

GF Stelvio

An Epic Challenge for



Kenneth BOURQUE, Lieutenant Colonel/OF-4/USA AF, IMR Branch Staffing and SWM Section Staff Officer

Every so often members of the SHAPE International Cycling Club (SICC) seek new challenges and variety outside the normal day to day routes that we have here within our host nation of Belgium.

Many of our rides within and between Wallonia and Flanders are characterized by short punchy hills and famous cobbled roads often combined with head winds and unpredictable weather that made Belgian cyclists such as the great Eddy Merckx famous for his ability to suffer harder and longer than his rival competitors.

SICC's location within the heart of the European Union allows its international members the ability to experience other great routes and cycling events the likes of which are unique to specific regions of Europe and in many examples only a day's drive from SHAPE. One such proposal came to the mind of SICC President Pino Rampini to ride the annual Gran Fondo Stelvio Santini hosted every summer by the historic mountain town of Bormio, a well-known winter sports resort nestled within the Alps of northern Italy.

"Gran Fondo" is actually a term invented in Italy and used universally to describe a type of professionally organized cycling event that is attended primarily by amateur cyclists in order to foster competition, camaraderie and the achievement of personal goals. Gran Fondos are known for taking place among the most scenic routes universally known to experienced cyclists

while including staffed rest stops with mechanical support to compliment the challenge and enthusiasm of those in attendance. Stelvio is certainly among the most scenic if not the most difficult to complete and it was this challenged that sparked our interest.

Pino (ITA), 61, along with fellow SICC members Simone Mastagni (ITA), 52, Frederic Quenon (BEL), 51, and Kenneth Bourque (USA), 45, organized a 4 day trip to ride this challenging Gran Fondo on 12 June 2022 which would include participants from 50 other nations.

After an initial very fast 40 kilometre decent the first climb to Teglio has a mild ascent of just under 800 meters, a nice warmup and a good test for the legs giving way to a picturesque route of a gorgeous mountain town with bird's-eye views, bell towers and churches. This year's edition gave the participants the great surprise of a renewed version of the famous Mortirolo climb from the Sernio side along the ridge by Guspessa. A climb that follows the stage that just the following day will be tackled by the participants of the Giro d'Italia under 23, with 1500 meters of altitude difference and an average gradient of 10.5% with some segments at 18% during the last kilometre. The climb was rewarded at the top by 8 km of ups and downs on wide open medium and high landscapes within





the lateral valleys of Valtellina. After descending to the bottom of the valley, an additional 750 meters of elevation separated the cyclists from Bormio and the legendary Stelvio climb.

The "valico dello Stelvio" is the highest pass in Italy. It has a length of 24.1 km, a vertical drop of 1832 meters and an average gradient of 7.6%. The highest point is 2757 meters above sea level."

The Stelvio Pass is most famous for its panoramic road with 48 breathtaking hairpin bends, the Giro d'Italia passed through the Stelvio Pass 9 times and it was the final goal 3 times during its 105 year history. The hardness and length of this climb has earned it the nickname of "Cima Coppi" par excellence: a memorable page of great cycling history has been written on every bend of this climb.

In summary, the weather overall this year was ideal, beginning the day at a cool 10 degrees with sun and very little wind to impede our ride. It is not uncommon to have snow on Stelvio due to the high elevation.

My limits were tested as I suffered through leg cramps just before the top of the very steep sections of Mortirolo which caused concern as the longer Stelvio climb lay ahead.

Thankfully we successfully finished at the top of Stelvio having climbed a total of 4,395 meters with a ride time of around 10 hours. It was an epic end to a fantastic experience as we were rewarded with a finisher's cap and the opportunity by the organizers of the GF to change into a warmer kit in order to comfortably descend back into Bormio.

The pizzas we consumed for dinner were equally epic!

Contact the SICC at: shapecycling@gmail.com or www.shapecycling.com or scanning the new QR:



 **BMW
MOTORRAD**

**EXCLUSIVE
SERVICE FOR
EXCLUSIVE
CUSTOMERS**
BMW MOTORRAD
DIPLOMATIC SALES

Depotter Motorbikes
Chaussée de Bruxelles 375
7822 Meslin-L'Évêque (Ath)
Tél. : 068 26 45 60
info@depottermotorbikes.net.bmw.be
www.depotter-motorbikes.be

