

THE SHORT REPORT

Revised June 2010

A GUIDE TO BIKING FOR SHORT PEOPLE (MEN TOO)

THE SHORT REPORT

Contents

- Up to Date Manufacturer info and recommendations
- Jim Birchall's Article on Bike Lowering
- WIMA members individual recommendations (please note these are the opinion only of the individuals concerned)
- All illustrations copyright WIMA GB or Sue Herbert

Has anyone ever said to you as you struggled to find a suitable motorcycle 'It's just a matter of confidence'? Ever noticed how the people who say that generally have long legs?

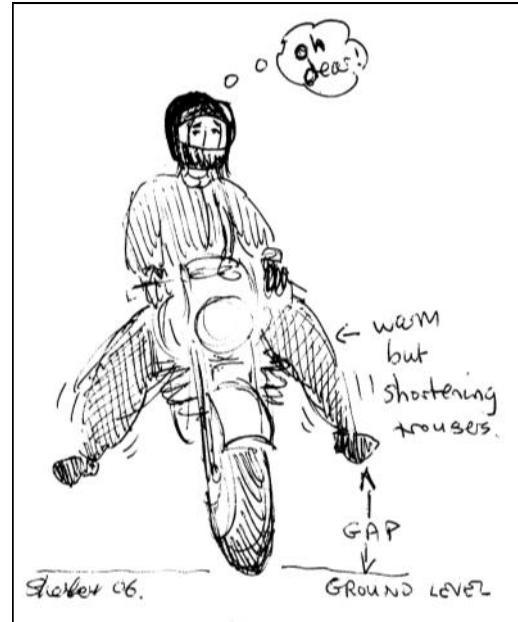
Confidence does play a big part in how easy it is for a person to handle a motorcycle, BUT, if you can't find a bike you are comfortable riding, you will never gain the necessary confidence to be a happy biker!

This booklet is aimed at sharing the information that is available to vertically challenged riders of either sex. I have asked WIMA members to share their experience and information and I have approached motorcycle manufacturers for their help with providing information about seat heights etc.

Please note that in general I have NOT included Cruisers in this report, because all Cruisers are by definition, low. If it's a cruiser you are after, fair enough. If not, read on.

Seat height is not the only factor in the equation of course. Weight, centre of gravity, seat shape, position of handlebars and foot pegs, length of frame, all matter. Even having fat little thighs makes a difference (!)

Trying to assess whether you would be comfortable riding a bike IF the seat was lower is very hard to do. It's not unknown for people to have the seat carved out and still find the bike very hard to manage. If you have to sit leaning forward to reach dropped handlebars, that alters the angle you sit at—it raises your heels, leaving you tippy toed on the ground and is equivalent to making the seat higher. Wearing thick winter overtrousers is equivalent to making the seat higher. Your choice of shoes or boots will make a difference, if you can only just reach the ground at the best of times. You will also find it almost impossible to wheel a tall bike anywhere, let alone paddle it whilst astride it, if you are a short person.



There are ways around these things if you are determined. But this booklet is aimed at helping to make life easier, showing you some short (pardon the pun) cuts that may save you time and money, and sharing the vibe that it's OK to be short and a biker—there are lots of us out here!

WHAT IS WIMA? The Women's International Motorcycle Association was formed in 1950, to link those scattered pioneer women all over the world, who rode motorcycles. Our members still feel there's a place for an organization that promotes and encourages female motorcyclists. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of WIMA GB.

**Edited by Sue Herbert
Women's International
Motorcycle Association
www.wimagb.co.uk**





It is not only seat height which may be a problem if you are small

“Further Training on your new machine is highly recommended”



**HONDA—
“motorcycles are precision designed for best performance so we do not offer lowering kits”**

WHERE DO YOU START?

We all start with a learner machine which will typically be light and small. Scooters and step throughs (bikes you don't have to sling your leg over!) tend to be automatic, which will not prepare you for a larger machine should you wish to go for one later. But seat height is not generally an issue with these.

In the olden days most riders went through a 250 cc phase. Now people move up from a 125 to a 500 or 600 cc machine as routine. It's a quantum leap. Further training on your new machine is highly recommended. See page 10 for more details of what train-

ing is available.

Below, you will find details of what bikes are currently available from major manufacturers but of course there are plenty of good second hand machines around. 2nd hand machines can be harder to get a test ride on, but they can be great value for money. If you are taken with a new bike, look out for earlier models, 2nd hand.

Taking a test ride is highly recommended wherever its possible. The low seat height of 'Cruiser' style bikes such as the Yamaha Virago or any Harley Davidson make them attractive but the handling

and riding position may not suit everyone.

If trying out friends bikes, please check that your insurance covers you to do so. Road laws apply in any public place, including car parks.

There are more factors affecting the suitability of a bike for you than simply the seat height. The position of the handlebars, the length of the frame, the width of the seat, the position of the footpegs, even what you are wearing on the day... all can make a huge difference to how easy a bike is to live with. To some extent you have to 'suck it and see'.

THE MANUFACTURERS

I approached the major manufacturers via their websites. Responses varied but I found Suzuki, Kawasaki and BMW particularly helpful and keen to market their motorcycles to women. I've awarded one star for each model offered, not including learner machines, scooters or cruisers, that is either low enough, or can be factory adapted, to suit a person who buys 'short leg' trousers (30cm leg) or has to take those up!

HONDA ****

HONDA said in 2008....

“Honda is committed to encouraging females to take up motorcycling so support for smaller riders is a priority. Apart from our scooter range which is mostly suitable, you may be interested in looking at the CBR125R, the Shadow 125, the VT750C Shadow and the VTX1300S which all have seat heights under 700mm. ...

Unfortunately all Honda motorcycles are precision designed for best performance so we do not offer lowering kits, however all rider types are considered in the design process.

All of our seat heights are detailed in our brochures and online at <http://www.honda.co.uk/>

motorcycles/” *end quote.*

Honda's 2010 brochure features the new VFR 800, which was recommended to my other half and myself as a 'low' seat, but at 805 mm, it's too tall for a 29" inside leg without seat sculpting or suspension lowering, thus making a test ride impossible—the bike is also one of the heaviest machines of it's type. Only 'low' compared to Honda's Sports bikes then! (These are all way out of a short person's league without serious alteration) You would be well served if looking for a scooter, Honda has a great range, including the sophisticated FJS600 Siler Wing, with a 740 mm seat.. Other good news is Honda's 'Traditional' range. The 'Hornet' CB600 is marginal at

800mm but the CBF 600N and 600S ABS have an adjustable seat height, taking them to a minimum 770mm, making them some of the most manageable bikes available for short people. The CBF 1000 ABS comes with seat height adjustment, taking it down to a modest though broad 780mm. Older CB600F Hornet models, with their 790mm seat height are highly manageable in standard form by those with legs at least 28" long, Naturally they offer Cruiser styles with low seats (and large engines) and 125 learner machines. Second hand Hondas such as the older, lower Hornets, are well worth seeking out, owing to the reliability and build quality of the brand .

KAWASAKI *****

The trusty ER500 with it's 780 mm seat has been replaced by the marginally taller ER6 machines, but anyone who can manage a Hornet (ie people with at least 28" inside legs) will be able to manage the attractive ER6s at a seat height of 790mm. It's also quite a narrow bike, which always makes a difference although I found the footpegs awkwardly placed.

The 250 Ninja offers a sporty looking option at the same

seat height.

However the VERY GOOD news from Kawasaki is that their UK PR person Martin Lambert has a particular interest in low seat heights and assures me that this issue has been raised with the factory on a number of occasions. Kawasaki are offering optional lower and narrower gel seats on the following models

1400GTR (815 mm standard, reduced by 25mm to 790 mm

+20mm narrower) - ZZR1400 (800mm standard, reduced as above = 775mm) Versys -(845mm standard, we looked at this and even with a gel seat, it was too tall for us to test ride. ER6N (up to 08 model) (785 standard, lowered to 765mm + 30mm narrower) ER6F (up to 08 model) 790mm standard reduced to 770mm + 30mm narrower. Gel seats cost between £186.95 & £280.95 inc VAT



Kawasaki Versys—lower gel seat option may help, but not for the very short.

SUZUKI ****

Suzuki offer the largest number of low-ish standard seat heights of any manufacturer. Their website promises 'find a Suzuki that fits you' - a sentiment I approve of. An e mail to their customer services brought a phone call in return and they were helpful and keen to attract female and shorter riders. They explained that the reason some smaller models are not imported is to do with 'type approval' and

Euro regs regarding emissions.

The Bandit comes in a teensy bit tall for some at a seat height of 795mm (790 for the 1250 version!) but a seat alteration would easily fix that and the 'gixer' GSX650F at 790mm is the same height as the Kawasaki ER models and the Honda CBF 600. The GSR600 is marginally lower at 785 mm. The SV650 is disappointingly 800mm high, although it's narrowness may

offset this, depending upon your body configuration! A commuter/tourer option might be the V Strom, which can successfully have the seat carved (or a gel seat made) bringing it down to 790 or 800mm, while those fancying a large capacity Cruiser will find all models have low seats. The new Gladius is designed as an entry level bike, basic, reasonably priced, low (785 mm seat), narrow and light.



The new Suzuki Gladius. Entry level, low and light

BMW *****

Featured on BMWs website front page is 'Lowered suspension bikes' - Hurrah! BMW have done customer research and discovered we're not all 6' tall. Top marks. They offer a lower seat as a free option on most of their range and in addition, lowered suspension on 6 models. This option lowers their F800 ST bikes to 760 mm. Apparently 45% of riders ordering BMW bikes have gone for lowered suspension

or lower seats. Models that can be lowered are: R 1200RT, R 1200 R, R 1200 GS, F650 GS, F800S and F800ST. The more 'venture' style GS bikes are particularly exciting—this is a style totally out of the question for shorter riders from any other manufacturer, now within reach at a lowered seat height of 790mm. At a cost of £165 (as of summer 2010) to have your chosen bike factory low-

ered, this makes BMWs a seriously attractive option, although it may not always be possible to get a test ride on a lowered model.

BMW are quite simply streets ahead of any other manufacturer in catering for shorter riders or simply those who prefer to be able to get their feet flat on the floor.



BMW F800 ST—one of the few all round bikes a short person could walk into a showroom and test ride, thanks to it's low seat.



Moto Guzzi Brevia 750
...user friendly, easy bike to ride, which would make it an excellent entry option...

YAMAHA *

The trusty XJ6 'Diversion' has a seat height of 785mm, but the sportier 'Fazer' is out of the question for many of us with a seat height of 815mm. Even their YBR125 learner bike has a seat height of 780 mm, (760mm for the 'cruiser' version). Yamahas are not for shorties! Yamaha told me they consider their long wheel base XVS950 Cruiser to be 'entry level' and that it's weight is 'not so much of an issue' due to a low centre of gravity. They admit to having received feedback about people wanting low seat heights 'from various motorcycle shows and events' and are proud to offer 2 models, the XJ6 and XVS950.

MOTO GUZZI ***

Moto Guzzi designed the 'Brevia' 750 specifically with lady riders in mind, I was told. Short men, do not be put off! It's looks and handling have won it a significant number of admirers and even converts who want to get off the merry go round of 'who's got the fastest bike'.

It comes with a factory option cut down seat (only £150) that takes it's seat height from the standard 790mm to just 760 mm (although the low seat seems wider, so you may want to try both to see what suits). It also comes in a 'cruiser' style Nevada option (767 mm standard height). In addition it is a user friendly, easy bike to ride, giving torque rather than lots of top end

speed. Compared with Japanese bikes, the Brevia is low powered but the finish is good and the handling superb.

Several other bikes in Guzzi's range have low enough seats to be considered by the more confident rider. Even the 1200 CC Norge Tourer at 800mm feels small compared to similarly spec'd BMWs and would need minimal seat sculpting to suit a smaller rider.

The Bellagio is a cruiser with a low seat but without the full on, feet in front styling. If you have a dealer near you, Guzzis are well worth a look for something different and I am told are rather fashionable with younger riders at present.



Triumph Bonneville—a seat height friendly to little legs.

TRIUMPH ***

Apart from the cruiser style Rocket III, which ladies with attitude could of course manage with ease, the motorcycle most obviously suited to the vertically challenged, is the Bonneville, with it's little-leg friendly seat height of 775 mm.

Street Triples might be manageable with seat sculpting, on paper (standard seat height

being 800mm) but there is not a lot of seat to sculpt! Speed Triples on the other hand—no chance.

The older Triumph Legend with its 725mm seat height, is Legendarily low (although it's a fairly broad seat) and is well worth seeking out as a second hand machine. It's a cruiser, but not the full on, feet in front and arms akimbo variety. It's

fairly heavy but the weight is low and it could make a good 'first bike' when moving up to a large machine. In general however, Triumph do not seem to have adopted the attitude that the shorter rider is worth courting as a customer, unless they want a Cruiser.



Ducati 696 Monster.
Low and very light

HARLEY DAVIDSON

I refer you to Melissa Tuttle's appraisal of Harleys in general. I could not even get them off the sidestand and the salesman told me I needed more 'attitude' ! They are all low. They are also all big and very heavy. Plenty of women I know ride them, so if you have 'attitude' give them a try! I have given them one star, even though they do not compromise their tough image by advertising that women could ride them & offer only Cruisers

DUCATI *

Ducati, like Triumph, offer a model they consider suitable for ladies and flag this up with a website photo of male and female riders side by side—except in this case the male rider is on the larger of the 'Monster' models—but for good reason. At a seat height of just 770mm and a dry weight of just 161 kg the Monster 696 is very attractive to the smaller rider. It's big brother, like the rest of the range, is enormous!

GREY IMPORTS

Most of the major manufacturers make 250 and 400 cc machines that might seem more suitable for smaller riders, but many of these do not meet European regulations. There are dealers who import a limited range of Grey bikes that can be registered in the UK. Parts will have to come from the country of origin via a helpful dealer. If looking at a Grey Import, do check that your insurer recognises the model, before buying.

ON BIKES AND BIKE LOWERING An Article by JIM BIRCHALL

As riders we need lower bikes so our feet flat foot the ground. We need this for a style of riding or for a style of bike. However manufacturers promote lower bikes for a style of bike, then a style of riding and then somewhat begrudgingly as an afterthought so our feet can flat foot the road. So we need to work harder at finding low bikes and in considering lowering a bike.

When I first studied physical ergonomics we were introduced to Henry Dreyfuss's Jo and Josephine as ergonomic references – well bike manufacturers seem to have only read up on Jo and never got as far as Josephine. As for the dictum of "Fitting the man to the machine" apropos "Fitting the machine to the man" – nobody seems to have thought of "Fitting the bike to the lady"

So what do you have and what can you do about it? Well there are some low bikes, or you can drop your feet with thick soled boots, drop the seat, or drop the bike suspension.

On low bikes

The lowest bike seating seems to be the Harley-Davidson Night Rod Special coming in at 640mm (25 inches) Apropos the highest bike seating seems to be the Aprilia RXV Enduro coming in at 996mm (39 inches)

However it can be noticed that "Long way down" had a whole new meaning with BM's R1200GS Adventure with a seat height of 915/895mm (35-36 inches)

However overall bike seats heights seem to be a plus and minus on 800mm (31½ inches)

Small cruisers are quite manageable, roadsters can be managed, and some women have been turning to a lowered BMW F600.

In addition there are some 400cc Japanese (national) used bikes such as a Honda CBR 400 or Honda CL400 that are being imported to the UK and can be found in import dealer showrooms such as Fastline at Preston.

On low bike types

In general cruisers are low, trailies are high and roadsters are of medium height. Get a copy of Used Bike Guide and a copy of What Bike? Decide what type of bike you want to get around on. Then look to the seat height. (Used Bike Guide groups them by type but What Bike? groups them by manufacturer)

Look to a cruiser like the Virago 535 (686mm) or its modern (somewhat lumpier) equivalent like the Honda Shadow VT750DC Shadow Spirit (652mm), Kawasaki Vulcan 500LTD (715mm), Suzuki VZ Intruder C800 (700mm), or Yamaha Dragstar 650 (710mm)

Look to the 500 – 600cc roadsters twins and fours. There are several that come in at just under 800mm seat height as: -

Honda CBF500 parallel-twin (771mm)
Or the Honda CBF600 in-line-four (785mm)
Kawasaki ER-6N parallel-twin (785mm)
Suzuki GS500 parallel-twin (790mm)
Suzuki Bandit 650 in-line-four (770mm)

Look to the BMW Funduro F650GS (750mm – low setting from 780mm) – how-

ever it looks very tall and the rear seat is much higher with the under seat exhaust and this may put you off getting your leg over.

In addition there are some 400cc Japanese (national) used bikes such as a Honda CBR 400 or Honda CL400 that are being imported to the UK and can be found in dealer showrooms such as Fastline at Preston.

On cruisers

Riders with short legs tend to go for cruisers as they have the lowest seat heights. However with cruisers the rider sits back with legs and feet forward, arms wide and stretched. The strain is taken in the arms and back. Surprisingly cruiser riding position is best suited to riders with long arms and long legs. Recommendation is that if you get a cruiser then changes the handlebars to a lower and narrower style and wear a kidney belt for support. (Beware here as some cruisers have the larger one inch diameter bars that narrow down to 7/8ths diameter just where the handlebar controls are – but the clamp fittings are for one inch diameter bars – and there could be a problem in routing the cables and the angles of the mirror stalks)

The Virago 535 used to be seen as a ladies bike with a seat height of 686mm and lots of chrome. But now some riders are trying them out as winter bikes as they are low, light to pick up and have a shaft drive but beware of salt in the aluminium and steel brake parts) I have also noticed that some very geriatric post hart-op bikers are now getting around on Virago 535s

Although they stopped making them in 2003 some good, very clean, low mileage ones can be seen for sale on the Virago Star Owners Club Web Site.

However going upmarket Harley-Davidson has some models that are more the normal roadster type of riding position such as the Sportster XL883L with a seat height of 641mm Beyond, or below, cruisers are lowriders – this is where a cruiser has been custom lowered even lower.

On lowering your feet

At best you want to flat foot your feet to the road with legs akimbo. At worst you are looking for a kerb to pull up against. Most bike boots have thin soles but some have thicker soles and some have heels. The Daytona Lady Star Boots have an extra one inch lift in the sole. The Sidi Violet Boots have a 1½ inch heal.

On lowering a bike

On lowering a bike you can either Lower the seat Change the shocks Get a professional lowering kit.

Lower the seat

Admittedly now some bikes have adjustable seats like the BMW R850R where the whole of the seat could be re-set to three different heights (with German efficiency BM included a clipped in allen key under the seat in order for you to do this)

Take the seat off and sit on the bike – this is the absolute theoretical lowest that you can get by cutting the seat down – but notice how your legs begin to splay out as the width of the side panels pushes them out.

CLOTHES MAKETH ALL THE DIFFERENCE!

Lorna Powell writes “

On the topic of short legs I was pleased to see that Frank Thomas now make leather trousers in a 27” leg length, they have done textile trousers of this length for a while but I haven’t seen leather ones before. They are only available at the moment through Girls-Bike2 and come in sizes 8 to 26.”

Marion Dick recommends Daytona Ladystar GTX boots with a built up instep on the inside which makes her effectively 1” taller. This enables her to get both feet flat on the ground. The boots cost her £200 five years ago but she describes them as ‘worth every penny’.

Jim Birchall in his article also recommends Daytona Ladystar boots. These now cost over £200 but could be a good investment. I can only find them advertised online up to size 39 (UK 6) but apparently the M-Star GTX is a similar boot in a larger size.

(A Cheaper alternative would be to ask your local shoe repairer to glue an extra sole onto your existing boots. A friend of mine did this and was delighted with the results. Ed)

A good upholsterer can cut one inch off a padded seat – and with special seat gels can approach up to 2 inches off some seats. But beware that the cut down seat must be narrow as well as low.

Lower the frame

In order to lower the frame you need to lower the front and back.

Also when you lower the frame you have to take into account the centre stand and the side stand – they may need removing or altering as well.

You can change the rear shocks and wind down the front shocks.

If your bike uses a “dogbone” suspension link then there are some after-market kits for most popular bikes. Some of these kits lower the bike by specific increments and some are adjustable.

Change the shocks

Shocks can be changed with either the shocks from another type of bike with shorter shocks or with special height reducing shock absorber which will lower the height of your bike by up to 50mm (But please remember that shocks are aligned diagonally so a one inch shorter shock will drop the bike less than one inch) The bike will also need the suspension winding down at the front as well to match.

Get a professional lowering kit

Suspension lowering link kits can be bought in – it is noticeable that some of these firms also offer bike lowering advice and even a bike lowering service.

Get the bike professionally lowered

There are a number of companies out there that will

professionally lower your bike or even specialise in lowering bikes for women again such as DRS of Hull. Dave Rose of DRS originally developed his own lowering kit for his wife but now they can custom fit virtually any motorcycle to your height. Dave tells me that they can typically lower a Honda CBR600RR by 75-80 mm (3 inches)

Conclusion

In conclusion:
Look to getting the right type of bike
Look to getting raised soled boots
Look to getting the seat professionally cut down
Look to getting the bike professionally lowered

Appendices

Bike Issue 415, November 2007, had an excellent article on “Are You Sitting Comfortably” by Simon Hargreaves.

Virago Star Owners Club
Web Site at
<http://www.vsoc.org.uk>

Fastline of Preston
www.fastline.co.uk

Professional bike seat lowering services are offered at
Bootleg Bike Seats
(Part of Preston Car Trim)
70 Wellfield Road
Preston
PR1 8SP

01772 251212

www.bootlegbikeseats.com

Professional lowering services are offered at: -
Dave Rose
DRS
1103 Hessle High Road
Hull
HU4 6SB

01482 646188

www.drshull.co.uk

Maria Greves can also offer advice
(Previously of She Loves Bikes)
Aardvark House
Braggs Farm Lane
Shirley
Solihull
B90 1RD

07782 383 195

Jim Birchall is a long term associate of WIMA via his late wife, the much missed Hilda Birchall who was a dedicated motorcyclist.

A source of useful information about bikes/ adaptations/good dealers or workshops and good gear, as recommended by Jim who mentions the Virago Star Owners club, can be owners clubs and forums for certain types of bike. For instance SV650.org features a forum that seems to be almost exclusively female! Perhaps it is only a matter of time before there's a 'Short' riders forum.

The 'Vintage' route.

Another potential source of bikes is of course looking for much older machines. British bikes of the 50s and 60s tended always to be very low; you sat 'on' rather than 'in' them. Italian 500s of the eighties were tiny and light compared to Japanese machines of that era. Moto Guzzi V50s can still be found cheaply, but be prepared for a lot of TLC and fettling! Beware of machines that have been modified and when searching ads, beware of machines described as 'projects' or 'runners'. This can mean they were, before they were taken apart!

WIMA GB MEMBERS RECOMMENDATIONS

KAWASAKI Z750 & other bikes

Recommended by Karen Reilly

I have been born into the motorcycle world with my family running a motorcycle shop and my brother being a motorcycle racer. I have suffered, trying to find a bike that fits! The only bike I have ever been able to touch the floor on is my old childhood bike the TY80! At the present time I own a Kawasaki Z750 (2007 model). I have had the seat cut down and have had an extra sole put on the bottom of my Daytona boots. I'm not short at 5' 5" but I have very little legs at 28" and struggle to touch the floor on most sports bikes. There is however a change in the way that manufacturers are thinking. The new Suzuki GSXR 750 is low and I can get both feet down but not flat. The bike is light and easy to move and I was not stretched. I have to say it is the best bike I have ever ridden and I took it around the Nurburg ring! What does let it down is the price!

Aprilia are also rethinking the new Shiver 750 which came onto the market this year. After many complaints about it's height, they are taking the Shiver back to the drawing board to make it smaller.

There are however other bikes you don't have to buy on the Grey market, such as the Fazer or ER600 but I like a tough bike, which is why I went for the Z750 (plus the 0% finance). I could have chosen a Grey import but could have found it hard to get parts and I feel it is important to get genuine parts. My partner works for a custom paint shop and has shown me several custom bikes that are low, so that's an option too.

I have also had a ZX6 lowered, but it was hard to ride

as all the proportion was knocked out of place. The front forks were lowered too much, making the bike hard to corner at any speed. You can lower bikes, but take them to a motorcycle shop with a reputable image. I tested this bike and had the forks brought back up to put the bike back in line. They are designed to be a certain way and playing around with them can be dangerous.

If anyone lives in the London or Surrey area and wants more information on lowering kits or bikes they can call Wheelpower Bike Centre on 0208 543 0321. This is my parents shop, they have 28 years experience and with my Mother being an ex racer and fellow short person she also has lots of advice and experience.

So in conclusion I would suggest that if a bike is too tall, have the seat cut down. There also are many bikes on the market that are getting smaller, you just have to test ride them. Also, look at what you are wearing. Leather trousers shorten your leg so I choose textile clothing when on the road; this also helps with mobility. And the extra sole on my boot also makes a big difference.

Honda CBF 600 SA Recommended by Elaine Clark

I've recently purchased a Honda CBF 600 SA (2008 fairing model with ABS). It was purchased based on the seat height being adjustable and the lowest setting is easy for me to reach the floor.

I really would have liked the CBF1000 but I have a steep incline into the garage and after riding the Guzzi for 17 yrs wasn't sure about handling a big modern bike. However, after owning the

600 and completing 4500 miles in just 7 weeks, I do have regrets for not plucking up the courage to buy the larger engine.

At the lowest setting I believe it to be 29.5 inches (about 75.5 cm). Purchased from Castle Motorcycles, Castleford, West Yorkshire

Not made any modifications as yet but the following is my wish list:

- * wind deflectors to widen the screen
 - * taller screen to deflect wind, rain and flies (current screen does very little to keep them off)
 - * heated hand-grips because I keep riding in rain & get cold hands
 - * possibly remodeling the seat to make more comfy and retain low position (the lowered position tends to push you forward rather than lower the whole seat)
- Or, I might take the depreciation hit and swap it for the CBF1000!!

Tricks or Tips to help manage bike

- buy bike boots which have an extra inch or two in in-step - Altborg boots do them but I have Daytona Ladies which have the same lift
- never get off the bike without the side stand being down
- look and plan ahead when parking - pick the easiest, flattest spot, ie, never park downhill as I cannot paddle it backwards safely - I reverse it into the space instead



Yamaha XV750



Honda CBF1000



Harley Nightrod



Kawasaki Z750



Honda CBF600 SA

WIMA GB MEMBERS RECOMMENDATIONS Continued



Honda VTR250

HAGON SHOCKS—
Recommended by WIMA members.
WWW.hagon-shocks.co.uk
Helpful firm based in Essex.



Buell Blast

HONDA VTR 250 GREY IMPORT Recommended by Lorna Powell

The Honda VTR250 grey import is quite small as standard, mine was further lowered for me by D&K, where I bought it, for no extra cost. It is 33bhp, has a top speed of about 85mph and weighs 139kgs. It is still being made and was available this year with a matt black frame which looked rather good in pictures.

HONDA HORNET 918 Recommended by Alana Scrivener

The Hornet 918, is a great bike, but at 5ft 6 I did struggle with it and was on tip toes for a while, my friend Mark did try to show me how to scoot my backside over to one side when you have to put your foot down, however dragging a rather large trailer of arse behind me proved difficult.

First thing we did was lower the shock which ended up with

BUELL BLAST. Recommended by Sheila Whittingham

500cc single cylinder.

Five speed gearbox.

Year 2004.

Two seat heights offered, and are quick change with one catch. 251/2 and 271/2

Weight approx 375lbs

Always a few for sale on E. Bay every year. Price new in America \$5000, about £2600.

Handles like a dream. Excellent brakes and good acceleration; delivers around 70 to 75 miles per gallon.

Honda CM 125 (Grey Import) Recommended by Sian Roberts

Year of Manufacture - 2003 (replica of the 82-86 model)

Seat Height - 30 ins, but could possible come a little lower via the rear suspension adjustment

Bought - Bob Minions, Derby

Approx price new - £2,500 (all models currently for sale are 2003 manufactured, but there are unused bikes still out there)

me feeling every last ridge or bump in the road.

Second, had foam cut out of the seat, professionally done, however it has spoiled the lines of the bike and you can see that the seat and tank don't line up like they should.

Last thing we did was get a smaller shock from Hagons (just Google) they are able to do a 40ml smaller shock, which is fantastic, but remember to have the side

Engine very lumpy until over 35mph and then it is very smooth. Belt drive. Top speed towards hundred mph.

Extras include a larger touring screen and luggage.

Spares are easily accessed via internet, from America. They can be purchased new by getting a Harley/Buell dealer to import one for you.

The Harley riding school at Builth Wells train their pupils on them and say they are unbreakable! Basically the engine is half of a Sportster engine.

Relevant Info - Upright cruiser style riding position with the legs at a 90 deg angle. I should imagine that someone with a leg length of 27ins could find it easy to touch the floor.

stand shortened at the same time.

Since I have had the shock, it has given me more confidence in maneuvering the bike, and just general ride ability etc... (I still wear New Rock boots which have a higher sole than normal boots, but can get away with other boots for perhaps shorter journeys)

Kawasaki ZRX 400 Recommended by Marion Dick

Marion Dick from Gloucestershire rides a Kawasaki ZRX 400, manufactured in 1994. The seat height has been lowered to 73 cms by the following method:
1" was cut out of the seat. The rear eccentric spindle was turned upside down on the adjusters. The fork legs were dropped through the yolks by 20 ml and finally low profile tyres were fitted.

The bike was bought in Elliotts of Cricklade, Swindon in 2001 for £2,500.

Recommendations by Melissa Tuttle

I am only 5ft 2" with a 29" inseam so I struggle to hit the ground on most bikes. However, I can provide some insight on bikes I have owned and what I can fit on.

1. Yamaha Virago XV750 or XV1100 XV aka Virago

**neither of these bikes are made anymore but there are still some good used ones around. Easy bikes to handle even for a beginner.

Engine type = Vtwin

Seat Height = 715 mm (28.1 inches). This may sound tall but it's not. The seat pinches in where your legs come over the sides so I was able to get both feet to the ground with a bend in the knee.

Power = 62 bph. Not much really in the high end but torquey in the lower gears. This bike can easily go 100mph but it's gonna take you longer to get to that speed.

Dry weight = 221.0 kg (487.2 pounds) - all the weight is LOW down so the emphasis is on leg strength not upper body. Think of the kids toy weebles wobble but they don't fall down. You gotta do some serious leaning to drop her

I loved my XV1100 and had her for 12yrs before trading in for the CBF1000. Bike handles great, is comfy for 300+ mile journeys, and is an excellent cruiser.

Downside: underpowered.

2. Honda CBF1000 ABS 2007

This is one of the bikes I own now. It has 3 seat adjustments which won't matter if you are short cuz you will be on low!

Engine type = in line 4

Seat Height = 795 mm(31.3

inches) The seat height is adjustable but the lowest it goes is 780mm. When I first got mine I could barely get tippy toes to the floor so had to slide off seat to get one foot flat.

I paid 50 quid to have the seat carved out by Dobles in Coulsdon and problem solved. The carve out even made the stock seat more comfy. Bit stiff before. I can get one foot comfortably flat to the ground or balls of both feet. Not a bike for a total beginner.

Power = 114 bph. VERY torquey. This is the Fireblade engine but without the race tuning. Your mates on sport bikes aren't gonna leave you behind.

Dry weight = 220.0 kg (485.0 pounds) - weight is a bit more top heavy but you notice this mostly when pushing around a parking lot or getting on and off center stand due to the fact it has a half fairing up the front. I have only put 1k on the clock on this bike and so far I really enjoy it. The only downside is the windscreen. The windscreen should be called the wind noise maker as it direct wind right into your eardrums. Currently I am looking to have mine carved down so that it sits flush with the fairing. Cost for this about 40-60 quid. So right now riding without the windscreen which does nothing to handling but looks ugly. I don't like bikes with windshields so this may be part of the problem. Other than that it's a nice bike for about town or for touring (with optional luggage). Having the seat carved out hasn't affected the handling of the bike at all and it didn't affect my reach to the handlebars enough for me to notice.

Bottom line: great bike for touring and plenty of power but slight top heavy nature

and inability to get both feet flat mean someone my height must be confident rider to own this bike.

3. Harley Nightrod 2006

This is the other bike I currently own. While the seat height is lower than the Honda and the Yamaha you gotta swing your legs out over that huge Harley engine. Don't be fooled this Harley is modelled on a drag bike so has plenty of power.

Engine type = V-twin

Seat Height = 26 inches stock seat height. But again you gotta swing your legs out over the engine and the pegs so really more like 28 inches.

Power = 120 bph. She's long, she's powerful, and she's got one bad attitude!

Very smooth acceleration on this high revving HOG. Don't be fooled, this liquid cooled engine was designed by Porsche for Harley's award winning drag racing team. She's not your standard cruiser.

Dry weight = 304 kg (637 pounds) - this is one big hunk of American iron you're sitting on but with 120bph she can move just fine thank you!

I haven't adjusted anything on this bike to affect the height and I can comfortably reach the ground with the balls of my feet. With only 5.5 inches of ground clearance there is no room for lowering this bike except to carve out the seat. The only modification I had was to pull the handlebars back an inch. Dealer didn't even charge for this. Bottom line: It's a Harley that's not a Harley if you know what I mean.

Harley characteristics: heavy, expensive, lots of cleaning, the wow factor. Non-Harley characteristics: liquid cooled engine,

strong powerful engine, mid-mount foot pegs and leaned forward bars provide more a race bike position than a cruiser. My hatred of Harleys has always made me quite an un-patriotic American and I was never tempted until I saw the Rod series of bikes. The Nightrod is the only one I can touch the ground and the foot controls from. You don't get the same attitude from Harley owners over here as you do in the States so I wasn't hung up on the "show me your t*ts" shouting a-holes that occupy most Harley seats back home when I bought mine here. So far love it except that brushed aluminum needs a LOT of polishing and I mean a LOT. More than chrome. If you aren't prepared to put in the time don't get this bike.

4. Harleys in general.

I have test driven several Harley's and can say that I can easily touch the ground from a Fatboy, a Softail Deluxe, Dyna Superglide Custom, Sportster models and the Dyna Low Rider. Almost every Harley can be lowered or the stock seat replaced to suit shorter riders. I know a Harley isn't everyone's cup of tea but it's worth giving them a try if you have the cash. They drive like no other bike. They aren't tinny like a Japanese cruiser (even though I loved mine) but they still have plenty of power to move that big hunk of steel.

5. Suzuki Bandit - the new Bandit 1250 has an adjustable seat although I found it just that much too high for my liking but I am only 5ft2!

6. Honda Deuville - similar to the Bandit. Just a bit too high and no seat adjustment so would have to carve the seat out or get a lowering kit. I wasn't interested as it's too underpowered and a bit boring...aka the Honda Dullsville.

FURTHER TRAINING TO IMPROVE YOUR BIKE SKILLS

INFORMATION ABOUT BIKES, SEAT HEIGHTS ETC

www.bikegirl.co.uk

Contains hints, tips, links and good advice including riding for the vertically challenged.

www.totalmotorcycle.com

includes a 'Beginners Guide to Motorcycling' with many bikes seat heights in inches.

www.vtwinmama.com/motorcycles_for_short_riders.htm

<http://www.supersarah.net/shortbikers.htm>

(the last two are US sites - not all machines will be available in UK or Europe)

The Police run Bikesafe courses throughout the country, usually starting in about April. These cost approx £100 for a two day course, including lunch. Women only courses are offered by some forces on certain dates, in case some females feel intimidated by the presence of male riders. Bikesafe is aimed at ALL riders, regardless of experience. The courses aim to build on skills already acquired and improve your general level of riding and roadcraft.

Independent companies offer one to one training in many areas—this is a more expensive option at around £150 for a day of one to one instruction, or you may be able to pay by the hour. An internet search for 'Advanced Training', adding your area, should bring you some useful results. If you'd prefer a female instructor, do ask if they have any—most places will these days.

The Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) Motorcycle groups offer assessed rides and training and a club atmosphere, including social events. The central website is www.iam.org.uk and from there you can search for your local group. Passing the IAM test can save you money on your insurance, in addition to having fun and gaining confidence on your bike.

RoSPA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) also offers advanced training on motorcycles.

Find them at www.roadar.org

RoSPA has over 50 local groups available to provide free advice and advanced training in preparation for an Advanced test which can knock money off your insurance—and possibly save your life, if not your fairing!

About the Author

I have been riding bikes for about 30 years and my other half longer than that. We are both what is generally designated as 'short'. I have 28" inside legs, his are marginally longer and he has oodles of confidence, but still has difficulty finding bikes he is comfortable riding. Having spent years trailing around motorcycle showrooms, having had salespeople look

pityingly at us and say "Well, you can try" and having ended up with typically one bike of the mid 600cc size from each manufacturer as our 'choice' of purchase, we have a particularly keen interest in seat heights and the manageability of motorcycles. The situation is improving. Manufacturers are targeting women and all of us shorties will benefit!

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