

# Riding high



**Using a shrewd business acumen and her own brand of management, 33-year-old Sulajja Firodia Motwani has secured a place for herself amongst the upper echelons of the business community, says Fareeda Kanga**

more punch than any of her bikes, beginning at 6.45 am with a gruelling workout in the hands of a personal trainer while the rest of the day is spent discussing new products, advertising strategies and creating a world-class image for the Kinetic brand.

"Sometimes I want to throw it all away and just meet my friends for lunch or take my son to a birthday party like most parents do as balancing motherhood and a career that is all-consuming can be exhausting," says this corporate leader who claims she does everything (even party) in extremes.

"Business is in my blood, I just can't shake it off, so even when I'm tempted

It's Sunday morning in Pune and Sulajja Firodia Motwani is tinkering around with her latest baby — A 250 cc cruiser motorcycle 'Aquila'. While most young moms would be worried about diapers and not disc brakes, the 33-year-old joint managing director of Kinetic Engineering admits, "I really push myself to the limit."

Known for her hands-on management style, Sulajja's entry into the family business in 1996 was scoffed at by industry insiders in the notoriously sexist business of selling motorcycles.

Armed with a management degree from Carnegie Mellon University, USA, and a stint with a financial portfolio management company in California, back in India, Sulajja flung herself whole-heartedly in her work — living out of a suitcase and visiting gas stations and over 200 Kinetic dealers across India in the first years in office. This, apart from overseeing the company's strategy, sales, marketing and finance portfolios. "The sacrifices were enormous, I took only four days maternity leave when my son Siddhant was born," she admits.

Was it worthwhile? Seems like it. While the Group turnover rose to Rs 1,200 crore, the Kinetic Engineering company — the group's flagship

motorcycles — saw a dramatic rise in turnover from Rs 15 crore in 1995 to Rs 150 crore in 2001-2.

The company has also increased its sales target for two wheelers in the fiscal ending March 2003 to Rs 2.5lakhs. "I wanted to inculcate a new corporate culture in the company and approach the business as a consumer not a manufacturer so that we understand the needs of the two-wheeler market."

Memorising the specifications of all her products comes easily to this pint-sized biker who has launched four motorcycle models in the last year besides diversifying into auto design, auto ancillary parts and finance sectors.

**“ Even when I am tempted to quit, I can't ”**

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It's the calming influence of husband Manish who says his wife is "a hyperactive woman" that keeps her balanced plus the support of her mother who baby-sits and supervises her home whether she's at her office in Chinchwad or attending the World Economic Summit at Davos.

In spite of numerous accolades — she was recently featured as a 'Business Face of The Millennium' by *India Today*; and was voted by *Fortune India* amongst the top 25 business leaders in a poll amongst industrialists — Sulajja remains surprisingly modest, never resting on her laurels but preparing to rev her engine in the race for excellence.