

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

Sharing A Passion For Riding

By Rob Dingman

My job requires me to be away from home and my family a lot, including over many weekends. One of the things I really like to do when I get a weekend off is to go trail riding. After being away for successive weekends at some motorcycling meeting or event, it can be hard to justify avoiding the honey-do list to go riding. I would never say that my wife is anything less than supportive (at least not in a publication that comes to my house anyway) but I do spend a great deal of time involved in one way or another with motorcycling.

Of course, it occurred to me that there's no better way to bond with my kids and spend more time with the family than to get them involved in motorcycling. Until recently, my 12- and 14-year-old sons had shown little more than a passing interest in dirt bikes. They both have other interests and are getting to the ages when there are fewer activities to bond with their old man.

As AMA president and CEO, I am not immune from the issues all motorcyclists face when it comes to things like getting buy-in from my wife and negotiating for additional space in the garage. I decided that I would ease into it and only get one bike for the boys to share and learn on—at first. (To this day, I am not certain that I ever officially got that buy-in, but then I never heard, “No!”) So one day this spring, the boys and I went to a dealership and purchased a Kawasaki KLX140L. After several trips to the local gear shop, they were both fully equipped and ready to learn to ride.

I started the boys out in our very small yard, figuring it would take them some time to get used to the clutch and develop a comfort-level with the bike. They learned quickly and had a really good first experience with the bike. My wife even rode a few laps around the yard.

A neighbor suggested that I take the boys out to a much larger neighborhood common area across the street. So we did. Now this is a small field usually used by the neighborhood kids to play soccer and football and fly kites and things like that. I figured if I let them ride there too long, it would only be a matter of time before I got a letter in my mailbox from the neighborhood association, so I reluctantly made them return to the yard. But—you guessed it—after riding in a much larger space, our small yard had quickly become even smaller.

Watching the boys ride and seeing how much fun they were having was really tough on their 8-year-old sister. You can imagine how many times I heard how unfair it was that the boys had a dirtbike and she didn't. Now, my daughter is what has been described as “spirited.” She is smart, tough, energetic and regularly puts her older brothers in their place. I frequently say that if she had been born first, she'd be an only child. In short, I had no doubt that she could be the strongest rider of the three.

It was my wife's idea, in fact, to get our daughter a bike. She only had to mention it once, and I brought my daughter to the dealership and picked up a Yamaha TTR50. We also got her outfitted with all the necessary safety gear and she was ready to go. She rode the wheels off that little 50 the first time out in the yard and, given the size of the bike, she had plenty of room.

While my boys seemed to get the hang of riding much more quickly than I thought they would, this also meant that I would



have to find a larger place for them to ride. They had grown bored with figure eights in the yard but they were not quite yet ready for trails. So the next time I was home on a weekend, I took them to a baseball field and let them ride around the outfield. This is where sharing a bike quickly wore thin.

As luck would have it, a colleague at the AMA needed additional space in his garage for a new bike he had already purchased and decided to sell me his wife's slightly used Honda CRF230F.

We were now ready for a family outing. I loaded my bike and the boys' bikes on the trailer and put my daughter's bike in the back of the SUV and headed for the nearby state forest OHV area. It has a large open area, where I thought it would be good for the kids to hone their skills because they weren't quite ready for trails. And since we were going to be staying in one place, Mom could come and supervise.

After riding around for less than a half hour, I suggested to my wife that she take a turn on the KLX. I was hoping it would improve her comfort level with me taking the kids riding. She put on a helmet and waived off my 12-year-old's offer of his gloves and chest protector. She was on the bike for less than five minutes when she grabbed too much front brake going into a little dip in the terrain, got out of shape and whiskey throttled her way onto the ground.

She was banged up pretty bad and told me through clenched teeth while still on the ground that we needed to leave. Obviously, this didn't turn out at all like I had planned. She has been a good sport about it since and, thankfully, enough time has gone by that she can almost laugh about it.

The boys finally graduated to easy trails and I recently took them to ride some trails in the Wayne National Forest here in Ohio. Yes, there was some controversy when my daughter got left behind at home but she'll be getting some one-on-one trail riding time with Dad soon. I am sure that it won't be long before I am the one who can't keep up with the kids.

Motorcycling really is a family affair. While riding with my wife and kids, I am reminded why we work so hard to preserve our motorcycling freedoms for future generations.

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