



In just one year Christine Vaughn has (unintentionally) catapulted her company, Wicked Women Choppers, into the media spotlight. It might have something to do with her being one of the first women to design her own bikes and sell from her now famous chopper company. Then again, HH knows that it is she, along with a female crew, who are truly successful bike-builders making motorcycle history. We caught up with Christine to chat about her whirlwind year.

HH: How does it feel to know that you are making (motorcycle) history with the success of WWC, and now the "Iron Angels" pilot?

CV: Motorcycle history... that's deep. I honestly never thought about it that way. Me making history... I am a little overwhelmed with that thought. Women have always been a part of this industry - they made the history - I just want to make them proud.

Women not only can build bikes they can build awesome, head turning, love-to-ride, kind of bikes. That is the kind of history I would love to make. To have women within the motorcycle industry is more commonplace and excepted - maybe even considered competitors would be a bonus.

The TV show: It will not portray a female version Jesse James or Indian Larry. I think I am skilled and have knowledge in the arena... I am also still a small company and I don't have the years of experience under my belt that these talents have. I hope the TV show will portray the struggles, the learning, and the determination that we all have to succeed in this. While I would rather it not show my failures, mistakes, and less than lady like behavior at times - that is part of the package.

I am not trying to pretend or imitate anyone in doing this TV thing. My emotions ran the gamete. My temper flared at times. My frustration mounted. I worried that there would be comparisons... in the end I figure it was a stressful, trying, tense situation and that was just me coping with very unfamiliar situations (the cameras).

Also, the first TV bike was the Breast Cancer Awareness Bike - tons of emotions went with that alone. This was a tough build for all of us. I didn't worry so much about making a fool of myself (I do that daily), as much as I worried about making a fool of women in this industry. There is a certain amount of added pressure when you are leaping into the unknown and not only trying to establish a place for

yourself, but also representing other women in what is widely considered a man's arena.

HH: Now that WWC has a year under its belt, do you have a legion of female mechanic fans?

CV: I have a lot of women (and men) that write or call to lend their support.

I honestly thought I was going to be laughed out of this business before I even began so to be here a year later and getting support and encouragement is awesome. I get several resumes a month from women (and again men too) all over the country that would like to come work for WWC in one form or another. Some want to be mechanic and builders. Some just want to be a part of this new venture. Women are sometimes over looked and disregarded as competent, skilled, talented, and true assets to any bike shop. While the doors are opening - they are opening too slowly. **Even at WWC gender is an issue... it's all about the women power here and empowering women.**

Don't get me wrong, I am in no way anti-man. My husband and son have been a true asset and support for me with WWC. This business would have never had possibility without the help and talent of my husband. We also have other men that work with us. We just want WWC to be about opening doors to women that want to step outside the box and follow their own path. The motorcycle industry is still a very male dominated industry. I have found that the industry as a whole is ready and willing to encourage women to play a more active role. You just have to get that first foot in the door... that sometimes is the hardest part.



Women Empowered: Christine Vaughn with her crew, twin sisters Shelly & Shara.

HH: What advice would you give female wanna-be mechanics, fabricators, welders, etc.?

CV: Whether you are a mechanic, welder, fabricator, or all of the above you are going into a male dominated profession. Just the fact that you are a women is going to have all eyes watching your work and testing your knowledge. Know your stuff. Prove yourself and stand out from the rest. You are not only making a place for yourself but those that want to follow in your footsteps. You could be the one to inspire and open the doors for others.

While I just gave that advice that is the part I have trouble with. I am burned out on being "tested" by others as to my knowledge of motorcycles. I know what I know and if I don't I will sure as hell learn it. It's a real pain to constantly have to prove

yourself and feel you are judged more critically just because you are a women. The joy comes when you stand at the back of a crowd who is looking at the bike you built and hear a guy say "I hate to admit it, but that is a damn fine bike". Respect is the ultimate reward.

I don't pretend I know more than I do. I am far from an expert or have endless knowledge of everything motorcycle related. I ask for help. I get advice. Sometimes I even come off as a real dingbat. At the end of the day I know more than I did going in and that is always the goal regardless of profession. **If the doors don't open for you - build your own door.**

HH: What kind of crew does it take and how long to produce a Shady Lady?



CV: For a long while the only crew was my husband, my son, and myself. Now we have two sisters (twins - believe it or not) that work in the shop with us. Shara and Shelly are both welders and metal workers. Amazing talents. We also have a few part time people that help out when we need extra hands.

We schedule anywhere from 8 - 12 weeks for a complete build. Since most everything we use has custom changes done to them it takes longer to get the part together for our bikes. There is little that is considered "stock" on these bikes. The handlebars alone have a 6-8 week turn around. We could build them faster and cheaper but won't. The goal is quality not quantity. This was never about building a large company - it was always about building an incredible bike.

HH: We read you have new models, *The Vixen* and *The Black Mariah* (great names, BTW) arriving soon, what can we expect from these motorcycles?

CV: *The Vixen* is the *Shady Lady* minus some of the bells and whistles.

For example: we use internal cable handlebars on the Shady Lady - the Vixen has external. The Shady Lady has Billet wheels - the Vixen has spokes, and so on. We don't build a cheap bike but we want to offer some cost effective alternatives.

The *Black Mariah* and the *Tomboy* are our rigid models. The Tomboy is fitted for the average female rider and the Mariah is geared towards the average male rider. We do have almost as many men interested in these bikes as women so we are trying to address there likes and needs as well.

HH: We understand that WWC are available to dealers; because the concept is so new and original, what has the response been to add a Shady Lady to the Industry dealer product lines?

CV: We have had a great response from dealers wanting to sell WWC bikes and products. Since we are still relatively new we are just now beginning the process of signing up dealers. There is no mistaking the quality of these bikes and that has been the comments from dealers. If you compare the components we use on any WWC bike to other builders you will see that are bikes are beyond competitive. We use top of the line products on all our bikes. While they may shine like a show bike these are built and designed for riding!

We have several US dealers in the process of signing up. We also just signed with a dealer in India, and we're working with some dealers in Canada, too. Since we never expected to be a large company, and with the filming of the TV show slowing us down, it is hard to meet the demand of getting bikes to dealers in a timely manner. After filming the first two episodes, we had several customer bikes to build. Once those are gone, we'll get the dealers bikes done. We are expanding and staffing up to meet the need of the dealers.

HH: At this point you must eat-breathe-sleep WWC, do you have any time to take a peaceful ride? If so, what are some other things you do to de-stress and relax - what soothes your soul?

CV: The only rides I get these days are test-driving bikes. I don't know what I do to de-stress. Sitting here answering these questions is relaxing... it's 2:30 in the morning. The phones aren't ringing. The crew went home. Dogs have finally stopped going in and out for the ten thousandth time of the night. This is really a pleasure right now. *Send me more questions!*

To me this isn't stressful... *well*, filming the TV show is very stressful. I just bite my nails a lot then. Other than that I really enjoy this and even though it's long hours it's what I am passionate about. Plus, I never look at my checkbook too closely, or at the ever-increasing pile of bills on my desk.... that keeps a lot of the stress away. When it does get to be too much I go to the shop at night and look around.... I just can't believe I have a real shop, I am doing this, it's really happening. WWC was a huge leap of faith to say the least and when I walk into that shop all alone and flip on those lights to see all the tools, the welders, bikes on the lifts, customers frames lined ready to go, engines in crates, parts on shelves, all of it. From an idea to a reality... it's still all very surreal at times. **I just feel so grateful for the opportunity to follow my dream - that will sooth any soul.**

HH: What would be your suggestion for HH's Road Goddess Guide - something you never ride without? (think mind, body, or soul)

CV: A healthy dose of fear (awareness). I know this is not what you had in mind, but this is one of the first things I tell new riders. The minute you get too comfortable, or too confident about your riding skills is when you are going to have problems. Some people get on a motorcycle and feel all that power and freedom and think they are invincible. The truth is it's dangerous. Yes, the rewards outweigh the risks, but in the end it's dangerous. We have all heard horror stories. It is better to remember them than to assume it won't happen to us, or that we are better-skilled riders.

When I first started riding street bikes the best advice I ever got was to assume everyone else on the road is out to get me. I think of that every time I start my bike. It keeps me alert and better prepared for the possibility of a problem. Everyone who rides know what an incredible experience it is. Some forget the possible flip side to that experience.

I will also say that I never get on my bike without taking a minute to feel proud of myself. It doesn't matter how many women riders are out there. I took this challenge on and am out there riding my own. When I pull up to a stop light and get that nod from the guy in the car next to me... yep, I am pretty proud of myself.



A motorcycle is intimidating for everyone the first time, being able to get past that deserves a good pat on the back. It's not only that it's great "me" time, but it also allows me to ride with a huge group and still be in control of my ride. It's all about the bike, the open road, and me. **For me, riding has been my ultimate sense of freedom and empowerment.**

HH: Would you like to give a shout-out to any of your friends, sponsors, or people who have helped make this dream possible?

CV: My husband is the person that made WWC possible for me to even attempt. When it gets overwhelming, my husband and son are the first ones to encourage me to press on. This has been an expensive, time consuming, and difficult venture to undertake. My family has never waiver on their support and endless assistance in making this happen. While others told me building bikes for women was silly or would never work my husband kept telling me I could do it. There is a lot of curiosity about my husband. The question he has been asked more times that I can count is "how do you feel taking a back seat to your wife." His answer "I don't consider it taking a back seat, I think I have a front row seat to watch her success."

Within the motorcycle industry Brett Smith, President of S&S Cycles, is the first one to open the door and lend me his support. He and S&S went above and beyond to encourage and help guide me through the process of getting established within the industry. With a company like S&S in your corner it made it easier to be taken seriously by other vendors and builders alike. Whatever question I have he is there to lend any assistance and advice I need. I have the utmost respect for Brett and will forever be grateful he took a chance on me and my silly idea.

I also would like to say thank you to the motorcycle industry as a whole. While I am sure I have my critics and skeptics, all of this has been an amazing experience. I had no idea that I am not only invited, but also welcomed into this community.
I have along way to go but so far it's been a hell of a ride!