

## Written in the stars

It's a small world, as the saying goes – but Polish endurance rider Ania Jackowska, 30, never expected it to apply on her 72-day solo trip through south-east Europe. As coincidence followed coincidence, Ania and her trusted BMW F 650 GS, discovered that the bond between motorcyclists spans countries, continents and even language barriers. From a passing honeymooning couple recognising the BMW F 650 GS and its stickers, and turning back to say hello, to reuniting with friends from previous adventures, the tour was packed with encounters Ania believes were destined to happen.



“There were so many meetings that seemed like coincidences but I actually think they happened for a purpose – I think I have good stars above me that are guiding me,” she says. “One day I was in a tiny village in Bulgaria, I couldn't find a church I wanted to visit, so I went to ask in a little shop and at that moment I heard a shout: ‘Syria, motorbike,’ and it was a girl I'd met on my last trip in the middle of the Syrian desert.

“Another day, I was walking in a historical town, wearing my jacket with my sponsors on, when I saw a man with a bike and he asked if I remembered him – I said no, but then realised we'd met in a petrol station when I was on my way to Syria. It was amazing to have so many chance encounters.”

Ania's journey covered more than 7,000 miles, four months, eight countries and countless memories. In June, she set off for the Balkans, with just her GS and the open road for company. The intrepid pair conquered freezing conditions, winding, pothole-riddled mountain roads, and much more during their journey, but Ania said that the GS made sure she never felt like giving up.

“I had no doubt the GS was the right bike for the trip – BMWs can always be relied on, so I knew I'd be able to trust my bike,” she explains. “Syria and Jordan was a great trip

so I already knew I wouldn't be let down this time and I was right. There were times when the trip was hard, when I was riding in rain and freezing temperatures, but I came out of it mentally and physically stronger. My favourite moment of the trip was in



Macedonia, I was heading for the highest village in all of former Yugoslavia. I felt there was nothing but me, my bike and the mountains. It was amazing.”

The sociology graduate, whose previous trips have included the Middle East and much of Europe, said the people she met on her travels were often fascinated by a lone woman biker. The novelty opened many doors over the course of the journey and saw her invited

to a wedding, plied with presents of honey, apples and other sweet treats, and welcomed by everyone from Romany Gypsies to border officials.

“Everywhere I went people treated me so kindly, they showed such care for me,” says Ania. “As soon as they saw I was a lone woman on a bike they wanted to help. I think the bike definitely helps to make a connection with people: you expect to talk to other bikers, but there were so many people with no connection to motorbikes who were fascinated by what I was doing and wanted to know why I was doing it, why I chose their country and what I thought of it.”

Ania's earlier travels were turned into a book, *Kobieta na Motocyklu* (A woman on a motorcycle), which she says is becoming increasingly well known in Poland. “I have a Facebook page and all the time I get messages from people who do not ride motorbikes and have no connection to them, but who have read my book,” she explains, adding: “I think the appeal is because I write about people, the culture, the stories – not just about the roads and what time I stopped for a beer, which is how some bikers tend to write.”

While most riders would at least wait until their engines had cooled before plotting where to explore next, Ania has already decided to head for South America. “The exact decision over where I will go has not been made yet,” says Ania. “I did say Chile at first, but because I must take my trip in May, it might not be the right time to go. But the trip will definitely be to South America – maybe Peru or Ecuador, I'm not sure.”



Wherever Ania ends up heading to, there will be no doubt the expedition will be anything but predictable. She says: “I do not plan too much before I go, I like to be spontaneous, to speak to

people and read newspapers and guidebooks along the way. I will decide that I am going to the Balkans, for example, but I will never plan my route. It definitely helps to make my trips exciting.”

Ania's adventures in the Balkans will be included in a new book, as yet untitled. For more information, visit [www.aniajackowska.pl](http://www.aniajackowska.pl) or see Ania's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/posted.php?id=167850460221&start=80&hash=d026bc98f50b5a5fc600f4f8860dede9#!/profile.php?id=100000757505686&v=wall](https://www.facebook.com/posted.php?id=167850460221&start=80&hash=d026bc98f50b5a5fc600f4f8860dede9#!/profile.php?id=100000757505686&v=wall)