THE CYCLING QUARTERLY

Conquista

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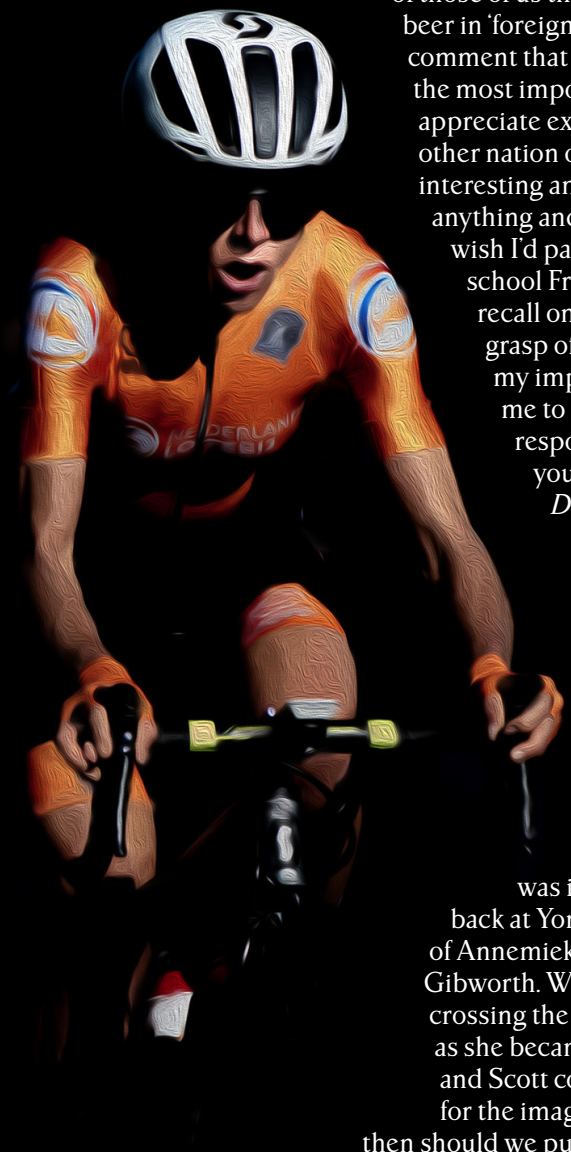
Editorial: Impover-ish.

Whilst listening one evening to 'the clever radio' I stumbled across an interview with a linguist. Fluent in many languages, she was explaining some of her favourite flamboyant phrases and translating them into English for the benefit of those of us that can barely manage to order a beer in 'foreign'. I was especially struck by her comment that "of all the languages, English is the most impoverished." I'll probably never fully appreciate exactly why she feels just about every other nation on Earth can find more elaborate, interesting and entertaining ways to describe anything and everything, but it did make me wish I'd paid a lot more attention in my school French and German lessons. I vividly recall one instance where my meagre grasp of German, no doubt informed by my impoverished mother tongue, led me to tell Ms Power "Ich bin heiß." Her response, while blushing: "I'm quite sure you don't mean what you just said … *Dir ist warm!*"



Despite the distinct disadvantage of our impoverished starting point, we continue to try our best to bring you some fancy words and pictures about bikes and stuff. Let us start at the very beginning and jump straight into the story behind our cover. The creative doyen that is Mr Scott O'Raw was inspired by our feature looking back at Yorkshire 2019 – in particular a shot of Annemiek van Vleuten (opposite) by Alan Gibworth. We found a different shot of AVV crossing the line with her arms spread wide, as she became the 2019 road world champion and Scott conjured up a 'Dutch Masters' effect for the image to give it a fitting finish. What then should we put on the back cover other than the guy who crossed the line first in the men's U23 road race – Nils Eekhoff – only to later be disqualified for illegal drafting behind a team car, some say wrongly. That being a fair decision or otherwise, it was a phenomenal ride by the young

Netherlander and we believe worthy of celebration alongside AVV as a fellow Dutch Master.

So, a quick rundown of what is inside this issue. We are delighted to welcome back Shane Stokes, who talks at length to Michele Acquarone about RCS's missing millions in 'Giro Scandal'. Next, our good friend Tom Owen has been out and about on his travels again, this time exploring Greece by bike in 'This is Sparta'. Photography is supplied by Mike Paschos.

We've dabbled in a bit of fiction previously and we were thrilled to receive 'The First Crocus of Spring', a submission from Nic Stevenson. We love this, so if you fancy having a go at something similar, or maybe a bit of poetry, we'd happily take a look.

To pee or not to pee, that is the question posed by Tommy Mulvoy in his perilous pursuit of a pointless PB as he tackles the mighty Swiss Cycling Alpenbrevet.

In her latest masterpiece Suze Clemitson reminisces about the fabled Trofeo Baracchi – a two-up time trial contested by the likes of Coppi, Anquetil, Merckx and Moser in a forgotten age before marginal gains and aero everythings.

What is there left to say about Lance Armstrong? Don't get Mitchell Belacone started – he's got plenty to say on the subject, and it might not be what you expect.

Ey up lads 'n lasses! Marcos Pereda relates the tale of his visit to a saturated 2019 world championships in 'Lost in Yorkshire'. We have paired his words with the fantastic photography of Alan Gibworth.

Laura Fletcher of The Peloton Brief regularly updates us on what's going down in Girona town. This issue's Briefings, however, come from a Land Down Under.

Meanwhile Russell Jones goes out for a ride and a chat with Sean 'King' Kelly about his time on the cobblestones of Paris-Roubaix in 'Roubaix Remembered'.

Driving the autobus and steering the peloton home just within the cut-off time is Tom Owen, who this time delivers a Postcard from Macedonia.

As we go to press, the entire world appears to be entering unprecedented times of uncertainty. We hope that by the time you read this it's still only the English language that is impoverished. And to Ms Power, just in case you are reading, I knew exactly what I was saying.

Stay healthy everyone, and with a bit of luck and a tailwind . . .See you on the road.

Conquista

GIRO SCANDAL

Michele Acquarone celebrates acquittal but fears the full truth may never emerge

The end of a long-running investigation into the theft of almost 20 million euros from Giro d'Italia parent company RCS Sport saw one person found guilty and several cleared of fraud. The latter included former Giro race director Michele Acquarone. The Italian welcomes the decision but fears that guilty people may yet remain unpunished.

Words Shane Stokes. Photography Cor Vos.

From Giro Success

Eight years ago Acquarone was on a high. He had been part of Italy's famous RCS Sport group for several years and, somewhat unexpectedly, was handed the reins of the Giro d'Italia. They named Acquarone as the successor to Angelo Zomegnan and saw the younger Italian as the perfect person to modernise the race, to make the most of modern platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and to help the Giro make up ground on the dominant Tour de France.

Acquarone synced well with riders and teams and was seen as progressive and innovative. Team managers such as Jonathan Vaughters praised him, recognising his new approach and his potential to help the race and the sport have a better future.

His tenure initially went well and it seemed he would be in the sport for a long time. However in October 2013 he was sensationally sidelined from his position, as was former RCS CEO Giacomo Catano.

The suspensions were carried out after RCS Sport said that a possible misappropriation of millions of euros had been detected and that an audit would be carried out. It eventually emerged that between 15 and 17 million euros were taken from various accounts between 2006 and 2013.

It made for huge news in Italy and others also found themselves heading out of the door. Media

Acquarone in 2011 with Mark Cavendish, Angelo Zomognan and Gianluca Vialli

...to Scapegoat

relations director Matteo Pastore was suspended. Chairman Flavio Biondi was replaced by Raimondo Zanaboni and employee Laura Bertinotti quit her role.

The scandal grew when Acquarone was finally fired in December 2013. Surprisingly, the company never clarified the reasons for his dismissal. It was unclear if it suspected him of being actually involved in the disappearance of the money or, rather, if it felt he had to go as the theft happened under his watch.

Acquarone protested his innocence but his ability to make his living was severely affected. His reputation, too, took a hit because of the actions of RCS Sport and its complete refusal to clarify why he had been fired.

Acquarone tried to fight back. He brought an unfair dismissal case against RCS Sport but this was dismissed by a judge in November 2014. Acquarone said that the judge didn't open the process nor interview any witnesses and so he lodged a complaint against this decision.

However he would have to wait another five years for his name to be cleared. Finally, in September, he and others were acquitted: Bertinotti was found guilty, and handed a long jail sentence.

Years ago I got chatting to a Spanish person who was studying English in Dublin. In the course of the conversation we talked about a range of things, from the teacher he fancied and was trying to impress to the peculiarities and intricacies of the English language.

He told me that he was making progress in his learning but was mystified by one phrase.

"When someone is blamed for something, why do they call it 'an escaped goat?'"

Michele Acquarone isn't Spanish, didn't study English in Dublin and wasn't the person in question. But he, too, is left confused about the term 'scapegoat'. In his case it's not about the word itself but rather how he became one.

Back in 2011 Acquarone's star was in the ascendant. As the new director of the Giro d'Italia he took the race in a new and modern direction, elevating its status using new technologies and trying to challenge the dominance of the Tour de France.

Two short years later everything had changed. He and others were dramatically fired from the race's parent company RCS Sport amid the reported misappropriation of 17 million euros. Acquarone protested his innocence, demanded answers but got nothing.

He launched an unfair dismissal case against RCS Sport but this was dismissed by a judge in November 2014. He pledged to fight on and in September of this year he was finally cleared of fraud at the end of long-running investigations and court hearings.

Former company accountant Laura Bertinotti was found guilty of the misappropriation of the funds in question. She was handed a sentence of eight years and eight months. All others were acquitted.

Despite the verdict, despite someone else having been found guilty, Acquarone still has a lingering sense of unease about the case. He believes Bertinotti was indeed at fault but questions whether she was the only transgressor.

"After the conclusion of the trial I was speaking about that with my family. What I said is

that on day one we knew one thing: that Laura was taking out money. She did it with fake documents and forged signatures," he tells Conquista.

"I don't believe that she could do everything by herself. When I first found out something peculiar was taking place, when I went to the bank to understand what was going on, the bank director said that they had spoken with the RCS treasury two years before just to say that something strange was happening. They told them that Laura was taking a lot of money in cash out of the bank. The bank said 'Please, do something,' yet the treasury did nothing.

"It is six years now that everybody knows that Laura is guilty because she took the money out. But the problem is – how can a simple employee steal 17 million by herself? And that is the point – when RCS fired me and everybody knew that I was the wrong person, I was the scapegoat… it was clear. In my mind, I said that probably during the police investigation, the trial, we will know what happened to the money and how it was possible that she took the money out of the bank like that. But we didn't."

If Acquarone's suspicions are correct, it means that Bertinotti is left taking the full blame for what happened. It is remarkable that the bank could have notified RCS of irregularities two years in advance of any action being taken by the company. It is, as he says, equally remarkable that one employee could have drained out so much money over such a long time.

"I am pretty confident that there is something more, something that we will never know in this life," he says. "It is six years that RCS has had this *omertà*. Probably they have something to hide. Blaming me was easier, so nobody was asking anything more."

'MY LIFE HAS A KIND OF GRACE AROUND IT NOW'

When it finally came, September's verdict was a massive weight off Acquarone's shoulders. It marked the end of six long years of hardship and heartbreak, a time when a respected individual had his name blackened and was cast aside.

He had insisted for many years that he was innocent, giving numerous interviews expressing his point of view and protesting at how he had been treated by the company. He had no doubt that he had done nothing wrong yet, paradoxically, found the official acknowledgement of that a little hard to believe.

> *I am not looking for revenge. I am just fine that I have my dignity back.*

It wasn't that he doubted himself but rather that he had lost faith in the system. Such was the effect of so much time out in the cold.

"It was unexpected. Unexpected not because somebody could think that I was guilty but just because it was a never-ending story," he explains. "In my mind somewhere there was a voice saying that probably I would be dead before the end of the trial. So when I got the news, I said, 'Wow, I am still alive.' And I can enjoy that.

"[The outcome of the trial] was great, because I felt definitely lighter. It is like my life has a kind of grace all around it now, colours shining. There is a kind of feeling about my life that the sun is shining. Everything can happen, good things can happen. I am more positive than ever."

The Italian's mood was in stark contrast to how he felt four years earlier. He was in despair at that time, unable to find regular work.

He had been in close contact with the Zwift company, giving advice as it prepared to launch what would be a very successful product, but ultimately wasn't offered a role. He was similarly unsuccessful when trying to land other positions.

Each time he impressed and each time he was told that companies couldn't take a risk while he was still linked to the RCS scandal. What was most frustrating to him, he says, was that he had originally tried to point out to RCS that money had been going missing. The leaking of funds had been brought to his attention and he went to senior management about it. But, instead of being rewarded for that, he was shafted.

"This is like a situation in cycling. Everybody knows about the doping problem," he told this writer four years ago. "Sometimes I feel I'm seen like one of the doped athletes who said they didn't do anything wrong and then you have all the people who say you are a cheater.

"But what I am saying is I am not like that. I was not one of these guys. I am like the guy who found out that in the team somebody was cheating, I reported it, yet I was fired. And now everybody thinks I was a doper. And that is crazy."

Once the verdict came in and it was shown that Bertinotti was the guilty person rather than Acquarone he had the right to be livid. And yet his reaction was to move on.

"In my mind, I don't want to think about RCS anymore," he said then. "For me, it is done, it is finished. I don't care. But, of course, at the beginning of it all I was angry, thinking of revenge. I had those thoughts, they were very strong. But now, after six years, I don't even remember that I had a problem with RCS. I am just happy that fans know that I didn't do anything wrong.

"I am not looking for money, I am not looking for revenge. I am just fine that I have my dignity back."

WELCOMED BACK TO THE FOLD

Talk to Acquarone for any length of time and his passion for cycling is obvious. His path into the sport was different from many others who became senior administrators. Former Tour de France

organiser Jean-Marie Leblanc, for example, was originally a professional rider who landed several wins and placed second in the 1970 Four Days of Dunkirk. Leblanc became a journalist and then went on to work as Tour de France race director from 1989 to 2005.

In contrast, Acquarone wasn't part of the sport from an early age but instead evolved into the position of Giro organiser. He was a fast learner, though, and also became a big fan of cycling. His trajectory was such that he, and the Giro, should both have prospered, but the events of 2013 ruined that momentum.

One of the hardest things about his time in the wilderness was not being able to work in the sport. Becoming a pariah hurt, but despite the pain he was still drawn to cycling during that time.

"I went to races in the past year," he reveals to Conquista. "I did it, but very hidden in the crowd. Now I can do it in a lighter way. And if I have to shake hands, I can do it because the people now know that I never betrayed fans. They know that I was working with passion and not thinking about stealing money."

The feeling of others towards him is important. Being under a cloud hurt him, and he was very grateful to those who reached out to him during his time in the shadows. Indeed, after he was cleared in September, he sent messages to some of the people he felt had been supportive expressing his thanks.

Acquarone's positive mood was boosted by the reaction of others. "I got a lot of messages," he says, speaking about the time after his acquittal. "A lot of warmth from fans. I was really surprised, because I didn't expect that after six years, so many people were still remembering me. I was just a shooting star in cycling. I didn't spend so much time [in the sport], but it was incredible how many fans, how many people that I don't know, were writing to me, reaching out to me on social networks to say 'I am happy, I know that you didn't do anything wrong, please come back.' That was very good."

And it wasn't just the fans. "I also got a lot of good messages from the people who were working in cycling, such as pro riders. But nobody from RCS wrote me a message saying 'I am sorry, I apologise.' Actually, I can't say nobody

Acquarone at the 2012 Giro d'Italia

Acquarone with the Trofeo Senza Fine in 2011

from RCS, because one did. It is a very important person in the company. He is not a friend of mine, just somebody who I respect a lot in RCS Sport. He was one of the first who called me and that was good.

"But nobody who was there when I was working in RCS said 'I apologise, we took out the wrong person.' They never spoke and they are not speaking now."

> "I went to races in the past year... but very hidden in the crowd"

Still, even if that wrong hasn't been righted, he is greatly boosted by the messages of support. That has made it clear to him that there could yet be an interest in him returning to the sport.

However he's uncertain if his future lies in this direction. He's a director at the D-Share company and is grateful for the opportunity it gave him when times were tough.

"Now I have a very good job here in Italy. The company who hired me two years ago believed in me when nobody did. So I have a great respect for them. I want to give my knowledge, everything I can to make this company grow. I am fine with that."

Still, there is a part of him that misses what he did before. "Of course, my love is in sport. My heart is in cycling, so never say never. But nothing happened in six years … I don't believe that something will happen now. Or if it does, it would probably be in another country.

"But there are so many good managers now, so many good people already. I don't think that something will happen in Aigle [at the UCI], or whatever. But of course if something does happen, if there is an opportunity, I will consider it carefully, because my heart is there."

Either way, he is grateful for the way things have turned out.

"I think it is just great that I can go to the races and that I know that people realise that I am a good man."

Michele Acquarone with Matthew Goss at the 2011 Giro d'Italia

THIS IS GREECE

The Peloponnese is a peninsula in Greece, the home of the ancient cities of Corinth and Sparta. Connected by the narrowest of strips of land to the rest of mainland Greece, it feels isolated and cut off without actually being an island. As far as I know, the long thin neck on which the road from Athens is built is the world's original 'isthmus'.

The other distinctive thing about the geography of the Peloponnese is its three 'fingers', long narrow peninsulas that reach down south into the Mediterranean towards Africa. The middle one, the Mani, reaches furthest south, to the southernmost tip of mainland Greece in

Words: Tom Owen.

Photography: Mike Paschos.

fact. In antiquity it was where the Spartans made their home and where the gate to the underworld was said to be.

As well as the ghosts of King Leonidas and his 300 men the Peloponnese is also the stomping ground of Pedal Greece, a tour company trying to draw cyclists away from the usual hotspots of Nice, Mallorca and Girona, in favour of something a little bit more rugged.

According to founder Agi Kolyvas, Pedal Greece chose the Peloponnese over the country's many other beautiful regions because it harks back to an older and 'less-regulated' version of the country. Not many people come here, there aren't many cars, but you can drive to Sparta on the highway from Greece, or fly into Kalamata, which is already on the peninsula.

I went to check out what Pedal Greece and the Peloponnese have to offer, to see if they really can rival the big winter cycling destinations.

The itinerary is called Spartan Roads, because Pedal Greece are not blind to the tough guy cachet that the name invokes, or the fact that there is some seriously challenging riding on the Mani.

Day one began at a hotel perched halfway up a mountain in the Taygetus range overlooking modern-day Sparta. At the end of the driveway we turned uphill and didn't stop climbing for over an hour. At least I didn't. The local hitters Pedal Greece recruited to pace us managed it in considerably less than an hour, and had enough energy left in the tank to ride halfway back down to me and keep me company. This was to become a recurring theme throughout.

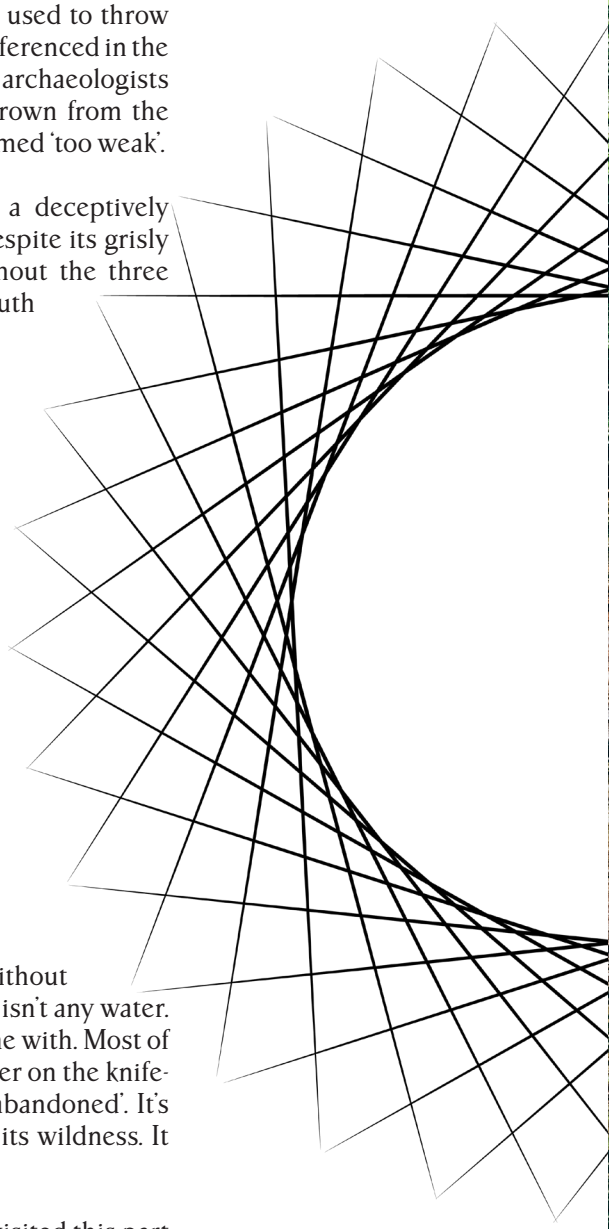
Some riders are more spartan than others, clearly, but it was great fun riding with a crop of local cyclists who effusively explained what they loved so much about their local roads. Tour experiences can sometimes feel like you're gazing at the place you're visiting through zoo glass – there, but also decidedly not-there. On the


COOKED
CRISPY
FRAZZLED
FRIED
FLAMBÉ
ROASTIN

Mani I didn't get that vibe at all.

If the name of the mountain range, Taygetus, rings a bell, you might know it as the mountain from which the Spartans used to throw their unwanted children and violent criminals, as referenced in the movie 300. In the real, non-Gerard Butlerised world, archaeologists have found plenty of evidence of adults being thrown from the mountain, but not so much of babies that were deemed 'too weak'.

There is not much flat in this part of Greece, a deceptively mountainous country, and the Taygetus range – despite its grisly history – became a constant companion throughout the three demanding days of riding as it petered out to the south of the Mani.



Mont Ventoasty

Cooked. Crispy. Frazzled. Fried. Flambéed. Roasting. Those are the words passing through my head on day two as I battle the sharp inclines of the road that wraps around Cape Matapan. I'm burning up and it's not even noon. The Peloponnese is scorching hot, even in the dog days of summer. Cycling here is only for the strong, or those with a team car to regularly dispense chilled bottles of water and tasty snacks. Luckily, I fall into the latter camp.

I've been cycling in lots of different bits of Europe, but this is one of very few places I've been that's so isolated that you couldn't safely ride here without support of some kind. In some places there simply isn't any water. Or food. Or really any road traffic to hitch a lift home with. Most of the communities that we ride through seem to teeter on the knife-edge between 'rustic tourist hotspot' and 'totally abandoned'. It's a real wilderness, but deeply affecting because of its wildness. It truly feels like you've reached the end of the world.

Patrick Leigh Fermor, the celebrated travel writer, visited this part of the world once, and when he crossed from the Taygetus into the Mani proper, he described it thus: "A wilderness of barren grey

Day 1: Sparta to Karavostasi

A gruelling day in the saddle, this 130 km ride began with a bang. Fifteen kilometres of climbing from the gun to the summit of the Taygetus, followed by undulating coastal roads to the gorgeous seaside hamlet of Karavostasi.

Day 2: Karavostasi to Karavostasi via Cape Matapan

A ride down the Mani peninsula to the southernmost point of the Peloponnese, with an absolute shincracker of a climb from the cape north towards Korogonianika, followed a few minutes later by one of the most spectacular stretches of road you'll ever experience on a bike.

Day 3: Karavostasi to Sparta

Heading back northward, this is the 'easy' day. Rolling roads after a short sharp introduction to the day as we leave sea level. Plenty of scope for through-and-off smashery if that's your bag.

Greece seemed like somewhere a dragon might hang out, a sort of Mont Ventoux-meets-Game of Thrones.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spikes shot precipitously from their winding ravines to heights that equalled or overtopped our own; tilted at insane angles, they fell so sheer that it was impossible to see what lay, a world below, at the bottom of our immediate canyon. Except where their cutting edges were blurred by landslides, the mountains looked as harsh as steel. It was a dead planetary place, a habitat for dragons."

Admittedly, I didn't read Fermor's book until after my visit, but I do remember thinking – rather less eloquently – that the part of the country at the southernmost tip of mainland Greece seemed like somewhere a dragon might hang out, a sort of Mont Ventoux-meets-Game of Thrones.

Seeking rest and some shelter from the sun, we sit in the walled courtyard of a tiny old church under the watchful stare of two large busts. Generals, or partisans, who fought in the second world war. It's hard to imagine anything so large as a war visiting this part of the world – it all feels so sleepy now.

The final day is one big climb and then rolling roads back to our starting point in the Taygetus. It goes by all too quickly, with the deserted, high roads of the inland peninsula giving way first to shaded squares in sun-lit villages, then larger towns, an arterial road – our first real encounter with fast-moving automobiles in 48 hours – and then finally the sprawl of urban Sparta. We have time for a dip in the hotel pool and to take a snapshot with the giant statue of Leonidas in the town centre before heading up to Athens and the airport. I leave feeling captivated by Greece, a country I never once thought of for road cycling – but which has turned out to be one of the most beautiful I've had the privilege to visit.


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I leave feeling captivated by Greece, a country I never once thought of for road cycling

THE FIRST CROCUS OF SPRING

Words: Nic Stevenson.
Illustrations: Scott O'Raw.

The wheel. There's nothing else. Everything reduced to this. Two bands of rubber, a little air. Everything else has gone, but the wheel is getting closer. Ten metres. Five. Three. One metre, half a metre . . .

The best cyclists, although maybe not the greatest, are like diamonds. They sparkle, they drag your eye to them, but they shine only from reflected light. Without others around them, they're nothing. Without a wheel to take, they're not so different to me. This wheel, so close I could almost touch it now. Then it slipped away.

The sun hit the peak for the first time.

Vision narrowed to a point.

A single drop of sweat, shining on the handlebars.

No sounds but the wind and my breathing. Deep, rasping, hard. Harder.

Time after time, the road switched back on itself, like it couldn't make its mind up how to chew me up.

There were twelve of us in total, but even this early in the climb, the road had separated us. A group of three up the road, two half a hairpin back. The rest are nowhere. Me? Alone now, just my breathing and the wind talking to one another to pass the time.

It was cold still, as we stood there to wait for them.

I was by the roadside, the first time I had been allowed. Last year I'd watched from Giovanni and Alicia's window – the best view in the village, you could see the whole way down the road to the bend by the church – but still behind the glass.

But this year, when they came by, I'd be close enough to reach out and touch them. I knew I wouldn't, knew I wasn't allowed, but I could do. If I wanted to, I could do.

I'd be close enough for Papa to see me. Maybe he would wave this year.

I was wearing the dress he brought me back from Milan. The red one with the bow. He won something, not a race, but one of the little races in the race, and bought me the red dress to celebrate. I knew he would see me if I wore that. Me and Mama also.

There was the smell of coffee, and cigarettes, as everyone in the village waited for Papa and all the others to come by.

I listened for the policeman on his motorbike. He always came first.

The pain, when it comes, comes in waves.

Gentle almost. Each deeper push, each turn bringing it back, harder.

Climbing is the purest form of cycling. The pain is obvious, anyone can see it. There's no trick to it. No way to make it easier. You just push, and it hurts, and you push, and it hurts. It doesn't matter if you go slowly or fast, it still hurts. The only way to make it stop is to turn around. So no one does that.

My legs have a hundred miles in them from yesterday, and more from the day before. Another bend. The gradient drops enough to ease back half a notch, to gather myself before the next long stretch upwards. Always upwards.

It isn't a competition, but it is. When there are two cyclists going the same way on the same road, it's a competition. Even if they don't both know it.

If I drop much further back, it will be impossible to latch on to the three on the descent, and I'll be left waiting for the group behind to catch me.

Dig deeper.

The sun was nearly full in the sky by then, the asphalt slickened with dew and deepest black. The green of the mountainside and the blue of the sky.

As I rounded the final bend, the one next to the cross, I saw them on the roadside, the first crocuses of spring. Watching like a tiny crowd, white, yellow – and one magnificently red.

I coughed, spat, coughed again. Dirt and soot and soot and dirt and no matter how often I dragged a mouthful of water around my mouth it was the same. The soot from the motos, and probably the factories too when we left the last town, the dirt from the road. Endless dirt roads.

This was the last one. *L'ultima*. Never again would I be riding this cursed, beautiful bastard race. It's shit. I'll be home soon. I won't get to stay this time, but soon I'll be home and I'll stay there. This might even be the last time I ride up this hill. When I stop, I'll drive up it every time and I'll laugh at the idea of ever bloody riding it again.

They were making all of us suffer again. One sodding climb after another. We left Brescia two hours before dawn, in the rain. Then the rain stopped, the wind dried out the road and the sun rose, and it was so damned hot and dusty and they kept fucking attacking. One after another. Attack after attack.

I just want enough time to stop and kiss Maria, and Giulia, to say hello, and say goodbye one last time. That's why I couldn't let the attacks go, because I needed to go on the attack. I wasn't going to win today, but my legs weren't even good enough to close the arseholes down.

I spat again, and dug again, and pulled the lot of them back up again, and breathed again.

Roberta had a radio, and she always let Mama stand close enough to hear it. Sometimes it told us when they were coming, sometimes it was just static and coughs. Today they said the race was split into groups, and that Papa was in the second group, so I knew that when the first policeman arrived, Papa might not be there yet.

Papa has been racing for longer than I've been alive. I don't remember when I first watched him race through the village, but the first time I went to watch him race with Mama was last autumn. It was a big important race and at the start there were so many people, all of them in their racing clothes, with their bikes, and their teams, and their cars and their helpers, and I couldn't see Papa at all.

But on the road, I could always see him. Maybe he didn't look at me, but I know he knew I was there, because he always looked like he was trying a bit harder when I was there.

I could hear engines now. The smoke was grey against the sky, and the motorbikes were whining because our road, our mountain,

was so steep. Everyone in the village was proud of our mountain, proud of our village, and our little white church stood at the very top of it, and proud that every spring the Giro d'Italia, the most important race in all of Italy, would race by our village on its way to Milan.

The best part of riding up a mountain is that you won't be riding up a mountain forever, but that's also the worst part.

We'd ridden together from the hostel, and only separated as the road turned upwards. First six and six, then three slip away, then me. Easily divisible, simple fractions. We all knew the route. Some rode together, some alone. But we all rode upwards. Towards the village, the cobbled street, the church and then the descent. One more climb after, but this was the one. The only one we'd come for, if we were honest.

Suddenly I wasn't climbing, bliss, but the road wouldn't keep still, never stayed flat, and then I was climbing again. Relief, washing over me like an ocean wave, only to withdraw as fast as it had come, leaving brackish salt-water sweat and shattered breath.

Why wouldn't they just let me be? This fucking stage had 160 more kilometres, and three more mountains to go and they wouldn't just let me be for this one bastard climb. They all knew it was home up ahead. They'd ridden past it with me last year, and the one before, and the bloody one before that. They'd been riding past it since before Giulia was born, since the year I was so strong I had time to kick, leave the others far enough behind that I could snatch a crocus to pass to Maria, snatch a kiss from her, and carry on before they even saw the church spire.

That was the year I won the thing. The year that Maria and I were married. Then next year Giulia came. It got harder to leave, but it got easier too. Every win, every envelope full of cash, it was all for a reason. First the little house, then all our plans for what I'd do when I finally stopped climbing on this bastard bike and got my life back. The payments got bigger, and they kept on at me to come back, but I'd told them this was it. *L'ultima*. They weren't getting me back on that bike.

Umberto was going, the prick. Why was he doing that? He was nobody. I no longer had the strength. But Rudi did, and he hated Umberto, so he spat, cursed and he went, and then I could go too, the others hooting like fucking owls at us all.

The boys from the village were all running around, kicking a football and chasing the dogs through the streets. They had to cut through the back streets, right past our house, because Papa and the other racers were coming up the road and everyone knew you weren't allowed there. They were noisy and trying to get attention like all boys do, but Dommi was with them, and every time they passed by he paused a little, and smiled if he saw me looking.

Sometimes I smiled back.

Behind the crocuses, the houses. It looked like no one had lived in this tiny mountain town for decades. Boarded up still, before ski season brought it back to life. The sting of sweat in my eyes and on my sunglasses made the whole place look softer. The air was so crisp, but through the haze the houses looked like impressions.

Then I saw her, watchful and suspicious in the doorway. She must have seen enough cyclists riding by to not be surprised, but she still looked angry. She looked like she could have been standing there watching riders pant and moan their way by her front door for three generations, but she offered neither encouragement nor sympathy, just a hint of acknowledgement.

I looked down and up again, the road was so steep here, and I couldn't even pull myself from the saddle to force the effort. It seemed to take half a lifetime from the moment I noticed her to when I pulled alongside her. The light had reached her, or I had noticed it framing her in the doorway. Squinting against the sweat in my eyes, it looked like she half-raised her arm towards me then, as I came close enough for her to reach out and touch me if she took a step forward.

I could see the corner where the church stood proudly against the sky, but it was more than half the village away and the cruellest gradient was still to come. I clicked uselessly at the gears again and uselessly they clicked back at me. I'd been in the bottom one for four or five kilometres, but I couldn't think properly any longer.

My rear wheel slipped and skidded on a viscous, vicious little patch and I slid and nearly lost it. I heard her breath over my own then – a sharp, scared inhalation that sent a flutter through her red dress before she turned away into the door.

It's not good enough to know how to hurt yourself to be great at this arsehole sport. That's enough to be good, but to be great you have to go looking for that hurt, day after day after day, for one week, two weeks, for whole goddamn years. I would do that and I would revel in it. Feeling the pain surging through me and knowing I was spraying it over all the others.

I don't know when I started to fear the pain, but I fucking hate it

now. I want it to stop. I want to roll up to Maria and put my bike down and never pick it up again.

But there she is. There. With her giant, stupid yellow hat so I could spot her so quickly when I could hardly see for sweat and soot and shit. Giulia was in front of her, red dress like a beacon.

Rudi and Umberto were still in front of me. God knows how many others were in front of them, but they were long gone, and I just needed a second alone, so I pushed, and I pushed, and the younger owls started hooting that I was going, and the others, the ones who knew said *woah* and *easy*, because they knew.

It was fine, they were letting me go. I was out of the saddle and my wheel slipped and I pushed this way and that to stop myself falling. Fucking roads, all grit and chips and Christ knows what.

I could hardly see but I could see them. This was too much. This wasn't pain, it was something else, like every part of me was trying to escape this race, and I'd be pulled apart as they went.

It was like a snapping. But I could nearly touch them now.

It was like a snapping. Like my heart was trying to escape.

How had it come to this, this point, this point where my vision was a point, and what was the point?

There was nothing, absolutely nothing left except pain and I couldn't start and I couldn't stop.

Everything flickered and shook like an old-fashioned TV picture. All I could hear was whooshing and I thought I'd fall. I even felt my head hit the ground.

He was here at last. He must be. The first four or five of them went past in a haze of dirt and smoke and shouts, then we waited. I could feel my heart beating and I counted it to pass the time. 236 beats until I could see the next group.

But where was Papa? Their jerseys were so dirty, their faces so black. They looked like Luca and Regina after the fire, when they'd stood in front of the house, two or three of their best things smoke-blackened and ruined at their feet, and the whole village standing around watching their house smoking. Imagine having a job that made you look like that every single day while you rode up a mountain. Imagine being that brave. That was my Papa.

They were twenty metres away, ten, then one rider surged clear. But he wasn't clear. He wasn't right. He was on the floor.

The others swept by. Papa must be in the next group.

The rider was still on the floor and we were all rushing over.

The ground rushed up to catch me, but it smashed me in the head as it did.

I could still see but I couldn't see any more than the spot.

A corridor that someone was running down, and then the spot filled up with red.

They were crying before I could see, and I still think I knew. Mama says I couldn't have but I still think I knew.

I saw him and I know he saw me, his eyes were open then, his eyes that found me and then they lost me.

And then Giovanni and Luca were picking me up and I was screaming to put me down and I could hear Mama crying and I wanted to cling to him and not let him go and if only they had put me down I'd have held on to him and not let him leave.

At last, the church was there, and so were the three. Of course, they waited, what had I been thinking? Catching them on the descent? We always waited for everyone. Kidding myself I was a pro, and this was a real race. Oxygen-starved, exhausted fever dreams.

The others were slow coming back, dribs and drabs, but the day was heating up and the crickets were waking up and starting to chirrup in the meadow, and it was so lovely it didn't matter at all.

Every year they come. Every month. Every week. Every day. In dribs and drabs, in ones and twos. Then once or twice a year in great groups. They come and they come and they come. Fast and slow but always they look like they hate it.

Why do they do it if they hate it so much? Why do they keep on coming? Reminding me every day of that day. Why do they keep on coming?

Looking down the road, I saw the last rider make the turn, and slightly weaving, make his way up the final 400 or so metres to us, heavily breathing apologies that none of us needed or expected.

She was still standing there as I turned away, her red dress almost luminous against the sky and the grass. She was still looking down the road like she was waiting for another rider, even though we were all here.

Someone always has to be last, just like someone has to be first.

THE SWISS CYCLING ALPENBREVET

160 km of riding and 5094 meters of climbing spread over four *hors catégorie* climbs in the stunning central Swiss Alps were more than enough reason to sign up for the Swiss Cycling Alpenbrevet. But the fact that I would not feel forced to pee in my bike shorts also helped.

Words: Tommy Mulvoy.

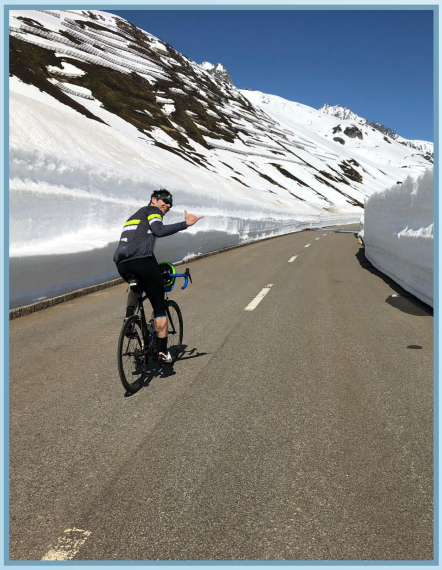
Photography: Tommy Mulvoy and www.alphafoto.com.

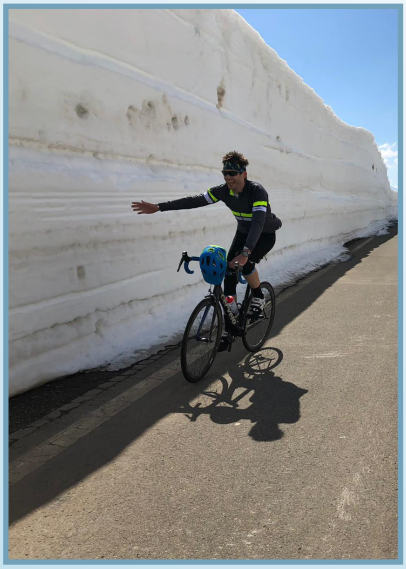
I first peed on myself as an adult during a marathon some 20 years ago. I was eager to break 3:30 and was convinced that stopping to relieve myself was a risk I couldn't take. So at around mile 18 I pulled my shorts aside and peed on my leg. I ended up running a 3:30:58.

Three years later, some 140 km into the bike stage of my first Ironman, in Lake Placid, NY, I peed on myself again. I was similarly convinced that stopping to relieve myself would prevent me from reaching my goal of qualifying for the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii. There were also serious doubts that I would get back on my bike. Unbeknownst to me I had developed a small saddle sore on my left butt cheek and when the pee hit the broken skin I screamed in pain, stood out of the saddle and sprinted for about 100 meters. I still didn't qualify for Hawaii.

Last January my friend Carl and I were in the tram heading to the top of the Gemsstock in Andermatt when we first discussed signing up for the Alpenbrevet. We were both giddy from a morning spent skiing on fresh powder and agreed that spending a day riding up the four mountain passes that surround Andermatt would be a great idea. The Alpenbrevet, which bills itself as "one of the most beautiful and toughest one-day classics in the Alps," is not a race but a supported tour. For two athletic, middle-aged men with full-time jobs, young children, and spouses who work it seemed like the perfect way to sate our competitive appetites while staying employed — and married. And I wasn't trying to qualify for anything and thus wouldn't feel compelled to pee on myself.

I spent my mid-twenties endlessly training for and competing in triathlons, running races and bike races. I enjoyed my monkish existence and was addicted to the adrenaline high of toeing the line. But as I approached 30 the monotonous focus on training and lack of enjoyment I was experiencing on rides and runs finally took their toll. I wanted to go for a long ride without spending the entire time dreading the impending brick session and I longed to come back from a run and crack a beer, not force down a protein shake. For almost two years I didn't enter a single race. I ran without a watch and rode without a bike computer. I sprinted when I felt like it, not because my training plan demanded it, and often set out for a quick 5 km only to end up running 15. They were two of the most enjoyable running and cycling years of my life.





I continued this low-key approach in 2011 when I moved to Madaba, a small town just outside Amman, the capital of Jordan, to teach. I ran without a mileage or time goal through the scorched fields that abutted my school, admiring the Bedouin as they harvested their fields in the spring and wondering where they all disappeared to when the rain arrived in the fall.

On weekends I rode to the Dead Sea and then hitchhiked back up the main highway towards Madaba, often stuffed in the back of a cargo van or hanging out the side of an animal cart. At the turn-off to my school I would hop out and buy half a dozen bananas or a handful of pomegranates from a street vendor and stuff them in my jersey before riding back home.

When I returned to the US in the summer of 2013 I signed up for my first triathlon in more than five years. It was a super sprint, and I treated it as such — no training, no taper and no 5:45 am swim practices. I spent most of the swim leg doing breaststroke, on the way to T1 I gave high fives to my nephews, who were racing in the kid's division, and on the run I tried to chase down my friend Tristan, who was a minute ahead of me in first place. I never caught him and finished second. Later that night I drove back to Brooklyn, where I had recently moved, happy to have raced again but no more eager to start training in earnest for long-distance triathlons.

Over the next three years, during term time, I rode and ran endless laps of Brooklyn's Prospect Park. In the summers I rode up and down the gaps surrounding Middlebury, Vermont, where I was studying for my master's degree. I set little goals for myself, like road and mountain biking more than 1200 km during my season, which lasts from May to early November, and completing the epic LAMB Ride in the Green Mountains. I accomplished the first, by 5 km, but got shut out of the second because of work demands this past summer. My younger self would have sacrificed my studies in order to complete the ride but I was just as happy reading Elizabeth Bishop and Shakespeare as I was struggling up the notoriously steep gaps.

With a full-time teaching job, primary caregiving duties for my son and a wife who works long hours, finding time to train for the Alpenbrevet was particularly challenging. Prior to my son's birth in 2018 I would ride for hours, both after work and on the weekends. Now, during the working week I often put Aksel to sleep while wearing my bibs and try to ride for an hour and a half before the sun sets. On weekends I ride during Aksel's nap time and substitute stretching sessions for folding laundry and cleaning the house.

Although Carl and I were not 'racing' the Alpenbrevet, we did want to finish. So, on a sun-splashed Sunday in late April, we hooked up for our first ride of the season. We rode from Andermatt, up and over the Oberalp pass, to Sedrun and then back. The ride was just over 40 km but gained over 1200 meters in vertical. The pass had been ploughed the week before but it wasn't open to cars because of avalanche danger and the possibility of late season snowstorms. Consequently Carl and I had the road to ourselves and enjoyed clear views of the surrounding mountains, which we had skied on all winter. When we reached the pass, we were greeted by a 50-meter ribbon of unplowed snow that was left to prevent rogue drivers from attempting to cross the pass. We shouldered our bikes and post holed through the snow as spring skiers sipping beers on the restaurant decks looked at us quizzically.

On the last week of the ski season, in mid-May, Carl and I planned to ride up the north side of the Gottardo Pass, then down to Airolo for an espresso and back up to the Gottardo on the famous Tremola road, which contains a nearly 8 km-long section of cobbles, before returning to Andermatt. But halfway up the pass we were stopped by the police because an avalanche had crossed the road a few hundred metres further up. We were disappointed, but happy not to have been taken out by an avalanche or gotten stuck on the other side of the pass.

Carl and I didn't break any speed records on these training rides but we were content knowing that, if work and family obligations got in the way of training during the next few months, we would have at least climbed a quarter of what we would do on the day of the Alpenbrevet.

In mid-June, I headed back to Vermont for seven weeks to finish my master's degree. Aksel stayed with his grandparents and cousins for the first few weeks, so, after mornings spent in classes and working in the library, I would spend a few hours in the afternoon riding around the Champlain Valley or up and down Middlebury Gap before returning to my studies. On my first weekend in Vermont I rode in the 110 km-long Vermont Gran Fondo. The course's 2000 metres of climbing included what Global Cycling Network considers one of the steepest sustained climbs in the world, the infamous Lincoln Gap road, with its maximum grade of 24% and average grade of 15%.

My schedule and the isolation brought back feelings of the training in my twenties, but I always ended my summer rides with a beer. In mid-July Aksel and my wife arrived in Vermont and my time on the bike took a hit. I was focused on finishing my final papers and free time was devoted to Aksel. But after riding close to 1400 km during my seven weeks in Vermont I arrived back in Switzerland convinced that I might actually ride a fast time in the Alpenbrevet.

Three days after we returned to Basel chaos engulfed us. First, Aksel came down with a horrible cold, and within 48 hours I was sick too. I didn't ride at all over the next week and spent most nights not resting but preparing to teach three new classes. By the middle of the following week Aksel and I were both feeling better, but Vicky, who somehow hadn't picked up our cold, awoke feeling nauseous and with a fever. She didn't leave her sickbed for two days. At this point, I was ready to call Carl and throw in the towel but on Friday afternoon Vicky begged me to do the ride. I finally relented and drove to Andermatt at 7:30 pm. I arrived just before 10, grabbed a pizza, and rushed up to our house to organize my gear for the early start. I didn't get horizontal until nearly midnight.

I awoke on Saturday morning excited but a bit nervous about how little riding I had done during the previous ten days. In my twenties I would have thrown in the towel, convinced that a wasted week of precious preparation would prevent a personal record,


Alpenbrevet
SWISS CYCLING ALPENBRENVET 2019
1162
STEPHAN BERGER
TREK

Conquista


Alpenbrevet
2570
THOMAS MULVOY
CRAFT
cervélo
REYNOLDS

but now I was just excited about the opportunity to ride up four gorgeous mountain passes with like-minded folks. As I straddled my bike for the short ride to town I realized that I had bent my rear derailleur when attaching my rear tyre earlier in the morning. I also realized that I had forgotten my water bottles. With my chain rubbing angrily against my front derailleur and slipping off nearly every sprocket, I rode back up to my apartment to retrieve my bidons.

On the 8.5 km ride from Andermatt to Wassen, where we passed numerous riders dealing with punctures or the effects of too much prerace hydration, we wore light jackets to ward off the morning chill and enjoyed an unobstructed view down the Reuss valley. Carl and I nervously joked about the first climb and relished the fact that we were weren't the only ones who thought spending an entire Saturday on a bike was a good idea.

A dropped chain and the constant noise from my derailleur were frustrating, but not enough to detract from the glacier covered peaks that surrounded me and the quintessential Swiss farms that lined the 18.5 km road to Susten Pass. I rode in and out of large groups and tried to speak to as many riders as I could. A quick *"Schönen guten Tag"* or *"Wie geht's?"* was often returned with a German phrase I didn't understand, but the collegiality helped as my legs started to burn.

After a quick derailleur repair and some food at the top of the pass I donned my jacket and set off on the 27.6 km downhill. I enjoy riding downhill, but the constant mental energy required to navigate new roads at 70 kmh and the strain on my arms from death-gripping the bars left me exhausted. Daring riders flew by like fighter jets while I focused on spots where I could feather the brakes. It was also incredibly cold: the sun had yet to hit the west side of the pass and the air temperature was in the low 50s.

I arrived in the small village of Interkirchen shivering, but within minutes I had started the 26.5 km climb of Grimsel Pass and was questioning my decision not to refill my water bottles in the town. The expansive valley approaching the pass was stunning but what most stood out to me was the concrete face of the massive

dam situated just below the pass. I thought the dam was on the top of the pass but after reaching the wall of concrete I looked up and saw seemingly endless switchbacks snaking higher up the mountain. Somewhat broken, I put my head down and pedalled on. I reached the summit feeling strong but after waiting in the food line for 25 minutes my energy high burst. I hadn't seen Carl since midway up Susten Pass and was in need of his dry humour to get me up the next two climbs.

The rest of the Alpenbrevet was something of a blur, but certain moments stood out. I remember riding into Gletsch and watching the Silver and Bronze riders head left towards Furka Pass while I headed right towards Ulrichen with the Gold and Platinum riders. After making the turn I was fully committed to riding up the Nufenen and Gotthard passes in order to get back to Andermatt. At the top of the 14 km climb to Nufenen Pass I made some quick calculations and realized that I could finish the ride in under 10 hours if I maintained my current pace.

About halfway down the pass I had an urgent need to pee. The thought of completing the ride in under 10 hours was appealing and I rode past a few prime roadside spots. But, as my bladder became more uncomfortable by the second, and the silliness of soiling myself in pursuit of the meaningless goal of finishing the ride in under ten hours became clear, I relented and pulled into a small roadside restaurant. When I saw the sign noting that it cost CHF2 to use the toilet I didn't hesitate to grab my wallet. When I was done I lingered for a few minutes enjoying the privacy and cleanliness. The enclosed space also kept my mind off the impending climb of the Gotthard pass.

I knew the infamous cobbles on the old Tremola road of the Gotthard pass would be challenging but I had no idea how much energy they would suck not just from my legs, but also my arms, back, and feet. Having already ridden more than 130 km, each small bump between the cobbles felt like someone was grabbing my jersey and trying to throw me off the bike.

Halfway up the pass my thoughts started to bounce around. I pondered why anyone decided to build this road, how good it

AFTER REACHING THE SUMMIT I
TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND SMILED

SEEMINGLY ENDLESS
SWITCHBACKS SNAKING HIGHER
UP THE MOUNTAIN.

would feel to cross the finish line, whether I should order one or two pizzas after I finished, why I had ever signed up for this ride, how strong I was feeling, how weak I was feeling and how I had to sit on my ass for another two hours later that evening during the drive back to Basel.

After reaching the summit I took a deep breath and smiled at the fact that I was done going uphill. I took it easy on the descent to Hospental, not wanting to risk a crash after spending more than nine hours in the saddle. After reaching the valley floor I pedalled the last 3.5 km to Andermatt in leisurely fashion and crossed the finish line in 9:52:11. Unlike the Ironman, where I was surrounded by family at the finish line, I exited the finish area alone. After inhaling a pizza and packing the car I checked in at Carl's house. He too was excited to have finished but was too busy playing tag with his four-year-old and trying to not step on his 9-month-old to provide many details.

When I arrived home just after 9 Vicky was resting and Aksel was fast asleep. I wanted to celebrate but come sunrise another gruelling 10-hour day would be staring me in the face. This one would be slightly smaller in stature than the Swiss Alps but surely no less demanding.


Alpenbrevet
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THOMAS MULVOY
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SIDI
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TROFEO BARACCHI

Words: Suze Clemitson.
Photography: Con Vos

"The end of this stage has been like watching the Trofeo Baracchi." That was Rob Hatch's commentary over the closing kilometres of stage 6 of the 2019 Giro d'Italia as Fausto Masnada and Valerio Conti pursued a two-up time trial to the stage finish in San Giovanni Rotondo. Old cycling buffs will have nodded their grizzled heads in agreement, while the young guns may well have scratched theirs, wondering WTAF Hatch was talking about.

The Trofeo Baracchi harks back to a time when riding against the clock wasn't all about technological innovation and geekery. When rain-slicked legs and pumping muscles powered ordinary road bikes for a hundred kilometres, two riders harnessed together by team or loyalty or sheer bloody-mindedness. To a time when giant personalities still dominated the sport and a bizarre two-man time trial could capture the imagination of the *tifosi* just before the season was put to bed.

The heartland of the Trofeo was the rolling roads around Bergamo, an exquisite southern city camped out in the Alpine region of Lombardy. Sharing its finish line favours between the pure white heart of Brescia, the *Leonessa d'Italia*, and the bruising might of Milan, this extraordinary race often finished on the boards of the fabled *pista magica* itself, the Vigorelli velodrome.

But it's another velodrome that plays a part in the creation myth of the Trofeo. The open-air velodrome at Sempione was built by public subscription in 1914, under the patronage of Carlo De Vecchi. And it was on the 333-metre track that four teams met to contest the first-ever Giro della Provincia di Milano on 24 June 1917.

Quality always trumps quantity and the two-man teams who met to contest that first edition were a 'Who's Who?' of the glory days of bike racing:

Costante Girardengo, at 24 not yet one of the greatest of them all, but already twice Italian champion and twice winner of Milano-Torino, and Angelo Gremo, stage winner at the Giro and third in that year's Milan-Sanremo.

"IT WAS A CELEBRATION OF TWO-MAN TEAMWORK, THE SWISH OF SILK TYRES SCATTERING AUTUMN LEAVES, EACH RIDER GIVING THEIR ALL."

Gaetano Belloni, the winner of that Milan-Sanremo, and his partner Ugo Sivocci, who switched sports and became a pioneer racing driver for Alfa Romeo.

Ruggero Ferrario, who would win gold in the team pursuit at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, and Lauro Bordin, winner of the 1914 Giro di Lombardia.

Oscar Egg, the Swiss time trial king and Hour record holder, with Luigi Lucotti, a prolific stage winner at the Tour and the Giro.

In the 20s Belloni would become *l'eterno secondo* to his great friend Girardengo, but not today. As the race covered the 102 km out and back from Milan via Como and Erba to finish in the recently-built velodrome, Belloni and Sivocci spun out a 54" lead over the duo Girardengo-Gremo, with Egg and Lucotti a distant third, 2'26" back. The day's racing finished with a track event and was such a success that they did it all again, with minor interruptions, until 1943.

It was the perfect blueprint for Mino Baracchi to work from when he decided to start a race in honour of his father Angelo, a devoted *tifoso*. Baracchi, a wealthy Bergamo businessman, tried a variety of races before he hit on the idea of tweaking the format of the Giro della Provincia di Milano. First the race was run for the *dilettanti*, then the amateurs and finally

the professionals. But the two-man time trial gave Baracchi what he craved – the opportunity to invite the champions of his choice and mix it up a little.

A man of few words but strong character, Baracchi was used to getting things done. The first race in the new format took place right when he wanted it, as the final race of the 1949 season. This gentleman's competition, regularly contested over distances between 100-112 km, rolled out on 6 November. He couldn't have hoped to make a bigger splash.

The race was won by the all-Italian pairing of Wilier Triestina teammates Adolfo Grosso and Fiorenzo Magni, the undisputed hard man of Italian cycling. Magni had won his first Tour of Flanders that spring and would double up with the Baracchi again in 1950, riding with Italian road race champion Antonio Bevilacqua, and then again in 1951, when paired with neo-pro Giuseppe 'Pipaza' Minardi, who'd won a stage at the Giro that year on his first attempt. Magni was a complicated champion, equally at home in black shirts and pink jerseys, a man who was booed at the finish of the Giro in 1948 and excluded from the opening ceremony in Rome in 1951 for his fascist sympathies, but who won both races anyway and another Giro in 1955.

Herman Van Springel

The eternal third behind Coppi the moderniser and Bartali, Righteous of All the Nations, Magni had to fight hard for the respect of the *tifosi*. Brute strength and stubbornness were his calling card and he muscled his way to a *palmarès* that would have looked outstanding in any other era.

The Trofeo Baracchi had set out its stall, and the public were definitely buying.

The Art of the Time Trial

Chris Sidwells characterises the Trofeo Baracchi beautifully when he writes "It was a celebration of two-man teamwork, the swish of silk tyres scattering autumn leaves, each rider giving their all."

The time trial is a Marmite discipline, loved and loathed in equal measure. The North Road Cycling Club is generally credited with creating the esoteric discipline of riding alone against the clock, dressed in black and carrying a bell. But it was the Tour de France that refined the discipline for professional road racing and created a race that either sees you deciding to visit Ikea for the day because nothing is worse than a time trial or has you salivating at the precision piston-pumping action of toned thighs as the critical seconds tick by.

If the mountain climbers are the fearless adventurers through oxygen-poor air, the *baroudeurs* the swashbucklers, and the sprinters the adrenalin-pumped boy racers of the peloton, the time triallists are the undisputed geeks, with their gadgets and their science and their quest for the most marginal of gains. An undeniably beautiful discipline when done well –

the implacable might of Induráin or the lightness and grace of Anquetil – it's an exercise that sometimes seems at odds with the free-for-all of the peloton. The genius of races like Bordeaux-Paris and the Trofeo Baracchi was to create the spectacle that the individual time trial lacked.

Watch the old footage on YouTube and the precision is clean as a whistle, the two-man chain gang looping and re-looping effortlessly as the front rider sticks his nose into the wind and then switch-switch-switch like teeth ratcheting along a chain. Kilometre after kilometre of irresistible cadence, the endless rinse and repeat of rolling bone, muscle and tendon making the pedals spin. But the Trofeo was never an easy race, the relays never quite as smooth and efficient as a snatch of black and white footage might suggest. It was one to be taken by the scruff of the neck and tamed – and pray to the cycling gods that your partner's pedal stroke and stamina were as fluid and effective as your own.

By the 1940s the best-dressed Italian riders were wearing silk jerseys, crafted by a Milanese tailor called Armando Castelli. Lighter, faster and far more stylish than the heavy woollen jerseys of the early days, silk swished with a knife-like efficiency through the air. When Fausto Coppi took four wins at the Trofeo in the 1950s, he was wearing a Castelli silk jersey, maybe even the silk skinsuit that Castelli had designed for its superior aerodynamic efficiency. It was an added bonus that silk worked so effectively with the sublimation print processes that were being developed at the same time.

Lycra wasn't far behind, with Dupont debuting Fibre K in 1959. Renamed Spandex, a nifty anagram of expands,

Henk Nijdam

and finally Lycra, this long chain synthetic polymeric fabric provided the kind of stretch and rigidity that was ideal for swimsuits and leotards, and finally the peloton. It was the fabric that had it all: supreme comfort and stretch, the moisture-wicking properties of wool and the aerodynamic and dye-absorbing properties of silk. When Toni Maier-Moussa went into the wind tunnel in 1978 in a Lycra all-in-one, the modern skinsuit – or chronosuit as it was dubbed – was ready to revolutionise the world of time trialling.

But on the roads of Lombardy throughout the 1950s it was silk that sliced the air and looked so supremely stylish doing it. And the most stylish of them all was Fausto Coppi.

The Heron Flies

Coppi had a series of solid rides in the Giro della Provincia di Milano, culminating with a trip to the top step of the podium in 1941 alongside Mario Ricci, winner of that year's Tour of Lombardy and second in Milan-Sanremo, a Venetian who knew the local roads well. Twelve years later, Coppi would finally win the Trofeo after taking second place in 1950 riding with his beloved brother Serse – they lost out to Magni – and a

third place with his faithful *gregario* Michele Gismondi behind the unfancied pairing of Astrua and Defilippis in 1952.

Once he broke his duck, Coppi dominated the race during the 1950s, winning three times on the trot (1953-55) with Riccardo Filippi and once more in 1957 with Ercole Baldini, who would complete his hat-trick with wins in '58 and '59.

1953 was a great year for Riccardo Filippi. He was crowned amateur world champion in a thrilling two-man sprint against future Tour champion Gastone Nencini, the pair finishing just 8" ahead of Rik Van Looy, who would go on to win all five Monuments and become world champion twice in his professional career. Coppi, who had won the professional men's race, with the Belgian duo of Germain Derijcke and Stan Ockers finishing a distant second and third over 6' back, looked on with interest. A month later the twenty-two-year-old turned pro in Coppi's Bianchi team. By the season's end the pair were standing together on the top step of the Trofeo Baracchi.

Having taken Anquetil's scalp in 1953, the pair did it again in 1954. This time Anquetil, one of the most fluent time triallists ever to push the pedals, was teamed with Louison Bobet. Bobet had the manners of a gentleman, the demeanour of a matinée idol and the legs of a professional footballer. Exquisitely courteous and well-dressed off the bike, he was never the most graceful rider on it, always seeming to wrestle his way through the air. Despite winning the Critérium des As time trial on four occasions, including in that 1954 season, he couldn't match Anquetil's *souplesse* and the pair were beaten by the well-drilled Coppi and Filippi, who obliterated the course record.

Bobet – in his pomp, having won the Tour for a second time and riding out his season in the rainbow jersey – was carried away by the crowds in the Vigorelli, and vowed to attack Coppi's long-standing hour record. It was a disaster. Bobet made a fool of himself and retired after just 39 minutes of effort. He'd have his revenge on Anquetil at the Vel d'Hiv, winning an exhibition omnium as the 1954 season was finally put to bed.

Coppi and Filippi continued to rule the roost in the 1955 edition, beating the Belgian duo of Brankart and Janssens, both handy when it came to time trialing – Brankart a gifted team pursuiter on the track and Janssens a future winner of the gruelling Bordeaux-

Paris in 1960. Anquetil was third, this time partnered with André Darrigade, the crack French sprinter with an impeccable Tour de France record, who took 5 stages in the 1958 race.

Darrigade would be back the following year with a new partner, the Swiss rider Rolf Graf. Riding in the distinctive Swiss champion's jersey, Graf and his partner beat the record holders and overwhelming favourites Coppi and Filippi by 30". But you wrote off Coppi at your peril. Even at the arse-end of his career *il campionissimo* still had the panache, the style, and the sheer glamour to pull off one last victory.

In 1957 Coppi was teamed with Ercole Baldini. The 'Forlì train' had an all-too-short but dazzling career, setting an amateur world hour record at 21 and winning the men's road race at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. He finished that season by bagging Anquetil's hour record at the *pista magica* and taking the world individual pursuit title on the track in Copenhagen. He turned pro for the Legnano team the following year and in 1958 won the Giro and the world road race championships and became Italian champion for the second time.

By 1957 Coppi was thirty-eight, the years of broken bones and injuries and drugs and scandal catching up with his elegantly wasted frame. Baldini, eager to show off what he can do, virtually tows the older man to the finish line. Coppi can barely hold the wheel as the Italian champion powers through the kilometres. But he hangs on for grim death and it's enough. Coppi is gracious enough or helpless enough to let Baldini cross

Coppi (left), Bartali (right with bottle) and Magni (at rear)

the line ahead of him, as they clock an average speed pushing 47 kmh.

Baldini will win another three times, clock up two top-ten finishes at the Tour, win a handful of one-day races and the Grand Prix des Nations, the unofficial world time trial championships, before retiring from the sport in 1964 after years of injury and illness culminated in career-ending leg surgery. For Coppi it was the last professional triumph of an astonishing career.

Whatever Happened to the Two-Man Time Trial?

The history of cycling is littered with dead or discarded races. Like the LuK Challenge Chrono, whose *palmarès* saw the UK's own time trialling legend Chris Boardman paired with Uwe Peschel, Pascal Lance, Jens Voigt and, most unlikely of all, Claudio Chiappucci in a two-up TT that fell foul of Germany's disengagement from the cycling scene in the mid '00s.

Or the long-standing and illustrious Grand Prix des Nations, the unofficial time trialling championships of the world for so many years, where Beryl Burton put in a creditable performance in 1968. Or the Criterium des As where riders were originally tandem-paced

for 27 laps of a 3.6 km circuit at Longchamp before their elegance and magic lost out to the comedy of Derny-pacing in the 1940s. And the Grand Prix Eddy Merckx, christened for the greatest of them all, which disappeared as a result of the creation of the UCI ProTour in 2005. Abraham Olano had the distinction of winning both the last edition ridden as a solo TT in 1997, and the first edition ridden in teams of two – with José Vicente García Acosta – in 1998.

All are gone now except for the Duo Normand, where pairings like Vaughters and Voigt, Durbridge and Tuft, Bäckstedt and Neuville and the all-GB pairing of Boardman and Manning have stood on the top step of the podium. And that race is an oddity, confined to the Europe Tour.

The Trofeo Baracchi in turn would not escape its inevitable fate. But while it lived it was the repository of as much Italian style, drama and élan as any race could muster, and lived longer than most, spanning five decades with the effortless ease of Rudi Altig punishing the feckless Anquetil on the roads of Lombardy in 1962.

The Chrono That Maître Jacques Couldn't Master

The Trofeo Baracchi is a repository of stories triumphant and tragic. How Herman Van Springel got shafted in the 1969 race, when Eddy Merckx's chosen partner Roger Swerts got sick and so Van Springel's partner Davide Boifava was drafted in to replace him. And how, paired with the Portuguese cowboy Joaquim Agostinho, he stormed to the top of the podium beating Merckx and Boifava by over a minute.

Or the story of Gerben Karstens and Henk Nijdam, who stormed to an unexpected late lead in the 1965 race as the road approached the finish in Milan. 20" ahead of Anquetil and Stablinski and with victory surely in the bag, Nijdam skidded on the tarmac made slick by autumn rain and cracked his skull, remounting his bike and peddling off like a dazed automaton. They haemorrhaged time over those final kilometres and entered the Vigorelli over 6' behind the French pair. But when Karstens stopped, Nijdam rode inexorably on, round and round the velodrome, first to the hoots and cheers of the crowd and finally in an eerie and horrified silence.

Wiped out by exhaustion, or doping, or a combination of the two, the experienced pursuiter was taken away on a stretcher, his hands still turning to simulate the inexorable rotation of the pedals, on, on, on.

For Maître Jacques, Monsieur Chrono, the Baracchi was a race that refused to bend to his will. This was a rider who was so obsessive about the accretion of marginal gains that he would scan the roadside for bushes to shelter him, who knew the right line through preparation as much as instinct, who could recite a time trial route with his eyes closed. Anquetil, like Coppi

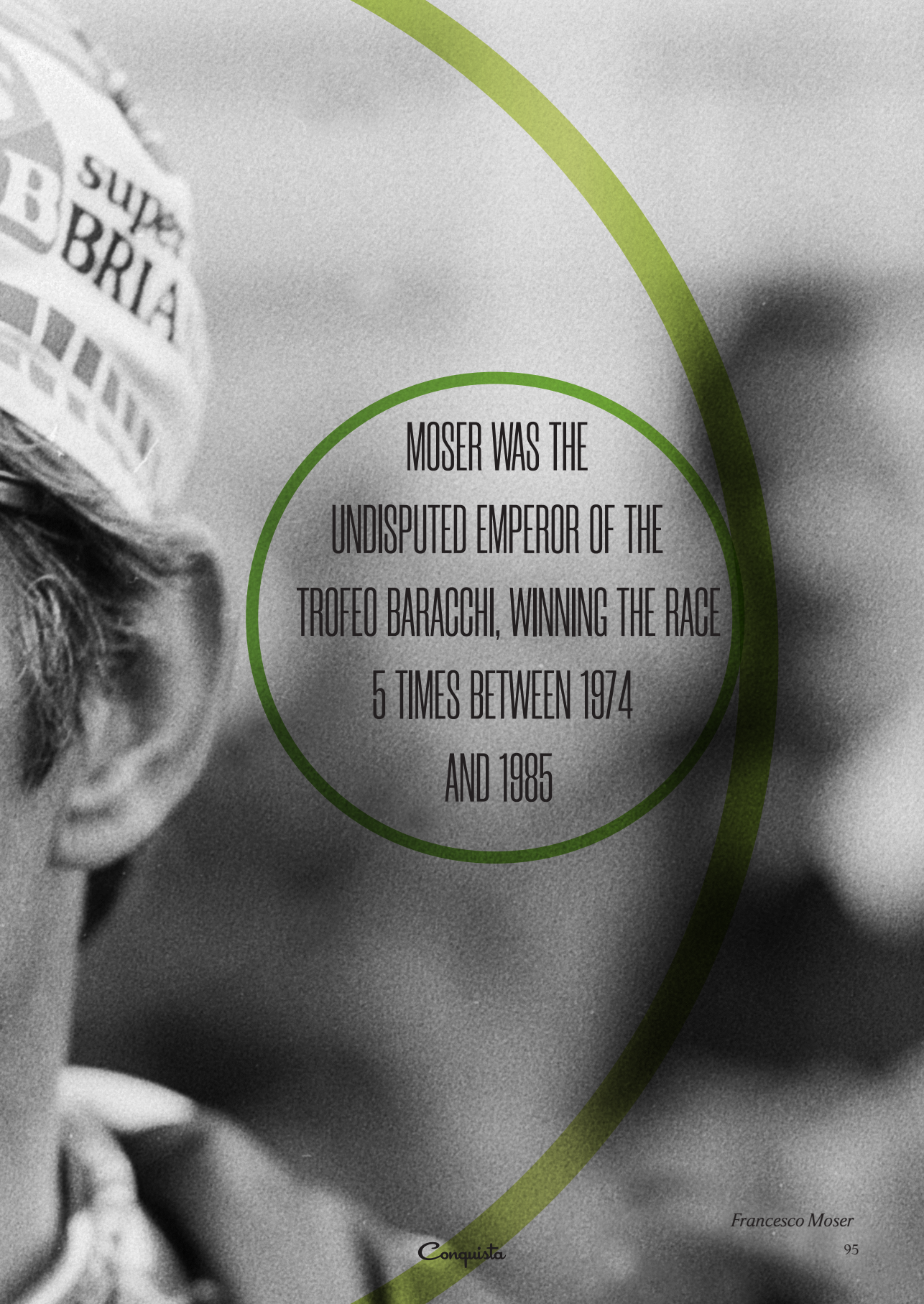
before him, wanted to shift the sport forward, refine its rough edges, create a place where science and beauty could meet in the annihilation of his rivals.

After the humiliation of 1962, when he was hauled to the finish line by his much stronger teammate Altig before crashing at the finish line to win by just 9", the Frenchman would stand on the top step of the podium twice more in 1965 and 1968. Pushed, cajoled and humiliated by Altig on the rain-slicked roads leading to the Vigorelli, Anquetil completed a blood-soaked lap of honour and then left in an ambulance, the final ignominy.

In 1963, in one of the impishly spiteful pairings that delighted the crowds, Anquetil was paired with his arch-enemy and eternal second, Raymond Poulidor. In a simple twist of fate they were beaten into second by the unfancied pairing of Velly and Novales by just 9". Then in 1967 the Peugeot team's all-Belgian pairing of Bracke and Merckx crushed any opposition, pushing Anquetil down to the second step of the podium again.

Yet, paired with the equally patrician Felice Gimondi, the Italian resplendent in the *tricolore* jersey of Italian national champion, Anquetil demonstrated an incredible synergy with his bike and his partner, the pedals turning with an almost languid fluency and deadly efficiency as the pair cruised effortlessly across the line in a display that was beautiful to watch. It was the finest of Anquetil's victories. Still, 3 wins in 10 participations somehow seemed a poor haul for one of the most elegant and lethally effective riders to ever take on the Race of Truth.


supermercati
BRIANZOLI



MOSER WAS THE UNDISPUTED EMPEROR OF THE TROFEO BARACCHI, WINNING THE RACE 5 TIMES BETWEEN 1974 AND 1985

The Inevitable Evolution of the Time Trial

By the 1970s the US was riding the wave of another bike boom, the Dutch were rejecting the idea that town planning should be car-centric and developing cycling infrastructure that remains the envy of the world, and the turnover of the Tour de France, the bellwether for professional cycling, had doubled. Meanwhile riders' wages and prize money were falling in real terms and the huge exposure as a result of 1980s TV deregulation was still in the future. Race organisers were in trouble and races were going to the wall.

But not the Trofeo Baracchi. For that race the glory days would continue deep into the 1980s, the crowds as dense and passionate, even though the challenge was increasingly outrageous as black and white gave way to colour.

Eddy Merckx and Francesco Moser define the changing era as no other riders could. Merckx's participation was brief but dominant, two early wins with pursuit champion and future Vuelta a España winner Ferdinand Bracke in 1966 and '67 bookended with a third in 1972 riding with Roger Swerts. Merckx had cried in the 1969 race when victory eluded him but, coming off the back

of the terrifying crash at the velodrome in Blois that arguably blighted his career, the young champion had nothing to berate himself with.

His partner that day was Davide Boifava, a new pro who would visit the Baracchi podium three more times. A valuable *domestique*, Boifava's race smarts really revealed themselves when he moved from the saddle to the DS car – in his career with Inoxpran and then Carrera he steered Giovanni Battaglin to success at the Giro and Vuelta, Roberto Visentini to the Giro and Stephen Roche to his extraordinary Giro-Tour double in 1987.

Merckx was impossible to categorise as a rider, so deep was his hunger to win and keep on winning. Excelling at every discipline, he won ten straight time trials in the Tour de France in the days before disc wheels and tri bars. Instead Merckx had holes drilled in his headset, handlebars and helmet to reduce his weight, never realising that it was drag and not weight that was his enemy against the clock. It never mattered – Eddy always mastered the clock anyway. He was so successful it was rumoured that the length of the time trials in the Tour de France was whittled away to curtail his supremacy.

Moser was the undisputed emperor of the Trofeo Baracchi, winning the race 5 times between 1974 and

1985 and defeating the sulphurous pairing of Merckx and Roger De Vlaeminck in his first victory. His older brother Aldo had stood on the top step of the podium with Ercole Baldini twice in the late 1950s after Coppi pedaled away towards a long, slow professional suicide. But kid brother Francesco had more ambition, more talent and more balls and he was about to take the time trial by the scruff of the neck and give it a proper seeing to.

In 1984 he did the unthinkable, breaking Merckx's hour record and putting a bomb under the very idea of how the time trial should be ridden with his strange silver aerodynamic machine. No surprise that the same year he won the Baracchi for the fourth time, his lenticular wheels slicing the asphalt like a razorblade through silk. Partnered with Bernard Hinault, he set a record for the race of 49.753 kmh, beating Luis Ocaña and Leif Mortensen's previous mark of 48.706 kmh.

That night, at a dinner of past champions – Anquetil, Gimondi and Baldini were all there by invitation of Mino Baracchi – Ocaña, dapper in a gray double-breasted suit and tortoiseshell specs, was presented with a little silver plaque engraved 'to Luis – until

this evening the Baracchi's record man.' Ocaña jokingly pleaded to be allowed to enjoy his last night as a record holder.

Moser won the Trofeo with five different partners: Dutchman Roy Schuiten, the crack pursuiter and time triallist (1974); Gianbattista Baronchelli, a rider who flourished on the roads of Lombardy (1975); Giuseppe Saronni (1979); Hinault (1984); and finally Hans-Henrik Oersted, a Danish pursuit specialist with multiple medals to his name.

But it was the 1979 victory he relished most. Paired with his arch-rival Saronni, the Coppi to his Bartali, Moser determined to make his companion suffer. Under a blue Bergamo sky Moser tested the younger man's legs again and again, teasing and taunting him with pace and cadence. With the time taken on the second rider across the line, Moser couldn't afford to drop Saronni, but you could see in his style the desire to rip Saronni's legs off like a fly's. Saronni said later that he felt Moser would have enjoyed losing by breaking him rather than having to win in his company.

Like *Day of the Dead* and the Summer Holidays

What made the Trofeo Baracchi so special? It was a beautiful confluence of sport and patronage, a golden age when intrigue and volatility and reward trumped science and precision, where loyal teammates enjoyed their moment in the sun and sworn enemies were forced to cooperate or fail miserably. When the time trial was all

about the combustibility of the personalities involved, not the cold dead hand of science and technology.

Mino Baracchi knew what he was doing when he put his race together. Claiming the end of season slot was a clever way to claim the spotlight without being try-hard – the atmosphere was like *Day of the Dead* and the last day of school, a dizzying blend of camaraderie and high-jinks, where the *tifosi* got to see their heroes without the circus and pressure of a high-stakes race.

Not that any rider worth their salt didn't want the Trofeo Baracchi on their *palmarès*, and it's a measure of its enduring influence that it is always invoked when two riders go balls-out in a breakaway, spinning and slipstreaming with fluent ease. That popular clamour was a great driver when it came to showing up in Bergamo and rounding off your season with a win. It was a way to settle some scores, to see out the season on a high, to have your name be the last one on everyone's lips as another year's racing was put to bed.

And Now We Come to the End

It's not difficult to see what killed the Trofeo Baracchi. The inevitable shift towards a more professional and commercialised sport, formatted as a narrow vision of what cycling should be. The move away from an all-purpose skillset to individual specialisms. It got harder and harder to attract the superstar names that the race had thrived on. It was an anachronism, a hangover from the Stone Age – too long and too tough, requiring the kind of training that an exhausted pro didn't have time for any more. It was the triumph of the pragmatic over the simple beauty of a dream.

Eddy Merckx

Felice Gimondi

The bloating of the season and the arrival of the UCI's ill-fated World Cup would finally drive the last damn nail into the Baracchi's coffin – it was cobbled together with the GP des Nations and run as a bog-standard chrono, with the Swiss specialist Tony Rominger taking the last bouquet. And that was that. On the 26th October 1991 the Trofeo Baracchi disappeared from the cycling calendar once and for all, after an uninterrupted run of 42 years.

In the Vigorelli, the *soigneurs* and the commissaires and the riders have left the stage. The public files towards the exit as the evening light leaches out of the sky and night descends. Whisper their names one last time – Coppi, Anquetil, Merckx, Moser – because the season is over now and the velodrome descends into silence.

Jacques Anquetil

LAN

ARMSTRONG'S DETRACTORS GET DROPPED

NCE

A couple of questions for the North American cohort of those who condemn Lance Armstrong: have you ever been an integral part of raising close to half a billion dollars to aid people suffering from cancer? Did you get off your death bed and win arguably the hardest sporting event in the world seven times consecutively? I ask because those are the two biggest differences between him and us. We should have chosen another whipping boy.

Words: Mitchell Belacone.
Photography: Cor Vos.

Take a gifted athlete in his early twenties who is made to realize the hard way that the only way to have a chance of winning in his chosen field was to do what the vast majority of the successful players were doing. Those were the unwritten rules of the game. The weaponry was often introduced and distributed by the older, wiser managers and medical professionals of their teams. Once on that path, there was no turning back without blighting or destroying your career.

Especially true for Lance who had much to lose, starting with his wildly successful charity where he parked $6,500,000 of his own money.

"Oh, but that doesn't make him right."

OK, but certainly not nearly as wrong as the majority of backseat crucifiers claim.

"But all his good was built on a lie."

The United States was built on broken promises, murdering almost an entire race of people in the process. Practically all that's left from that genocide are ironic jokes at Thanksgiving. More than two and a half

million cancer survivors had been helped by Lance's charity as of 2012 when he stepped down. Take a moment to compare those truths.

"But he was mean to people. He destroyed lives."

Can you show me where in the UCI rule book it states that attaining a charm school diploma will reduce your penalty? He was protecting himself, his foundation and the many others who played the same game by the 'real world' rules they were given. When the jig was up we were sold a simplistic good versus evil storyline and then led to take bloodthirsty satisfaction in bringing the hero down.

"He almost destroyed the sport."

The year before Lance started winning his Tours the sport was a shambles, thanks to the Festina affair. The whole Festina team was kicked out of the Tour de France for getting caught with drugs. People were arrested, other teams quit and during the race the peloton twice got off their bikes and stopped the race in protest. Lance's Cinderella story and subsequent victories resuscitated the sport and the Tour.

When a corporation moves a factory overseas to raise its stock price a few cents — putting thousands out of work, terrorising families and burdening the middle class to subsidise our peers —after one news story, that's not a big deal for the press. Their corporate handlers are OK with it, because that's what they are: a corporation of the conglomerate, by the conglomerate, for the conglomerate, that shall not perish from the earth. Adios to us, but not them.

The free press: free to answer to their corporate and political puppeteers. Donald Trump in large part owes his election win to the liberal press. He was the spectacle that sold advertising. Thus, they kept his name front and centre. They helped elect him knowingly. On a personal basis, they might not have liked the result, but they had a bottom line to answer to. We understand, just do us all a favor and don't spend years preaching morality

about a young man who went off course in a far less harmful game.

If you work on Wall Street kindly consider stifling your thoughts on Lance. You're often trained to sell what's best for your company, which is not necessarily what's best for your client. You and your superiors survive by commissions, we get it. Every so often you get so greedy and deceitful you go bust, and the middle class is forced by your government to pay your bills and return you to your million-dollar salaries. Never mind the old ladies you took down with you that don't get bailed out.

As for the lawyers: nearing my seventh decade, I can only speak from personal experience. If I paid one that actually had my best

LANCE'S CINDERELLA STORY AND SUBSEQUENT VICTORIES RESUSCITATED THE SPORT AND THE TOUR.

interests at heart, I felt lucky to the extreme. In my sample group were a half dozen that worked for the highest bidder. I can't go into more detail because it might force me to pay another lawyer to defend me, who in turn would likely betray me. So, to my small advocate circle, plead the Fifth on Lance or may Shakespeare have his way with you. Henry VI: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

In Europe I recently paid a leading surgeon $20,000 for a surgical procedure. Included were 3 days in the hospital, ten days of a physical therapist and a nurse who brought all the drugs I needed to my hotel room. My friend just had the same surgery as an outpatient, everything à la carte, in the USA. The doctor and the hospital billed his insurance company $218,000. From my experience, surgeons sell what they do and knock what they don't do. Doctors often drag the elderly back for more office visits

than needed to collect more insurance. Fine, you're a business, but don't try to pass yourself off as more than that. And to this bankrupting-happy gang of thieves, please don't share your diagnosis on how heartless and dishonest Lance Armstrong was.

If you are a politician in either US political party— I've learned to accept this truth — reality and the law are not part of your equation. Your success is little more than an exercise in rooting for the home team. You consistently put young men and women in harm's way for the profit of a few. You are there to serve the special interests which put you there. I would advise shutting up, but that would be bad advice, because it would leave you with next to nothing to do. We don't need your referendum on Lance.

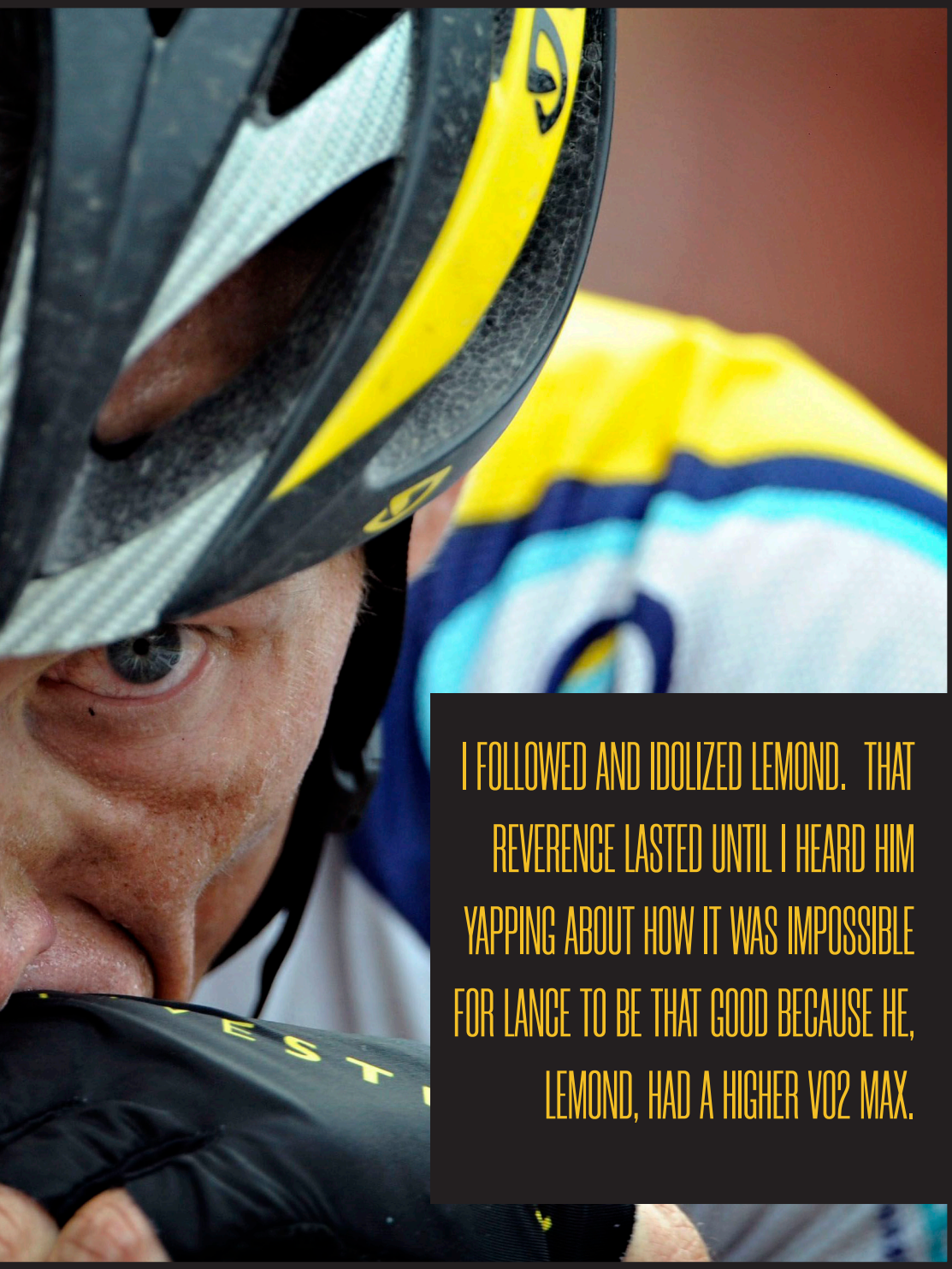
Our high-tech hero billionaires: find me a coffee shop without some internet surfer pecking away at the keyboard, proudly shining their backlit, fruity logo in your eyes. That cult was founded by a trendily dressed hipster who wouldn't even give the mother of his daughter the money to feed her. He bullied everyone from underlings, to waiters, to Whole Foods employees. Ask Dr. Joseph Wiesel, who holds a patent for a device that detects an irregular heartbeat, what he thinks of today's Apple Watch, which detects irregular heartbeats. Or follow the court case.

Bill Gates, hero philanthropist? Microsoft has paid out billions in fines and in settlement of a multitude of lawsuits. In the words of the playwright Eugene O'Neill in The Hairy Ape: "For de small stealing dey puts you in jail, soon or late. But for de big stealing dey puts yo' picture in de paper an yo' statue in the Hall of Fame when you croaks."

At the time Lance stepped down from the Lance Armstrong Foundation, the American Institute of Philanthropy Charity Watch gave it an A-, a higher rating than any other sports figure's charity. How did they rate your charity? How did they rate my charity?

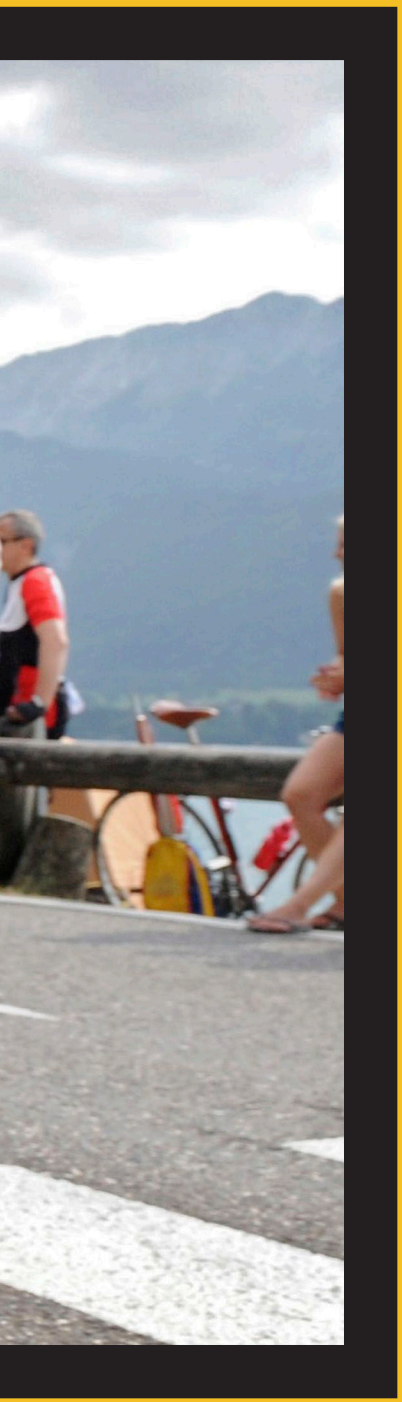

GIRO
LIVESTRONG


IRO



I FOLLOWED AND IDOLIZED LEMOND. THAT REVERENCE LASTED UNTIL I HEARD HIM YAPPING ABOUT HOW IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR LANCE TO BE THAT GOOD BECAUSE HE, LEMOND, HAD A HIGHER VO2 MAX.


GIRO
KAZZING
TREK
BONTRAGER



The whistleblower Floyd Landis, who made more than a million dollars for ratting out Lance, had his Tour de France victory taken away for the same reason as Lance. If Floyd could collect the seeds from that irony and convert them to ones of cannabis, then plant them, his marijuana farm would make him richer than Pablo Escobar ever was. Others could have stepped away and spoken out the first time their morality was affronted, as opposed to when the threat of jail stared them in the face. If they haven't yet, they should apologize to Lance, and then go away.

Emma O'Reilly was Lance's masseuse and also served as a drug mule. After she spilled the beans to David Walsh, there's no doubting that Lance put her through hell. The big question:

EDDY MERCKX, 'THE CANNIBAL', NEVER TRIED TO GIFT A RACE TO A TEAMMATE AND TESTED POSITIVE FOR BANNED SUBSTANCES THREE TIMES.

if she left the team over issues with Lance's coach, Johan Bruyneel, and as she described, had a great relationship with Lance, and called him a buddy, why snitch? Was it to get back at Bruyneel and to hell with Lance leaving him as collateral damage? In an interview on Ireland's Public Service Media, as to her own culpability she stated "I did very, very, very little." I'm not sure everybody else would describe getting rid of syringes, and picking up and delivering drugs as "very, very, very" little. Lance snitched on nobody.

Greg LeMond lost his bike brand and claimed all kind of horrors as a result of trying to expose Armstrong. Which, on its hands and knees, raises the question: if they were friends as

both stated, why of all people did LeMond take it upon himself to try to annihilate his friend? Was he travelling the moral path and sticking up for the sport, or trying to reclaim his old throne as being the greatest American cyclist?

I followed and idolized LeMond since the day I sat in wool shorts outside a bike shop and read in Velo News about him winning the 1981 Coors Classic at the beginning of his career, beating a tough field including a Russian Olympic gold medallist. That reverence lasted until I heard him yapping about how it was impossible for Lance to be that good because he, LeMond, had a higher V02 max. The only thing that proved, scientifically and otherwise, was that Greg LeMond was not a great friend to have. What was he expecting anyhow? I'm guessing he saw the Tour de France stage where Armstrong was trying to gift the race to his breakaway companion and teammate. Lance told his friend "Ride like you stole something." Two Germans came from behind and rode his teammate down. The pair presented no danger to Armstrong in the overall standings. Out of anger and revenge he risked his Tour by chasing them down through the curvy narrow streets of the finishing town to win the stage. Hey Greg: you fucked with that Texas bull, and you got his horns.

Eddy Merckx, 'The Cannibal', never tried to gift a race to a teammate and tested positive for banned substances three times. He is still recognized as the greatest cyclist of all time, and rightly so. He's a beloved figure and a great asset to the sport. The average guy on the street wailing about Armstrong wouldn't know Merckx's history or who he is in the first place. As Jacques Anquetil, five-time Tour de France winner said, "Leave me in peace, everybody takes dope." Fausto Coppi admitted to taking 'la bomba' (amphetamines) although at the time it was legal. In all seven of Lance's Tour victories only one podium finisher, Spaniard Fernando Escartín, was not tainted by a drug scandal.

The British journalist David Walsh was on the job, and he did his job well. It seems clear that Lance put him through hell also. Describing his ordeal David acts surprised, as if the baby Jesus just fell from the sky into his arms. He couldn't have been so naïve as to think one of the most competitive athletes of our time, armed with a Texas-sized bank balance, would roll over dead for him.

Mr. Walsh, you chose to take down a cancer victim well on his way to raising a billion dollars to help his fellow survivors. When Lance stepped down from his foundation in 2012 the money it had raised helped 2,500,000 cancer patients. Clearly you were in the right, Mr. Walsh. Although next time you think about your victory, consider taking a moment of silence beforehand.

Bill Belichick (widely considered the best American football coach of all time) of the New England Patriots has been caught cheating more than a few times. The consequences: nada, nothing, or a slap on the wrist. American football players who are caught taking steroids for the first time get docked four games out of a sixteen-game season – in a sport where their strength can maim others for life.

THAT'S THE MICHELANGELO OF FU'S TO THE RIGGED, CORRUPT, HYPOCRISY THAT DESIGNATED HIM THE EVERYMAN FALL GUY.


GIRO
RadioShack
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We have people who were born men, aided by a scalpel and a slew of drugs, dominating women in women's sports and we have to accept it as fair play or be damned with horrific labels.

The good Lance did shouldn't have served as a 'get out of jail free' card. It didn't. The courts had their say, he paid his fines, lost his sponsors, as well as his place in the sport, and the public got to vent on who they were programmed to vent on.

Return his records, even if for appearances' sake someone has to stick an asterisk on them. While they're at it, they should put a couple by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson's names. They owned slaves. If I ever have the honour of meeting Lance, the only favour I'd ask him would be to gift me a signed picture of him on a couch staring at his seven yellow jerseys after they were supposedly taken away. That's the Michelangelo of FU's to the rigged, corrupt, hypocrisy that designated him the everyman fall guy. I'd be so proud to hang that photograph on my wall.

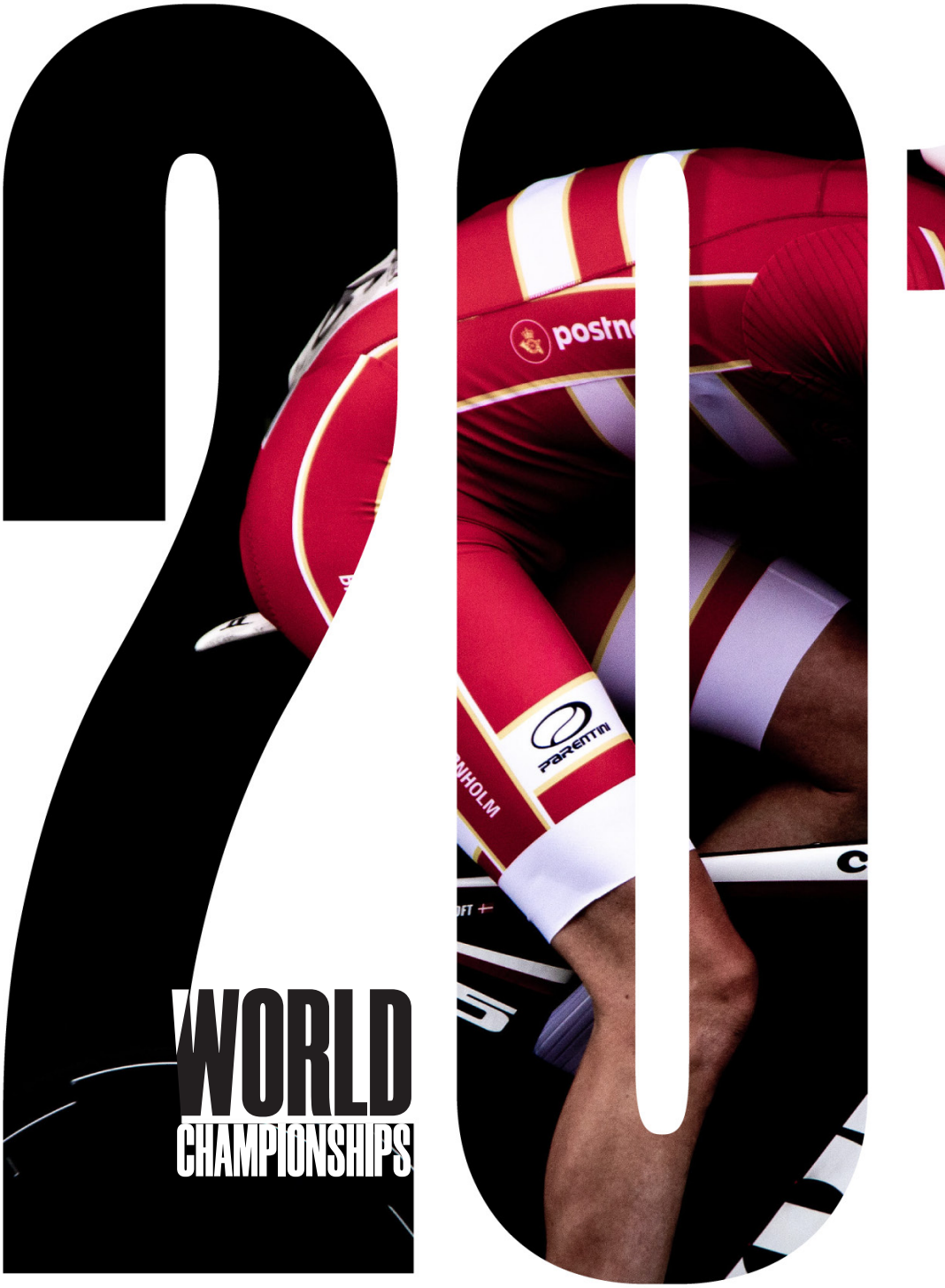
What Lance did on the bike was brilliant. What he did for millions of others should never be forgotten.

In Memory

Michael G. Shebay

April 19, 1951

January 15, 2020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WORLD
CHAMPIONSHIPS

Lost in Yorkshire

The sea waves shine in the bright midday light. It's a late summer day in Cantabria, one of those September days that seems like a disguised day from another month, when the sun's rays gently caress your skin. It's 27 degrees and there's barely a breath of wind. I smile. It's delightful.

A few hours later.

The wind blows my rucksack from side to side and blasts raindrops in my face. Fat drops, like marbles. It's cold. I'm wearing layers and layers of clothes, afraid of falling ill away from home (one of the most miserable experiences you can have). I pick up the car and drive for an hour. At one point I pass a huge poster. It's white and criss-crossed by the colours of the rainbow. "Harrogate says hello to the Worlds!" I have arrived.

Welcome to the World Championships in Yorkshire.

Words: Marcos Peredo. Translation: by Matthew Bailey. Photography: Alan Gibworth.

These Familiar Roads

My trip starts in Ithaca. I like to be original. What can I say?

Actually 'Ithaca' is the name of a bar next to the bus stop where I am waiting for a ride to the airport. The thing is, saying my journey starts in a bar is much less symbolic (and let's not kid ourselves, less 'cycling'), so I permit myself a little poetic licence. I am about to leave for Manchester to cover the UCI Road World Championships. It's being held in Yorkshire and will take in almost the entire county. This will be the third time the Worlds have been held in the United Kingdom. The first was in 1970. Leicester, won by the tragic Jean-Pierre Monseré. The next was twelve years later. Goodwood Autodrome, West Sussex. Locals say that on a winter's night you can sometimes still hear Giuseppe Saronni's cranks spinning as if he had dropped his chain. Perhaps the most spectacular attack of all time.

Surely this year the race would be less tough. After all, these days the cyclists are different, the range of talents in the peloton much narrower, so that everything is much more controlled. Everything, or almost everything. One of those things that can't be measured (unlike speed, watts and calories) is the weather. And it played a transcendental role in Yorkshire. But we're getting ahead of ourselves …

Where were we? Oh yes, boarding the plane. Or almost. A nice delay, just to intensify the experience (how we cyclists love to suffer). I'm on the same flight as some of the riders. You can tell at a single glance they have no chance. The fit of those modern shirts isn't fooling anyone. Fate has embedded me in an army of babies (all bearing a strong resemblance to Winston Churchill, ca. 1948) who never stop crying for the entire flight, taking turns in precise relays so that silence becomes a distant memory. All of which does wonders for the misanthropy I've been sharpening over the years. And how funny it will be for my friends when I tell them about it. I ask the stewardess whether she has a sedative so I can escape the howling, but she doesn't seem to think much of my request (another of my characteristics, this lack of graciousness). A young couple, barely three metres apart, talk to each other on their mobile phones. They're excited. You can tell from their voices.

I smile.

As we are landing, I think about how the lights at night are different everywhere I go, as if the orange and yellow had shades that change as you pass from one country to another. Of course it isn't true, but I won't stop feeling it throughout my trip.

This (Slight) Sensation of Familiarity

I'm not going to lie to you: arriving in Britain is pretty scary when you come from a different culture. Especially if you come from one where they drive on the right, for a start. You start slowly – very slowly. And somewhat anxiously. Just in case.

But I needn't have worried, because the trip from Manchester, where the plane dropped me off, to Yorkshire is a true delight. A familiar one, by the way. Narrow roads, well-surfaced, lined by low stone walls that frame the farms, reminiscent of the enclosures that filled the cities with cheap labour during the Industrial Revolution. At any rate, it looks a lot like my home. Here and there, sheep of different colours dot the landscape. The colours are not an invention. In reality they are all white, but someone has painted their bellies blue, pink, green, yellow. I have no idea what it means, but it makes for an odd landscape, as if someone

had scattered the moors with a children's breakfast cereal, all sugar and colouring.

I pass through the Forest of Bowland and think how riding a bike through it would be as exhausting as it would be entertaining. Not a flat metre, ramps here and there of up to 20 per cent, small plateaus exposed to the wind (which always blows in a cyclist's face, of course). A (sweet) agony. It's lovely.

Our progress is accompanied by a noisy stream. Pheasants cross the road with much greater equanimity than is advisable, and in the ditches there are hedgehogs disguised as mossy stones and ferns that look like giant spiders (I find these rather disturbing but I do my best not to notice them). In many places what there is *not* is mobile reception, creating an ideal opportunity to get lost and enjoy the silence. Or our puffing and panting. Don't take a chance on unprepared legs.

(Two triangular road signs in particular caught my attention. These signal danger. One announced the presence of ducks in the road, which I found charming. The other showed the unmistakeable outline of an evil witch stirring a cauldron full of magic potion. I supposed it was a joke, but in that place, with no one around for miles, it was rather disturbing.)

We come here for the atmosphere, not the weather. A good thing, too, the bit about not coming looking for sun and warmth. Because if one thing characterised the Yorkshire Worlds it was bad weather. Rain, wind, cold. All these left memorable images. Flushed faces, riders falling apart, races won by process of elimination.

There are also other, less pleasant matters. The crashes during the junior TT, for example. Or the tears of Germán Gómez, the young Colombian who cried in dismay when he suffered a mechanical and his support car took an age to reach him over the moors. The bad weather also eliminated one of the favourites before he had even started. The champion *in pectore*, the defender of the crown. Alejandro Valverde doesn't like the rain. All the Spanish journalists were thinking the same thing, though no one wanted to say it out loud just in case they had got it wrong. Valverde didn't even finish.

But I'm getting ahead of myself again. No, we were still talking about the weather. But the Yorkshire Worlds was wonderful despite what I said about the wind and rain. Would


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you like a good metaphor for it? Among the Worlds merchandise was a flat cap: one of those hats that look like a hunter's and suit the inhabitants of lost valleys of the north of England so well. I'm sure you know the sort of thing. Well, it was lined in all the colours of the rainbow jersey. Very tasteful of the UCI, very cheerful, very modern. But on the outside . . . on the outside it was brown, sober, elegant. And it worked, it certainly worked. I saw many being worn, mainly because they were necessary. It was that kind of a week.

Of course, there was also lots of fun to be had. There were lots of fans. Who felt like partying. Some of them drunk. Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian, even Spanish. The Nordics wore Viking helmets with horns and everything. In honour of York, I imagine, as this whole area was a Norman kingdom at one time. The fact that Vikings didn't wear horns on their helmets is neither here nor there. After all, they didn't get here by longship either. It's the thought that counts.

And Brits too, of course. In the Elite race the locals didn't seem to have much of a chance, but they decided to support Tom Pidcock, the under-23 rider who looks like being the next star to come from the islands. He

finished fourth after trying to break the race in every possible way (in the end he would be awarded third place after the disqualification of the Dutch rider Nils Eekhoff). With the mentality of a winner, his gestures after finishing the race said it all. Thick tears rolled down his face, lips cerulean with rage. He was comforted by his mother, his girlfriend, his support staff. You were fourth, you gave everything you had, you have no reason to reproach yourself. Pidcock did not answer. His socks, white at the start of the race, were now a mixture of dirt, mud and blood from a fall. His arms hanging limply, he looked lost. "I just wanted to win. Just to win." The mentality of a champion, and a tremendously versatile one. Remember his name.

This all happened right at the finish line, the liveliest ever. About 70 metres before the white line there was a pub that had been renamed for the occasion. 'The Finish Line', it was called. Some journalist joked: I hope the riders don't get confused …

If I had to describe the Worlds I would use two words: rainbows and bicycles. The first is clear, right? The symbol of the jersey everyone covets, and which appears in various

places in Harrogate. In hairdressers (including ones where you can get your beard retouched), restaurants, the places I went for coffee in the mornings, the decorator's shop, the antique dealer. Everything is a huge marketplace, adorned with the colours that every cyclist wants to wear at least once in their lives. Or live in them full time, like Peter Sagan.

The other thing is the bikes. And we're in England, friends, so what can I tell you? Well, there was style, style everywhere. I saw beautiful machines, the latest models but also some classics that really made an impact on me. Clothing with a retro air. Many jerseys of the seventies and eighties, leather shoes with hard soles and laces. Casquettes. Molteni, Bic. High socks, mid-leg. A paradise for cool cyclists. The clap, clap, clap of cleats walking carefully on asphalt fills the streets instead of the backfiring of exhaust pipes (mind you don't slip in the wet). Oh, and there are people in cycling jerseys and culottes in every shop, in every part of town. From bars to banks, to supermarkets, to more or less elegant restaurants and bookshops. It's as if the aliens had arrived in Harrogate one night and replaced all its inhabitants with cyclists (more or less fit, more or less flabby). Just for fun, the aliens think. Just to see it . . .

A Quiet Spa Town Full of Cowbells

Harrogate is a tiny little town. Venerable and restful, with serene architecture, wide streets, everything within walking distance. A spa town designed to accommodate discreet elderly people who spend their mornings taking baths and their afternoons reading the newspaper or playing bridge. More or less. I mean, we're not in Jane Austen's time now. But you know what I mean.

This is Harrogate. Or that's how it was.

Because the Worlds changes everything. It brings with it, for example, bells other than the serious, solemn pealing of the churches. No, here many of the fans wore cowbells around their necks, making metallic, sharp music that even drowned out the screams of the nearest fans. All is excitement. At the middle of everything was the Fan Centre, located in the heart of Harrogate Park. Full of stands, music, laughs, and vans selling food and drink. Or at least that was the theory. In practice it became a huge quagmire, a Woodstock of the bicycle, where everyone looked as if they had recently finished Paris-Roubaix. Here the children


SWAN ROAD
HALES BAR
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stood out, of course. A few of them were totally uninhibited, and I watched them cover themselves in mud from head to toe before the eyes of their worried but resigned parents. But they looked so happy…

It's worth mentioning that the smells in the enclosure were of fried food, of kebabs, even of *churros*. British cuisine was notable only by its absence. There was some in the press centre, yes, but it didn't go over so well (in fact this was the first time I had ever seen food left uneaten by journalists, normally so fond of local delicacies). I prefer not to draw hasty conclusions or accuse anyone of anything. But the atmosphere, the atmosphere was unbeatable.

The day before the men's Elite race there was a concert by a Foo Fighters tribute band (or maybe it was the real Foo Fighters, I didn't get close enough to be sure). In the mosh pit people were wearing rubber boots. Of course the British knew what might await them in Yorkshire at the end of September. I regarded them with envy as I tried not to get any more mud on my only pair of trousers. Without success, obviously.

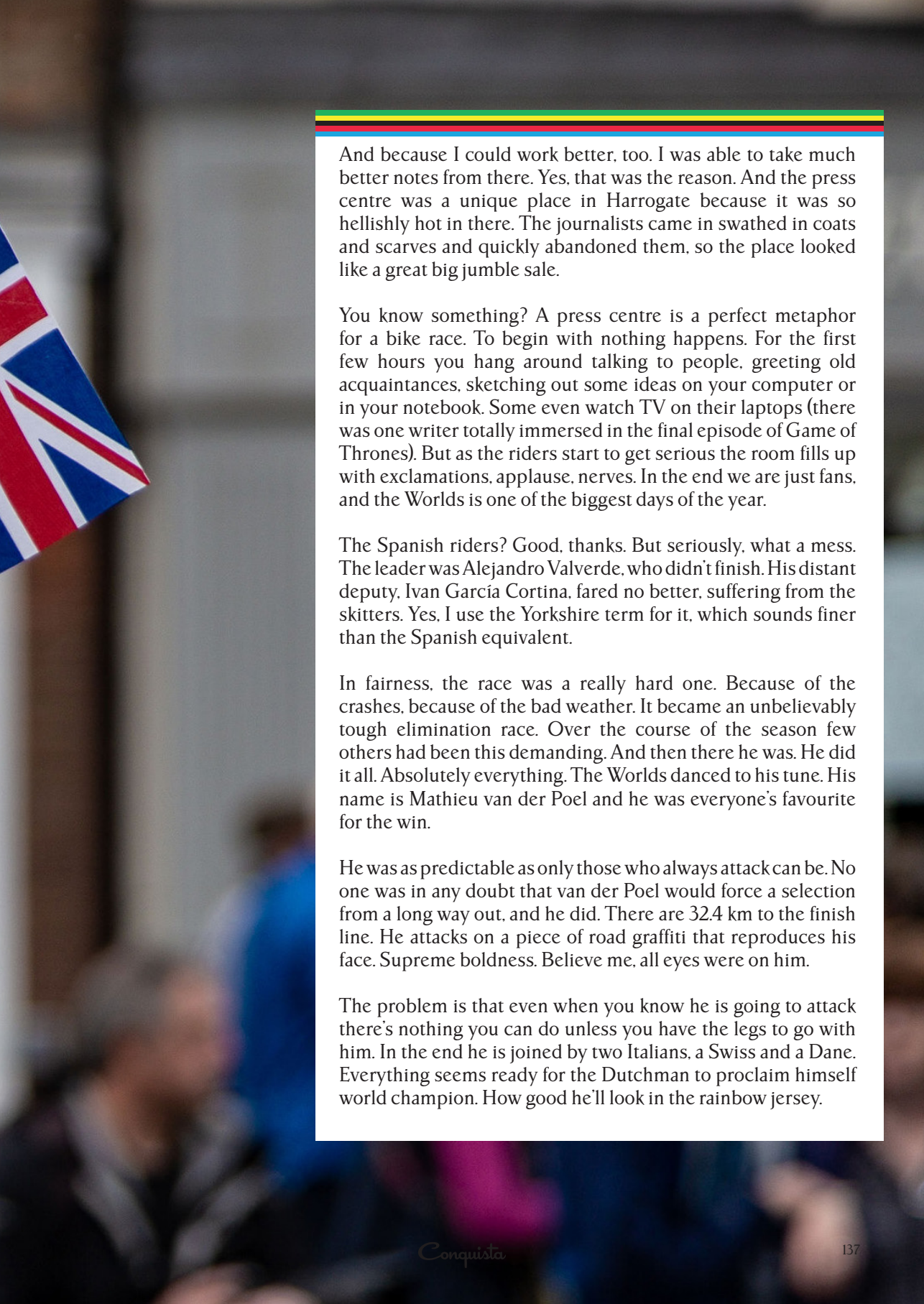
I enjoyed the live music but I missed the Delgados. That would have been nice. Although, to be honest, there wouldn't have been much point, because, sung by drunken fans in the outdoor discos, pubs and bars, every song sounds the same. Something like "Lolololo lalalala". Sing loudly with a pint glass in your hand and it's as if you were there.

My congratulations to those who covered the pubs full of cycling iconography and even organised bike-related activities. My favourite was the stand with the rollers. It was a real pleasure to watch people try to generate hundreds of watts while sinking a few pints of beer. (Of course I didn't join them: I am a serious journalist and I was there to work. Ahem.)

A World Championship Elimination Race

And on Sunday the big race. The one everyone was waiting for. A dog of a day. Cold, rain, wind. The ditches covered with dead leaves, huge puddles in the road, a row of umbrellas greeting the riders on their way through the north of the county. Utterly autumnal. From their faces it was obvious that some of the fans were even keener to end the suffering than the riders were.

Of course I was in the press centre most of the time. I'm a gentleman and I value comfort.



And because I could work better, too. I was able to take much better notes from there. Yes, that was the reason. And the press centre was a unique place in Harrogate because it was so hellishly hot in there. The journalists came in swathed in coats and scarves and quickly abandoned them, so the place looked like a great big jumble sale.

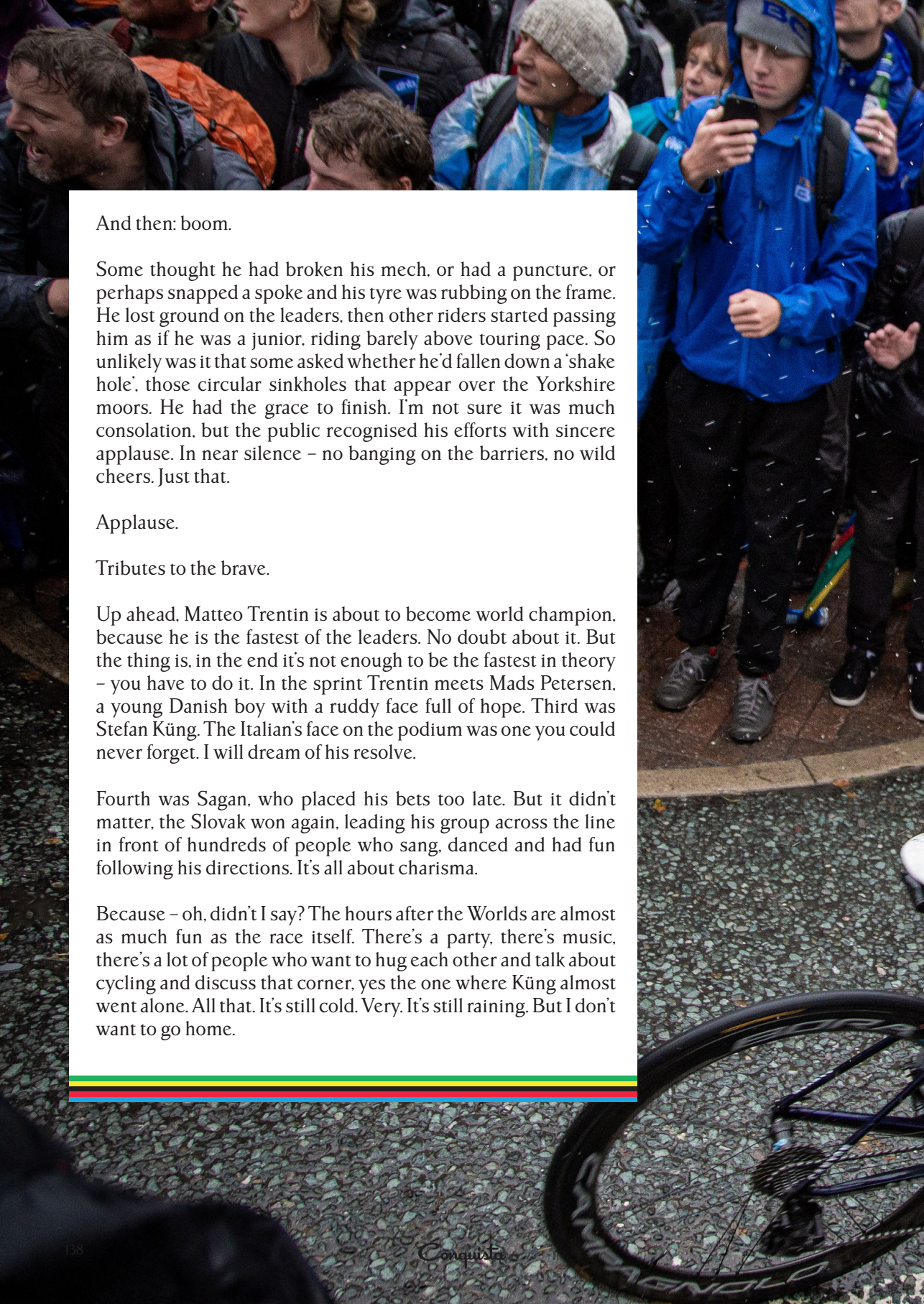
You know something? A press centre is a perfect metaphor for a bike race. To begin with nothing happens. For the first few hours you hang around talking to people, greeting old acquaintances, sketching out some ideas on your computer or in your notebook. Some even watch TV on their laptops (there was one writer totally immersed in the final episode of Game of Thrones). But as the riders start to get serious the room fills up with exclamations, applause, nerves. In the end we are just fans, and the Worlds is one of the biggest days of the year.

The Spanish riders? Good, thanks. But seriously, what a mess. The leader was Alejandro Valverde, who didn't finish. His distant deputy, Ivan García Cortina, fared no better, suffering from the skitters. Yes, I use the Yorkshire term for it, which sounds finer than the Spanish equivalent.

In fairness, the race was a really hard one. Because of the crashes, because of the bad weather. It became an unbelievably tough elimination race. Over the course of the season few others had been this demanding. And then there he was. He did it all. Absolutely everything. The Worlds danced to his tune. His name is Mathieu van der Poel and he was everyone's favourite for the win.

He was as predictable as only those who always attack can be. No one was in any doubt that van der Poel would force a selection from a long way out, and he did. There are 32.4 km to the finish line. He attacks on a piece of road graffiti that reproduces his face. Supreme boldness. Believe me, all eyes were on him.

The problem is that even when you know he is going to attack there's nothing you can do unless you have the legs to go with him. In the end he is joined by two Italians, a Swiss and a Dane. Everything seems ready for the Dutchman to proclaim himself world champion. How good he'll look in the rainbow jersey.



And then: boom.

Some thought he had broken his mech, or had a puncture, or perhaps snapped a spoke and his tyre was rubbing on the frame. He lost ground on the leaders, then other riders started passing him as if he was a junior, riding barely above touring pace. So unlikely was it that some asked whether he'd fallen down a 'shake hole', those circular sinkholes that appear over the Yorkshire moors. He had the grace to finish. I'm not sure it was much consolation, but the public recognised his efforts with sincere applause. In near silence – no banging on the barriers, no wild cheers. Just that.

Applause.

Tributes to the brave.

Up ahead, Matteo Trentin is about to become world champion, because he is the fastest of the leaders. No doubt about it. But the thing is, in the end it's not enough to be the fastest in theory – you have to do it. In the sprint Trentin meets Mads Petersen, a young Danish boy with a ruddy face full of hope. Third was Stefan Küng. The Italian's face on the podium was one you could never forget. I will dream of his resolve.

Fourth was Sagan, who placed his bets too late. But it didn't matter, the Slovak won again, leading his group across the line in front of hundreds of people who sang, danced and had fun following his directions. It's all about charisma.

Because – oh, didn't I say? The hours after the Worlds are almost as much fun as the race itself. There's a party, there's music, there's a lot of people who want to hug each other and talk about cycling and discuss that corner, yes the one where Küng almost went alone. All that. It's still cold. Very. It's still raining. But I don't want to go home.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GALLERY

The photography fee from this feature was donated to the Roadpeace charity. Visit roadpeace.org to donate.


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2019
Today's Race
Team Time Trial
Mixed Relay
Expected Time
1.10pm - 3.37pm
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FOR SALE


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HSBC UK
CANYON


USA
USA
USA

We interrupt our scheduled programme . . .

It's hard to write our normal Girona Briefing when the last two months have been spent in Australia, so in this issue we bring you the inside line on all things antipodean.

The Australian cycling season is a jam-packed month, when we go from the quiet few months of the off season to the UCI WorldTour kick-off, one-day races, and of course, the first UCI race of the year: Australian Nationals.

The cycling world's eyes turn to Ballarat, Victoria in the first half of January when the pros descend on the old gold mining town. It's probably watched more than most national championships due to its place in the calendar. But there's a race no one sees: the race within the race to get the coveted spot in the feed zone, along the stretch of highway marking the first part of the climb.

There is some serious Lord of the Flies action going on here. Because there aren't 18 or 22 teams at the race. Each rider has a mother, a friend, an uncle and a dog marking their territory within the 500 metre markers, jostling for position for the 14 'feed allowed' laps. Even the few teams that are there as teams have at least three feeders on the grassy knoll. Lauren Kitchen filled us in on the family affair. "It's my mom's thing. She builds for this every year. I even brought her in for Race Torquay and then Brodie won [her dad was there doing bottles as well actually]. I also stay with my mom in Ballarat and always have. She's basically our swannie, mechanic and DS at the same time. It gives me motivation having her there and it's special, because it makes her part of what I'm doing when so much of the year I'm on the other side of the world."

Nationals offer family and friends a rare opportunity to get closely involved in the action. It wouldn't be Ballarat without the dozen or so members of Jay

BRIEFINGS

Words & Photography: The Peloton Brief.


SUBARU-GIANT
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McCarthy's entourage parked up with the RV, BBQ out and all wearing custom-printed 'Team Jay' paraphernalia. It also wouldn't be Aussie Nationals without the glorious display of family-owned camper vans, 'Jaycos' as they are branded: maybe the real competition is who has the best and blingiest tent on wheels.

"I tell off those people who try to spectate in the feed zone," said Robbie, Lauren's mom. "Keep walking." The front row is contested space as the peloton comes flying past, and the maternal instinct is going to do a lot more to fend off rogue spectators than the secret-service-style security at the Tour de France.

But competition is hot between the feeders too, and the inexperienced partner of someone new in the ranks can cause chaos with the blink of an eye. One step too far back, one bottle dropped a second early, and it can be dominoes. With 100 bodies lined up the hillside the pressure is on to be seen, to get that bottle out there, and avoid the wheels.

"I always have complete faith that she will get me that bidon. When I was a junior we used to practice doing feeds. It's a real mother-daughter bonding thing for us female pros." Lauren continued. "My mom has never watched the Nationals from anywhere but the feed zone in 12 years."

It's the only feed zone on the left all year. Not even at Tour Down Under and Cadel's, let alone the rest of the racing calendar around the world, is the only feed zone this side. Well, the feed is on the left, but it's all still all right.

ROUBAIX REMEMBERED

Words: Russell Jones.
Photography: Gor Vos.

I knew the feeling, and it wasn't far away. I thought if I stuffed myself with food I'd be right. I was wrong. We'd just turned onto the Schelde so I knew it was roughly a flat 20 km back to the hotel, and that was 20 km of 140 km so far of what I thought was a 100 km group ride through the best of Flanders with Sean Kelly. Even 100 km was more than I was prepared for, but since Kelly was here I intended to finish, no matter what. Starting to struggle, and realising I was on the wrong side of the bunch to hide from the sidewind, I searched my pockets for any remnants of food to get me home. Just as I was plotting my way to the back and onto the sheltered side, the bunch rolled through with Kelly now alongside me. "Russell, are you having a good ride?" I smiled at him. "As you said earlier Sean, it's all in that last 60 km."

Although it was Kelly's Paris-Roubaix rides I wanted to hear about (and that's Paris pronounced with an 's'), it was the day before De Ronde and Sean was observing the odds listed by the papers before we left for the ride. "It says Gilbert may not be riding so it's going to be Jungels for Deceuninck because he has the power, but he hasn't got the experience of riding the race, of where to be. A guy like Gilbert, he knows where it's important, when to have the power, when to be in the top 15 and in which section. In the Classics it's always in the final 60 kilometres, that is where the big power is needed, and the experience means you can ride across those Roubaix cobblestones at 40 km an hour after 220 kilometres."

It's like he knew.

CUTTING TEETH: 1977 – 1979

After his amateur Tour of Lombardy win Kelly was famously tracked down by Flandria *directeur sportif* Jean de Gribaldy while driving a tractor along the country lanes of Carrick-on-Suir. The Frenchman was keen for him to sign for the next season. "He came down from Dublin, I didn't know, they didn't make any contact, they just arrived. I was out working on the tractor and they came to the home and my mother said he's gone out that direction. I said I'd think about it."

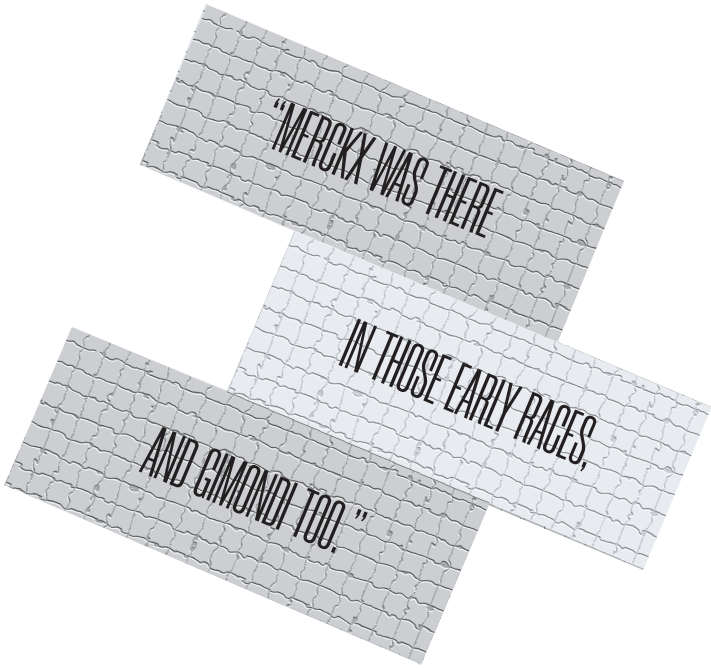
"There were stories out that I was trying to get more money, but I really wasn't. I wasn't too sure I was ready as I was only 19

Kelly and Verschuren

and I hadn't had a lot of experience, so I was a bit scared to move too quickly. About two or three weeks later I signed."

Housed above de Gribaldy's shop in Besançon, Kelly was schooled with the rest of the French-based feeder squad of the Flandria-Velda team. "We started off at the Tour of Med and all of those races down at the Côte d'Azur – Grand Prix this and Grand Prix that. I was doing OK in the Tour of Med and a few other races so I got a call at the last moment that I can do Paris-Nice. That was with Freddy Maertens of course, and all them."

It was a successful outing for the squad, Maertens taking the win ahead of TI-Raleigh's Gerrie Knetemann. The youngest rider to finish was Kelly in fortieth place, thirty minutes behind the oldest, Raymond Poulidor, who finished sixth at 1'49".



"It was pretty scary I suppose when you are in there and you are riding with these guys. Merckx was there in those early races, and Gimondi too, and you had been reading about them in the cycling mags for a number of years just before. In the races you'd try and get on their wheel but you were always worried that you were going to take someone down, so you don't push it too much because you don't want to do that. That's something that's changed, nowadays the young fellas, they just barge in first race, they've no respect."

Kelly was to get his first taste of the *pavé* a year later in 1978, the year Moser won his first of three. Kelly was called up to the squad

Sean Kelly and Martin Earley


PDM
PDM
PDM
ULTIMA

at the last minute. "It was only about three days before, so we rocked up at Roubaix but I'd never seen the fucking cobbles before. I had been in Belgium so I had seen some smaller cobbles in the *kermesse* races and they wouldn't be the worst cobbles. In Flanders you have a few cobbles, like the Paddestraat and some of those, but I'd not ridden Flanders, and they are nothing like Paris-Roubaix."

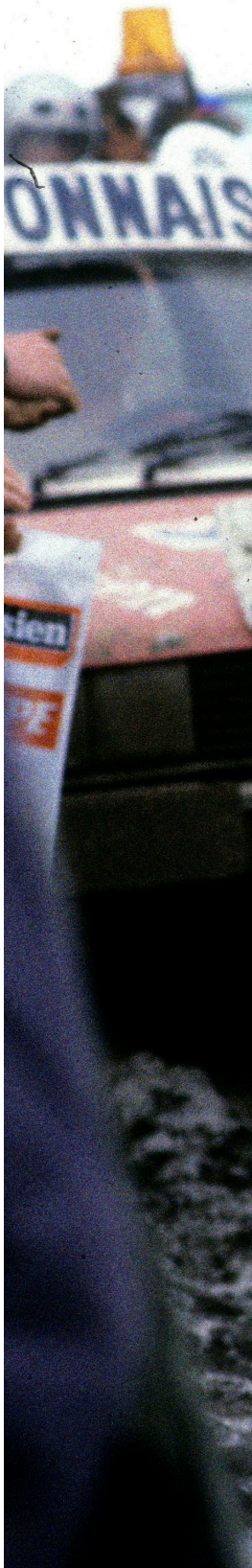
"It was horrible, I remember I fell down about five times. My role was just to ride at the beginning and try and keep Freddy in a position and stay with him as long as possible. When you get to the first lot of cobbles there's always that big fight to get there and I was just riding to keep Freddy near the front and when we got to the first section of cobbles I went back through the peloton quickly. I was scared as I'd never seen anything like that before, it was just full on, so I never saw the front again."

"I remember we got to Roubaix and I don't think we even got a finish time. I said to myself 'How can they even ride these cobblestones at that rate and stay upright?' I was totally demoralised."

UNTETHERED: 1980 – 1982

Although Kelly missed Roubaix in '79 while still establishing himself within his new Splendor team, he was back to test himself in 1980 and work for team leader Michel Pollentier, who was on form after his Flanders win and aiming to break Moser's stranglehold on the race. "I remember Pollentier had these cane wheels, but his front wheel just disintegrated on one of the sections of cobbles and he came down on his head. I had a bit more experience by then, but I don't think I finished, I think at the second feed station I got into the car."

The '81 edition saw Kelly getting up there. Wickes-Splendor allowed him and his teammate Eddy Planckaert free rein to get in amongst it after Kelly had nabbed a top ten finish in Flanders. "We'd ride and see how it played out, some of the other guys maybe gave us a bit of help but for Planckaert and myself we had a bit more freedom." Wet cobbles saw world champion Bernard Hinault take the gallop ahead of De Vlaeminck and Moser from the six-man break. Eventually finishing 19th, Kelly was witness to Hinault's late fall. "I was a little bit behind and there was a bit of a gap. I saw this black dog and the next thing it was people, and when I came to the corner Hinault was trying to get back on his bike. It split again and I remember I was suffering big time, Hinault came by me and as



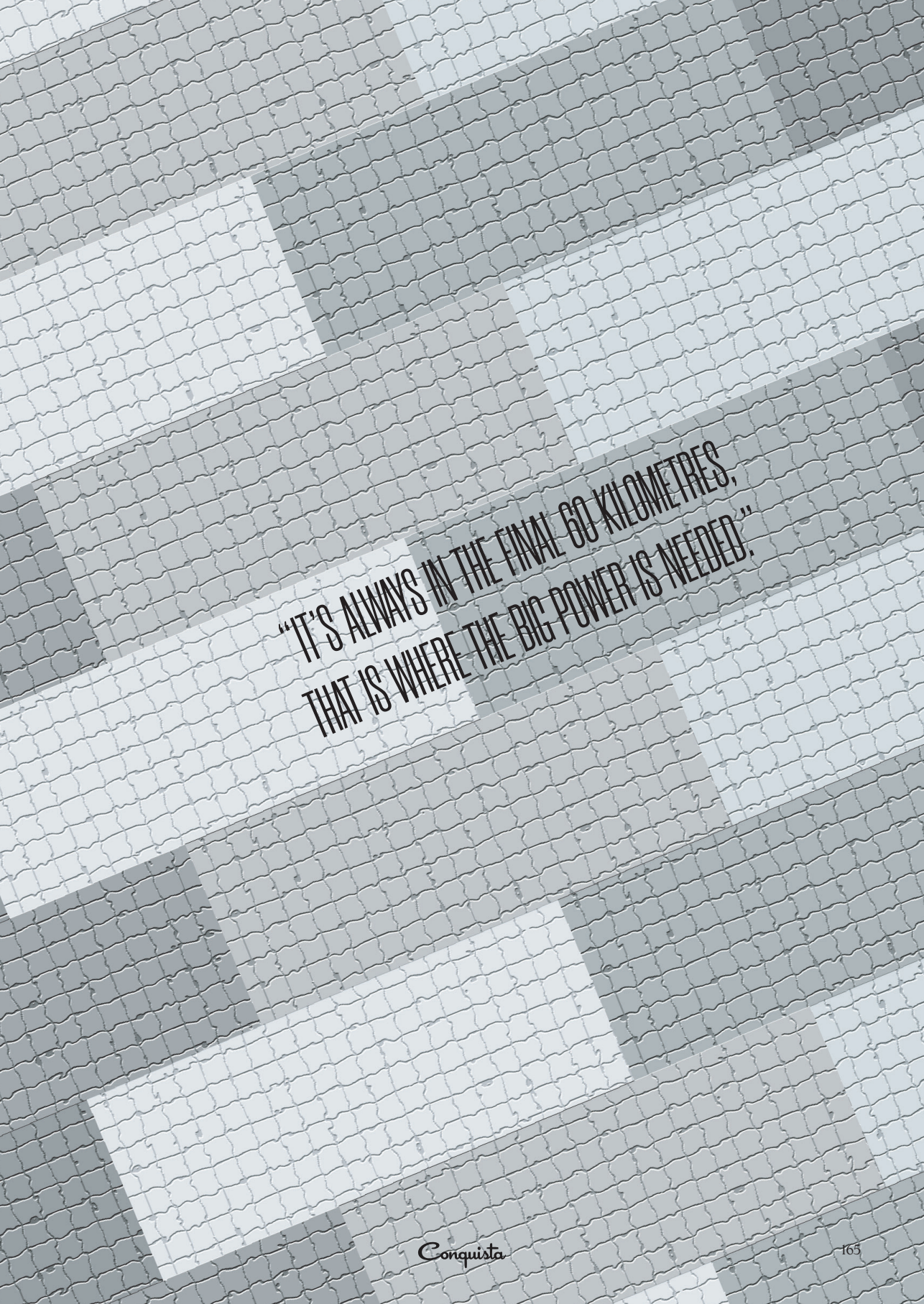
Sean Kelly 1984

we went onto another section of cobbles I got distanced again. I finished – it wasn't by much but I wasn't there in the sprint."

He may not have been there for the sprint but Kelly was starting to get to grips with the race. "I was starting to get confident. I was learning how to ride those races, especially the cobbles and how to ride over them. Positioning, gaining experience every year, and as you can see from the results I was coming up slowly and getting closer. When Raas won it in '82 it was that little kick up with about 5 or 6 km to go. It wasn't on the cobbles when he rode away, so I was in the leading group with the contenders up to that point, so definitely getting closer." He was indeed, ultimately finishing 12th.

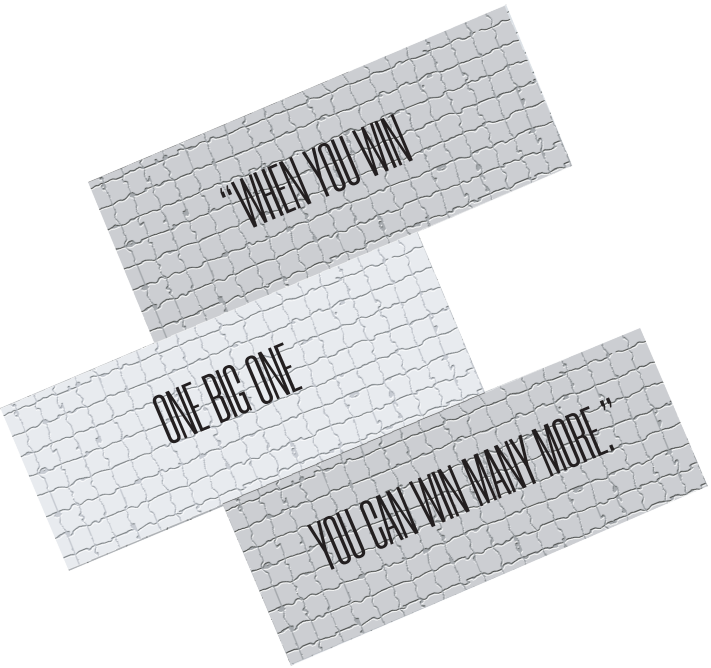
"It's not easy to break into that circle because you had Moser and you had Raas and De Vlaeminck, that 'clique' as we called it, and to break into that, well, they don't make it easy for you. It was up until you win a Classic, then you are finally accepted into that set. They don't allow you in easy, they made it as difficult as they can for you because they want to keep it between themselves. So, if it comes down to the end and you are a young guy coming up they can ride against you until you prove yourself. I did serve my apprenticeship as such over a number of years, slowly getting better.

"Getting to know the *pavé* of course was also very important. When you go out there and do a recce over the final 60 or 80 kilometres it's easy as you can see and pick your points on each part of the section, where to be and where you are. But on the day of the race


"IT'S ALWAYS IN THE FINAL 60 KILOMETRES,
THAT IS WHERE THE BIG POWER IS NEEDED."

there's cars and there's people and flags, and you can't see that little house or something, so you just need to know where to be and always be in that right position – that's from riding it a number of times. It's called 'the experience.'

"It's also learning how to ride over the cobbles. Getting the confidence and knowing the lines you can take. Roubaix has 50 km of cobbles, some really bad sections, and at the end you have a lot of sections and they come very quick one after the other. The big thing is, Paris-Roubaix, it's not won in the first 100 kilometres. Yes, you can lose it in the first 100 kilometres, crashes, something like that, but it's always in the final 60 kilometres, that is where the big power is needed. To have that power you need to build that slowly as well by doing the distance, by doing that 260 km. It comes with age."



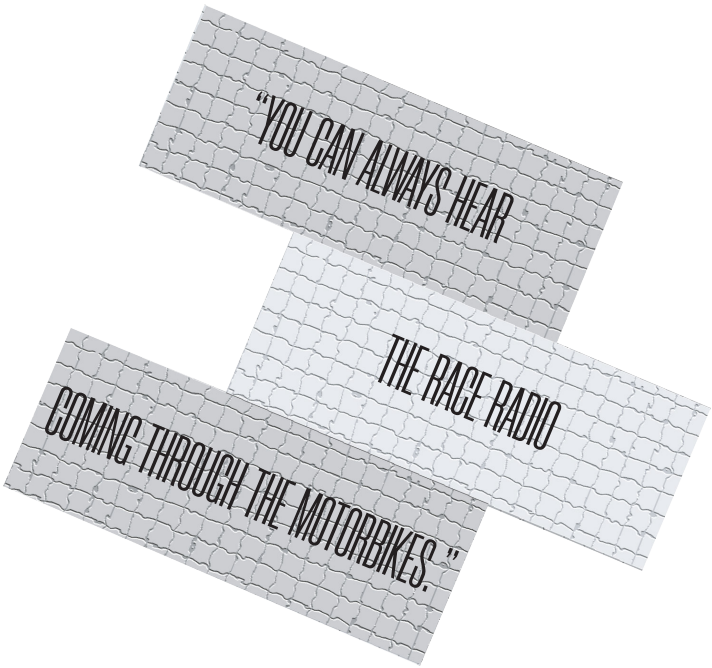
THE RISE OF THE KING: 1983 – 1985

Winning his second Paris-Nice in 1983 meant Kelly might have been an outside contender for Paris-Roubaix that year, but a broken scaphoid and collarbone soon afterwards meant he missed Hennie Kuiper's win. Nonetheless, the edition remains one he recalls well. "I crashed at the Tour of Med, and it was a bit of a bummer when you've put in so much time all through the winter doing all this training, but I remember watching it in my bed on TV in hospital in Leuven. It's amazing like that, you do Paris-Roubaix so many times and a lot I forget but that one I remember."

After winning the late season Tour of Lombardy Kelly went into 1984 with added fight. "You get that confidence. As the saying

goes, 'When you win one big one you can win many more.'" After finishing second in both Milan-Sanremo and the Tour of Flanders Kelly woke to a wet Roubaix, psyched to take to the win.

"I remember I was in really good shape and [Alain] Bondue and [Gregor] Braun were away from very early [both La Redoute] and I remember talking to de Gribaldy after some of the sections and I said 'I want to attack,' but he said 'No, wait, those guys will come back on their own.' Another 10 kilometres and I said to him 'On the next section I'm going to try,' but he stopped me at least two, maybe three times because there was still 60 or 70 kilometres to go, talked me down every time. Which was a good thing because you can feel good with 70 km to go and you can ride off there on your own but then it can hit you in the final 20 km and a minute is nothing if you've really run out of gas."



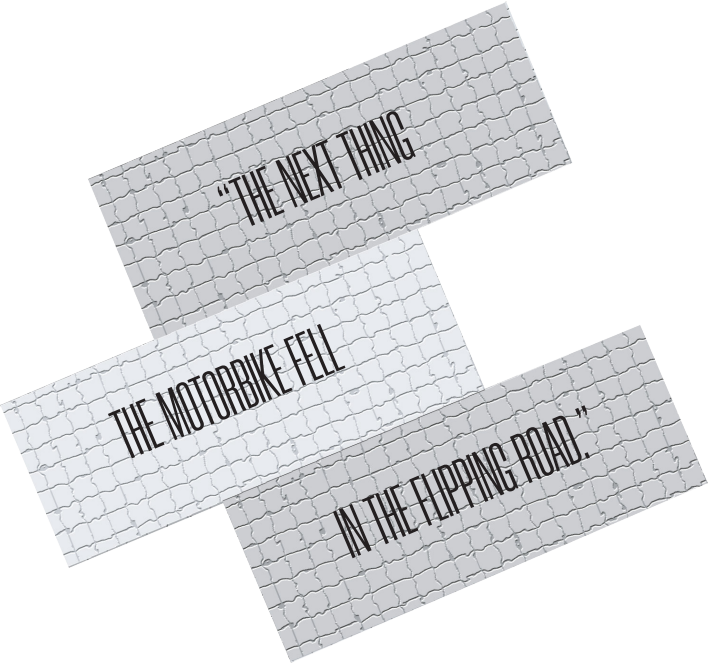
"I remember Moser was riding very strong on the cobbled sections. He was the guy that was tearing along on the sections and he seemed to be the one on the front. He had the experience and had ridden it so many times so he knew the place to go and he was riding us along for I don't know how many kilometres of the cobbles, he was really strong. About 40 km to go I decided to go and took off. There was a lot of guys around, but when I came off the section of cobbles and I looked round I could see only one single rider coming, Roger Rogiers, so I slowed up and let him come back and then we started riding."

"We rode on and we were gaining time as you can always hear the


JEAN
KELLY


KELLY

race radio coming through the motorbikes, so we knew we were pulling away and catching the other guys. They could have had maybe two minutes at the time I took off, I'm not sure now, but it took a while to catch them. You just have to keep working at it, you are 40 km out and you just have to keep riding it, you know, 90% or 95% and if you hear the gap is going out just five more seconds then five more, well it gives you the confidence to chip away at it."



Once they caught the leaders Braun struggled to stay with them once and was dropped, and after Bondue fell on Camphin-en-Pévèle Kelly and Rogiers were left alone for the finale. "I was probably riding a bit more than Rogiers but I was feeling good and Rogiers was probably trying to keep a little back for the sprint, maybe he was hoping he may be able to do something. I was always pretty confident but you can never be sure. First of all, in Roubaix you just never know and you could have a mechanical at the end so you are always tense and worried about it."

Kelly seemed to just ease away on the final corner but checked behind many times before reaching the line. "People say that to me, that sometimes in a sprint maybe I look around too much, that I should look ahead and just keep going for it full gas, but it's best to be sure."

Winner of the season-long Super Prestige Pernod International, and with another Paris-Nice under his belt, Kelly was again the obvious favourite for the '85 race. Away in the final selection that included the likes of Greg LeMond, Rudy Dhaenens, Marc Madiot,

Eddy Planckaert and Jozef Lieckens, Kelly was looking strong on yet another wet Roubaix day. But with Roubaix, you never can tell.

"In the Carrefour [de l'Arbre] you have two or three sections and we were on the second section where you go right then you go immediately left again. I remember I was second or third behind Planckaert and the TV motorbike was in front of us. Next thing the motorbike fell in the flipping road and we crashed into the back of it. We didn't really fall – I got my foot out but the bike was sideways. Madiot, he came through and just rode on and it was 15 or 20 seconds before we got moving again with that big gear on those cobbles. It was a nightmare. In the group was no organization, and there was a teammate of Madiot there, [Bruno] Wojtinek, and he was just following and blocking. I remember Plankaert and Lieckens were fighting and not wanting to ride because the two of them were thinking about the sprint, usual Belgian thing, them having a row."

With everyone watching each other, Wojtinek escaped before the velodrome to get a Renault-Elf 1-2, Kelly now eyeing up the last spot on the podium. "Plankaert and Lieckens crashed on the way into the velodrome and I had to go way up the side and come back out again, so I lost 10 or 15 metres on the others but I caught up and then I got the sprint for third."

CONFIRMING: 1986

Cold, wet and windy, the 1986 Roubaix had Kelly written all over it, especially after his wins in Milan-Sanremo and Paris-Nice. Initiating the race-winning attack, he dragged Dhaenens, Ferdi Van den Haute and Adri van der Poel with him, looking towards the latter as a potential ally.

"I felt good at the end of the Flanders and I was in the group there with Adri van der Poel, Jean-Philippe Vandenbrande and Steve Bauer. Van der Poel was saying, 'Ah, it would be good if I could win today,' as he had a Belgian sponsor, Kwantum. So I said 'Shall we see at the end?' and that was it.

"I was riding really good at the end and we got to the finish and I said to myself, 'Yeah, I'll show these fellas how to make a sprint.' I put myself at the front and with 150 or 180 metres to go I started leading out the sprint, but then in the final 10 or 15 metres I could see the legs going and could see van der Poel coming and I thought


21
La Redoute
63

Bondue and Braun in 1984

'What do I do here? Do I close the door?' But I knew I'd be thrown out, so yeah, van der Poel got it. Then afterwards van der Poel said, 'We'll see what happens in Roubaix.'

"At the end of Roubaix I remember Van Den Haute went on the attack and it was van der Poel that opened up behind and closed it down." Kelly launched over them to win by two or three bike lengths ahead of Dhaenens. Van der Poel sat up behind for third.

"When you are really feeling good then you are oozing confidence and you feel so comfortable riding across the cobblestones. Even if somebody attacks and they are really pushing you can follow without having to bite your tongue – that's the great feeling. When you are feeling that way, that gets the confidence up and then you've won a big part of the battle."

"But it's only a part, there's no guarantee. As I say, Roubaix is the greatest race to win but it's the shittiest race to ride. Mechanical problems and crashes are always there, that's always a concern."

HEMMED: 1987 – 1988

After finishing second at Flanders, taking the bunch sprint after Claude Criquielion had soloed away for the win, Kelly once again set his sights on a Roubaix cobble in '87.

After an early break got away Vanderaerden, the other main favourite, marked Kelly carefully, waiting for him to make his move and bridge across. It was not to be: Kelly fell with 25 km to go, leaving Vanderaerden to attack, catch the lead group and win the sprint.

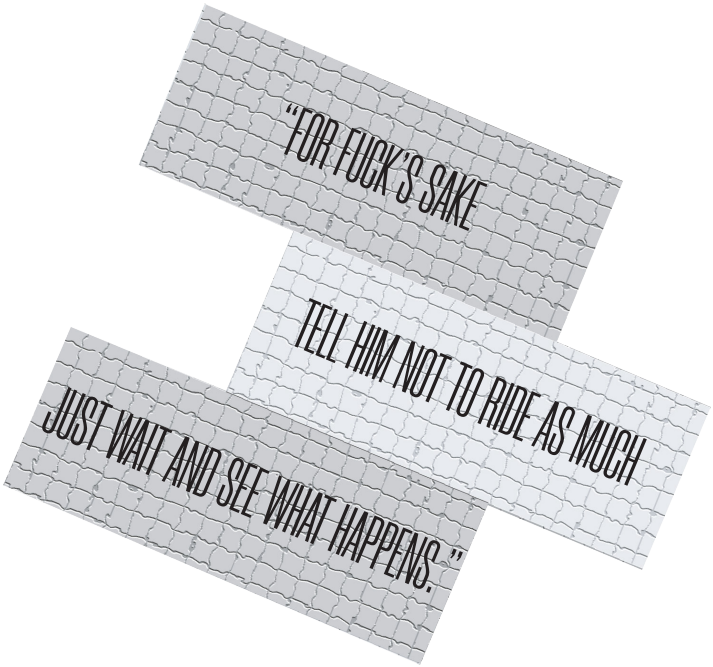
"Yeah, first I punctured in the front on the final 150 metres of the Arenberg. I was riding it flat at the end because there's somebody with wheels at the end and I remember the clatter was fucking terrible. So we went on and onto that section where I fell. You know, it was taken out afterwards as it was a very bad section. I remember riding but next thing I knew the handlebars broke and came off and I went into the grass between the spectators. That was when Vanderaerden rode away."

"We had all been watching each other and it was getting to the point, you know, something was going to happen. The build to that had been coming for a number of sections and if he had seen that

I had a mechanical he was going to try and do something anyway. The fall was just the opportunity he was looking for, for him to go."

Sunshine greeted the riders for the 1988 edition, and with a record 7th Paris-Nice win under his belt, plus a fifth in Milan-Sanremo and a fourth in Flanders, Kelly was ready for victory in Roubaix. Again there was an early break – but this time Kelly had made sure he had a teammate up there.

"Yes, somebody up there for later, which was the tactic for one hundred years already. [Thomas] Wegmüller was up there, but he was such a strong rider and I remember talking to the team car to tell him to take it easy as everyone knew that if he got into a breakaway he would just drive and drive and drive. When they got to the cobbles he was the guy that was riding at the front every time so he was just eliminating them. It was quite a big breakaway, and it just slowly whittled down one by one because Wegmüller was driving it."



"I talked to the car a few times and said, 'For fuck's sake, tell him not to ride as much and just wait and see what happens from behind.' At one time the car said to me, 'He won't stop, he wants to ride,' so I said [laughing] 'Just push him off the road with the car if he doesn't obey the orders.' In the end there was just himself and Dirk Demol, but at the finish he got a plastic bag in his derailleur and that really messed him up for the sprint. I don't think he would have beaten Demol anyway, Demol was always a bit better in the sprint and Wegmüller had driven it so much."

Kelly en route to victory in 1984


SKIL
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FRUSTRATION: 1989 – 1990

1989 saw Kelly move to the PDM team. This brought his Paris-Nice winning streak to an end, as the Dutch squad's preference was to ride Tirreno-Adriatico. His win at Liège-Bastogne-Liège made up for a frustrating start to the year.

"Before the Classics I got a stomach bug, so I was sick and I wasn't good in the early Classics. I remember I struggled, already 60 km out I was starting to feel it."

In 1990 a broken collarbone from a crash in the Tour of Flanders saw Kelly miss his old teammate and rival Eddy Planckaert's win over Steve Bauer. The same injury, this time caused by a crash at that year's Paris-Nice, meant he missed Marc Madiot's second Roubaix victory in '91.

"When you are lying at home injured and watching it there's not much you can do. You might be on the turbo trainer for a couple of hours in the morning, but you still watch it. You say, you know, 'If I was there, now's the time to hit it.'"

THE LAST ROUNDS: 1992 – 1994

Bouncing back later in the 1991 season, Kelly won the Tour of Lombardy and took his fourth and final win in the Nissan Classic. His descent to victory in Milan-Sanremo the next season is still one of legend, and he was very much considered a contender on the Compiègne startline.

The race was won by Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle, who soloed away for the first of his two victories. Kelly came in 1'22" down, within a huge group of 28 sprinting for third place behind Olaf Ludwig in second.

"Duclos was at the front and there was a big group there, totally unorganized, nobody wanted to chase of course. You'd get to the cobbled section and you'd push on but after the cobbled section nobody wanted to continue riding. I wasn't good enough to try something, to ride away on the cobbles, you have to be really strong to do that. You do talk with some of the guys, and you say, 'Let's try and ride,' and you get two or three guys and they'll ride once or twice but then they start looking about because you have

ten guys sitting on the wheel, so it all falls apart again quickly."

'93 brought a mechanical and a DNF. "You know, it's funny, that one, I can't remember that one." Kelly's swansong was with the French Cavatana team in 1994, riding his favourite races for one final time. With three punctures before the Arenberg there was to be no fairytale ending for Kelly, who eventually retired at the second feed.

"I knew it was going to be a struggle to get through as I wasn't really riding that well before, but when you knew it was going to be your last one you'd try and get out there and do your best. But when you start to get mechanicals, you get three punctures, then your morale gets really . . . well . . ."

AND THE ART OF ROUBAIX

There was one last question I wanted to ask. Given the random elements of Roubaix I wondered if there was any edition he felt he should have won but didn't, a loss that still stung a little (I was thinking in particular of 1987). The answer was one not of bitterness, but of Zen.

"No. In Roubaix I don't think you can say 'I'm pretty sure I would have won that one.' The Tour of Flanders, when you get so close, when you get to the final 200 metres, you say to yourself 'Yes, I should have won that one.' But in Roubaix, no. When Vanderaerden won, for example, if I didn't have the mechanical problem it would have probably been different, but it still had a long way to go, probably 30 kilometres, so anything could have happened."

Somehow, I made it back to the hotel. I headed straight for the vending machine so I could eat something, anything, and start to see straight again. While I inhaled whatever the euros could buy, Kelly came over, giggling at the state of me. "I told you, it was those last 60 km you were telling me about Sean," I splutter. "Yes but, 60 km or not Russell, you are nothing without your food. You should have eaten more."

Kelly and Adri van der Poel

Conquista

Kelly winning Paris-Roubaix, 1984

"YOU WIN A CLASSIC, THEN YOU ARE FINALLY ACCEPTED."

POSTCARD
From Macedonia

Words & Pictures: Tom Owen.

'Crap Greece.' That's how I'd heard North Macedonia described before I went there. Or 'Greece without the seaside.'

Having ridden a 700 kilometre lap of almost the entire country I can confirm that these characterisations are deeply unfair, as well as inaccurate. It's a beautiful, mountainous country with stunning inland lakes, edenic valleys, expanses of fertile grazing land and dense green forests. There's no denying it is landlocked, nor can its connections (or conflicts) with the country directly to its south be put to one side.

Most recently, Greece has been aggressively blocking any attempt by the tiny state to join the EU, due to a dispute about its right to call itself 'Macedonia', the ancient name of the Greek region situated immediately over the border and once home to Alexander the Great. The Greeks say North Macedonia's appropriation of it is nothing more than an attempt to con its way to some cheap tourism.

The border of the country encloses land that was formerly part of Yugoslavia and before that various other empires. The idea of a North Macedonian national identity is extremely recent. Indeed, the many Albanians who live here seem to have a stronger sense of national pride than the locals. The striking red flag with the black two-headed eagle flaps proudly above many homes, particularly in the west near the Albanian border. There are also a great many Kosovans in the country – it provided a safe haven for those fleeing violence and persecution and remained largely peaceful throughout the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

Copycat country or not, there are things in North Macedonia that you won't find anywhere on the shores of the Aegean. Spomeniks, huge brutalist concrete monuments left over from the Yugoslav era, being the main ones.


“It’s a beautiful, mountainous country with stunning inland lakes”

Everywhere in North Macedonia there are reminders of the past and an absence of contemporary identity. These faded, sometimes crumbling structures represent an attempt to forge a single identity for the disparate territories of former Yugoslavia, a country now replaced by seven others. Mostly they are ignored, left to fall apart – places for teenagers to gather and smash glass bottles, it seems. Occasionally they are well-kept, but even then there is never anybody near them. We visited about ten, each one as solitary as the last. North Macedonia is not a 'crap Greece' – it has a beauty, romance and sadness uniquely its own.

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