Learning to Drive a Motorcycle

I was a teenager the first time I ever got on the back of a motorcycle. By the end of that ride, I knew I was hooked. For years, I was a willing passenger. But by the time I reached my early thirties, I was not content with just being a passenger. I longed to be in control of the motorcycle, instead of being just a passive rider. Learning to drive a motorcycle seemed like a daunting process that both scared and exhilarated me at the same time.

In the state of Ohio there are a few different ways to obtain the motorcycle endorsement on a drivers license. Everyone must take a written exam in order to receive a temporary permit. After that, would-be motorcyclists can take a driving exam or sign up for a weekend course. The course is designed for both experienced riders and novices to hone their skills and boost confidence, along with providing the needed information about Ohio laws regarding motorcycles. At the end of the course, riders are required to perform certain maneuvers on a motorcycle. If I passed the course, then I automatically received the endorsement on my driver’s license.

The weekend that I chose to participate in the course dawned cold and rainy. In order to stay warm (and safe), I donned layers. This included leggings underneath my jeans, a long sleeve shirt, a fleece jacket and a leather coat. Gloves and sturdy shoes were required and I was also required by law to wear a helmet, which was provided by the course sponsors. I was quite comfortable while we were inside doing the required classroom segment, which included becoming familiar with Ohio traffic laws and watching numerous videos. However, as the time drew near to actually get on the motorcycles, my heart began racing and my stomach started dancing. What was I thinking? What if I wrecked? Was I being an irresponsible mother?

At first, we simply straddled the bikes, turned them on and walked them on the black asphalt of the riding arena. Then we learned the basics of releasing the clutch while opening the throttle, which caused the motorcycle to move forward. After stalling out a few times and taking a little spill, I found my groove. I quickly learned that riding a motorcycle isn’t exactly as easy as it looks. I learned to shift gears with my left foot as I controlled the throttle and clutch with my hands. Braking, turning and staying balanced were all a part of the equation. The rain spitting from the sky definitely compounded my already skittish feelings that I had regarding this endeavor, but quitting wasn’t an option for me. I powered through and learned the basics of being a safe rider along with the handful of other brave souls that signed up for the class.