



from Berlin TO Milan

GIRO DI LOMBARDIA

GARRETT AND I FIRST MET FOUR YEARS AGO through our common interest in track bikes. We rode together, filmed together, and travelled together. Our passion for riding also grew together and we made the transition from being track bike purists to novice "roadies" and crossed into the much larger world of cycling and it's history. As we started to enjoy the ability to ride farther, higher, and faster than previously were able to on the track bike, we knew that something bigger was always on the horizon. In May of last year I made the move from San Francisco to Berlin, and I knew it was only a matter of time until the continent of Europe became my training ground and would visit the monuments of cycling history. Garrett and I were instantly talking of where we could ride and with the end of the cycling season approaching, it was easy to plot a route that would be devastating to our morale, but would reward us with a brilliant arrival in Italy for the Giro di Lombardia. With not nearly enough kilometers in our legs and no real knowledge of what lay in front of us, we started our ride from Berlin to Milan. We arrived in Milan successfully but not to our original route and hopes. Such is the battle on the bike, and why

I think with the greater difficulty, the greater enjoyment. It was an amazing trip, and one that has cemented my love for this passion and sport in my soul.

Day 1: Berlin to Magdeburg

The winter was already quick to arrive to arrive in Berlin. With a moderate (meaning 170km) opening day, we set off early and were abruptly met with routing problems that would persist the whole trip. A wet and cold morning departure at just after sunrise, it was the lack of experience which made it the most difficult. We had to work through the first day and learn what worked the best for the rain and cold temperatures that were present throughout Germany. With myself only having one flat, we made it to Magdeburg in decent time, arriving well before nightfall and enjoying what felt to be a "gourmet" meal in a gas station near the Formule 1 Motel (where the rooms are glorified jail cells, but by far the cheapest option in travelling). It was the first day, and enjoyable with fresh legs, of what we were to experience for the next 10. I knew this would be an adventure.

Day 2: Magdeburg to Hannover

We would wash our kits every night and dry them on the heaters in our room. Being the newbie I was, only half of all my items were dry in the morning. From that point on, I knew this may not be the most enjoyable of days. Besides being wet on my left side, my body was also screaming at me. There is no way to properly prepare yourself for the aches of riding for eight hours a day. While my legs were heavy, but relatively okay, my back, neck, and crotch were all aiming to make it as unbearable as possible to continue. Already being damp, we left the "Jail" in a mist of water from above and mud from below. While traveling across Magdeburg, I received my second flat, and spent some time getting as filthy as possible changing the tube. Luckily, this was the worst of it for that day.

Day 3: Hannover to Lette

Our GPS was not trying to make this trip any easier for us. Constant routing problems meant taking stabs in the dark at directions and hopes of not losing too much time while it determined the route. We set off after finally getting a partial route, only to have Garrett flat before we even left Hannover. By the time we hit the road, it was already mid-day and we knew we had some efforts in front of us to make it to our destination. The riding was beautiful that day, and we hit our first small climbs of the trip, which also felt great since it meant getting out of the saddle. As night started to fall, we realized we were not going to make our

final destination. We rode for about an hour in pitch black fields at a sprinting pace to try and cover as much ground as possible, and constantly hitting the light on the GPS to make sure we were on track. Finding ourselves on country roads on an overcast night, we decided to find a hotel.

Day 4: Lette to Mannheim

After the best breakfast we were to have the whole trip (actual eggs and waffles, plus all the condiments!) we set off and found out how the GPS device was trying to make this fun casual ride to Italy into a gruesome devastating epic. I had originally scouted the route via Google Maps, but I had underestimated the detail of the GPS device and how it decided our routes. We found out that we had been going West a lot longer than needed and continued to do so as we finally made it into Dortmund a little after mid day. What I expected to take no more than an hour, took us four. And while I loved riding the small back roads we were guided on, I was dreading getting stuck in the middle of the German countryside for another night. After finally making it to Dortmund, we found another Formule 1 in Mannheim and opted to catch a commuter train towards the city and ride to our next "jail" cell. Finally getting out of our kits and clean, we ordered a delicious greasy pizza and two large Cokes to knock us out.

Day 5: Mannheim to Strasbourg

By far the most annoying day of the whole trip. From the

start of the day we encountered problems with the GPS. We set off in the direction of our destination in Luxembourg while the GPS was deciding the route. After 40km and no route, we paused to find out where we were in fact going. From what was said to be a 80km direct route to our destination, only came up as a 220km route on the bike, an impossible distance for the daylight we had. With Garrett suffering from what seemed like the flu, we went to the nearest train station to get out of the cold, and went to Strasbourg to get some rest and a day to recuperate.

Day 6: Strasbourg

We spent the day in Strasbourg to have one rest day before we started heading uphill. We ate, napped, and enjoyed the warmer, friendlier French culture. It was a warm welcome and the farther south we went, the more open and inviting the people were. Suffering all day on a bike, in the wet cold weather, makes it difficult to be all smiles and even more difficult when it feels as if you are being glared at as if you were some spandex clad foreign invader.

Day 7: Strasbourg to Mulhouse

A perfect day on the bike. The weather warmed up enough in the morning to be the first day without leg warmers, which my very white legs were thankful for. Garrett, though feeling better was still not 100%, so I spent most of the day in the front pulling and practicing my Cancellara TT efforts. It was a beautiful ride through the French countryside with little traffic



and empty roads. We made it in early to Mulhouse and got some food at the nearby Super Market Place. Sat outside drinking coffee and enjoying the warm weather in the late afternoon. This is how it was supposed to be.

Day 8: Mulhouse to Zurich

Where the weather was perfect the day before, this morning started off in a chilling fog. Plenty damp, and wearing every layer I had was not enough to keep the cold out. After we hit Basel the sun greeted us, and rode right into Switzerland and on to Zurich. We arrived to find our lovely hotel right in the middle of Zurich's Red Light District. Fun place, though it seemed that anyone under 40 was not a regular customer in the area, and you better take that wallet from the back pocket and put it in the front. Another Sunday with everything closed, we had to settle on Subway, which was not going to suffice two avid riders' hunger. After stocking up at the train station on plenty of snacks, we hit the hotel and left the "girls" to their streets.

Day 9: Zurich to Disentis

This was the day. We knew we were on the first steps of the Alps, but had no idea what was waiting for us. We got a quick taste as we climbed out of Zurich, then dropped into an amazing area that had a few more climbs, and some of the most beautiful glassy lakes I had ever seen. We rode along roads that were carved into the rock mountainside and simply smiled at each other, knowing this is what this trip was all about; riding in postcard locales. We stopped for lunch at a market, ate in the parking lot, and jokingly stated that the scenery was just okay. But in reality, we both know our home of Northern California has amazing riding, but nothing compares to what we experienced that day. After finding our way to Oberalppass, we dropped just after sunset into darkness and arrived in Disentis.

Day 10: Disentis to Milan

We left early, feeling the pains of the previous day's climbing in our legs and hoping that this day would be more descending than ascending. We dropped from Disentis immediately and then were immediately greeted by another climb that would eventually take us up to San Gottardo Pass and about the same elevation as the day before. Perfect climbing. After cresting San Gottardo pass, we found what was the descent of a lifetime. Forty-five kilometers downhill which took almost an hour of tight corners and sprints. Never have I gone downhill for so long. That day we finally made it to Italy and took a commuter train to Solbiate Oleano to meet our friend from Cinelli, Fabrizio Aghito. We had finally made it to Italy.

Day 11-14: Milano

Our friends from Cinelli were the most gracious hosts and showed Garrett and I so much cycling history in such a short time. After one day in Milano at Cinelli, and visiting Masi at Vigoreli, we made a ride out to Lecco, and then up to La Madonna di Ghisallo. Truly a highlight of this trip and of my time on a bike, it is impossible to discuss the sense of history and camaraderie in words. The true sanctuary for all cyclists. The following day we rode to the Giro di Lombardia with Fabrizio and we were both in shock of seeing our favorite pros up close. An excitement and anxiety of seeing people you idolize, which I have not felt



in years. We watched Cunego summit the Caviglio and then drop to what was an insanely tight and technical descent to take his third win. After all the riders and team cars had passed we followed the route and dropped in behind on the closed roads and Garrett and I shared our own sprint to the finish of what was the race course and our trip.

The importance and impact of such trips are something that is hard to realize in words. While trying to reflect the fun and enjoyment that was had, it is impossible to ignore the significance of the experience. It would be trite to put into words the thoughts that flow through your

head day after day on the bike, or the love of cycling and appreciation for those who have made the sport what it is at the Ghisallo. It was the first time I felt I could call myself a "cyclist" with any sincerity. I appreciate everything that is there and everything we experienced, and thanks to those that made the trip so memorable. [R]

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