



health to promote equality/Baddies on Bikes: Women riding motorcycles

By: Savana Robinson



There are several benefits to riding a motorcycle: improving mental health, boosting confidence, and finding a sense of community with those who also love to feel the wind on their face. Riding a motorcycle gives the rider a feeling that is hard to emulate. That feeling is best described as freedom.

There's a saying: "You'll never see a motorcycle parked outside a psychiatrist's office." A study published by Brain Research in 2021 titled, "Modulation of attention and stress with arousal: The mental and physical effects of riding a motorcycle," found that riding a motorcycle reduced stress by 25%.

## Finding Your Girlies

Adina Kingstrom, an employee at the Jolly Giant's Cupboard at California Polytechnic State University, Humboldt, has been interested in the local motorcycle scene since 2021. Kingstrom joined The Litas Humboldt in Sept. 2022 and wants a Harley-Davidson Sportster for her first bike.

Created in 2015 by Jessica Wise, The Litas are a worldwide collective of women on motorcycles. According to The Litas community director, Kim Okabe, there are 326 branches in 32 countries across the globe. There are two in Humboldt county: The Litas Humboldt and The Litas Lost Coast, founded in Oct. 2019 and Dec. 2022, respectively. Their mission is to empower and inspire women through a community based on a shared love for motorcycles.

Kingstrom said she wants to start riding motorcycles as a way to improve her mental health, she noted that she deals with seasonal affective disorder, which according to the National Association of Mental Health, is a shift in mood that can be felt with the changing of the seasons. Less sunlight in the winter can



The Litas Humboldt pose in front of their motorcycles on the Trinidad Pier on Feb. 11, 2023. : Photo by Savana Robinson.

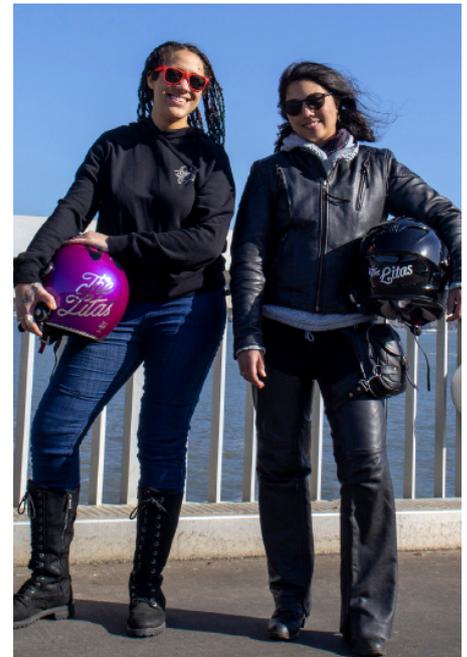
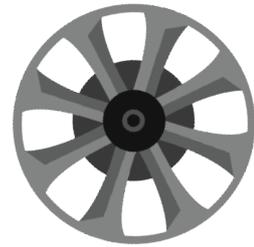
lead to symptoms such as overeating, oversleeping, and participating less in activities that would usually bring someone joy. "If I focus my energy on something positive, then that might help," said Kingstrom. "That's one of the deciding factors about it, too. If I can do something that's empowering." Kingstrom added that riding a motorcycle may alleviate the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder. "Literally being in daylight is good for me," said Kingstrom. "Just being outside for ten minutes will help me." Kingstrom also noted the negativity that she's received in her endeavor to start riding a motorcycle. "When you tell people that you want to get a motorcycle, they immediately say something like, 'oh, well, they're dangerous.'"

Kingstrom added that she is getting a motorcycle just for herself, not to make an impression on anyone. "It's going to be for me," said Kingstrom. "If you're doing things for other people, then maybe it's not the best way." Seeing a group of women riding motorcycles isn't very common compared to seeing a group of men on motorcycles. Groups such as The Litas are working to change that stereotype.

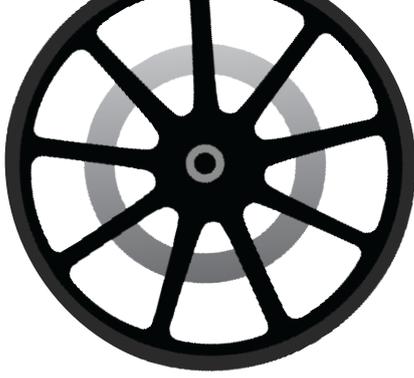
Along with Lindsay Koupal and Sara Glass, Erin Taylor founded The Litas Humboldt in Oct. 2019. Using social media, Taylor found an oppor-

tunity to meet Koupal, knowing that she also shared a passion for motorcycles. Koupal introduced Taylor to Glass, and the rest is history.

"The three of us met up for a ride and this is where I first learned of The Litas Women Motorcycle Riding Collective," said Taylor. "We decided to request



Litas founders, Brook Madison, left, and Erin Taylor, right, stand on the Trinidad Pier after the Litas Galentine's ride on Feb. 11, 2023. Photo by Savana Robinson.



forming a local branch in Humboldt County, CA since it is required to have three Founders create and lead a Litas branch."

Taylor said that she rides because of her dad. "I have been riding for about 16 years now," said Taylor. After growing up riding on the back of his bike, her dad inspired her to start riding. "He influenced me to become his motorcycle riding buddy at the age of 16."

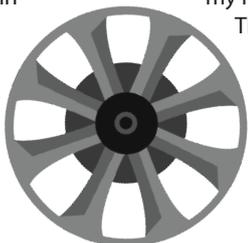
After taking the three-day California Motorcyclist Safety Program, Taylor got her motorcycle license on her 17th birthday. "Little did I know at the time, my M1 [motorcycle endorsement] was going to shape so much of my lifestyle in my late 20's/early 30's."

Taylor's goal is to inspire other women who are interested in motorcycling. "I truly believe I have successfully encouraged and recruited women to ride motorcycles and continue to do so on a weekly basis," said Taylor. "As an original Founder of The Litas Humboldt, a big part of the leadership role is to provide mentorship, especially to the new riders and women who are not riders yet but would like to be."

Taylor rides her motorcycle because it's therapeutic. "Every time I fire up the engine and accelerate into my ride, I get a dose of adrenaline and excitement," said Taylor. "It releases endorphins and a wave of pure bliss overcomes me."

Taylor refers to her fellow Litas as her Wind Sisters. "I love the feeling of leading a group ride and looking back in

my mirror to see  
The Litas riding  
in staggered



formation," said Taylor. "It always feels so empowering to ride together as a synchronized unit."

It is a rare and unique experience to be a part of a group of women that share a passion for motorcycling and are bonded like sisters. In addition, imagine the bond that a mother and daughter may have when they both have a love for riding on two wheels. That is inimitable. Inspired by her mother, third-grader Eva Madison wants to ride a motorcycle and be a Lita just like her mom, Brook Madison, who is the newest co-founder of The Litas Humboldt.

Eva Madison wants a pink Harley-Davidson Low Rider. "Work hard. Get a motorcycle. Have fun," said Eva Madison when asked what she would say to other girls that want to be like her mom. Eva Madison listed a Lita's responsibilities as encouraging others and being kind.

Brook Madison rides for her late younger sister, Janell Snead, who was diagnosed with cancer in 2019 and passed away in 2021. In 2020, they were both encouraged to start riding by

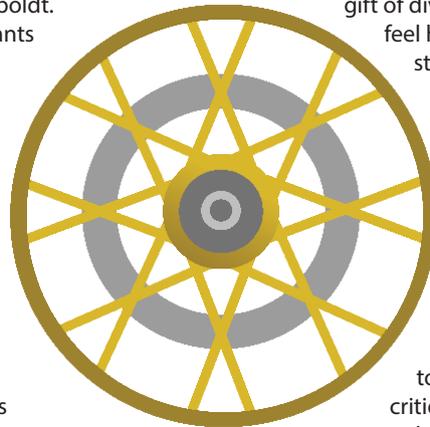
their brother who rides, and family friend Taylor, who grew up in the same town as them, (Magalia, California). Brook Madison got her motorcycle license in May 2021 and became a Lita in Aug. 2021. She gained her role as co-founder of The Litas Humboldt in Dec. 2022. "I chose to face my fears and learned to ride for myself and for my sister," stated Brook Madison.

"I am grateful for all of the encouragement and support from my family and friends."

Brook Madison named her 1995 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200 after the gift of divine influence: Grace. "I feel honored to have such a strong machine carrying me, supporting me," said Brook Madison. "I respect it and together we ride with Grace."

Through riding, Brook Madison has learned how to conquer uncertainty and continues to learn from everyone she gets to ride with. "I take tips and critiques if given. It all helps me to be a better rider. There's always room to improve," said Brook Madison. "It's important to be comfortable, alert and safe, and enjoy the ride."

Brook Madison said that when she rides, she feels free, sometimes like she's meditating. "I just flow. I like to



Emily Gunnink, owner of Gunnink's Harley-Davidson sits on her first bike, a since-rebuilt 1985 Harley-Davidson Sportster Ironhead 1000 at Gunnink's Harley-Davidson on Apr. 5, 2023. Photo by Savana Robinson.



The tank graphic on a 2022 Harley-Davidson Softail Lowrider El Diablo in Arcata, CA on Feb. 17, 2023. Photo by Savana Robinson.

cling, but she doesn't let it dissuade her from pursuing a career involving her passion. "I feel like there's still a lot of stereotypical people out there that feel it's not a woman's place," said Gunnink. "I bring so much to the plate that if they truly think I'm not bringing whatever they're looking for, it's their loss."

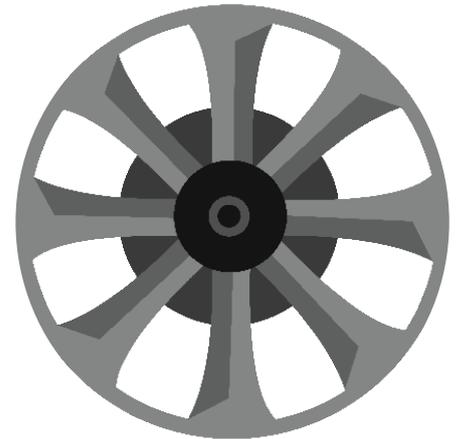
Gunnink said that she wants to instill self-trust and faith in women who want to ride. "I try to do as many events as I can every year to get more women out there," said Gunnink. "There's a lot of ladies that come in that are so nervous." Gunnink said she wants to help others break out of that box. "They think that they can't. That's the same old style of thinking," Gunnink added.

go fast and get that rush. I feel like I'm flying. I look at the birds flying and I think of my sister. Soaring together in the wind," said Brook Madison. "I feel focused and alive."

Brook Madison would like to inspire other women and young girls to believe that they can ride, too. "Start imagining it now. Set some goals, work toward them," said Brook Madison. "Help others along the way and don't be afraid to ask for help. It won't always be easy. Trust the universe and trust yourself and go for it." Brook Madison said that there is no feeling like riding with a group of women. "It's so empowering, supporting and encouraging each other to step out of our comfort zones."

spend more time with her dad, and for the feeling of freedom. In 2021, she and her husband, Leif Magnussen, bought Gunnink's Harley-Davidson from her parents. Gunnink currently rides a 2019 Harley-Davidson Street Glide Special, complete with purple flames. Gunnink said that there is some truth to the term "wind therapy." "When you get out there, you just kind of lose yourself," said Gunnink. "There's no one to talk to. There's nothing you have to deal with. It's just you and the world. It's really empowering."

Gunnink said that she has faced some sexism in the world of motorcy-



## Being a Boss

Emily Gunnink, owner of Gunnink's Harley-Davidson in Ukiah, CA has been riding on the back of her dad's motorcycle since preschool. Gunnink got her first motorcycle, a 1985 Sportster Iron-head 1000 at 19. Gunnink said that one of the reasons she started riding was to

Gino Grier sits in front of his 1991 Harley-Davidson Police Dyna FXR on Feb. 17, 2023. Photo by Savana Robinson.



## Getting Your Own Wheels

The ability to ride a motorcycle is easier to learn than some may think. Anyone that can ride a bicycle can ride a motorcycle.

Dan Ruff is a fit specialist at Redwood Harley-Davidson. A fit specialist is a motorcycle salesperson who specializes in making sure that riders find the bike that is the best one for them. "If the motorcycle doesn't fit you to start, you can form it to fit you," said Ruff. "Harley's are like Mr. Potato Heads. you can customize the bike how you want it to be"

There are several ways to tailor a bike to the rider's needs. Some seats make it easier for shorter riders to sit more comfortably and move the bike around. Different handlebars may be more comfortable, too. Lowering kits and tall boots also help a rider be more flat-footed at stops.

Ruff said that the most important part of his job is communicating with the customer to ensure they find the right motorcycle. "They're already coming in here looking at bikes, so you want to make them more excited," said Ruff. "You want to hype them up." Ruff noted his perspective on motorcycle groups as an employee of Harley-Davidson. "I'm not necessarily part of riding groups but it's cool to see a lot of the camaraderie that they have, and friendship, and family," said Ruff. "They're like tight groups. I think that's really cool that people can find that."

Ruff recommends that newer riders start on a Harley-Davidson Street Bob or a Softail Standard. Both are smaller, but powerful motorcycles, ideal for someone still practicing their skills. "It's something you're going to grow into and come to love," said Ruff, in reference to his suggested starter motorcycles.

Sportsters are probably the most popular beginner Harley-Davidson, especially among women. They are wonderful for shorter people, or someone who has never ridden before and needs something to learn on. There is no shame in saying you ride a "starter" bike, but never say it's a "girl's" bike, because it's not. A lot of non-feminine riders love sportsters for their classic appeal as a slim and sporty Harley-Davidson.

Ruff suggests that new riders do the California Motorcyclist Safety Program offered by California Highway Patrol as the first step toward getting their license.

## A Man's Perspective

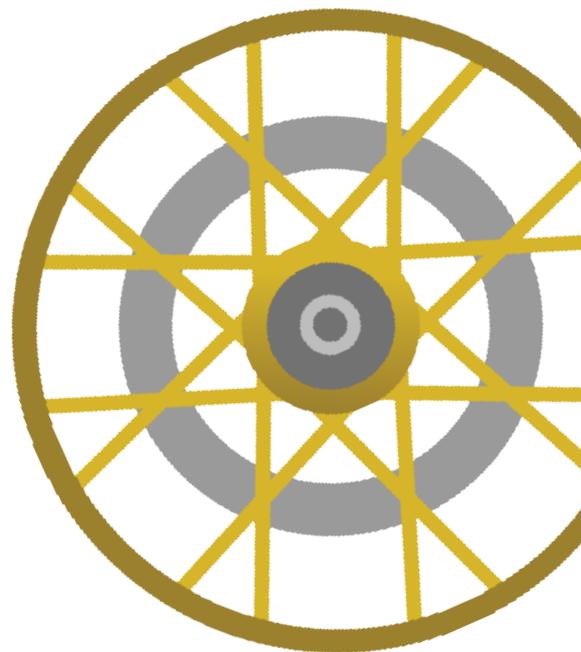
Gino Grier, a sophomore at Cal Poly Humboldt who got his motorcycle license in November of 2021, bought his 1991 Harley-Davidson Dyna FXR Police model from his godfather. Grier said his dream bike is a Harley-Davidson Fat Boy bobber.

"I see that the culture around bikes tends to be hyper masculine," said Grier. "I hate seeing guys call sportsters a girl's bike, as opposed to men's bikes. I hate that the difference isn't men and women, it's always men and girls."

Grier is in firm support of seeing more women on motorcycles. "I think everyone should spend some time in the saddle, put everything that can hurt you in front of you and make your peace with it," said Grier. "Control it."

### In Conclusion

Riding a motorcycle is a freeing and exhilarating experience. An individual's journey in motorcycle riding is intimate and rugged. It's about individuality, expression, and solitude as well as connection, community, and embracing those with whom you share a passion. A rider's identity is ever-evolving. It changes in tune with personal growth.



Brook Madison, left, and Eva Madison, right, sit on Brook's 1995 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200 outside their McKinleyville, CA home on April 3, 2023. Photo by Savana Robinson.

# Three Starter Bikes for Newer Motorcyclists

Not all motorcycles are created equal. Some are better tailored for newer riders than others. Whether someone wants something classy, sporty, or a little in-between, there is something out there for everyone. Here are three recommendations for those who are thinking of getting their first bike.

## Honda Grom 125

The Honda Grom is perfect for someone who just wants to dip their toe in the waters of motorcycling, but also wants a sports bike. It's small, low maintenance, and frugal. With a 125 cubic centimeter displacement, it gets 166 miles to the gallon and holds 1.6 gallons of fuel. Combined with a top speed of 73 miles-an-hour, it's a great city commuter. Starting at \$3,399, models in 2023 come in Matte Black Metallic, Queen Bee Yellow and Pearl White with an exclusive Candy Blue anti-lock braking system model.



## Royal Enfield Meteor 350

With a classic look, the Royal Enfield Meteor is sure to appeal to anyone looking for a cruiser to start on. It handles well, offers a smooth ride, and is a stylish and cool motorcycle. Holding almost four gallons of fuel and getting 96 miles to the gallon, it's a good city and long-haul ride. It comes in a rainbow of colors: sparkly Stellar Red, Blue, and Black, vivid Fireball Red, Yellow, and Blue, Matte Green, and glittery Supernova Brown, and Blue. 2023 models start at \$4,699, fitting into the budget of many first-time buyers.



## Triumph Bonneville T100

A beautifully high-quality, contemporary, yet classic motorcycle, the iconic Triumph Bonneville T100 packs a powerful 900 cubic centimeter capacity engine. A genuinely legendary motorcycle, it has easy handling and modern capability. The tank holds 3.8 gallons and gets 69 miles to the gallon. 2023 models start at \$10,995, making it better for someone looking to keep the bike for years to come, rather than upgrading soon after getting comfortable with their riding skills. It comes in Jet Black, Meriden Blue/Tangerine, and Carnival Red Fusion White. Available only for the year, the T100 Chrome Edition in Cobalt Blue has a higher price of \$11,459.



# Why I Ride

By Savana Robinson

I was 16 years old when I got my motorcycle license and I was the only girl at my high school with a motorcycle. Calls were made to my parents about “attitude problems,” but my father said it was good for confidence. After five plus years of riding, I’ve heard many people ask me the same question: “Why do you ride?” For my mental health. It’s called wind therapy.

When I’m on my motorcycle, I’m not thinking about my problems. I have a mantra, “I’m riding.” When I tell myself that, I stop thinking about the past or the future and I focus on the present: just riding. It’s my favorite kind of meditation. I breathe in the open air and exhale peace.

The inspiration to ride motorcycles comes from my father. Riding with him is one of my favorite things to do in the world. Getting to ride motorcycles with my dad is one of my favorite things in the world. I feel so lucky to share this special bond with him and hope that when I have a daughter someday, she’ll feel the same connection with her mother.

Falling just under five feet tall, I ride a smaller bike.. My first bike was a 2009 Honda Rebel 250. Tiny, but fun. Currently, I have a 2020 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200 Iron, which is bigger and even more fun. To personalize my bike

I’ve had a couple modifications made including a Saddlemen Step-Up seat and a one-inch lowering block. The seat lets me sit closer to the tank, making it easier to back up the bike. The lowering block stretches the suspension, bringing the bike closer to the ground, which makes my feet more flat-footed, especially when I wear my two-inch platform boots that make me feel like a badass.

I’ve faced a lot of challenges on my journey, but I’ve never let the sexist or

The inspiration to ride motorcycles comes from my father. Riding with him is one of my favorite things to do in the world.

pathetic jokes about my height dissuade me. At the end of the day, I still have over five years of experience under my belt, and I am proud of

every moment. I would encourage everyone, regardless of gender, to imagine themselves on a motorcycle just for a moment, and weigh the happiness of that feeling. There’s nothing like it.

Top: Savana Robinson with her brand new 2020 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200 Iron at Gunnink’s Harley-Davidson in Ukiah, CA on Nov. 29, 2019. Photo by Kaley Robinson.

Right: Savana Robinson on her 2009 Honda Rebel 250 at Ukiah High School on Dec. 15, 2017. Photo by Kyle Pham.

