

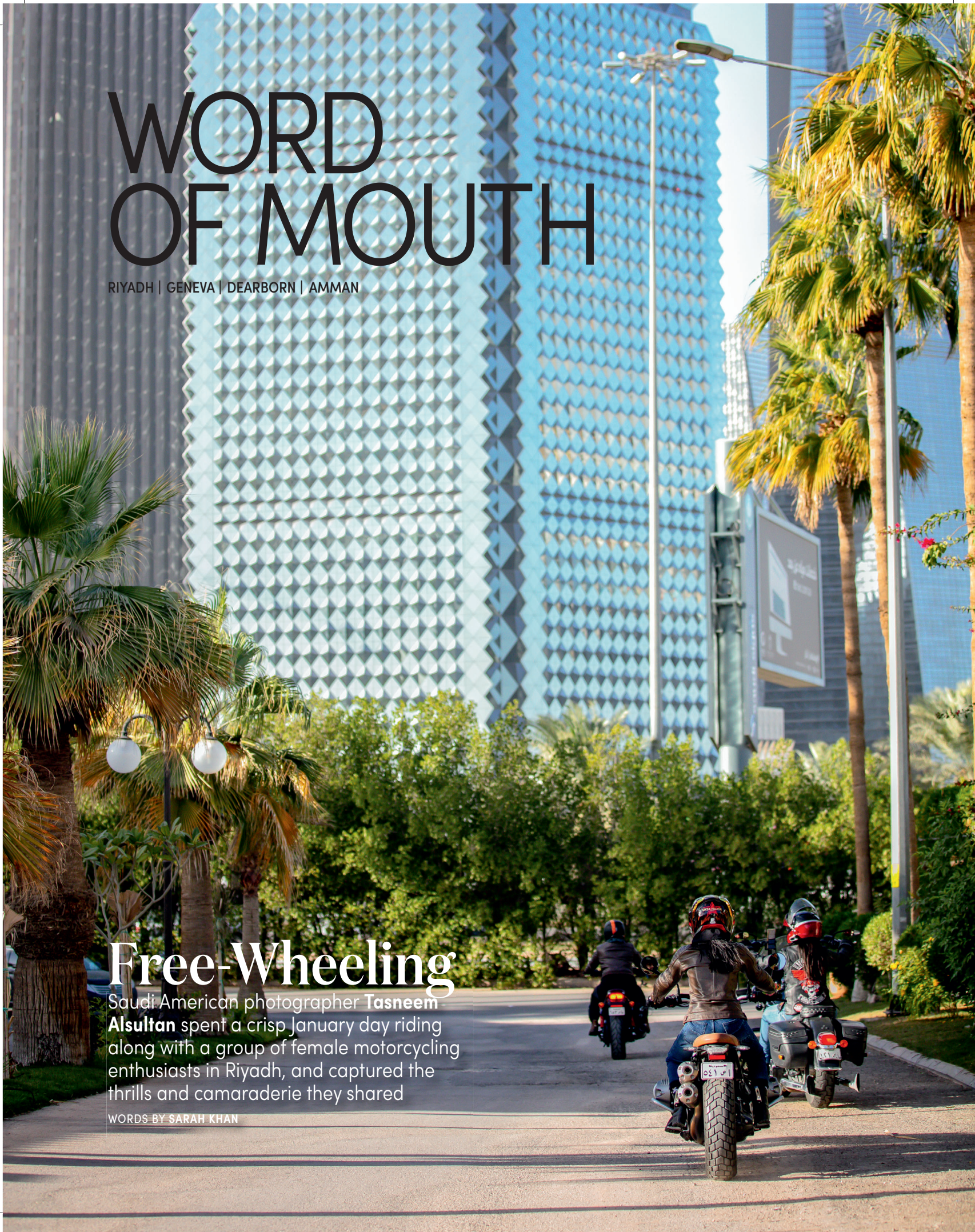
# WORD OF MOUTH

RIYADH | GENEVA | DEARBORN | AMMAN

## Free-Wheeling

Saudi American photographer **Tasneem Alsultan** spent a crisp January day riding along with a group of female motorcycling enthusiasts in Riyadh, and captured the thrills and camaraderie they shared

WORDS BY SARAH KHAN








**M**y first ride ever was amazing – I remember hearing my own thoughts and my heartbeat along with the bike’s vibration,” recalls Fatmah Nasser. “Adrenaline was up the sky.” Every Saturday, Nasser dons her leather vest and climbs onto her Heritage Harley Davidson and hits the road with her friends. It’s a sight that would have been hard to fathom on Riyadh’s streets just a few years ago: “I never thought that one day such changes would happen and I would have the chance to ride,” says Nasser, who used to join her brothers as a passenger. “Once I knew that women were allowed to drive, I started to check if motorcycles were part of it – and yes they were.”

There was no looking back. Nasser, a paediatric dentist and university professor, is a part of the Hawks, an international club that started in the UAE and has members in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon and Egypt. As the Hawks’ ladies officer, she also goes out with the female members as well as women from other clubs – they even travel together, taking long road trips and camping in the desert or by the sea.

While much has changed in the Kingdom in recent years, seeing women on motorcycles can still be an unusual sight.

There were only one or two others when Nasser started riding, but now she estimates there are around 15 other female enthusiasts in the city. “When we ride we get a lot of looks – some are weirded out, but most get shocked then smile and wave or give thumbs up to show support,” she says. Other women in particular are very excited to see them: “They jump and wave and sometimes follow us to take pictures, or share numbers to get to know us more.”

Seeing these women was eye-opening for Saudi American photographer Tasneem Alsultan. “It’s beautiful to watch,” she says. “I got to know them on a personal level, I got to see that their parents and families are very supportive, which is exactly the opposite of my own stereotypes and expectations.”

On a chilly Friday afternoon, Nasser joined friends including Eman bin Abdan, Hanan Saleh and Aiza Zainal to take a spin around the city. After a hectic six-day work week, these weekend rides are the ultimate stress reliever for Nasser. “It brings peace and focus, it’s like a meditation for the soul,” she says. “Riding is my fuel, and every time feels like the first time – it never seems to fail me.” 





**Clockwise from opposite, top left:** The women hit the road; Eman takes a break; Fatmah at the wheel of her Heritage Harley Davidson; Eman, Aiza, Fatmah, Hanan and Reem catch up before they set out for the day. **Previous page:** Riding towards Riyadh's King Abdullah Financial District



WORD OF MOUTH







Fatmah takes a group selfie in front of King Abdullah Financial District. **Opposite page, clockwise from top left:** Aiza and Hanan at a traffic light; a helmet-wearing rubber duck is affixed to Fatmah's bike; Aiza's customised helmet; the women add their personal flair to their bikes; waving hello to excited passersby