



Born to Be Wild: A History of the American Biker and Bikes 1947-2002

By Paul Garson, Editors of Easyriders

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Take an exhilarating ride through the history of the American bike, biker, and the biker nation in this fascinating and comprehensive chronicle of the biker era and today's ever-expanding legion of motorcycle enthusiasts. Impassioned, idiosyncratic, and razor sharp, *Born to Be Wild* traces a century's worth of the culture, the bikers, and the bikes themselves.

Who are these bikers? Are they those hard-living, leather-clad, tattooed guys often associated with images of the Hells Angels and Satan's Sinners? Or are they those clean-cut, suit-and-tie wearing riders with the sporty helmets you pass on your daily commute? In fact, they are both, for what began as a subculture of misfits and outlaws has grown into a flourishing society of men and women who celebrate the freedom of the open road and the brotherhood they find among bike enthusiasts of all stripes.

Today's biker has evolved from the rough-and-tumble antihero to a vast and vibrant biker culture populated by a new breed of rider including the RUBs, or Rich Urban Bikers, and championed by everyone from titans of industry like the late Malcolm Forbes to media celebrities like Jay Leno. And while elements of rebellion still remain intrinsic to the biker mystique, the culture has in fact expanded to include a plethora of riders from the American mainstream -- doctors, lawyers, and executives -- who love the freedom they find on their bikes and the camaraderie they find with their fellow devotees. It is also a multibillion-dollar industry that draws hundreds of thousands of participants and spectators to its annual events.

Born to Be Wild, written by motorcycle journalist Paul Garson and the editors of *Easyriders* magazine, captures as never before the spirit and evolution of the biker era. Beginning in 1895, *Born to Be Wild* traces the development of the modern bike, with special attention to Harley-Davidson's supreme contributions to the quality of the machines as well as the aesthetics of biker society. Featuring numerous fascinating sidebars that highlight the particular characteristics of the culture, the book also explores the socio-political events that have culminated in the great biker nation that we know today.

With more than two hundred photographs of bikes and bikers across the decades, *Born to Be Wild* is a definitive work that will open readers' eyes to a thriving society, one whose celebration of freedom and the open road precisely reflects what is best about our country as a whole.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This is a breezy look at the mystique as well as the myths surrounding the love affair between motorcycle enthusiasts and their machines, and its publication is perfectly timed to coincide with the 100-year anniversary of the Harley-Davidson company. As the premier American cycle, the Harley and its various permutations grab a sizable amount of the book's pages, and the book provides an excellent short history of the most storied of motorcycles. But the authors are not uncritical of the company's ups and downs—they mention the company's poor quality during the 1970s. The author's real subject is much grander than just a history of technological developments: they want to capture how "the concept of the motorcycle outlaw was as uniquely American as jazz." Decade by decade, the book details the "evolving history" of the cycle, from "cut-down to bobber to custom chopper," at the same time as it connects cycle culture to mass culture, from Brando's movie *The Wild One* (Brando rode a Triumph) and the history of the leather biker jacket to an excellent critical look at current helmet laws. Readers not familiar with the rough-and-ready style of the popular *Easyriders* motorcycle magazine may bristle at the authors' unbridled love of the wild side of biking when there were "no multimillion-dollar R&D facilities required, no patents, no DMV rule books, no smog certificates, and no limits." But there is no doubting this is an essential new classic in the field of books on motorcycle culture in general.

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From [Booklist](#)

A salient feature of this wide-ranging appreciation of motorcycles and their lifestyle is the breezy, informal writing of the flagship journal of chopper piloting, *Easyriders*. Garson and the other *Easyriders* editors comprehensively trace the cycle's development, paying respects to foreign manufacturers while maintaining focus where it belongs, on Harley-Davidson and its many satisfied customers. In boxed sidebars, they present life-on-the-road vignettes, and they scatter lots of illustrations throughout. Indeed, the pictures of vintage bikes and striking custom jobs are worth the price of the book—but don't overlook the pictures and stories of noteworthy bike passengers. Sadly, more revealing pictures of distaff scooter lovers, oft seen and loved in issues of *Easyriders* and other cycle mags, are absent here. Detailed but far from bogged down by it, this is an excellent resource for hog-ridin' fools and those who love them. If it circulates enough, consider a library subscription to its source and, perhaps, some videos of the great annual biker rally at Sturgis, South Dakota. *Mike Tribby*

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About the Author

Paul Garson is a twenty-year veteran of motorcycle journalism. The author of over a thousand articles on biking, he has published work in more than fifty magazines, including *Easyriders*. The first editor of *Hot Bike*, Garson is the former Editor-in-Chief of *VQ*. In partnership with Jim Lensveld, he published *Harley-Davidson: Factory and Custom Dream Machines*. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

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