

## Spring Training PMVC-Europe, 2012: Verona & Tuscany

Despite some doubts stemming from a dismal lunch and dinner situation in 2011, PMVC-Europe undertook its third consecutive Spring Training expedition to Tuscany in March. No longer interested in epic coffee rides in early March snow storms (2010--no report available), they and their Verona-area companions had chosen the middle of the month for their trip. On both counts--meal companionship and riding weather--the men met with success. Subordinate aspects such as beach experience, celebrity sightings, and sightseeing worked out very well also. Strangely, both Michele and Ruud planned very poorly for the important, post-ride intellectual activity, with both of them bringing actual work under the delusional expectation that they would actually do some. New this year was that Ruud not only rode Michele's material but also purchased some of it, in the form of a beautiful, allegedly lightly-used, all-carbon Nikor frame.

On Friday, March 16, Ruud traveled to Verona by way of Paris, carrying only shorts and short-sleeved jerseys in his backpack while Michele took the train from Padua, wearing a band-aid around his thumb--the



result of a cooking mishap. They met in beautiful spring weather at the Verona train station where Michele took his beater bike home and Ruud eventually boarded bus no. 21 in the same general direction. The admired but elusive Erica being committed to a big training ride with her new team, the two embarked on their own warm-up ride the next morning. After a quick Erica-sighting on the way out of town ("Ciao Ruud!") they immediately set a new record, stopping after only six miles for pastry and coffee at their regular stop (usually on the way home): the bakery in Bussolengo. You don't get coffee there; for that you go to the coffee place a few blocks down (where you do not touch the pastries). They saw Lake Garda and Bardolino, and they saw a good part of the course where Michele does his regular road racing these days. Ruud was envious. This got worse when instead of heading home, they decided to take advantage of the warm and sunny conditions and add three beautiful climbs in Valpolicella. The fact that this was not only the first time on a hill but also the first ride in shorts and short sleeves immediately made this the ride of the year for the rider of PMVC-Holland. After a tasty lunch of horse meat stakes and salad, the drive to San Vincenzo, Tuscany, by way of Bologna and Florence was uneventful, except for the stop near Livorno to watch the final hour of Milan-San Remo in a low-atmosphere road side restaurant. Numerous people entered the establishment during this hour, but nobody as much as glanced at the tv screen.

The group for the first ride on Sunday wasn't particularly large or strong, but it did contain the good old [Grezzana](#) boys, which also meant that there would be wine during lunch and dinner (one of them being an employee at a Verona-area cantina where they bottle locally-produced wines). For about two-thirds Michele and Ruud followed the lead of Michele's friend and mechanic, Carlo, but eventually they did the climb to Sassetto alone, also finding their own way home by way of the friendly downhill to Suvereto and the pretty little climb to Campiglia Marittima. Michele said they did 100 kilometers, Ruud wrote down 63 miles. Recognizing the error of their intellectual ways, they hurried into town after lunch in search of non-work-related reading materials. Michele found an entertaining mystery/crime novel, Ruud was relieved to find some German and English language weekend papers. New people at dinner that night forecast a bigger and stronger group for Monday and immediately provided relief from the all too interesting conversation of the non-cycling wives.

The next morning, Carlo led the group north, to the rolling section between Bolgheri and Bibbona where Ruud likes to put in a little acceleration because the up-and-down there makes it so much fun. New guy Guido joined him up front, riding a very fancy, all-black Cervelo. But Guido looked sharp anyhow. According to Michele, Ruud was stronger, but in the accelerations they did together ahead of the others all week, Ruud could

discover no weakness in his partner and once or twice was happy just to finish a climb on Guido's wheel. The Monday ride actually brought some rain, right when the group rode through La California, Paolo Bettini's hometown. It was dry again in the beautiful small hill-top towns of Montescudaio, Guardistallo, Casale Marittimo (coffee stop), and again Bibbona. Then the Ruud section in reverse, the cypress trees of Bolgheri, and single-file toward Castagneto Carducci where, on the way out, they had spotted a Rabo team set-up. It turned out to be the women's team, including phenomenon and living legend at age 23, [Marianne Vos](#). Ruud went over to chat, but Marianne was not interested. With a friendly but remote hello, she rolled out of the parking lot on her time-trial bike, leaving the other young women (from Holland, Belgium, Australia, and Germany) to deal with the visitors. In the afternoon, Ruud tried to overcome his disappointment, sitting at the beach, staring out over the Mediterranean. Michele eventually found him there and took him to Carlo's cabin for some cookies, which made Ruud feel a little better.

For Tuesday, Ruud had invited everyone to join him on the best hill of the area, Montebambilo (see last year's report), and could hardly contain his excitement. Thinking he was leading the 25 rider group through downtown Venturina at 35k/h, he only found Michele on his wheel, the others having turned off early, probably after letting the two PMVC aces go. Eventually, the two European Pittsburghers spotted the group again, a kilometer up the road. There followed a little chase which ended shortly before the turn-off to Montebambilo. Nobody joined them, and the rest of the day, Michele and Ruud happily rode together in the secure knowledge that they made the better choice. The only disappointment was Michele's refusal to take any pulls on account of some upcoming little race. The afternoon sightseeing trip of the week led to [Piombino](#)--the Pittsburgh of Tuscany. It is where you take the boat to Elba. Piombino has hills, a steel plant, lots of water around, and at the very tip a kind-of Point State Park. The men did not use up the 75 minutes of parking time purchased, because after locating some gelato and some cake, there remained nothing for them to do there.

Tuesday was the best ride of the week, but Wednesday brought the high point, even though it was leaving day. After having been bothered by Michele all week for one of their cool white zippered leisure vests (he promised to teach a class wearing it), the Grezzana boys announced during the PMVC farewell lunch that they would indeed hand over a vest, but to Ruud. Ruud's Italian not being what it could be, he thinks it's because of all the work he did at the front of the group all week, but it could also be because they just don't think Michele is Grezzana material. Anyone taking one look at the photo (below) will agree that the American Dutchman certainly is. The ride took the now even larger group (some thirty men and women) up from Suvereto to Sassetta, then on to Canneto, and from there ("new road!") in the direction of Serrazzano. After the climb out of Canneto--one final acceleration with Guido--Michele and Ruud joined the short route group, with Ruud, alone and perfectly happy, doing one more climb up to Campiglia Marittima.

Back in Verona, in between packing up the Nikor frame and taping up the package to make it small enough not to incur extra charges at the airport ("it's bike parts, not a bike--do you see any wheels?") there was a final dinner at one of Verona's traditional restaurants: [Il Torcolo](#). Beautiful place, great food, and perfect company (Marcella joined us). Until further notice, this will be the new PMVC Verona clubhouse. Mileage for the week, respectively and consecutively: 48, 63, 54, 66, 63.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruud