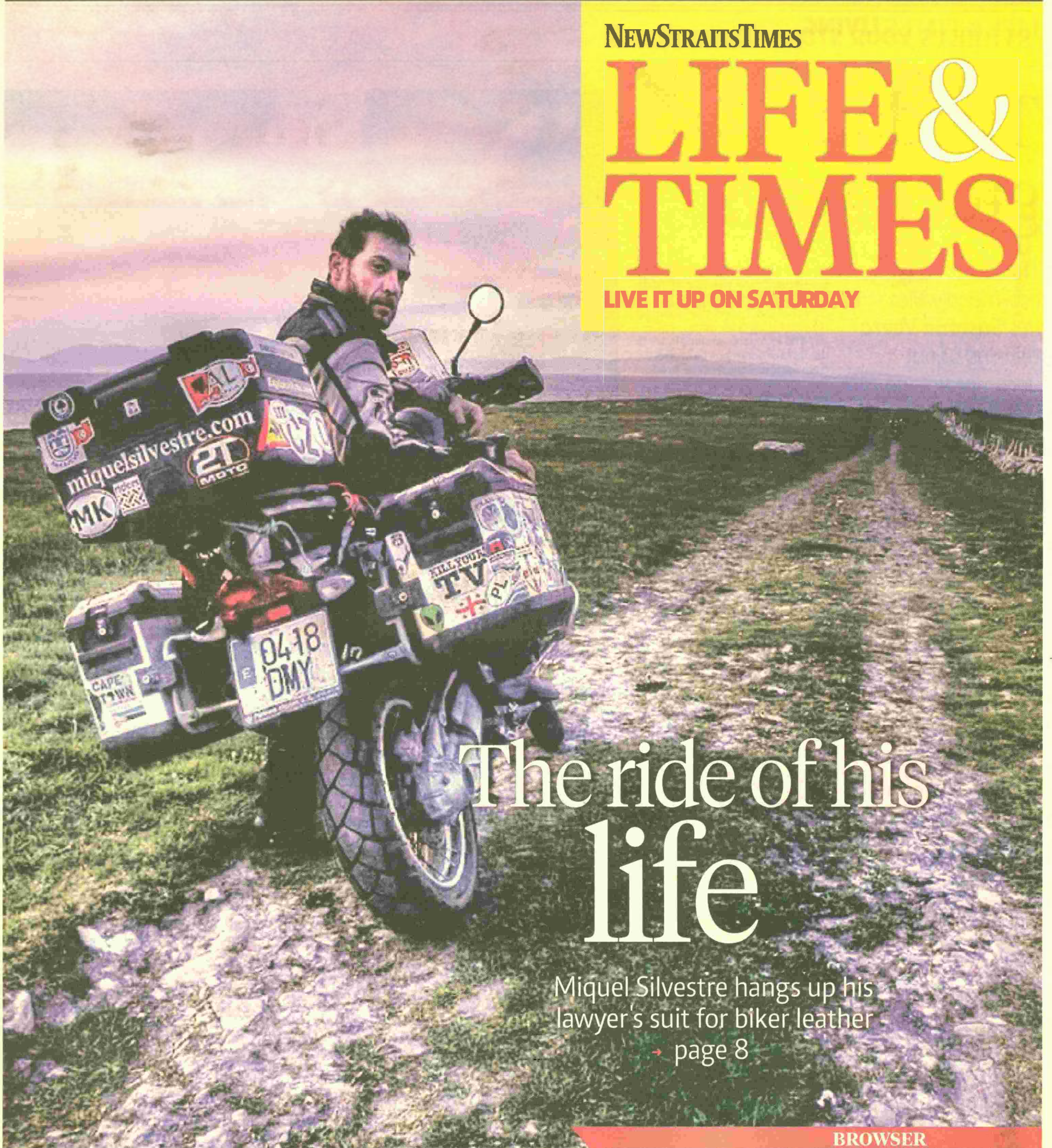


NEW STRAITS TIMES

# LIFE & TIMES

LIVE IT UP ON SATURDAY



## The ride of his life

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# The rider who sold his suit



Miquel Silvestre quit his lawyer job and became a professional rider. He tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** how the decision changed his life

**H**IS is a story that is reminiscent of Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. "I was a lawyer before. I studied in Spain for 10 years and worked in a very high position. Then things became bad."

At 39, Miquel Silvestre met with an accident. He realised that something in his life needed to change. "I was always in a rush and felt I was losing what I was before."

He decided on a move that many lawyers who have left practice can identify with — Miquel quit law and decided to write a book. "I went to Ireland to learn English and find ideas for my novel."

In due course, he came across a 16th Century letter by a captain in the Spanish armada chronicling the seven months he tried to survive after being shipwrecked. Miquel decided to follow the route, albeit on his motorcycle, that the Spanish captain had travelled in Ireland. He recorded his adventure, and then decided to abandon writing his novel and become a professional rider instead.

Now 43, the central theme of Miquel's adventures is to trace the routes of Spanish explorers of yesteryear. His travels have taken him to more than 80 countries. For instance, prior to his arrival in Malaysia, Miquel was in Nepal



Riding into new sights, smells and colours

following the route of two Spanish climbers who succumbed to exhaustion and altitude sickness on the peak of Mount Annapurna. He also visited Goa in India to retrace the steps of the Jesuit missionary, St. Francis Xavier.

What's the Spanish connection with Malaysia?

Miquel explains: "The Spanish never came here. But they were in the Philippines and I believe there's a group of people who speak a language called Chabacano in Borneo. I want to go there and listen to them speak. See if it sounds familiar."

"Writing is in my soul," he says, adding that chronicling his adventures is better than writing fiction.

"I don't know what the end of this story is going to be. I am the hero here. Reality is more interesting. Being a professional rider is harder than being a lawyer. To keep riding, I have to write good stories, sell photos. I learnt how to take good photos. Now, with the Internet, people want things fast. They also want it for free. So, I have to learn to take videos and upload them."

Clearly proud of his efforts, he says: "Maybe early in the morning,

someone will go to the office and watch one of my videos... it only lasts 5 minutes. But, for the rest of the day, he'll be thinking about it. He'll see how I'm living my dream and maybe, he will dream a little too. I like that — that what I do allows people to dream. I don't know how long I'll do this, but every day I thank God."

Though his current trip is being sponsored by BDO Spain, this son of a doctor and lawyer admits that he is able to finance these adventures because he has few financial responsibilities. "I don't have children. I don't have a wife. And," he says, pausing for dramatic effect, "I don't have the most expensive one, an ex-wife."

Humour aside, there were some tense times during his travels.

One time, when he crossed into Kurdistan and arrived in a place called Zakho, "It was night and with all my gear and the motorbike, I must have looked like someone who had come from Mars. I didn't know where I was going to sleep,"

he says.

A man walked up to Miquel and asked what he was doing. Hearing Miquel's predicament, the man offered him a place in his home. "I am Christian", he said. I said OK. So, he got on the back of my bike and told me where to go."

Miquel began to panic when the roads narrowed and they were going further away from the centre of the town. "I don't know this country. There could be a US\$2 million (RM6 million) bounty on my head and no one knows where I am," he says, recalling his thoughts at the time.

When they arrived at his host's house, Miquel says: "It was like in the movies. You know, when the door opens and the hinges make a noise."

At this point of telling the story, that persona of a rough, tough, professional rider in leather completely crumbles as Miquel loses his composure. "I'm sorry. Every time I think of this story, I end up like this," he says, wiping away a tear. Collecting himself, he explains: "The person who opened the door was a young girl. She was only about eight or nine. And she spoke to me in English. But when I looked in her eyes, I saw ..." Miquel doesn't finish this sentence. Instead, he says: "Looking into her green eyes, I knew that in the place she was living, nothing will ever happen to me. I will be safe."

Miquel dismisses the point that men are perhaps better suited to travelling alone. "You're totally wrong," he replies, full of conviction.

When a woman travels alone, people worry too much about her. They'll come out to protect her. Those who are bad, they are not going to come after you. They're too busy doing bad things."

By far, the biggest impediment to travelling is not gender or even the colour of your skin. "It's the visas," says Miquel. "You see, when I was in South Africa, I was in an accident. A white man and his family helped me. He was just a normal guy. When I went back to Spain, I wanted to invite him and his family over for a holiday. I even paid for his ticket. The problem was he couldn't get a visa. With my passport, it's not so difficult."

Naturally, Miquel has a story about border authorities. "One time, I wanted to cross into a country, but had problems with the motorbike. The policeman took me into a room. It was dark and there were no windows. He said, 'I cannot let you go in.' He was biting his toothpick and kept saying, 'It's too difficult.' Then, I understood, difficult is not impossible. So I said to him, 'Maybe if you help me I can help you.' The policeman leaned forward and asked, 'How much is help worth?'" "Help" was worth precisely US\$50!

Why a motorcycle and not a car? He throws his head back and laughs. "In a car, you're protected from the outside. In a motorcycle, you become part of the scenery. You feel the adventure. You're cold. You're hot and you have that feeling, 'This is mine.'"

Miquel's parting advice? "Follow your heart. If you know that something doesn't seem right, avoid it. Also, expect what you give. If you eat what people eat, do what they do and show others respect, it'll always be given back to you. But if you always say no, then you're in a cage. You're not feeling and not learning. Be open-minded and generous. People everywhere want the same things: A family, good home, good job and friends."

"But if you always say no, then you're in a cage. You're not feeling and not learning."

Miquel Silvestre