

We came, We saw, We Collied!

By Nadine O'Connor

A team of enthusiastic cyclists as part of the 2007 Bike Force Tour of Italy included the famous Nove Colli mass participation ride into their itinerary and along the way raise money for cancer research.

The idea of completing the Nove Colli ride as a fundraising event for cancer research was born in 2006 after a group of friends were cycling in Italy with Karilyn whose partner Mark Hartmann had died from cancer 5 months earlier. Mark was an avid cyclist who passed away at 40 years of age after being diagnosed at 39 with Oesophageal cancer. The Nove Colli ride was on the 20th of May 2007, two days before what would have been Mark's 41st birthday.

The Tour de Italy 2007 provided the touring 16 from Bike Force with yet another memorable mountain experience. Headed by Bill Gordin of Bike Force Subiaco, no Perth hill was left un-ridden while completing a solid three-month preparation of climbs and surrounding coffee shop stops!

Touching down in Italy our first stop took us to the beautiful Tuscany region of Massa Marittima. These climbs provided the induction for most new-comers in preparation for the annual 37th Nove Colli, where it quickly became apparent .. there were no hills in Italy, just long steep mountains!

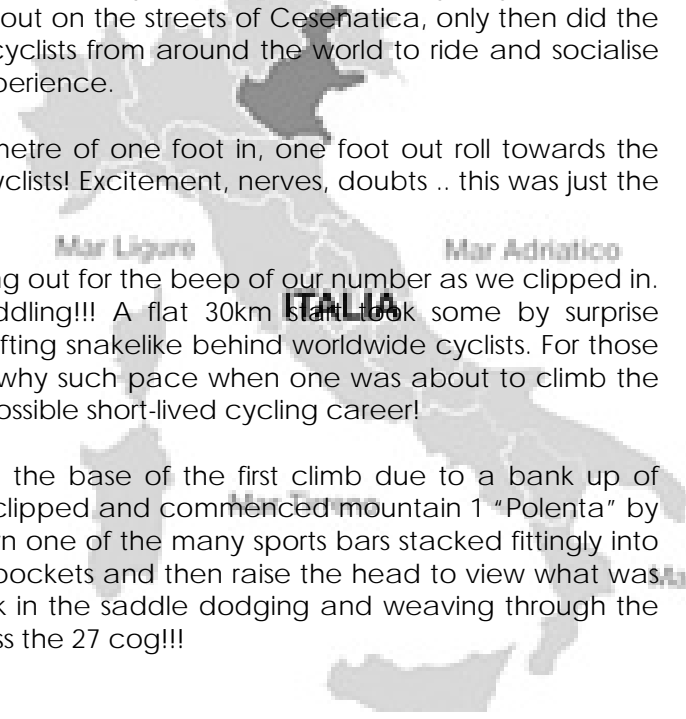
Cesenatica, our second stop became the destination for those making the start line of the Nove Colli. Nine mountains over a 206km distance or four mountains over a 135km distance, saw entry of 14 of the 16 tour participants.

A 4am breakfast call kick started what could only be deemed as a crazy way to work up a Sunday thirst. As we made our way out on the streets of Cesenatica, only then did the status of this event hit home. 11,000 cyclists from around the world to ride and socialise with was going to be a truly global experience.

At 6.30 most endured at least a kilometre of one foot in, one foot out roll towards the start line in amongst groups of 4000 cyclists! Excitement, nerves, doubts .. this was just the beginning!

Finally we crossed the start line, listening out for the beep of our number as we clipped in. It was time to do some serious peddling!!! A flat 30km start took some by surprise averaging speeds in the high 40's drafting snakelike behind worldwide cyclists. For those first-timers, the question surly loomed why such pace when one was about to climb the biggest and steepest lumps in one's possible short-lived cycling career!

A well earned rest awarded most at the base of the first climb due to a bank up of several thousand cyclists who had unclipped and commenced mountain 1 "Polenta" by foot! Time to suck in the scenery, down one of the many sports bars stacked fittingly into the back of each of the three jersey pockets and then raise the head to view what was to come. Minutes later we were back in the saddle dodging and weaving through the packs at a comfortable spin. God bless the 27 cog!!!





Climbs 2, "Pieve di Rivoschio" and 3, "Ciola" went by in much the same fashion, minus the pit stops as the field had well and truly spread and settled in for the days outing! Magnificent hills rolled by as we took in such incredible scenery and the never-ending procession of cyclists making their way up or down the mountainsides.

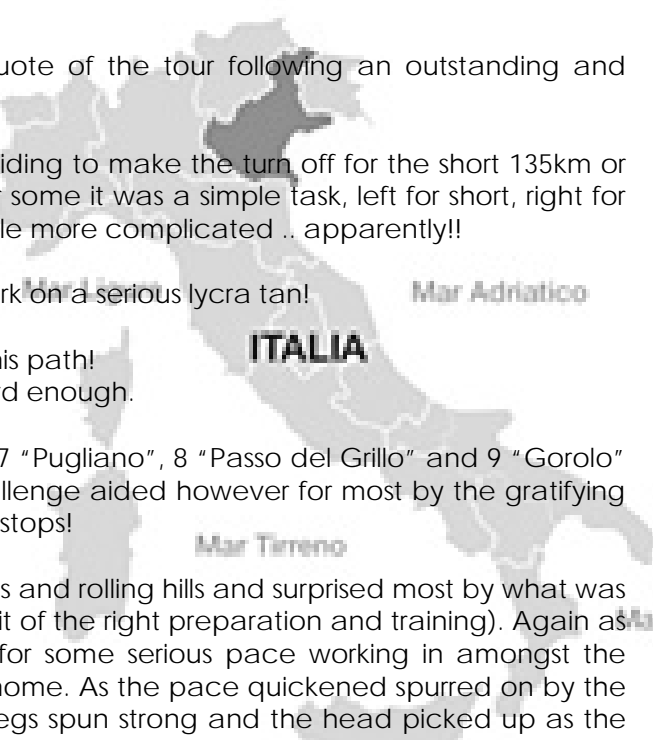
Prior warning was kindly received as to what awaited us next. Mountain 4 "Barbotto" which at 5km in length and a maximum gradient of 18% and a minimum of 12% was the steepest of all the climbs and the hill most feared. With the gear ratio at rock bottom, we started to climb and climbed and climbed! OMG – You know you had reached 18% when you felt you were going to fall off backwards!

As nasty as this climb appeared, it was well and truly matched kilometre for kilometre for entertainment. With the locals lining the streets at the steepest points campaigning for your survival to the top, the pain barrier was marred against the cheering and support. And when you're a female in Italy you sometimes get that little something extra .. and mine came by way of a big push at just the right time to get me to the top. This climb was an achievement in itself.

"We spit on Balbotta", became the quote of the tour following an outstanding and rewarding ride by Michael O'Donahue.

It was at this quite timely stage that deciding to make the turn off for the short 135km or long 206km course had to be made. For some it was a simple task, left for short, right for long, for others though, the decision a little more complicated .. apparently!!

For me ... I chose right and was off to work on a serious lycra tan!
 For one ... www!
 For another ... a crash had determined his path!
 For most ... either direction proved reward enough.



Mountains 5 "Monte Tiffi", 6 "Perticara", 7 "Pugliano", 8 "Passo del Grillo" and 9 "Gorolo" proved both a mental and physical challenge aided however for most by the gratifying food and beverage stop(s) and/or toilet stops!

The final 30km journey encompassed flats and rolling hills and surprised most by what was left in the tank (a combination and credit of the right preparation and training). Again as per the start, the final distance made for some serious pace working in amongst the many nationalities of cyclists to just get home. As the pace quickened spurred on by the actual realisation of achievement, the legs spun strong and the head picked up as the distance reduced kilometre by kilometre.

Turning onto the finishing strip where the atmosphere was electric, one even managed a sprint to the finish line (a cheeky effort for 4 seconds!). Whatever the distance, this riding experience in perfect conditions via the most scenic countryside and awe-inspiring atmosphere took place in a country where "cycling is a religion". Does it get any better?

Perhaps not .. however to be presented with the 'Nove Colli General Classification' trophy awarded to the group with the highest number of participants classified in both routes comes close!

Congratulations Bike Force Tour de Italy 2007 participants:

Bill Gordin
Matt Gordin
Ian Gilfillan
Wayne Litchfield
Mike O'Donohoe
Frans Buissink
Ross Stevens
Gary Bell
Scott Sawyer
Craig Ferrier
Ross Scott
Louise Hurst
Tanya Johnstone
Karilyn Farmer
Kylie Colum
Nadine O'Connor

See you 2008 ... Dolomites?!!

