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*Jenna Stellar reimagines
biker chic*

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M A D E ^{IN} A M E R I C A

COMPANIES CREATING GOODS—AND JOBS—ACROSS THE U.S.A.

RIDE OF HER LIFE

MORE AMERICAN
WOMEN ARE BUYING
MOTORCYCLES THAN
EVER. MEET THE
DESIGNER WHOSE
GEAR IS KEEPING
THEM SAFE.

BY HANNAH LOTT-SCHWARTZ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH WEINBERG

Jenna Stellar grew up motorcycle adjacent—in the sidecar of her father’s 1964 Triumph Bonneville 650. When she was just 7 years old, she rode along at Los Angeles’s Griffith Park Sidecar Rally with her dad, a custom motorcycle fabricator and decorated rally racer. Her three brothers raced. Her boyfriends all rode. But Stellar was happy to sit in the back and hold on tight. In her experience, that was a woman’s place in the moto world. “I think if I saw more women racing, I might have gone in that direction,” Stellar says. “Our subconscious minds need visuals when we’re young.”

For most of her life, Stellar pursued other interests: figure skating as a girl, fashion design as a young woman, costume design in Hollywood as an adult. But motorcycles never entirely left her orbit. After nearly two decades working in film and television and styling bands like The White Stripes and Green Day, she returned to the sport, though this time, in the driver’s seat. In 2017, she launched Stellar Moto Brand, a motorcycle gear company in North Hollywood that’s quietly disrupting the industry by making some of the most technically advanced clothing on the market, specifically tailored for women riders.

“It was in me, to be a part of that world,” says Stellar, 39, sipping coffee in the kitchen of her North Hollywood home one spring morning. Her fiery hair glows Mars red against the black chalkboard hanging behind her, scrawled with the words “You are the cosmic plan. When you have a desire, the cosmos shift into action.” When Stellar was 14, her father, Mike, was killed in a motorcycle accident. She was grief-stricken, yet she wasn’t ready to give up the sport they’d shared. At 18, she got her motorcycle license. “When my mom saw—just the way she looked at it and walked out, I was like, *Do I*

need to do this? Right now? I don’t. So I put it away for many, many years.”

After studying fashion design at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, the fourth-generation Angeleno began unwittingly laying the groundwork for Stellar Moto Brand. “The idea came to me 15 years ago,” she says. “I was doing custom motorcycle jackets for friends, then I put it on the back burner for a



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while.” As a costume designer and stylist, Stellar gained practice constructing pieces durable enough to withstand a tour’s worth of thrashing around onstage; and because of the entertainment industry’s needed-it-yesterday nature, she’d developed a relationship with a manufacturer in Downtown L.A.’s Fashion District who could execute quick turnarounds.

Then, in 2015, a few years after she’d started riding seriously, she had

a bike accident of her own—spinning out, and tearing up her right knee on the pavement—and realized she couldn’t put off her dream much longer. She hadn’t been wearing armor, not because she was particularly reckless, but because protective motowear for women, outside of competitive gear, was hard to come by.

“All that was available was for men,” says Stellar. “I felt weird when I went places because I would look like I was going to play football. That was the whole thing: I cared more about what I looked like,” she says with a laugh. “But then again, that sort of gear didn’t exist.”

Few companies make women’s crossover gear—protective clothing that functions both on and off the bike—even though women are one of the fastest-growing demographics among new riders. A 2018 national survey from the Motorcycle Industry Council found that bike ownership among women nearly doubled in the last decade; now 19 percent of owners are female. Only in the last few years has motowear started to catch up, with companies like Atwyld (another L.A.-based gear brand) and online stores like Wind & Throttle devoted to providing viable crossover options for women.

Stellar, ever the resourceful designer, was one of the first to use denim made with Dyneema, a polyethylene plastic “superfiber” that’s up to 15 times stronger than

steel. The synthetic fiber Kevlar—often used in bulletproof vests, it’s a mere five times stronger than steel—has been the industry standard for protective moto gear since the 1960s. But Stellar found that the thickness of any Kevlar-based jumpsuit prototypes she made were less Catwoman and more Michelin Man.

She stumbled across Dyneema while researching Kevlar alternatives after her accident. The fiber—which is UV- and water-resistant, significantly



Clockwise from top left: a worker measures leather; rolls of leather in a partner factory; a book Stellar uses as inspiration; a factory workspace; opposite page: Stellar in the Maven Mechanic jumpsuit



more flexible than Kevlar, and thermally conductive, keeping the skin cool in hot weather—was being used to make everything from military-grade vehicle armor to commercial fishing nets, but not fabric. So Stellar called DSM, Dyneema’s manufacturer, to request it, and waited for the fabric’s release for almost a year. “Maybe I nudged them in the right direction,” she says with a smile.

Complete with removable armor, the Stratosphere jumpsuit is stretchy, soft to the touch, and breathable, vital for warmer months when leather jackets are stifling. At \$850, the list price is only slightly higher than what standard Kevlar-lined riding jeans and an armored jacket would cost, a small price to pay for a head-turner and a lifesaver sewn into one. It’s so popular that Stellar

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Moto is releasing a jumpsuit for men this summer. Dubbed the Orion, the suit will be the first piece in a full line of men’s crossover gear. Like her women’s pieces, the new line will take retro design cues from the sport’s history, from 1960s leather racing jackets to Evel Knievel’s signature jumpsuits. “I just wanted to start with women’s because nobody was recognizing our needs,” Stellar says. “We need visuals as adults too.”

Like the rest of her cosmic-inspired gear—which includes jackets, pants, and coveralls for women, as well as unisex shirts, pullovers, and accessories—the Orion is being made in Downtown L.A.’s Fashion District, one of the largest garment manufacturing hubs in the country. There, Stellar collaborates with a network of seven different factories, depending on the specific technical requirements for each piece in her line. Dyneema, for instance,



Clockwise from top: Stellar in a Stratosphere jumpsuit; the Starfield MX leather jacket; Stellar’s record player

has to be cut with special scissors, as the fabric is so strong that it quickly dulls the instruments.

Employing workers nearby also allows Stellar to be hands-on throughout production. “I like having relationships with people. I walk in. I talk to them,” she says. The process isn’t as streamlined as it could be, but if she used just one

factory or went overseas, Stellar feels she’d be sacrificing both product quality and rider safety—a compromise she’s not willing to make. “You know how you have that one piece of clothing that you just keep forever? That’s how I want people to feel about my stuff,” she says. “That they want to pass it on to the next generation—like my dad did with me.”