

SARAH BURWASH
Hungry Valley

The Dayroom
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St. John's, NL
Saturday & Sunday 1-5 PM
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Opening reception: September 22 2016 7-10 PM

I held the handle bars and again I recited the most pertinent advice:

“Ok, she’s in neutral now
now pull in your clutch
and remember your front brake is on the right
and the clutch is on the left - your left
pull your throttle gentle
and rev her up to about thirty five hundred
kick her down into first gear and let your clutch out gentle.
Don’t be afraid, she’ll feel it!

... I am right here”

There have been a handful of times when I’ve recited these well worn lines to a new rider. My 1974 RD350 sits low and snug to the inner contours of those with narrow hips and slender frames.

You need trust if you want to be any good at teaching someone how to ride. First, you need to trust them, so that they can trust themselves, and in turn, trust the bike. It was the experience I had when my father first taught me how to ride a motorbike, an exceedingly heavy, aggressively wide, and masculinely powerful bike. And yet, generously absorbed in his embrace of confidence, I had no hesitation. No anxiety induced fears.

I would like to think my mother felt the same way when he taught her to ride. But then, it’s also unimaginable. How she felt when she was letting the clutch out for the first time. When she revved up the bike and spat out in first gear. At that time, bikers were proud to self-identify as existing within a misogynist society. Women were bitches or ol’ ladies, a mere accessory for a sissy bar toted around on the back of a motorbike. The remnants of this society still exist today, in leather patches that exclaim “if you can read this the bitch fell off” and in garages adorned with stolen pages from mechanics’ catalogues advertising exhaust pipes, nestled among irrelevant backdrops of cleavage.

Talking with Sarah Burwash, I hear about Babes in the Dirt, a weekend-long campout, oriented around dirt biking, hosted in the American badlands, and exclusive to those that self-identify as women. Of course I would hear about this from her. After all, she’s the woman I met in a basement, wielding a high powered demolition hammer, dressed in a pale pair of carharts, her hair slung back in a slick pony tail. Burwash is the type of woman who won’t be told no, or at least won’t listen if you dare project her interests or typecast her gender. Of course she would travel off alone and seek out this oasis of assertive femmes roaming on two stroke bikes. Sensibly, these women are just like Sarah, gentle in their assertion of authority but confident about their confidence.

Sometimes, it’s not about being included in a dialogue, it’s about making your own conversation. Perhaps this explains why Burwash chooses to paint motorbikes and also accessorize with soft silk, an obvious reference to femininity. After all, it’s time we get off the back and make this all our own.

Text by Nicole Westman.