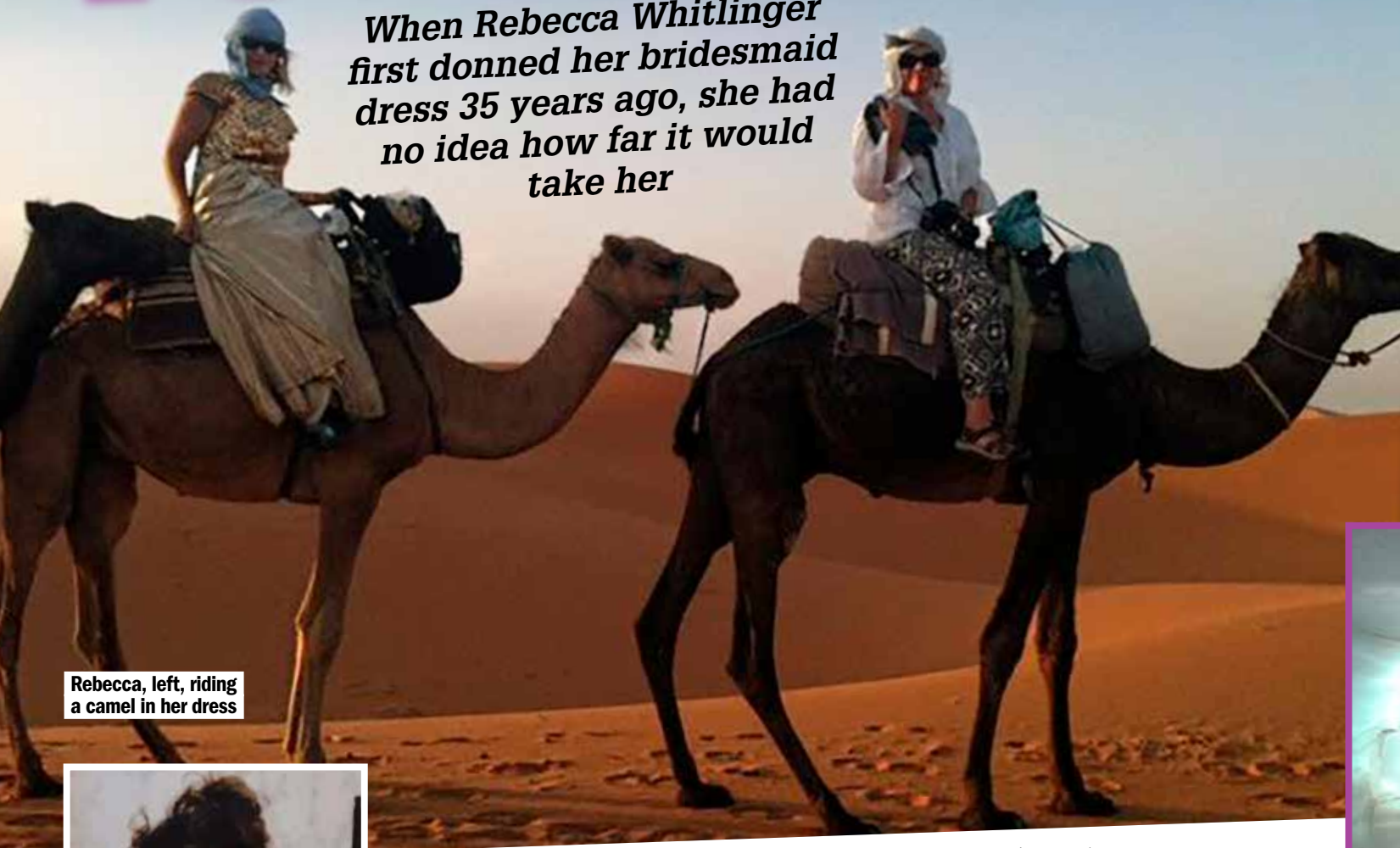


I said YES to the DRESS

When Rebecca Whitlinger first donned her bridesmaid dress 35 years ago, she had no idea how far it would take her



Rebecca, left, riding a camel in her dress



As a bridesmaid in her 20s

As Rebecca slipped into her gold bridesmaid dress, a big smile swept across her face. But it wasn't a wedding she was getting ready for — it was a photoshoot in the Peruvian mountains. That's because, after being a bridesmaid for her friend, in the years that followed, she'd taken her gown on a globetrotting adventure. 'The dress has a gold sequin bodice, and when I tried it on and looked in the mirror, I must admit I didn't love it at first!' says the 62-year-old. One of five bridesmaids, she didn't let that get in the way, and carried on enjoying

her friend's big day. 'We all had an amazing time, and let's face it, no one becomes a bridesmaid because they get a dress out of the deal,' she adds. But as the celebrations went on, Rebecca slowly became more enamoured with the garment — loving how it shimmered under the evening candlelight. As the big day drew to a close, she realised what a shame it would be if the dress was only worn once. 'Brides frequently assure their bridesmaids that the gowns can be worn again,

but it always seems unlikely,' she says. Rather than tucking the dress away in the back of her wardrobe where it would have gathered dust, Rebecca had a brilliant idea. 'I was determined to get use out of it. So I decided to wear the dress *everywhere* — and take photos to prove it' she explains. Just weeks later, Rebecca made her way to a nearby building site, accompanied with her best friend, Patty, who was armed with a camera. 'For my first photo, I leant against a digger and started

'People ask if I'm filming a movie!'



Parasailing in Mexico



Catching some sun in Bermuda



Trekking in Peru



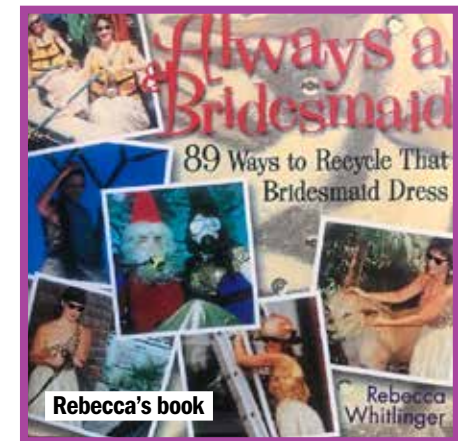
Putting on the glitz in Iceland

posing. But it suddenly started moving,' she says. 'I jumped in horror. I didn't know anyone was inside. The driver of the digger looked just as surprised as I was!' And nearly four decades on, Rebecca's dress has done the rounds and been photographed in every corner of the globe. 'I've travelled all over the world and always made sure to take my dress with me,' she says. 'I've worn it in Paris, Iceland, Peru, and even in Mexico when I went

parasailing! 'And when I holidayed in Morocco, I warned my friend in advance that I was going to get a photo of myself on a camel while in the dress!' Rebecca admits she sometimes gets weird looks when she's out and about in her gold gown — but it's never held her back. She says: 'Quite often, people ask if I'm filming for a movie!' Over the years, Rebecca has managed to fine-tune the art of a quick change, so that it now only takes her a minute

to get in and out of the dress. 'I literally throw it on over whatever I'm wearing for a fast photo, and then remove it afterwards,' she explains. She's even wearing it on her passport and driving-licence photos! And 35 years after first donning the dress, Rebecca still fits into it and can zip it up, which she credits to a healthy lifestyle and watching her waistline. 'I work out every day. I walk a lot and dance at home, and that helps to keep me fit. I still indulge in regular cocktails and desserts, but I make sure I dance it off,' she says. Rebecca has now turned her travels with the gown into a book — *Always a Bridesmaid: 89 Ways to Recycle That Bridesmaid Dress*. She donated part of

the proceeds to a charity that supports people touched by cancer. She also organised a fundraiser where guests were encouraged to wear something they wouldn't usually wear. 'I plan to keep wearing the dress wherever I can,' Rebecca says. 'If someone told me back at the wedding that I'd be wearing this dress for the next 35 years, I would have thought they were mad. 'It's been a crazy hobby, but one I've got a lot of fun out of over the years.'



Rebecca's book

Rebecca Whitlinger