



LETICIA CLINE

ALTERNATION

THE WOMENS MOVEMENT

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The morning air was crisp, each inhale serving as a brisk wakeup call, stinging the lungs. I awoke with a knot in my stomach from yesterday's decision to rent a motorcycle and set out on a 400-mile ride. It had been six years since I had been on a bike, and the rapid beating in my chest reminded me of that with every thump. I sat on my porch and my thoughts turned to my father, who taught me to ride and, up until his death, had been my steadfast road-trip partner. I was afraid. I was alone. But this was something that was bigger than just me and a motorcycle.



THE WOMENS MOVEMENT



A lot had changed in six years. The women's movement in motorcycling was something that I was not well familiar with. I'd never ridden with girls, and really did not even surround myself with them in regular life. I had a couple of women friends at that time and even they acted more like men than most men I know. For the first time in my life, I was nervously yearning to be accepted, even though I wasn't yet sure why.

Having become familiar with the massive population of female motorcyclists through social media, I found myself wanting to do more than just connect with women online; I wanted to actually meet, to hear their stories in person and ride with them. For so long, we women have been labeled as "catty" and "emotionally unstable," and even though I am a woman, I generally tended to agree—up until I discovered this subculture of women who actually encouraged one another. Maybe it's because they were a subculture and by nature that comes with the territory; those in the minority tend to look out for each other.

It's no secret that women have been riding motorcycles for a long time. What's changing now is that women are no longer encouraging only other women to ride, but men as well. We have become pop culture, showing up in ads for anything from purses to mascara to feature films, riding away into the sunset at the handlebars, not feebly sitting on the hero's backseat. Today, one in four motorcyclists is a woman; there are nearly seven million female riders worldwide, a 45 percent increase since 2003.

Every day, a new women's motorcycle club or woman rider is born, and the world is taking notice. The American Motorcyclist Association's #getwomenriding hashtag demonstrates an understanding for the movement and, more importantly, support. They even highlighted female influencers in the industry, including Ducati rider and blogger Alicia Elfving (The Moto Lady) and East Side Moto Babes member and racer Stacie B. London (Triple Nickel 555). Microsoft even highlighted woman rider, racer, and builder Jessi Combs in their #DoMore campaign.

Surprisingly enough, men have had a lot to do with making this women's movement possible. The male culture of motorcycling has finally recognized that there's more to women and motorcycles beyond the idea of "Hey, she's hot. Let's put her on a bike and take pictures." It's because of a man, my father, that I started riding, and a lot of other women were introduced to motorcycles in similar fashion. Whether it be a boyfriend, friend, brother, uncle, or father, they are teaching alongside us women that our daughters no longer have to conform to societal norms, that they, too, can break through the glass ceiling created from age-old mindsets. It's a common struggle for all riders, men and women alike. The modern American motorcyclist is not a rebel and lawbreaker who doesn't bathe and looks like a Sailor Jerry tattoo photo.

The women's movement in motorcycling is important for more than just the girls who swing a leg over a bike. The biggest challenge ladies face is overcoming insecurities. Since birth, we have been told that we are the weaker sex, that we should uphold





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some old-school standard of femininity. Comments like “You’re too pretty” or “You act like a girl” are still common criticisms in today’s world. What’s worse is that after hearing it over and over, you believe it. It holds a lot of women back, and at the same time it’s the fire that ignites a lot of us to ride, run, play, jump, or push even harder. The women on bikes inspire not just those within the realm of motorcycles, but anyone who has ever felt too weak, too small, too fragile, or simply afraid to do something they always wanted to do.

It’s a great time to be a woman riding a motorcycle. The legacies of the women before us are heard now more than ever and new legacies are being created every day. Every time you get on a bike, you are saying to the rest of the world that you live passionately and ambitiously and not only do you not mind being a leader, but you revel in it. Women riders are changing the way the world thinks, one mile at a time.

I have been fortunate enough in my travels to have met a lot of you who own the title of female motorcyclist. I read your stories online, I listen as you talk with passion and vigor, and I retell those stories to others in hopes of encouraging them to take the first step toward living an adventurous life. I am but one voice in this movement;

there are so many others, and it’s with all of our voices combined that we become one and provoke change. You all inspire me. That may sound cheesy, but by my feminine nature, I hold the right to get emotional when need be, damn it!

Not long ago I was just a girl sitting on the edge of her porch, nervous to embark on a fuel-inspired journey. Finally understanding the desire and hunger that you ladies feel ignited a fire within me. I finally feel like I have made it home, and now I understand what it means to be a part of something great. I’m so happy that you all have embraced me with open arms.

So I say ladies, celebrate your ability to be a woman who’s not afraid to get beat up and dirty. Paint your nails and chip the polish on your journey. Fix your hair and stuff it in a helmet. There is no reason that you cannot be both feminine and powerful, and as long as you believe that, then there is nothing that you cannot do alone and nothing we cannot do together.

“Other people will call me a rebel, but I just feel like I’m living my life and doing what I want to do. Sometimes people will call that rebellion, especially when you’re a woman.”—Joan Jett



