



The bag lady

Words and images: Mike Ferris

There's no getting blown up when Mike's in charge.

There was a lady called Margaret who wanted to join our Himalayan Heights safari in the early days, 1997. She was in her late 50s and hadn't been riding for very long, a couple of years at best, but was confident of being able to tackle the various hazards presented by mountains, altitude, and the Indian road system. She and I had a mutual friend who vouched for her, assuring me Margaret was a competent rider, so we took her on and a couple of her other friends signed up too. Quite a well-spoken lady of dulcet tones, her friends would occasionally refer to her as 'Lady Margaret'.

Recommended

I'm sure Marg won't mind me telling, but the ride proved to be well beyond her. She dropped her bike almost every day in the first week alone. Remarkably,

she didn't hurt herself and always bounced up cheerfully, admonishing herself and apologising to me, before mounting up again and continuing. I gave her as much coaching as I could 'on the fly' and suggested she might benefit from some advanced rider training when she returned to Sydney. I recommended doing the Australian Superbike course run by Steve Brouggy, as I'd recently done it myself and found it to be excellent tuition.

Marg took the advice and indeed completed more than one level of the tier-structured course. But even so, a couple of years later when she enquired about our Andes tour – and now in her 60s – I was a little trepidatious. I suggested instead she might enjoy our tour of Turkey, which is a little less arduous. Marg acknowledged Turkey was in fact on her list of places to visit, and when I mentioned we could put her on a



Suzuki 650 Freewind, the same bike she had at home, it was a done deal. She signed up for our Turkish Treasures 2003 ride.

Pressure situation

When we subsequently gathered in Istanbul for the start of the tour and introductions were completed, Marg related how she'd had all manner of complications getting her new jacket through the various airport security systems. As an extra safety measure, she'd invested in one of the latest jackets which incorporated an integrated airbag function. If the rider suddenly became separated from the motorcycle, the airbag would inflate in a fraction of a second in the same way airbags do in cars, and it was operated by a lanyard which the rider 'plugged in' to a fixed anchor point on the bike. When the lanyard was yanked by a rider launched into orbit, it pulled the pin on a compressed-air cylinder within the jacket, and it was the cylinder which gave the airport authorities cause for concern. Marg had had to produce various specifications and bits of documentation from the manufacturer proving it was safe to carry the jacket in a pressurised aircraft. ▶



MIKE FERRIS



Left: A bunch of old crumblyies - and some ancient Roman ruins.
Above: Sisters are doing it for themselves.
Below: The attraction known as Phallus Valley.





To the point

From day one of the tour the improvement in Margaret's riding was immediately noticeable. The training had sharpened her skills in many departments and she

was much more confident on the bike. She was looking well ahead through the corners, counter-steering nicely, shifting her weight on the seat and was enjoying herself as a better rider. We

visited Gallipoli, the Aegean coast, the Mediterranean beaches, and traversed the eerie landscapes of Cappadocia on our way north to the Black Sea coastline. The land there is a soft volcanic *tufa*





which has been eroded over centuries by wind and rain to form unusual and spectacular shapes including 'fairy chimneys'. Marg and the other ladies had quite a chuckle when I took the group to observe the nearby Phallus Valley.

As we continued north the next day, on a gently sweeping uphill corner somewhere high on the Anatolian Plateau, the unthinkable happened. Marg hit a greasy patch on the road, the back end of the bike went past the front, and she was flung from the saddle. She went one way, the bike went another, and both slid down the road on divergent paths – fortunately at a fairly slow speed.

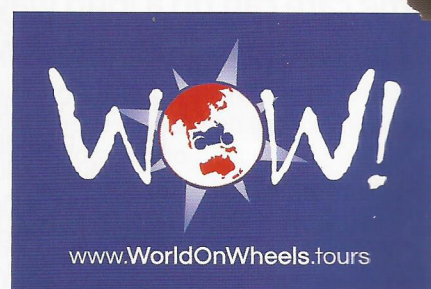
She had an audience of course. There were three of us riding with her at the time, and we all stopped quickly and helped pick them both up, brush them down, and make sure Marg was okay. True to form she had bounced up, unhurt, almost before she even stopped sliding.

"So, Marg," I was dying to know, "How well did that new airbag-jacket-thingy work?"

It was the only time I ever heard Lady Margaret use an expletive. She looked at me with an exasperated expression and spluttered, "I forgot to plug the fucking thing in!"

ADV

Far left: The ancient Roman library in Ephesus.
Bottom left: A rustic rural parking lot.
Above: Yes, it can get very cold in Turkey.
Below: "Airbag jackets? Nah, pull ya head in."
Right: Marg's high-vis airbag jacket.



Turkish Treasure is one of the tours in the World On Wheels portfolio.

Check out the website at:
www.WorldOnWheels.tours