

BORN TO BE MILD: Gloria Tramontin Struck, fourth from right, with her fellow Jersey Motor Maids, including her daughter, Lori DeSilva, third from right. Below: Struck, circa 1944, on her 1941 Indian Bonneville Scout.



Jersey Girls on Wheels

Roar down the highway with the Motor Maids. **BY CATHERINE LAUGHLIN**

The cold can bite. The rain can pierce. And the wind can chafe your face. None of that bothers Gloria Tramontin Struck, a biker babe—yes, you can call her that—who at age 87 is still riding her 2004 Harley-Davidson Heritage Softail Classic.

For 66 years, the plainspoken grandmother has been a member of the Motor Maids, the oldest continuously operating all-women motorcycling organization in North America. It was a revolutionary idea when founders Linda Dugeau and Dot Robinson started the group in 1940. Today, there are nearly 1,200 members nationwide, including 17 in New Jersey.

The group stages rides and the occasional charity event. On a recent Sunday, Struck and 13 other Jersey girls motored to Country Griddle in Flemington for their monthly meeting. The women in the group are variously mothers, single, married, divorced; artists, caterers, teachers, homemakers and writers, says Raritan Township fire chief Risa Hynes. Riding means different things to different members: adventure, freedom, power. But there's one common denominator: "We all like to ride," says Hynes, a member for eight years.

Some women start riding in midlife, says Susan Keenan, 53. (In

fact, none of the current Jersey group is under 40.) Kennan joined the club more than two years ago. "I ride to the grocery store and put the bags in my saddle bag," says the Delanco resident.

Joan Watson, 87, joined the Motor Maids in 1948. Years later, she lobbied in Trenton for legislation that in 1977 allowed bikers on the cars-only Garden State Parkway. "I'm not getting old, but my hands are," Watson says. The Pompton Lakes woman retired from riding seven years ago, when gripping the handlebars became too difficult.

These days, Tonie Holmlund, the 60-something director of the New Jersey group, relies on a cane for balance when she walks. During a motorcycle rally in 1994, Holmlund suffered a stroke. Fourteen years later, she had open-heart surgery. But she still blasts down the road on her 600-pound Harley.

"The doctor inserted a pig's valve into my chest. And everyone knows a Harley is called a hog," says the Piscataway resident, who has been a Motor Maid for 45 years. "I like to think I have a piece of my Harley inside me." ■



Catherine Laughlin rides her Schwinn Ridge bicycle around her hometown of Riverton but leaves the real riding to the Motor Maids.