

After Hours: Biker lady Ambika Sharma

A science student who went on to study Shakespeare, a software developer who studied advertising, an entrepreneur when she founded Pulp Strategy... there are many hats that Ambika Sharma wears. But here Sharma talks about her other passion – biking

Roshni Nair | Mumbai | March 16, 2017



Ambika Sharma

(This is a weekly series on advertising professionals who have enriched their own lives and their audiences as performing musicians, artists, painters, actors, singers, mime artists and much more. We will bring a new adman-performer every Thursday.)



Think of a biker and the one image that instantly comes to the mind is of a well-built man, clad in leather, sporting a handlebar moustache, probably riding a Harley Davidson. But breaking stereotypes and challenging norms is Ambika Sharma, Founder and MD, Pulp Strategy Communications.



Sharma's former experience includes working as Chief Operating Officer for Jagran Solutions (a unit of JPL), Encompass (a WPP company) and Kidstuff (a Mudra Group company).

Sharma started riding when she was only 12 years – on a Royal Enfield – and credits her father for teaching everything she knows today about biking. That first ride marked the beginning of a love affair that has stood the test of times; She today own 2013 Suzuki GSX-R1000 1 Million Commemorative Edition and a Harley Davidson Road King. She indulges her adventurous streak through extensive road trips, diving, swimming and kayaking.



“My father is a biker, so I learned how to ride with him. I started pretty young, when I was 12. My father was an army officer and he used to get posted at really nice, exotic places. We used to travel quite a bit to nearby places and that is really how my love for biking started.”

But riding is not all that Sharma learned from him. Whether a man or a woman, riding comes with a lot of risks and Sharma’s father ensured that she was capable of handling any challenge that the long winding roads would throw at her.

Talking about the one big bone of contention between father and daughter, Sharma said, “Back then there were no tubeless tyres. Scooters have a stepney but bikes don’t; even tyres, back and front, are not similar. So if you get a puncture the only thing you can do is to park the bike, take off the wheel and take it to the near puncture repair shop to get it fixed. So, I wasn’t allowed to take the bike out by myself for solo rides until I could take the Royal Enfield’s wheel off and put it back together. My father thought it was more important to know how to fix a puncture and take the wheel off than knowing how to ride the bike.”



The first long distance journey that Sharma embarked on was from Delhi to Agra, where her father was posted.

Speaking about the longest journey she has undertaken, Sharma said, “The most memorable and the longest journey I have undertaken is from Delhi to Kanyakumari with my dad. The journey was about 14-15 days long and we went all coastal. We cut through Gujarat, Daman and from Daman we followed the coastal belt, along the seaside, all the way up to Kanyakumari.”

But being a rider is not very easy in India because of the deplorable conditions of our roads and being a woman rider is rare still. But Sharma feels that as long as one is careful and knows what they are doing, there is nothing to fear.



“You have to be careful about safety. Not in riding in the dark is one of them, you should carry your own tool kit, you should know how to talk to people and avoid certain areas. People in the small towns in India are generally nice to you; if you don’t show attitude then they are extremely nice to you. In small towns in Rajasthan and Punjab, women riding two-wheelers is actually not a big thing. Whether you are riding a scooter or a bike is just a choice of vehicle. I think women riding alone has become a big issue in cities like Delhi because of the safety concerns. But back when I started riding, it wasn’t so bad and bike was the only option I had for going to college.”

Sharma has also started Trails of India, a platform to bring together riders from across the country.

“Trails of India started in late December of 2015. Biking is becoming a very popular passion and people want to travel across the country but they don’t actually know how. I used to make fun of my friends a lot about how they would not be able to tell the difference between a railway line and a road. People today are so used to Google Maps that they haven’t actually read a map. I wouldn’t know about all this too if it weren’t my father. When we decide to take a trip, the planning used to start a month before we actually set out for the trip. So, Trails of India is a platform that enables people to share information about their trips and their knowledge about travel.”



Any journey would be incomplete without interesting encounters and stories to talk about. As someone who has travelled across the country, Sharma has had a few memorable encounters.

Talking about one such encounter, Sharma said, “Last year I and my father rode from Delhi to Goa. So we went across most of Maharashtra. So, we wanted to explore the villages around Ganpatipule and Ratnagiri. You could ride for hours on these roads and meet no one. So we were riding and kind of lost track of time and we couldn’t find anywhere to eat. There were no restaurants or even a roadside *dhaba* (eatery). So we saw this place where there were a lot of cows and bullock-carts and a lot of benches. We assumed it to be an eatery and went inside. Once inside we asked the guy to give us food. He looked at us and told he only had fish. We were so hungry we told him we would eat anything. We probably ate all the fish in that house and we were sort of complaining what kind of a restaurant this was. Turns out it wasn’t a restaurant at all and that it was the man’s house. He had just caught those fishes for himself and his family but had fed us because we were so hungry. We felt terrible and even offered him money but he wouldn’t take any money, saying we were his guests. We did pay him for the fish but it was a very minimal amount. Finally, we gave him a ride on our bikes around the village so he could show off the bike to everyone.”

The destinations on her bucket list?

“I have been to Leh a couple of times but I haven’t been to Spiti so I would love to go there and I would definitely love to take some time off to go to Bhutan.”

Ride on lady!