My first bike

Film star, Ewan McGregor, recently rode round the world on a motorbike. He talks about how he first took up riding motorbikes.

My biking beginnings can be summed up in two words: teenage love. My first girlfriend was small with short, mousy blonde hair, and I was mad about her. Our romance came to an abrupt end, however, when she started going out with another guy in my hometown, Crieff. He rode a 50cc road bike first and then a 125. And whereas I had always walked my girlfriend home, suddenly she was going back with this guy. I was nearly sixteen by then and already heartbroken. Then one day, on the way back from a shopping trip to Perth with my mum, we passed Buchan's, the local bike shop. I urged my mother to stop the car. I got out, walked up the short hill to the shop and pressed my nose to the window. There was a light-blue 50cc bike on display right at the front of the shop. I didn't know what make it was, or if it was any good. Such trivialities were irrelevant to me. All I knew was that I could get it in three or four months' time when I was sixteen and allowed to ride it. Maybe I could even get my girlfriend back.

I'd ridden my first bike when I was about six. My father got hold of a tiny red Honda 50 cc and we headed off to a field that belonged to a family friend. I clambered on and shot off. I went all over the field. I thought it was just the best thing. I loved the smell of it, the sound of it, the look of it, the rush of it, the high-pitched screaming of the engine. Best of all, there was a Land Rover parked next to two large piles of straw with about a metre and a half between them. I knew that from where the adults were standing it looked as if there was no distance between them. Just one large heap of straw. I thought I would have a go. I came racing towards the adults, and shot right through the gap in the straw. I was thrilled to hear the adults scream and elated that it had frightened them. It was my first time on a motorbike. It was exciting and I wanted more.

So when I looked through Buchan's window in Perth that day, it suddenly all made sense to me. It was what had to happen. I can't remember whether it was to win back my ex-girlfriend's heart or not, but more than anything else it meant that, instead of having to walk everywhere, I could ride my motorbike to school and the games fields at the bottom of Crieff and when I went out at weekends.

I started to fantasise about it. I spent all my waking hours thinking about getting on and starting up the bike, putting on the helmet and riding around Crieff.
I couldn't sleep. Driven to desperation by my desire for a bike, I made a series of promises to my mum: I won't leave town. I'll be very safe. I won't take any risks. I won't do anything stupid. But, in fact I was making the promises up – I never thought about keeping them.

At the time that I was begging for a bike, I'd already had an accident with a bike belonging to George Carson, the school laboratory technician. When I asked him if I could borrow it, he agreed, not knowing that I didn't have a clue how to ride it. The bike was in an alleyway up the side of the school hall. I managed to start it and zoomed down the alleyway until I crashed smack into a wall, bending the wheel and snapping the handlebars. Mr Carson came out to find me looking very red-faced. The bill for the damage came to more than £80, a fortune to a fifteen-year-old in those days and one that took me months of working as a dish washer and waiter at the Murray Park Hotel to pay back.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

1 What does 'Such trivialities' refer to in line 22?
A his mother's attitude to the bike
B the bike's size and colour
C the bike's price
D the bike's quality and its manufacturer

2 Ewan did not buy the bike straightaway because
A he did not have enough money.
B he was too young to ride it.
C he was uncertain about its quality.
D he had to ask his girlfriend first.

3 The adults were frightened the first time Ewan rode a motorbike because
A the bike was making too much noise.
B he disappeared from view.
C they thought he was going to have an accident.
D he seemed too small for the bike.

4 What was Ewan's main reason for buying the motorbike?
A It would be exciting to ride.
B It would improve a friendship.
C It was good for his image.
D It was a useful means of transport.

5 In paragraph 5, Ewan's desire for the bike meant he
A thought about nothing else.
B spent more time with his mother.
C invented reasons for buying the bike.
D started behaving more carefully.

6 One result of Ewan's accident was that he
A was injured.
B was punished.
C had to get a job.
D lost interest in bikes.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Vocabulary

Phrasal verbs and expressions

1 EP Match these phrasal verbs and expressions from the extract (1–8) with their definitions (a–h).

1 take up (line 4)
2 sum up (line 6)
3 get hold of (line 27)
4 have a go (lines 36–37)
5 take risks (line 54)
6 make up (lines 55-56)
7 keep a promise (line 56)
8 not have a clue (line 60)

a describe the important facts or characteristics about something or someone
b do what you said you would do
c say or write something which is not true
d start doing a particular job or activity
e be completely unable to guess, understand, or deal with something
f try to do something
g do something even though something bad might happen because of it
h obtain something

2 Complete these sentences by writing a phrasal verb or expression from Exercise 1 in the correct form in the gaps.

1 I'd never do something like sky-diving because I don't enjoy ..... .
2 How would you ..... her personality in just a few words?
3 Hans let me ..... on his new bike, and now I want to get one myself!
4 Sometimes when I arrive home late, I ..... an excuse to tell my parents why I am late.
5 Diego ..... how to answer the questions in yesterday's exam because he simply hadn't studied.
6 People won't trust you unless you can ..... and do what you say you're going to do.
7 I need to get more exercise, so I'm thinking of ..... jogging.
8 We could play football this afternoon if I can ..... a ball.

LIVEWORKSHEETS