

EVERETT KONTI-EVETT AND OTHER DAREDEVILS

BY JOE SCALZO



The wild men on wheels
—and one wild woman—who defy death
every time they perform!

2350

**WEST
KNIGHTS
AND OTHER DAREDEVILS**

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books

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That's right, thirty. It probably is possible. But the world is not ready for it yet. Probably I'd be foolish to try it at this point.

"But before I get out of jumping, I'm going to try it. That's the only way of knowing if it's possible or not."

Gill paused. He sounded rueful. "I'm also afraid that this 'who is the real record holder?' business will go too far. Some day Knievel or Super Joe is going to come along and challenge me to a jump-off. Both of us will keep jumping a greater distance, over more and more cars, until someone crashes. And I can't think of anything more asinine.

"Doing a jump-off is kind of like having a gun fight. Only one guy can walk away from it. You keep jumping cars until one guy busts himself totally. Down deep, I wouldn't want to be a part of that. I wouldn't want to be involved in something where a man got killed, just because he wanted to be better than me."

Again he paused. Now Gill sounded angry. "But if those guys keep pushing me, I'll do it. That's right. And if they put their money where their mouths are, I just might get forced into it."

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Debbie Lawler

This is the story of Debbie Lawler, pretty girl motorcycle jumper, who on March 31, 1973, at Beeline Dragway, Phoenix, jumped her Suzuki motorcycle seventy-six feet through the air over a line of parked cars and afterwards was awarded the "World Record for motorcycle distance jumping—female" by something called Motor Sports International. Later, as her fans converged around her, the vivacious Debbie joyously passed around special autographed pictures of herself: "I like the feeling of freedom, it's like flying over the highest mountains. It's great to succeed in doing what I love. (signed) Debbie Lawler, 'The Flying Angel.' "

A girl motorcycle jumper—what next? That was my first, negative reaction when I heard of Debbie Lawler, and it lasted a long time. Then I met, and talked at length with Debbie in the apartment of her manager, Charles Samples. It was a weird interview. And I changed my mind. I mean, if America can put up with an Evel Knievel or a Super Joe, why not a Debbie Lawler? Certainly she can't be barred from jumping over cars, just because she's a girl. And if Evel Knievel can go around saying he wants to jump over the Grand Canyon, surely Debbie is free to shoot her mouth off too. "Well," Debbie told me with that soft, dainty voice of hers, "what I'd *really* love to do,

is jump my motorcycle over two destroyers—you know, those great big naval boats?—moored in the harbor. I'd just really *love* to do that."

Really *love* to. Debbie Lawler can be a charmer, all right.

Debbie Lawler is a blue-eyed blonde, five feet two inches tall, weighing 109 pounds, just turned twenty years old, and out of her form-fitting leather suit is slender but shapely, still looking every bit the high-fashion model she once was. No terrible scars or ugly pavement rash mar her delicate features yet. Certainly she is the most attractive of all motorcycle daredevils. But Debbie isn't the first woman to perform bone-shredding feats from the back of a flying motorcycle. Putt Mossman's sister, Dessie (also a good looker), used to do things far more suicidal than leap a motorcycle a measly seventy-five feet. And salty Speedy Babbs once employed a female quartet named the "Cyclettes" who steered man-sized motorcycles 'round and 'round high walls. And Hollywood today has some really talented girl motorcycle stunt riders.

Debbie Lawler is special, though. If Charles Samples, her untiring and extremely resourceful manager has his way, she'll soon be the most famous heroine since, say, Joan of Arc. Samples is the man who "found" Debbie, and who is, at the moment, shaping her, attempting to develop precisely the right image for her to project. The problem is, there seem to be three Debbie Lawlers.

The first Debbie Lawler is the hard-bitten girl daredevil who restlessly smokes two packs of cigarettes a day, behaves recklessly at all times, and who brusquely declares, "I really love to do risky things. If I were never to take a chance in life, I might as well go hang it up. There's risk involved in everything in life. But if you get to the point where you are afraid to try anything—well, like I said, you might as well go hang it up."

This daredevil Debbie, besides "loving" to jump her motorcycle over cars, also "loves" to drive one hundred and forty miles an hour on the highway, to waterski with no hands (holding the tow rope between her knees), and to scuba dive five fathoms beneath the sea. She goes to bullfights in Mexico as often as she can, a real aficionado.

"But," I asked, "doesn't the sight of the blood bother you?"

"Of course not," she sniffed. "It's only an animal."

The second Debbie Lawler is the sweetie-pie Debbie, the Old-Fashioned Girl who loves cooking, sewing, the flag, writes romantic poetry in her spare time, is scared of spiders and other "icky" things, and is wholesome, clean-living, but also soft-hearted. "I just *love* small children," she can sigh with cloying sweetness. "And I respect old people *very* much. I will stop and give an old person a ride, rather than let them walk."

The third Debbie Lawler is the sexpot Debbie. Talk about oozing sex and titillating her public, Debbie scandalized the Kansas city of Wichita not long ago by showing up for a TV interview in so low-cut a gown that the station couldn't air the resultant film. The sexpot Debbie is very outspoken on the subject of brassieres—"I won't wear one"—but recently admitted she does wear a "lucky" bra during her motorcycle jumps. "It's a superstition with me. I always wear my lucky bra when I jump." She emphatically added: "I'm no woman's libber. I like men. Especially I like masculine men."

Daredevil, sweetie pie, sexpot. Which is the *real* Debbie?

There is a shattering clash of images here, and hopefully Debbie's manager will soon figure out which image he wishes Debbie to portray full time, and reject the other two. For I received the impression that it was Charles Samples and no one else who

"created" Debbie, who named her "The Flying Angel," and who of course came up with the ingenious idea of experimenting with different images for her to project. At this moment Debbie is not as widely known as Evel Knievel; Samples is still bringing her along slowly. When the time comes, he, and not Debbie, will select the image he wishes Debbie to project (meaning the image that goes over best with the paying public). Debbie herself doesn't seem to care which of the three images she is asked to play; and since besides being a motorcycle jumper she is an "aspiring actress" (Charles Samples' term) she can play all three with surpassing skill. She also seems to know that Charles Samples, and no one else, is in complete control of her future. He arranges all her bookings and publicity appearances, and if she is to make a lot of money from her motorcycle jumping, it will be because of him. "I'll do anything Charlie says," Debbie (the sweetie pie) declares obediently. "And I'll never jump my motorcycle unless he's there with me."

Talking with Debbie is a bit confusing, even unnerving. She seems to practice all three images simultaneously, and even changes images in mid-sentence. You can never be sure whether you're talking to the daredevil, the sweetie-pie, or the sexpot.

Charles Samples and his wife Molly sit in on most of the interviews Debbie grants, and they sat in on mine. Debbie would not answer any tricky or controversial questions without getting the okay first. For instance, I asked the sexpot Debbie her measurements.

Turning to Samples, Debbie (the sweetie-pie Debbie) dutifully asked, "Can I give my measurements?"

Charles Samples nodded his head.

"35-25-34."

Debbie Lawler began her motorcycle jumping career in and around Phoenix. This doesn't seem a coincidence. For one reason or another this arid,

dusty corner of Arizona has recently become a spawning place for motorcycle jumpers. A 14-year-old jumper named Gary Wells started his career here. More recently a pair of jumpers named Gary Davis and Rex Blackwell jumped over double lines of cars coming from opposite directions, criss-crossing their motorcycles in the air. Said Davis: "Both of our approaches are exactly the same distance, and we must hit the ramp at precisely eighty-eight miles an hour. Each ramp is forty feet long and seven feet high. When Rex and I are up in the air, we must watch each other, and also the landing ramp, at the same time. When we hit the opposite ramps we listen for the crowd. We can tell from the crowd reaction if the other is okay."

But Gary Wells and his manager-father have since left Phoenix and moved on to Houston. And Davis and Blackwell, after quarreling with their manager, who happened to be Charles Samples, are now out of motorcycle jumping. They were replaced by Bob Duffey and Dick Stone, also no longer active. All these departures seemed to leave the Phoenix field wide open for Debbie Lawler, who (this is the daredevil Debbie) says: "The routine question I get is, 'Why are you doing a male's thing like jumping cars?' Well, to begin with, I don't feel anyone should call motorcycle jumping a male or a female thing. Just because Evel Knievel started it, doesn't mean someone like myself, a girl, can't do it. I don't interpret it as being a male sport at all. But, certainly, it takes guts and bravery."

Debbie Lawler was born on December 13, 1952, in Grants Pass, Oregon, but grew up in Medford, fifty miles away. She has two older sisters, Sherry, 26, and Barbara, 25, both of whom she says ride motorcycles, and a younger brother, Benjy, 10, who rode *his* first motorcycle at age 4. Her father is a building contrac-

tor and former desert motorcycle racing champion. Her mother paints for a hobby.

By her mother's account, Debbie behaved like a typical girl until she was 10. And Debbie recalls, "I collected dolls. I had little dolls, paper dolls, Barbie dolls, an Aunt Jemimah doll. I also had a bicycle. But I was so short I couldn't learn to balance it, and so couldn't ride it until I was 10 years old." The bicycle was a disappointment, she ruefully admits. "It didn't excite me much, just to go pedaling around. I think, even then, I wanted something faster."

This "something faster" came two years later, on Debbie's twelfth birthday. Her father presented her with her very first motorcycle. "My father took me to the desert, made me ride through some terribly difficult obstacle courses," she says. "Riding a motorcycle came easy to me. Pretty soon, at fourteen, I was entering amateur races, beating some of the boys." Her motorcycle notwithstanding, she still was feminine enough, and cute enough, to become one of the football cheerleaders at the local high school. Soon she tired of it. When Debbie gets tired of something, she drops it entirely. "Being a cheerleader was very, very disappointing," she sighs. "It was nothing like what I'd expected. So many phony people; one thing I really don't like is phony people. I really detest 'em. So, halfway through the school year, I just quit being a cheerleader. Just like that."

Where Debbie really wanted to be was out doing risky things. "Everybody in my family likes doing risky things. My father was an underwater demolition expert in the navy, and owns a big boat. When I wasn't going to school, or racing my motorcycle, I liked to go out off Catalina Island in California and scuba dive and water ski. I'd dive for abalone. I always trusted my father and no one else.

"When I water ski, I still always like to do tricks. My favorite trick is holding the ski ropes between my

legs, leaning over backwards and doing backbends. But one time at Lake Havasu I was skiing and I hit a big cross wake left by a cabin cruiser. It flipped me over, nearly broke both my legs, and dislocated my shoulder.

"I like to swim. I also like to go snow skiing. I did competition snow skiing on the slalom courses for a while. I still go to Aspen in winter. Once I tried sky diving, but sprained my leg and haven't been back since. And I play tennis. My goal is to become an expert tennis player."

Debbie says she graduated from high school somewhere in the middle of the class: "I wasn't the smartest, but I was the dumbest. One thing I was, was short. I was the shortest girl in school." She had no idea what she wanted to be. Because of her looks, she chose modeling. But, she says, she was still racing her motorcycle on the weekends, and felt compelled to take risks. "I had an idea I wanted to drive big racing cars. I'd seen some drag races, and it was always my ambition to drive a 200-mph fuel dragster. They are so fast, and I'm naturally competitive, so the idea intrigued me." Later she changed her mind. "The more car races I saw, the more disenchanted I got. The cars only went fast for only a few seconds in a straight line. It didn't seem enough for me. Where was the risk?"

According to Debbie, the next thing that happened was that she met Charles Samples. "Charlie was looking for a girl motorcycle jumper to replace Duffey and Stone, his two boy jumpers. There'd never been a girl jumper before.

"Well, I was always *fascinated* by the jumpers. And I'd always wondered why there wasn't a girl doing it, too. So I expressed an interest in it and arranged for an interview with Charlie.

"Charlie, at the time, was just getting ready to fly

some other girl in from New York or somewhere and train her. But he agreed to see me first.

"I'll never forget the expression on his face. He was stunned. I think he was expecting some girl who weighed five hundred pounds and was four feet eleven inches tall and with black curly hair.

"But, what he got was little ol' me. And, look at me. I'm not strong or husky. But Charlie agreed to teach me how to jump.

"He had a landing and take-off ramp built out of wood. He set them together, and I rode a motorcycle over them a few times. Then he moved them back, and I jumped over them. We started slow, but practiced for a couple of months. Charlie was always good about explaining things to me. I have to have everything explained before I'll do it.

"He got me a baby blue set of leathers that I still wear. The first motorcycle I used was so huge my feet couldn't touch the ground, and Charlie had to kick-start it for me. That was too embarrassing. So he got me a smaller bike, a Suzuki. I like it fine.

"Once I learned how to jump, Charlie started making engagements for me. And that's how I got started. And nothing is going to stop me now."

I'd traveled to Phoenix in the baking summer of 1973, not to see Debbie Lawler, but to see Duffey and Stone, known as the "Astro Jumpers." But they had broken up their act and gone separate ways. Debbie Lawler, however, had recently made headlines in the Phoenix papers by appearing at a downtown Ford dealership and jumping her motorcycle over ten parked cars in the street. That was enough to make me want to see her. And so I telephoned Charles Samples.

Samples, a graying, fortyish man, greeted me cordially. He told me he had been an electrician for thirteen years, but was glad to be out of it and into his

new role of manager-promoter. Debbie was going to make a lot of money before she was done, Samples insisted. Then he handed me a mimeographed sheet.

PROMOTIONAL SUGGESTIONS

Debbie Lawler is a spectacular motorcycle jumper, expert water skier, an aspiring actress, and high fashion model. Any promotional engagement which would include any of these aspects would be welcome. Debbie is fully insured.

Speedways—Debbie, by agreement, will perform spectacular motorcycle jumps and will attempt to break any established motorcycle jumping record.

State and County Fairs—Debbie will attempt to better her world record motorcycle jump at fairs in the United States and throughout the world, including those of international scope.

Shopping Center Publicity—Debbie is willing to appear at shopping center openings and promotions and will perform jumps at speeds up to 90 mph as space permits.

Automobile Dealerships—Debbie has appeared at automobile dealerships and drew surprisingly large crowds for openings and new car showings. She is capable of jumping ten of your brand automobiles which can be named in promotional material.

Charities—Debbie is interested in assisting charitable benefits, in any of the above talent areas. Her interest here is of an inspirational nature. She especially wishes to assist in those charities which benefit disabled or handicapped children.

Education—Debbie is available for speaking engagements on motorcycle and water safety. Films which accompany these programs are available for showing.

Public Appearance—Debbie is available for public appearance at fashion shows, civic programs, boat

shows, home shows, and new product promotions on the local, national, and international level.

"Debbie's a busy girl," Charles Samples crowed. "People love her. Her jumping is really popular around Phoenix. But she's going to get a lot busier. Wait'll we go to the Astrodome in Houston for a jump in 1974. That'll draw 25,000 people at least."

Samples and I talked some more. Later Debbie's mother arrived, bringing with her pertinent bits of information for Samples to stuff into a thick press information kit he was planning to distribute to radio, TV, and newspapers. Debbie's mother apparently approves of her daughter's new life as a motorcycle jumper.

"Debbie was always the teacher's pet in school," Mrs. Lawler reminisced. "Her favorite food is fried chicken. She weighed four pounds and thirteen ounces at birth. And she was a premature baby, born in only eight and a half months."

After a while Debbie's mother left, and then Debbie herself arrived. "Darn it," she complained. "I broke one of my fingernails out riding in a rubber raft in a canal today."

Molly, Samples' wife, clucked in sympathy. But her husband curtly informed Debbie she should be more careful, that he had a lot of money invested in her career, and it was her responsibility to take care of herself in between motorcycle jumps.

Debbie shrugged.

Then she went to the refrigerator in the kitchen and began rummaging around in it for something to eat. Finally she located an apple, and sat down at the kitchen table to munch on it. Finished with it, she lit a cigarette.

In person, Debbie Lawler looks even younger than she does in her publicity photos. She looks like a normal, peppy girl, and at first seems neither daredevil

nor sexpot. She was wearing a yellow formal gown, and looked as if she'd just come from a high school prom. Actually where she had just come from was the shower. "Oh, I'm always taking showers," she said aimlessly. "I seem to spend most of my time taking showers."

I sat down at Charles Samples' kitchen table to interview "The Flying Angel." Charles Samples and Molly Samples prudently excused themselves, then went and sat in an adjacent room, within earshot of our conversation. Later I decided they were brazenly eavesdropping to gauge the type of questions other reporters might ask Debbie in the future.

It was, as I mentioned earlier, one of the weirdest interviews I have ever been involved in, made so by the fact that I was never sure which of the three Debbies I was talking to: the daredevil; the sweetie-pie; or the sexpot.

Debbie Lawler (daredevil Debbie) began by saying: "There's risks involved in everything in life. If you get to the point where you are scared, you better hang it up. I know what I can do. Just because I'm a girl doesn't make any difference. There are plenty of girl motorcycle racers. And I have plenty of confidence in myself. I've never been hurt. So why shouldn't I jump? I mean, how can I miss?"

Debbie was puffing on a cigarette. She had two open packs on the table in front of her. She alternated packs. I asked what she thought of Evel Knievel.

"Well," she replied, "not long ago my manager took me over to Caesar's Palace. You know, the fountains in Las Vegas that Evel jumped? And I was unimpressed. It looked easy. I know I could jump them, too. I could jump them blindfolded. Oh, maybe not *completely* blindfolded. But what I'm trying to say is, it would be pretty easy."

Stamping out her cigarette in the ashtray, she lit

up another one. She exhaled a stream of smoke, smiled, and said, "But my thing is not to compete with Evel Knievel at all. I'm no woman's libber. Knievel is the king of the jumpers, right? Well, I'm the queen. And a queen can't beat a king—it's impossible.

"And I don't like to compete against men anyway. I'm a girl."

Debbie's voice softened; the tone of her voice, I think, was meant to imply she was speaking from the heart. "I admire Knievel," she breathed. "He seems to me like a very *intelligent* man. There is something unique about him. Oh, I've heard people say he's really dumb for what he does, jumping like that. But he's not, you know. He's getting out there and making a living. Plus doing what he loves—jumping. Jumping is what I love, too; it fascinates me. Jumping motorcycles is the most important thing in my life. So I can understand Knievel. Anybody who can live as he does, I really admire them.

"Of course," she softly added, "I'm a *very* understanding person. Say, for example, that Evel wasn't married and I was his wife. I would understand that if he loved what he was doing—jumping—I would not stand in his way. Not in any way would I interfere with his life.

"Someday, I'll marry. And any husband I marry, even if he's a ditch digger not making good money, if he loves what he's doing, I'll be very happy for him. I'll never try to hold him back."

Before my very eyes, the daredevil Debbie Lawler had shifted gears and suddenly became the sweetie-pie Debbie.

"What I love about my jumping the most," she continued, "is that it gives me the chance to be around young children. I just love small children. I'm *very* big hearted. I've always been that way. That's why I refuse to sell any of my publicity pictures after

jumping. I just give them out, free, to the small children who come to my motorcycle jumps—especially to little underprivileged children.

"Before I do a jump," she went on piously, "I always look over my crowd. There are always children there. Children love me, just like I love them. Some of them, the underprivileged ones, probably spend their last money to come and see me perform. And all they have to show for it is a little ticket stub. I know I'm their idol. And they don't have enough money left over to buy pictures. It just really breaks my heart. So, to this day, I'll never sell my pictures—I'll give them away."

She paused a moment to wipe her eyes, which were misting, either from this heart-tugging thought, or because the small kitchen was filling up with smoke from her cigarettes. But Debbie was lighting up again.

"Also what I love, is to talk with older people. Because older people are *sooo* intelligent. Of course I love to talk; I talk to most everyone. And I have a real bad thing about picking up little old ladies." She flashed a smile of sweet innocence. "Oh, I just can't resist 'em. I see a little old lady walking down the road, and I'll stop my car and give her a ride. I'll take care of her. I've always been like that, I guess. If I feel sorry for people, I'll try to help them."

In front of her, the ashtray was filling with discarded cigarette butts. Peering at her through the dense smoke, I asked Debbie what she did with her life when she wasn't jumping her motorcycle, or giving away free photos to underprivileged children, or stopping her car to assist little old ladies.

Debbie, still the sweetie-pie, answered, "I live with a girl friend in an apartment. And she calls me 'butterflies', because I always fly in and fly out. I love cooking and sewing. I get up in the morning, take a shower, do my nails, and watch TV. And, I create."

Create?

"Yes. I *love* to make artificial flowers. I'm always bringing bouquets of artificial flowers to Charlie's wife. And when I finish those flowers, it really *excites* me.

"I also paint. My mother paints, too. She specializes in painting old shacks and shanties, buildings and chapels. My sister is very good at people's portraits. I paint, too. I would never buy someone else's painting; I prefer to paint myself.

"And I love to write poems. Would you like to see one?"

She opened her purse and passed me a piece of paper. On it was written:

"Love is a beautiful thing that comes on wings
but leaves with tears
but memory of love is an ever burning ember."

Then she recited to me another, longer poem, about some poor devil lost in the desert and his tongue was swollen and mouth was cracked with thirst, and then he found someone with water who wouldn't give him a drink.

I didn't understand the poem and Debbie admitted she didn't, either. "It's kind of morbid, I'm afraid. It just came to me. I write gobs of poetry. I write all different types. I wrote about small children." She paused to sigh. "Oh, I just see a small child and feel like writing about him!"

She said this so loudly, that I suppose it was for the benefit of the two Samples in the other room, who were still listening intently. Was Debbie trying out different lines of dialogue for the benefit of her manager, so he could determine which ones sounded the most effective, or what?

To forestall hearing again how much she *loved* small children, I hastily changed the subject. What

about dates? I asked. Debbie was pretty and vivacious. Didn't she go out with boys?

Her voice hardened. She was shifting back to the first Debbie, Debbie the daredevil, again.

"Well, I've had trouble as far as dating goes," she grumbled. "I have some boyfriends, of course. I like the masculine male. But boys find out what I do, that I jump a motorcycle over cars, and they don't like it at all. I guess they don't want to see me get splattered around. Or maybe they don't like the competition. Anyway, my motorcycle jumping just kind of gets to them, and they shortly leave. I have no steady boyfriend now. It's hard to find a boy who wants to lead an exciting life.

"I used to have a boyfriend, and he was a motorcycle racer. A pretty good one. But he'd never go out in the desert riding with me because I was always faster. Riding a motorcycle fast happens to be what I like to do. Still, it kind of makes me feel bad, because the boys feel like that.

"But I won't slow down. I have to be the way I am.

"And I would never go out on a date with another car jumper. All we'd talk about would be jumping cars. That'd be a drag.

"I've driven a car fast on the road. I went one hundred and forty miles an hour up in Oregon once. The car had a really big engine. And on my Suzuki, even though it's a small bike, I've gone eighty-five. I look forward to getting a bigger, faster bike, so I can go one hundred and twenty. Anything that's exciting or makes me excited, I love it. But I won't ride a motorcycle on the street. Too dangerous. I had an accident on the street one time in a car, and my head went right through the windshield. I'm not the best driver in the world. I wasn't hurt; not even a concussion. I must have a hard head.

"But I never think about getting hurt. I never worry about it."

The daredevil Debbie was in full cry again.

"I'm very relaxed before I jump. I always eat a big dinner before a motorcycle jump. The first time I jumped, over at Tucson, I'd brought a portable TV along with me. It was during a big motorcycle drag race. I was to jump at intermission. But I was sitting there watching *Sanford and Son* on TV, and forgot all about jumping. They had to come remind me.

"I love talking to the crowd before I jump. I say, 'Hey, how is everybody?'

"Basically, I'm not scared. I don't worry. Even though I have night blindness."

"Night blindness?"

"Yes. I can barely see a thing. I have it terrifically bad. That night in Tucson I had to jump seven cars. But I couldn't see the ramp. So I just jumped with my eyes closed. That's right. Closed my eyes, and let myself go. The bike and I shot over the cars easy. I think I have success because I'm such a good motorcycle rider.

"The people loved it. I don't think the general public is lecherous or sadistic or anything. I don't think they want to see me get hurt. So I don't get nervous about it. I've always been very lucky. The only time I've been to the hospital was when they thought my appendix had to come out, but it was a false alarm. I was born on Friday the thirteenth. And my manager was born on the thirteenth. But my manager gets very nervous. Don't you, Charlie?"

From the other room Samples, catching every word, called back, "Oh, yes, very."

Debbie, (now the sweetie-pie) said, "Of course, I'm really soft-hearted. If someone got hurt, I'd just *die*.

"And I could never be rude to my public either. Your public makes you, you know. Makes you or breaks you. And when you get to the point where you forget about your public, well, they forget about you."

I asked what woman she admires the most. Joan of Arc, perhaps?

She shook her head. "My favorite actress is Rhonda Fleming."

Rhonda Fleming?

"Yes, we were on *What's My Line?*, the television program, together. And she is so gracious. A very elegant woman. I really admire a woman who is older but keeps herself up like that."

Who does she hate?

"Natalie Wood."

Why?

"Because she's very rude to her public. I saw her once. Some man asked her for an autograph and she really came out with some foul words. I would never use such words."

She blushed for my benefit.

Then the daredevil Debbie chimed in: "My goal is to jump my motorcycle over a couple of naval destroyers. I've already figured it out in my mind. I've talked to my manager about it. I'm always coming up with these really brilliant brainstorm. And Charlie thinks I'm crazy.

"Anyway, the size of these two destroyers will be tremendous. Knievel says he's going to jump the Snake River. Well, my jump will be just as big. It'll be 112 feet across. I take off from one ramp, sail my motorcycle over the boats, then land on the other ramp. Simple. Oh, it'll be really easy. A diagram shows how it can be done."

By now, I was never certain which Debbie was going to answer my questions—the daredevil or the sweetie-pie. So I asked her why she jumped, and held my breath.

"Well," she sighed, "someday I hope to use my motorcycle jumping to benefit the country." Sweetie-pie Debbie was back in the saddle. "I'm really looking forward to doing that. I'd like to go to Red China

and jump, and to Russia. A good will tour. I mean, politics I know nothing about. But I can relate to people, people of all sorts. They all love me. I can do more for the country than a politician can. So I'm really looking forward to that. To a good will tour."

Then the sweetie-pie departed abruptly.

"I jump because I like it. Some people are 'monkey see, monkey do.' But I have to go my own way. And I like to shock people. I just live for right now."

And money?

"Of course. I make as much as \$25,000 per jump. I have to make as much money as I can now. I can't jump cars forever. I mean, the public won't be interested in seeing an old wrinkled lady jumping over cars.

"My manager invests most of my money for me. But the money that's left—I just love to go out and blow it. I love expensive clothes. I love jewelry. I run around town a lot, but would never go out unless my hair was just so.

"I've also been working on four movies, and we are in negotiation with Warner Brothers. They're going to do my life story. This is a big honor for me. I don't know if I've led that exciting a life. But I've done a lot. I'm twenty, but some people at ninety have never seen the things or done the things I have."

That seemed to be the end of our interview. Debbie had run out of cigarettes and seemed impatient to leave. The sexpot Debbie had not made an appearance yet, so I assumed that that image had been permanently shelved. Maybe Charles Samples thought people would be shocked by it. But just then Molly Samples walked into the kitchen: "Debbie," she prompted, "don't forget to tell how you were a sex symbol in Wichita."

Debbie picked up the cue.

"Oh, er, yes. Well, in Wichita a short while ago I was having a press conference and all the television

cameras were there. Well, I was braless, of course, and with a rather low-cut dress on. The young newsmen loved it! They flipped out. They had no qualms about it.

"But the station director wouldn't run my interview on the air. He said the way I was dressed was too risqué.

"All I can say is, I never wear a bra. No one I know wears one. It's just like getting up in the morning and eating breakfast. You get up in the morning and don't put a bra on. But in Wichita, just because I didn't have a bra on, and my dress was so low-cut, the TV station figured people would complain." She laughed loudly. "They are only farmers back there, anyway."

Debbie looked quickly at Molly Samples and received a smile of approval.

Charles Samples prompted her further. "But tell about the lucky bra you wear when you jump, Debbie."

"Yes, er, well, I won't jump without my lucky bra. I just won't jump without it. It's a real dainty French thing. I'm superstitious about it. I won't jump without it or my manager being right there."

This time she was awarded a winning smile by Charles Samples. Inwardly I thought: he has really trained her well. But which one is the real Debbie?

Debbie Lawler may be, as you read this, one of the most highly publicized motorcycle jumpers. She has a publicity campaign going for her that is unmatched by anyone but Evel Knievel himself. And, being a girl, she is a novelty. The only problem for Debbie now is, sticking to the image Charles Samples chooses for her to portray. Will it be daredevil, sweetie pie, or sexpot? Debbie plays all three well. She doesn't have to jump her motorcycle a great distance; just the fact she is a girl is enough. And as for jumping over two

destroyers, the idea is sham, the Navy would never allow such a thing, so it is perfectly safe for Debbie to talk about it, just as it is safe for Evel Knievel to talk about jumping the Grand Canyon.

Debbie also said to me, "You know, the mind—a person's mind—really intrigues me. Your mind is very, very powerful. Being able to control it and train it, enter into it, and understanding your own mind is unique. It's mysterious. Most people never are able to seek out their own mind." This sort of talk startled me, because it sounded a lot like Super Joe Einhorn. But Debbie doesn't know Super Joe. Possibly, then, this is yet a fourth image for Debbie Lawler—Debbie the mystic—another one that Charles Samples may put on center stage to see how effective it is, and whether the public will accept it.

On March 4, 1974, little Debbie Lawler finally pushed her motorcycle and luck too far. Choppy 20-mph crosswinds turned what was to be a routine jump over fifteen parked Datsuns at the Ontario Motor Speedway into something sickening and violent.

Even for a professional daredevil like herself, it was a terrible crackup. And afterwards Debbie must have wondered if her \$5000 jumping fee had been worth it.

Her screeching Suzuki two-stroke hit the take-off ramp going 80. Too fast, but the stiff winds were behind her, pushing.

And it became clear to Debbie immediately that she was going to land far beyond the designated spot. In fact, she cleared her landing ramp completely on her breathtaking 145-foot flight.

Down came the motorcycle's rear wheel. For a split second it appeared that Debbie might wheelie her way to safety. But both arms were torn from the handlebars when the front wheel crashed down crossways. Then the out-of-control bike tipped, swerved, and

scraped across the asphalt and hurtled into a low concrete wall at terrific speed.

The crowd of 10,000 screamed and screamed.

A crash helmet, and her pink protective leathers, probably saved Debbie's life. But she suffered two cracked vertebrae and, following a hospital stay of a week, faced further painful confinement in a wheelchair.

Had she, finally, had enough?

"Debbie's real anxious to start jumping again," the ever eager Mrs. Molly Samples assured me a short while later.

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