

FEMMOTO: Where the Girls Are...

Story by Teri Conrad, Photos by Andrea Wilson



If you're looking for a safe and friendly environment where you can demo the latest in motorcycles from a variety of manufacturers, Femmoto at Las Vegas Motor Speedway may be just the place for you. But there is one small requirement – you must be a woman in order to participate!

What started out as a one-off women's track day in 2001 fueled what has now become Femmoto, an annual women's motorcycle event where women can ride on a track without feeling intimidated. In what has traditionally been a male-dominated environment, Femmoto caters specifically to the female motorcyclist and is open to both novice and intermediate riders. This event sells out each year and continues to grow in popularity. Last year there were 330 riders, up from 150 riders the previous year.

For those who prefer the dirt to the track, Kawasaki offered a beginning Dirt Bike School, where approximately 60 riders participated and learned the fundamentals of dirt bike riding.

The classes were held near the motocross course on the flat sections where students learned the basics of dirt riding. The course ran

approximately four hours and the finale included a ride along the perimeter of the MX track where the female students got to practice their newfound skills riding over some basic obstacles.

"Those who participated in the class found that their new skills helped them with their road riding by giving them a better sense of balance, better bike control, better use of both brakes, and an understanding of the importance of body positioning," explained MSF Dirt Bike School instructor, Mercedes Gonzalez-Natvig. "One of the best things about an all-female event like this is the amount of enthusiasm women have around their peers. There is so much encouragement going on. I was very impressed with how quickly the majority of women picked up on the skills," continued Gonzalez-Natvig. Kawasaki provided several KLX™125 and KLX 250 bikes for the class, along with boots, helmets, goggles and gloves.

According to Kawasaki public relations manager, Jan Plessner "Women appreciate positive role models. When a woman sees other women doing what she wants to do, it gives her the confidence and the inspiration to try it."

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At Femmoto, registrants can sign-up for demo rides on the latest product offerings from manufacturers like Kawasaki, Aprilia, Buell, KYMCO, Moto Guzzi, Ducati and others, while testing their skills in a controlled environment on a closed-road circuit under the direction of instructors from Sportbike Track Time, the premier on-track specialists.

Part of why this event has become so popular, attracting women from all over the country, is that you don't have to be a sportbike rider to participate. Cruiser riders can benefit from a day on the track as well, and learn valuable skills which can translate into improved and more enjoyable riding on the street. Track riding is not so much about speed as it is about learning the feel of the track. It's more of a mental exercise which requires the ability to follow lines while practicing leaning and turning with controlled acceleration and deceleration.

Bonnie Strawser, founder of Femmoto, offers this advice for new women riders, "Don't let anyone talk you into getting on a motorcycle that you don't feel comfortable with." While it's not uncommon for new women riders to start off on a middle-weight motorcycle, others may feel more at ease starting off with an entry-level bike and moving up in displacement as their skills improve.

Lisa Lomenick, a resident of Los Angeles, California, attended her first Femmoto track day in 2005. Having participated in a few previous track days, Lomenick enjoyed riding the Kawasaki Ninja® ZX™-6R and the ZX-10. "It doesn't matter what you ride, the track is the best place to learn anything you want to learn," explained Lomenick. "I know a lot of people say, 'Well, I'm not fast enough to go on the track, or I haven't been riding long enough,' but the track is the perfect place to ride, and until you do it, you don't know that."

One of the things that she liked most was being able to share her experiences and learn from other women riders. "They're like me. I can share something with them and we talk about our experiences and they know how it is. There are not a lot of us who do this," continued Lomenick. "If you're a woman out there who wants to ride, you've got to do a [Femmoto] demo day. It's the best experience, and you can learn so much. It's also a great opportunity to ride a variety of bikes and see what you like."

Lisa Schwerin, a police dispatcher and resident of Northern California, also attended Femmoto and has been riding for five years now. Schwerin admitted that she's accustomed to riding with only a handful of women on the track. While she used to ride a Suzuki SV-650S, Schwerin really enjoyed her demo rides onboard the Kawasaki Ninja® 500, ZX-6R and the ZX-10. When asked why she started riding motorcycles, Schwerin replied, "I've always been an adrenaline junkie. I love it."

And because it's Vegas, just about anything goes! So, grab your girlfriends and head out to Las Vegas next year for what will make an exciting and memorable weekend on two wheels. You'll want to tell all your friends about it. Spectators and umbrella boys welcome!

Femmoto 2007 will be held over three days in Las Vegas, October 5-7. Entry fee is \$125 per day and you must be a Club Femmoto member (\$35 annual fee) to participate. All riders are grouped according to skill level as either novice or intermediate. Also offered at Femmoto – MSF Dirt Bike School sponsored by Kawasaki for an additional fee. A portion of the membership fees and proceeds from the event will be donated to the Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. For additional information or to register online, visit Femmoto.com or call 888.390.4020 ext. 902.

