



The Happy Bottom Riding Club: The Life and Times of Pancho Barnes

Lauren Kessler

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Pancho Barnes was a force of nature, a woman who lived a big, messy, colorful, unconventional life. She ran through three fortunes, four husbands, and countless lovers. She outflew Amelia Earhart, outsmarted Howard Hughes, outranked the Mexican Army, and out-maneuvered the U.S. government. In **The Happy Bottom Riding Club**, award-winning author Lauren Kessler tells the story of a high-spirited, headstrong woman who was proud of her successes, unabashed by her failures, and the architect of her own legend.

Florence "Pancho" Barnes was a California heiress who inherited a love of flying from her grandfather, a pioneer balloonist in the Civil War. Faced with a future of domesticity and upper-crust pretensions, she ran away from her responsibilities as wife and mother to create her own life. She cruised South America. She trekked through Mexico astride a burro. She hitchhiked halfway across the United States. Then, in the late 1920s, she took to the skies, one of a handful of female pilots.

She was a barnstormer, a racer, a cross-country flier, and a Hollywood stunt pilot. She was, for a time, "the fastest woman on earth," flying the fastest civilian airplane in the world. She was an intimate of movie stars, a script doctor for the great director Erich von Stroheim, and, later in life, a drinking buddy of the supersonic jet jockey Chuck Yeager. She ran a wild and wildly successful desert watering hole known as the Happy Bottom Riding Club, the raucous bar and grill depicted in *The Right Stuff*.

In **The Happy Bottom Riding Club**, Lauren Kessler presents a portrait, both authoritative and affectionate, of a woman who didn't play by women's rules, a woman of large appetites--emotional, financial, and sexual--who called herself "the greatest conversation piece that ever existed."

From the Hardcover edition.



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