

Searching for Balance

ON OUR THIRD date back in October 2004, I picked up my then-girlfriend Terri on my old Harley Sportster, a violent jackhammer of a motorcycle. She had no pillion experience to speak of, so I supplied some basic gear and instructions before departing. We took off from New York City on that damp Sunday afternoon and logged about 350 miles through the backroads of upstate New York, as a test of sorts that I concocted to see what her reaction to motorcycling would be. I worried that the Sportster's harsh lack of creature comforts, the gloomy, inclement weather and the long hours in the saddle would conspire to turn Terri off to my passion for riding long and hard whenever possible. Alas, such a predictable response would have signaled trouble in the future, and I was weary of starting a relationship on such shaky ground. To my surprise, when we finally stopped for the day, she exclaimed, "That was fun, but I'd much rather ride my own than sit behind you."

A few months later, after she successfully passed the MSF's Beginner class, she sourced an adorable Feder Weiss BMW R60/5 as her first motorcycle. Both Terri and the Beemer were born in 1971, and both were already veterans of extensive travel. But the enthusiasm with which she embraced motorcycling was a very pleasant surprise to everyone in our social circle. We spent every spare moment of the next two years either riding or planning to ride, and Terri never wavered when presented with the challenges of a long day on the road. She hung in there on the 900-mile days and in the downpours, with nary a complaint. I was personally ecstatic about having a riding partner as fervent as I am, instead of having to beg for time away from my significant other, as too many of my riding friends are resigned to do. Motorcycling had become an integral part of our lives, culminating in a month-long cross-country sojourn in 2007, when I finally proposed to her under the dazzling stars of a South Dakota sky.

A few months after we married last year, we were thrilled to learn that we are expecting our first child this coming July. Amidst all the commotion of such an announcement, we began to discuss how this would impact our riding habits, and we've been struggling with this very personal decision ever since. Both Terri and I have met other motorcycling families that have dealt with a new baby in any number of ways. Some keep on riding, as if nothing changed. Others limit or even stop riding altogether until the kids are grown, and then try to pick up where they left off. A few even split the difference, where one parent stops riding and the other continues on. Every situation is different, based on the individuals involved and their unique circumstances.

The only certainty about it all is that for us, there is a radical priority change in progress right now. Terri has not climbed



Above: Girlfriend Terri in 2005 with her first motorcycle. Below: Terri this year, now my wife, 5 months pregnant.



aboard either of her bikes since learning of her pregnancy. We calculated that she had indeed ridden a few times while pregnant, before she officially learned that she actually was. To Terri, the rewards of riding in her current condition, especially here in densely packed NJ, are not worth the potential risks. These days, she still stares longingly whenever we see a motorcyclist pass by, but she hasn't seriously considered taking a ride herself while pregnant. However, she has not decided what to do after the baby is born. Advice has poured in from friends and family, running the gamut from banning all motorcycles in the family (my mother's two cents, naturally) to taking a ride whenever possible. My own feeling dictates that she does what comes naturally to her after the baby is born, rather than try to plan it out ahead of time. In my view, certain biological attachments between parent and child will kick in once the baby is born, and render any such pre-planning wishful thinking.

Since learning of the pregnancy, I too have consciously ridden less than before. Since I started in 1997, there

has always been a diminutive voice in my subconscious warning me of the inherent dangers of riding a motorcycle. I hear it before each ride, and it's always helped me stay grounded and focused. Nowadays, I'm finding that voice growing ever more strident, and gaining influence accordingly. I'm actively finding excuses as to why the cage might be a better choice for the day's commute, in direct contradiction to my way of thinking for the past 12 years. It's a strange, undeniable, involuntary mental reflex of sorts which is tempering my zeal for riding motorcycles with an added sense of familial responsibility. A war rages in my head each morning before I depart, with the lure of the open road pulling me in one direction, and a knowledge of its potential hazards pulling me in the other.

Every one of us must find a natural balance of how much risk we are comfortable assuming when suddenly there are other lives dependent on us, and I'm guessing my vacillations will continue until I find my own. The balance involves not just risk, but personal freedom and identity. Just how much does being a conscientious, responsible parent impact being an avid motorcyclist? Beyond the obvious constraints on free time, when one is truly addicted to the cathartic release that riding provides, sacrificing any more than absolutely necessary to achieve the balance can be potentially unhealthy. Riding is in our veins, as compulsory as eating, breathing, and sleeping. To eliminate it entirely is for some essential part of us to die. To continue as before is selfish and unfair to the growing family. Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the equilibrium we are endeavoring to discover. Where was yours?

—Moshe K. Levy