

Maddog Unleashed

The Giro's Too Hard, Gas Is Too Expensive And Other Good News



"After this Giro ends, I am going to give a present of a bicycle to (race director Angelo) Zomegnan and tell him to ride this Giro and make all the transfers that they've put us through."—Barloworld rider Enrico Gasparotto speaking with *VeloNews*

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

What's the last thing to go through a rider's mind in the final kilometers of a stage at the Giro d'Italia? His ass, judging by the appalling number of faceplants I've seen this year.

Seriously, these guys were falling like California housing values in the first two weeks of what seemed less like a grand tour and more like the Italian Invitational Asphalt-Surfing Championships. As the body count started piling up, I wondered whether some riders were taking dives just to get out of the race, which was shaping up as one of the toughest in recent memory and taking its toll on the peloton.

VeloNews European correspondent Andrew Hood said Jens Voigt "had smoke coming out of his ears" after the stage-16 time trial, a monstrous hill climb on the service road to Plan de Corones, with 5.2 kilometers of gravel and a peak grade of 24 percent.

"It's a stupid race—I don't like it! We are at a ski area! Leave it to the mountain bikers!" the German grumbled. "I don't want to sound like an old grandmother, because I know cycling is hard. But this Giro is too much."

Does Granny Miss Her Little Helper? Too much, is it? Maybe the war on drugs is finally taking some prisoners. Or perhaps it's simply a case of a fed-up race organizer saying, "Okay, if you guys insist on taking all this dope, we're gonna give you something spectacular to do with it."

Whatever. This Giro has been big fun to watch, especially since some of cycling's gods appear sweatily mortal for a change. Race director Angelo Zomegnan certainly seemed to enjoy the suffering he had inflicted on the peloton.

"Cycling needs spectacle like this to lift it out of mediocrity," he told *VeloNews*. "Look around us—there are not mountains like this anywhere in the world. What do (the riders) want? Every day, this Giro has had huge crowds along the road, on the finish, big audiences on TV. This is the Giro—if they don't like it, they can race somewhere else."

Speaking of Addiction and Withdrawal. Equally pleasing to the eye has been the largely positive press about how some motorists are turning to pedal power in the face of soaring gasoline prices.

From Maine to Spokane and Minot to McAllen, local news outlets report increased bike sales and repair traffic at neighborhood shops, though prominent extraterrestrialist Gregg Bagni says his little green pals still don't see any significant change in Earthworm behavior shy of six bucks a gallon: "In the meantime they'll still drive their SUVs, idle their cars and just cut back on the stuff that's not that important—y'know, healthcare, food, premium toilet paper and vacations."

Still, I've seen more bicycle commuters this year than last, and I'm not alone. Dale Heinert told *The Associated Press* he's been getting some company on his daily bike to work in Bismarck, North Dakota. The 56-year-old engineer began cycling to work when the price of gas began skyrocketing—in 1973. But that isn't the only reason he prefers pedal power.

"It's a stress-reliever," he said.

Just don't try to sell that concept to any of the survivors of this year's Giro. He might just try to kick you in the butt, if he has the strength to raise a leg.