



By TAMMY MEEHAN RUSSELL & AMANDA BRAMBLE

We've all watched movies like *Transformers* or *The Matrix* where Mikaela (Megan Fox) and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) hop on a motorcycle and ride those two wheels like the siren babes they are ... and then thought, "Damn, I wish I could be like her!"

The stigma of a "female biker" has evolved rapidly over the last few years as women have begun to realize there is not just one mold. Being a female rider is much deeper than that Hollywood rebellious image; it's a way to escape everyday anxieties. The therapeutic release of riding is a universally shared feeling; that feeling you get when you hit the pavement. Women tend to have a natural ability to selfishly nurture and pour their emotional energies into others, many times to their own detriment, leaving them burned out, drained and constantly working to stay ahead. Riding is a tool to recharge that energy and bring back a sense of identity, empowerment and energy.

With all this in mind, we decided it would be fun to dive into each other's psyches on what riding means to us. Our

similarities, our differences and overall how riding on two wheels has an inexplicable ability to bring us together.

Q: What got you into riding motorcycles?

Tammy: My childhood neighbor Larry built vintage Harleys across the street in his garage. Larry would take us for rides around town in his sidecar; honestly, these bike rides were among some of my fondest childhood memories. I didn't officially get into motorcycles as an adult until my husband got himself back into riding. My contentment on the back lasted all of a few weeks. I started to ask him a million questions about shifting, leaning and all the other technicalities of riding. After a few weeks of my questions, he challenged me to take a basic riding safety course. I've never been one to turn down any sort of challenge, so I took him up on it. I passed the tests and got my own bike the next weekend. I haven't looked back since.

Amanda: I grew up with a grandfather and father who rode and were constantly tinkering on their bikes. I was secretly obsessed with the image of being a biker, but I never showed

that interest to them. I grew up a tomboy with a natural lack of grace or manners, so I was constantly trying to fight that and be a well-behaved lady for my family. Being a biker felt wrong. I dressed how I thought people wanted me to and acted how I thought people wanted me to. It wasn't until college when I saw an Indian Vintage in the parking lot of a Whole Foods that that obsession with gasoline and spending hours in the garage came rushing back. But this time I didn't care about societal pressures at all. I wanted that bike more than anything. Seeing that Indian motorcycle made me instantly feel like "that's who I am, that's who I'm supposed to be."

Q: What keeps you riding?

Tammy: The people, places and personal challenges keep me riding. When I first hopped on two wheels, I honestly had no idea the many amazing aspects that surround the community of riding. My happy place was always at the lake. My uncle likes to tell me that I got the "water gene." Some of us get it, some don't. I guess the lake gene means that I love being in, on and around water, as much as possible. For those who don't ride a motorcycle, going for a ride isn't necessarily about the destination; it's about the ride itself. About a mile from leaving my driveway, I can ride on twisty roads among some of the most beautiful scenery around lakes and rivers. I've also met so many amazing people who use their bikes as a conduit toward accomplishing much bigger things. Through riding I've discovered a beautiful sense of community with like-minded, free-thinking change-makers, and I feel I've just barely scratched the surface of connecting with this community.

Amanda: Confidence. Riding is the only thing I have found that completely clears my head of anxieties and stressors. My chronic low self-esteem and thoughts that I couldn't do something melted away instantly the day I started riding. That feeling you get when you hit a straightaway, drop into sixth gear and take off is like nothing explainable. It also gives you a reason to get out of the house sometimes. Being a homebody kept me from seeing some amazing places. Moving from North Carolina to Minnesota, I now ride past lake after lake in awe of the tranquility it brings! When I talk to women about riding, one of the first things I hear is "I don't think I can do that" or "That bike is too big for me." Our lack of confidence is the only thing stopping us. Riding is empowering. Riding is freeing, and riding makes you feel like a total badass.

Q: What prevented you from riding sooner?

Tammy: No idea. I suppose confidence? Maybe exposure? I suppose a little bit of the stigma. ... At the point that my husband got his bike, I literally said the words "I'm just fine on the back of your bike. I do not need to ride myself." ... Luckily, it only took me a few weeks and a little challenge from the hubs to change my state of mind. There aren't many times in our adult lives that we can take on a new challenge and feel a huge sense of accomplishment. Apparently, my mom also rode a motorcycle, and as the story goes, she met my grandparents

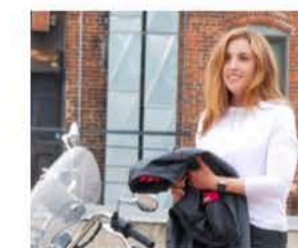
(her future in-laws) by picking up my dad on the back of her bike. Seriously, I have no idea how I didn't get into it sooner.

Amanda: 1,000% confidence. Like I said before, I grew up in an environment where a woman had certain roles. Riding a motorcycle was not one of those roles. Even after I knew I wanted to ride so badly, it took time to get the confidence to jump on. It took friends and family helping my anxiety and urging me to do it before I jumped on. No matter what I accomplished in life, I always had this sense of needing to be better or doubting my abilities. It wasn't until after I started riding that my outlook completely changed. I now have the feeling of being able to take on any task brought to the table. It's amazing how riding can affect your self-esteem! The more women riders you meet, the more you realize we are all different. There isn't one style, no stereotypical "biker chick." Once you start riding for yourself and not trying to blend in, that's when the fun starts!

Q: What is something about riding that would surprise most nonriders?

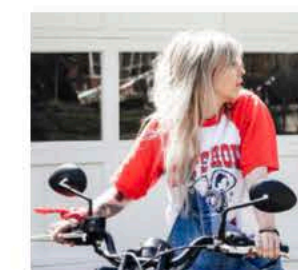
Tammy: Motorcycle riders are some of the most generous philanthropic peeps I've ever met. Nearly every ride I've been on has included an aspect of fundraising for a charity, riding for a cause or giving back to a community.

Amanda: I completely agree! The motorcycle community bases the majority of their events around charity and causes close to their hearts. The Sturgis rally was also a big shock for me! It's not just a mega party; it's about the connections you make on the road. It doesn't matter what you ride, if you blow a tire ... there will always be a rider to stop and help you. This tight-knit community welcomes new riders and protects their own — it's an amazing feeling! Every time we go to Sturgis, I make friends that stay with me through life.



Tammy Meehan Russell

Tammy is the chief catalyst of The PLUM Catalyst, a strategy and innovation consulting firm focused on connecting communities through new transportation technologies. She lives in Minnesota with her husband Mike, their four kids and their adorable pup, Zoey.



Amanda Bramble

Amanda is the marketing manager at and part owner of Indian Motorcycle St. Paul in the Twin Cities. She moved up to Minnesota from North Carolina when they purchased the company in January 2022. She now lives in New Richmond, Wisconsin, with her fiancé and Great Dane.