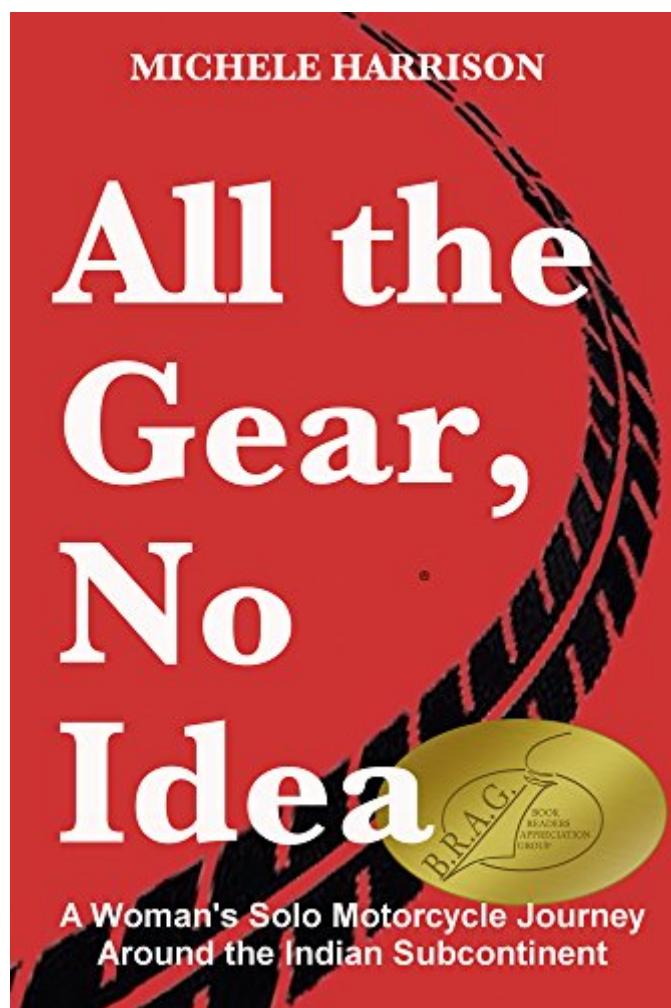


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All The Gear, No Idea: A Woman's Solo Motorbike Journey Around The Indian Subcontinent



Synopsis

BOOK REVIEW by Stuart Jewkes, Editor of The Rider's Digest"All the gear and no idea" is usually meant as a pejorative term aimed at chequebook bikers. On the other hand, Michele Harrison inverts the phrase here to illustrate her refreshingly honest and upfront admission of her inexperience in relation to the magnitude of her undertaking - a massive road trip round India, all by herself, on a locally-procured Royal Enfield, with no backup or support of any kind. Unlike many of her "moto-travel-lit" peers, Michele uses the best policy of all, which is to adopt the value system of her host nation and leave everything to fate; a policy which eventually has a lasting impact on the rest of her life (in a good way - but I won't give it away!). As a result, she makes Homeric road trips like this sound accessible and achievable to mere mortals, when so many others give the impression that lack of expertise is a barrier to entry. It's not all Pirsig-style mysticism either. Instead you variously get crashes, dynamite, harrassment and hospitality, charity and larceny, disease, enlightenment and a side-trip into the Himalayas. At the centre of all this is Michele and her motorcycle ("Big Thumper"), which is the perfect vehicle for the human interaction that is the cornerstone of all great travel stories, including this one.

BOOK DESCRIPTION

Just because someone told her India was "really in your face", Michele Harrison quit her office job at the age of 33, bought herself an Enfield motorbike and set off for nearly a year in 1997 to tour the Indian subcontinent. Until then, she had only ridden scooters around London. With more gear than sense, her 17,000 miles journey took her through the mayhem of Delhi traffic, the mountains of Kashmir, the deserts of Rajasthan, the beaches of Goa, the southern tip of India, the remote tracks of Nepal and the eerie Himalayan barrenness of Ladakh. She wanted an adventure to spice up a boring life and fulfil her wanderlust. She got that, and more.

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Solo Travel

Customer Reviews

This is a fantastic travelogue of a single woman's year-long trip, on a motorcycle, through India and Nepal twenty years ago. Michèle Harrison took "breaking out of your comfort zone" to a whole different level. I was amazed at how she took one day at a time with what seemed like very little planning ahead. A true optimist, she seemed to know that "it will all work out in the end" and she just kept on. Because there were no photos, I followed along with Google Earth and all the photos it offers for each of her stops. If you like adventure and travelogues, I highly recommend this memoir.

This wonderful book follows a year-long journey around India by a single woman. She leaves her job in banking, takes a motorcycle driving class, goes to India, buys a Royal Enfield 500cc motorcycle, and off she goes, exploring the country. I laughed out loud at some of her adventures, was quite frightened by others, and am just a little stunned at her willingness to give up comfort, safety and predictability for this big, big adventure. Her matter-of-fact impressions of the cultures and the people along her way fascinated me.

"So much of traveling is waiting, often not knowing why". In this one small phrase, Michèle sums up the mystery of travel, and of the Asian subcontinent, and her yearlong odyssey by motorcycle around and about India. This delightful tale of a 'thirty-something' woman who quit her high-end dead-end job, packed her gear, and hied off to India to buy an Enfield motorcycle .. And laying aside fear she sets out to learn .. everything, from how to ride, to how to survive in a strange land where so much depends on the kindness of strangers. She's candid and straightforward and funny, cringing at her gaffes and glorying in people and country and the simple joys of riding. Well done.

A lovely travelogue of a year long solo motorcycle trip through India and Nepal nearly 20 years ago. I enjoyed it the most when she interacted with the locals and other tourists. It was very brave for a woman to travel alone, it is still considered unsafe. But the author had a great adventure. It must have been difficult to pare down the year long ride into one book, but she did a great job editing the story.

In this age of over-preparation and over packing (think of "Long Way Around" as proof) I found this adventure refreshing. Determination, pluck, and the ability to take help offered by strangers makes up for lack of "proper" kit. Small and simple will always come out better than huge and complex when traveling through less developed areas.

In full disclosure I bought this book for my girlfriend in hopes she would get the motorcycle bug. More accurately, I bought it in hopes she would want her own bike. To date she is still content to be a passenger on the back of my ride. This should in no way reflect poorly on the writings of Ms. Harrison. However, it did inspire me to download the book to see what the problem was. I quickly found out there was no problem. The story was well told and well written. Although my knowledge of India's geography is sparse I found myself transported, wishing it was me sitting behind the handle bars of "Big Thumper" instead of the author. Would I have had more luck with the mechanics and maintenance of the bike? I hope so, but doubt it. All in all its a fun and easy read. The only hard part is finding an affordable Royal Enfield on Craig's list.

This book is a testament to women, humans, adventure, kindness, luck and motorcycles. I love that a young woman was able to traverse a foreign land on a motorcycle and that she shared this story. It is my dream to make adventures but I suspect I'll do not vicarious travelling than actual.

I enjoyed the authors writing style and the detail of the story as she toured around India on her Big Thumper (what she names her Enfield). Although she claims to know very little about motorcycles, I was happily surprised that she actually wrote a fair bit about her bike, how it fared in the conditions she rode and the mechanical and maintenance side of her adventure. Funnily enough a lot of authors of motorcycling adventures neglect to speak about their bikes hardly at all! As a motorcycle obsessed traveller, to hear about the bike is very satisfying for me... I looked forward to picking this book up each night and it is with sadness that I finished reading. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

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