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# Grace and Grit

## Motorcycle Dispatches from Early Twentieth Century Women Adventurers

Book review by Susan Dragoo

☆☆☆☆☆ of five stars!

Author: William M. Murphy

Publisher: Arbutus Press

([ArbutusPress.com](http://ArbutusPress.com))

ISBN: 978-1-933926-40-7

Paperback: \$18.95 | Kindle: \$9.99

Lost in the pitch black desert at night—no headlight, no moon, no sign of a trail. Slogging through heavy rainstorms and deep, sticky gumbo—washed-out bridges and long detours. Negotiating mountain climbs with tortuous, narrow switchbacks where one false move meant a deadly fall....

It has all the makings of an epic adventure ride in some exotic locale, but this was the common experience in America 100 years ago for the few who dared cross the continent on motorcycles. In this case, a few intrepid women who defied the Victorian ideals of feminine behavior and became pioneers in the world of motorcycling.

Illuminating the state of transportation around the turn of the century, *Grace and Grit* is a well-documented and entertaining account. It tells the tales of Della Crewe, Effie and Avis Hotchkiss, and Adeline and Augusta Van Buren, women who undertook nearly impossible journeys on "highways" which were little more than poorly marked, unimproved dirt roads and old stagecoach trails, on motorcycles that were temperamental, heavy, and difficult to operate.

Effie Hotchkiss made the difficult ride self-supported, with little fanfare and her 215-pound mother in a sidecar. Describing an incident on dirt roads in Iowa, she says, "The mud was thick and the road looked to have been stirred with a big spoon and then left to its fate, the stirring having brought up a lot of

assorted rocks from the depths. I had not gone very far when the motorcycle and I took a header. This was quite humiliating as I had no inferiority complex when it came to my ability to handle a motorcycle. I was not hurt, who could be landing in the soft goo, but I cried from pure rage. I got on again and the road got worse, if that was possible, and I had another spill."

Hotchkiss and her contemporaries were capable and determined. The Van Buren sisters made their 1916 transcontinental ride as the U.S. wrestled with the question of entering World War I. They wanted to prove to the Army that women were capable of serving as dispatch riders, freeing up men for the front lines. In spite of their successful demonstration, the Army wasn't convinced, but the sisters' legacy endures. In fact, a cross-country ride in their honor is being organized to honor the centennial of their accomplishment.

I found *Grace and Grit* a great read and an inspiration. As author Murphy writes, "... we are the beneficiaries of everything gained by those who had the moxie to at least try, succeed or fail." Knowing what these women accomplished, it would be difficult not to be motivated to honor them by spending more time on my own two wheels.

[SistersMotorcycleRide.com](http://SistersMotorcycleRide.com) **ADV**

