

Riding the world

Naazher Brenner

IN MAY 2003 Simon and Lisa Thomas left the UK riding two BMW motorbikes on a four-year journey around the globe.

"It wouldn't be unusual to see a tough, forty year undertaking such a journey, but Lisa, 42, a technical IT computer analyst, is 1.6 metres tall and she has a heart complaint. She will be the first woman in the world to achieve such a feat," said Simon.

To date the two have travelled 29 countries and altogether will have passed through over 100 countries and all seven continents while circling the planet when their journey is complete.

Table View is their headquarters while they are in Southern Africa.

The project has been a life-long ambition for the "2 Ride The World" team. "It's not just about riding motorbikes through as many countries as possible, but more importantly about getting to know and understand the countries, their cultures and their people," said Simon. "We trained that chiefs of tribes in remote parts of Africa take pride in supplying security for visitors. We parked our bikes in villages and the headman drew a circle in the dust around them thereby guaranteeing the safety of our possessions."

Executing "unsupported" on a journey of this scale, the husband and wife team will have to deal with riding their motorbikes through some of the world's most inhospitable regions while coping with the diversity of extreme climates—the

towering sand dunes and relentless heat of the Sahara, the jungles of South America and the freezing conditions of the Arctic are but a few of the challenges they will face and have to overcome.

"This journey is going to be the ultimate test, not only for Lisa and me personally, but also physically and mentally. We have known each other for 12 years and been married for eight years. We don't have children, so we've left no one behind. This journey represents to us boundless and unimaginable opportunities, but also in equal measure dangers and pitfalls. Ultimately our plan is to make it round the world together while raising as much money as possible for our chosen charities," said Simon, who is 34 and sold half of his telecoms business to help finance the journey.

The Thomases chose the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK as their beneficiaries, because cancer and heart disease have touched both their families. Their third beneficiary is Water Aid, whose vision is a world where everyone has access to safe water and effective sanitation. Water Aid has programmes in 15 countries in Africa and Asia.

Simon and Lisa's journey has already taken them to the most northerly point in Europe within the Arctic Circle. Their route then saw them travelling through Russia, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and across to Morocco in North Africa where they steeled themselves

to cross the Sahara desert.

Their ride then took them south along the length of West Africa to arrive recently in South Africa.

They will soon embark on a journey up the middle of the African continent returning to Cape Town along the east coast of Africa.

The aim is to pass through as many countries as possible to increase donations to the beneficiaries—the more countries the Thomases ride through the more money the beneficiaries will get.

From Cape Town they will cross the South Atlantic to Brazil then ride to the most southerly point of South America reachable by road, Cape Horn.

The month thereafter will see them riding north the length of South and North America. From New York they plan a trans American crossing to the West Coast and then on to Canada.

Heading West, they will take the journey to Japan, from where the riders will launch into the Asian leg as they head across the Gobi Desert and the wild lands of Mongolia. The next destination will be Australia followed by Tasmania and New Zealand before setting out on the long journey home to the UK.

Simon and Lisa are taking each day in their stride, working here and there to make money to move forward.

Lisa said one of their most memorable experiences was being in the middle of the Sahara desert, where "the sand dunes are like silent sculp-



■ Lisa and Simon Thomas pause in their "2 ride the world" project to take in the beauty of Table View's permanent vista.

tures reaching to time immemorial."

The scariest moment for Simon was putting their motorbikes into dugout (red) tanks to cross a Mali border. "The border was just a torrential river with a couple of men paddling people and equipment across and all I could think was, if our machines went to the bottom, that would be it. I was like a frantic jelly, panic-walled up. Lisa was far more controlled than I," said Simon.

"We have been overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality of incredibly generous people all along the route so far," said Simon. "We thought we had secured a sponsor for repairs, maintenance and fuel for the bikes, before we set out, but the company went into liquidation only three weeks before our journey started."

"We took stock of the situation and decided to go for it despite the setback and it's been wonderful," he said.

Simon and Lisa are looking for sponsors to

get them across the South Atlantic to South America for the west leg of their project and for sponsors to assist them with fuel and maintenance for their vehicles.

"At the moment food and fuel form our daily expenditure, anything else is a luxury," said Lisa.

The trip itself will be the catalyst for donations to the three beneficiaries, donations to which can only be made through the couple's website or directly to the beneficiary organisations.

"We don't handle the beneficiaries' money at all," said Simon.

For more details on these charities and how to donate directly to them or how you can help Simon and Lisa on their way, visit www.2ridethe-world.com.

Supporting bodies include, not only from a humanitarian viewpoint, but also directly by sharing the media attention inevitably focused on the project and through the website.

The site also explains in detail the technical alterations and modifications to the bikes as well as other useful information regarding independent travel abroad. Anyone with an adventurous spirit should check out.



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