

# A Passion for Motorcycling

BY BETTY ANNE CLARK

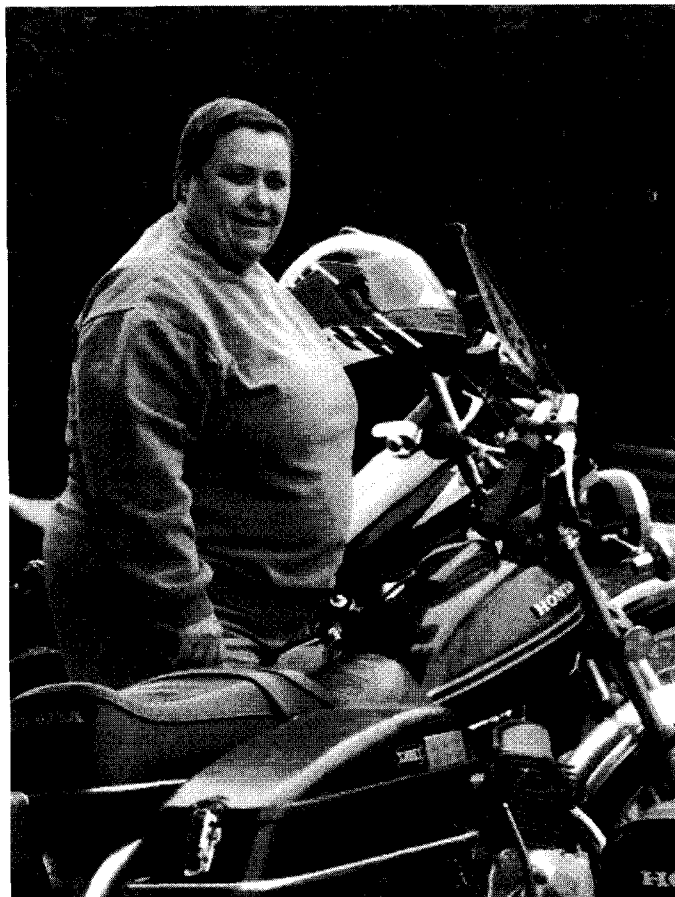
*L'auteure nous parle de son intérêt pour la motocyclette et comment ce sport est devenu une passion et une partie intégrante de sa vie..*

What is passion for motorcycling all about? This desire to be on the open road with no more than an inch of rubber on each of two wheels keeping you from becoming a statistic? When did I realize that motorcycling would become as important to me as life itself?

Thinking back, as a young girl, I was always interested in sports and speed. We used to have a summer cottage in the Kawarthas where I was able to satisfy some of my desire for speed. Once I nailed two four-by-eight sheets of plywood into a wedge shape, cut out a place for me to sit in, and then added a transom board that I powered with a ten-horsepower engine. My “sea flea” was red and white and my summers at the cottage past quickly as I spent most of my time flying in my “sea flea” over the lake. I was a real “tomboy” and my mother despaired that I would never meet someone and marry if all I knew was how to compete with the boys! I didn’t care. Boys were fun to hang around with and race against. Besides I was learning all sorts of things about engines and mechanical things, which I really enjoyed, had a flare for and a skill I would be grateful for in later years.

As I grew older joining a women’s hockey league satisfied my passion for speed and sport. Again, my mother despaired, especially when I lost my front tooth! I’m sure my parents thought they were looking out for my best interest when they tried to steer me away from anything that made me “more mannish” in their eyes. Let’s face it, the only reason I was allowed to play hockey was because Mom loved the sport and I played with all girls. She used to get all bent out of shape when I played with the boys during pick-up games at our local parkette. At least playing in a league and being a member of the Ontario and Canadian Ladies Champions was acceptable. Besides it was a sport and our neighbour Johnny Bower, who was my mother’s favourite, thought it was okay.

But in the ’60s there was no place to play hockey in the summer and so it wasn’t long before I became enchanted with motorcycles. At some point I just could not hide it any more and, thanks to Bob, a really good friend and avid motorcyclist, I gave in to my desire to try the maneuverability and speed of the open road, not in a car, but on a motorcycle. Having found an old picture of my



*Photo: Brenda Cranney*

Dad on a 1940 Indian, I realized I had a little leverage in my quest to own a motorcycle. My parents relented when they realized that what I was looking at was not a real motorcycle, but rather a motorized bicycle—a moped to be exact. I convinced them it would save money spent on transit fares or buying a car. Proudly, I spent an entire summer on my 50cc moped. My Mom was wrong about the boys because I did meet someone who thought it was great that I would even consider riding my own machine, even if it was small. Even back then, true motorcyclists didn’t care what you rode; they just were pleased that you rode! That summer, with a little help from my friend, I obtained my motorcycle license, something I never told my parents about.

I finished high school and started training as a medical technologist. Between school, work, and starting to date seriously, I sold the moped and focused on playing women’s hockey. Years passed, I married, and talking about motorcycles became limited to private conversations with



Photo: Brenda Cranney

my brother-in-law, Drew, who shared a similar passion. Being only five feet tall meant I just couldn't touch the ground on Drew's "Elsinor" and so was destined to watch with quiet envy as he rode off.

We moved to Brampton in 1977, and once again the desire to ride on a motorcycle and embrace the feeling of freedom it offered began to take control of my very soul. JJ, the neighbour across the street, was an older man with a magnificent Harley in his garage. We would spend hours talking about riding and he would tell me stories of all the women riders he'd met over the years. He told me about Hazel Kobb, the "Motorcycling Grandma" who rode her Harley to the four corners of the U.S.A.. That story still lingers in my mind and, I guess, it was the beginning of an adventure that is still alive today. Her book, *On the Perimeter*, continues to inspire me even now.

With a little motorcycle shop at the corner, a neighbour to help me get started, and a partner who truly understood my need for self-expression, it wasn't long before I had my first real motorcycle. It was a 125 cc Honda street machine—small but definitely a real motorcycle!

One evening, I arrived home from work late. I went to get the "bike" out of the garage only to find it missing along with my partner! Needless to say, he too became interested in this exciting sport. As the years passed, larger and more powerful motorcycles replaced the smaller street

machines in our garage. I began learning how to service my own bikes and soon became very skilled in motorcycle repairs.

In the summer of 1984, my husband, our friends Graham and Briegetha and their two children, set off on a trip of a lifetime. Four motorcycles, one with a sidecar "rig" and one pulling a trailer, we headed west. Using Interstate 90 as a guide we traveled across the U.S. through Wall South Dakota, Mount Rushmore, Yellowstone National Park and, after crossing the mountains, eventually traveling north toward Vancouver. Our trip back saw us ride through snow-covered roads in the Canadian Rockies, a prairie fire in Saskatchewan, and swarms of locusts in Manitoba. It was an adventure I will never forget.

A few years later all of our lives changed and my partner and I moved in different directions. I was alone, without a partner or friends who rode, and with a 500 cc Honda Shadow in the garage. Guess I'll sell this machine, I thought, I'll never be able to handle this on my own! My non-riding friends and family echoed that sentiment. Well, almost all my family. Aunt Gwen, a really wonderful woman—75 years old going on 40—told me that it didn't matter what others thought. She reminded me of the many accomplishments I could be proud of and challenged me to be true to myself. A little hard to do at a time when my whole world had come crashing down around



*Photo: Brenda Cranney*

me and all I could think about was not “rocking the boat” and doing whatever I needed to in order to be liked! Sell that bike is what I had to do!

I went to that little motorcycle shop which was now much larger and in a different location. I talked to one of the salesmen with tears in my eyes and asked if they could sell my “bike.” The best advice was then forthcoming: “Betty Anne, go out to the Brampton Motorcycle Association meeting, get to know some of the great people there and rethink your decision once you have meet a few others who share your passion.” And, “oh yes, there are a few ladies who ride in the club.” I left the shop, thinking about what Aunt Gwen had said and determined to be strong, I made the connection and I have never looked back. The club made me feel very welcome and today I have some of the nicest friends anyone could ever ask for. We all share a common passion for motorcycling and spend as much time as we can fulfilling our dreams of the open road.

Getting connected with the Brampton Motorcycle Association proved to be another beginning of sorts. I began to ride even more and became interested in other aspects of the sport. In the past 15 years I have been involved with Ontario Road Riders Association and was the Chair for several years. I helped to write a report on motorcycle accidents in Ontario and was Chair of the Motorcycle Riders Safety Council. I also belong to the

Canadian Vintage Motorcycle Group and currently am treasurer for the National Rally held on Father’s Day weekend every year in Paris, Ontario.

Owning six machines, I need to be able to do my own service and repairs. I have a fully equipped workshop and, with some assistance, have built more than one machine from a “basket case.”

I need to get one thing out of the way. Motorcycling is a male-dominated sport, but it is not just for men. There are plenty of women who ride and do it very well. I have met women who race motorcycles and sidecars, who have been to places like Alaska and toured Europe, Africa, and South America on motorcycles. I know plenty of men who envy us in silence, just as I did, before joining this very special breed of people, the motorcyclist. Let’s also get something else clear: I’m a motorcyclist, not a “biker.”

Over the years I have enjoyed the company of some really interesting and accomplished people. Many of them are women and many of them, like me, felt that motorcycling was something we just didn’t talk about with others because it required too much explaining. “Are you crazy? Do you want to kill yourself?” or, “Do you just do this to find a man?” and so on. Times have really changed. Years ago, women got into riding because a brother, father, or husband accompanied them and supported their need to ride. Today, it is not uncommon for a 50- to 60-year-old

professional woman to sign up for a motorcycle course, buy a bike, and take to the road. Many get their license before telling their friends and even their mates. One friend hid her new helmet under the bed for three months before telling her husband that she had her learners permit and was about to take a riding course!

Why you might ask, would a woman want to risk so much in older years to learn to ride. When I asked some friends who share my love of motorcycling, here is what they replied. They all used words like speed, control, risk, accomplishment, sport, freedom, and independence over and over again. I asked some male friends about women on motorcycles and they responded with similar words: speed, control, risk, freedom, sport, and independence. One friend in particular reminded me how proud he is to know women who truly enjoy the sport, who go beyond wanting to ride because their mate or potential mate wanted them to ride. He talked about how women who really embraced the sport are self-directed, independent thinkers, and a force to be reckoned with!

A look back in history shows that women have been riding for years. They were few and far between but they are in the history books for us to remember. As well, there are a number of motorcycle clubs dedicated just to women riders. One started in the late '30s and the following, taken from the Motor Maid's web site describes this:

In the late '30s, a young Woman motorcycle enthusiast named Linda Dugeau of Providence, Rhode Island, conceived the idea that there might be a number of women who owned their own motorcycles and might be interested in becoming acquainted with one another. Linda wrote to dealers, riders and anyone she thought might know of women motorcycle riders. After this extensive search, she compiled a list from which the Motor Maid organization was founded with 51 Charter members in 1940. The American Motorcycle Association Charter #509 was issued to the club in 1941.

As I begin a new era in my life, semi-retirement from a very satisfying career as a medical laboratory technologist, I have dreams of the open road, of the twists and turns that will challenge my skills, and of the inner piece that will come when riding my newest addition to the collection. I sit here dreaming of the sportbike I once owned and visions of the "twisties" in the Parry Sound area bringing back feelings of both satisfaction and self-fulfillment. I dream of taking a ride in a sidecar racer with women from Etobicoke who have become famous for how fast they can maneuver the tracks at Shannville, Mossport and elsewhere.

Being without a motorcycle would be like losing a part of myself. Each year as spring approaches the excitement grows. Warm days and melting snow bring with them an energy only a motorcyclist can understand. The freedom,

the open road, the sense of accomplishment, the inner peace that accompanies every ride remains an important part of that passion that I feel when I'm on my "bike."

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## KELLY ANN MALONE

### "Newborn"

I can't believe my eyes  
You are soft and mesmerizing  
Every move you make takes my breath away

Your mouth opens and closes with delight  
Your ears so small but real  
You smell of powder and whimsy

I wrap you tight in place of me  
I put you down to slumber  
Then wait anxiously for you to awake

Your cry is symphony to me  
Again to be near you  
You gaze up at me  
I hope I please you

I keep you warm  
I nourish your body  
You nourish my soul

*Kelly Ann Malone has been writing poems since she was 12 years old.*