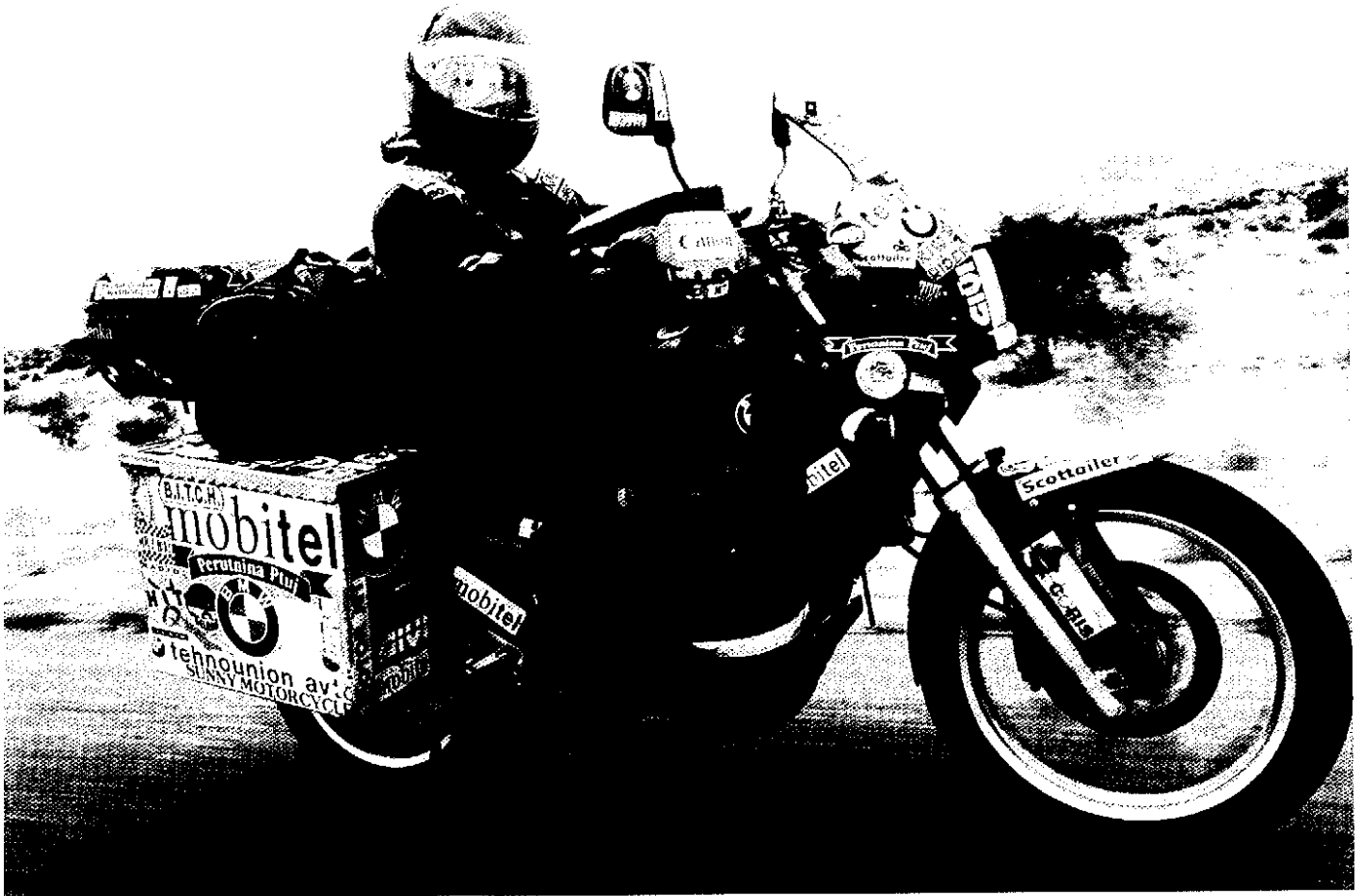


Reflections on a world record setting ride



REFLECTIONS

ON A WORLD RECORD SETTING RIDE

Interview by Roger Wiles #32797

Bernarda "Benka" Pulko, of Slovenia, recently completed her five-plus-year trek around the world on a BMW F650. The *BMW Owners News* has published several articles chronicling her adventure and is pleased to be able to now bring you a closing account.

BMW ON: What countries were in your final leg of the journey since your last visit with BMW ON readers?

Benka: I have been through South Africa, Swaziland, Namibia, Botswana, and many other countries. I saw some parts of the Middle East including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Finally, I returned to Europe and rode through Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldavia, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Finland, Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Hungary. On the very last stretch I rode through the former republics of Yugoslavia, of which my homeland, Slovenia, is one. It was one of the highlights of Europe. The still old-fashioned Belgrade, which used to be our capital, revealed its hospitality and charming character.

Bosnia used to be the warm heart of a broken country. Nowadays there are blown-up bridges and burned-out homes screaming at you everywhere. But the people stayed the way they were: simple, warm and happy. The recovery is slow but sure. Where there is a wish, there is a way.

After Croatia, I was ready to have a look at what the Slovenes had changed in my absence. Thankfully, they have carefully protected its forests, which cover 51 percent of the land. The mountain peaks are still the same and the quiet villages along the ridges are reminiscent of fairy-tale beauty.



BMW ON: How do you feel now that you have completed your odyssey?

Benka: I feel great, although at times, sad, and in a way, relieved. It was wonderful and rewarding. Despite the fact I am off the saddle of my "Red Husband" (my BMW F650), my odyssey is not exactly over yet. There are many activities that have to be done and the project must be completed properly.

BMW ON: When did you finish the journey?

Benka: Exactly 2,000 days after I left Slovenia, about 5-1/2 years after I began. Late morning found me on a Slovene border crossing into the southern part of the country... A bright, crisp morning. Snow was all around me and there were barely any cars, let alone motorcycles, at least not in neighboring Croatia where I was coming from. But then, on the other side of the border, there were some 30 motorcycles and crowds of people waiting for the moment I had literally been dreaming of for years. I received a warm

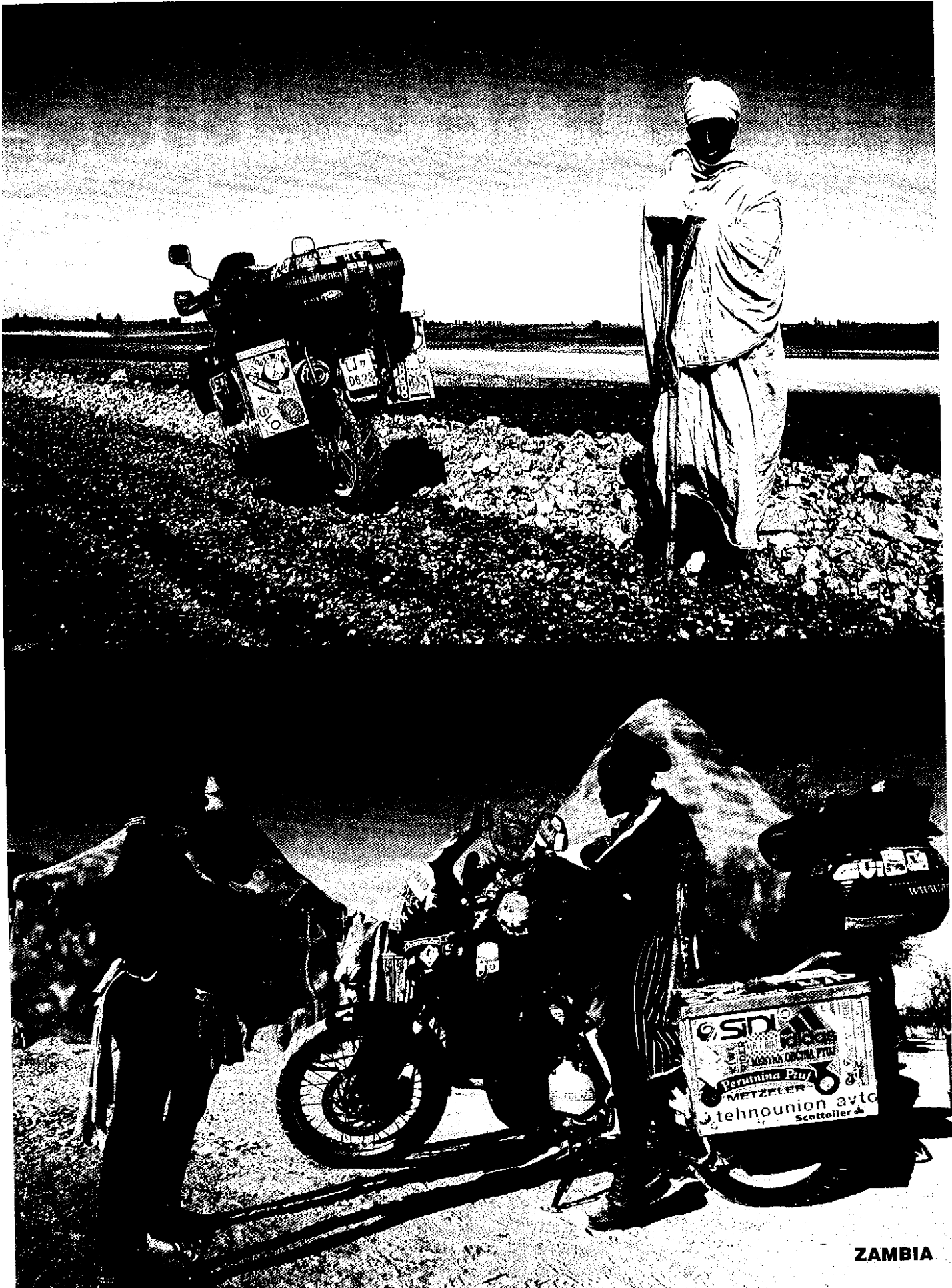
welcome and a police escort for the last stretch of 16 miles before reaching my hometown. The last tears of the trip were tears of endless joy. I could not help but feel a sense of belonging to this place, a feeling of connection greater than any other. This is my true home despite the hundreds of temporary homes and friendships I have found around the world. They say that home is a feeling in the heart, not a place. This time it was a place as well.

Later, another welcoming was carried out with a long ceremony. Then the press avalanche started and it hasn't slowed down yet. It is just another adventure to go through, this time in fancy clothes, with designers and stylists, on a stage in front of cameras. It is fun but I would rather opt for a worn-out Aerostich and my beat-up System helmet.

BMW ON: How did you feel as you came closer to the end?

Benka: Odd, somewhat insecure, and strange. For my last destination, Slove-

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ZAMBIA