



Interview with Gloria O'Brien Fontenot

Helmet Hair Magazine.com is thrilled to introduce stuntwoman extraordinaire, Gloria O'Brien Fontenot—a rider with heart, soul and lots of panache. Gloria can be seen in the upcoming movies “Blade III” (motorcycles for Jessica Biele) “Constantine” and “Fun with Dick and Jane.”

Gloria and fellow stuntwoman, Darlene Williams, founded the V-10 Stunt Team to support other stuntwomen and improve the quality of their abilities, and work in the stunt community with the goal of commitment to individualism and freedom of career pursuit. Along with being a multi-talented stuntwoman, Gloria shares insight on balancing life, being a mother of two (*which is daring in itself*) and her career. We caught up with Gloria to uncover what inspires her to harness the spirit of motorcycling.

HH: At what point in your life did you realize that, "Hey, I want to be a stuntwoman."

GOF: I spent my whole childhood working as a singer and an actress; however, I also did ballet for seven years and gymnastics. I competed in gymnastics - that was my real passion. It never even occurred to me that a career of being a stuntwoman existed until I was at LA Valley College working out at the gymnastic gym and met other ex-competitive gymnasts-turned-stunt professionals. It took a few years of training with other stunt people and learning many of the different skills and modifying my gymnastic abilities into stunt skills to get established.

Most of the first few years of my career were in the fields of acrobatics and martial arts since those were my original specialties. I also became a SCUBA Dive master and did underwater stunts and safety. I didn't get introduced to any of the motorcycle sports until 1999 when I first went to a motocross track with the guy I was dating at the time. I had never seen anything like it. I went to watch him a few times, then decided that I wasn't going to sit around and watch anymore, it was time to try it. Since I started so late in life at motorcycles, it has taken a lot of time and hard work to become even adequate. I felt like a fish out of water for a very long time. I describe my first few years of riding as sheer terror. If I hadn't loved it so much, I never would have kept doing it.



HH: Guessing you are a product of the 80's, there were so few (known) motorcycle stuntwomen that existed during that decade, so what exactly was your inspiration to get involved in such extreme, two wheeled stunts?

GOF: I wasn't allowed to watch much TV or movies, just perform in them, so I didn't grow up thinking anything about stunts. When I first saw motocross in 1999, I started riding just because it was fun. I started in motocross and only did that for the first few years. Subsequently though, stunt guys that knew I was riding and would be at the tracks started to hire or recommend me here or there for things they thought I could do.

Interview with Gloria O'Brien Fontenot continued...

My first "motorcycle job" was on VIP doubling Natalie Cigliuti (guest actress) for a week for riding a street bike. The second one ended up being a job on a low budget movie filming deep in the jungles of Jamaica. I had only been riding for 6 months and had just gotten over a severed achilles and the surgical repair that put it back together (a gymnastic injury). I had to do a head on, near miss with a Mac truck with a passenger on the back of my bike, and then some riding around and then crash the bike with the passenger and fall down a hill. Of course, it was a really old scooter type with very bad controls, old street tires on wet clay type dirt, which actually made some things easier and some things harder. It wasn't built for the dirt hills and the wet clay surfaces we were riding on and we were slipping all over the place. We were also in sandals and skirts! The Mac truck didn't have brakes and so they had it going up hill and us going down hill so they could get it to stop at the end of each take and run behind the wheels and put blocks so it wouldn't slide backwards down the hill. This is the kind of stuff you have to deal with sometimes. I remember one take on the head on - near miss where my passenger and I, (Dorinda Moore who doubles one of the girls on Charmed) watched the bumper of the Mac Truck literally pass less than one inch from our knees against the bike. Fortunately, you do those kinds of things at a somewhat reduced speed, but you can still get pretty hurt, and being in Jamaica in the middle of the jungle is not someplace you want to get your back tire clipped by the bumper of a Mac truck. But it all worked out and I have to hand it to Dorinda for having the guts to get on the back. She was great and went with every movement.

I never really rode just so I could do stunts on the bikes, but rode because I fell in love with it, and what it brought to my life. I was only into motocross until I spent a couple of months in Prague, in the Czech Republic (my favorite city in the world...so far). In Prague, there were two English Channels on the television, Eurosports and the BBC News. Well, even though I tried, I couldn't catch on to Czech, so Eurosports it was. Well, the sports they show over there are totally different than over here and that's when I discovered road bikes and MotoGP... I have to say that



it was the doctor, Valentino Rossi, and his amazing performances that made me want to ride road bikes. It's all his fault. So I got a 900RR used, that I hardly ever got to ride because my husband, at the time, commandeered it as his trick bike and beat it up. Then I got a brand new 600F4i in 2002. I crashed it the day after I got it, working on riding it with my feet over the handlebars. But that's what I bought it for...to learn. But in hindsight, I had no idea what I was doing.

I started casually working on tricks with some of the stunt guys and trick riders. I didn't ride a lot on the street except to train and learn what I needed to learn. I picked up some good jobs riding during this time like "The Italian Job" and "Quake" (I was jerked off the back of my bike on that one), and I worked on "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle" doing the easy stuff on the motocross bike for Drew Barrymore (Ronnie Renner did all the cool trick stuff for her, he was awesome). I didn't feel like I had good control of my bike, however, and had some real close calls street riding.

Then in 2003, I went to Freddie Spencer's Riding School for SR1...well, I had to take SR2 the next week and then a month or two later, Pro Level 1. I was absolutely hooked. I could not believe what I had been missing out on. The teaching and the advances I made there changed my life both on and off the track. I had control of my bike for the first time and a completely different perspective on riding. I got home and bought an Erion Honda 600F4i from Jason Curtis of No Limits Motorsports and went to as many track days as I could.

As far as a female stuntwoman who is and continues to be a role model to me - my friend, Jennifer Caputo, has really inspired me with her perspective on riding and her passion for it. She races motocross professionally when she has time between stunt jobs and also does some great stunts on motorcycles. Another friend, Melissa Stubbs is also someone I enjoy and look up to. She's done some great stuff in films on bikes and we have lots of fun riding both street and dirt together and going to Freddie's together.

HH: Crashing from a motorcycle really hurts - how often do you smash yourself on one and what kind of toll does it take on your body? And when it comes to taking a beating, what's the worst crash you've had on or off the set?

GOF: Yep....crashing generally doesn't feel so good. When you crash a bike as a stunt though, there is a technique, a system and a plan that is well thought out. It's different than the crashes you experience training and learning that you don't plan and the ones that happen specifically because you didn't plan or prepare properly or just did something stupid..LOL. I have not been injured on the set on a motorcycle...knock on wood. But when you crash or fall on purpose, it's a little strange in your head, because you know you are planning to go down. There is a stress and a weirdness to it that is hard to describe. You are doing something that most of the time you do everything you can to avoid. You have to think aggressively and believe in your plan and the safe procedures you have worked out with your team and thought out in your mind. You also have to do it in the way that is appropriate for the scene, hit the right camera marks, not hit the people or the cameras or other vehicles in the scene, etc. It is a lot to put into an

equation. All this is planned way ahead of time and you discuss it with the stunt coordinator before you even agree to do the job to see if it is something you want to do. You walk through each thing and do slow rehearsals beforehand. When you get jerked off the back of one for the first time, it's very strange because once you go, you have very little control over what may happen after that point. That's when being prepared, informed, having the right team, and having done your homework with the right people beforehand is most important. Angles, speed, and where you are going to land are all well thought out, but that moment when you feel yourself being pulled off the back of a moving bike is very strange. You are in the air hoping you did all the right preparation and you're not going to land on your head or neck too hard....you don't know it's OK until you hit the ground and you're conscious and nothing hurts too much. Then you get this great feeling of satisfaction that everyone did his or her job correctly and nobody got hurt. That's what a successful stunt is all about, walking away and being able to do it again because it was done right.



The same thing goes for laying down a bike. You do it as you planned and plan the best you can. Many times at work, you don't even do a crash, but have to do some technical riding in bad conditions such as rain, wet pavement or sleet, without helmets, with other vehicles, etc. Whenever I do something without a helmet, it adds to the pressure because without a helmet, a small mishap can be a huge deal, especially if there are other vehicles such as cars or trucks in the scene. There are things you can do to protect yourself if the way they are shooting it and the budget will allow you too, such as a small plastic form made to fit your head underneath a wig, but that isn't always possible and it's expensive and time consuming for production. At work, you have to do what it takes to get the job done in the manner that it fits the script.

However, when not in that situation, **I'm a great advocate of wearing the correct protective gear when riding motorcycles at all times!!** When I ride my street bikes on the street for a canyon ride or any other reason, I wear a full Dianese, leather, one-piece race suit, full hard shell back pad (Dianese) hard shell gloves, helmet (Shoi), and the hard Alpine Star Race boots. If I'm

trick riding, I have different more flexible protective gear that I can climb around in, but under that I wear hard knee/shins and elbows, tailbone pads, etc. Leather is definitely important if you value your skin even on the small crashes if you are on pavement. I've seen friends go down without the right gear on, just working on slow speed stuff and they had road rash for a month.

It's kind of silly not to protect yourself if you can. My friends are all tired of my lectures...until they learn once the hard way and then they join in on my lectures...LOL. I'm always trying new gear to see what gives me more freedom of movement with good protection.

My worst or just plain dumbest crashes have been: One motocross crash where I separated a shoulder, and my last crash in April 2004 at Laguna Seca Raceway, where I fractured the head and neck of my talus (ankle). I just got over that one and it cost me six months of work. It was a completely avoidable crash but a good learning experience. None of these injuries happened while working and both of them were my mistakes. Fortunately neither crash was particularly scary and didn't make me *not* want to ride. I ride in as many controlled environments as possible, so that if I crash, I'm usually on a private, motorcycle only course, or away from lots of traffic. Other vehicles are definitely not your friend if you crash. If you are going to push your own envelope and learn new things, do so in a controlled environment ...not the canyon.

HH: Realizing you're a mom, does your schedule allow you to bring a balance between work and family?

GOF: I think all working moms constantly struggle with that issue. I don't know a single working mom who isn't constantly torn between the time they work and the time they have with the kids. My kids, I think also have the same feelings. They like the opportunities and the travel that my job has given them, but they also want more time with me. My kids have been to Prague, London, Montreal, Vancouver, New York, and Curacao. They have both been in their first movies, "Bad Santa" and "The Hulk". They got SCUBA certified last year, got to swim with Dolphins, stingrays, turtles and tons of amazing fish in the ocean. They get to do a lot of really neat activities due to the advantages and opportunities that are provided through my lifestyle in the stunt world. The down side to that is that I'm not always available due to the amount of training and time I have to put in and the long, unpredictable hours.



HH: Your children share your talent in the acting field. Have they picked up an interest in motorcycling?

GOF: Both my kids ride Dirt Bikes. My daughter has an XR50 and my son an XR70. He's moving up this year to something bigger and is really tired of me putting it off!! They like to ride, but we don't have the time to do it as consistently as we'd like. We all ride at *A Day In The Dirt* every year as a family and spend the Thanksgiving weekend there with the stunt community that rides and the motocross racers that have made that their family tradition. That event is truly a wonderful family event for those who love stunts or motocross. It's also the one time of the year, where all the families get to see each other, since we live such nomad type lives going from movie to movie, or for the riders, from race to race.

My kids don't have to ride if they don't want and they make their own choices based on how they feel. I like to expose them to many sports and other activities and if they like it, they can do it and if not, no pressure.

HH: Is there ever any room for you to get a chance to take off and ride for pleasure?

GOF: Ninety-nine percent of all my riding is for pleasure because I like to ride! Even if I'm training on a specific thing or working on specific goals, to me, that's fun. I do take an occasional long canyon ride with my friends, and track days are my absolute favorites. My favorite tracks are California Speedway, Las Vegas Speedway (AMA course) and Laguna Seca. I find that the friends that I ride with become my closest friends. We share quality time, goals and the passion and pain of riding. Also, when I go with the kids to the motocross track, I really enjoy it. The first time they did *A Day In The Dirt*, it was more of a treat for me to see them ride, cross the finish line for the first time, and experience it all themselves, than anything I've ever done.

HH: Do you have a relaxation ritual that prepares you for the rigorous demands of your job?

GOF: I'm very type A. I would say it's less of a relaxation ritual than an intense focus ritual right before a stunt. Typically, you have run through things, done rehearsals and set up, and right before the big takes, you are swarmed upon by hair, makeup and wardrobe who want to be supportive and are always so sweet and nice, but it can be distracting to have people combing, powdering, sewing, tucking, etc, while you are working out last minute details with the other stunt people, riggers or coordinator. At that point, I focus on what is important and ignore everything else around me. I breathe and don't let anything distract me. I deliberately slow down. I run through everything I'm going to do in my head until we go. If there are any possible discrepancies that I foresee in the plan, I take care of them to make sure everyone is on the same page. I don't rush, and don't let anyone rush me, but when the camera is rolling and someone calls "action", I go for it. I always make sure that I'm warmed up and stretched out at the beginning of the day so that I can go in and out of things quickly and my body isn't shocked by suddenly having to perform something brutal.



HH: What advice would you give to women beginner motorcyclist? (We thought it was really cool that you were first "terrified" of riding, as most of us feel the same way, but are addicted just the same)

GOF: I guess the advice I would give a beginner woman motorcyclist is to take a lot of classes but also be careful whom you listen to. There are so many people out there who think their way is the only way and I think it's really good to learn many different techniques so that you have a huge basket of options to apply to different situations. Remember, any one-day school is barely going to scratch the surface and can only go so far. Take schools where you do several days in a row or try to do a couple schools of the same teachers right in a row. Most guys you ride with will have lots of opinions and things to say and they may not really know but they claim to be experts. Remember...they are all experts in their heads. Read the motorcycle magazines and look at who the people who are that are giving you information, and what their success in the sport really is. Spend time in safe places practicing so that you can make mistakes in a safety zone instead of on the street. Don't do a lot of street riding until you have accomplished a fair amount of skills so that you can handle anything that may come up. Always wear full protective gear. A woman rides a bike differently than a man.

When it comes to learning things, we learn different and our physical differences do play a part. We have to use finesse and technique where brute strength can't pull us through.



Ride regularly so you don't get rusty, and apply every technique and physical advice through your own filter regarding your particular body size and abilities. Always

Ride a little below your ability so you stay in a safety zone. You have the rest of your life to become great. Don't have needless crashes trying to get there too fast. Don't get rattled when you get buzzed on a track or have to deal with scary traffic situations. A cool, calm head is the key to survival and good choices. Remember, where

your eyes go, your bike goes. Breathe and always think about it, on and off the bike. Stay in good physical shape.

HH: What books, music or movies are you into?

GOF: I love to read murder mysteries, suspense and romance novels but I also read self help books and training books on all subjects from fighting, security, weapons, etc. I read the Bible regularly and books to help me improve. I read the motorcycle magazines and books on how to raise my children. Reading is something I absolutely love to do but since I had kids, I really only get to do the recreational reading when I go out of town and get on a plane or something.

I love all sorts of music. Since I sing, write and produce music, I always listen to all sorts of things to see what's going on, but typically, I just like high quality music of any kind: Pop, Classical, R&B, Country, Christian music, Hard rock, etc. As far as movies, I watch all the kids' stuff because they always win the movie thing! I never get to see the big stuff until it gets to cable because of time. I love comedies and romantic comedies, Tom Hanks can do no wrong. I also loved Queen of the Damned, and most dark vampire movies. And other than that, it's Comedy of any sort, and all the AMA Superbike stuff and the MotoGP stuff. I Tivo it all and watch it over and over. I also watch the motocross and supercross races over and over.

HH: What would be your beauty tip for Helmet Hair Magazines' *The Road Goddess Guide*?

GOF: I wear sunscreen and powder to keep the sunscreen from dripping in my eyes when I get sweaty. I have a smoke tinted shield on my helmet so I don't have to deal with sunglasses. I use Mary Kay skin products exclusively from top to bottom and their entire line in a roll up bag for travel. I always wear underarm or under my leathers and/or something very similar. I think a girl can ride and still look wholesome and pretty when she gets off the bike. I like to have sunscreen lip balm, lipstick and powder with me and extra sunscreen, a brush and water in my tank bag if I'm on the road, and of course my Mary Kay Compact so I can touch up when I stop to eat and hang out. On the track, it's the sunscreen and powder and some light makeup to shade my eyes and braided hair and nothing else matters. *Gotta have tools!* You never know when you'll need them.

If I don't feel like riding....I don't. Safety first. If you're not having fun, why bother.

Gloria's shout out: I would like to give a very big thank you to my sponsors and all those people who have been so supportive of my continuing journey learning to ride: Pit Pro of Santa Clarita, Asterisk, No Fear, Fly Racing, Freddie Spencer's Riding School and staff, (Freddie Spencer, Jeff Haney, Nick Lenatsch, Jason Curtis, Jason DiSalvo), Girlyz, Russ and Beth Wageman and family, Lisa Birch, Dan Kyle, Chris Tuck, Mick Rodgers, Kenny Alexander, Chris O'Hara, Casey Johnson, Clay Fontenot, Scott Leva, Jeff Cadiente, Gary Hymes, Mark Chadwick, Jennifer Caputo, Melissa Stubbs, Carl Rice, Mark Chadwick, V10 Women Stunt Professionals, Brand-X, Stunts Unlimited, Powersports Photography, Bruce Heinsius Photography.

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