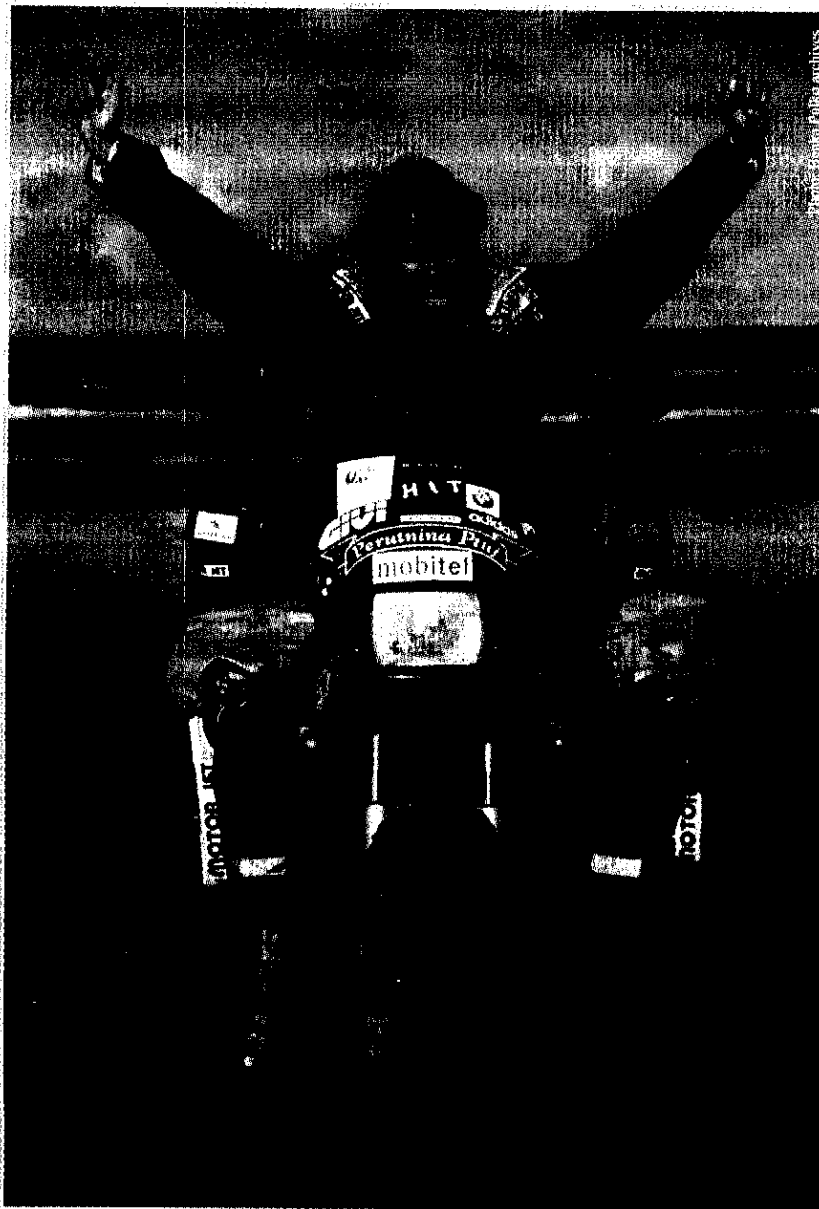


Celebrity

Slovenes of the Year

A woman on a motorbike, Benka Pulko, and ex-president Milan Kučan, were voted 'Slovene of the Year' by readers of the weekly magazines: *Jana* and *Nedeljski dnevnik* respectively.

by Barbara Drnovšek



The beginning of the New Year is a good time to select the most popular personality in public life over the past year. Two of the oldest and most respected selections of this kind are organized by the weekly newspaper *Nedeljski dnevnik* and the women's magazine *Jana*. This year was the 16th time that *Jana's* readers had been asked to make this choice. This year's title of 'Slovene Woman of the Year' was won by Benka Pulko, the first woman to travel

around the world by motorbike. Her adventure lasted for five years and she remains the only woman to have rode across seven continents and the first to travel around Saudi Arabia, a country renowned for its strict rules towards women. Despite Benka's restless spirit she settled down and published a book about her adventures. After all her venture made it into the Guinness book of records.

At the glamorous show in January, where she was announced as the winner, she said: "I'm not so extraordinary a woman. I can make pasta, I don't like football, I prefer motorbikes." Melita Berzelak, the editor of *Jana* agreed that this year their female readers chose a very special woman, who is far from ordinary because for the past five years she has been 'married' to her motorbike. Benka Pulko joins the 15 previous winners, a fascinating group of women who include ex-first lady Štefka Kučan, journalist Mojca Drčar Murko, and Vida Žabot, a nun who left her order and spoke out about repressive monastery life.

The ex-presidential couple are obviously still very popular with the Slovene public. That was also proven by this year's selection for 'Slovene of the Year' by *Nedeljski dnevnik*. The former president of the Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, who was the head of the country for more than a decade, was chosen by readers as 'Slovene of the Year' for the 12th time. Kučan was surprised by this year's recognition and said that it meant a lot to him, because he is no longer in the public eye. The current president, Janez Drnovšek, came 9th in this year's poll. ■

