

# WOMEN RIDERS

How has the perception of female motorcycle riders changed over the years?

If you look at today's woman motorcyclist compared to let's say seven years ago when I learned to ride at the age of 50, perceptions are changing. The horrible stereotypes associated with women riders, such as uneducated, bad people, dirty, road rage, death-wish, angry at the world, running away and gangs are slowly disappearing. It's unfortunate that pop-culture continues to fuel the view of who rides motorcycles into two genres: biker gangs and a guy searching for something while out on the road. And the situations always show the man riding with the woman on the back, primarily as a sex object.

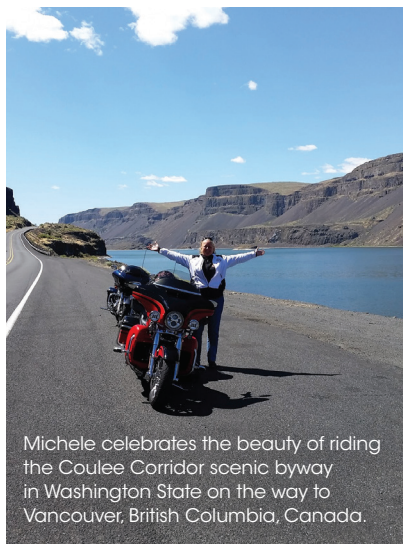
Well, open up your eyes—today there are thousands and thousands of women out on the road riding their own motorcycles. They are purchasing motorcycles that specifically fit for them, and spending their money on custom designs. There are hundreds of special events, tours, women-owned businesses and groups popping up every day.

The industry is very slow in designing motorcycles to fit women and clothing that looks feminine, yet is sturdy for riding. And the perceptions that a girl can't ride that big bike, or that girls can't teach others to ride, are finally disappearing. Just take a look at my photo—I own a Harley Davidson Limited CVO, and so do many other women.

Windy City Motorcycle Group is quite supportive in promoting its riding academy to women, and recruiting more female instructors. I absolutely love being a rider coach for the riding academy. You will see me on the motorcycle ranges at Wildfire HD, Fox River HD, Illinois HD and City Limits HD.

**There is a social aspect of motorcycle riders. What events and opportunities are available?** There are numerous women riding groups available online and in-person. These groups provide phenomenal networking experiences to learn from other women

about riding, parts and accessories, clothing, trips, special events, and good old-fashioned conversations about our families and careers. Determine what you are interested in, and I can guarantee you that you will find a wonderful group of women to ride with. For example, I ride with the Midwest Women Riders (Facebook) and the Wild Roses of Illinois—great women, great rides, great information and great friendships. Besides women's groups, I am a member of the Wildfire Harley Davidson's Harley Owners Group (HOG), and do participate in other rides such as Toys For Tots, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Tour (FAST), the H-D Milwaukee Rally Women's Ride and DuKane Abate rides.



Michele celebrates the beauty of riding the Coulee Corridor scenic byway in Washington State on the way to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

**What are some favorite rides in the area, and one of my favorite excursions?** I bought a big touring bike, because I love long-distance riding, and I have incorporated the motorcycle into my speaking business—and my clients love to see a professional female speaker on a motorcycle. My favorite rides so far are Vermont, New Orleans, the Blue Ridge Mountains, Vancouver, Utah and the

Big Bear Pass in Montana. Alaska, Historic U.S. Rte. 66, Europe and Nova Scotia are on my bucket-list.

**How can you begin the experience of riding a motorcycle?**

Sign up for class through Harley Davidson's Riding Academy at Wildfire HD (Villa Park), Fox River HD (St. Charles), Illinois HD (Countryside), or City Limits HD (Palatine). Go to your local DMV, and get the *Motorcycle Rules of the Road* book and your permit. Then ask a friend or ask me to bring you to a dealership to introduce you to the culture. I had never been in a dealership, and was scared. I experienced the friendliness and the passion everyone had for riding. I fell in love with this beautiful sport, and have met so many wonderful people. ■

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Michele Wierzgac, keynote speaker and author, has been dubbed by the media as "Business Solutions from the Lady on the Harley." In her spare time, Michele is a rider coach for Harley-Davidson's Motorcycle Riding Academy. She has a Master's degree in educational administration and leadership from Illinois State University, where she also earned an undergraduate degree in physical education and athletic coaching.