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ESTABLISHED 1958



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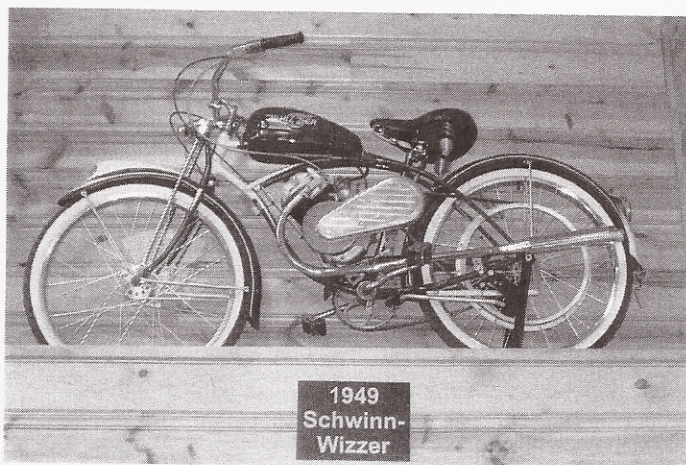
My First Motorbike

By Merle

My first motorbike really was a motorbike. I'd pretty much forgotten about it until I spotted one last year displayed in a gas station come general store in the South Dakota black hills on the road to Sturgis. Unfortunately I was travelling by car and missed the rally by a month but I got the "T" shirt anyway.

In any case, someone in the '40's manufactured a kit that could be fitted to the big framed, balloon tyred bicycles that were sold in the U.S. It consisted of a gas tank that fitted over the cross bar, a 4 stroke single cylinder motor that fitted in the frame, a lawnmower type throttle, a belt clutch assembly that was operated by a lever and cable that disengaged an idler pulley and a large belt-driven pulley that fixed to the spokes of the back wheel.

The starter for the contraption was a swing down stand that pivoted near the rear axle and lifted the wheel off the ground. This enabled the rider to climb on and peddle like mad with the clutch engaged until it started.



My "Whizzer" wasn't quite as fancy as the restored one on display. I found mine in my Uncle Arthur's barn when I was about 13. I don't think the bicycle ever was new but someone had put it together and it all worked. I'll never forget the first time they let me take it for a ride.

Sunny day, gravel road, motor underneath and countryside as far as you could see - it was too much. For about \$35 it was mine. I don't know how my parents ever got it home but I cleaned and painted it to the best of my ability.

I immediately came off on its maiden voyage in the suburbs while racing my friend on his bicycle. I still have one elbow bigger than the other. Don't tell my mother! I can't remember selling it, but I must have eventually when I got my first scooter.

Merle.
BMW F650GS

CONQUERING (MY PART OF) THE WORLD ON A BMW F650GS

I'd thought my riding days were over. Sure, 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. My husband had a bike when I met him; in fact, he bought it from my brother, a lifelong rider and collector of motorcycles.

We left Brisbane and lived in many places around the world, less-friendly motorcycling climates and circumstances. We had three children, then four, when we returned to Australia in the mid '80s. Motorcycling was something we used to do, and our dusty helmets were still in the garage.

In 1997, a friend confided that she had heard our husbands discussing test-riding motorcycles. I was surprised, and pleased and supportive when my husband rolled home on a brand-new BMW R1100GS, on our 25th wedding anniversary. The kids were older now and "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 "A Pillion in a Million".

We met other like-minded 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 and signed up for a Ferris Wheels (www.ferriswheels.com.au) trip - our first - in Rajasthan, India in January 2007. It was fantastic and the boys really enjoyed riding those old Enfields. I was certainly never even tempted - so why did I take such pleasure in, from time to time, starting the beast and hearing it roar?

We returned to Australia and 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 for my decision. So I duly went along to Q Ride and came home with a licence, restricted to a less than 250 cc, clutchless bike.

It was a slow process getting competent and confident. So many times around the block, around the park. The 1100 and its rider were so patient. Finally, I took the scoot up Mount Coottha, then Mount Glorious, which was a major achievement, a benchmark in Brisbane motorcycling. Six months later, after one particularly tortuous 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 CBF 250. This was August 2007. Again, my very patient husband followed me and led me (never actually pushed) around Brisbane, so I could be a better and more confident rider.

Our next Ferris trip 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 18 months I put 13,500 km on that 250.



We had met a couple in Turkey and Helen had a licence now too; however, it was an unrestricted one. The four of us had a great time – lots of weekends away, lots of country pubs, lots of kilometres. On one occasion, I did overhear a conversation, musing on whether the 250 was up to a particular journey. So, with little surprise, along I went for the final step to a Real Proper Unrestricted Licence.

Before it was delivered, we joined our third Ferris trip – Morocco this time, in April 2009, and again I was registered as a pillion. After a couple of days on the road, and because my husband had quietly arranged for it, I had what I think of as an “audition” ride on Denise Ferris’s BMW 650. 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.

Another rider had developed a severe back condition and was unable to ride, except in the bus. With a bit of juggling of bike assignments, I was offered a bike to ride for the rest of the journey. I could hardly sleep I was so excited and nervous. The mechanics and all the other riders were very supportive and helpful. I had “Team Viki” around me. Needless to say, my husband was my chief supporter and parking valet. He couldn’t decide if he preferred to lead me or follow; luckily others were there too so he got a chance to do both.



So, on our return from Morocco, with my by-now used open licence, we collected my new Honda 400. What a treat! but again, that process of becoming familiar with the bike, and how it feels, gaining confidence on tricky turns, and learning to feel comfortable. Another 14,000 km but this time it only took seven months!

In December 2009, to recognise our approaching retirement,

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along we went to BMW and ordered 2 more new bikes: a F650GS (twin, in red, actually 800 cc) for me, and an F800 GS (in white) for him. For me, that is 3 new bikes in less than 3 years. But now I had a bike I could ride, or rent, anywhere.



In February 2010, we rented bikes in New Zealand - a BMW F650GS (red, single) for me- the same as I had ridden in Morocco, and a Honda Transalp (blue) for my husband. We did 2600 kilometres in the South Island in 8 days. No downs, no dramas, great fun.

May 2010 found us on our fourth Ferris trip – this one on the Dalmatian Coast – 5 countries. We were blessed with good weather, but more importantly, I was assigned a F650GS (twin, in red), with factory-lowered suspension – the exact replica of my own in Brisbane!



I confess that the riding was challenging: amazing narrow steep hairpins with cobblestones, and lots of broken pavement in the mountains, but good and predictable road engineering nevertheless.

There were 24 people in the group, most in the “fifties to sixties” age range, comprising 17 riders, 3 pillion, two wives on the support bus, and our leader, Mike Ferris. There was only one other female rider (a highly competent 60+ year-old). The high-quality, well-maintained, new-near new fleet consisted of 17 bikes: 13 BMWs (4 F650 GS twins, 1 G650 GS single, 5 R1200 GSs, 1 R1200R, 1 R1200RT), 4 V-Stroms, and one Yamaha FJR1300. Did I mention the hairpins and the cobblestones??

The route included five countries: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia &

Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the Dolomites area in the north-east of Italy. Great scenery. Apples & oranges. All special so no favourites.

Our trip began in late May, and ran for three weeks. We really were blessed with good weather, apart from one hour with some rain, of course on a mountain road. A previous group did the same trip four weeks earlier, and unfortunately had several days of heavy rain, with consequent accidents and some drops.

Anyway, my bike never hit the ground - not even a "technical" toppling off its side-stand. I engaged in a lot of self-instruction inside my helmet, particularly "look where you are going", accompanied by 270-degree neck-craning to see around the next of the never-ending switchbacks. There were a couple of big uphill switchbacks that stumped me a bit but I got back on track again. Once, with melting snow and a stick in the middle of a major slow-speed switchback, I looked at the stick!! Luckily, my renewed progress was assisted once again by another rider - it was magic having on-call help from all other riders and the support team.

Until further training, I am not sure I could even attempt those mountainous bits again, but somewhat in-the-dark (ie every day a new adventure) I managed to cope with each day's challenges. It was a great buzz to complete the trip, and I have already signed up for a Stay Upright Advanced rider training course at Mt Cotton.

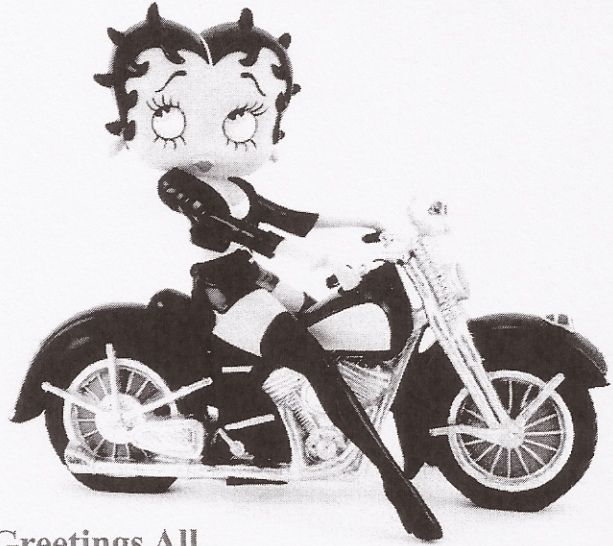
So, my message: Go Girl. Why should boys have all the fun? I'm 60 now, 162 cm (not tall), weigh 55-60 kilograms (depending on how many holidays we've been on recently) not particularly athletic, adventurous, or risk-taking. I get scared on sailboats

even though I swim well. I've learned a lot about myself - that I do it in "baby steps". I am proud of my achievement (any one understand "fig jam"? or how about "legend") and happy that my husband and I can share this hobby now, in a way different from that of a pillion.

I can do this and I want to.

Viki Skerman

Ms Betty Beemer



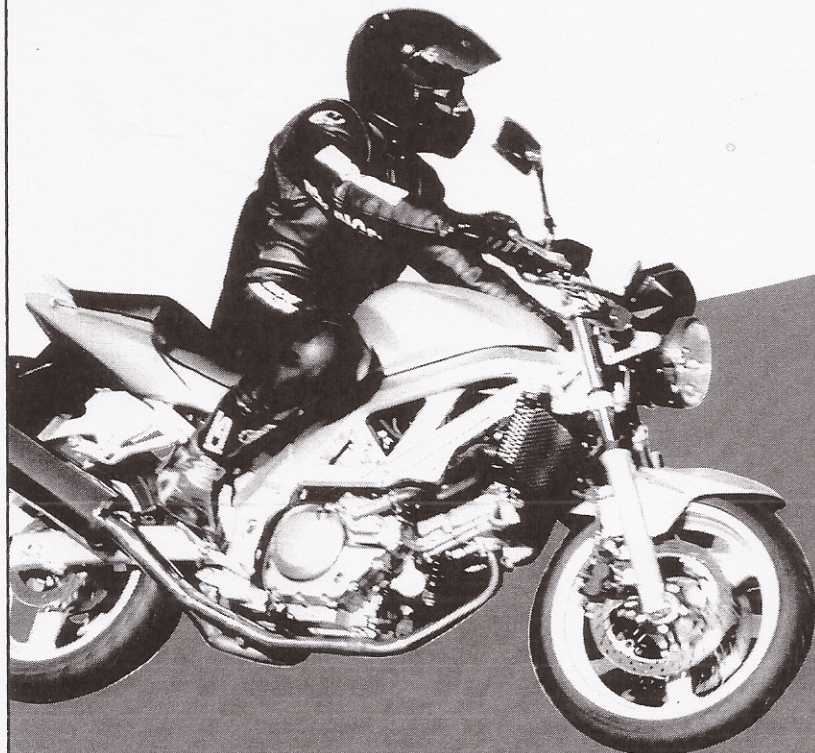
Greetings All

If you have some ideas for the girls, then send me a line via the Editor. Otherwise catch me next month for more girl gossip 'Til next time

Betty Beemer

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