

[HOME](#) [STORE](#) [MAGAZINE](#) [MOTO LIFE](#) [BLOG](#)[Contact](#) [Distribution](#) [Advertise](#)

Getting Things Donn

Can't find gear? Don't know how a helmet should fit? Who you gonna call?

Jul.01.2009

By Karryll Nason

Joanne Donn, aka the Gear Chic, seems to be in perpetual motion. Three jobs, multiple interests, and she's still bursting with energy. She's got lots to say about women riders, motorcycles vs. scooters (not so different in many ways), the importance of MSF rider courses and having the right gear, and how she founded Gear Chic (www.gearchic.com).

How it all began...on a whim and a honeymoon.

Joanne says it had never entered her mind to ride a scooter or motorcycle until 2003, when she and her husband Evan rented a scooter on their Las Vegas honeymoon. They had so much fun that upon returning to San Francisco, Evan bought a lemon acid Aprilia Scarabeo 50cc Ditech. Joanne learned to ride it in the Presidio and then rode every day for a year, and got her M1 license. Evan, not getting any time on the scooter, bought a used Ninja EX250. At first, Joanne didn't want to bother learning to shift, but eventually she learned to ride it, too. Evan upgraded to a Yamaha Seca II and then to a Suzuki VX800, while Joanne got a Kawasaki Z750S. Just recently, she has moved on to a 2003 Suzuki SV650S, which she waxes rhapsodic about, "riding the SV feels right to me; everything works for me and my body, and my riding style. It just fits me. Now I actually want to ride, any excuse to ride and I'll do it." Until she got the SV, she hadn't realized that her Kawasaki wasn't the right fit for her, a little too top-heavy, too wide, with uncomfortable rear suspension. So bikes are like gear—having the right ones makes all the difference. The moral to this story is...shop around, try different things, until you find just the right ones—bikes and gear—for you.

From newbie to MSF instructor...

While attending the MSF class to learn to more comfortably ride the EX250, the instructor suggested Joanne become a RiderCoach. Joanne began six months of training and now works one weekend a month as an instructor for Bay Area Motorcycle Training. This is how I first met Joanne, as one of the instructors for the all-scooter Experienced Rider Course arranged by San Francisco Scooter Girls last August. I could see why she was asked to become an instructor -- she was friendly, non-intimidating, encouraging and super knowledgeable, always ready with helpful advice about what we were doing wrong or could do better. A scooterist herself, she did not treat us as simply more feeble-minded, less-skilled motorcycle

riders.

When I mentioned this to Joanne, comparing the ERC to my seven years earlier dismal experience with the beginner course in San Diego (too humiliating to talk about!), she filled me in on the major changes in MSF courses the last five years. Courses now take an entirely different approach to learning, based on how adults learn in a relaxed environment; they are much more learner-centered, less "militaristic," and more fun. Appreciating the importance of lifelong learning, the MSF also requires RiderCoach re-certification every two years, and each coach must take a class of some kind (not necessarily motorcycle-related) to experience being a learner as well as a teacher. Joanne clearly relishes teaching, sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm for riding.

Gear Chic goes online.

Joanne is a big believer in ATGATT (All The Gear All The Time) and this inspired her to start Gear Chic ("Chick"), a blog devoted to helping women find the right gear. She quips that it combines "two of my favorite pastimes, riding and shopping," but she is quite serious about the importance of having the right

Issue 66 Articles

- ▷ [Cafe Man](#)
- ▷ [XT 500 Café Racer](#)
- ▷ [Alloy Age Ducati Café Racer](#)
- ▷ [My 1992 Storz Performance Cafe racer](#)
- ▷ [Hung off: the look without the stuff](#)
- ▷ [Open roads, open doors](#)
- ▷ [The Catalina GP 2010 with Wade Boyd #102](#)
- ▷ [The harleyton 45](#)
- ▷ [Sanity and Culpability](#)

gear for safe and enjoyable riding. As she says, "Something you may not realize is that wearing proper gear helps you ride better, pay attention to what's going on around you, and anticipate those potential situations 4-1/2 seconds ahead of you. When you have nothing else distracting you, it's a lot easier to focus on the ride. There's so much going on around you when you're on two wheels, it's important to minimize all the risks that are within your power to control."

Joanne established Gear Chic in 2007, dedicated to "real curves, real women, real gear," after taking a parttime job at Scuderia West in San Francisco (look for her there weekends) to learn how to better help women find the best gear - for their body type and the kind of riding they do, from scooters to sportbikes. Her blog reviews all types of gear and accessories, inviting reader participation of questions, comments and other reviews by experienced riders. As Joanne puts it, "If you buy something that doesn't fit you quite right or isn't the right type of gear for your riding style, you probably won't appreciate it, and you might not even wear it all the time. Why would you? If your gear isn't working for you, or doing what you need it to do, it'll make it really hard for you to justify spending the money on a better piece of gear next time. I think it changes the way you look at gear and why it's worth spending so much money on." What's next for the Gear Chic?

Now, two years later, Joanne and her website are becoming more and more well-known. She spoke about selecting the right gear—what to shop for and how it's supposed to work—at the 2008-2009 International Motorcycle Shows in San Mateo and Chicago. (Read her talk at <http://gearchic.blogspot.com/search?q=Dress+for+the+ride>.) She also does a 20-minute product evaluation segment the first Tuesday of each month on Tom Lowdermilk's podcast Side Stand Up (www.sidestandup.com). And she has plans to produce a video to illustrate common fit issues in finding the ideal jacket.

Joanne recently added a forum to the Gear Chic website, to provide for more online interaction, as well as a venue for social exchange among women riders. In her spare time (after her full-time "day job" as ops manager for an innovative consulting firm in the Presidio), Joanne has designed a couple of T-shirts with snazzy graphics produced in small runs—you can order the latest on her website. www.gearchic.com.

[· Check her out here...](#)

