



FERDY KÜBLER AND HUGO KOBLET

Grit and Glamour
from Cycling of another Age

Text by Marco Blaser, Gian Paolo Ormezzano and Sergio Zavoli
With an interview with Ferdy Kübler



ANNEXE
HERMITAGE
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KOBLET

Different lives but the same great triumphs

by Marco Blaser *

I'm a boy of the square. People say that my first cries mingled with the notes of Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz* which the Brass Band of Lugano played, conducted by maestro Dassetto in Piazza della Riforma. Actually, I was born and raised in the old district of Sassello, the streets of vie Pessina, Soave, Petrarca, Luvini, the Cortogna cross-roads and the Town Hall, a type of municipal Buckingham Palace where, one day, another George also blessed with a strong personality would take up office. As a boy I breathed the penetrating aroma of the roasting at the Conza café. For hours I would pause in the doorway of the "Leventinese" artisan ice-cream shop, and then obtain the crumbling pastries that had remained unsold on the elegant counters of the Burri bakery, which is nowadays the premises of the *Banca Popolare di Sondrio*. That was the district where I lived. The rhythm of the day was punctuated by the regular news bulletins from Radio Monteceneri. I too was a child of the "Radio Days" depicted in Manhattan by Woody Allen, while recognising, of course, the different scales of our existence in Lugano. Indelible traces were left in my memory by the announcements given by Mario Casanova on September 1, 1939 of the invasion of Poland by the army of the Third Reich and the Normandy landings by the Allies on June 6, 1944. The arrival of the GIs - as the American soldiers were called - was accompanied by the jazz music played by Glenn Miller's orchestra, a permanent guest in those days of the Anglo-American AFN radio station.

When a peal of bells sounded on May 8, 1945 to herald the end of the war, I developed a notion of working in radio. The suggestions made by the customers of my parents' restaurant that I should go into in the world of banking proved to be in vain. Not even the prospect of taking advantage of my family's experiences in the hotel trade could dampen my enthusiasm for radio broadcasting. The seeds were already sown. The series on Swiss sport narrated by Vico Rigassi, Giuseppe Albertini and Alberto Barberis sealed my choice. In 1950 I went to Locarno to cheer Fritz Schaer, then the wearer of the pink jer-

sey in the Giro, and also salute the surprise victory in the stage of Hugo Koblet, the first foreigner to win the prestigious Italian staged race. In 1951 I went to Val Ganna for the Varese world championships. I sat in the front row to greet Ferdy Kübler, wearing the rainbow jersey, at the home circuit. A couple of years later I took part in a contest for "new voices" and on December 1, 1954 made my debut behind the microphone of the legendary Radio Monteceneri. My father expressed his approval in a rather bitter tone with little conviction, "If you want to be an acrobat, just take a tumble!". A few months later I was sent to follow the Tour de Suisse as a young "sorcerer's apprentice" beside Alberto Barberis and Tiziano Colotti. I was more passionate about cycling than any other sports. The simplicity of the participants and their human relationships fascinated me. Genuine and sincere friendships were born that have stood the test of time. Emilio Croci Torti, Ferdy's "lieutenant", gave me bananas from his supplies day after day to nourish my own growth, while Remo Pianezzi, Hugo Koblet's faithful team-mate, revealed his team's strategies to me. I remember that in a country divided between the supporters of the two Ks my instincts made me incline more towards Kübler, even though talking with Hugo was easier. The striking athlete from Zurich, so powerful and elegant, could already look back on his extraordinary achievements in the Giro and Tour. However, as my career in journalism began, his star was beginning to fade.

Left:
Hugo Koblet at the Tour de France in 1951 in the individual time trial from Aix-les-Bains to Geneva. He won by covering the 97 kilometres of the stage in 2 hours 39 minutes 45 seconds at an average speed of 36.43 km/hour and so took his advantage in the general classification from 9 to 22 minutes. He won the 38th edition of the French race two days before the end.

Right:
RSI's radio commentator, Vico Rigassi.



Top:
The young Koblet, both elegant and impeccable, shown in a detail from a group photo amongst school companions.



Bottom:
Hugo Koblet with his wife at the lap of honour in the Zurich Six Days race. The picture was taken on March 21, 1957, the day of his 32nd birthday.

Hugo Koblet was born in 1925 at number 3, Hildestrasse, in a vast popular district of Zurich. His parents ran a small but esteemed bakery. Hugo, the youngest child, was expected to deliver the bread. He developed his muscles by covering dozens of kilometres every day and soon became one of the most promising pupils of the regional Velo Club. In 1943 he won his first race as an amateur. He turned professional and in 1947 won the first stage of the Tour de Suisse, the Zurich - Siebnen run, ahead of Kübler, Coppi, Bartali and other distinguished champions. He drew attention to himself as a long-distance racing cyclist by winning plaudits from the most astute observers. Göpf Weilenmann, the winner of our Tour de Suisse in 1949, predicted a bright future and brought him to the attention of Learco Guerra, who had just decided to tackle the Holy Year's Giro. Midway though, Koblet, the novice in the demanding staged race, was wearing the pink jersey already worn for some days by Schaer. The Swiss champion gained a place in the hearts of cycling fans owing to his innate elegance and irrepressible athletic powers. The inspired correspondents of the *Gazzetta dello Sport* christened him the "Blond falcon". Handsome, strong, polite, he managed to become the darling of the pink caravan. With the leader's jersey his will and courage multiplied. The withdrawal of Fausto Coppi, the victim of a fall in which he fractured his pelvis, caused difficulties also for Gino Bartali, the most feared rival, who wanted to meet Pius XII with the winner's jersey. However, Hugo, who stroked his pedals with determination, gave no ground away to the Tuscan champion and arrived victorious, at the finishing line at Terme di

Caracalla; he was the first foreigner in history to do so. So it was he instead who was greeted by the Pope and by the celebrating Swiss Guards. To cross the border at Chiasso he donned the pink jersey. That afternoon our schools stayed closed and the town halls were decorated. We learned to appreciate his coquetry: he would freshen up his face and comb his hair neatly before facing the public and the photographers at the end of the contest. He delighted young and old alike but fascinated women in particular. Parisian journalists called him the *pédaleur de charme*.

His name was consecrated in 1951 on the trans-Alpine roads with a significant victory in the Tour. A long series of impressive performances followed. In 1952 Koblet went to Mexico. His ingenuousness and inability to turn down invitations induced him to take part in a curious handicap race invented by a group of unusual entrepreneurs. The adventure was shrouded by a mysterious secret that would change his life. When he returned to Europe, friends and team companions noticed that the Mexican trip had undermined his health. Sudden, strange pains made it difficult for him to breathe freely. Once he passed above 2,000 metres, a tightening in the throat would cause him to pant painfully.

In 1953 he came back to the Giro d'Italia as a genuine front-runner. He was considered among the favourites for the final victory. He reached Bolzano wearing the pink jersey, behind Coppi, who won the stage. That day Mario Ferretti began his report by uttering



the unforgettable words in the microphones of RAI: “Just one man in command, his jersey is blue and white and his name is Fausto Coppi...!”. It was said that the victory formed part of a mutual pact: “Today I’ll win the stage and tomorrow you’ll win the Giro!” However, the next day, on the punishing hairpin bends of the Stelvio Pass, Koblet’s problems recurred and Coppi was obliged by his team leaders not to heed the presumed pact and to go on to win at Bormio and so win that tormented edition of the Giro. The Southern Tyrol, the mountain air of the Valtellina with the Stelvio Pass and the Engadin, with the Bernina, played an important role in Hugo’s career. At the Tour de France, his heart and breathing began to bother the Swiss champion again, who was already used to suffering. His career continued amidst highs and lows. Generous and chivalrous, in 1954 he backed up his “lieutenant”, Carlo Clerici, who won the Giro. Hugo settled for second place. Next he concentrated on the classic events, on challenging circuits, on the “Six Days”, on the time trials. In the meantime, he married the emerging fashion model, Sonia Bruehl, but unfortunately forgot to adjust his pace of life to his new, less lavish earnings. In fact, the major talent of world cycling was a terrible administrator. In just a few months he squandered the wealth he had accumulated. “Money just slipped through his fingers”, said Armin von Büren, his companion in numerous “Six Days” events. His sporting career ended at the Tour de Romandie in 1958. The “Blond falcon” was breathing with difficulty at just 1,000 metres altitude. Seeing the difficulties of an athlete who had earlier had the power to beat the most illustrious champions brought a feeling of pain to everyone.

Owing to his fame but also his innate courtesy, Hugo received a proposal from Enrico Mattei’s AGIP. He was invited to travel to Venezuela to promote the *Supercortemaggiore* - a trademark depicting a six-legged dog. He settled in Caracas with Sonia and remained there for two years. He returned quietly to Zurich in December 1960, when AGIP decided to entrust him with the petrol station at the Oerlikon cycle racing track. A group of loyal supporters urged him to accept an offer to comment on cycle races

for Radio Beromünster. By now timid and hardly extrovert, he accepted the offer. Nevertheless, he asked to be assisted by a fellow commentator who would ask him questions about the technical aspects of the race. Sepp Renggli, then head of sport at the radio station, accepted Hugo’s requests and offered me the position in the summer of 1961. I made my debut by his side on October 15 in Lugano to comment on the time trial. We were partners for three years, carrying out some 15 assignments. During that period I came to know Koblet better, a tormented friend who, at certain moments, felt vanquished and humiliated. He was abandoned by Sonia who stayed on in Caracas, while certain thoughtless relatives exploited him with incomprehensible cynicism. During our trips and during dinner before our commenting assignments, he told me repeatedly about the discomfort he felt at the transition from the bicycle to the business world. In Caracas he discovered a passion for tennis and water skiing. He even won some amateur tournaments but they were just ephemeral flashes in the pan. With pleasure he recalled amicable relations with Kübler, Bobet and Remo Pianezzi. He enjoyed telling me about the incidents connected to the victory at the Giro in 1950 and



the joy of Learco Guerra, who would never have imagined reaching Rome with the captain of his team wearing the winner’s jersey. He recalled that, during the official ceremony in St. Peter’s Square, Learco cried with happiness. “He seemed like a little boy disoriented by so many presents from Father Christmas”.

Tour de France, July 16, 1951; Koblet in action in the stage that brought him victory from Brive to Agen after a legendary solitary breakaway of 136 kilometres.



Among the finest moments in his career, he recalled the Tour de France and his good fortune in being able to perform the job of his dreams, even though it could be harsh and even cruel sometimes. For him every race was an adventure, a new experience that stimulated and entertained him. He loved to travel, to see new countries, to journey through Europe and meet different people. On the other hand, he did not like to talk about a less illustrious episode: the event at the Stelvio Pass in 1953. One day he told me that the Giro began badly. It seemed like a war conducted on two wheels. Almost under his breath he admitted to me that, "I lost the Giro on the Stelvio Pass stage as we arrived at Bormio. I was beaten by Coppi, the greatest champion of all time". I tried to induce him to speak about the presumed pact and the possible subsequent betrayal but I met with no response. Instead, he became locked in silence. In those days, forces were brought into play that were probably sufficient to cause hesitation even in such a coherent and honest man as Coppi. According to him, cycling in the 60s was unfortunately undergoing radical changes. He would often say that cycling had gone full circle. Feats such as those performed by Coppi, Bartali, Magni, Kübler and Bobet were no longer repeatable. Ever-increasing meddling from the sponsors, the quest for immediate success to make the brand of their products more visible and ensure returns on the increasingly high investments were the breeding ground for the dangerous influence of extreme sporting medicine. Without any shadow of a doubt he smelt the odour of doping and anabolic substances that were already used in certain countries in Eastern Europe. He ended his career without ever winning a rainbow jersey. That was the result of an unplanned and reckless approach to the sporting season. He never fixed any concrete targets but regretted never winning the world hour record. He failed in his first attempt and withdrew from the second, due to be held at the Vigorelli in Milan, owing to a sudden indisposition. One evening I asked him point-blank to assess his own life. We were at the "Sanremo" restaurant in the Brunnenhofstrasse in Zurich, where we were enjoying a *sminzuzato* (finely sliced veal) with fried, grated

potatoes. He gave me a surprised look and said, "I didn't miss out on anything. I was a baker's boy and left my parents' shop. I have tasted glory, travelled around the world, known a lot of people, earned a lot of money and, despite being a Protestant, was even received in private by Pope Pius XII. This evening we've come here for a pleasant meal. What should I expect? Perhaps I have come to the end of the road. But let's not get ahead of ourselves". That particular phrase concealed bitterness and delusions and was part of a depression connected to the mysterious trip to Mexico that jeopardised his health. He said the same to Armin von Büren when his partner from numerous Six Days events suggested that he should take more care of his wealth that had now shrunk. His decision not to accept the post of technical commissioner of the Federation remained incomprehensible. He refused owing to absurd tensions between the officials who, he argued, were blocking every initiative. On the other hand, he was always ready to give advice to the youngsters who surrounded him, recalling generously that "The house on the Zollikerberg is always open". However, I felt that his natural reserve was growing. He often struck me as confused, unsure of himself and sad. A few weeks after our last professional meeting, Hugo Koblet, at the wheel of his car, inexplicably crashed into a tree in open countryside, along the road from the village of Esslingen towards Mönchaldorf. The day was November 2, 1964. He breathed his last several days later without ever really recovering consciousness. I bade him farewell alongside Sepp Renggli

Left:
Koblet after his victory at the Tour de Suisse in 1950. The "Blond falcon", "pédaleur de charme" and "the James Dean of cycling" were some of the epithets he was given owing to his charm and elegance.

Right:
Koblet at the wheel of his car, a legendary Studebaker, in the vicinity of the Hallenstadion at Oerlikon. In this suburb of Zurich he managed a filling station for some time after retiring from competition in 1958.



Right:
Kübler, driven on by a committed supporter, tackles the approaches to the Furka Pass in the 3rd stage of the Tour de Suisse in 1947, the Bellinzona - Sierre stage of 213 kilometres. He was soon way out in front after the start and won with 3 minutes 32 seconds advantage over Fausto Coppi.

Below:
Ferdy Kübler greeted by fans after his victory in the World Championship in Varese. The day was September 2, 1951, and the Swiss tore away from the Italians Fiorenzo Magni and Antonio Bevilacqua in the sprint.

and with colleagues from the editorial staff, Bruno Galliker and Max Ruegger, together with thousands of fans. We were joined by athletes from Switzerland and abroad, including Kübler, Clerici and Bobet, who starred with Hugo in some of the most intense and heroic events in cycling in the middle of last century. That day Ferdy Kübler lost the point of reference that had accompanied him in his career as a great champion.

Ferdy was six years older than Koblet. He was born and raised in Marthalen in the Canton of Zurich. His background was extremely humble. His father, a warden at the mental hospital in Rheinau, received a monthly salary of 140 francs, income which had to suffice for the parents and five children. Together they tried to round up the microscopic income. During his school holidays Ferdy went to work at a nearby farm. A willing boy, he looked after the cows from dawn until 9 o'clock in the evening. His reward was 20 francs a month, which he handed over untouched to his father. One day he received a present of an old bicycle so that



he could do the shopping for a neighbour. That marked the start of his relationship with the "velocipede". Two months later he was taken on by the old baker, Schneeбели, to deliver 40 kilograms of bread each day to the inhabitants of the hamlet of Pfannenstiel. These exertions built up his muscles. By savings and with a small loan, paid back at five francs per month, Ferdy managed to buy a racing bike. He took part in some novice races, winning his first on the Glarus circuit before he reached 19 years of age. As an amateur he distinguished himself at Le Locle, enthusing Vico Rigassi. In a live broadcast

the commentator predicted a great future for that lively and strong-willed athlete from Zurich. He turned professional in 1940 and led the Lausanne event from start to finish. They were promising beginnings that allowed him to leave poverty behind. His performances gave him the necessary manoeuvrability to improve his precarious financial circumstances. The spectre of want had accompanied the early years of his life and left an indelible mark on his youth. Many remember him as a shrewd calculator and even today he is regarded as one of the prudent savers, a tendency that the less diplomatic never hesitate to define as meanness. A rumour that has become almost a legend. In truth, the principle of saving was indoctrinated in him by one of his heroes, the indomitable Paul Egli, who insisted on the strict need for punctuality and economy. By now a professional he settled in Adliswil, a municipality which, after his most resounding successes, was christened "Kübliswil" by the fans. He rented a flat for 20 francs a month, half of what he would have paid in nearby Zurich. In the meantime and while war was raging, he won the Lausanne - Berne stage, one of the three in the Tour de Suisse, in 1941. He drew up his programme for the next year but, along with hundreds of thousands of fellow citizens, he was called up to the army. He joined the mountain infantry. In 1947, when sport resumed, he lined up at the Tour de France, winning the first stage, Paris - Lille, and the stretch that brings the procession from Strasbourg to Besançon. Those were the years of the hugely popular Jean Robic, nicknamed "glass-head", Giordano Cottur from Trieste and the Weilenmann brothers. That year Gino Bartali made his name at the Tour de Suisse, while fans saw the first confrontation between the "two Ks", who won a stage each. Koblet won the first at the finishing line in Siebnen but Kübler won the Bellinzona - Sierre stage. That was one of Ferdy's most impressive feats. He broke away from the pack right after the start and arrived first after a solo break of 213 kilometres. The position of honour at the Valais finishing line went to Coppi, followed by Bartali, Depredhomme, Schaer and Dupont, in that order. The unforgettable sprint (which was tactically incomprehensible) caused an



Right:

In spring 1946 Kübler worked out at Lugano in the gym of Georges Mieze, an Olympic gymnast in Amsterdam in 1928 and in Berlin in 1936.

Below:

Ferdy Kübler and Emilio Croci Torti, his loyal team-mate, reach the start of the Crans - Locarno stage, the 6th in the Tour de Suisse in 1952 on a motorcycle. Carlo Clerici made it through the Simplon Pass first but "Ferdy National" made up ground downhill and triumphed at the finishing post.

uproar. Alberto Barberis announced in the microphone, "Every now and again we need to see that nobody is unbeatable. You just have to want it!". It was the beginning of a spectacular series of duels between the two Swiss champions and the start of the remarkable epoch of the "Ferdy National". Over the next six years he was destined to win the staged Swiss race on another two occasions (in 1948 and 1951), two editions of the Liege - Bastogne - Liege and the Flèche Wallonne, once the Bordeaux - Paris, the Tour de France, the world title at Varese and the Rome - Naples - Rome and concluded his career in autumn 1956 with a victory in the Milan - Turin. On three occasions he was first in the prestigious classification for the Desgrange - Colombo trophy. In 1957 he took part in several farewell meetings involving the exceptional Belgian sprinter, Rik van Steenbergen, and the rising star, René Strehler.

He occupied a leading position in the history of world cycling. Then he decided to concentrate on family life. He is the father of five children and is now a contented great-grandfather thrice over. In his restless retirement, he has been able to preserve the popularity he gained on the roads of Europe. With surprising acumen he developed an innate talent for public relations. His unusual instinct induced him for many years to lend his unmistakable profile to an insurance company that many still associate with

his nose. He was a popular ambassador for Credit Suisse, Villars, Bio-Strath and Trident. During the course of half a century he attended more than 2,000 events with fans to sign souvenir photos. He became a ski instructor and, after he reached his 70s, took up golf. Prompted by his current wife, attractive, cordial Christina, he soon became a regular visitor to the greens, driven by a fervour that some describe as an obsession. Now he is an honorary member of the clubs of Ascona, Crans-Montana, Unterengstringen and Kensington in Florida. He always returns to the area south of the Alps with pleasure. When Emilio Croci Torti, his loyal "lieutenant", calls him he replies with the word, "Present!". Even today, Ferdy takes into consideration the advice and wishes of his former team-mate who, in the figurative arts, has found a new and much appreciated activity as a talented painter. For years the meetings with Emilio have proved to be a benchmark of the lively and contented camaraderie that characterised cycling in that epoch. Bartali, Nino Defilippis and Ercole Baldini have never put on kid gloves when it comes to recalling pranks that occurred while racing. "Did Astrua ever see the watch that you promised him for allowing you to win at Lugano?", Gino asked Ferdy point-blank. He was referring to a pact reached when, out of breath, they were tackling the hairpin bends of the Monte Ceneri in the final phase of the Giro del Ticino. That





evening, without losing his composure, Ferdy took out of his pocket a Swatch and told the Tuscan that he had wanted to give him the watch for ages but that difficulties with Customs and memory blocks owing to his age had always denied him the pleasure of settling that old debt. Recollections, victories and playful disclosures rich in human touches have always been a common ...feature of these pleasant reunions. Ferdy is now amongst the oldest protagonists from cycling in the “heroic” age.

In the parade of the winners of the Tour de France, organised to commemorate 100 years of the race that features Trans-Alpine stages, he climbed up to the podium last behind the 79-year-old Roger Walkoviac, the yellow-jersey rider in 1956. Now 87, he is diligently completing a programme of physical rehabilitation to eliminate all the lingering after-effects of a disastrous fall on the stairs at home. With his customary enthusiasm he joined up with friends to drink a toast to his new biography which the publisher, Peter Schnyder, with Martin and Hanspeter Born and the legendary commentator of major sporting events in the second half of the 20th century, Sepp Renggli, have compiled to retrace his magical career and revive our joys and emotions of the 1950s.

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Ferdy and Hugo at the Italian

by Gian Paolo Ormezzano *



The last major duel between Koblet and Kübler occurred at the Tour de Suisse in 1955. The former won the race and the second stage from Baden to Delsberg, but Kübler beat his rival in the 5th stage from Sierre to Locarno.

On this page:
Ferdy at the bedside of Hugo, who had fallen on the downhill section from Pau to Luchon, the most classic of the Pyrenean stages of the Tour. The date was July 19, 1954. The accident meant that Koblet finished more than 26 minutes behind and a day later he was forced to withdraw from the race.

Koblet and Kübler, team-mates in Tebag, rushing to Wildegg in the section of the "race on the railway tracks" of the Schlossberg Rundfahrt at Lenzburg in 1948.

Those were the years when Peppino De Filippo, tearing himself away from the sublime but supporting role of Toto's partner, asked again and again, in a cinematographic solo and investing the question with a mysterious, solemn Neapolitanism, why on earth it was obligatory for the great cycling champions to have such a long noses. He was thinking of Fausto Coppi, who did remind you of Pinocchio, but was also including Gino Bartali, whose nose was large rather than long. In Switzerland the long nose was represented by Ferdy Kübler, a cyclist that was a long nose joined to a body sitting on a bicycle and who finished second and then third in two world championships, won the yellow and rainbow jerseys in 1950 and 1951 and competed with the Italians at the highest level, whether in trials, in the high mountains or on the track; mad undertakings for their day. Kübler was to become the world champion in Italy itself when he beat in a sprint two Italians, Fiorenzo Magni (with the turned-up nose) and Antonio Bevilacqua, known in Venetian as "labròn" because his lower lip dropped from the mouth towards the road as if it were a spoon to collect who-knows-what, perhaps the air, perhaps the exertion that came out disguised as wheezing or perhaps the flies.

The golden age of Ferdy Kübler and Hugo Koblet, the first great Swiss cyclists to make their name in Italian cycling (which was then in its zenith) raised the parameters, dictated the levels, selected the gears and regulated the ratios (gear, ratios: a specific cycling lexicon applied to living in a group) - was extremely well received by the fans in the *Bel Paese*. It was the end of the 1940s. The fact that not a single Swiss had ever won the Giro d'Italia or the Tour de France before was a guarantee that it would not have the terribleness of tradition and the immediately obvious class of the two was a guarantee of high-level (in fact, even spectacular) competition, considering the cycling and physical characteristics of the two protagonists (of which we will have more to say later). Remember that in the cycling world people cheer for cycling even more than they do for the cyclists. Even the keenest fan of a particular "pedaller" never boos any other; s/he just doesn't support him. That is precisely the opposite of what happens in the boorish world of soccer. That gives rise to the civilised but disturbing sensation - sometimes vague, sometimes pronounced - that by now everything that differs from soccer must be, on the face of it, something good and fair.



Amongst other things, Kübler and Koblet distinguished themselves although the one did not have the ballast as a celebrity compared to the other, as on the other hand happened with Bartali and Coppi, who appeared together in the last Giro d'Italia (1940) before the War. Gino was the captain and Fausto was his deputy but Gino was surprisingly beaten by Fausto. As a result, when races resumed the rivalry between the two was clear, well defined and bitter. Each was a terrible weight and indispensable for the other. Ferdy and Hugo both arrived in the upper echelons of cycling almost at the same time, though Ferdy (a contemporary of Coppi) was six years older than Hugo (more or less the same age gap as between Gino and Fausto). For both the first cycling experience was as baker's boys. Both hailed from Zurich; Ferdy was a country boy born in Marthalen on July 24, 1919, whereas Hugo was a city boy born on March 21, 1925. Both were distinguished in their first sporting ventures by a "no" from their parents. Kübler's sometimes rough father wanted him to be a farm hand and not a cyclist, whereas Koblet's anxious mother (his father died when the future champion was aged just nine) had sent him to work in the workshop of a silversmith and only an outbreak of pimples caused by chemical reagents "saved" the boy from a destiny as a goldsmith or something of that sort. In the sense that he left that world of chemical reagents to which he was allergic and went instead to the workshop of a former cyclist who encouraged his sporting mania, helping him to debut in a race at the age of 18 (without his mother's knowledge and wearing a vest instead of the rider's jersey). When he achieved his first victory in a climb near Oerlikon, Koblet received as his prize a silver plate, which served as a sort of reminder of his first arduous workplace. In contrast, Kübler made the transition to cycling as a sport directly from cycling for work: from deliveries for a baker to racing. That was the "classic" start for so many (Coppi was a butcher's delivery boy).

When Koblet took his place in the sun among the professionals, in the Milan - San Remo of 1947 won by Bartali, and in which Koblet finished 34th overall but 4th among the foreigners (at that time, meteorology



respected the legends, so that, after the Turchino climb, leaving behind the sullen Piedmont and emerging by the Ligurian Sea, the rider invariably faced the sun and that classic race was indeed known as the "race to the sun"), the other *K* (Kübler) was already one of the best riders. Ferdy had turned professional in Coppi's year, 1940. Switzerland's neutrality had allowed him to continue his sporting activity at home and as an amateur he had enjoyed success at the Lake Geneva Tour (1938), the Grand Prix of Le Locle and the Basle Circuit (1939). His first victory under contract was the A travers Lausanne (Across Lausanne), which he was to win on another four occasions: a time trial, which suited him, just like stages, climbs and races, destined to finish with a sprint, because, quite simply, Ferdy Kübler could do everything well. Even on the track; he was the Swiss champion in the pursuit race in 1942, the year in which he also won the Tour de Suisse (which he won three times, like Koblet). He was as skilled at PR during the race as much as after; fierce or joyful at the right moments, although his attitude as a "jolly fellow" prevailed. In their own country the dichotomy was never fully applied, which some think is vital or at least extremely important for cycling, i.e. the rule of two, or if you prefer, the duel; according to this duality a champion is more of a champion if on home ground he has another champion in his way with the same passport who he sometimes beats and sometimes doesn't. The two divide the favours of the fans while discussions rage for one or the other at the Bar Sport (or rather they did,

Koblet combs his hair as he arrives at a stage of the Tour in 1951. This was a familiar gesture that formed part of the image and myth of the *pédaleur de charme*.

Right:
Koblet returns to
Switzerland a victor
after winning the Giro
d'Italia in 1950. In his
home town, Zurich,
frenzied crowds
welcome him along
the Bahnhofstrasse.

because now it's all football in too many places in the world) and jokes fly from one part of the street to the other, where everybody waits to catch a glimpse of his own man for just a few seconds that are worth so much (as Paolo Conte sings, "I'm here, waiting for Bartali, pawing the ground with my sandals ..."). The familiar Swiss neutrality seemed to reverberate in them both because they felt a mutual respect for one another and never elbowed the other out of the way. Outside Switzerland they found ample scope to achieve personal glory. In Italy which, as already mentioned, had set the tone in cycling to the world: amongst other things, it was permitted to hold the Giro in the year after the end of the war, in 1946 when the rubble was still smoking, whereas France, which sat at the winners' table, had to wait until 1947 for its Tour, Kübler came soon after Bartali, as a champion who chewed up the road, snarled at his adversaries and conceived the course metre by metre. Koblet was linked right away with Coppi and, like him, was full of an almost hieratic class and clung to subtle rites, to sprints away from the madding crowd and to meditating on programmes, transforming the competition into a mathematical exercise of force that was accessible to only a precious few. Bartali and Kübler shouted strong words to the crowds, while Coppi and Koblet whispered significant things. Amongst other things, Koblet appeared to be closely bound to Coppi by health problems and by fate. Both were "delicate", as we might say of women who manage to extract glamour from illness. To some extent they were both marked by ill fortune and sadness, bearing in mind what would be, for both, a premature and tragic end.

The extraordinary interest with which Italy in those days followed the two Swiss cyclists - yes, they were foreigners but much less outsiders than the Belgian or French cyclists (*L'Étranger* in Camus's novel is an outsider more than a foreigner, if we try to explain the special value here of the adjective) - probably owing to how much or little Switzerland contains of Italy and the linguistic links between the two countries, allowed Koblet to become not just the first Swiss but the first foreigner to win a Giro to Italian applause, although he was guilty of iconoclasm, destroying the local idols. He

gained the nickname of the "Blond falcon" and left Bartali in second place by 5 min. 12 sec. This was a Giro in which Coppi, who suffered a fractured pelvis after a stupid fall between Vicenza and Bolzano, left the race on the first day in which the extremely handsome Hugo wore the pink jersey (on the arrival of the stage that was "unpropitious" for Fausto - so it was written at the time - Bartali was first, Koblet second and Kübler third). However, the winner did not have to suffer in the shadow of the Great Absentee, owing to the splendour of his technical and athletic performance, the conviction of his pure class and the abundant talent of the *pédaleur de charme*. While it was said of Coppi (though not much in writing) that, after his arrival, he would stick two fingers into his throat to vomit up something, with Koblet we noticed the extreme care with which he tidied himself up, splashing on eau-de-cologne and, above all, combing his hair carefully. Especially, for the last day, with the arrival at Rome - it was the Holy Year - before the Pope; Koblet, the Protestant or Evangelical went down on one knee respectfully, beside the pious Bartali and in front of Pius XII. However, there were no TV cameras; it was all recorded in style by some photographs and the imagination of commentators and clerks.

A few days after Koblet's final jersey, Kübler also became the first Swiss; as the winner of the Tour de France he became the model (a term appropriate for his natural elegance) for the yellow jersey in Paris. He arrived there in an edition of the *grande boucle*, in which the Italian national team left the race in the Pyrenees, with Fiorenzo Magni in the yellow jersey and Gino Bartali, the winner two years earlier, in a good position, to respond with a clamorous withdrawal to the excesses of the French fans, who defined the men from the team of the green, white and red flag as *succhiariute* ("slipstream riders"). Kübler won comfortably and argued he could have raced and won against anyone; with the Italians in the race he might have even found matters easier to control and nobody, not even in Italy, not even Magni and Bartali, claimed that he had been dealt a kind hand. The fact is that Koblet was glamorous, Kübler was likeable and people had understood their particular human characteristics perfectly well.

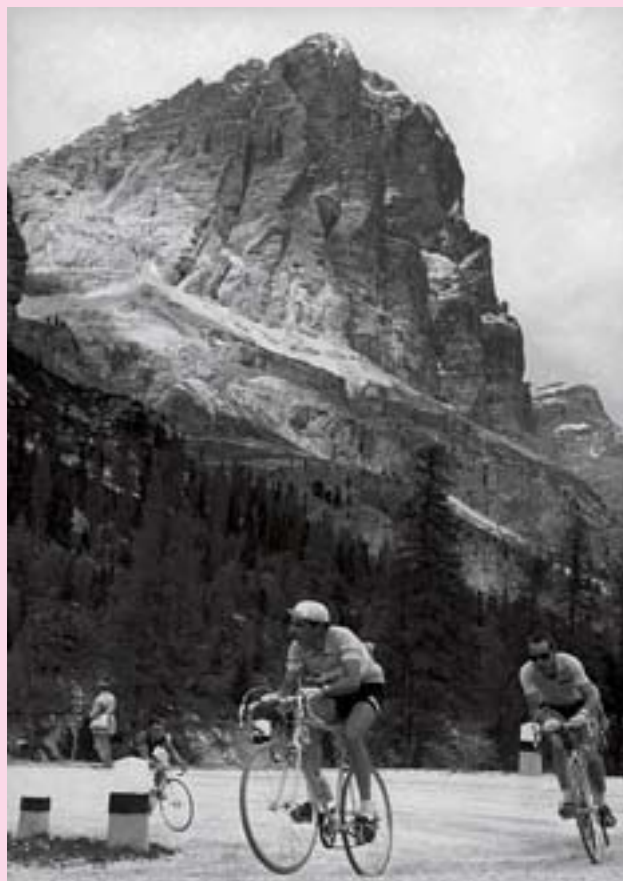


Koblet and Coppi tackle together the approaches to the Sella Pass in the 19th stage of the Giro d'Italia in 1953, from Auronzo di Cadore to Bolzano. The Italian crossed the finishing line ahead and, the next day, after an epic and much debated performance on the Stelvio, took the pink jersey away from the Swiss.

A year after Kübler, Koblet also won his Tour de France. His domination was almost light or subtle and the margin was 22 minutes over the second placed rider, the French Geminiani from Romagna (Bartali was fourth almost half an hour behind and Coppi suffered a breakdown in the Midi). Koblet combed his hair coquettishly as he approached every finishing line. He won in the Pyrenees and the time trial and exerted control in the Alps. So the only two Swiss successes in the *grande boucle* were successive. At the time there was talk of the start of a Swiss domination but in 1952 the supremacy of Coppi in both the Giro and Tour resumed.

In 1951 Kübler even won the world title within a stronghold of Italian cycling, two steps away from Switzerland: the Varese circuit. In a final sprint the “long-nose” won the race he had perfectly controlled right to the end. As we said, he beat Magni and Bevilacqua (officially Coppi was ill, actually he did not like the Italian team). Applause for them all. The night before the event, Kübler had slept in the house of a friend and team-mate from Ticino, Croci Torti, who had given up his matrimonial bed to allow him to rest better. In fact, another Swiss had already attained a world title before him, Hans Knecht in 1946 in Zurich itself, but there was talk of Fate’s special prize for an unknown on a circuit that was too easy to constitute a genuine test.

In 1953 again, Koblet excelled over Coppi for most of the Giro; the latter appeared worn out in body and spirit by a long series of accidents. In fact, Coppi was also in the early stages of an intense and tedious love affair with La Dama Bianca (the White Lady) who would become extremely famous, and two years earlier had mourned the death of his brother, Serse, caused by a fall during a race, possibly prompted by a break-down at Montpellier (this was a tragic “imitation” of Bartali, who had lost his brother, Giulio, in the same manner). So on the Stelvio Pass Koblet had to give way to Coppi, who took the pink jersey at the end of a day when things happened that nobody believed could happen, as Fausto caught up so many occasional but “fakir”-like and devoted teammates. The day before Koblet had reached the finishing line with his 12th pink jersey.



He was suffering from bronchitis but seemed invincible and, although Coppi was just 1 minute 59 seconds away, he seemed resigned. After the Stelvio, Coppi had 1 minute 29 seconds advantage in the classification over Koblet. On the last day, between Bormio and Milan, the great champion pedalled with extreme care, while Koblet was coughing. Third in the final classification list was Pasqualino Fornara, from the Piedmont but known as the “Swiss” owing to his four triumphs in the Tour de Suisse. Borges would write about the seeds of crossed destinies (in fact, they were often crossed in Valtellina, Bormio and Sondrio, always “big” finishing lines). A year later Koblet propelled Carlo Clerici to victory, who had Italian origins but had recently taken Swiss nationality, and who was in his team under the supervision of a great former champion of the Giro d'Italia, Learco Guerra. Perhaps it was not a pre-laid plan but Clerici won the 6th stage with a surprise sprint. Astonishingly, it gave him 20 minutes’ advantage over the favourites. Koblet adjusted generously to his role as Clerici’s “team mate” and covered Coppi, from whom a reaction was expected after his stomach upset

from eating oysters. Koblet beat Coppi by 27 seconds that were of the utmost psychological importance in the timed section at Lake Garda. Clerici reached Milan ahead of Koblet (in second place) by 25 minutes. He defended his position in the mountains and took advantage of the “*Bernina go-slow*”, when the Swiss mountain was climbed by the group at a tired man’s pace as a provocative reaction to the accusations of lack of commitment and that they were “loafing about” (we recall that Fellini’s film had just been released) and to react to the threat of “blocked” prizes. The accusations were levelled at all except Clerici. On the final sprint at the Vigorelli velodrome in Milan, the Belgian, Rik van Steenbergen, the world “king” of sprints, was first. It was disputed in front of a crowd determined to whistle so loudly that it was not even possible to hear the bell that announced the last round in this farce.

At this stage it is important to clarify and recall the status of cycling in those days. In Europe, or at least in France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Spain, there was no really colossal popular support for soccer, in the sense that cycling held the greatest psychological command over the masses. It was the ultimate sport. Among other reasons, it had still not been plundered by television, which would have stripped it bare and exposed the meanness of the wild, dirty toil. There was no persistence that today would be defined as “mass media”, but a sneeze from Bartali, Coppi, Kübler, the Frenchman Bobet or Koblet was more important than an avalanche of goals even from a famous soccer club. So the go-slow on the Bernina was an international affair that shook the regulations and stirred consciences. The printed Press was still dominated by the so-called “singers” or their descendants, i.e. those who, since the early 1900s (the first Tour de France was in 1903 and the first Giro d’Italia in 1909) had invented the cyclists’ feats; they were not visible on the dusty roads but were fully described, even recounted in stories, converted into myths and projected as roaring heroes or desperate but admirable men who took on Herculean tasks. A Press who wrote in that way had created for the cyclists and for cycling, which symbolised knowing how to suffer, an immense public popularity,

ultimately destined to suffer the fate of well-being, which evokes the car and desanctified sweat, calling it perspiration instead. It seems we can say that, in those years a scientific study began around cycling, until then a sport beloved by its “singers” and followers; it was popularised by journalists who began to talk about weights, measures, types of strain, etc., and encouraged in particular by Coppi, as ugly as sin off the saddle and as beautiful as Apollo when he pedalled. To sum up, love developed into eroticism and that was the precursor for another evolution, into pornography.

Because sport today is indeed a pornographic event, owing to the vulgarity, the excesses and often because of the driven and hypocritical sophistication in the presentation (sophisticated vulgarity - the sport also lives on oxymorons), with the athlete nude just like in any strip-tease, the athlete in all his or her intimacy, the athlete bearing his ransacked heart. The spectators are unconsciously (or perhaps not?) similar to those who attend red-light shows; they go to see specialists do well what they would like to do, things that they can rarely do.



However, let us return to the two Ks, strangely never combined in the acronym K2, which in 1954 was to identify the second highest mountain in the world, climbed for the first time by an Italian expedition. Kübler, who was a ski instructor in order to occupy his winters with sport, was a fitness fanatic and quite unfettered in proving it. He has reached the age of 87, has two wives in his life, does an excellent job of returning as a veteran and, when he arrives in Ticino, makes jokes as he swaps recollections with Croci Torti, who was his companion during their toils and is now a fine painter. Kübler achieved his last victory at the age of 37, in the Milan to Turin. He won

Koblet and Kübler riding together at the Zurich Six Days in 1956, where they finished 4th.

more than Koblet, of whose physical misfortunes we will speak later; classics too such as the Liege - Bastogne - Liege and the Flèche Wallonne. He earned well and managed himself well. He was what we describe as a "big personality" and remains one. If he could go back in time and make a wish, he would ask for the Giro d'Italia.

Koblet was delicate, like a hothouse flower compared to Kübler, who was a flower from the Alpine summer pastures. In 1949 he broke a leg and his bones were almost as



Emilio Croci Torti,
Ferdy Kübler and Hugo
Koblet in Locarno at
the end of the 1940s.

rather than a particular point. They wept copiously for him in Ticino, too; he had carried out his military service in Bellinzona, in the mountain infantry. He had cycling friends such as Emilio Croci Torti, Remo Pianezzi and Fausto Lurati, with whom he posed in the cathedral square in Lugano for some photos - the "pedaller" posing, in a simulated starting position - which seem typical of the times.

Kübler always spoke highly of Koblet and vice-versa. They even competed together as a team for a while. Bartali and Coppi spent a season in the same team but the supporting rider Coppi mocked the captain by snatching the Giro from under his nose. Bartali always got on well with Kübler, and Coppi always admired Koblet, even when the Swiss beat him. Bartali and Coppi probably acted out their enmity, following the script for cycling duels, but Kübler and Koblet never declared it because they really felt it within.

* *Journalist and writer*

fragile as Coppi's. In the 1953 Tour, while seeking redemption after the Giro was snatched from him in the last moments by Coppi, he fell and was scarred not only physically but mentally; he took on a sort of permanent sadness (now we might describe him as unlucky). He stopped competing at the age of 33 after racing on many tracks, including nine Six Days. His last victory was an invitation event in Ticino. He was restless, seemed to harbour strange indispositions, and travelled to South America. Women found him attractive and he married a beautiful one. He lost a fortune in deals or rather in various non-business matters. He opened a petrol station near the Oerlikon cycle racing track and became an inspector for a petroleum company. He also attempted a career as a radio commentator, as a federal technician and as a selector of Swiss sprint (*pistard*) cyclists. He died four years later than Coppi in 1964. He had some problems; his childless marriage had not really worked (in contrast, Kübler was a father and grandfather several times over and married twice); and he ended up crashing his car into a tree. It was said that he had driven up and down that stretch of road at speed several times, as if he were looking for something but an end

KÜBLER'S CARD

Kübler was born in Marthalen (Zurich) on July 24, 1919. He made his professional debut in 1940, winning the A travers Lausanne and the Swiss pursuit racing title. The following year he repeated these successes, broke the national hour record and won the Berne stage in the Tour de Suisse, finishing in third place (he won the following year).

After the war Kübler took up with the cycling traditions of France, Italy and Belgium. In the first Tour de France since the end of hostilities (1947) he won two stages. In 1948 he got ready in his homeland, winning the Tour de Suisse, the Tour de Romandie and the Swiss road title. Next year he was second in the world championships and the Giro di Lombardia and won a stage on the Tour. In 1950 he became the first Swiss rider to win the Tour. In 1951 he won the Rome-Naples-Rome, the Flèche Wallonne, the Liege – Bastogne – Liege, the Tour de Romandie, the Tour de Suisse and became the world champion on the road. His *palmarès* also included three successes in the Desgranges – Colombo Challenge, a sort of world classification based on points,



four Giro del Ticino, three national titles as a pursuit rider and one as a cross-country cyclist.



KOBLET'S CARD

Koblet was born on March 21, 1925 in Zurich. He made his debut as a professional in 1946 and a year later won the Tour of the Four Cantons and a stage in the Tour de Suisse. In 1948 he won a hard mountain stage in the Tour de Suisse and a stage in the Tour de Romandie. He won the same stage in Romandy in 1949, then had to stop owing to a leg broken during a fall in training. He enjoyed success in the 1950 Giro d'Italia, winning two stages, and also at the Tour de Suisse, which he also won in 1953 and 1955. He was victorious at the 1951 Tour de France. Then his career was interrupted by some periods of inactivity caused by various physical problems. In total he was victorious 197 times in his career, the last being in 1958 at an invitation event in Locarno.

Koblet died on the night between November 5 and 6, 1964, after 60 hours of agony, following injuries sustained after his car crashed into a tree along a road some 20 kilometres from Zurich.



Eighty-seven years of “Imperial” sprint

Marco Blaser talks to Ferdy Kübler



Left:
Kübler in the timed race from Geneva to Lausanne, the 3rd stage of the Tour de Romandie in 1953. He reached the finishing line 3rd, behind Koblet and the Italian, Pasquale Fornara. In the general classification, Kübler finished 7th, 9 minutes 38 seconds behind the winner Koblet.

On this page:
Both weariness and happiness on Kübler's face after his victory at the Le Locle Grand Prix in 1939.

Kübler with Emilio Croci Torti at the Tour de France in 1950.

My most recent meeting with Ferdy Kübler dates back to last autumn. We met in Regensdorf, a dormitory village on the outskirts of Zurich. In the hotel bar a multimedia projector printed a series of images in rapid sequence from the most significant moments of the sporting career of this popular athlete. The homage was being paid by the publisher Schnyder and by Christina, Ferdy's inseparable second wife, to celebrate the end of a nightmare. In the summer, on July 27, and three days after his birthday, he fell down the stairs, which caused a series of painful internal injuries. A typical domestic accident that compelled him to undergo a long course of treatment and stays in a rehabilitation centre. "I don't remember having suffered so much ever before. Besides it happened to me after 87 years! I suppose it's a warning to be more careful!". He said this with a ringing laugh and asked me not to overdo the embraces and slaps on the back.

My interest in Ferdy Kübler began at the end of the 1940s. I idealised his daring acts of folly and his feats performed with the strength of a lion (his star sign is Leo). They were narrated by the commentators on Radio Monteceneri: Vico Rigassi, Alberto Barberis

and Giuseppe Albertini. Combative, a fighter with an iron will, he gave me countless days of happiness. I was proud of his victory in the Tour de France in 1950 and of the powerful final spurt in 1951 which, at the finishing line in Varese, enabled him to gain the rainbow jersey. The pedigree champions also included Koblet, Bobet, Bartali, Coppi and Magni, but I remained loyal to my favourite. So I was particularly pleased to meet him in person at the world championship in Lugano in 1953, which was won by Fausto Coppi on the straight at Agno airport. I had applied to be an assistant to foreign radio commentators. I was placed in the Dutch team led by Wout Pagano and convinced Ferdy to find a few minutes for a link-up with Hilversum. I met him again at the Tour de Suisse in 1955. Thanks to a competition for new voices, I was taken on by RSI and joined the radio commentary team. A spontaneous empathy with Emilio Croci Torti, the captain's lieutenant, gave me access to the world of the Swiss team. I became convinced that his declaimed connection with Ticino was sincere and profound.

Do you still feel close to the people of Ticino today?

Yes. Ticino is my second home. For 27 years I have spent a month's holiday with the family in Lugano - Paradiso, in Ivo Huhn's Beauvirage hotel; he's a close friend. During that period many long-lasting friendships have become more profound. After all, my connection with Emilio began in 1950 during his struggle to win the Tour de France. It was at his house, on the eve of the victory at Varese, where I ate a tasty minestrone. That was followed by a deep sleep which was partly responsible for the rainbow jersey and victory. The crossing of the border at Stabio, the ride towards Lugano and the rejoicing in the Piazza della Riforma with the embraces of thousands of fans were unforgettable. I never missed the Giro del Ticino and won it four times.

The victory at the Tour de France was a feat that changed your life. Paris promoted you to the top flight. How much were you earning then?

The total prize money was divided equally between all the team members. Each of us





received about 5,000 francs. After the grand final at the Parc de Princes I signed about 80 contracts for return race meetings that amply repaid the toil in the Alps and Pyrenees. But I earned well and I have no regrets, even if they were sums that are not comparable to the prizes and contracts of today. I was able to buy an apartment block in Zurich and renovate the florist's business that Rösli, then my wife, opened. A few weeks later Tebag proposed a fixed contract for me with a monthly stipend of 500 francs. It was a godsend. So I'm content because I've been able to keep away the spectre of poverty that marked my childhood and adolescence.

What are the finest moments that you remember most?

Naturally the Tour. I was already 31 and was able to make a big jump in performance. Then the rainbow jersey that I could wear for an entire year and which I commemorated at Lugano, making fun of the executives of the federation led by the president, Senn. After ignoring me for weeks and weeks, he woke up from his almost legendary sluggishness to invite me to a celebratory reception to be held in Zurich. I made no response to those marching orders and preferred to drink a toast with a delicious glass of wine in the square in Lugano. Without overlooking the magical moments of the weekend in the Ardennes, the long, fatiguing Bordeaux to Paris run that I won in '53 is still unforgettable. A start at one o'clock in the morning, with an estimated arrival at 5 p.m. after 573 kilometres of racing, pedalling 16 hours with-

out pause. Just after the start, three of us sprinted: Ockers, Van Est and myself. I made a solo break and took first place. A strong sensation that tied me inseparably to delicious bottles of Bordeaux ... followed next by the excellent Merlots of Ticino.

You have often won sprints. Do you remember the irresistible one that some commentators described as "Imperial". What's the secret of this power that you managed to produce as the finishing line approached?

To a large extent, I think it's a gift. I've almost always reached the finishing straight with some reserves of energy. A psychological power emerged that allowed me to coordinate all my muscles instinctively and, with a sudden rediscovery of power, to amass all the energy that I had left. Of course, the duels with Rik van Steenberghe are still unforgettable. The bursts of the Spaniard, Poblet, made an impression on me, as those now of Cipollini.

Like all of us, you have experienced difficult moments. What were the worst instances?

The most recent was my fall this summer. In the distant past I had a heavy fall in Davos that caused me to break my nasal septum and therefore the destruction, fortunately just temporarily, of my most cherished symbol, my nose, to which I owe not only an aerodynamic function but also important sponsorship contracts, like the multi-year one drawn up with *National Insurance*. I have almost forgotten the other difficult moments. Of course, the feeling of discom-

Kübler tackles a bend in his victorious 6th stage of the Tour de France in 1950. He rode the timed 78 kilometres from Dinard to St. Briec in 1 hour 57 minutes 22 seconds, 17 minutes ahead of Fiorenzo Magni. That year he won the *grande boucle*, finishing 9 minutes 30 seconds ahead of the Belgian Stan Ockers.



fort and impotence that gave me a knock-out blow on Mont Ventoux in '55 never left me. It isn't the most difficult climb. There are worse. The problem lies in the complete absence of vegetation, the arid landscape that hinders your breathing. I was riding alongside Raphaël Geminiani. We attacked the climb with undeniable boldness under a perpendicular sun, while the air in inland Provence exceeded 40 degrees. At a certain point I felt a lack of oxygen. I began to zigzag and soon after put my feet on the ground. The suffering was indescribable. It was the most painful moment.

In a certain way that episode marked the start of your decline. That stage is still connected to an individual squabble with Raphaël, who had drawn your attention to the Ventoux, which was a peak that differed from the others. It seems you did not take that advice and replied to your sprint companion that if the Ventoux was not like other peaks then Ferdy was also not an athlete like the others ...

That story was a total invention by two aggressive journalists from a popular French

daily. They were trying to discredit me. Geminiani himself confirmed that when talking to Briquet, the legendary French reporter. Various stories have been attributed to me over the years. Unfortunately, I have had to live with that type of perverted journalism.

On the other hand, the rumourmongers have never undermined your relationship with Emilio Croci Torti.

Emilio was a tremendously reliable teammate. He was indispensable. We are still bound by a strong friendship. In various circumstances he was able to smooth over certain insidious controversies. Emilio has given me so much. I hope that I have been able to make him understand how valuable he has been to me in my sporting career and in the years that followed. When he won the final stage of the Tour de Suisse in '52, arriving alone at the Oerlikon racing track, I was as happy as if I had won myself. I remember that, at the end of the Arosa - Zurich stage, I said to him, "Go on, go for it!". He came in first and also won a piglet that he managed to sell at the cycle track, just after the lap of

Tour de France, July 18, 1955, 11th stage, Marseilles to Avignon: Kübler experiences a crisis on the climb of Mont Ventoux. He arrived at the finishing line in 42nd place, 26 minutes 19 seconds behind first place and withdrew from the race.

Right:
Kübler with his wife,
Christina, celebrating
his 80th birthday on
July 24, 1999.

Below:
Kübler: from cycling
legend to youth ski
instructor at Lenk.

honour, for 350 francs. Neither will I forget my excellent relationship with Bartali. It was he who recommended me to Fritz Dietrich from Tebag, leading to my separation from Cilo. I often met Bartali, thanks to the generous initiatives of Emilio. Dietrich was also my financial consultant after my career ended. He was an important person, especially after my sporting days, which I faced without a manager or entrepreneurs!

Correspondents often indulged themselves by emphasising or inventing some clashes with Koblet. But I never had the impression you were enemies.

Hugo and I were always rivals but not enemies. We had different characters and personalities. He was from the city, elegant, was active in the social life in Zurich, a key figure in the jet-set, adored by women and rather a spendthrift. I, on the other hand, was born and raised in the countryside in fairly poor circumstances. I was six years older than him and treated him like a younger brother and I was never jealous of his feats. We were good pals and respected one another. Anyway, I should confess that without Hugo I would never have become "Ferdy National". Thanks to him I developed the energy that took me to the winner's podium more than 150 times. I owe a lot to Hugo and his tragic end grieved me.



Once you left professional sport, you concentrated on other sports. What influenced your choice?

Until I was 75, I cycled about 40 kilometres almost every day. But the traffic and the lack of cycle paths convinced me to hang up my bicycle on the proverbial hook. Even so, between the ages of 50 and 70 I was a ski instructor. It was in the on the pistes of Davos that I met Christine, my present wife, who is responsible for my taking up golf.

Your bond is strong, much admired and often even a little envied.



I am happy living with her. She helps me, she understands me, supports me and is a divine cook. Unfortunately, she almost always beats me on the golf course. She looks after my papers and together we manage to deal with copious correspondence.

I know that you still receive many letters and requests for dedications and, thanks to your personal replies, you retain your admirable handwriting.

Yes and I'm proud of it. It was my father who indoctrinated in me the pleasure of good formal writing. So I don't find it a burden. A German journalist made a strange calculation to work out how many autographs I have given out over the years. There were a million and a half signatures. He was probably right.

Over the years you have met numerous personalities. Who made a particular impression on you?

Undoubtedly General Henri Guisan. I was on active service in the Second World War. When I won the Tour de Suisse in 1948 he was retired and he came to shake my hand. That gesture moved me. I have met so many personalities from the world of national and international politics but also from business circles and, of course, a lot of journalists. I still have sporadic contacts with many of them. Among the most exceptional meetings I remember the visit that the world accordion champion, Yvette Horner, paid to me. She came to the hotel room that I was sharing with Emilio in Pau and dedicated a very pleasant concert to me. The laughs with the clown Grock were very memorable, as well as the chats with "Sherpa" Tenzing, the conqueror of Everest. I got on well with Bud Spencer and Achille Compagnoni. I dined



with them, thanks to Bartali and Emilio Croci Torti. Finally, I should mention the indomitable entrepreneur Andy Rihs of the Phonac team.



I know that Rihs is an admirer of yours. He's important in today's business world but unfortunately has been involved in sad doping incidents. How do you regard those painful episodes that cast a heavy shadow over cycling? How did you behave?

I think that Rihs's decision to leave cycling and break up a team that included about 20 racers and more than 70 employees, including masseurs, mechanics, doctors and managers was a brave one. Unfortunately, doping is a plague that penalises sport in general and cycling in particular, because it is more vulnerable than other disciplines. Too many cyclists behave irresponsibly. The scandalous decline began in the second half of the 60s and, on the hairpin bends of Mont Ventoux, cost Tom Simpson his life. There was a quick transition from simple pills to injections and all types of stimulants before they came to EPO. That was a tragic and absurd development, partly because it involves not only the professionals but also young people, novices and amateurs. Bartali used to say you could win races by sleeping well. I always followed his advice, adding a severe training regime and drinking litres of orange juice to have the necessary reserves of vitamins. I hope we can bring this phase to an end and return to clean cycling. They will probably have to race more. Emilio often says that he must have gone round the world at least four or five times on a bicycle. I have cycled the distance of the Equator between seven and eight times. In our day, the season began in mid-March with the

Milan - San Remo and closed at the end of October and that's not to mention the Six Days, the winter meetings and cross-country cycling. Today some tend to concentrate on just a specific segment in the season. To appear at that moment they permit themselves everything, without holding back! If we want to save cycling we must act decisively. So Rihs's gesture is particularly courageous and significant. I hope it won't be just a one-off. We should not forget that sports medicine has unfortunately relegated cycling to the role of a patient in agony.

In common with the indestructible "Ferdie National", I hope that the future will bring a much anticipated, luminous rebirth of cycling. I would be happy to find Ferdie Kübler at the road cycling world championships at Mendrisio in 2009 and drink a toast with him to his forthcoming 90th birthday.

A gesture of camaraderie between Kübler and Koblet at the Tour de Suisse in 1955.

On this page:
Emilio Croci Torti, Ferdie Kübler, Gino Bartali and Achille Compagnoni at a private viewing of a one-man exhibition of Croci Torti's work in 1994.



Fragments of reality, memories and imagination

by Sergio Zavoli*



Left:
Cyclists and trees in single
file along an unmade road.

On this and next page:
"Bucolic" cycling from the
distant past.

A leading Bank which has a civilised inclination to share with its community the motives for the cultural and social identity of its territory has cast a far from perfunctory or distracted glance at an aspect of collective life that has taken its place in modern existence: I am talking about sport and, in particular, one of the most popular disciplines, cycling, a small and mythical world whose story has been handed down to us despite a grave sequence of incidents along the way that have marred its image. It is natural enough that if we wish to look for models for the legendary and uncontaminated part of this story, we would choose two champions; two athletes from Switzerland, Kübler and Koblet, who have been shining examples for their country.

I met them both at the start of the reign of Bartali and Coppi. The first of my numerous Giri d'Italia in 1954 was the prerogative, against all expectations, of a Swiss racer, Clerici, an unknown who took his place at the head of the classification and stayed there until Milan, winning a single stage by a huge margin, which could explain the little credit paid to him by the "multi-coloured snake", as the most imaginative writers call the pack of cyclists.

Kübler and Koblet invite comparisons with Bartali and Coppi: the former was more robust, stubborn and generous and resembled the Tuscan champion, while the latter was more elegant, enigmatic, modern and reminiscent of the champion from the Piedmont. Except that Kübler, compared to Koblet, won more with power while the other used his head more, rather like their Italian counterparts. Just their way of sitting on a bicycle distinguished the two pairs, one opting for power and the other style. Koblet had his airs, like Anquetil. For example, he would often tidy his hair, he was careful of his manners with colleagues, journalists and fans and took a graceful wife with experience of the world. Instead, Kübler was more like Nencini and was more brusque, direct and transparent in everything.

Cycling still had "a human face", not just aesthetically. It did not live by bread and water alone even then but it seemed more innocent and it largely was. When the generation of Coppi and Bartali came to an end and that of Gimondi and Merckx, I finished

my last season as an official race follower. My love for cycling did not die. It had been born in my schooldays on the fateful day when they took us to see the Giro go by. We took up a position at the end of the bridge over the Tiber a couple of hours beforehand. We understood that, if not slowed down, the fragile frames of the racing bikes would shatter on the disjointed slabs of the Roman stone. As soon as it appeared on the white, humpback bridge, the Giro strung out in single file, just like in a communications trench. In this way, as it proceeded slowly and cautiously, we could enjoy the spectacle for as long as possible. Among the dazzling apparition, first of all the heads emerged, then the shoulders, the arms and finally the whole racer, with the tubeless tyres crossed on his chest, which gave him the air of a martyr. When the group stretched out before us, we looked on in silence, electrified, as if we had been fated to see the arrival of Constantine at the Milvio Bridge, with the troops preceded by the jubilation of insignia, fabrics and flags. Only the Cross was missing. At the head of the line, a turn and Cazzulani passed by. So stately in the way he led, with that workman's name; turned white by the Italian roads, he seemed like a monument to the racer, while we, the custodians of such a privilege, once the rites were over postponed the enchantment until the next year, should the Giro once again pass by the Consulate and over the bridge on another day of school and sunshine.



To conclude, the Giro had a religious aspect to it. Its appearance took me back to what I had seen in the Chiesa dei Servi in a votive offering: the clouds crossed by the rays of the sun, the one miraculously cured with a luminous dart full in the chest and so many

On the way to the Mountain Grand Prix, between the ranks of the crowd.

angels around him in a celestial light with their eyes looking upwards.

The racers, who rested on the handlebars in order not to exert pressure on the wheels, took advantage of the pace and took the food from their saddlebags that the mechanics and masseurs had prepared. Once they had passed the bridge, the road opened up to the follies of the race; suddenly, a racer would break away and there would be agitation in the Giro, which suddenly became disorganised. That was the moment at which the riders relieved themselves of everything that had remained in the large pockets in their jerseys. I remember that even the bananas ended up in the ditch. They were never seen, not even at Christmas, by their children. It was not by chance that the older riders threw them only when they saw a group of children becoming excited at the edges of the noisy streets and by the hullabaloo.

Each of us was allocated a task that was fundamental to the development of the race: throwing water on the scorched faces of the cyclists, informing them of the number of kilometres that remained on a placard and unfurling a pink flag, the colour of infatuation and as soft as a petal, as soon as the first in the classification was announced. I was supposed to look out for dogs - so that they would not cross the road - and I felt that I was the guarantor of the general safety, while harbouring some particular thoughts (I admit it) for the most popular champions. Such was the desire to greet them that, in the anxiety, everything merged in a surge of colours, with neither head nor tail.

When the caravan of riders had gone by and at the bottom of the road even the last side-car with three madmen on board - wearing yellow sunglasses and a white dust-coat and paid to announce that there was nobody behind - had disappeared, we remained in silence, unable to leave the scene. Was it possible that there was nothing further to anticipate, to see or to shout? That everything had vanished, like a flash of lightning? Once the line had disappeared, we poured out lazily onto the street. The dogs now left the ditches and joined the confused dispersion of their owners. It really was finished, we could go away towards a solitude that seemed permanent.

There are some who protest but I say cycling

is not really a sport! Even if it is, it is so vague and impregnable that the person most able to talk about it seems to be he who knows how to derive metaphors from it and to falsify it, perhaps out of love, making something unreal out of it. Nietzsche said that, "There are no facts, just their interpretations"; perhaps that would be an idea for the Giro d'Italia! In the good old days, you would have been able to debate the *Processo*



alla tappa (Process to the stage), expressing and hearing all shades of opinion. From that mass a whole host of ideas was dispersed, all based on "the utmost poetic possibility allowed to the human body", as Alfredo Oriani - exaggerating, as he was wont to do - described the bicycle.

The *Processo* featured as defendants, so to speak, men and conduct, confusion and customs that were little or nothing compared to what gradually began to happen. To the extent that we now need to consider that the term "sport" carries meanings that do not conform to the Olympian ethos, when it does not refer to a disinterested personal activity - by amateurs - but to the series of athletic disciplines regarded as professional, gathered together, administered and protected by legally recognised institutional agencies. As a result, I am persuaded that, sooner or later, "sport" should concern only amateur activities and not even all of those. The reader will ask if somebody who advances such a radical proposal, i.e. the undersigned, has "alert senses", as doctors tend to write in their reports, or (in colloquial language) is seeing things. "Sport" was just a word that was created and grew in the English-speaking world but gained a foothold in the communicative system and cultural, civil and educational repertoire of

half the planet. After a century and a half, it has fallen so far from the loftiness of its archetype that we must reconsider its meaning. I will act as arbitrator to pronounce this sort of judgement in the name of an ethical tribunal which, even though it lacks an institutional verdict - if not in the conscience of sporting humanity - adjudicates in the name of an offence which (and I apologise to codified law) I would call misappropriation. With the aggravating circumstance of the resonance of the bad example which has contaminated the institutional spirit of a human activity that is civilly, pedagogically and spiritually significant, to the extent of corrupting the ONLUS (non-profit making, socially beneficial organisation) jurisdiction *par excellence*, the Olympiad, which was always more geared to adopting a para-professional dimension and in which non-profit making activity has given way - or, I should say, has thrown open the doors - to market forces, to which has been added the most fraudulent and inexcusable form of cheating: doping. At Turin, in the grandiose and sophisticated inaugural ceremony for the Winter Olympics that would be difficult to top, the highest authorities in Olympic sport officially introduced the word "drugs" into their speeches! I wonder why, after the scandals that broke out in the shadow of the "five rings" - the "swollen muscles" from the anabolic substances in athletes from Eastern Europe and the Far East, the blood pumps and use of erythropoietin in European

cyclists, the pharmacological addiction centres provided by alembics from the world of science and the thousands of shady intrigues introduced swiftly by wizards and sorcerers - it is still possible to utter the word "sport" everywhere as if, despite the now prevailing contamination and corruption, it were permitted to skip abysses of unworthiness, especially those that have already been investigated, pursued and condemned publicly with a show of frowns and a copious flow of moralisms enough to make Tomás de Torquemada turn pale; he understood inflexibility well enough. Now like an Arabian phoenix, that five-lettered word is reborn every time from the ashes and returns to what seems to be its due, as if by right, from every point of view: legal, social, political, economic, cultural, educational, etc. Most likely, unless there is an overwhelming *tsunami*, the situation will continue and will even deteriorate; with the athlete further and further away from the ordinary man compared to when sport was still a "school of life" and what mattered, to use the abused words of De Coubertin, was not to win but to take part. Not even the athletes from the poor nations believe it, although they are the only ones who still express sport in its "raw and naked" form, to quote my friend Gianni Brera, an expert in sporting morphology, that is to say the sporting gesture and its relation with the body and, I would add, with the spirit - starting from the Africans, the barefoot champions, as agile and



The hairpin bends...
the climb...

Preparation before
the scramble.



speedy as the cheetah, marathon runners like the gnu and, finally, myths like the hero of Marathon or the torchbearer of Olympia - which is still recognisable in the solitary runs on the high plains of Kenya. At this stage, I am reminded of the Ethiopian Abebe Bikila, the most cherished story from the 1960 Olympics, in that luxuriant Roman sunset. That race became extinct with the growth of the absolute domination of TV, which marked the start of the contamination and tolerance, just to add flattery and targets to the collection of samples from each and everyone.

Little will be learned from the discoveries by Lascaux - in France, but also in Africa and Australia - of cave paintings reproducing the ritual ceremonies of 30,000 years ago, which concluded with "games" played with just arms and legs; or, in Libya, the representation of men trying to shoot with the bow, a trial in which one prevailed for survival, or fishing in Egypt, where the Pharaohs were not just spectators but also referees, because

then refereeing meant guaranteeing a contest that also symbolised the sacred nature of life. Soon, you will see, go-kart trials and paragliding will become Olympic sports. Some have even had the temerity to suggest giving sporting dignity to running backwards and perhaps even shooting with the sling, the boomerang, the peashooter and who knows what!

We will not be so foolish as to deprive ourselves of the uncontaminated beauty offered by the authentic Olympic show, beginning with athletics, and neither will we renounce the professional theatre - soccer, cycling, motor racing, motorcycling, basketball, etc. - which showcases the extent to which individual and "team" competitiveness can express popularity; nor will we let ourselves be coerced to invite half the world to desert the field by the explosion of money and drugs, with their snares! However, the humus will remain that draws its nourishment from the pages of Pindar - derided in vain by Aristophanes - which can be found in

Hordes of bicycles and fans lining the road to see the champion go by.

the *Storia delle Olimpiadi (The Story of the Olympic Games)* by Stefano Jacomuzzi, which a referee of proven clarity, Claudio Magris, recommends to us in the name of the survival of incorruptibility.

In my sporting experience (in a discipline like cycling), I scandalised half the Giro when I wrote that resorting to doping by the more villainous deprived the sport of dignity. I recall that, to justify that verdict, I was inspired by the words of a poet who adored the bicycle, Alfonso Gatto, but was terrorised by just the thought of getting on to it. One day, touched by the beauty of the Giro, he said, “Now I will fall, I will fall until the last day of my life, dreaming of sprinting”.

I admit that the hardest change was to see the comparison made between the unworthiness of soccer and cycling. I rebelled against that notion. Initially I was indignant at the idea of likening two worlds which are so profoundly different in every sense. Then I had to give in on so many things, while still wishing to give cycling the record in toil and sacrifice, persistence and dedication. The manner of battling and winning is starkly different. In soccer you are free to imagine that a result may depend on a cross-eyed linesman or referee, while victory for a racing cyclist is easier to verify: on a white line which identifies the finish, where it is decided by the wheel that crosses first, by the stopwatch, by the final sprint, but also by the breakaway, the ascent and the descent, a mechanical breakdown and the tricks of the road, the ice and glaring sun, by hunger and thirst. An unwritten covenant of credibility and trust binds the “giants of the road” to their public. However, if it is possible to suspect that success was due to the injection, the intravenous drip or transfusion, the pact collapses, epic poetry descends to the cellar and ethics go up in smoke. In short, a cherished world is shattered. Not that there was any lack of reasons for alarm, allusions, half-truths and even scandals, such as that which involved a great and acclaimed champion, Marco Pantani, but we believed that the anti-doping law, which everyone had said they wanted, would serve as a deterrent. That was not the case, or at least barely. Judging by how things have been going and when the lid of the saucepan comes off, the risk is that there will be nothing more to find, prevent

nor repress. In the interest, above all, of so-called “clean” racing cyclists, the victims of a system that has lost its way, sooner or later it will be necessary to return to zero and start from scratch; from the boys you would feel tempted to embrace when you see them in their tight cycling gear at the side of the road on a Sunday morning; and their bicycles, lighter and quieter than the air, too.



After becoming athletes, they will have to commit themselves to respecting an ethical code. However, the technicians, doctors, managers and journalists also need to commit to precise obligations. We can hardly expect that the considerable interests at stake today will be converted spontaneously into sporting morals, but they should be induced or compelled to accept the rules, if for no other reason than the fear of destroying the machine that manufactures the profits. Will it still be possible to equate cycling with transparency? Is that utopia? Have we gone too far to turn back and do everything differently? One sports writer, Eduardo Galeano, wrote: “Utopia is like the horizon; it is unreachable but it helps us to carry on walking”.

At this stage, I am so immersed in recollections of the cycling in my own era and so marked by how we experienced it that a start is sufficient to reawaken a youth that lay dormant who knows where. I do not think it has happened just to me. For example, I recall that each one of us told the tale of a race that was his own version, different from any others. Even then I thought that cycling could not be described according to a technical yardstick. At least three writers and a poet had considered dedicating to Coppi something that went beyond an interest in sport that was even extraordinary and was

The wall ... the
cobblestones

caused by the champion: I am thinking of Buzzati, Vergani, Mosca and Gatto. My four companions on the wings of fortune, commentators for the love of it, hinted at a novel somewhere between the real and the arcane that featured as the protagonist a real and, at the same time, mythical character. It might seem excessive, yet there were years in which (as I tell the younger generations) Coppi really lived within people's imaginations to the extent that we believed that he was not so much a racing cyclist albeit an exceptional one, but an extraordinary apparition in the panorama, so to speak, of human possibilities. If we then add the enigma of dismay and misfortune - and a faint pallor even of the spirit - then we have the portrait of a man from a novel. Besides, a whole pop-



ulation was devoted to the beauty of their Giro, including intellectuals, who often turned their noses up at sport, except Pratolini, Bernari and Pasolini, who gave vent to impassioned words against the snobishness which appeared to overlook that Coppi, in his own way, was a much more "literary" hero than other invented characters. It is difficult to deny the fable-like nature, for example, of the scenario set by Buzzati for the victorious image of the champion in '49: "And he found himself flying down the gravelly road in the heart of the wood. And the wood had turned black. The clouds were also black, all frayed around the bottom. Every now and again, some savage rock in the Dolomites, amid the fog. Something stung his face and thighs. A storm in the mountains. Little by little the scene and the battle became more powerful. The stark spruce firs fled at the sides, all made crooked by the speed...".

Eleven years later, on January 2, 1960, the "great heron", as Vergani called him, died.

The incomparable pursuit racer telephoned the *Corriere* and spoke breathlessly: "Fausto would win but never smile, as if he did not believe entirely in himself. He seemed to be too preoccupied, listening strangely to and absorbed by an internal voice that was murmuring an incomprehensible word. The clamour and applause of millions of spectators were not enough to drown it out. Misfortune, the *guigne* (rotten luck), the sad companion of the old road races, broke the thread of that extremely fragile life just like a little gust of wind breaks the thread of a spider's web covered with hoar-frost; there on the wintry hedges of his native countryside". A purist would have said it was the completion of an imaginative great person, who coupled success with melancholy, writing with the legend providing the reader with a new key to enter the world of cycle racing. Time passed and it was discovered that Malaparte was thinking of Fausto Coppi when he called the bicycle "this work of art, this jewel of the spirit". During the race Brera himself - now it would be Mura's turn - produced extremely vivid portraits of the "sky blue and white" champion with the virtuosity of pursuit riders. They did not always manage to avoid flourishes and emphases, in other words the prose could be slightly affected. But was not the most appropriate language for cycling a mixture of fact and fiction? The master of that alchemy was Orio Vergani himself, who wrote his tales in his newspaper's car, his notebook on his knee and his fountain pen in his mouth. Every now and again he would look out of the window, searching for an adjective. Then, once the stage had drawn to a close, he would ask for the piece to be dictated by a young assistant, Walter Breveglieri - an excellent photographer from Bologna who died some years ago - the only one in the caravan able to handle that writing full of jumps, scrawls, knots and marks set out on the right-hand side of the sheet in a crooked and increasingly slender column that ended in a line of just two or three words. One day, at Montpellier, Breveglieri picked up the telephone and read, "Who is that swarthy young man who appeared alone at the finishing line?" The typist at the *Corriere* protested, "You're asking me? Can't you say who won?" Breveglieri resumed his dictation patiently:

The final sprint towards the finish.



“Who is that swarthy young man ...”.

In those days, sports writers could be vague. In fact, Fellini would say, it was thanks to that very imprecision that the report took on a captivating narrative quality. It is also true that, to digress without doing the facts an injustice or being unworthy of the reader, you needed to be called Vergani, or at least resemble him, to have that capacity to touch everything with imagination, culture and humanity, embracing the truth in the imaginary and vice-versa, depending on the inclination taken by the event or your humour. Breveglieri spoke about him for years, with a few transgressions from devotion. Another report, he would recall, had a problematical beginning: “Should I tell you about the winner of the stage or the wines of Burgundy?” But then the pen would unleash extraordinary tales that lost their way and returned with continuous darts and references, where the facts prevailed - sovereign - in the middle. In this way, people who had never appreciated sport began to read about it and people began to concern themselves with cycling even though they had never felt tempted to write about it, in spite of their love of it.

Now that cycling is no longer my trade, Enrico Ghezzi brings it back to me and it is difficult to say how many emotions are resuscitated. The flickering of the television set shows us what has been saved from our own forgetfulness not to mention the almost

undetectable suicides in the memory. In an enormous reliquary of millions of tapes, not only a common recollection - by now diaphanous - has been stored. What re-emerges from time to time is the possibility of reconverting it to everyone's past. Some time ago I saw again *Processo alla tappa*, which is now more than 30 years old. The remoteness in time now conferred a certain indulgence and, at least for me, empathy. Not even an aesthetic contradiction filtered through the black and white, by now rather tired but still carrying the ingenious epos that continued to pulse within it. The language seems appropriate for a “flicker”, in other words just a fragment of a report, but, at the same time, and for a reason that remains mysterious, it began to reconnect with a sort of surviving, inexhausted and harmonious “need” for those images, in other words for that time and those stories. I saw the programme at about three o'clock in the morning, the time allotted to Ghezzi and his “author's meanderings”. Something reserved for sleepwalkers, the disturbed and insomniacs. It was a *Processo* about doping. After I switched off the television set, I remember thinking, “Cycling, if you're still in time, save yourself! At the cost of no longer being a sport for a while, save yourself! Just look at football!”

Now I would like to express my gratitude to the Banca Popolare di Sondrio (SUISSE) for

taking us back to the long-distant humanity of the “pedallers”, those “giants of the road” and the “last innocents”, as Eugenio Montale, another great poet of chance and fortune, wrote. On the subject of innocence he was preceded by an equally outstanding French writer, Stéphane Mallarmé: “Incredulousness has no talent!” he shouted under the effect of a vintage Chabli to a group of pessimists, who those from my area in Romagna call the “noers”. Because they invariably say “no”. But can you live and respect yourself without believing that we - even we - will be able to “do everything all over again?”

* *Journalist and writer, former President of RAI*

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Dino BUZZATI,

Non tramonerà mai

la fiaba della bicicletta

(The sun will never set

on the bicycle's fable),

in "Corriere della Sera",

June 14, 1949

Detail of the poster

"Cycles Météore"

Artist: Georges Faivre