



MOTORCYCLE RIDING

interview with Genevieve Davis

questions by Shurika Kikuchi

photographs by Genevieve Davis

SHURIKA KIKUCHI How long have you been riding and what inspired you to learn?

GENEVIEVE DAVIS I got my license 8 years ago, but I started riding 5 years ago: it took me 3 years to save up for my first bike. When I was 19 I dated a guy with a vintage Triumph. I immediately fell in love with the machine and the endless potential for freedom it offered. I never had delusions of riding on the back. I wanted my own bike from the start.

SK Do you remember the first woman you ever met on a motorcycle?

I could never forget her: Karla Munoz. She was a larger than life, gorgeous, blonde, punk rock woman a few years older than me. She had a huge smile, an infectious laugh and was a bit of a local celebrity. She rode a Honda CB 750 cafe racer. Today female

motorcyclists in Southern California are fairly common, but at the time Karla, Tamara Raye, and Emma Bass were the only women I knew of, and Karla was the first I had met. I hadn't experienced having stars in my eyes the way I had for Karla, before or since meeting her. She was so kind to me. She passed away from a riding accident when she was 27, before women's motorcycling in this area really took off. I wish she could have seen what she helped inspire. Karla was the original moto girl.

SK It's no secret that when most people think of bikers they picture white men, but each and every day I see more and more women and diversity on bikes. What do you see or hope for the future reputation of bikers?

There's still a lot of patriarchal, racist, sexist, homophobic bullshit that is tolerated and expected within



pockets of motorcycle culture. I think that just by showing up, the wave of women that took up riding in the last five-ish years has challenged what was once acceptable behavior. We're breaking up one of the last "safe spaces" to pretend it's still 1965 and women are property, that painting swastikas on your tank is still shocking and cool. I understand needing places to feel free and wild and crass, but it's 2018 and my tolerance for threatening or demeaning behavior towards others is zero. In the last few years as more diverse folks take up riding, I have seen more push back, more demand for accountability and respect, and my hopes are that the culture continues to progress instead of stifling in this regressive stew thinly veiled as nostalgia. I want everyone to feel comfortable taking up riding, regardless of their race, sex, orientation or otherwise.

SK What has been the largest or most prevalent obstacle you've had to overcome as a female rider?

The same obstacle I've had to overcome as a female human: safety. I've been followed and harassed on my motorcycle, just the same as I've been followed on foot or otherwise. I take long road trips alone, I have long red hair and a sparkly blue bike, I'm easy to spot. The majority of the strangers I encounter are friendly, and fortunately I can zip out of most situations. So far, harassment hasn't stopped me from riding alone yet.

SK What do you admire most about All-Female gatherings such as Babes Ride Out? Are there any in future you plan to attend?

My answer to that actually ties into my answer to the last question. As a woman there aren't a lot of places where I'm not on my toes to some degree. The women's events are one of the few places I can not only relax, but feel strong. At the first Dream Roll I rolled up to, there was this massive meet-up and ride-out from Portland, Oregon to Mt. Hood. There must have been over 50 women in the lineup. It took me by surprise, but when we all started up our engines, sitting there straddling these roaring steel machines, I looked around and had a visceral reaction. I felt the most powerful I'd ever been. We were untouchable. There's an electricity in the air of strength through sisterhood at these events. It's the best feeling.

I'll be at Babes in the Dirt in April, Babes Ride Out Joshua Tree, as well as the Wild Gypsy Tour at Sturgis. I'd love to make it back to the Dream Roll & Babes Ride Out East Coast. I'd go to all the women's events if I could.

SK I see that you've also been surfing a bunch this year. I've found that a lot of women on motorcycles tend to engage more in high-adrenaline or what some might consider "masculine" sports such as horseback riding, snowboarding, skating, and





surfing. For generations society has had a distorted view of women who embrace their wild within. What do you think we can do to change that?

I did start surfing this year and I've become completely obsessed. I played roller derby for 5 years with the LA Derby Dolls and in the last year I've picked up snowboarding and rock climbing as well. I love the outdoors, and I'm definitely an adrenaline junky, but all these sports;motorcycling included -- are, in the most basic sense, a way I can play in nature. Interacting outside with different environments in this heightened mental state is my meditation. I'm so focused on what I am doing out there that there's little opportunity for my mind to wander. These activities act as both a challenge and a release to me.

The best way we can change the perception of femininity or break molds or stereotypes is to lead by example. I can't tell you how many times I've ridden in areas there aren't many female riders, and women in cars or little girls on the street will light up and wave when they see me and my girlfriends ride by. I've had Gran-nys stop me in parking lots and gas stations to tell me how great it is to see a woman on a motorcycle. Sometimes people need an example of someone who looks like them doing something, as permission to do it themselves. Riding is also a way to support each other. If you're expelling energy tearing other women down about what they choose to wear, what they look like, their sexuality, or other lifestyle choices, you're playing into the hands of a system that keeps women weak. No

time for cooler-than-thou girls. Build each other up, it doesn't take anything extra to be nice.

SK What is one piece of advice you'd give to new riders or women who want to learn to ride?

Get comfortable being uncomfortable - this is also just good life advice. Once you've mentally committed to the idea that you're not going to be good immediately; that it's going to take time but you'll try your hardest, it's a lot easier to learn. Choose

not to be embarrassed. It doesn't serve you and nobody cares as much as you think they do. Everybody is too busy worrying about themselves. The more you practice being uncomfortable, the easier it gets to pick up something new or scary.

See more of Genevieve's work at www.genevievedavisphoto.com and follow her on Instagram at [@genevieve_davis](https://www.instagram.com/genevieve_davis)

