

## **Born to ride: Behnaz Shafiei, the first female Road Racer in 'conservative' Iran**

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In a country where conservative clerics condemn the idea of women attending or participating in men's sporting events, Behnaz Shafiei went on to become the first female rider to undertake professional road racing.

Going against the laws and conventions prevailing in Iran's male dominated society, Shafiei nurtured her dream of becoming a rider with the support of her mother and has been riding from last 15 years.

The 26-year-old belongs to the first group of female motorcyclists in Iran which has acquired official permission to do training on off-road circuits.

However, Iran doesn't restricts female riders like Shafiei and other existing female motocross riders to perform in clubs but riding on official race tracks or participating in competitions is prohibited for them. Tehran's magnificent Azadi sport complex is currently exclusive to men.

It is a worth mention that Iranian women are still banned from riding motorbike in public and are not issued licences. However, they are permitted to participate in other sports ranging from martial arts to car rallies.

Behnaz Shafiei, in her bright orange and black biker suit and helmet, is often considered to be a man by the onlookers. But, when the helmet comes off, the sight of a female driving bike make the people stunned in reality.

Speaking on her love for motor biking Behnaz Shafiei said, "Motorcycling has changed my life for good, my entire life is tied to motorbikes. If I don't ride, I'd fall ill. It's a way for me to empty my mind and free myself".

Let's take a look at her stint in motor biking arena:

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Iranian motocross rider Behnaz Shafiei takes a break during a training session at a racetrack near the village of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. "When two days pass and I do not ride my motorcycle, I get really ill. Even the thought of not having a motorcycle some day gives me an awful feeling," Shafiei said.

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Behnaz Shafiei rides her motocross bike during her training session while fans watch riders at a racetrack near the village of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. On a recent weekend, she drew a crowd when she took off her helmet, part of a lot of gear from her international sponsors. Women crowded around Shafiei to take snapshots with her.

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Iranian Behnaz Shafiei pushes her motocross bike by a racetrack as she takes a break during her riding session on the outskirts of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. "My goal is to be a pioneer to inspire other women," she said. "Together, we can convince authorities to recognize women's motorcycle racing."

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Elma Ajdari, center right with sunglasses, talks to motocross rider Behnaz Shafiei during Shafiei's training session at a racetrack near the village of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. "My goal is to be a pioneer to inspire other women," she said. "Together, we can convince authorities to recognize women's motorcycle racing."

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Behnaz Shafiei rides her motocross bike during her training session at a racetrack in the Alborz mountain range near the village of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. Shafiei fell in love with motorcycles 11 years ago when she saw a countrywoman running errands on a small bike.

In this photo taken Friday, June 5, 2015, Iranian Behnaz Shafiei rides her motocross bike during her training session at a racetrack in the Alborz mountain range near the village of Baraghan, some 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. For motocross rider Shafiei, she only set out to fly over the dirt hills of race tracks, but instead found herself jumping over the cultural and legal barriers women face in the Islamic Republic.

In this photo taken Sunday, May 31, 2015, Iranian motocross rider Behnaz Shafiei poses for a photo as she stretches her legs, while a male rider takes to the air at a racetrack at a sports complex on the outskirts of Hashtgerd, some 45 miles (73 kilometers) west of the capital Tehran, Iran. "My goal is to be a pioneer to inspire other women," she said. "Together, we can convince authorities to recognize women's motorcycle racing."