

GROWING UP MOTO

Pastime Becomes A Passion

By Heather Wilson

Motorcycling is more than just a sport that I love to participate in and watch. It is quality time spent with my family at races, work or other motorcycling events. I'm very passionate about the motorcycle industry, and I wouldn't have chosen to grow up knowing any other lifestyle.

Motorcycles have been part of my life since I attended my first motorcycle race at 3 months old. I owe it all to my dad, Wally Wilson. He has raced dirtbikes since he was 15 years old. Then, in 1977, when he was 19, he opened up a Husqvarna shop in Pataskala, Ohio. In 1980, he moved his business to Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and changed the name to Wheelsports. He added KTM motorcycles in 1985.

I remember waking up at 6 a.m. on Sunday mornings to head to the races with my dad, mom and younger brother. We would leave when it was dark outside, and arrive home when it was dark outside. I loved holding up signs that read, "Go faster, Daddy!"

Since I was 8 years old, I helped my mom and my grandma at the AMA and District 11 (Southern Ohio) registration table for the Hocking Valley Motorcycle Club, where my dad's a member. I remember signing up some of Ohio's finest over the years—Mark Hyde, Cory Buttrick and Nick Fahringer, to name a few.

At the races, I've become known as "Wally's daughter." Now, when I go to watch my boyfriend race, I still have people ask, "Aren't you Wally's daughter?" I don't mind, though. I'm honored, actually! He has worked hard to accomplish what he has, and I admire that.

I remember thinking that my dad was the coolest guy in the world to have ridden dirtbikes his whole life, opened a motorcycle shop, and raced for the U.S. national team at the International Six Days Enduro in 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984. (And I still believe he is the coolest guy in the world!)

He taught me to ride when I was 5 years old. Soon, my parents were taking me and my brother down to Logan, Ohio, to camp and ride. My skills improved, and I went from the follower of the group to the leader. I had such a good time riding, and I found it so relaxing. Once, my dad asked me when we stopped for a break in the woods if I was singing to myself while riding.

Sure enough, I was guilty.

“Motorcycle enthusiasts are the friendliest people around.”



As soon as I could, I took the Motorcycle Safety Course and obtained my streetbike license at age 16. I am pretty sure that I was one of a few ladies in the safety course of at least 20 men.

I admire so many people in the motorcycle industry, from past riders to current riders—people such as John Penton, Malcolm Smith and Mike Lafferty. It takes a great deal of dedication, hard work, and personality to do what they have done—and are doing. One of my favorite photos was from when I was 10 years old. John Penton attended an open house at my dad's shop in 2003, and I had my photo taken with him. The best part was, I was wearing a skirt, a KTM motorcycle jersey and a KTM hat on backwards. I have no idea what I was thinking back then!

But style-consciousness aside, I love KTM. I bleed orange! This year, I helped KTM with its demo fleet at AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course for the second year in a row. I had a great time. My favorite event to watch is the vintage motocross. It is so neat to see how the bikes have developed and improved throughout the decades.

As I've gotten older, I've started to turn my attention to promoting motorcycling. From school presentations to meeting folks at races or my dad's shop or anywhere, really, I love to talk and promote motorcycling. Motorcycle enthusiasts are the friendliest people around.

At 18 years old, and ready to begin college this fall, my goal is to earn a degree in journalism and ultimately work in public relations. Maybe someday this will lead me to a career in motorcycling, promoting manufacturers, organizations or riders. Working in an industry that I am passionate about would be a dream come true. Motorcycles are in my blood. But one thing is for certain. No matter what career path I discover, I will always be an American motorcyclist.

Heather Wilson is an AMA member from Reynoldsburg, Ohio.



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