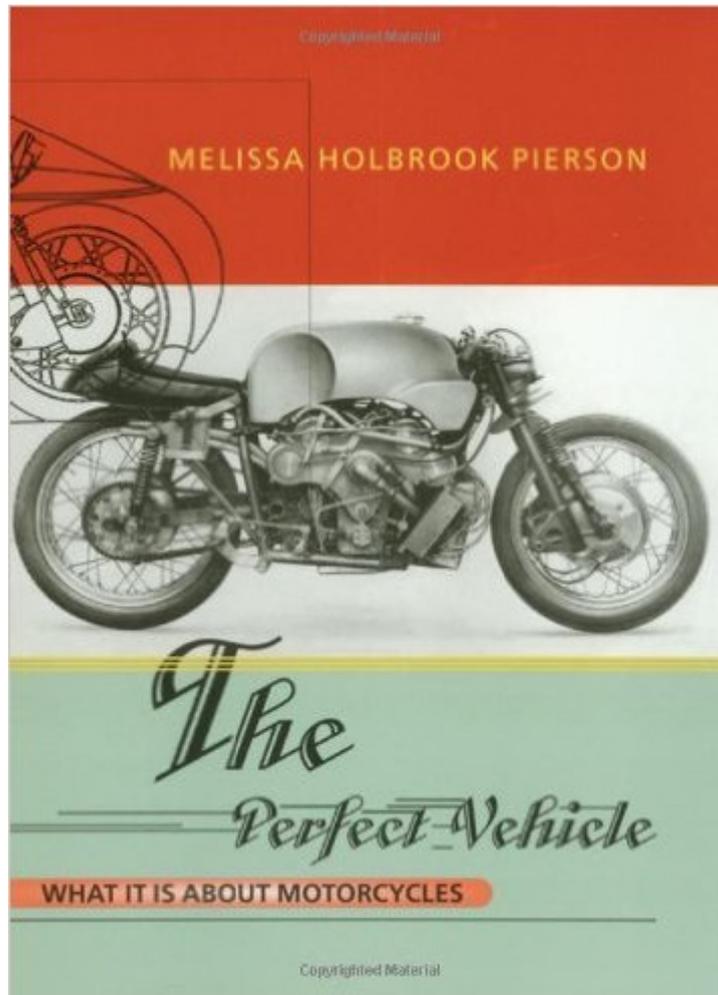


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The Perfect Vehicle: What It Is About Motorcycles



Synopsis

"This book, a polished, winding meditation on the theory and fractiousness of motorcycles, celebrates both their eccentric history and the wary pleasures of touring." •The New Yorker 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

This book will further your insight into why motorcyclists ride and why they think what they do about their bikes, motorcycling, and each other. But by the time Pierson is on to her second bike mechanic boyfriend, you will realize that you're going to have to see the truth for yourself, because the author has her hands so full with her own issues -- anxiety, delusion, hypocrisy -- that she can hardly help herself or her endlessly sick bike, let alone help you, the questing reader. She does give you all the clues you will need, so don't despair. It's just that you're on your own in figuring out what the clues mean. The Fallen Bike Incident is a good example of Pierson's lack of self-knowledge, and why this

book is accused of male-bashing. In the rain, Pierson's bike has fallen over due to the soft, wet surface she has planted her side stand in. This is a classic blunder. It's in the curriculum of the motorcycle safety course (of which Pierson is a graduate) and she even mentions elsewhere in the book how, for this very reason, wooden blocks were passed out in the dirt parking lot of a motorcycle rally. You can easily conclude that it is her own damn fault her bike fell over, but you won't read her admitting it in so many words, and this lack of personal accountability is everywhere in *The Perfect Vehicle*. In her motorcycle class she has been taught how even a grandmother can lift up even a fallen Honda GoldWing (800+ pounds of bike), but for reasons unexplained, she is unable to lift her sub-400 pound Moto Guzzi. Again, no admission that she failed to learn the very thing she was specifically taught to do; you just read that it didn't work out and draw your own conclusion.

The first writing in this book (the Forward) is worth the price of admission. If it stayed at that level, it'd be "off the charts great" ... up there with "Eat, Pray, Love". Unfortunately, this is not the case. In the Forward (and the Postscript, for that matter), her writing is concise, poetic, wonderful ... it is art. And it's about the motorcycle - exactly what the title promises it will be. It is simply awesome. But from there on, she takes more twists and turns than her favorite ride. And they don't really live up to the title or its subtitle. Instead of addressing "the Perfect Vehicle" or "What it is about Motorcycles", it addresses Melissa's own journey. And in this, I feel like she cheated us. She might have more aptly entitled it "Motorcycles, Men, and Me". And - even with that - it could be a good story. But that tight, crisp, clean writing in the Forward is not present throughout much of the rest of the book. It is more flowery, rambling, unfocused, and off-point from the title. This is where it dips to 2 Stars. She also tends to spend a lot of time grinding an axe about her experience of being a FEMALE rider in what she perceives to be a Man's realm. But then again, maybe that points out to a dated book (she's relating experiences from the mid 90s). This is maybe 3-star writing. I've been motorcycling for only 4 years. I got started in Thailand when a woman from Germany talked me into motorcycling with her through the Golden Triangle area along the Burma-Thai border. Now, when I bike in Idaho, often as not at least 1/3 of the riders I'm with are women. They are on Beemers, Harleys, Yamahas, Suzukis ... and this is IDAHO. Not exactly what you'd call a liberal state.

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