

PMVC-Europe March 2015

Michele Crashes His Car¹ Marcella² Saves Spring Training

Overcommitted at work during the "spring" 2015 semester, both members of PMVC-Europe nonetheless scheduled their always-hoped-for-but-too-infrequently-realized Spring Training in Tuscany for late March. Because if you don't schedule things, they certainly won't happen. (This could serve as exhortation, but this year we decided that we were not going to talk about Sardinia).

The time was the final days of March--because that was when the Verona contingent, led by Il Presidente and good friend of ours, Carlo,³ would camp out at the Riva degli Etruschi resort just south of San Vincenzo (42 Euros a day; fine rooms; three meals, spaced out evenly across the day). Other than the excellent roads, the group (and the group rate) is the incentive to go--not the wine, and certainly not the coffee. Although this year, on two of our three days we either rode alone or as a pair, and on the remaining one our company consisted of just two other riders.⁴

On Wednesday March 25, Ruud flew to Verona by way of Paris (March is too early in the year for direct flights from Amsterdam), and next took the right bus the wrong way--*away* from the downtown square where Michele lives. He got to see all kinds of Verona neighborhoods at rush hour,⁵ eventually to return where he started: the Verona train station. He then decided to get off, where he could have stayed put, because at this time the bus embarked on the downtown portion of its route. This Ruud realized as he watched the bus disappear in the direction he was now walking. But walking is the way to go anyway. It only takes fifteen minutes, and so it served Ruud right to have wasted a good Euro-and-a-half on an annoying, half-hour bus ride. The only good thing about the excursion was that it kept him off the streets while Michele was making his way home late. In the end, the riders got to the house at virtually the same time.

The first bit of news there, for Ruud, was that he would have to undertake the traditional Verona-area warm-up ride alone the next morning, because Michele was expected at his university one more time, so the story went, to fulfill his teaching responsibilities. (At least this time Ruud was spared the indignity of having to listen to another "important Skype-conference" story). The second bit of news concerned our

¹ not pictured

² not pictured either

³ pictured, below

⁴ not pictured, though mentioned below

⁵ there was more than enough time, and yet: no picture

transportation to Tuscany: it had disappeared in a recent collision involving Michele, his car, and another car. Although he blamed a low-hanging sun, Michele had been forced to take responsibility. His car disappeared into some shop. There was, of course, no way of telling when the many different parts would be in and the repairs finished. On both of these news items, Marcella became the undisputed heroine of the week. Not only did she leave Ruud her keys the next morning so that he could go for his ride and get back into the house, she also offered the men her car for their trip. This, of course, was good for us; for her, it meant that for almost four days she would have to make do without a car, meaning, among other things, no weekend trip to the mountains for some end-of-season skiing. As if this wasn't enough, while we were discussing all of this, she also made us dinner.

Ruud's warm-up ride didn't happen because of rain, but by four o'clock on Thursday, PMVC-Europe was on its way to San Vincenzo, where they arrived a little after eight to a dining room packed to the gills. There was a cheerful reunion with the Grezzana boys (the same who in 2012 had presented Ruud with one of their dinner jackets, which he was now wearing).⁶ We noticed our old friends had not brought their habitual box of Verona-area wine, and so we joined another table. Carlo came over and introduced me to another Dutchman present who, according to his business card, goes through life as a "trip master."

Being in charge of our own trips usually, we nonetheless started our ride with the other Dutchman the next morning, along with many Italians. There were so many, actually, that Michele and I lost sight of each other and ended up in different groups, riding different routes. I only stuck with my group for a few kilometers, because my companions did not seem so interested in a serious ride. Or maybe they were worried about the rain clouds approaching from the north. As I continued on my own, it did start to rain. However, I had come to ride, and for weeks I had been thinking about returning to my favorite hill in the area: Montebamboli. And so that's where I headed. I got wet, the bike got dirty, but having spent the winter in chilly, damp Holland, this 12-degree rain wasn't so bad. Besides, I realized that as I rode there Oscar was likely dragging himself in and out of one damp Portugese church after another. Compared to that, how bad could a little rain really be? As I began the climb, the rain actually stopped, and save for a brief shower later on, it did not return. I have raved about Montebamboli in earlier reports, and this time too, it fully lived up to its billing: good climbing, beautiful views, virtually no traffic. After descending toward Massa Maritima, I turned right, then right again toward Montioni, then another right, and eventually a left toward the climb up to Sassetta. Down on the other side through Castagneto Carducci, "the Eric Shaffer vacation town"; a brief detour to the turn to Bolgheri, where we had once seen Marianne Vos and her teammates--no such luck this time; and from there a quick 15k back to San Vincenzo. My feet stayed wet all morning, and I also had to fix a flat, but on the whole this first ride (101 kilometers) was very satisfying. Michele, it turned out, had also left his group behind and done a useful solo ride of about 90 kilometers. At a tearful reunion at the room, we vowed never to be separated ever again.

There followed a very busy afternoon. In addition to the mandatory intellectual activity after lunch, we had to go to town for a variety of chores. Not only did we need to replace my spare tube, we also had to get something nice for our chains:

⁶ please use the search-engine of the PMVC website to locate the report on the 2012 Spring Training trip; see also below, p. 7



some more items to occupy our brains:



and eventually also something one could (but I won't) categorize under ill-gotten gains:



At some point that same afternoon, Michele received a call from his friend Gianni, present somewhere in the Verona crowd, who wanted to ride with us the next day. He would bring his friend Francesco, and they already had a route in mind. This made it easy to turn down the Dutch trip master, who at dinner approached us with very long and convoluted proposal for Saturday, aimed at riding 200 kilometers. We weren't going to do that anyway, but now we had an actual alternative plan.

With Gianni and Francesco, we had an excellent day (it included a quick coffee stop in Monteverdi Marittima), although it was better for Francesco, Gianni, and me than for Michele. Michele fell far behind on the first climb of the day (Suvereto to Sassetta), which he blamed on too much breakfast. On this day, he also claimed that due to too much work, he had not been on the bike since averaging a ridiculous 36 k/h in the 132-kilometer Granfondo of the Po Valley on March 1. To us, it seemed the perfect way to taper for a couple of days of truth in Tuscany, but Michele preferred to see his glass, though not his stomach, as half-empty. And he pointed up his stamina in these adverse conditions. He even considered calling his Team Butty president and hero (other than Oscar), Remigio Alba⁷ and tell him of his feat. Here you see an image of Carlo talking Michele out of this silly plan:



⁷ see the 2013 spring report [actually summer report] from France and Italy on this site

In the afternoon, there was more intellectual activity, this time at the beach:



Our third and final day was Sunday. Most of the Verona contingent had left town, and so together Michele and I headed north to what have to be the prettiest roads we know there: Bolgheri, Bibbona, Casale Marittimo. Right, and then south through the valley toward Canneto. It was sunny, there was little wind, and an hour into the ride the arm warmers could come off and there was no need any more for the gilette. (I rode in shorts every day, the first time since October). There were lots of locals out for their Sunday ride, and on the way to Canneto we thought we had found a couple of good ones. They certainly were setting a good pace, and it appeared we were headed for an interesting showdown on the last couple of uphill kilometers into Canneto. But that's where our companions suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. Fine, then we'll ride up alone and pause in town to top off our bottles:



The climb to Canneto made us very unambitious for what remained of our ride--it doesn't take too much in March to make you tired. Not having seen a hill since the previous September, I certainly felt I had gotten my money's worth, and for both of us it had been a long time since we did three consecutive 100-kilometer days. What worried us after lunch was that instead of intellectual activity, there would be the four-hour drive back to Verona, and our worries increased when the coffee bar at our usual gas station outside of San Vincenzo (the only stop Michele will agree to) was closed. But we had a lot to discuss; got very excited when, driving past Florence, we spotted the Duomo; and so made it back to Verona feeling fairly alert. Dinner was at Pizzeria Saval da Mario--the PMVC Verona clubhouse, where you order large beers and share an appetizer margherita pizza before eating your own, main course pizza (usually with arugula--or, as we say here: rucola--on top).⁸ Fortunately, Marcella joined us, and we could not stop talking about how grateful we were to her--until she kindly but firmly told us to.

Submitted, April 2015
Ruud

Approved, also April 2015
Michele

⁸ we'll be sure to get pictures next time