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# Motorcycling

FOR

# DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>

**Bill Kresnak**  
*Motojournalist*

**A Reference for the Rest of Us!®**



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# ***Motorcycling For Dummies***

**by Bill Kresnak**



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Wiley Publishing, Inc.

## **Motorcycling For Dummies®**

Published by

**Wiley Publishing, Inc.**

111 River St.

Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

[www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

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Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2008924950

ISBN: 978-0-470-24587-3

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# About the Author

**Bill Kresnak** is a popular motojournalist with more than 35 years of experience riding all types of motorcycles, from dirt bikes and cruisers to some of the fastest sportbikes on the planet. He currently is the government affairs editor for *American Motorcyclist* magazine, the magazine of the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA), which is the largest motorcycling organization devoted to rights, riding, and racing in the world.

Kresnak is intimately familiar with safe motorcycle riding practices through his work at the AMA, but he also has toured many parts of the country by motorcycle and has reported on some of the biggest motorcycling events in the nation. Before becoming a motojournalist, Kresnak worked for almost 20 years as a reporter in Honolulu, where he covered government and politics — first for United Press International and then for *The Honolulu Advertiser*. He earned his journalism degree from Michigan State University in 1978, and he currently lives in Reynoldsburg, Ohio.

# Dedication

For my young children, Adrian Samantha and Joshua Enoch Keoki, and their mom, Sheryll, who all still find a remarkable wonder in each day; for Cindy Shultz, my muse who convinced me to sit down and write when I really wanted to go out and ride; and for all my friends, who are also my colleagues, at the American Motorcyclist Association; they are the most knowledgeable, dedicated motorcyclists in the world who do a tremendous job of fostering motorcyclists' rights, riding, and racing.



# **Author's Acknowledgments**

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the following individuals for their help in making this book possible:

Kevin Foley, Yamaha Motor Corporation, USA

Garrett Kai, American Suzuki Motor Corporation

Jan Pressler, Kawasaki Motors Corporation

Mike Morgan, Harley-Davidson Motor Company

Bruce Mullins, Skunkworx Custom Cycles

Jon Row, American Honda Motor Corporation

# Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at [www.dummies.com/register/](http://www.dummies.com/register/).

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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# Introduction

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You see motorcyclists everywhere: having a good time navigating city streets, enjoying the ocean air while cruising along the beach, or just having fun riding in the countryside. To the outsider, motorcycling is simple. It's just motorcyclists out having fun.

And while it's true that motorcycling is simple, it's also a lot more complex than just a rider, a bike, and a good time. In fact, there are facets to the sport that even many longtime motorcyclists don't understand.

It's easy to have a lot of fun on a motorcycle without knowing a whole lot about motorcycling. But it's even more fun when you do. And it's also a lot safer when you know about the proper riding techniques, the safety gear, the items you should take with you on long trips, and the handling characteristics of different types of motorcycles.

Motorcycling really is a mysterious world to the outsider, to the new rider, and even to some experienced riders. But, really, it isn't that difficult to understand the complexities of motorcycling; it just takes some time to discover them all. In fact, sometimes it takes years — unless, of course, you read this book.

And to be frank, you'll meet a lot of "know-it-alls" in the motorcycling world. But, unlike those folks, I have a lot



of knowledge and facts to back up my statements! I began riding when I was 17, and I have been passionate about motorcycles ever since. I've done a little bit of racing, and I've covered all aspects of the sport as a motojournalist for almost a decade.

So, it has taken me about 35 years of being heavily involved in motorcycling to learn everything I know. And with all that knowledge, I wrote this book for new riders, serious riders, and even people who don't ride but want to understand a friend or relative who does.

## **About This Book**

For new riders, this book is full of the useful information that's needed to confidently get started in the wonderful world of motorcycling. I cover everything you need to know. I explain different types of motorcycles, the various motorcycling cultures, how to fit in with other motorcyclists, how to get your motorcycle license, safe riding techniques, and much, much more.

For the experienced rider, this book is just as useful. It's chock-full of information and useful tips to make motorcycling a lot more enjoyable and safer, too. I also delve into topics such as how to keep your bike from getting ripped off both at home and on the ride, what essential items you need to take on a week-long trip, and how to plan a rewarding trip when you have a limited amount of time.

All riders can benefit from the strategies in this book, especially those strategies for buying a new or used bike, selecting the proper safety gear, getting your child involved in motorcycling, and understanding the ins and outs of insurance. Plus, I cover fun stuff like motorcycling movies, major motorcycling events, and customizing your motorcycle.

My goal for this book is to help all riders understand the richness of motorcycling, the camaraderie, and why it's such a passion not only for me but for motorcyclists around the world.

And the greatest thing about this book is that each chapter is written in a simple, understandable way so that even people with zero motorcycling experience (as well as those with many years' experience on the road) can be entertained and benefit. Motorcycling is fun, and the best way to make this motorcycling book fun to read is to simply jump around to the sections and chapters that interest you the most. In fact, even the sections of the chapters are easy to read and digest. Feel free to jump around to different chapters and different sections any time you want.

## **Conventions Used in This Book**

To help you navigate this book with ease, I include the following few conventions:

- ✓ **Boldfaced** words highlight the keywords in bulleted lists and numbered steps.
- ✓ *Italics* emphasize keywords and important terms.
- ✓ Monofont indicates Web addresses.

When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happens, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

## What You're Not to Read

As you're going through this book, feel free to skip any text marked with the Technical Stuff icon. This text is interesting, but it isn't essential to your understanding of the topic. The sidebars, which are the gray shaded boxes you see throughout this book, are also skippable (but I highly suggest you read these fun and interesting tidbits!).

## Foolish Assumptions

I assume that you have an interest in motorcycling; otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this book. Maybe you think motorcycling looks like a lot of fun but you want to learn more about it before shelling out the big bucks for your very own bike. Or maybe you're an experienced rider looking for good tips to make your riding safer and more fun. Or maybe you just know a motorcyclist and want to find out why he or she is so passionate about motorcycling. No matter why you've picked up this book, you're bound to find the info you need, because I've written it with you in mind.

If you're a new rider or a potential rider, you may have picked up this book to get answers to some of these questions:

- ✓ How can I possibly fit in with that tough-looking motorcycling crowd?
- ✓ How much is it going to cost me for a bike and safety gear to get started in motorcycling?
- ✓ I'm a woman. What special challenges do I face getting into motorcycling?
- ✓ What riding techniques do I absolutely need to know to be safe on the road?
- ✓ What's a good bike for a beginning motorcyclist?

If you're an experienced rider, you already have a passion for motorcycling and a desire to learn even more. If you fall into this category, you may have questions like this:

- ✓ What are some advanced riding techniques I need to master so that I'm prepared for any situation on the road?
- ✓ What are some travel tips that ensure I can have a safe and enjoyable long-distance ride?
- ✓ Which of the mega-motorcycling rallies around the country is best for me to attend?
- ✓ Which motorcycling organizations should I belong to in order to get the most out of motorcycling?

If you don't ride a motorcycle, but have a loved one or friend who does, maybe you have questions like these:

- ✓ How can anyone in their right mind ride a motorcycle when they're so dangerous? That is, what's the allure of riding one?
- ✓ Why do some motorcyclists wear black jackets that make them look so scary while others have colorful jackets (sometimes even with touches of pink)?
- ✓ Are motorcyclists lone wolves or social animals?

In *Motorcycling For Dummies*, you get the answers to all these questions and more. This book isn't just Motorcycling 101; it's a fairly complete collection of what every motorcyclist needs to know.

# How This Book Is Organized

The six parts of this book are organized so that you can find what you need to know quickly. Each part is centered on a specific topic, so simply determine what it is that you need to know and then check out the corresponding part.

# **Part I: The Mysterious World of Motorcycling**

If you've never ridden a motorcycle or hung around with motorcycling types, you're probably wondering what the attraction is. Why do bankers, lawyers, movie stars, and factory workers all ride motorcycles? Why are there so many different types of motorcycles? After all, isn't just one style good enough? And why has the media portrayed motorcyclists as thugs? Are they all really bad seeds? Finally, you may wonder how someone learns to ride a motorcycle. In this part, I reveal the answers. If you're more experienced and know the answers, you'll still appreciate this part because I reveal some of the little-known history of motorcycling, and some of the knowledge experienced riders can gain by becoming involved in a track school or getting other advanced riding training.

## **Part II: Welcome to the Club**

So you've decided to get into motorcycling? Great! Remember that there are a lot of different subcultures in motorcycling. But don't worry. This part explains all of the subcultures so you can decide which crowd you want to run with. And if you're in the market for a bike, this is the part for you. Here I reveal the different styles and cultures associated with them. In this part, I also provide some special advice and tips for women, and what everyone needs to know to suit up for the ride. Plus, if your kids want to ride, this part provides the info on how to get them started safely. All in all, this part gives you the information that you need to feel like a veteran rider.



## **Part III: You and Your Machine**

This part is the real nuts-and-bolts part of the book. It explains what makes a good beginner machine, and it shows you what's available out there. I spell out what to look for when buying a new or used motorcycle, and I show you how to maintain your machine to keep it running properly. Plus, because motorcycling is about individuality, I discuss how to customize your bike to make it your own. And, of course, you need insurance for your machine, so I include all the important info. Motorcycle insurance, in some aspects, is different from that which you buy for your car, so don't feel like you can skip this chapter.

## **Part IV: Let's Ride!**

This part has all the really fun stuff that's important for both novice riders and long-time veterans. For instance, what ritual should you follow before taking off on a ride? What are some of the proven techniques for handling obstacles and other dangers while on the road? And how do you deal with potential disasters such as a stuck throttle. How do you ride safely in a large group? Where are some great places to ride, and how does someone plan a dream motorcycle trip? All this, and more, is explored in this part.