

PMVC Spring Training, Italy, March 2011

PMVC held its 2011 European Spring Training camp March 5-9 in Verona and San Vincenzo, Italy. This time, the program included participation in the [Granfondo Val di Cecina](#). When the organizers unveiled their plan, PMVC President-For-Life-And-Near-Death, Oscar Swan, reportedly uttered the words: "Spring Training? My foot!" This effectively put an end to any possible participation from the Pittsburgh contingent of the club. While Eric and Steve headed out for some riding in Death Valley, CA, Dusty decided to keep his powder dry until the summer, and Vishal realized that, not having located the photos of his previous European cycling trip, there was no way he could undertake a new expedition already. Present, therefore, were just the members of PMVC-Europe, Michele and Ruud. They started their short week of playing hooky with their respective departments with a pleasant warm-up ride in Verona (44 miles). Riding out of town there was a surprise meeting with Michele's friend Adelio. When you go on a ride in Verona, there are usually chance meetings with friends; it's just that kind of a town. Having reached Valpolicella the three men met up with a small team-Zen contingent, led, fortuitously, by their idol, Erica Venturini, and also consisting of Erica's long-time teammate Alberto and her friend Noemi. Michele and Ruud peeled off in the Lake Garda town of Bardolino as they had their Granfondo to look forward to the next day. All they needed was a coffee ride, which is why on the way back to Verona they stopped for coffee and pastry, and we mean good pastry. A four hour drive next got the two riders across the Apennine mountains and into sunny Tuscany, where the temperature was in the low teens--centigrade. Race numbers, electronic chips, and bag with pretty useless swag were easily located upon arrival in Cecina, and we realized that the next morning our place at the starting line would not really be there, but at the very back of the pack of 2000+ participants. When they fired the starting pistol the next morning at the kind hour of 10 am, we were too far away to hear it, and once the pack starting moving it took us about five minutes actually to cross the starting line. After that, things moved more quickly. Michele accelerated as if the finish was just around the corner, with Ruud, a notorious slow-starter, thinking he'd probably see him again soon. This was both an accurate and an incomplete forecast, because after passing Michele on the first climb, Ruud proceeded to drop his chain, which forced him to dismount (he was grateful not to have to hear Oscar laugh at him, the way Oscar likes to do at bottom of the climb to Natrona Heights), and so Michele got ahead again, and Ruud got to chase and catch up a second time. For a moment Ruud thought that Michele's progress in the past year under Erica's tutelage might be such that they could attack the rest of the Granfondo together, but that too turned out to be inaccurate. By his own account, confirmed by his finishing time, Michele's legs began to feel pretty good around the half-way mark of this [87.7 km course](#), but on the first hill they were average. When Ruud looked back just before the top, Michele was nowhere in sight. Having traveled all the way from Amsterdam, Ruud decided he should do his best then on his own, in spite of the early date (March 6) and the fact that last time he had done any hill climbing was the previous September. It turned into a kind of race, where you could pass lots of people on a climb and then, on downhill and flatter sections, get sucked along by one group or another to the next climb where you could resume dropping people, on your way to the next, usually stronger, group. In the second half of the race this draft-and-flutter approach got me in an ambitious group that also took the downhills very seriously, and at a speed I would never choose on my own. We did some hairy turns together. They must have wondered what the idiot with the fender was doing among them.

Based on my experiences last year, I had brought a clip-on fender with me from Holland which, given that it had rained early in the morning and possibly could again, I had actually attached to the seat post of the good old aluminum Nikor Michele had once again graciously made available to me. I did not see any other Dutchmen, and neither did I see anyone else with a clip-on fender. I got through it all, finishing in a time of about 2:32, twenty minutes behind the winner of this [short course race](#) (the long course would have added 40 kilometers and some more serious climbing--too much for us at this early date, we had wisely decided). For some reason my name is not in the official results, but it was 12:37 pm when I finished, and at the start we had waited at least five minutes before letting our chip make the thing at the starting line beep. Michele, whose name can be found in the official results, finished about 15 minutes later, in 680th place, 24th in his age category. A time of 2:32 would put me around place 330, 20-25th in my age group. We were tired, and my back tightened up faster than it has ever done at the end of a race or ride. I could barely walk, and worried about the rest of training camp. We still had three days to go, after all, presumably amid the fearsome Grezzana boys (of the town by the same name, to the northeast of Verona). But unlike last year and contrary to what they had promised, the Grezzana boys did not show up, and neither did any other strong riders of our own age. For the riding this was good, as our legs really never recovered from the Granfondo effort. The Grezzana guys, had they been there, would have had their way with us. For the culinary part of training camp (or maybe we should just say: the part where we got fed), the absence of good people to ride with was outright unfortunate. The people (and their wives) we found ourselves sitting with every breakfast, lunch, and dinner (for a total of more than three hours a day) did not ride with us beyond the first warm-up miles. They were as lifeless at the dinner table as they were unambitious and incapable on the bike. We didn't share experiences, banter, stories, or much else. Michele kept assuring me that here it was actually a good thing that I did not know Italian. And then it got crazy. Suddenly one night we found ourselves thinking of Eric and his Blackberry. And then it got even weirder: we missed it! During these three days (63, 66, and 57 miles respectively), we rode many very quiet and very pretty roads, occasionally leading through small towns and frequently offering up spectacular vistas. Some climbing, some downhill riding, most of it very pleasant--as one might picture Tuscany (but without the warm weather--temperatures didn't get out of the 40s after Granfondo Sunday). Another way to imagine this would be to think of Lardintown Rd, but without the junk yard. Special mention should be made of the spectacular little road we explored on the last day. We had bypassed it last year, but it was well worth doing. It reminded us a little of the Milis-Paulilatino road on Sardinia, except that for this one we happily used our lightest gear (34x25). In it, we still had to stand and pull hard on our handlebars in order to keep going. It went up and up and up for about four kilometers, in stages alternating between fairly and very steep, there was no traffic, and the views kept getting better. The silence was probably the best part of it. Put it on your list, if you're ever in the area, the name is: [Montebamboli](#), about 25 km due east of San Vincezo. If you click on the link, you'll see that there's a very nice-looking guest house there. Maybe that's where we'll stay next year. Plenty of room, everyone invited; we'll do our own cooking.

Submitted respectfully to all,

Ruud