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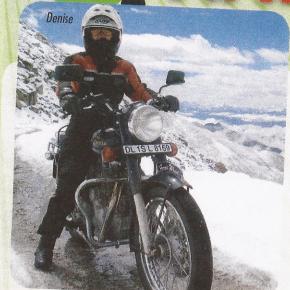




FEBRUARY 2012 - 37

PAGE UP A SMORGASBORD OF EXOTIC MOTORCYCLE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

The stereotypical international motorcycle tourist is a bloke. These ladies break the stereotype



MIKE AND Denise Ferris run Ferris Wheels, a motorcycle tour company which will take you to some very exotic places throughout the world. Many riders dream of one day undertaking such a tour but the ladies in this feature have lived the dream with Ferris Wheels, and kept living it, showing that neither age or gender should be a barrier to enjoying a motorcycle, whether it be at the controls, or on the pillion seat. These are their stories.

'Chicken Lyn' she calls herself.

"I was asked by my friend Kerry to be a pillion. She wanted to take a motorcycle safari in Turkey and her husband

couldn't go. I had only been on the back of a bike once in my life in Bali and that was over 30 years before. She took me for a trial ride from Murray Bridge to Renmark in South Australia one afternoon when it was about 40 degrees. I enjoyed the ride and so I said I would go, having never done anything like that before. The Turkey experience was great; a real adventure. I loved being on the bike and would have loved a go at riding but I considered my age was against me as I was getting close to 60. When we left Turkey Kerry let me keep the helmet I had been wearing. Back home in Adelaide I kept looking at bike riders and feeling jealous. I missed the experience so I made some enquiries about getting my licence – I already had the helmet! I purchased a CB250 Honda and after my second try I got my Learners and started taking rides along the coast.

"One day coming back from a very enjoyable ride I stalled on a steep hill because I was in the wrong gear. I tried to start off again but unfortunately the bike was too heavy and I fell. Putting my arm out to prevent breaking anything on my bike, I broke my elbow instead.

"One year off 60 with a bolt in my arm and still on my Learner's everyone kept telling me to give up, to give my bike riding a miss. Instead I waited for my elbow to mend and went back to the riding course several months later, passed the test, and got my licence. I was so thrilled I couldn't stop smiling.

Continued on next page





PECK-Up and Color A SMORGASBORD OF EXOTIC PMOTORCYCLE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS.



Continued from previous page

"I still have my little Honda 250 because of my size (152 cm, 60 kg). I have found it hard to find a bike on which I can place both feet on the ground. I'm not keen on cruisers because of the weight; I would love a more powerful bike but have trouble with the seat height. My partner got a bike after I got my licence. I plan to retire soon and look forward to doing more riding and hopefully will find a more powerful bike with a low seat height.

Helen works in Quality Assurance

"Getting on a motorcycle was something I would never have considered on my own. In my mind it was always something other people did, but not me. My first time on the bike was with my boyfriend Sean – a gentle ride around the block. The block got bigger and bigger until we did a 700km return trip to Hervey Bay. I hung on so tight that my hips seized up. I felt as though I'd done a full gym workout by just sitting in constant anxiety.

"I soon became very relaxed on the bike and loved being with the one I love without having to say anything. A month after my first pillioning effort we rode from the Gold Coast to Longreach. This is where I first fell in love with being on a bike. I could see all of the things you can't see from a car - bird's nests in trees and the finer details of Western Queensland that otherwise might go unnoticed. Only three months later my relaxation levels had progressed so much I could barely keep my eyes open, especially after a counter

meal. So I had my first bike lesson.

"Even though each lesson had me feeling like a teenager learning to drive again, the smile never left my face. Every new skill learnt was such a rewarding achievement.

"After a few lessons it was time to head off on an international motorcycle safari, where we rode two-up on a 650 V Strom (Suzuki). Being a pillion again I suddenly realised all of the reasons



I loved being a rider. After three weeks on the road as a pillion I was hooked on the feeling of riding. Having had some lessons, I could really appreciate how well Sean rode and I learnt a lot from the back seat. As soon as we arrived home I was keen to continue riding, so I had a few more lessons and got my licence. Two days later I bought a GS500 (another Suzuki) – my first bike, in an attractive blue (colour does matter).

"After spending three weeks with like-minded people in a foreign country, bike riding became the glue of some fantastic new friendships. Having had my licence only a matter of weeks, one phone call from the great friends we'd made on the trip and suddenly I'd committed to join another tour and ride around Morocco - on the front seat this time.

"In the nine months I had to prepare for the tour, I put 13,000km on my bike. But the first day on the rented bike in Morocco I was petrified! Luckily the 650cc BMW had a bit more grunt than my GS500, otherwise I may never have rolled off the starting blocks. Next thing you know I'm cutting it up with the locals in the crazy Marrakech traffic. We rode in all sorts of conditions on all sorts of roads, waving enthusiastically at all of the Moroccan children and farmers. 3,700km later I'd be lying if I denied I shed a tear of

amazement, pride and confidence in myself, and a bit of relief. I learnt that the more uncomfortable something is, the more you're getting out of life and the better is the experience.

"Another nine months later and there's now 31,000km on my GS500. Next year we have already planned another international motorcycle safari, this time to the Himalayas – to ride the Khardung La, the highest motorable road in the world, with some of the same friends we met on the first overseas tour we did. What an amazing life motorcycling has opened up!

"Riding is soaring freedom, peace, challenges, independence, smiles, heartbeat and achievement. It opens up a whole new world of conversation. You're never short of friends when you ride. Women are more than capable of riding, why should men have all the fun?"

Viki - retired but not retiring

"I'd thought my riding days were over. I'd had a 'bike' (Honda 90 step-through!) when I was young in Brisbane in the early '70s. It was handy for getting around, to uni, to work, and my husband had a bike when I met him.

"Scroll forward two decades, living overseas and four kids later. In 1997, I was surprised, pleased and supportive when my husband rolled home on a brand new BMW R1100GS on our 25th wedding anniversary. 'Our' bike did many kilometres, solo and two-up, on road trips and BMW Adventure Safaris. I was a happy pillion and was proud to be called his 'pillion in a million'. We met other likeminded couples and would go for weekend overnights to country pubs. I always said I was happy on the back and I was — boredom was sometimes an issue but never comfort or enthusiasm.

"With another couple we decided to get a bit more adventurous; a motorcycle tour of Rajasthan in India followed in early 2007. Upon our return I decided to renew my scooter licence. One of our by-now adult sons had one in the garage that I thought we could share. There were whoops of excitement and support with my decision.

"It was a slow process getting competent and confident. So many times around the block, around the park. Finally, I took a scoot up Mount Coot-tha, then Mount Glorious, which was a major achievement, a benchmark in Brisbane motorcycling. Six months later after one particularly torturous descent however, I resolved that some engine braking would be useful. So off I went again to Q Ride for an upgrade. I'll never need a bike bigger than this, I said of my new Honda CBF250.

"Our next international foray was to Turkey in 2008 and again I



was a happy pillion. However, I participated in every corner, every gear change on that V-Strom and longed to get back to my own bike, thinking I would have forgotten all my skills during our time away. No, it was fine and in the 18 months that followed I put 13,500km on that bike. Conversation ensued on whether my 250 was up to a particular journey, so with little surprise, along I went for the final step to a proper unrestricted licence. The new more powerful bike that followed was a trendy tri-colour Honda 400/4 (ABS model). Finally I would be able to keep up with everyone.

"Before it was delivered we joined another international motorcycle safari to Morocco; again I was registered as a pillion. After a couple of days on the road I had the opportunity to ride on our tour leader's BMW F650. I loved it and managed fine, right side of the road no problem, the bike wasn't too heavy or too tall. I was dancing for joy when I finally relinquished the bike. A few days later one of our group was experiencing back problems so I found myself riding his bike out of the imperial city of Fes. His back problem continued and I was given the option of concluding the tour by riding back into Marrakech – I could hardly sleep I was so excited and nervous and even the snow between there and our destination couldn't deter me. I had joined the Riders' Group.

"On our return from Morocco we collected the new Honda 400. What a treat, but again the process of becoming familiar with the bike and how it feels, gaining confidence on tricky turns and learning to feel comfortable. Another 14,000km but this time it only took seven months.

"At the end of 2009 to recognise our approaching retirement we went along to BMW and ordered two more new bikes: a red F650GS for me, a white F800GS for him. Wow. For me it's been three new bikes in three years! 2500km in eight days in the South Island of New Zealand on similar bikes followed, no downs, no dramas and great fun. Apart from those thousands of kilometres I did as a pillion, by my reckoning my personal riding total is now about 40,000 in less than four years. Most recently this includes 4,000km along the Dalmatian Coastline Ð my 60th birthday celebratory tour and my first full international motorcycle ride on the front seat! No downs, no dramas, awesome fun!

"I'm now 60, I'm 162 cm (not tall) I weigh 55-60 kilograms (depending on how many holidays we've been on recently) and not particularly athletic, adventurous or risk-taking. I get scared on sailboats even though I swim well. I've got a university degree, four adult children and I work part-time for pleasure. I've learned a lot about myself – that I do it in baby steps. I am proud of my achievement and happy that my husband and I can share this hobby now in a way a pillion cannot. I can do it. I want to!"

Lesley - a pillion for now

Lesley's story is a little different. She works as a PA, she's in her early '50s and she doesn't have her motorcycle licence . . . yet.

"My first experience on (the back of) a bike was over 30 years ago, back in 1978. It was mostly inner-city commuting, mixed in with touring the eastern coast of Australia. My longest journey was a return trip from Melbourne to the Whitsunday Islands. In 2007 I finally discovered the joys of overseas motorcycle travel.

"Having now visited India, Turkey and Morocco two-up with David (my husband) I don't want to travel any other way. It was great to have the opportunity to get to know some female riders. Some of the women had a fair bit of riding experience, but there were those that didn't and they jumped in and got on with it anyway. I was impressed by the intrepid attitude. In Turkey there were at least three female pillions who were in the throes of getting their bike licences. I started thinking... hmm, why not moi? I think it was a competitive instinct and this can be a good thing.

"So I've made the decision to learn to ride and have begun the process. Several riding lessons have involved early morning sessions at a big local car park, supervised by David on his 1967 BSA Royal Star.

"I'm looking forward to a full motorbike licence and moving to the front seat!"

If you'd like to find out more of what Ferris Wheels can offer the touring motorcyclist call them on 02 9970 6370 or email safari@ferriswheels.com.au.

- Denise Ferris