorcycle is the way to go. Maybe your car gets 25 miles to the gallon. A gas-guzzling motorcycle gets about 45 miles per gallon, and other motorcycles get even better gas mileage. Motorcyclists do the math and know how to keep money in their pockets.



Riding a motorcycle brings other cost-saving benefits as well. Annual registration is cheaper because registration is usually based on vehicle weight — and, of course, motorcycles weigh a lot less than cars. Some cities have free motorcycle parking to encourage the use of motorcycles to reduce traffic congestion. Road tolls are also usually cheaper as well. Plus, depending on your age, locale, and the type of bike you ride, you'll shell out a lot less cash for a motorcycle than you would for a car.

Performance: What car drivers don't want you to know

Maybe you have a bud who likes to take his car to the dragstrip now and then, and he brags about his 13-second quarter-mile times or about how his car can go from 0 to 60 mph in 7 seconds. Well, as a motorcyclist, you can just nod your head knowingly and smile smugly. You can smoke him at that track on your bike.



Even the most high-performance car on the planet (which probably costs hundreds of thousands of dollars) can't match the performance of today's high-performance motorcycles (which, incidentally, cost around \$12,000).

High-performance motorcycles can do the quarter-mile in a little more than nine or ten seconds. You want 0-to-60-mph performance? Put another way, you want to get from stoplight to stoplight quickly? Well, you can get bikes that do 0 to 60 mph in 2.8 seconds. No bragging — just fact. And a car can't match the acceleration of a motorcycle from 60 mph to 80 mph, which is great for passing on the freeway.

Want proof? Consider a 2007–2008 limited production (only 20 built) Lamborghini Reventon high-performance sports car, and a 2008 Suzuki Hayabusa mass-produced high-performance motorcycle:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Reventon</i>	<i>Hayabusa</i>
MSRP	\$1,485,100	\$11,999
0 to 60 mph	3.3 seconds	2.8 seconds
Top speed	211 mph	186 mph (factory-set limit)

If you really think about it, these stats make sense. After all, the power-to-weight ratio of a motorcycle far exceeds that of a car. Motorcycles are very light, and the motors of the high-performance bikes pump out 150, 160, even 170 horsepower. Think about your own car. How much horsepower does it have? Maybe 150 or 200 horsepower? And what does it weigh? Maybe 3,000 pounds, compared to maybe 400 or 500 pounds or less for a high-performance bike? You do the math.

Plus, the high-performance motorcycle market is extremely competitive. The manufacturers have to employ cutting-edge technology to make their motors powerful and to keep their suspensions up to snuff to handle the performance. Otherwise they'll drop out of the market.



Even motorcycles that aren't considered high-performance bikes can smoke cars on the quarter-mile. Maybe a few high-performance production cars that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars have higher top speeds than today's motorcycles. But high-performance motorcycles can go up to 186 mph (300 kph). The motorcycle manufacturers have a gentlemen's agreement to cap the top speed of their bikes at 186 mph because of rumblings in Europe a while back that motorcycles were being made to go too fast.

The bottom line is that even bikes that aren't high-performance machines generally can outperform a car. "So what?" the car guys may say with their feelings hurt. High performance isn't just for bragging rights; although that's fun, too. High performance gives motorcycle riders a safety edge to get out of the way quickly when a car changes lanes into the path of the motorcycle, or to stop quickly to avoid a collision.

The Glamour of Motorcycling

Okay, quick quiz. What do the following people have in common: Ben Affleck, Jessica Alba, Catherine Bell, James Belushi, Nicolas Cage, George Clooney, Tom Cruise, Billy Ray Cyrus, Leonardo DiCaprio, Fabio, Laurence Fishburne, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Sammy Hagar, Hulk Hogan, Kate Hudson, and Lauren Hutton?

And what about Billy Joel, Angelina Jolie, Perry King, Queen Latifah, Hugh Laurie, Jay Leno, Lyle Lovett, Ricky Martin, Ewan McGregor, Juan Pablo Montoya, Kyle Petty, Richard Petty, Brad Pitt, Dennis Rodman, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Bob Thornton, Bruce Willis, and Dwight Yoakam?

They're all celebrities — the “beautiful people” — and they all ride motorcycles. In fact, a lot of them are hard-core motorcyclists. Sure, Ewan McGregor is well known for portraying Obi-Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* movies. But many movie-lovers also followed his filmed exploits with buddy Charley Boorman when they traveled from London to New York by way of Europe, Mongolia, and Canada. The television series was called *Long Way Round*.

Or consider Catherine Bell, a star of the television series *JAG*, who also starred in the movie *Bruce Almighty*. At last count, she had a dozen motorcycles. And singer Lyle Lovett loves to ride motorcycles on the street *and* in the dirt.

Before he died in 1990, multimillionaire Malcolm Forbes was famed for taking bike trips with his motorcycle club, the Capitalist Tools — and with actress Elizabeth Taylor as a passenger!

Today riding motorcycles is chic. And it's fun to know that, as a motorcyclist, you have such good company. After all, we can't all be famous celebrities, but we can do something that they do. Or, if you look at it backward, famous celebrities and millionaires want to be like us! So you, too, can be part of the “in” crowd. All it takes is about a thousand bucks for a used motorcycle.

Riding makes you feel Marlon-Brando cool

A famous poster made from a photograph from the 1954 film *The Wild One* shows Marlon Brando sitting on a Triumph motorcycle. (I discuss this movie in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 21.) He looks soooo cool. In fact, he's cool throughout the movie. At one point in the movie, this motorcycling rebel is asked, “What are you rebelling against, Johnny?” To this he replies, “Whaddya got?”

All of us have a little Johnny in us. Maybe we have to wear a suit and tie when we go to work; or we need to punch the clock at the factory at a certain time, eat lunch at a certain time, and punch out at a certain time. We have bosses at work telling us what to do; we have responsibilities at home we have to take care of. Maybe we want to rebel against everything, but we can't. We can, however, feel like a rebel and feel cool when we ride our motorcycles.

After all, motorcycling isn't just about motorcycles. Motorcycles are a key component, of course, but motorcycling, really, is all about how it makes you feel. And when you put on your black leather jacket, black pants, and motorcycling boots and then pull on your gloves and hop on your bike, you can feel

like Johnny in the movie. Go ahead, add a little sneer right after you fire up your machine and take off down the road. It's fun, and nobody gets hurt.

Maybe you're looking for a different kind of cool. Maybe you don't want to be a rebel. Maybe you want to be (and be seen as) an adventurer, ready to ride thousands of miles at a moment's notice — willing to ride 500 miles just to have lunch at a cool restaurant. You can do that, and you can have tales from your adventures to tell anyone who asks.

Admit it, you don't feel very cool when you hop into the family minivan. But when you hop on your motorcycle? It conjures up a whole different world in your head. You can live your fantasy. In fact, on a bike, your fantasy can become reality. You can feel very, very cool.

Being the envy of friends and strangers

When you take up motorcycling, people look at you in a different light — especially if you're the kind of person others wouldn't expect to ride a motorcycle. Based on our own life experiences, we all have our own perceptions of who a motorcyclist is and what type of person he or she is. Your friends and family may lecture you, telling you that motorcycles are dangerous and that you're too old to be riding a bike. However, the reality is that most of your friends will be envious and wish they could be motorcyclists, too.

And they have good reason to be envious. Motorcyclists are daring, adventurous types; otherwise they wouldn't ride motorcycles. They would be happy just riding around in cages, which is what motorcyclists call cars. Folks who don't ride motorcycles are envious for a number of reasons. One is the freedom that a motorcyclist has to just hop on his or her bike and ride, searching for adventure. A motorcyclist doesn't need a destination. He or she just needs a bike and some gas money.

Outsiders are also envious of the fun a motorcyclist has riding his or her machine. Most people have been driving cars for so long that they're on automatic pilot when they slide into the driver's seat. Not motorcyclists. On a motorcycle, they're hyperaware of what's going on around them, and they're in total control of the machine, making many quick-as-a-thought decisions during a ride: how to best take this turn, how to avoid that pothole, what gear to be in, how hard to brake, whether a car might pull out of that driveway.

People may think that just cruising down a country road on a motorcycle hearing the rumble of the engine, feeling the sun in your face, and smelling the flowers along the road must make the ride a pleasurable experience. And they're right. Or they may imagine the fun you have strafing tight corners on your high-performance bike; turning left, right, left; going up and down on a roller-coaster ride in the country. Again, they're right. And they're envious.

The bottom line is that friends, and strangers, want to be you. They probably won't admit it, but it's true.

Speaking the unique motorcyclist language

Attitude separates motorcyclists from car drivers. Motorcyclists are more adventurous. They're willing to step out of their comfort zones and try something new, and they're really part of a special group. As part of that special group, motorcyclists also have their own language, which is some of the fun of being a motorcyclist. You can talk biker talk with other motorcyclists that the car drivers don't understand. Being fellow motorcyclists is like knowing a foreign language or having a special handshake.

Biker language, of course, evolved out of the need to communicate with other motorcyclists about certain characteristics of motorcycling. And when talking about biker language, I'm not just talking about the special words that motorcyclists use — I'm also talking about what riders talk about. For example, motorcyclists talk an awful lot about tires. Do car drivers? Ask one of your car-driving buds what size tires are on his or her car, or whether they're high-performance tires. Your bud probably won't know.

A motorcyclist, however, will know all sorts of stuff:

- ✓ The size of his or her motorcycle tires
- ✓ The brand of tire they have
- ✓ Whether they're high-performance tires or tires designed to last a long time
- ✓ Whether they're radial or bias-ply tires
- ✓ How many miles he or she gets out of the tires before they need to be replaced

Imagine that you hop on your *Hog* (the trademarked nickname for a big Harley-Davidson motorcycle), and cruise down to a local restaurant that's a popular gathering place for motorcyclists. You park your bike next to a *bagger*, which is a big touring machine with saddlebags or luggage. Another motorcyclist greets you and asks whether you're a member of the *AMA*. That motorcyclist is talking not about the American Medical Association, but about the American Motorcyclist Association, the largest association of motorcyclists in the world.

In the restaurant, you sit down with other bikers and order a cup of coffee and a big slice of apple pie. Someone asks you what you're riding, and you say "a Hog." He replies that he's riding a *Duck* (Ducati). You then get into a

discussion of your ride to the restaurant. He asks whether you had any problems on your big machine with the *sweepers*, which are long, gentle curves or turns in the road; or with the *twisties*, which are tight, sharp turns. He then asks whether you saw a bike on its side just off an *off-camber* turn (that is, a turn in which the asphalt tilts down in the opposite direction of the turn). He says he heard that some rider earlier got into the turn too *hot* (fast) “and *threw it in the weeds* (crashed).”

The discussion then turns to the size of the motor in your bike, the tires, how far you’ve ridden this riding season, your longest trip, what accessories you have on your bike, and other fun stuff all related to motorcycling. As a motorcyclist, if you aren’t having fun riding your bike, you’re having fun talking about motorcycling. I cover basic motorcyclist language in Appendix A.

Dressing the part of a motorcyclist

Besides riding and talking about motorcycles, what makes motorcycling fun is the wide variety of clothes you can wear that are related to the sport. Like motorcyclists, even nonmotorcyclists like to wear Harley-Davidson and West Coast Chopper T-shirts. Motorcyclists also like to wear and collect special shirts, like from the Harley-Davidson shops in areas where they’ve visited, or shirts that only other motorcyclists recognize.

For example, a motorcyclist may have a T-shirt from the Smiling Skull biker bar in Athens, Ohio; from Sturgis, South Dakota, which was bought while attending the mega-motorcycle rally there; and from Pacific Harley-Davidson in Honolulu. The collection may also include a foxhead shirt made by Fox Racing; a Gary Nixon Enterprises T-shirt sold by legendary motorcycle racer Gary Nixon; or a fancy Team Suzuki pit-crew shirt. Besides T-shirts and pit-crew shirts, you can buy motorcycle-themed Aloha shirts, dress shirts, tank tops, and more.

Motorcyclists always wear a motorcycle-themed T-shirt under their jacket when they ride. These shirts are part of the culture, and most motorcyclists have a large collection of motorcycle-related T-shirts. But for protection from the road when riding — and to look really cool — a motorcyclist needs a great jacket and other safety gear. Even nonmotorcyclists are dressing the part of motorcyclists nowadays. And why not? The jackets are so cool.



The great thing is that you can choose from an awful lot of great jackets. Dressing up for the ride in black or colorful riding gear is part of the fun of motorcycling. You can dress in a black jacket, black chaps, and black boots for a bad boy/girl look. You can wear a tight-fitting, colorful jacket and pants for a professional racer look. Or you can go with synthetic riding gear to have an adventure-across-Africa look. You can even change your looks, depending on what bike you ride. Though, you do need to wear the right gear for the bike you’re riding. Why? To fit in with that subculture of motorcycling. Or, go ahead, be a rebel — wear whatever you want!

You want fringe on your jacket? You can get it. You want an orange and purple jacket? You can get that, too. The fun part of motorcycling clothes is the look, so have fun with it. But remember, motorcycling clothes serve an important safety function: They're made specifically to help protect you in a crash. I discuss riding gear in detail in Chapter 5.

Racing: Mikey (Michael Jordan) likes it!

Motorcycling is glamorous not only because of the people who ride motorcycles, but also because of the popularity of motorcycle sports even among non-motorcyclists. The top two motorcycle sports are *Supercross* and *roadracing*.

Supercross is racing that takes place in a stadium on a dirt course that features high jumps, tight turns, and rows of small hills that racers stutter over. These events are like rock concerts, with bright lights, giant megatron TV screens, fireworks, and professional riders who are as glamorous and popular, and almost as highly paid, as rock stars. If you go to any Supercross race around the country, you'll find thousands of fans screaming for their favorite riders, and probably only a small portion of the fans are motorcyclists. Supercross is great entertainment, something that motorcyclists are proud to be a part of.

Roadracing isn't actually racing on roads. This racing is exciting professional racing that occurs on asphalt tracks around the nation. In these races, riders hit 180 mph or more on their machines, and they ride elbow-to-elbow with other riders. The riders lean so far over in the tight turns that they scrape the knees of their leather racing suits, which have special protection. Some riders lean so far over that they scrape their elbows!

If you attend a professional roadrace, you may see former basketball legend Michael Jordan, who has his own racing team called Michael Jordan Motorsports. He has a two-rider team that races in Superbike and Superstock classes. Or you may bump into actress Catherine Bell or other celebrities who enjoy attending the races. With the colorful race team semitrucks, the carnival atmosphere at the track, and the big money that's put into professional motorcycle roadracing, these events have about all the glamour that you can stand.

Of course, you can find a lot of other motorcycle racing disciplines. But Supercross and roadracing are the two big glamour sports. I discuss some can't-miss races in Chapter 16.

Women in a Man's World

More women are getting into motorcycling. In fact, an estimated 10 percent of the motorcyclists on the road today are women. And that's great. After all, why should men have all the fun?



Motorcycle manufacturers and safety-gear makers recognize this growing market and are catering to women in various ways. Bike manufacturers have special programs to help women learn about motorcycling, and the safety gear producers are making products specifically for women. Women no longer have to buy ill-fitting men's jackets and pants that may not offer all the protection needed in a crash when the gear moves around upon impact with the asphalt.

Also gone are the days when a female rider had to buy a man's motorcycling boot in a small size to be able to stay safe while riding, or when she had very limited choices in jacket or pants styles. Women today have almost as many choices as men in jackets, pants, boots, gloves, and helmets. You can even find them with a feminine look. I discuss women's styles more in Chapter 6.

Some of the most beautiful women in the world ride motorcycles. For example, Catherine Bell, Lauren Hutton, and Angelina Jolie all ride bikes. A woman doesn't need to be big, look tough, and have a ton of tattoos to ride a motorcycle. And as more women ride motorcycles, more male motorcyclists are accepting them into the world of motorcycling not as women, but as fellow motorcyclists.

If guys are cool on bikes, then women are supercool

Male motorcyclists get a lot of respect when they have the skills to handle a motorcycle (which most men don't have) and when they're adventurous and look cool in their riding garb. Even so, they're men. As such, among motorcyclists men are no big deal. Women, on the other hand, *are* a big deal.

Women who ride are still a minority both among women in general and among motorcyclists. So for male motorcyclists, and even nonmotorcyclists, a woman who rides is a dream woman. Why? The perception may not match the reality, but women riders are seen as adventurous, outgoing, willing to take risks, and willing to step outside their comfort zones to enjoy life.

Female riders are supercool because they're strong women who decide to do something and then do it, who can stand up for themselves, and who can talk about motorcycling. Plus, they look great in today's motorcycling clothes cut specifically for women, with feminine designs. When a female motorcyclist walks into a restaurant, everyone knows she's special without her having to say a word.

And although guys have a great time giving women rides on their motorcycles and feeling the women hold them around the waist, true male motorcyclists prefer when women ride their own bikes. Why? The dynamics of a motorcycle change with a passenger, and a bike is a lot more fun to ride alone.

Dealing with special gender-related problems



Motorcycling is still very much a man's world, so women do face some problems. For example, on the whole, motorcycles are still made for men, so most are simply too big for women. However, motorcycles can be modified to make them safe for smaller women to ride, so don't think that you're forever locked out of motorcycling because of your size. (I talk about how to make these modifications in Chapter 6.)

And sometimes gaining acceptance as a motorcyclist by some men can be tough. But don't worry about those guys. Plenty of male motorcyclists will accept you and help you enjoy the joys of motorcycling.

Plus, along with the increase in female riders comes an increase in resources for them. You can join women's motorcycling clubs, where women socialize and ride together. And, today, more Web sites and magazines are geared specifically for female riders to share their stories and advice. Now truly is a good time to be a woman in the world of motorcycling.

Even Kids Can Ride

Motorcycling may seem difficult if you've never done it. But, really, how hard can it be? After all, 4-year-olds race motorcycles! Granted, they're very small motorcycles . . . and they don't go very fast . . . and they're riding in dirt. But, hey, those are 4-year-old kids riding them!

Talk to any motorcycling family in which the kids ride motorcycles in the dirt with dad (or even dad and mom) or race at a local track, and you discover a special bond. The kids are doing something they love, and the parents know exactly what their kids are up to every weekend because they're right there with them riding in the woods or at the racetrack.

How many other activities can you participate in with your kids? Plenty. But how many can you participate in that your kids actually think is cool? If you're a riding family, your kids are the envy of all the other kids on the block and at school. It's good, clean, wholesome recreation for the whole family. (I discuss children and motorcycling in further detail in Chapter 7.)

Getting kids started in motorcycling

It's great if your child wants to ride a motorcycle. In fact, it's something to encourage. After all, it's a lot better than having your kid hang out at the local

mall. And it's a safer sport than you think, provided you ensure that your child has the proper training and safety gear and is well supervised.

Your child may not be old enough to drive a car or ride a streetbike, but he or she certainly can ride a dirt bike. And there are a lot of good pint-sized bikes available on the market for them. Safety gear and excellent training also are available for the youngsters. And while this hobby can be expensive, it also can be done cheaply if you pick your bike and safety gear wisely. (I discuss buying a used bike in Chapter 9.)



Riding a dirt bike will make you a better street rider, as I discuss in Chapter 3, so it will give your child valuable skills if he or she decides to get a streetbike later.

Kids + motorcycling = fun

Get your child a dirt bike, get one for yourself, get some dirt bike training, and then head out on the trails and have a ball. Riding with your kid is fun, and it's a great way to enjoy being with each other riding at a slow, leisurely pace. If you ride at your child's pace, you'll both stay out of trouble, no matter how much of a novice rider you are.



Take along some snacks and water or sports drinks to enjoy while stopped alongside the trail. Chat a little about riding and what's going on in your child's life, and I guarantee you'll make memories that will last forever.

Keys to Riding Safely

It's unavoidable. After you start talking about getting a motorcycle, your well-meaning family and friends will look at you like you've grown a second head. Then they'll start telling you tales of people they know who got motorcycles and then proceeded to seriously injure or even kill themselves. While some of the stories may be true, it's also true that people are killed driving a car, walking across an intersection, or even playing a sport like football or baseball.

Sure, motorcycling is dangerous, especially when compared to driving a car. After all, if a car hits another car, the drivers have a good chance of escaping serious injury because of the safety features of the car and because the driver is surrounded by heavy metal to absorb some of the impact. A motorcycle rider is much more vulnerable and likely to suffer injury if hit by another vehicle.



But motorcyclists have some big advantages over drivers of other vehicles when it comes to safety. For example, a motorcyclist on a nimble bike can accelerate out of the way of trouble or stop more quickly than a car or truck driver can to avoid a collision. And motorcyclists spend a lot of time practicing safe riding techniques to ensure their survival on the road.

Enrolling in basic training for motorcyclists

Although there's no boot camp for aspiring motorcyclists, there are great beginner motorcycle safety training classes run by friendly instructors. These classes are available to anyone with the desire to learn how to ride a bike and the tuition money to plunk down. This basic training is a great way for anyone interested in motorcycling to learn a couple things:

- ✓ Whether they would enjoy riding a motorcycle, since the class gives a taste of what the experience is like.
- ✓ Whether they even have the coordination needed to ride a motorcycle. Some people don't.



More importantly, though, basic rider training classes teach new riders how to be safe while riding their motorcycles. They do so not only by teaching basic riding techniques such as accelerating, stopping, turning, and swerving, but also by teaching what dangers to watch for while riding, such as a car making a left turn and pulling into a rider's path or a car merging into the rider's lane on the freeway. I discuss getting the best motorcycle safety training on the planet in Chapter 3.

Developing special riding skills

Besides basic training, motorcyclists have the opportunity to take advanced training and to attend classes held at racetracks to hone their accelerating, braking, and cornering skills. And all the skills they learn in basic classes, advanced classes, or even on the racetrack, they practice every day when they ride their motorcycles.



Motorcyclists know that practice is the key to using important skills, such as braking and swerving, without having to give the technique any thought. They see every curve as a challenge to determine whether it can be negotiated with perfect technique. Every stop sign is an opportunity to practice smooth stops and starts, and every empty parking lot presents an opportunity to practice slow, tight turns. (I discuss safe riding techniques in Chapters 14 and 15.)

