

# PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF WOMEN

**W**hen *ADVMoto* began publication in 1999, adventure motorcycling appeared to be very much a man's world. In fact, statistics from that period indicate only 8% of U.S. motorcycle owners were female. Eighteen years later, there can be no question that women have established themselves firmly as participants in, leaders of, and advocates for adventure riding. Women now make up 14% of motorcycle owners and 25% of riders in the U.S., according to the Motorcycle Industry Council. Today our pages are graced with words and images from and about females who ride, wrench, guide, coach and organize—so much so that it's easy to overlook just how much progress has been made in the last 20 years.

To understand what's driving this change, we interviewed several of today's most influential female adventurers about their experiences, observations, and visions for the future. While several have been involved for some time and others are relatively new, they're all forces to be reckoned with in today's adventure riding world.

Englishwoman Lisa Thomas has been riding the world with her husband Simon on their *BMW* motorcycles since 2003. Their travels have been tagged "The World's Longest Motorcycle Journey" ([2RideTheWorld.com](http://2RideTheWorld.com)). Alisa Clickenger, American motojournalist, organized and led the 2016 *Sisters' Centennial Ride* in honor of the pioneering Van Burens and is busy leading all-women's motorcycle tours around the globe ([MotoAdventureGal.com](http://MotoAdventureGal.com)). Former motocrosser Pat Jacques, also an



IVANA



ALISA



LISA



PAT



EGLE

# ADVENTURE RIDERS

by Susan Drago



Lisa Thomas takes in the view from a campsite at the base of the Annapurna Himalayas in central Nepal. The tallest peak in the background is Machapuchare, also known as Fishtail Mountain. It is one of Nepal's holy mountains, which means it hasn't and never will be climbed.



Egle Gerulaiyte rides through Crete's Tripiti Gorge while exploring the island's back roads in 2016.

American, is a motorcycling coach and the organizer of the first all-women's ADV motorcycle rally, which occurred in 2016 in Colorado ([ADVWoman.com](http://ADVWoman.com)). Relative newcomers include Macedonian Ivana Colakovska who, with partner Manu Torres, is engaged in motorcycling all seven continents in an undertaking tagged "Around Gaia" ([AroundGaia.com](http://AroundGaia.com)), and Egle Gerulaiyte, a native of Lithuania, traveler and journalist, who runs the [WomenADVRiders.com](http://WomenADVRiders.com) website in the midst of her round-the-world ride.

Back in 1999, Ivana was a young teenager whose dreams didn't yet include motorcycle adventures. Egle was still in high school but, she says, "planning her escape." For the others, the foundation was already laid for their future adventures. Alisa and Lisa were active motorcyclists, and Lisa and husband Simon were "feeling the need for an escape and a big adventure." Meanwhile, motorcycling was nothing new for Pat, who had retired from racing motocross but had acquired a *Honda XR350* and was rediscovering her love for trail riding and "simply exploring."

For all, motorcycling eventually became the vehicle to satisfy their desires to travel, rather than their travels being primarily about the motorcycle. As Egle puts it, "I'm a traveler first, motorcyclist second, and adventure is and will always be more important than the bike on many levels." And Lisa recalls, "Having ridden on the road for years I always knew what was around the next bend, it was either another bend or more traffic. The idea of standing on the pegs and speeding through the Sahara, or across an endless savanna, is my very definition of freedom... and isn't freedom what we're all after?"

Along the way, role models have provided

inspiration. Lisa credits the U.K.'s Patsy Quick, the first British woman to complete the *Dakar Rally*, and Pat cites former world champion motocrosser Rolf Tibblin. For Alisa, it was someone's grandmother: "When I was fiddling around with the idea of riding a motorcycle to South America," she says, "I came across the story of an older lady who had ridden solo to Ushuaia. The article mentioned how cool her grandchildren thought she was, but all I remember thinking was, 'Well, if Grandma can do it, then I certainly can!'"

A man she recalls only as "Ryan from California," was Egle's muse. They met in Peru in 2013 when Egle didn't yet know how to ride but had decided she wanted a two-wheeled machine to become her primary mode of transportation. Ryan was riding South America on a small dirt bike. "He could have told me I was crazy, laughed at me, or been condescending; he could have given me some generic advice." But he did none of those things. Instead, he helped Egle find and purchase her first bike, learn to ride it, then wished her luck.

The group's thoughts on the forces driving the growth in women riders affirm the obvious: Seeing other women through social media with personalities like author Lois Pryce is having an impact. "We saw it, tried it, and wanted it, and later we shared the experience," says Ivana. And Lisa reminds us that motorcycle and accessory manufacturers are doing a better job of making bikes and gear that are a good fit for women's physiques, making it easier for them to enjoy the lifestyle.



But there's also a deeper and not-so-obvious undercurrent: "I don't believe that there are forces driving these women," says Pat Jacques. "Rather I believe that their passion is pulling them to live their truest, boldest, most authentic and powerful lives. I believe that there is an awakening amongst women, and as we see and hear about more and more of these exciting, nontraditional life choices that it fuels the passions of kindred souls."

Yet Egle provides a fresh, almost contrarian, perspective: "I think there are increasing numbers of women involved in motorcycling, period," she says. "ADV riding, or rather, the ADV riding industry is fairly new; so there are more and more ADV riders in general, and some of them just happen to be women. I don't think women adventure riders represent this wondrous, surprising new trend, and I certainly don't think women ADV riders are these exceptional unicorn-like beings as they're very often portrayed. People love adventure riding—that's all there is to it."

According to these leaders, most of the limitations still

existing today for women motorcyclists are self-imposed. Lisa puts it this way: "Unfortunately, many women feel uncomfortable getting out of the shadow of their own stereotypes. I would encourage any women to get out there and do it! Procrastination and doubt is just slow self sabotage." And she adds one of her favorite quotes, from Ryan Blair: "If it is important to you, you'll find a way. If not, you'll find an excuse."

Pat notes that training for women continues to be an issue: "Without question women are physically different from men, we learn differently from men and we build confidence differently, too. Yet, for some reason, we still seem to think that women should be taught motorcycling exactly how the men are." The training Pat offers through an all-female coaching staff is her contribution to overcoming that challenge.

And there's still an opportunity for motorcycle and gear manufacturers to be better listeners, even as selection improves. Alisa has this advice for them: "Besides the obvious



Alisa Clickenger negotiates a water crossing on Section 5 of the *Colorado Backcountry Discovery Route* near Lynx Pass, just south of Steamboat Springs.

'Don't you dare shrink it and pink it,' come up with innovative ways to fit a wider array of women's bodies. And don't think that we don't play as hard or as dirty as the men. Stop giving us less armor, less protection, less less less."

That said, she acknowledges as a journalist in the apparel industry that there's a financial challenge: "Factories have minimum order quantities, meaning an apparel company needs to order a certain amount of goods before they'll do a run," she explains. "Motorcycle shops have a hard time because a lot of people these days go into the shops, try on the clothes, and then order online for a few dollars less. What's the point in stocking a full size run if the products are just going to sit on the shelves?"

Beyond that, Pat points out an undertone that still needs to be addressed: "I would most like for motorcycle manufacturers and dealerships to really start paying genuine attention to women. At the *IMS Long Beach* motorcycle show, I did an experiment. I spent a minimum of 15 minutes and sat on two to three different motorcycles in four different OEM manufacturer areas. Not one sales person approached me. Yet, men would walk in and stand and look at a motorcycle and a sales person would walk over and engage them in conversations." Pat continues, "I have 50 years of experience riding and racing motorcycles. I know my way around. Yet, I was completely ignored. Just imagine how it feels to a woman who is new to this, knows nothing and wants to learn."

As women become proportionately a greater force in the ADV riding community, change is inevitable: "We're


already seeing a marvelous sea change within the sport and within the industry," says Alisa. "It used to be that the only all-ladies events to look forward to were *Femmoto* and the *AMA Women and Motorcycling* conferences every three years. Now it's very different. Last year Pat Jacques organized the first ever all-woman adventure rally. This year Pat and I organized the first all-ladies *Colorado Backcountry Discovery Route*, and the tour sold out before we even managed to put out the press release."

Women flexing their financial strength will lead to better products and services for everyone, says Pat. "When women ride," she adds, "the whole family rides. Hopefully the motorcycle industry is waking up to that fact."

Lisa points out, "As a gender our view on motorcycling typically is more pragmatic than your average guy. We plan more, we anticipate problems, we look a little further ahead, which means that we demand that ideas, technology and products evolve in a slightly different direction than many of my male riding friends who're happy to just throw their legs over any bike, tear off into the distance and think about safety, hygiene, and getting hungry later. As more women get involved, our collective voice will be heard by the industry, which in turn will affect market forces and product development."

So, what will it look like for women motorcyclists in another decade or two? "Maybe then we will be riding flying motorbikes," says Ivana.

But Lisa cautions, "I honestly believe that we need



Ivana Colakovska asks directions from a group of Maasai women in northern Tanzania on the way to Lake Natron, the Ol Doi Nyio Lengai Volcano looming in the background.

Balanced body position is a priority for Pat Jacques. "For me, when I ride balanced, I feel light. Almost like I'm flying," she says.



to be careful about focusing on the divide between male and female riders, as ultimately many of the concerns and issues that can easily be thought of as women-only problems are actually shared by many, many men. The limitations we each have are the limitations we imagine for ourselves and that is equally true for either sex. The important thing is to constantly challenge yourself, to grow, to learn and to find yourself on the next horizon."

Still, as Alisa puts it, "In my lifetime it sure would be cool if I could roll up to a gas station and pull my helmet off and have people not be surprised that I'm a woman."

Chances are, Alisa will get her wish and it won't take another 18 years. The adventure riding community as a whole is growing and that's good for everyone involved. Lisa says it best: "Motorcycling is about passion over practicality and as a species, let alone a gender, as long we value passion there will always be people who want, and need to ride motorcycles." **ADV**



**ADV**Moto Associate Editor **Susan Dragoo** rode dirt bikes as a youngster and returned to the fold when she traded her Harley Sportster for a Yamaha XT225 in 2006. She's been writing for motorcycle publications since 2007 and her current "adventure bike" is a 2003 Kawasaki Super Sherpa 250. [SusanDragoo.com](http://SusanDragoo.com)

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