

Saddle up for a class experience

GETTING STARTED: Signing up for schooling is the best way to get onto two wheels safely



Learning to ride can be fairly intimidating, but schools such as Pacific Riding School will teach you the skills you need to be a safe rider. ALEXANDRA STRAUB — FOR THE PROVINCE



As part of the 30-hour riding course, 10 hours are spent in the parking lot learning how to manoeuvre a motorcycle.



Should you require gear, Pacific Riding School provides it as part of the course. They even have women's gear for the first time.

So, you've decided you want to learn how to ride a motorcycle. That's awesome!

Or you're still deciding it's something you want to pursue but aren't sure how to go about it or have some reservations.

Whatever you decide or have decided, the good thing to know is that you have options.

Gosh, that sounds kind of like a pharmaceutical commercial!

Jokes aside, in order to get you on two wheels and out on the open road, you'll need a few tools.

First, you'll need to study for a knowledge test, then take the test to obtain your learner's permit.

The ICBC website (www.icbc.com) has the steps, requirements and material listed to help get you ready for the road in regards to your paperwork.

Paperwork aside, it's the learning-to-ride part that can be intimidating. Years ago when I decided to develop my skill set on two wheels, I had a few friends willing to teach me the basics.

After much contemplation I decided the best thing for my safety and education would be to get taught by professionals.

So I signed up Pacific Riding School (www.pacificridingschool.com) and was extremely glad I did.

Since it has been a few years, I decided to revisit my old stomping ground and talk with Mark Kruger, co-owner of the school, about the program they offer.

As we chatted, the passion and enthusiasm he has for seeing his students succeed is still evident. It was there in 2007 when I took the course and is still there now.

What I found to be the most useful out of my experience at the school was what Mark had pointed out in our talk.

"Learning how to ride is one part, the other part is how do you operate that bike under stress?" he explained.

The course, which takes place over 30 hours, 10 of which are held in the classroom, 10 in the parking lot and the rest on road rides, prepares you for such.

As part of the road rides, the instructors take the students to downtown Vancouver to help ease them into the 'stressful' situations. That was invaluable in my training.

Before heading to the mean streets in the urban jungle, the Motorcycle Skills Assessment (MSA) test, which is required by ICBC, is part of the curriculum, so you don't need to go elsewhere to obtain it.

Classroom sessions are limited to 25 students, whereas parking lot ride time is limited to 10. In the case that there are 10 students on bikes, there are two instructors, so the student/teacher ratio doesn't exceed 5:1.

Speaking of instructors, there are 15 on staff, four of which are female. And with the number of women wanting to learn how to ride, Mark mentioned that for the first time, they now supply women's gear if need be.

Available safety gear includes helmets, gloves and jackets.



Alexandra Straub

IN THE SADDLE



The Province's Alexandra and her alma mater at Pacific Riding School back in March of 2007.

No experience is necessary to sign up for the program.

For those who have been out of the saddle for some time but want to get back into it, there are programs out there, too.

The Justice Institute of BC (JIBC) offers such a program.

When talking to Al Lund, Director of the Pacific Traffic Education Centre at the JIBC, he mentioned that there are quite a few people, seniors included, who would like to get back in the saddle. They've been out for numerous years and would like a refresher course.

"We offer a course that gives one-on-one instruction for three hours in a parking lot," Lund said.

There are over 30 motorcycles to choose from, including Hondas and Yamahas in case you don't have your own, and the school can supply the safety gear as well.

But make sure you still have your Class 6 licence. Should that have lapsed, the JIBC also offers a full 40-hour course at their training facility.

Visit www.jibc.com and type in "Motorcycle Traffic Refresher" in the search bar.

Contact Alexandra at shiftinggears-girl@gmail.com and follow her on [Twitter.com/cargirlsgarage](https://twitter.com/cargirlsgarage)

Women + wheels

Calling all ladies who would like the 411 about getting on two wheels. There's a "Garage Party" happening at Trev Deeley Harley-Davidson in Vancouver on Thursday, March 22. It's a women's-only event full of information, prizes and fun. Come out, learn a few things about bikes and have a great time. Register at www.garageparty.ca