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RIDE EVERY MOUNTAIN



The 'On Yer Bike' series has so far led us, on two wheels, from the MX track to the mailbox and then in and out of the city traffic. With this episode **ROB BLACKBOURN** reckons Denise Ferris's story takes us almost out of this world...

It's one thing for a woman to discover bikes in her late 30s and then, inspired by the encounter, to get her licence and partake of this wonderful experience we call motorcycling. It's quite another however for her, only a couple of years down the track, to have already been a leader of motorcycle tours through various exotic overseas locations – even up into the awesome Himalayas. Welcome to the world of Denise Ferris.

Denise, together with partner in life and business Mike Ferris, runs Ferris Wheels Motorcycle Safaris. Mike established the business 13 years ago but Denise was blissfully unaware of Mike, the business and the pleasures of riding motorcycles until a chance meeting between them on an overseas flight, in early 2004, set in motion an interesting chain of events...

INTRODUCTION TO BIKES

We were curious about the details of Denise's first encounter with bikes.

She explained, "On our second date, being the wise man that he is, Mike took me for a ride on his black Ducati ST2. We rode up around Macquarie Pass, with all those great corners. What an awesome experience. I loved it! The freedom, the speed, the connection with nature – I could smell the trees, feel the climatic changes, hear the birds. I was alive!"

Soon Denise moved on from the pillion to the pilot's seat. She also moved on from her mainstream corporate background. The "proper" job she left was CEO of The Humour Foundation – a national Australian charity that puts "clown doctors" into children's hospitals around Australia to bring laughter to sick children and their families.



She swapped the executive desk for the chance to ride bikes to some amazing places. This lifestyle exposes a rider to a range of experiences that most of us will never sample.

HER HIGHLIGHT TO DATE

"A truly magic moment was my first time riding to the top of Khardung La, the highest road in the world, in the

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Indian Himalaya. At 5600 metres this is as close to the heavens as one can get on a motorcycle and it's indescribable. We use words like sensational, awesome, fantastic, stunning, breathtaking but nothing can quite capture how it feels to have ridden to the highest point one can in the world. And now I get to do this twice a year... It's my job," said Denise

A WORKING DAY FOR A TOUR LEADER

We asked Denise to describe a typical working day (if such a thing exists) on safari.

She replied, "The tour leader's day involves:

"The morning briefing about where we're heading, what the day is likely to include, specific points of interest, petrol stops, number of kays etc.

"Sometimes leading the group and marking corners – sometimes riding at the back and 'shepherding'.

"Organising morning tea and lunch stops, ordering food and paying bills.

"Pointing out sights of interest and arranging photographic stops along the way.

"Handling unexpected events on the road such as landslides, road closures, bike hiccups, rider incidents and injuries and soldiers at military checkpoints along the way – of course there's at least one of these events most days.

"Co-ordinating hotel rooms and dinner at the end of the day and providing the evening briefing. "It's a tough job, but I'm the woman to do it!"

Denise, as a relative newcomer to bikes, hasn't let the grass grow under her wheels.

THE MOTORCYCLE TOUR BUSINESS

The Ferris Wheels Motorcycle Safaris business grew from Mike Ferris's pioneering ride through the Himalayas in 1994 leading a group of Australian riders.

These days Ferris Wheels takes intrepid riders to a range of regions including Rajasthan, the Indian Himalayas, Nepal, Bhutan, Turkey, the Canadian Rockies and the Andes.

Trips are typically of three weeks duration. Check the website: www.ferriswheels.com.au

"I'm keen to encourage people... to get out and live and ride a motorcycle."



The F650 seems to work well for Denise.

Istanbul's Blue Mosque is only a bike ride away.



She rides over 20,000km yearly outside Australia, on Enfields from the Ferris Wheels fleet in Asia and on a range of rented bikes elsewhere. Back home she manages to fit in around 5000km annually on her own BMW F 650 GS. She takes the skills aspect seriously too, having done a Superbike School with Steve Brouggy at Eastern Creek.

DENISE'S 'MONEY-NO-OBJECT' BIKE

Beyond the bikes she has already ridden, we asked Denise if there's a particular bike she aspires to own.

She said, "I'm currently very happy with my second-hand, red F 650 GS. It's very me. I guess I could be tempted to think about adding another bike to the garage. I don't know what make it would be, but it would be a really classic, beautifully restored old motorcycle that I loved to ride. It would probably be light blue. Colour is very important to me."

Beyond the fact that Denise has embraced motorcycles as part of a package that throws in a husband and a business for good measure it's obvious that she is quite passionate about motorcycling per se and is an effective advocate for motorcycling.

HER RELATIONSHIP WITH BIKES

"Coming to motorcycling in my late 30s, I'm keen to encourage people, particularly women, who may be blissfully unaware (as I was) of the enjoyment that motorcycling offers, to get out and live and ride a motorcycle," was the way she summed it up.



Beside the sea – at Alanya, Turkey.

THE ZEN FACTOR

Denise turned to Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to amplify something of the richness of the motorcycling experience.

"(In a car) you're a passive observer and it's all moving by you boringly in a frame. On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming," she quoted.

ADVICE TO WOULD-BE RIDERS

With the kind of enthusiasm that Denise demonstrates for motorcycling she's bound to get people flirting with the idea of giving it a go. So we asked her if there was one precious gem of advice she would offer to anyone thinking about taking up motorcycling.

She replied: "Life is for living and on a motorcycle you always know you're alive, you can't stay passive. But every time you get on your motorcycle, you should respect the risks that are inherent in being more alive and focus your attention on minimising those risks. Life is also very precious."