

Biker on a quest to circle world

By CAL MASSEY

Staff Writer

DAYTONA BEACH — In Slovenia, a country of 2 million in the former Yugoslavia, she is a celebrity.

In Daytona Beach, she is a biker in need of routine maintenance, haggling with the motorcycle shop's owners over payment, with only fifty bucks in her pocket.

They worked it out. Bernarda Pulko has a knack for working things out, sometimes on the fly through a chance encounter, more often by perseverance.

The 30-year-old former nurse, professor of biology and masseuse for the Slovenian men's national basketball team is in the fifth month of a three-year trip around the world on a motorcycle.

She's a working journalist, filing reports to 24 different newspapers, magazines and radio stations in her home country, with a two-book deal as part of her contract. She covered the motorcycle races last weekend in Daytona Beach.

But Pulko also is taking the ultimate test drive. She rides a BMW F-650 owned by her primary sponsor, BMW Slovenia, and if the bike holds up on this brutal itinerary, it should come highly recommended.

With a tour of New England and eastern Canada already behind her, Pulke next takes a slow boat to South America, where she'll ride for eight months before heading through Central America to San Diego.

There she and her trusty metal steed will hop a plane to New Zealand, then Australia, for a year or more down under. *China is next* — if the authorities say yes — followed by other Asian venues. The last leg of the tour is Africa.

She's due back home — the city of Ljubljana — in June, 2000.

So is all this the realization of a lifelong dream? Uh, no. The idea came to Pulko in January.

"I just had the idea. No money, no knowledge of repairs," she said. "But I asked myself if I was ready to go back to work, and said no.

"I've been in love with motorcycles for 15 years, but only riding since (a year ago in) May."

So Pulko studied repairs, rounded up 30 sponsors, took care of planning and became a star.

"Before I left," she said, "TV news was full of me. Obviously there is something outstanding about what I am doing for the average person."

Then on June 19, Pulko left her cheering countrymen and women, took a plane to New York, unpacked her precious cargo and headed out to see the world.

Only four continents to go.