

# G GEARS Training at the Rally

By Richard Klain #22237

**AS A LONG-TIME MOA MEMBER** and occasional *Owners News* contributor, I've attended the MOA National rally when it's within a thousand miles or so from the "Left Coast." Anyone who's wandered the rally grounds has seen an area cordoned off with a sign about something called GEARS Training. Until I recently looked it up on the web, it was somewhat of a mystery. All I knew was that it was some sort of motorcycle safety training for younger riders. What I discovered is that GEARS stands for "Gaining Early Advanced Riding Skills" and was scheduled for the two days preceding the start of the 2015 rally in Billings, Montana.

GEARS Training has changed a bit from previous years. The 2015 camp was the first with the new format, with the MOA Foundation providing motorcycle safety training and experience for those in the 14-18 year old range before the rally, while also offering "refresher" and other training (in future years) to those who are



Karen Umphress, an MSF instructor from DirtBike Tech, demonstrates body positioning.

older, both during the rally as well as at other times during the year.

The day before the beginning of GEARS Training, I expected to see a bunch of teens pitching tents. In reality, most "camped" with their parents in an RV, motel or tent somewhere nearby on the Billings Metra-Park fairgrounds.

On the first day of GEARS training, everyone gathered to get GEARS underway. Twelve GEARS participants were split into two groups of six. This number was flexible because some GEARS participants arrived late or left early, and a couple of GEARS graduates showed up to help out. The average GEARS participant age was 15, with most too young for a driver's license, let alone a

motorcycle license endorsement, but many had off-road riding experience.

The curriculum's main components were an interesting mix of classroom and practical experience split into two, half-day and quarter-day sessions for each group. There was lots of active, hands-on instruction which couldn't help but engage teen interest and interaction.

After the morning introductions, I joined the first group heading to the range. Once there, students were assigned dirt bikes to ride and practiced basic skills like starting, stopping, turning, and using their bodies for balance and control. Karen Umphress, an MSF instructor from DirtBike Tech in Minnesota, was responsible for the on-range instruction as well as post-ride seminars. Bruce Sanders, MOA Foundation Director and Secretary, also pitched in to help.

It was fun going out and watching the first group on the range the first day.



Practicing accident scene management.

Because they had just met, they were quiet and were probably wondering what was about to happen to them. On the way back, they were all best friends and, as expected, were making lots of noise.

Back in the classroom, Rick Wallace was responsible for both the Accident Scene Management and Medical First Aid instruction. His background includes extensive EMT management and hands-on experience in the field. Simulated accident scenarios got the GEARS teens engaged and thinking. They quickly learned that there are a lot of subtleties to the process of assisting a downed rider, both in terms of not jumping to conclusions, as well as considering personal safety when moving around on foot, possibly in the midst of distracted and gawking traffic. Voni and Paul Glaves, who were the original GEARS Training organizers, also assisted.

Additional classroom instruction included Medical First Aid instruction, where each of the GEARS teens had a chance to perform hands-on CPR (breaths and chest compressions) as well as basic defibrillation on training mannequins. Additionally, every GEARS participant spent time on the BMW MOA Foundation SMARTrainer set up by Tom Pemberton. Each rider got to "ride" several scenarios to see how well he or she could anticipate and react to the unexpected. GEARS participants received certificates for improving their skills and learning new skills that could make them safer and more helpful when the unexpected happens.

So what were these kids really like? I'm not sure what I was expecting, but these were just normal kids who wanted to learn and be safer. They were strangers who became BFFs (Best Friends Forever).

Without the teens, GEARS wouldn't have happened, but it also couldn't have happened without their instructors.

Particular thanks go to Peter Perrin, GEARS Training and MOA Foundation Director, who took over the responsibilities for GEARS Training at the last minute. And thanks to George Rice, MOA Foundation President. ☺

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