



The Perfect Vehicle: What it is About Motorcycles

Melissa Holbrook Pierson

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Motorcycles can only be termed "charismatic objects": the feelings they call up in us are nothing short of primal. Those who are crazy about these sleek machines form a fascinating subset of society, segregated by the arcana and rituals of their motorcycling life - even as they manifest an essential humanness by their devotion to an activity that concentrates some instinctual drive toward tribalism. It is this paradox that led Melissa Holbrook Pierson, over the course of ten years of riding her motorcycle in the United States and Europe, to want to capture - amazingly, for the first time in the motorcycle's hundred-year history - the specific what and why of motorcycling. Pierson sifts through myth and hyperbole: misrepresentations about danger, about the type of people who ride and why they do so. The Perfect Vehicle is not, however, a mere recitation of facts, nor is it a polemic or apologia. Vivid historical and social accounts take up subjects as varied as the origins of the machine, the mayhem that has long been attractive to certain elements of biker culture, the often hidden story of women riders past and present, the tale of the defiant ones who taunt death on the racetrack, and especially a portrait of the normal heart - what might be called the silent majority of bikers. These are intertwined with Pierson's own story, which, in itself, shows that although you may think you know what kind of person rides a motorcycle, you probably don't.

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