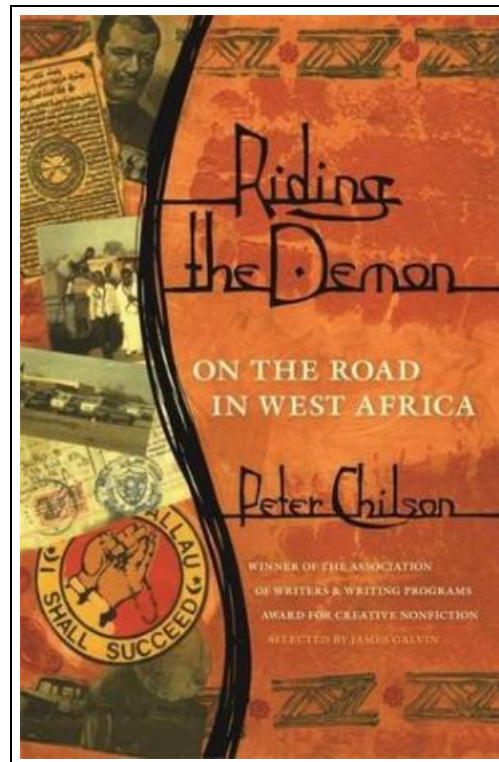


Riding the Demon On the Road in West Africa Association of Writers and Writing Programs Award for Creative Nonfiction



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(Althea Aufderhar)

RIDING THE DEMON ON THE ROAD IN WEST AFRICA ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS AND WRITING PROGRAMS AWARD FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION



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University of Georgia Press. Paperback. Condition: New. 216 pages. Without railroads or domestic airlines, Nigers roads are its lifelines. For a year, Peter Chilson travelled this desert country by automobile, detouring occasionally into Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, in order to tell the story of West African road culture. He criss-crossed the same roads again and again with bush taxi driver Issoufou Garba in order to learn one drivers story inside and out. He hitchhiked, riding in cotton trucks, and he also travelled with other bush taxi drivers, truckers, road engineers, an anthropologist, Nigers only licensed woman commercial driver and a customs officer. The road in Africa, says Chilson, is more than a direction or a path to take. Once youve booked passage and taken your seat, the road becomes the centre of your life. Hurling along at 80 miles an hour in a bush taxi equipped with bald tyres, no windows and sometimes no doors, travellers realize that theyve surrendered everything. Soldiers collect taxes at checkpoints, and black-market gasoline salesmen appear mysteriously from the roadside bush. Courageous drivers - who come across in the book as rogue folk heroes - negotiate endless checkpoints; ingenious mechanics repair cars with nothing. The road is also about blood and fear, and the ecstasy of arrival. On African roads, car wrecks are as common as mile markers, and the wreckage can stand in monument for months or years: a minibus upended against a tree, as if attempting escape; a charred truck overturned in a ditch. Chilson uses the road not to reinforce Africas worn image of decay but to reveal how people endure political and economic chaos, poverty and disease. The road has reflected the struggle for survival in Niger since the first automobile arrived there at the turn of the century,...



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