





# Women on the move

More women than ever are shifting gears and taking to the road on motorcycles

BY DONN J. BROUS

The next group of motorcyclists you see on the road may not be men.

Women are the fastest-growing segment of motorcyclists in the United States today. They are joining the man's world of motorcycling—moving forward from the passenger seat to the driver's seat, buying motorcycles of their own and opening up motorcycle-related businesses. According to a recent survey by the U.S. Motorcycle Industry Council, one out of 10 riders today on American roads is a woman. Between 1998 and 2003, more than 4 million women registered as the primary operators of a motorcycle, an increase of 34 percent.

This national trend can be seen here in Georgia.

JoAnna Murray, co-founder and co-owner of Atlanta Motorcycle Schools, says, "What we've observed in recent years is that more and more women are signing up for classes because they are excited about learning to ride—not because a partner has urged them to do so. Lots of our students are single women and women married to men who have no interest in riding. These women are pursuing their own dreams and discovering a new passion."

Chad Burns, manager of Georgia's Motorcycle



This T-shirt seen at the motorcycle conference in Athens last summer says it all.

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Safety Program in Atlanta, reports that women are participating more. "During the 20 years that I've been with the organization, there have always been a lot of women taking our training programs but not staying with the sport; that's what's changed in recent years. Not only are they continuing to ride after the basic program, they are getting their licenses and buying their own motorcycles. That's what we've seen here in Georgia."

Chad goes on to say that he believes specific developments are supporting this new trend. "Bike and clothing manufacturers are responding to

women's needs. They are producing bikes that are lighter and offer lower seat height, an advantage for slighter builds. Manufacturers of riding gear have also caught on that women want gear that is designed for them." This is a very good thing, he adds. "It is making women safer and better protected on the road and making it easier for them to be involved."

Not only is the availability of women's riding gear in step with the increased interest by women riders, it is also opening doors for women interested in the business side of motorcycling. Dahlonega entrepreneur Judy Mecham launched a retail and Web business, "She-

**Opposite page, far left:** Relaxing atop her powerful German sport bike (BMW K1200), Carol Youorski, a surgeon's medical assistant in Atlanta, got "hooked" on riding at age 43. She says, "I love the uniqueness of being a woman in a man's sport." **Opposite page, left:** Co-founder and co-owner of Atlanta Motorcycle Schools, JoAnna Murray not only instructs but rides regularly for her own pleasure. Here, she takes a break during one of her road trips to warmer climes.



**Far left:** Astride her cruiser, Genevieve Schmitt, of Montana, began riding in her 20s as a way to get out of the rat race of L.A. on weekends; it became a full-time passion, on and off the bike. Genevieve is the founding editor of *Woman Rider* magazine and [www.womenridersnow.com](http://www.womenridersnow.com). **Left:** "I love any kind of riding, including an occasional track day at Road Atlanta [in Winder]," says Laura Mitchell of Grayson. **Lower left:** Laura adds, "Getting off the beaten path is refreshing and rejuvenating."

Rides," five years ago following a frustrating search for gear to fit her own petite frame. An active rider who valued comfortable—and fashionable—protection, she undertook the challenge of finding the gear and accessories best suited to women. She now offers everything a woman needs to ride in style and in safety at [www.she-rides.com](http://www.she-rides.com).

Another Georgia woman, Carol Youorski,

a passionate rider and a surgeon's assistant in Atlanta, makes a unique contribution to the sport, one that women especially appreciate. When not on duty at the hospital, Carol often attends educational motorcycle rallies to demonstrate how to pick up a dropped bike. Most women (and even some men) fear the embarrassment of being stuck roadside with a bike "rubber up" instead of "rubber down." Carol's simple technique using body positioning and leg leverage makes it almost effortless to right a bike of any size. Her demo is always on the agenda for Georgia's all-women meeting of "The Twisty

*(Continued on page 20)*

### To learn more about motorcycling, visit these sites:

- [www.amadirectlink.com](http://www.amadirectlink.com): American Motorcycle Association
- [www.atlantamotorcycleschools.com](http://www.atlantamotorcycleschools.com): Private instruction
- [www.mic.org](http://www.mic.org): Motorcycle Industry Council
- [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org): Motorcycle Safety Foundation—state-run classes
- [www.motormaid.org](http://www.motormaid.org): Motor Maids—First motorcycle organization in North America for women
- [www.she-rides.com](http://www.she-rides.com): Georgia woman-run retailer—gear and accessories for women riders
- [www.two.com](http://www.two.com): Two Wheels Only (TWO)—First-of-its-kind lodge and campground for motorcyclists, located in Suches
- [www.twistysisterz.com](http://www.twistysisterz.com): Organized women's riding group; hosted by TWO
- [www.womenonwheels.org](http://www.womenonwheels.org): For ladies around the world, whether they drive or ride
- [www.wowatlanta.org](http://www.wowatlanta.org): Atlanta chapter of Women on Wheels
- [www.wimausa.org](http://www.wimausa.org): U.S. Division of Women's International Motorcycle Association
- [www.womeninthewind.org](http://www.womeninthewind.org): Since 1979, promoting a positive image of women motorcyclists
- [www.womenridersnow.com](http://www.womenridersnow.com): Online motorcycle magazine launched in 2006

**‘There is something exciting and almost magical about seeing hundreds of women parading by on motorcycles. These riders project an energy that speaks volumes about the joy and exhilaration a woman experiences on a motorcycle.’**

—Genevieve Schmitt of [www.womenridersnow.com](http://www.womenridersnow.com)

*(Continued from page 19)*

Sisters Riding Club,” held in Suches at Two Wheels Only Campground and Lodge each August. The event focuses on ways to help women be more confident riders.

For Laura Mitchell of Grayson, a nurse practitioner in Lawrenceville, riding has been a way of life for 35 years, starting on a dirt bike at age 13. “I love riding the twisties in the mountains, fire roads through the woods, an occasional track day at Road Atlanta or *any* kind of riding. Getting off the beaten path is refreshing and rejuvenating. Challenging yourself with the terrain gives you inner strength and peace.”

New to the sport of riding her own motorcycle is Gina Lopez of Alpharetta. “I’ve always wanted to ride. My dad used to take me as his passenger and I just loved it. When I got married to [Atlanta Braves player] Javier [Lopez,], we decided to each get bikes. The first few times I tried to ride, I was extremely intimidated. There’s a lot to know, and I think for most women, unless they’ve had past experience, it takes a lot of practice to become confident. Following lessons with Atlanta Motorcycle Schools, I’ve gained that confidence. Each day I can hardly wait to go riding,” she says.

Women throughout the United States are discovering how much motorcycling can enhance their lives. Genevieve Schmitt, of Montana, founding editor of *Woman Rider* and an online magazine, [www.womenridersnow.com](http://www.womenridersnow.com), says that riding has changed her life—redefined her life—and has taught her how to function in a man’s domain. “I believe that all women who ride have



KENNY SIMMONS



**Above left:** Laura Mitchell, of Grayson, is a no-nonsense, accomplished rider with 35 years of experience on all types of terrain.

**Above:** Former Braves player Javier Lopez comes to cheer on Gina, his motorcycle-riding partner and wife, during a training session at Atlanta Motorcycle Schools.

had to dig deep to find their inner strength. Once they find it, they also find a freedom that’s unexplainable. Riding can become an outlet for self-expression and improved self esteem—it has for me,” she says.

When you see a motorcyclist on the road, in Georgia and elsewhere, chances are it’s a woman—and she’s got a big smile on her face! 🍷

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## Georgia in the motorcycle limelight



PHOTO COURTESY AMADIRECTLINK.COM

The American Motorcycle Association held its 2006 “Women & Motorcycling Conference” in Athens this past summer. According to Tom Lindsay, public information director for AMA, Georgia was chosen as the site for the 2006 conference “for its excellent facilities and for its proximity to great motorcycle riding.”

Lindsay says the 2006 conference nearly doubled its participation rate and that 45 states were represented as well as eight foreign countries. The Athens Convention and Visitor’s Bureau estimated the economic impact for the community at more than \$675,000.

Educational seminars included the how-to of bike mechanics, off-road riding, real-world advice for threatening situations, what to do at an accident scene and what it takes to establish a career in this sport.

To learn more about the conference held in Georgia or upcoming ones, see [www.womenandmotorcycling.com](http://www.womenandmotorcycling.com).