



## **Beauty & Brawn Move Over, Boys!**

Motorcycle industry seeing increasing interest from women

By: Alexia Cameron

Draped in a snug black poncho, designer jeans and four-inch heels, Dena Besece adds stature to her petite frame. To the uniformed eye, Besece appears better suited to go on a shopping spree with ladies who lunch than to manage the C&A Harley-Davidson dealership she co-owns in Plain City.

But Besece's sculpted appearance represents the new wave of the Harley-Davidson future: women riders.

"People on the outside of the motorcycle industry come up with this whole biker babe persona," she says. "But you can tell from my appearance, I am not burly or tattooed. People are always like, 'Really, you ride?'"

Besece personifies the contemporary crop of women riders living by C&A's adage of taking life by their own two handlebars.

An avid motorcycle rider, Besece contributes to the rapidly growing buying power of female riders. Women make up approximately 15 percent of C&A's motorcycle transactions, which is 3 percent higher than the national figure reported by Harley-Davidson in 2007.

"In early 2000, Harley realized that women were an untapped market who controls 80 percent of family buying decisions," says Alexa McAllister, C&A's Rider's Edge program manager.

Harley Davidson estimates women will spend about \$300 million on Harley-Davidson bikes this year in the United States alone. And that's not including riding gear, accessories and clothes. So, marketing to the owner of the family purse strings seems obvious. C&A is aggressively pursuing women riders by piquing women's interest through female-driven programs and a burgeoning apparel line.

As women move up the ranks in this expanding consumer demographic, other dealerships are also taking notice.

Iron Pony, a parts, apparel and accessories superstore in Westerville, attributes its 10 percent-

and-growing female clientele to its store's appearance.

"Our store is set up like Nordstrom, or any other high-end department store," says Marketing Director Frank Lark. "We have wide aisles and shopping carts, so women are less intimidated to browse through our merchandise."

Women account for 40 percent of Iron Pony's staff and a woman, Tammy Jones, is vice president.

Expanding the selection of ladies apparel and accessories has helped reel in female buyers. Iron Pony stocks top-selling female brands within the industry, such as Icon, Joe Rocket and First Gear.

"A majority of the top brands are catering to women by having women's fitted jackets, gloves, and helmets in a variety of colors. Five years ago, that didn't exist. The industry is really responding to the wants and needs of female riders," Lark says.

However, no one seems to better grasp the marketing niche of catering to women better than Harley-Davidson. C&A hosts monthly garage parties where experienced and novice riders intermix between four rotating stations and bouts of tea. Guests learn how to select the bike that fits their needs and how to customize it. Partygoers are then taught the correct way to boost their 800-pound hog off the ground in case it tips.

Toni Gale, 35, works in specialist process management in IT for Nationwide. Growing up, her dad always had a Harley parked in the garage, so when her hairstylist approached her to attend a garage party, she immediately accepted.

"Learning to ride has always been a personal goal of mine," Gale says. "But I recently felt a push to pursue riding because my dad passed away a year and a half ago. I want his spirit and passion for riding to live on in me."

Gale found the motivation she needed to follow through with her lifelong goal of riding the open road solo after she discovered C&A's Rider's Edge course. The four-day, 25-hour, weekend-long motorcycle safety course culminates with students taking a motorcycle licensing test.

C&A boasts one of the largest Harley-Davidson clothing departments in Ohio. Harley has expanded beyond its black-and-orange, skull-and-crossbones image, and has even incorporated pastels and lingerie into its merchandise repertoire. Clothing and apparel sales have risen 12 percent within the past three years, according to C&A officials.

McAllister is not surprised.

"High-end designers like Donna Karan and Karl Lagerfeld base a lot of their designs on what bikers and rebels are wearing. The biker mystique has been around for decades, and Harley is expanding an image that it helped create," McAllister says.

So maybe Besece's well-manicured ensemble is not that of ladies who lunch. Maybe it's only fitting of ladies who ride, who get their lunch on the go.

*Alexia Cameron is a contributing writer for CityScene.*