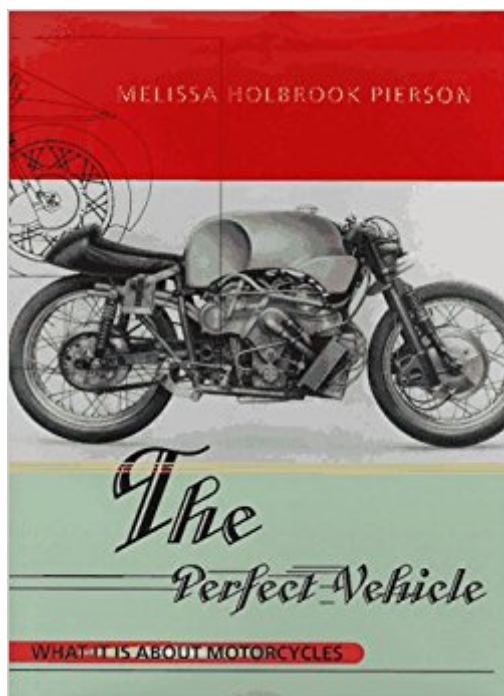


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# The Perfect Vehicle: What It Is About Motorcycles



## Synopsis

In a book that is "a must for anyone who has loved a motorcycle" (Oliver Sacks), Melissa Pierson captures in vivid, writerly prose the mysterious attractions of motorcycling. She 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 a mere recitation of facts, nor is it a polemic or apologia. Its vivid historical accounts -- the beginnings of the machine, the often hidden tradition of women who ride, the tale of the defiant ones who taunt death on the racetrack -- 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"From my mother I learned to write prompt thank-you notes for a variety of occasions," Melissa Holbrook Pierson writes. "From Mrs. King's ballroom dancing school I learned a proper curtsy and, believe it or not, what to do if presented with nine eating utensils at the same place setting.... From motorcycles I learned practically everything else." Pierson, an intellectual New Yorker, is open to her own contradictions--she is bold and fearful, a motorcycle-crazed poet with a Ph.D., and these seeming incompatibilities are what make this book so good. She can write equally well about the visceral pleasures of riding and about the pains of heartbreak or her own displeasure with her fears. This is the motorcycle memoir for those who are sick of memoirs--or motorcycles. It is a book for people who don't know what the big deal is about riding, or why the Guggenheim Museum in New York, in a swirl of controversy, would exhibit motorcycles as works of modern art. "Riding on a

motorcycle can make you feel joyous, powerful, peaceful, frightened, vulnerable, and back out to happy again," Pierson writes, "perhaps in the same ten miles. It is life compressed, its own answer to the question, 'Why?'" --Maria Dolan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It's too bad that people with little interest in motorcycles will generally not be the ones picking up this book to read. Although motorcycle diehards will find their convictions confirmed here, motorcycle know-nothings perhaps could benefit the most from its unabashed pages, gaining the inspiration to try their hand at motorcycling down the open road. The author's 10-year love affair with motorcycles informs this extended homage to the thrills and chills of this exciting vehicle. Only 7 million Americans ride, Pierson cites; but they are a dedicated few, who seek no greater pleasure than being ensconced on a motorcycle, head down, wind roaring in their ears, "the road, constantly turning, constantly offer[ing] up the possibility of something unexpected around the bend." The author appreciates its dangers, but she hopes her reader appreciates the feeling of freedom that time spent on a motorcycle can provide. Discussions of motorcycle history and racing round out this buoyant book. Brad Hooper

I tried to like this book and for the first 100 pages I found it entertaining but after that it seemed as if Melissa used filler to meet some length requirement set for herself. The moto guzzi history section was especially brutal as well as the latter half of the book that talks about men in absolutes. The writing style is scatterbrained and seems to have no rhyme or reason to it. There would be personal accounts blended in with motorcycle history that left me constantly thinking "am I learning or am I experiencing?". Overall it was uninteresting. Some odd instances: She clearly disliked the crowd and culture at the Laconia Bike Week in NH...but she stubbornly attended year after year. Personally I went one year and I hated it. I don't think I'd bring my wife there for more than a 1/2 day. The solution is simple, I don't go. She complains about men making comments about women riders. She complains about the well meant comments such as "nice to see a female rider". Maybe it was meant to be written as a girl power book which is all well and good but it comes off as a "woe is me" piece. She broke up with a guzzi mechanic boyfriend with barely any detail which probably would've made for a good story. She then confusingly followed him around like a puppy follows its owner. It would've been different had she gave us more details to understand why all of this happened. She talks about her husband who isn't a rider for all told maybe 1 paragraph. Yet her old boyfriend pulls in a solid 10 pages. hmmm.....

I was hesitant to buy this book based on the reviews of many other readers, but after pretty much running out of stuff to read I took a chance on it. It was an interesting book, but had some serious shortcomings. For starters, Pierson writes in a style that reminds me of a Tarantino movie, the subject jumps around, but with Tarantino there are connections between the sequences, Pierson's come off as being scatterbrained. The chapter on the history of Moto Guzzi had nothing to do with the theme of the book or Pierson's life, and was HEAVILY borrowed from Mick Walker's extensive histories of the company. Pierson's background is academic and she writes as such, however I'm afraid that it comes off as condescending in many cases, and myself coming from a similar background would never relate my personal life experiences, especially about riding, in such a manner. Another reviewer stated that he's not sure if the author actually even enjoyed riding. While I don't necessarily agree with this assessment, I can see why it was made. Pierson seemingly got involved with riding more for the fashion, amongst other wrong reasons and despite her long trips and years of experience, she comes off as being an amateurish show off. She touts feminism, but at every point of the book, finds herself relying on a man to fix all of her motorcycling problems. In fact, at the end of the book she writes that if it weren't for her husband, who she met by writing to him for help with the book, it probably wouldn't have gotten done. Now before you label me as a chauvinist, I'd like to state that I own both "Lois on the Loose," and "Red Tape and White Knuckles," by Lois Pryce - A woman who rode from Alaska to the tip of South America and then from England to through Africa. She did this mostly alone, and was able to repair her motorcycle, deal with the emotional strains of both trips, and conquer all the goals she set out to do. If anyone could argue a case for feminism, it'd be Lois Pryce, and not once in her books does she mention it, she's far too mature of a rider and I also believe an author. If you are the type of rider that buys a motorcycle for the style and plays biker on the weekends, this may be the book for you. If you are a year round rider who does it for the love of riding, I think you'll be embarrassed reading Pierson's book and afraid that people who don't ride may think her experiences are the standard and not the exception. Nonetheless, I wasn't frustrated enough to stop reading the book and it's still on my shelf. If you want a real riding experience that conveys the motorcycle as being "the perfect vehicle," do yourself a favor and pick up one of Lois Pryce's books.

Good book for those who love motorcycles. Very well written. A somewhat similar book, also by a female rider is "Motorcycles I've Loved" by Lily Brooks-Balton. However I preferred the writing style of Holbrook-Pierson. As other reviews have mentioned, I would have given this book 5 stars if it was

not for the chapter dedicated to Moto Guzzi bikes (it just felt out of place). Regardless, if you have a deep passion for motorcycles, this book is well worth the read.

A gem of a find for the motorcycle enthusiast. Melissa does a fine job of sharing her love of riding and self disclosure through her own journey. In addition, she writes with historical accuracy the past and present of women in motorcycle riding, racing, and loving. Too bad it took me this long to discover her book. She could certainly do a follow up, second addition. I'd love to meet her one day.


This book was recommended to me by the president of our Dual Sport group -- and it's been one of the most spot on reads that I've had in a very long time. Pierson weaves both personal and informative studies of motorcycle life expertly. This is a great read for anyone, but especially other lady riders can glean a lot from what Pierson has gathered in this short book.

Successor to Pirsig. And if you know a woman who could be seduced into enjoyment of the world of two wheels, this is really your book. And if you have a Guzzi fetish (I do), she wrote this for you. Don't go thinking this is anti-macho or over-the-top girly of feminist. It's just a really good (REALLY GOOD!) experiential piece on motorcycling.

I love seeing female riders excited enough about riding to write about it. This particular rider is extremely verbose in her prose and praise for the two wheels that move the body and soul. An excellent read.

At turns confusing, irritating, infuriating and enlightening.....but, always a good read. Actually got me interested in Moto Guzzis and now I have owned two. Years on, Melissa Holbrook Pierson is still publishing and playing to a divided audience. So what. Ride and write on!

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