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Women bikers lead the way: Tale of one's grit, road to empowerment

The ride to Ladakh tops her list, because the route she chalked out (Delhi-Manali-Jispa-Leh-Khardungla-Pangonso-Sarchu-Manali) was the toughest one to traverse.



Published: 31st May 2020 09:09 AM | Last Updated: 31st May 2020 09:09 AM 🖨 | A+ A A-

By Rajkumari Sharma Tankha

NEW DELHI: As one of the few women bikers to ride a Touring Bike, Ambika Sharma has had many memorable rides.

But, the ride to Ladakh tops her list, because the route she chalked out (Delhi-Manali-Jispa-Leh-Khardungla-Pangonso-Sarchu-Manali) was the toughest one to traverse.

“The most difficult bit was to Leh, as it was the first time that I was covering it on a Harley Road King. This touring bike 1700cc with a loaded weight above 500kg, is not suited to the rugged off-road terrain of Ladakh,” says Sharma acknowledging that the adventure lover in her had overruled common sense.

In fact, the ‘bikerholic’ dreams of trips on the bikes she owns (BMW GTL K1600 and Harley Davidson).

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“I believe the experience of the machine is more important than the machine itself. You can have the best machine in the world but what’s the point if you aren’t clocking some interesting miles,” says the Founder & Managing Director of Pulp Strategy, who plans her life between her three loves: travel, diving and motorcycling.

Excerpts:

When did you get into biking?

I learnt to ride a motorcycle from my father when I was 12. We lived in a small place near Siliguri, and it was a gated station. When I entered college, I got a motorcycle of my own and rode it to college. Adventure riding back then was limited to riding to Agra (my home town) or till Alwar. It was only in 2000 I began planning longer trips.

Were your parents supportive of your interest?

Perhaps, they are even more adventurous than me! I was always able to discuss and plan trips with them. My father has excellent knowledge of Indian roads, and it is from him I get insights on routes and locations that most folks have not heard of. I was encouraged to climb every mountain and swim every river. The discussion was always around how, not why



Tell us about your Ladakh ride?

When I discussed my intent of riding the Road King to Ladakh and onwards to Khardungla (world’s highest motorable road with an elevation of 5,359m), all my fellow riders advised me against it.

They told me horror stories of broken bones, crashed bikes, pulmonary edema! No one back then had taken a Road King to Khardungla via Manali.

Thereafter, I kept the conversation within family and friends, and planned the ride with just one rider.

Till Rohtang, the ride was a breeze. The descent from Rohtang to Jispa was unnerving as my bike just slid downhill. I spent Day 1 adjusting to the behaviour of the bike on that terrain. Day 2 was a long 11 hours.

We kicked off from Jispa at 6:00am, and within the first hour, I got separated from the second bike. After waiting for a few hours with no means of communication, I decide to proceed solo and not waste daylight.

It was a day of Zing Zing bar (water crossing streams), which crisscrossed the path between Jispa and plains ahead. I learnt the disadvantage of a heavy machine can turn into an advantage with gushing water during crossings.

By 5:00 pm, Tanglangla Pass was minus 8 degrees. I met many riders along the way and made it to Leh by 7:00pm.

My dad had flown in to Leh, which added merry to the madness. Day 3 gave me a feeling of being invincible.

After a ride to the Mighty Khardungla and the overnight to Pangongso, the 12-day trip was almost over. I rode back the same route, but this time with dad as a pillion rider. It's only after I was back in Delhi, I let everyone know that the trip is done and dusted.

Other adventure sports you are interested in?

I am a certified advanced open water diver, on my way to become a dive master.

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