

Who is Ashley Fiolek?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Ashley Fiolek (1990–present) was born Deaf and turned pro in motocross at seventeen. She won the Women's Motocross Championship three times by twenty-one, rides by feeling the bike's vibrations instead of listening to it, and now trains other women to race.

EARLY LIFE

Dearborn to Florida, and a backyard course her dad built

01 CHILDHOOD AND SPORTS

01 Ashley was born Deaf in Dearborn, Michigan, but she spent most of her childhood in Florida.

While growing up, she tried everything from ballet to basketball, track and field to waterskiing, dirt-biking, and, her later claim to fame, motocross (cross country racing on motorcycles).

02 Ashley attended the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, but later transitioned into homeschooling.

After becoming homeschooled, she spent a significant amount of time learning motocross, and her dad even built a backyard course for Fiolek with a variety of turns, jumps and other obstacles.

RACING

Pro at seventeen, three championships by twenty-one, and pink hair

02 WORKING HER WAY UP

01 Ashley started traveling the country for competitions, and by seventeen she turned pro, and won her first championship when she was eighteen.

02 By the time she was twenty-one, Fiolek had won the Women's Motocross Championship three times.

Even though she was a big competitor, Fiolek wanted the male-dominated competition to know who they were racing against. In order to make sure they knew, she dyed her hair pink.

03 RACING WITHOUT SOUND

- 01 While her Deafness presented some unique challenges, Ashley learned how to work around those struggles.

Because motocross is a sport that the athletes tend to rely on sound in, Ashley had to learn how to feel the bike. Her dad proposed mounting flashing lights on her bike to signal when to shift, but instead she trained herself by tuning into vibrations and learned how to recognize the right buzz for the right shift.

- 02 Ashley also learned how to track the movements of the other bikers during competitions, learning when to take peeks and watching the shadows.
- 03 Ashley has expressed that her being Deaf allows her to get into a zone and become one with her bike without the usual loud distractions.

04 BREAKING BONES AND MAKING RECORDS

- 01 Even with all of her adjustments, motocross is a dangerous sport. Ashley has suffered a broken left wrist and arm, a broken right wrist and ankle, a broken nose, smashed teeth and three broken collarbones.
- 02 Even with all of these injuries, Ashley still managed to make a huge impact on the motocross course. She was the first Deaf professional racer on the women's circuit, the first Deaf National winner and the first Deaf WMX National Champion — literally and figuratively breaking ground.

BEYOND THE CIRCUIT

A factory ride, a commercial in ASL, and a school of her own

05 BIG CONNECTIONS WITH BIG CORPORATIONS

- 01 Ashley had a reputation for being a smooth, speedy rider, and because of that big corporations noticed.

Fiolek was the first female appointed to what is called a “full factory ride.” She was a part of the Honda Red Bull Racing Team.

- 02 Ashley is best known to many as the star of an Emmy Award winning Red Bull commercial.

The camera shows an unidentified racer zipping around the course, and it ends with Ashley pulling off her helmet and saying “Welcome to my world. The world of Red Bull” in American Sign Language. It was a shock that the rider was a female to most viewers, but the fact that she was Deaf was an even bigger surprise.

06 CREATING HER OWN TRACK

- 01 Ashley wasn't satisfied with her success on the track, and decided that she wanted to help open the track up to other women. Ashley felt that it was more difficult being a female in motocross than being Deaf, and it was the lack of support that led her to leave the circuit.

Since she left, she has started the Women's MX Schools, training girls in the hopes that they'll get more exposure and that things could change.

- 02 Even after leaving the circuit, Ashley couldn't stand to sit still, and now she likes to Jet Ski, snowboard, ride pole position cars, or do "anything crazy" in her free time.

07 KICKING UP DIRT

- 01 Ashley has also had many accomplishments in print. Fiolek co-wrote a book called *Kicking Up Dirt*.

She was the only female motocross racer to be featured on the cover of *Transworld Motocross Magazine*, and has also been featured in *Vogue*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Rolling Stone*.

- 02 When Ashley was asked what advice she would give to other women interested in motocross, she replied with a quote that sums up her life:

Keep working hard and reach your own dreams. Hard work pays off. Most important is to have fun while you're working hard to reach your dream.

ASHLEY FIOLEK

08 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Motocross	Cross country racing on motorcycles, the sport Fiolek became known for.
Full factory ride	The team arrangement Fiolek was the first female appointed to, with Honda Red Bull Racing.
WMX	The women's motocross series; Fiolek was its first Deaf National Champion.
Women's MX Schools	The training program Fiolek started after leaving the circuit, to get other girls more exposure.
<i>Kicking Up Dirt</i>	The book Fiolek co-wrote about her life and racing.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

09 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How did Fiolek's family support her interest in motocross after she began homeschooling?

02 Riders usually listen to the engine to know when to shift. What did Fiolek do instead?

03 Name two ways Fiolek keeps track of the other racers during a competition.

04 Why did Fiolek dye her hair pink?

05 Fiolek said being a woman in motocross was harder than being Deaf. What did she do about it after leaving the circuit?

06 Fiolek says being Deaf lets her get into a zone on the bike. Using two details from the reading, explain what she means.

10 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Ashley Fiolek biography	Internet Movie Database · imdb.com
“Ashley Fiolek, Hear Me Roar”	Jason Gay · Vogue
“Ashley Fiolek: New Chapters”	Donna Maeda · TransWorld Motocross
Deaf Person of the Month: Ashley Fiolek	DeafPeople.com
“Fox Women’s Athlete Exclusive: Meet Ashley Fiolek”	Babes In The Dirt
“Shock Factor: Ashley Fiolek is the new face of motocross”	Submerge Magazine