

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO TEXAS MOTORCYCLING
NEW ADVICE COLUMN - YOU NEED A GOPRO ON YOUR BIKE! (SEE PAGE 8)

RideTexas

GUIDE TO

HANGOUTS

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RIDE THE NATCHEZ TRACE

WOMEN IN MOTORCYCLING EVENTS FOR 2025





Learning to work on their own bikes gives kids a sense of pride in their accomplishments.



Charlie displays a CRF 70 cylinder and head.



Alanni restores an XR 80 clutch cover.

MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE AND SWEAT EQUITY

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BILL DRAGOO

TEACHING KIDS TO USE THE TOOLS OF LIFE

Nine-year-old Charlie proudly displays the cylinder and head from a Honda CRF 70. The engine had been smoking and burning oil. A scored piston and cylinder are graphic illustrations of the perils of poor maintenance and neglect. He is almost as excited about taking the engine apart as he was riding a friend's bike earlier. He has no idea he is working on his own Christmas present.

Alanni, ten, patiently scrapes a hardened gasket from the

clutch cover on the XR 80 that will soon replace her CRF 70. Already a veteran of six D.A.R.T. adventure rider training classes, Alanni is an accomplished rider and ready for a motorcycle with a hand-operated clutch. When the time comes, she will know exactly how a clutch works.

Alanni's twelve-year-old sister, Gianna, twists an eight-millimeter T-handle wrench to remove the fuel tank from the Suzuki DRZ 125 she is helping resurrect after its long hiatus gathering dust. Next, she dives into the carburetor, cleaning and inspect-

ing the jets and float bowl. These kids want to ride and are willing to put in the work to make it happen.

The desire to ride a motorcycle isn't hard to muster for a youngster. Who wouldn't want the freedom only two-wheeled transportation can impart? Few thrills can match the feeling of power that comes from twisting the throttle on a perfectly tuned machine. Yet there is another kind of thrill for kids who are allowed to perform their own maintenance.

Parents routinely buy their child's motorcycle outright or leverage the child's desire to ride as motivation to save a portion of their money toward a purchase. Sadly, for some children, ownership begins with enthusiasm and ends in frustration for everyone involved. The bike breaks down, and the child moves on.... It is an opportunity missed or perhaps only partially realized. A once shiny new thing of beauty becomes an expensive, ignored lump with flat

tires, collecting cobwebs in the corner of a garage. Before we know it, an electronic media-induced coma takes over the child's impressionable brain space, and the interest required to focus on the grimy and occasionally arduous task of motorcycle maintenance and repair dissipates like two-stroke exhaust on a windy day.

This illustration is not an indictment of parent or child. It is the natural evolution of good intentions and the result of competition for the attention of humans young and old. Fortunately, there is an alternative to these modern distractions. Teach the child to fix what broke.

When a child learns to maintain their own machine, the benefits of ownership grow well beyond the usual fun factor of merely riding. Basic riding skills can be learned in an afternoon, but mastering the mechanical skills necessary to keep the bike running can take much longer.

A little intentional hands-on training can accelerate a youngster's mechanical skill development alongside the love for the feel of a wrench and the clean click of a good ratchet. If the child finds it fun, they will never want to stop learning. Give a kid a motorcycle and you've made them smile for a day. Teach them to maintain it, and they will smile for a lifetime.

Tool usage and manual dexterity are byproducts of learning to maintain a motorcycle. The simple concept of "lefty loosie, righty tighty" becomes a lifelong skill that applies to countless tasks into adulthood. Children can quickly learn the



Gianna works at removing the gas tank on a DRZ 125.

concepts of using a ratchet, combination wrench, or screwdriver. How do inch-pounds relate to foot-pounds? Ask a child who has used a torque wrench and calculated the correct tightness of a fastener.

Delayed gratification is another valuable lesson a child can learn through responsible motorcycle ownership. Once a motor has been torn apart, reassembled, and made to run again, the hook is set. This takes time, but the reward is real. The power they feel when fixing something is as gratifying as what Dr. Frankenstein expressed when he first exclaimed, "IT LIVES!"

Teaching children requires patience. Some kids have a greater aptitude and learn quickly, while others take longer to grasp certain skills or concepts. Those dedicated to teaching must keep the end goal in mind. Don't be tempted to do everything for them. The objective is for the child to experience the heady consequence of hard work, getting dirty, and remaining focused on a task long enough to see it through. Be kind when they break something, strip a bolt, or scratch fresh paint. Their feelings are fragile. Quality time in the shop results in quality time on the trail with a well-oiled machine, and they will enjoy a sense of pride for the accomplishment.

Mechanical sensitivity is also learned when a child washes, dries, lubes, and goes over a motorcycle with a fine-toothed

comb. They come to understand the toll taken when they ride by interpreting impressive visual clues, such as the contrast between fresh oil and the black mess drained from the engine after extended use. Rusty chains, bent exhausts, and scars on the engine made by a loose chain all remind the child that when we take care of our horse, our horse will take care of us. And when we don't, it won't.

The term "ride it like you stole it" is aptly applied to something that costs nothing. The motorcycle's value is equal to its cost in sweat equity. Often, what children learn by maintaining their own bike, and, by extension, about using the tools of life, is enough to justify the investment a parent will make in buying a motorcycle for a youngster. 🏍️



Bill Dragoo is a lifelong teacher of things technical, a retired flight instructor, automotive service director, certified airframe and powerplant mechanic, scuba diver, and mountain biking state champion. He competed with Team USA for the BMW GS Trophy in South Africa. Bill founded Dragoo Adventure Rider Training (D.A.R.T.), based in Oklahoma, a legacy that lives on through his son, Ben. Learn more at billdragoo.com.



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