

# Sports

The Press-Enterprise



LAURIE L. WARD/The Press-Enterprise

Bonnie Warch kicks up dirt during a recent practice run. Below, she and Tami Rice (3) take a break. The

two Riverside women are founders of the Women's Motocross Association.

## It's not just for the guys

Riversiders hope to start women's motocross circuit

By JIM SHORT  
The Press-Enterprise

**I**'ve been in motorcycles all my life," Tami Rice said. "When I started racing in 1982, I was always the only girl out there and I always rode with the guys. I thought some day it would be neat to have some girls out there."

"I started racing when I was 16," Bonnie Warch said. "A guy at school asked me to join the high school motocross team. He told me there were other women that raced. There weren't any, but I had fun anyway. I came in last, but I had a blast."

"I didn't really flaunt it much in high school. I was thinking, 'Gosh, people are not going to think it's real feminine.' Now, I think it's a powerful expression of femininity, and I let everyone know I do it."



Now, there are other women out there, too. Not a lot, but more and more each year, thanks in large part to the efforts of Rice and Warch. The Riverside residents, teammates on the race track, are the founders of the Women's Motocross Association (WMXA).

That organization, the only one of its kind in the nation, was created about two years ago.

Rice, 27, is the president. She organizes most of the large women's events in Southern California and handles most of the interviews, at

times talking so fast and with so much enthusiasm her words seem to stumble over one another.

Warch, 25, is the publicist, putting together press kits and sponsorship proposals for both their team and the WMXA and writing newsletters to the membership.

She said women's motocross has been growing consistently.

"It's not blooming, but there's been a steady rise, which is neat for a declining industry," said Warch, who holds a bachelor's degree in (See MOTOCROSS, Page F-7)



# Motocross . . .

(From Page F-1)

communications from Chapman College in Orange.

"We have about 35 women that are members," said Rice, whose father, John, was one of the pioneers of motocross, "but our mailing list is like 200 throughout the United States.

"I've been around motorcycles since I was born, but I never raced when I was younger because my parents were afraid I'd get hurt. That's what happens to a lot of girls now. I was never able to race competitively, so I had to wait until I was old enough to buy a truck and my own bike. It's OK for boys to race and do whatever they want to do athletically, but girls are supposed to play with Barbie dolls.

"What we're trying to do is make women have a good image in motocross and motocross have a good image in the public's eyes."

The ultimate goal, of course, is to have women's motocross stand on its own, with separate events, its own ranking system, and its own following. Toward that end, Rice and Perris Raceway owner Todd "Goat" Breker recently staged the second Discover Women's Motocross day, which raised more than \$1,600 for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

Over the weekend, Rice, Warch and other WMXA members were at the Mammoth Mountain Motocross in Northern California. In late August, they will travel to Tennessee for the Loretta Lynn Nationals, one of the biggest events of the year nationwide.

In all, Rice said, there are four or five major races a year for women. But most of the time, at weekly events throughout Southern California, they compete against men. Or boys, if you prefer, since Rice and Warch are in the 125cc novice intermediate class, which is dominated by teenagers. It's one of the training classes in men's motocross, but Warch said it represents "a big breakthrough in the level of women's motocross in general." And that says a lot about women's motocross.

A few, like Mercedes Gonzalez, currently the No. 1 woman rider in the world, have sponsorship from one of the motorcycle factories. Most are responsible for their own equipment. Rice and Warch get motorcycles and parts from Suzuki, but still must find other ways to pay expenses — for entry fees, transportation, lodging, etc. Warch estimates those expenses at close to \$5,000 for a season of weekend competitions at club events in Southern California. So both hold full-time jobs.

Rice said when she started competing "promoters didn't want to touch any women with a 10-foot pole." Now it's only a five-foot pole, so there has been some progress. But it takes a while to dispel stereotypes, overcome prejudices and get rid of jealousy. It also takes more members than WMXA has today.

"When we put our heads to it and decide to run the phone bill up, we can get 30 women on the (starting) line for a weekend," Warch said.

Normally, though, Rice said there are six to 10 women on hand for an event because "there are too many places to go."

"I've been trying to come up with reasons why someone should be a WMXA member," Rice said. "Right now in Southern California there are four major clubs they can join and they all cost \$30 to join. What we're trying to develop is a WMXA license that would be good wherever we go. That's where we get the skepticism from other promoters. They say, 'When the old-timers (veteran riders) come, they can guarantee me 40 or 50 riders.'

"I can guarantee 10 or 15, and they don't think it's worth it."

In a way, too, Rice and Warch are working at cross purposes, since at this point riders such as themselves and Gonzalez prefer to ride against men because the level of competition is higher.

"Sometimes it's a little difficult to create your own competition when you want to be the one that wins," Warch said. "We like to have a class for women starting off, but the higher-level women still want to practice with the guys. I'd rather race against the guys anyway. I don't have a lot of natural aggression, and the men bring it out more."

So the issues then become jealousy, particularly from younger male riders resentful of the

women's factory sponsorship and media attention, and stereotypes — the weaker sex and all that. That situation isn't helped by the men dominating the winner's circle.

Rice, the California Racing Club women's champion in 1987, bristles at the suggestion she and Warch have gotten sponsorship and attention merely because they are women. Neither denies that gender is a plus, but, Rice said, "It didn't just grow on trees. We've worked very hard to get what we've got. We've sent out a lot of proposals and put in a lot of hours and we go out there and race every weekend."

"Most guys don't do have what we do for our sponsors," Warch said.

Rice said she isn't sure there's much validity to the weaker sex argument, either, since motocross riding "is not all muscles; it's flexibility and endurance and stamina."

But she knows the stereotype is strong nonetheless because she's encountered it frequently in her efforts to make women riders or races for women a part of the Camel Supercross and Mickey Thompson Ultracross series.

"Right now, in motocross, promoters still don't consider us competitive against men," Rice said. "Within the next year or two I think you'll see women in there, somehow, but it's like trying to pull teeth right now because it is a male-dominated sport. We've got to prove to promoters it's worth doing.

"I get frustrated and depressed once in awhile. But I get out of it because I see where Bonnie and I have gone and what we do have. We're factory riders, and most men only dream of doing that. That's only because of persistence."

