

# Motorcycles stir woman's passion

**LONG BEACH:** Rider will speak at expo.

By Al Rudis Staff Writer

Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a scooter and a motorcycle.

That version of the song could be the theme for Joanne Donn, whose honeymoon kick-started her infatuation with two-wheelers.

Donn will be on the floor of the Progressive International Motorcycle Show at the Long Beach Convention Center from Friday to Dec. 19 sharing her experience, expertise and passion at the Women Ride Experience area.

It all started in Las Vegas. "My husband had always talked about riding," said Donn, speaking from her office in San Francisco.

She's an office manager at a design and development company that works on such consumer technology products as Bluetooth headsets and MP3 players.

"He had been researching getting a scooter, and when we got there on our honeymoon, we got one of those coupon books where this scooter rental business was offering a discount."

She ended up riding behind him for the five-day honeymoon, and her husband bought a scooter soon after they returned to San Francisco.

But he works out of his home in the Sunset District doing corporate video production, filmmaking, web development and programming, while she was taking a bus to her job in the financial district. So she began riding the scooter to work every day.

After a year, he bought a motorcycle since his scooter had turned into her scooter, and she took a class in motorcycle safety.

"As soon as we bought the

## Want to go?

**What:** Progressive International Motorcycle Show. The expo includes hundreds of 2011 bikes and scooters, tricked-out choppers, stunt shows and female-friendly cycles.

**Where:** Long Beach Convention Center, 300 Ocean Blvd.

**When:** 4 to 9 p.m. Friday; 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

motorcycle, I started riding it to work every day, and that for me was really the moment where I realized I wanted to ride motorcycles," Donn said. Eventually, they sold the scooter and bought a second motorcycle for her husband, and since then, she's transitioned from her Kawasaki Ninja 250 to a Kawasaki 750s to her current 2003 Suzuki SV650S.

Donn says women starting to ride might want to consider a similar pattern. "If you just Google 'best beginner motorcycles,' you will find lists that people have compiled through the years of all different kinds of motorcycles.

There is one part of her early experience that she would change.

"I think a lot of women don't do any homework. They feel like I did. I relied on my husband, and he did all the homework, until the last two or three years when I did my own research to figure out what I thought was the best for me, not what he or other people think is best for me."

She advises beginning women riders to take a class first. "I would tell her to find a motorcycle safety class that is recommended by the state. Many times the California DMV will accept completion of

Saturday; and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday

**Admission:** \$15 adults, \$6 children 6 to 11, free for children 5 and younger; on Family Day, Dec. 19, children 12 and younger are free with a paying adult; \$2 off adult online tickets with promo code TX2 (see website below).

**Info:** 800-331-5706 or [www.motorcycleshows.com](http://www.motorcycleshows.com).

a course as a way to get your license.

The classes can be found at the Motorcycle Safety Foundation website, [www.msf-usa.org](http://www.msf-usa.org), where they are listed by ZIP code

"After she takes the class, she'll have a very clear picture, yes or no. Then, hopefully, she's going to start doing research on what kind of bike to get, making a list like, what do I need in my motorcycle, what am I going to do with it, am I going to ride it to work?"

"And then start reading and seeing what's out there. She should also go to all the dealerships in her area, no matter what the brand is. Even if she's not considering a Harley (-Davidson), I would still go look at them and sit on them. If you don't look at everything before you buy, you just don't know what could be there for you."

Donn said that often new riders make friends in the safety class and create a support group. "And Meetup.com is a great way to find groups for any kind of hobby," she said. "There are a lot of motorcycle groups out there."

She took a solitary approach herself. "Honestly, most of the time, I think that's the best option," she said, "because motorcycling is an individual activity. It's something that

you have to accomplish on your own and figure out. And if you don't take the initiative to learn by yourself as much as you can at first, it's not going to help."

She would match her passion for cycling against any man's but notices differences in approach between the sexes. "For women, the motivation is more fun," she said. "I want to ride because I enjoy it and I like being challenged. It's not about competing with friends or anyone else because they have something that I don't."

"For men, it tends to come from a competitive point of view, like 'My friend has a Harley. I need to get one.'

"We don't go out and buy a \$30,000 motorcycle as our first motorcycle without any kind of thought as to training or safety. I think, in general, women are far more cautious than men. We're a little more thoughtful about our bodies."

"The training is a huge factor in the way we minimize our risk levels, and you're also being taught crucial emergency riding technique and maneuvers to avoid situations. So training is number one."

"Number two is the gear aspect of it. Invest as much money, time and effort as you can to buy gear and accessories to minimize the risk of injury. Also, when you're lacking the right gear and the right bike, you're mentally distracted. You need the right gear to let you focus more on the riding aspect." Donn is the founder of [gearchic.com](http://gearchic.com), a website that provides information about protective motorcycle gear for women.

Even with good training, a good bike and good gear, accidents will happen. Donn has had two.

She's still riding. "For me, I love it too much," she said. "I would never give it up. Not yet. Maybe if it was a severe accident, I might. I don't know because I've never been there."

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