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Taking the driver's seat More women buying motorcycles

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GWEN NEWMAN For the Daily Record/Sunday News

Susan Jones took up skiing at the age of 40 and bought her first motorcycle when she celebrated 50.

"I have a somewhat adventurous spirit, and I wanted to try something interesting," Jones said. "Whenever I hit those 10-year markers, I tend to do something different."

She has since purchased a second bike, a larger model that provides more stability and is more comfortable to ride - an important factor when planning a cross-country trek.

Now 53, Jones admits she gets a surprised expression when most learn she is the proud owner of a Yamaha VStar 1100.

"I'm executive director of the September House Senior Center," the West Manchester Township resident said. "So people are surprised at first - pleasantly though. And I would never have dreamed I'd like it as much as I do."

Jones is not alone in her newfound love of two-wheelers. An estimated 10 percent of motorcyclists today are women, and the numbers are climbing, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council. Women's riding clubs and motorcycle magazines provide a new forum where female cyclists can bond and travel together.

Marketing dollars, meanwhile, are spent targeting the female buyer.

"The fastest growing segment in cycling is women and motorcycling," said Joe Galie Jr., a salesman at B&B Sales & Service in Lancaster.

He said the trend is evidenced by new merchandise that showcases pink leather jackets, helmets with flower designs and bikes and attire specifically designed for a woman's comfort.

"Female gear takes up about a quarter of our floor space," agreed Dan Alloway, a regional general manager at the Ray Wilt Motorcycle ATV Superstore in Hanover. "Manufacturers are making bikes smaller for females and making different designs that appeal to women."

Turnover of merchandise is also much faster with a steady stream of new fashions, accessories and other biking gear.

Alloway said female cyclists often are the wife or girlfriend of a seasoned rider.

"They're tired of riding on the back. They want a little more control."

Della Uhlik, who lives in West Manchester Township, has been riding motorcycles for years. She grew up driving a dirt bike, just like the local boys, then "moved up" to her first motorcycle in 1999, six months after her husband purchased his.

There were far fewer females on the road then, but Uhlik said the motorcycling world has always welcomed women. Today, she rides a 2005 Harley-Davidson Sports- ter 883 Low.

For Uhlik, the only surprise is that it took this long for fellow females to see the beauty of the bike.

"I ride as often as I can," she said. "If it's nice out, I come home and hop on the bike. You feel free. It's open. I like everything about it." PIC: DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS - BIL BOWDEN Jones says she gets a surprised expression when most learn she is the proud owner of a Yamaha VStar 1100. 'They're tired of riding on the back,' said Dan Alloway, a manager at Ray Wilt Motorcycle ATV in Hanover, of female motorcycle riders. 'They want a little more control.' PIC: DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS - BIL BOWDEN Jones, executive director of the September House Senior Center, participates in a recent gathering of the Red Riders, a group of motorcycle enthusiasts. PIC: DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS - BIL BOWDEN Susan Jones recently joined the Red Riders, a group of motorcycle enthusiasts. Jones, who bought her first motorcycle when she turned 50, is not alone in her love of two-wheelers. An estimated 10 percent of motorcyclists today are women, and the numbers are climbing.

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