



With only a shoe-string budget and zero blueprints, Cristine “Cris” Sommer Simmons set out with her pal, [Jo Giovannoni](#) , to spread the gospel about women in motorcycling. Not realizing their “naive efforts” would actually help change the face of motorcycling.

Sounds pretty profound, but their magazine endeavor, *Harley Women*, is considered the first widely distributed magazine for women riders.* Both women went on to freelance notoriety in the world of motorcycle journalism, with Cris inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame a whopping three times!

Through music, film, and writing, Cris continues to place a spotlight on women, on motorcycles, and on how the two together make good sense. Her latest effort, [The American Motorcycle Girls: The Early Years 1900-1950](#) , takes a pictorial journey to the past showing evidence of female’s longtime love affair with motorcycling. We take a moment with Cris to learn more about her latest archival process and how she first arrived at the decision to write about the sport.

Interview: Cristine Sommer Simmons

Written by Becky Shimek

HH: The idea of women riding motorcycles was still not a “marketable” endeavor in the early 80s, yet you quit your day job to co-produce a magazine solely devoted to that lifestyle. What did you and Jo Giovannoni hope to accomplish with this pioneering feat?

CSS: I think Jo and I really followed our hearts on this one. We didn’t have any background at all in publishing or even writing. Our



lives were riding our motorcycles! We had an idea and knew there were other women out there riding, just like we were, and knew that there was a need for our “own” magazine, a magazine that would give us a voice, and that was *Harley Women*. So, we really were successful in the long run. Maybe success shouldn’t always mean how much money you make (because, believe me... we didn’t make any money!), but we lived our dream and I think that means as much as anything. When I think about it, maybe that’s what our message was all along. Have a dream and live it!

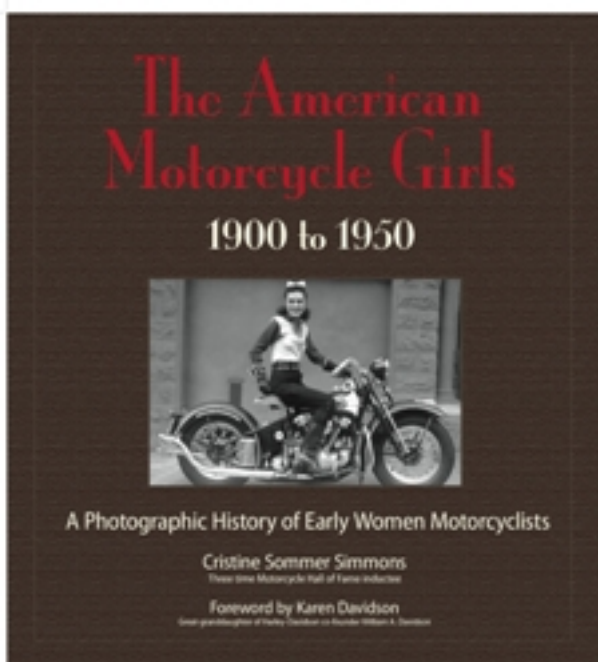
Interview: Cristine Sommer Simmons

Written by Becky Shimek

HH: After *Harley Women*, you went on to become a freelance journalist for numerous motorcycle magazines. Did that give you an opportunity to continue writing about women riders, or were you steered to more mainstream industry topics?

CSS: I wrote about what ever I wanted, which was very nice, but I remained true to heart and always had women riders as my main topic. I was lucky to be able to write a women's column for *Hot Bike Japan* for 12 years. They were great and let me write about whatever was on my mind. I also got into vintage bikes and did some articles for other magazines on that subject. This was at a time when I was raising my three kids. So it was a great way for me to balance being home with my kids and be a full time mom, but yet keep my writing too. I always told people I made it through three kids without cutting my hair or selling my bikes!

HH: Fast forward to the present where you are currently promoting your newest book "The American Motorcycle Girls," a pictorial ode of early women motorcyclist. How were you able to identify, locate, and then ultimately interview some of these women (or their family members)? The process must have been moving for you.



CSS: It was a wonderful experience that I wouldn't trade for anything. I lived this book everyday for over two years. Working on it was a true labor of love. I would be so tired at night and not

want to stop, but had to sleep! I would even dream about it! That's how fun it was. I scoured the Internet for information, looking through old newspaper archives and calling and emailing everyone I knew who was into old bikes. My husband and I are hopeless old motorcycle literature collectors and I spent countless hours looking through old motorcycle magazines. Many times I would match an unknown photo with a name. I contacted a few of the motorcycle museums who were helpful too. I made lots of calls and talked to lots of people. Having a background as a motorcycle journalist for so many years gave me a great list of contacts. I also got to know many of the families of these women, some of whom I am still in touch with. There are eight women featured in my book who are still living. I have met, or talked to all of them on the phone. Some have become close friends who I adore. My next project is to interview them on film and work on producing a documentary, which I've already started to do. One door closes and another one opens!

HH: The women covered in your book demonstrated from early on that they enjoyed riding motorcycles just as much as their male counterparts. Even though these women paved the way to greater acceptance, does it surprise you that in the 21st century we still face some of those same hurdles?

CSS: I learned so much while writing this book. One important thing is that women were riding all along and we have never really stopped. There will always be stereotypes, in any culture, and women motorcyclists have gotten more than their fair share over the years.

Overall, I think today's women have been accepted in other traditional male sports such as auto racing, golf, basketball. Why not motorcycling? There's no reason a woman can't do anything she sets her mind to. Many of these walls have been broken down. For example, look at the number of women racing at Bonneville on the salt these days. The amazing Laura Klock and her two daughters, setting land speed records. Others like Leslie Porterfield and Erin Hunter to name a few. There are well known women bike builders like Athena Ransom and Jody Periwitz, all doing what they love. Gender isn't an issue like it was even ten years ago. How exciting is that?

Interview: Cristine Sommer Simmons

Written by Becky Shimek



<http://www.hobbyhorse.com/forums/showthread.php?p=18001052>