



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

She's Still Riding At 85!

Gloria says she'll keep riding as long as her body will allow.

I'VE ALWAYS SAID I'm a journalist, not a joiner.

That's why I've avoided becoming a member of a motorcycle riding group. I prefer to watch the action from the sideline rather than infuse myself in it. This thinking comes

from being educated as a journalist back in the 1980s when traditional journalism values were taught, one of them being the reporter always keeps himself out of the story. I like it that way.

However, I recently broke these rules when I paid the membership dues to become a member of the Motor Maids, the longest running women's motorcycling group in the world at 70 years old. Several members have been courting me to join in recent years, and when I discovered the group's next annual convention would be held in Cody, Wyoming, my neck of the woods, I decided I wanted to go and learn more about this long-standing group that requires its members to ride their motorcycle to the convention, and, in particular, I wanted to meet some of the senior members. The Motor Maids, because of its longevity, boasts the largest contingent of women riders over 70, women who rode when it wasn't cool for a woman to ride, women who blazed trails in the 1940s. Being a history buff, I'm very interested in their stories; I might just get an article or two out of the effort as well.

Sitting among the 200-plus members at the opening ceremonies and hearing their stories, I thought of all the hotshot women riders I've met over the years. If you think you're all that on a motorcycle, join the Motor Maids because these are women who have more miles, more experiences, and more stories than most of us could ever boast. One of the oldest members of

the Motor Maids is Gloria Tramontin Struck, who, at 85, still rides her Heritage Softail Classic. Gloria hopped on her Harley two days after burying her husband of 56 years to ride from her home in Clifton, New Jersey, to Cody, arriving in time for the start of the convention. Encouraged by her longtime Motor Maid sisters, grief still so fresh, Gloria powered through 650-700-mile days alongside her daughter, who rides an Ultra Classic, to be among good friends, knowing that would ease the pain of her husband's passing. Gloria has always been a determined woman; steadfastness comes from her widowed mother who had to make do with little during the Depression years. "There was no such word as *can't*," says Gloria, whose father died in a motorcycle accident at age 31. "I became very independent early on."

While many riders park their motorcycle for good when physical and mental acuity wanes, 128-pound Gloria says she feels as young as ever. "I take no medicine and I'm a vegetarian. And I believe in all natural, like I've never used hair dye." She attributes a lifetime of healthy eating, not genes, to her good health. Her only issue: "I have high cholesterol, but recently that has come down."

We all know it takes mental and physical strength and stamina to operate a motorcycle safely and successfully. What blows me away is that Gloria, at 85 — 85 for crying out loud — has what it takes to do that. "I have friends who are 60 who can't even make it up my

front steps," she remarks. Gloria recently did something not many of us can say we'd even have the guts to do during last year's Sturgis rally. At the burnout contest at the Broken Spoke Saloon, motorcycle photographer Michael Lichter suggested she sit on the back of an Ultra Classic that some guy was about to do a burnout on, figuring it would make a great photo op. So there's Gloria, with sandals on no less, perched on the passenger seat as this guy spins his back tire, the bike skidding left to right while he muscles it to maintain control. White smoke from the burning rubber billows around the bike so much that all you see above the cloud is Gloria's head with her luscious mane of long gray hair, her face beaming upward with a broad smile ear to ear. She says she felt no fear. Rather, she felt like a celebrity that day. "Everybody was cheering and taking photos. It was like paparazzi were all around me."

Gloria says she'll keep riding as long as her body will allow. She doesn't believe in graduating to a trike or a sidecar when she can't handle two wheels anymore. When she's done, she's done. "I still have dreams. There are so many dreams, things I still want to do." One of them is to ride her motorcycle to the Motor Maids convention when she's 91. Her brother is 91 and he's still riding a motorcycle. The convention is held in the East, South, and West regions, rotating each year. When she's 91, it will be out West again, and she's determined to ride there. "I've got so many people who tell me they want to ride with me then. I'll have like 200 people with me!" I know I'll be one of them, that's for sure. What an inspiration. **AIM**

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