

FEBRUARY / MARCH 23

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE...

Issue 74 is go!
Bikepacking the EWS? Matthew Fairbrother did it and we had a chat with this young Kiwi on his extraordinary year. Derek went to South Africa for the Wine to Wales Epic, we talked to IMBA about turning trail building into a career and the Angry Insider is back!

We have Clive with the Technique section and Mischa explores Domodossola Italy for the Trail Guide. Furthermore we have kit on test from Absolute Black, Sram, Fox, Silva and many more. Of course there are the regulars like Light Box and Movie Night are of course also present so dig in and enjoy!

ENJOY THE LATEST ISSUE!



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- INTERVIEW WITH MATT FAIRBROTHER -
TRAIL BUILDER AS A CAREER / THE WINE TO WHALES EPIC
TRAIL GUIDE DOMODOSSOLA / ANGRY INSIDER / TECHNIQUE, TESTS & MORE!

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PLANT

LESS GEEK MORE CHIC

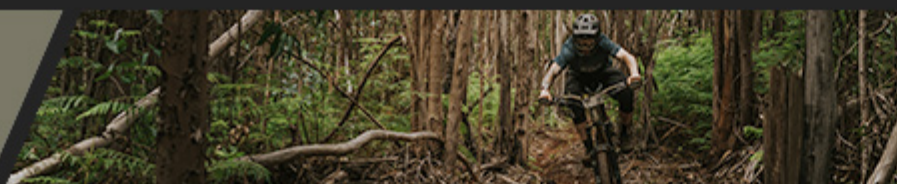
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FRONT COVER PHOTO JAMES VINCENT

COMPETITION



TECHNIQUE -
WINTER SURVIVAL



EDITORIAL



TRIED AND TESTED



INTERVIEW WITH
MATT FAIRBROTHER



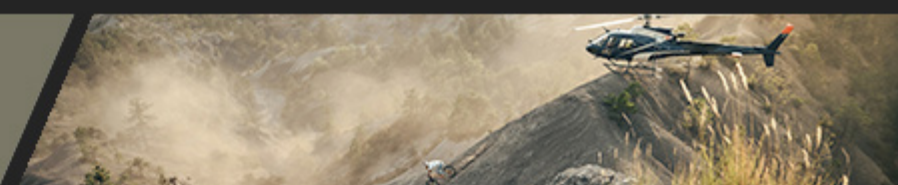
ANGRY INSIDER -
BIKE RENTAL



TRAIL BUILDING AS
A CAREER



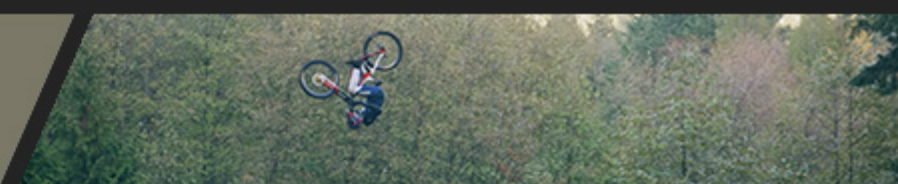
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WINE TO WALES - THE
TRUE GEES OF MTB



MOVIE NIGHT



TRAIL GUIDE
DOMODOSSOLA



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ISSUE 74

The Dark Ages

At the time of writing, winter mountain biking has never been this good in the Alps. The trails are clear up to 1500m altitude and for the past weeks it has been sunny, dry and at times even with spring-like temperatures.

But although riding conditions are prime, the bike industry has started to shift from the initial 'we're out of stock of everything for the coming 12 months' crisis right into the opposite end where the warehouses are packed and the dealers are stuffed while 2022 sales figures dropped with double digit percentages.

Obviously this should not come as a surprise for most, as the massive rise in sales over the pandemic period

was due to drop at some point. I believe that life is like a pendulum and one swing always follows another in the opposite direction.

But, I don't think we should make any rash assumptions here. The sport is far from doomed, and I think we can all see around us many new people that entered the sport in the past few years. And they are here to stay because once you discover the limitless joy of riding your bike down a bit of singletrack there ain't no turning back!

Even on the business side of things there is still hope. Recently the EU voted to allow member states to cut VAT on sales, rentals and repairs of bicycles from 15% to 5% and the IMBA is working on turning MTB Trail building into a certified career with the help of EU subsidies.

And there are other industries closely linked to riding bikes too. Events are back on and with travel being 100% back to normal with all the guiding operations, bucket list events and races back on the calendar, the summer of 2023 is looking better than ever!

But first, in front of you lies the fruit of several weeks of labor called IMB Issue 74! Crammed once again with two wheeled adventures, interviews and product reviews to get you through the last weeks of winter.

I hope you sincerely enjoy and appreciate the magazine!

Jaruo Hoogland
Publishing Editor



WORDS JARNO HOOGLAND & MATTHEW FAIRBROTHER

MATT FAIRBROTHER

THE KIWI THAT LOVES WINGING IT!

If you were following any news on the EWS race series of 2022, it would have been impossible to not hear about a young Kiwi kid bikepacking to all the rounds.



"WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE EWS AND ADD IN LIMITED SLEEP AND 200KM DAYS IN THE SADDLE AS A 'RECOVERY RIDE' "

Now if you've ever raced an enduro race, you know that even if you try to take it easy and do it 'just for fun', that by the end of the weekend you're pretty fried. Now multiply that by 5 as we're talking about the EWS and add in limited sleep and 200km days in the saddle as a 'recovery ride' and you have the 2022 race season of Matthew Fairbrother in a nutshell.

We tracked him down with some questions and you can see the result of the interview below!

Matt! As far as riders goes, I think you had the most eventful 2022 of all of them. How many km did you put on the clock eventually?

Yeah 2022 was a blast! I did about 3500 km of riding between races.

So, let's wind the clock back a bit. When did you actually start riding bikes and how did you get into riding in the first place?

I started riding when I was 11, my brother had just joined the MTB club at his high school - My dad started joining him for rides and I followed them along. My competitive nature wouldn't let them be better than me so I was continuously trying to improve over those years.

At what point did you start competing and in which disciplines?

I think I did my first race when I was 12, It was a night XC race. For the following couple of years after that I was racing local XC races. After that I was racing XC,



"I'M ALSO AS STUBBORN AS ANYTHING SO I THINK THEY KNEW BEST TO OFFER ME CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK RATHER THAN SHUTTING IT DOWN AS I'D BE RIDING EITHER WAY."

Enduro and DH. The past two years my focus has been on Enduro with the occasional DH race and suffer-fest ride thrown in every now and then for good measure.

And I heard you didn't even plan to ride from EWS to EWS at first, but you planned on bumming a ride with some other racers is that right?

Correct, I'm just a young kid out of New Zealand. Living on the other side of the world, I knew no one at all. I'm not old enough to have a driver's licence in Europe/UK even if I did there would have been no way for me to afford a vehicle.

I was relying on finding a lift with someone from the UK to the European races, unfortunately after many messages the week prior to the first EWS in the Tweed Valley (Scotland) I accepted that I couldn't get a ride from anyone and I'd have to work out my own way. In my head the thing that made the most sense was just to ride there, I've got a bike so why don't I just pedal it there?

Were your parents ok with you pedalling the whole way to the events?

It took some convincing but I think they somewhat understood my intentions and my reasoning behind it. I'm also as stubborn as anything so I think they knew best to offer me constructive feedback rather than shutting it down as I'd be riding either way.

It must have been tough to get the funds sorted. What did you do to get your budget together?

Straight after school finished in November I went into working as a bike mechanic at the local bike-park and a large chain store. Most weeks I was doing at least 60 hours. This ruined me, I was tired and had almost zero time for riding my bike, training or studying but it had to be done.

" HEADING OVER TO A COUNTRY I KNEW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT AND WITH VERY CLOSE TO NO PLANS I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT. "

What about the school side of things?

Immediately after the school year finished in 2021 I signed myself up to a New Zealand Government run online school so I could get a headstart on the following year's studies. I managed to get a third of the year's work finished before heading overseas but my lifestyle overseas unfortunately wasn't suited very well to studying so I abandoned that mid-way through the year.

Before heading out, did you plan anything at all? Did you look up the distances between races and book some accommodation for the round in Scotland?

I'd booked accommodation for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd rounds with some other racers I knew from New Zealand. I hadn't looked up any distances or anything, and riding to the events hadn't been a thought yet!

So you got your bags packed, hopped in the plane and off you went. First time out of NZ in your lifetime. I can imagine you were pretty stoked. Can you tell us about that moment?

A whole mix of emotions - excited but also very scared. Although it definitely doesn't seem like it, I like to be a very organised person with detailed plans.

I like to know the exact layout of what I'll be doing. Heading over to a country I knew almost nothing about and with very close to no plans I didn't know what. I often get stressed in unknown or planned situations, especially in non-english speaking countries. I think this year was a great learning experience though.



PHOTO 7MESH

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Then you are in Scotland, first race how did it go?

Bit of a mixed bag as most races go. I had a good first few stages and was sitting within the top 10 U21, on the second to last stage I crashed and got pushed back to 10th. Then on the last stage I was pushing hard and snapped my derailleur off near the top. I finished the run chainless and landed myself in 11th. I was bummed to have been pushed out of the top 10 but stoked to see I could actually be competitive internationally.

"STAGE I WAS PUSHING HARD AND SNAPPED MY DERAILLEUR OFF NEAR THE TOP."



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" THE FIRST FEW DAYS WERE TOUGH, COMING STRAIGHT OUT OF A RACE THE LEGS WERE EMPTY. "

At what point you realised that getting a ride to Slovenia might be a challenge and when did you decide to just pedal it?

I realised the week prior to the race that I need to have a back up plan, just in case I couldn't catch a ride with anyone. I ordered bikepacking bags and everything I thought I'd need. I decided to pedal it on the Saturday of the race weekend, and then left Sunday immediately after the race.

The first 'commute' to Slovenia was a big one straight out of the box. How were those first days in the saddle, did you manage to enjoy it a bit?

The first few days were tough, coming straight out of a race the legs were empty. I pedalled 80km straight after the EWS and called it a day at 2am, without realising it I had stopped to sleep next to a lake. After a 4 hour sleep I woke up covered in midge bites and then rode another 80km to the NewCastle ferry.

The following days my legs started to come alive more, I was clocking 200-300 km most days, the experience of it all unfortunately started to vanish as I was zoned out and suffering for most of it. I do have a selection of photos and videos though that were nice to look at once I was in a better state.

Did you do any huge days like these before heading out to Europe?

Once a year I like to do a challenge to see what I'm capable of. I've done 3 everestings and 1 10000 metre vertical ride - All on a mountain bike.



"THERE WAS NO WAY I'D BE ABLE TO TURN THIS DOWN AND BEFORE I KNEW IT I WAS AT WHISTLER LAPPING THE PARK ALL DAY!"

Once in Slovenia, I believe a fair amount of riders were surprised you actually made the effort. How was the reaction of the pro field?

I think they were all amazed I actually made it. The reality of it all soaked in when I won the Wyn Masters Privateer of the week award.

Soon after I left the venue, on-route to the next race, I rode through the pits and all the pro riders were clapping and cheering for me on my way out.

Of course word got round and you started to get more support from people. What are some of the coolest things that you got sorted out with?

Deviate Cycles set me up a Go-Fund me page and paid for my flights for the North America rounds. The Go-Fund me raised me enough to be able to afford better food and accommodation and to participate in all the following rounds.

Something I'm also incredibly appreciative of is all the people that reached out to me and offered me food and a place to sleep. I only managed to take a couple people up on this offer due to logistical issues but the amount of people that genuinely wanted to help was mind blowing.

So at one point you get sorted out with the support for also doing the North American legs of the tour. Weren't you looking forward to a bit of a break by that time?

Yea, for sure! But at the same time this trip was all about learning and the experience. There was no way I'd be able to turn this down and before I knew it I was at Whistler lapping the park all day!

" I WAS VERY WORRIED ABOUT MY BIKE GETTING STOLEN, ESPECIALLY SINCE I HAD ALL MY BELONGINGS ON IT. "

The USA and Canada are quite different from Europe. More crime, less cycle paths and wild animals too. I'm sure you had some cool encounters you can share.

Probably my favourite story was from the commute between Burke and Sugarloaf. I accidentally biked through freshly painted road markings and shortly after passed the road workers who had just painted those lines. My tires were laying fresh paint on the road every rotation and one of the road workers saw and wasn't happy. He started yelling at me and I boosted off trying to avoid confrontation, he jumped in his truck and followed me down the road, eventually pushing me off the road. I then decided to straight line it through a marsh and join up with the road later on to avoid the worker, I ran into a very unhappy Canadian goose which began attacking me.

On the logistics side, how did you manage to eat, drink, find your way and charge all your lights and devices?

I was very worried about my bike getting stolen, especially since I had all my belongings on it. I opted to only stop at small villages or isolated gas stations. My diet mainly consisted of lollies and the occasional pastry if I got lucky. For my lights and devices, I bought a few power banks before leaving the UK, I'd charge these up before leaving the venue and they'd last me up to a week.



A photograph of a mountain landscape at sunset. In the foreground, a yellow tent and a bicycle are set up in a grassy field. In the background, a mountain peak is visible with a radio tower on top. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple.

" I HAD NO EXPECTATION OF WHERE I'D END UP AND FINISHING UP THAT WELL IS HONESTLY A SURPRISE! "

So, let's move to the racing side of things. You had some really solid results throughout the season, ending up with a lucky 13th overall in the Under21's. How happy were you with your first season of racing abroad?

Yea I'm super happy about that. I had no expectation of where I'd end up and finishing up that well is honestly a surprise! I think it's a great starting point to build upon over the next couple of years.

On what aspects besides being well rested before a race do you think you can still improve and up the ante in races and stages?

I think nutrition is a big one here although in my position I think I have very limited options. It's something I'll be putting more thought into this season. I think everything else comes down to general training and doing my best to limit fatigue.

What type of race track do you like best and which was your favourite event to race?

Something technical and fast - but not bikepark. I think last year I enjoyed Sugarloaf the most.

So for next year, are you planning to bikepack the whole EWS again? Are you setting up your own sub category of EWS?

I'll be doing it all again! I believe there are a few other people planning on doing it too! Hopefully we can create a peloton riding between all of the races.



"KNOW YOUR ABILITIES AND LIMITS AND KEEP IT SIMPLE, THERE'S NO NEED TO MAKE IT COMPLEX - JUST GO WITH THE FLOW., BUT WHATEVER YOU DO JUST GO. "

For our readers, do you have any tips for bikepacking for anyone that has never tried it?

Know your abilities and limits and keep it simple, there's no need to make it complex - just go with the flow., but whatever you do just go.

So, to finish things up, what are the plans for next season so far?

I'll be taking on the full EWS calendar this season and bikepacking to all the races. I've also got a couple of side challenges lined up, the Hightrail 550 in Scotland being the first. You'll hear more about that in the near future.

That sounds awesome, I'm sure there will be plenty of adventures on that trip. So who is supporting you for the ride?

This season Deviate Cycles, Trail One Components, Worldwide Cyclery, POC, Ergon, Granite Designs, Tailfin, Motorex, Fox,

Shimano, RaceFace, Crankbrothers, Mons Royale are backing me!

And that finished up the chat with Matthew. If you want to follow his journey make sure to follow him on instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/matthewfmtb/> The last thing we saw him post up there was his race at the NZ Nationals. After winning U21's on day one, he 'didn't manage to keep the horse up straight' on day two, leaving him with his first ever DNF.

Don't worry though, the next day he was already spotted pedalling 100 km from Hobart Airport to the Maydena Bike Park in Tasmania with his foot in a cast on his fully loaded bike. What a beast!

A full-page background image showing a mountain biker in a black jersey and helmet riding a gravel bike on a light-colored gravel trail. The trail is surrounded by dense forest with trees showing autumn foliage in shades of green, yellow, and orange. The biker is positioned in the middle ground, riding away from the viewer.

TRAIL BUILDING AS A CAREER

The popularity of mountain biking is booming, with record amounts of bikes sold in the past half a decade it is obvious the need for proper mountain bike trails is growing just as rapidly. To create this new infrastructure, it is super important that they are designed, built and maintained by a set of skilled people who are educated properly in order to have a sustainable trail infrastructure all across Europe.

WORDS MARK TORSIUS PHOTOS IMBA



**" IT IS SUPER IMPORTANT THAT THEY ARE DESIGNED,
BUILT AND MAINTAINED BY A SET OF SKILLED
PEOPLE WHO ARE EDUCATED PROPERLY "**

This need was what put the DIRT (Developing Inter European Resources for Trail builder Training) project in motion back in 2019. Started by IMBA Europe and an international project group representing both volunteer and professional trail builders, education providers, municipalities, and tourist destinations. This project was aimed at creating a professional toolset for trail design, construction and maintenance.

In the first project phase DIRT developed a mountain bike trail educational framework and study programme, leading to Europe's first formal education for Mountain Bike Trail Planning, Construction and Maintenance at Fagskolen i Viken in Norway. The program was launched in September 2022 in Geilo, with a total of 25 students from 12 different countries.

But it's not only a training offer that has been created for professionals. Specific training programmes for volunteers are also on its way in Denmark and Scotland. Depending on the maturity of the MTB market and scene, a bespoke training offer can be developed based on DIRT training resources provided one has experienced, competent tutors. New to the DIRT Educational Framework is the distinction by different build levels (from 'rake and ride' to hand built, machine built and engineered trails) and the consideration of rider dynamics when designing new trails.

Christoffer Riis Svendsen, trail expert and project manager of the On Trail project in Denmark, explains how the DIRT training resources cascade into training programs for volunteers.





"THE DEMAND FOR KNOWLEDGE TO BUILD BETTER TRAILS IS GROWING AMONG THE VOLUNTEERS."

"We have benefitted from the DIRT project with a much more broad and specialized updated knowledge on mountain biking as a recreational activity and trail building as a profession. Within that spectrum we got the opportunity to develop and design a Trail Keeper and Trail Boss training course for volunteers and specific workshops to step up the quality of the purpose-built mountain bike Trails in Denmark. Moreover, we also

address topics like legislation, cooperation with landowners and how to manage dig days for volunteers".

The growth of mountain biking also translates to the number of people interested in becoming a (volunteer) trail builder. "There is a solid interest in being a volunteer trail builder in Denmark. And the demand for knowledge to build better trails is growing among the volunteers. Almost all trails in Denmark have been, or are, built by volunteers. And the few small companies who build trails, often do it with some sort of cooperation with the volunteer groups.

Over the years the knowledge about trail building among volunteers has increased. Governmental agencies, municipalities and land managers have had some issues and found it sometimes difficult to accept that 'some volunteer' came and knew much more about how to build good sustainable trails in our nature. But they have overcome, and now do appreciate and embrace the special knowledge and skills among many volunteers", as Christoffer explains.

Thanks to the renewed support from the European Commission, DIRT will be able to continue developing the existing framework into a European-wide trail builder certification program.



" THE FIRST PHASE OF DIRT T WAS DEDICATED TO BUILDING MORE TRAINING CAPACITY BOTH AT THE VOLUNTEER AND PROFESSIONAL LEVEL. "

BUILDING CAPACITY, DISTINGUISHING QUALITY

In a comprehensive trail building sector survey undertaken by the DIRT T project in 2020, as many as 65% responded that they struggle to recruit employees with the appropriate skills and competence. Furthermore, 56% of the sector experience that there is not enough training available to meet the needs of their organization. Hence, the first phase of DIRT T was dedicated to building more training capacity both at the volunteer and professional level. Another central finding in the 2020-survey was a strong demand for a non-mandatory certification program. As many as 79% of the respondents felt that the introduction of certification would lead to an increase in the quality and sustainability of mountain bike trails.

With a growing body of quality assured educational resources, and DIRT T-related training and education programs starting to form around Europe, the international certification program was a natural next step for DIRT T. Work on the certification will commence January 2023, leading up to a planned 2025/2026 certification launch coordinated by IMBA Europe.

Sylvain Häderli, environmental engineer at BikePlan as well as being responsible for the MTB trails in Verbier, has a clear idea about the future development of the trail building sector.

" WE WANT TRAIL BUILDERS TO MEET, EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES TO RAISE THE BAR OF QUALITY OF OUR PROFESSION. "

"Our generation is in transition from amateur trail builders, doing it for passion and most of all for themselves and professional ones that build trails according to users needs, land constraints, budget and with a long-term vision. With DIRT we first wanted to give the new trail builders technical content to improve the quality of their work but that's not all. We aim to improve trail builder's understanding of the public they build for, the land they build on and the process to deliver a successful project. We want trail builders to meet, exchange experiences to raise the bar of quality of our profession. It's great as well to have a pool of experts that can help all these new companies to start with the right standards of quality and prices that are coherent. Certification will help clients identify these companies that deliver quality, and it will justify their prices"

A MOVE TOWARDS STRONGER JOB RECOGNITION

What will a certification framework mean for trail builders? Firstly, the planned certification framework for mountain bike trail building will be a standard for the competences needed in the sector, serving as a much-needed yardstick for quality assurance of the skills and knowledge held by professionals in the sector. Secondly, a certification framework will add a stronger degree of formal job recognition to the craft of trail building across Europe.

"We realize that maintaining the status quo might feel like the most convenient alternative for some.



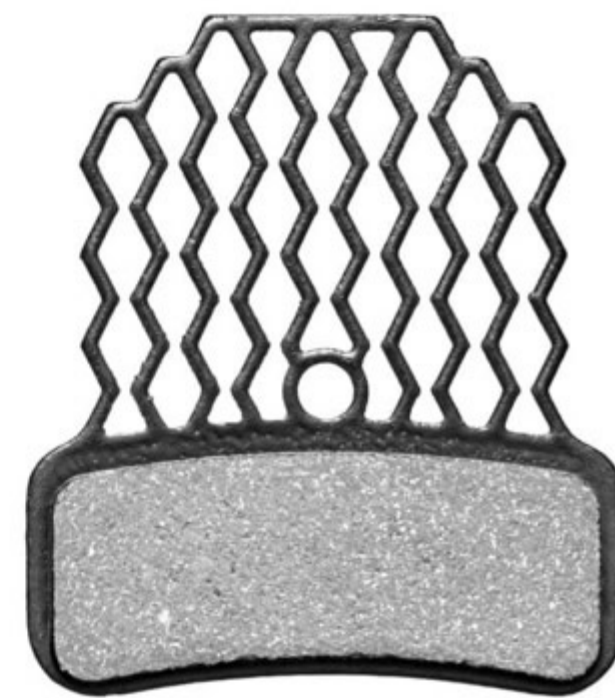


Yet, with the massive growth in trail building also comes increased responsibility. The certification project is a golden opportunity for the sector to shape the profile and position of professional trail building in the future." – Lars W. Jensen, DIRT Project Manager

It's clear that the sector has a big responsibility due to the increased participation in outdoor recreation, new user trends, increased awareness of sustainability, climate change and loss of biodiversity. The complexity of planning, designing, and building or maintaining trails has grown over the years. Whether it's landowners, National Park managers, resorts, or municipalities, the conditions they place on trail builders or trail maintenance crews have become stricter as well.

"THE COMPLEXITY OF PLANNING, DESIGNING, AND BUILDING OR MAINTAINING TRAILS HAS GROWN OVER THE YEARS."

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ABOUT DIRT:

- Project name: Developing Inter-european Resources for Trail builder Training (DIRTT)
- First phase (2019-2022): Development of an Educational Framework
- Second phase (2023-2025): Development of a Certification / Competency Framework
- DIRTT is co-funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ program
- More info
<https://www.imba-europe.org/knowledge-hub/dirtt-project/>

"I think today we plan a lot more than back in the days. It is about sustainability, lack of spaces, project costs/time, maintenance costs. The concern about users' safety is growing as well. Trails need to be predictable, according to their trail grading level. It is not only adrenaline junkies riding trails anymore, the mainstream public have other needs in terms of security. Safety regulations within companies and workplaces are getting stricter and stricter as well. It's very different from one country to another but all in all there is less and less space for amateurism. I think a company doing cheap work would not last very long nowadays but still they can have a very bad impact on the environment and how the public and stakeholders perceive mountain biking", says Silvain Häderli.

"There's still a lot of work to do and more collaboration with trail builders, trail associations, land management agencies and other stakeholders will be essential to future proof this sector", says Mark Torsius of IMBA Europe. "What we certainly don't want to do is take away the creativity and, to some extent, the romance around the 'craft' of trail builders. Nobody would like to see or ride trails that are all the same. But we do want to make sure that we construct and maintain trails in a way that we minimize the impact on the natural environment or try to strengthen the recreational carrying capacity or by better planning and design. It's about the right trail in the right place, and that also means it's better not to build a trail in some places. With the DIRTT educational and future certification framework, we expect more and more trail builders to make the right trade-offs when developing new trails or making existing trails more sustainable'

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THE TRUE GEES OF MTB

WORDS DEREK WILSON PHOTOS SWISS EPIC / W2W



With Covid (hopefully) well and truly in the rear-view mirror now and the world getting back to a sense of normality a timely invite dropped onto the doormat of IMB HQ. Wine to Whales, a 3 day stage race in South Africa organised by the "Epic" team responsible for a bunch of other big ticket events including Cape Epic - South Africa, Swiss Epic - Switzerland, 4 Islands - Croatia, Andorra Classic - Pyrenees, Cape to Cape - Australia as well as others. Let's face it, that's a large slice of pedigree there in putting on large professionally run races, pretty tempting.



"THE RACING IS FULL GAS AT THE FRONT BUT THERE ARE ALSO LOTS OF FOLKS TAKING PART FOR THE LAUGHS AND GRIN FACTOR."

This 3 day event is a little different on closer inspection. It still has all the "big event" feel with professional catering, accommodation, and everything else that goes with a big event. But the vibe they promote is far more chilled out and what the locals like to call "serious GEES". Gees is an Afrikaans word meaning "spirit", in this context it's the spirit of MTB

camaraderie, fun, like minded people doing the stuff that makes them smile and virtually giving everyone in the event a fist bump.

Sure, the racing is full gas at the front but there are also lots of folks taking part for the laughs and grin factor. The beers and banter between the stages, the afternoon and evening chat replaying back the tuff ups and the glorious downs of the fantastic trails that cover this part of the world.

W2W has been around since 2009 so has enough years under its belt to have ironed out the bugs, coupled with the fact South Africa

Africa is just coming into summer the chances of blue skies and dry trails is pretty high. It had also been a while since we had an international race number board on the bar, but this felt as good an opportunity as any to "get back at it" so we booked up the flights and blew the cobwebs off the bike bag.

The format is no different to many stage races, it's a pairs event so go grab your partner or a like minded buddy that's willing to share the fun. I looked no further than Dean Camier who has accompanied me on plenty of other similar events and doesn't mind towing me round and shouting encouragement when my legs and lungs start to give up.

" COVERED IN SUBLIME TRAILS AND VIEWS WHICH LEAD BACK TO THE OAK VALLEY ESTATE FOR MORE REFUELLING AND RESTING. "

WINE NOT?

The three day event kicks off at the Lourensford wine estate where the route takes us over the single and double tracks to the Oak Valley estate. Here we recover, refuel and spend the night. Day 2 loops round the Oak Valley area which is covered in sublime trails and views which lead back to the Oak Valley estate for more refuelling and resting. On the third day the trails bring us down to the coastal town of Hermanus famed at this time of the year for whale spotting (hence the Wine to Whales name). The best thing is all the venues are situated within about an hour drive of Cape Town so easy to get to if flying in.

In order to pull off the spectacular feat of putting up an event with close to 1200 riders, the organisers split the racing in three different groups aptly named after wines. The Chardonnay event is the 1st running from Friday to Sunday, then Pinotage Monday to Wednesday and finally the Shiraz Friday to Sunday again. The Chardonnay hosts the Women pro race, Pinotage the ebike main race and Shiraz the men pros. The rest of the field consists of everyone else, regular folks making up 600 teams per event.

I completely get how this format will work both for riders and event organisers, getting the most use from all the expense and effort of setting up the race village. It's a huge amount of infrastructure required to cater for 1200 riders + event staff, massage area, bike wash, tents, catering, chill out areas etc, acres of everything required to make a great place to hang out and make the event run well.





" EACH DAY IS AROUND THE 70KM MARK SO SPOT ON AND ACHIEVABLE FOR MOST PEOPLE BUT STILL TOUGH ENOUGH TO BE A CHALLENGE "

XC WARRIORS

Anyone that's been to this part of South Africa will know that XC riding and racing is in the DNA of the place. Pretty consistent dry weather, varied terrain, quality climbs and descents with mile upon mile of world class singletrack has meant it's a well known training ground for pro riders and teams as well as a great place to holiday and ride.

For the average non-local faced with the challenge "where do I stay, and where should I ride" an event like W2W is an ideal way to shortcut all that hassle and just join a pre-baked "it's all organised for you" event. Each day is around the 70km mark so spot on and achievable for most people but still tough enough to be a challenge whether racing full gas or 1st go at a multi-day event.

Before you head into the race, the day prior to rolling up to the starting line you chill at the picture postcard Lourensford wine estate. Here you sign up, get your race plate and get some time to head into the actual area where the massive containers of wine are stored. Industrial engineering meets architectural beauty with masses of stainless steel pipes and vats, an area behind the scenes that you wouldn't normally get to see. Besides the obvious abundance of wine, there's cold beers, food, huge lounging bean bags dotted around the immaculate lawns, music playing and sun shining. I can't imagine a better way to prepare for a MTB race!





" THERE IS SO MUCH WORK IN THE AREA MAINTAINING AND CARVING OUT NEW SINGLETRACK IT'S UNREAL, EVEN THE LOCALS GET TO RIDE NEW STUFF EVERY YEAR. "

STAGE 1 Lourensford Wine Estate to Oak Valley Estate. 72km 1500m of elevation.

The riders are pre categorised into groups of around 100 people. Each group gets about a 15 minute gap ahead of the next making sure everyone can enjoy the singletracks and not get stuck in 'traffic'.

After breakfast we packed our bags for the local DHL crew to collect. As we were making our way to Oak Valley estate by bike, they would take care of our luggage. Pretty smooth!

The commentary team are talking us through today's stage and some of the specific new trails they have been working on over the last few months. There is so much work in the area maintaining and carving out new singletrack it's unreal, even the locals get to ride new stuff every year.

Clicking off the km's, we can see the Gantouw pass appears in the distance. This world heritage site is a key feature to the Wines2Whales, it is situated at the top of Sir Lowry's pass and is famous for the ruts carved in the sandstone by the ox wagons locked wheels as they were dragged over the terrain.

This was the only route through the Hottentots Holland Mountains until Sir Lowry's pass was constructed in the early 19th Century. This is a portage and riders' must walk their bikes, the only time in the race. The ox wagon tracks are clearly visible, and we climb our way up and over the pass.

" MORE WELL GROOMED TRAILS FOLLOW WITH SOME FAST HIGH BERMED SECTIONS INTO THE FINISH AT OAK VALLEY ESTATE. "

The effort is rewarded with a spectacular view of the Elgin region below as we snake our way down towards the Protea trail. More well groomed trails follow with some fast high bermed sections into the finish at Oak Valley Estate. All in all an amazing first day with blue skies and epic trails. Having dropped our bikes with the mechanic we collect our rider bags and head to the tented village.

As part of the entry everyone gets an individual tent. If you're no big fan of tents you can also upgrade to a luxury tent with daily fresh towels, camp bed, carpeted flooring, bedside lamp and table are a welcome sight. There is plenty of space to lay your kit out in some sort of order. This saves the usual routine of emptying the entire contents of my bag in a "recon" mission for the favourite pair of gloves for the following day. Next up was a trip to the massage tent, grab some food and then hit the chill out zone for a cold beer.

STAGE 2 Oak Valley Estate to Oak Valley Estate.
68 km 1250m of elevation.

The route takes us through Paul Cluver wine estate making the riding into a sightseeing tour at the same time!. We pass right by the estate restaurant set in the backdrop of Groenlandberg mountains. While behind the glass guests are dining and sampling South Africa's finest wines we pass by sweaty and covered in dust. As I whizz past I make a mental note to return later in the week to have a bit of that ourselves.





" ALL SLIGHTLY DOWNHILL, HARD-PACK, FAST AND FLOWING ALL THE WAY TO THE FINISH LINE. WHAT A FANTASTIC WAY TO END A GREAT 3 DAYS OF RIDING! "

The route takes us over many bridges past a massive dam and through multiple gorgeous forests. So many fantastic trails again today, even a long pontoon bridge over a lake. Pretty cool day out with some fast flowing singletrack bringing you right into the finish line.

We return back in the Oak Valley Estate again where the luxury tent has our name on it. Happy that we made it past the halfway point without any big spills or mechanical problems too. One day to go!

STAGE 3 Oak Valley Estate to Curro Hermanus. 65km 1000m of elevation.

Last day heading out of the race village and we are on our way down to the coast. Some sandy fast trails today mid stage but the highlight for us has got to be the last 7 km on the Onrus River trail. All slightly downhill,

hard-pack, fast and flowing all the way to the finish line. What a fantastic way to end a great 3 days of riding!

FINISHING OFF

This 3-day event is a perfect introduction to stage racing. A super relaxed atmosphere, world class trails, incredible scenery, hospitality and #SeriousGees this is a great event even if you're not of too competitive nature.

When you reach the finish, you're right at the beach, ready to do some whale watching with a cold one in hand. Really bringing in that vacation feeling to it all.



" NEW TRAILS ARE BEING DEVELOPED ALL THE TIME ON TOP OF THE VAST AMOUNT OF ALREADY ESTABLISHED ONES "

For 2023, the event will run in reverse from Hermanus to Lourensford. New trails are being developed all the time on top of the vast amount of already established ones, we can't wait to find out what's in store next year. Well done to the Epic team for creating this "mini epic" event. We loved it.

To find out more or just to secure your entry into the 2023 event visit <https://www.epic-series.com/wines2whales>

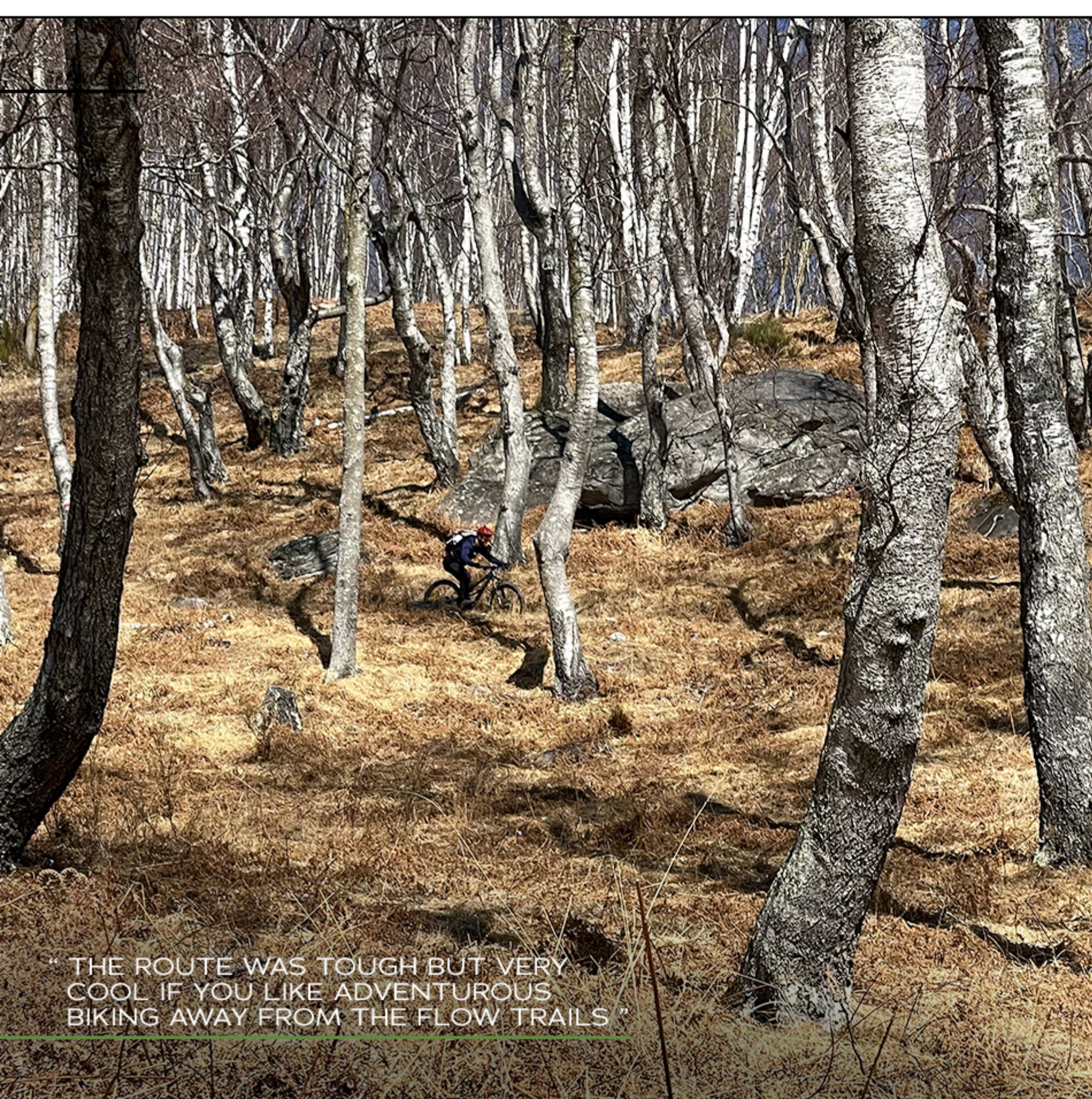


TRAIL GUIDE ENDURO D'OSSOLA

The North Italian Ossola valley is a perfect place for experienced bikers. It is little known outside its own borders – even in Italy. Imagine technically challenging rock slab trails free of snow all year round, remote high alpine passes, cosy mountain huts, excellent Italian food and drinks, all being just an hour and a half away by train from, e.g., Bern in Switzerland or Milano. So there must be a catch – it's damn easy to get lost in many ways ...

WORDS & PHOTOS MISCHA CRUMBACH





“ THE ROUTE WAS TOUGH BUT VERY COOL IF YOU LIKE ADVENTUROUS BIKING AWAY FROM THE FLOW TRAILS ”

LOST IN THE WOODS

It's half past 6 pm at the end of September. The often barely visible but awesome trail that I followed down a mountain ridge for almost 1'000 vertical metres just ended in the middle of a steep forest. My mobile phone battery is at 5%, I've been out of water for about one hour, and the sun is already behind the mountains.

I'm on a recce trip in a side valley above Domodossola trying to find a challenging route down to Domodossola for a two-day bike crossing starting at the Simplon Pass in Switzerland. So far, the route was tough but very cool if you like adventurous biking away from the flow trails and do not mind carrying your bike uphill to reach the best trails. But now I need to find a way out. Returning is not an option, it is way too far ...

LOST ON MAPS

I check the two different maps on my phone. One shows houses a little bit back up the mountain and a trail starting there. I didn't see any, so I doubt it. The other map shows a trail around 100 m below me – good! So I scramble down between the trees. No trail! So I revert back to the first map – the potential houses above. Quite exhausting after this long day, and indeed, I was right: NO houses where the map shows them. I decided to descend again but this time I go about 200m further down, as there should be a trail that I know. Suddenly as I am making my way through the leafy forest, a trail is coming from above out of nowhere. This one is on none of those maps! I am lucky, and safe.



“ IF YOU GO EXPLORING ON YOUR OWN,
BE PREPARED FOR SOME SURPRISES ”

Lesson learned: There are no reliable maps of this region. In some cases, Open Street Map is pretty ok, in some cases Swisstopo Map, but both can be totally off. And some of the best trails are on neither of them. Instead, they show plenty of trails that do not exist anymore. I also once used the Strava Heat Map – normally I avoid its bright lines and explore its dark areas, but for once I wanted to see the ‘main trail’ in my research area. Apparently, the local bikers don’t mind walking down trails after long uphill...

So, if you go exploring on your own, be prepared for some surprises. Good news is that slowly some of the trails are introduced on Trail Forks or the Swiss Single Trail Map, but both bare surprises, too.

It seems that the region has identified biking as a tourist opportunity, but there is very little signposted infrastructure yet. In contrast, on a website of the tourism office I recently found some bike route suggestions that are perfect if you want to kill yourself on a 2'000 vertical meter uphill with many hike-a-bike sections, then push your bike downhill (unless you ride like Danny McAskill) to the closest fire road and race this road all the way back down. At least this is consistent with my Heat Map experience described above, but it doesn't fit what I am looking for as an experienced biker: a technical but feasible challenge (meaning black/expert level, but not orange/extreme)...

LOST IN WINTER

Yet, they exist indeed: Awesome trails, mostly centuries old, of natural character, often rocky and technical (think hiking trails in Ticino) but also a growing portion of fun stuff shaped by the locals not far away from the city of Domodossola. The city is located at 270 m a.s.l. on the southern side of the alps. This means the trails around Domo (as it is called by many) are rideable all year round. And on the southern exposed hillsides you can normally go to 1'300 m a.s.l. and reach a couple of truly iconic trails all winter.

One of my favourite places is the area around Montecrestese and Crevoladossola north of Domo.

It offers fantastic slick rock riding: the million year old gneiss rocks were polished by the glaciers of the ice ages – probably the oldest ‘trail builders’ of them all. Above those playgrounds are the forests on the southern exposed slopes – wide open birch tree woods. I just love when they are flooded by the low winter sun and the dried fern and grass on the ground is glowing golden. The trails in these woods have many technically challenging sections (black/expert level), but there are always some easier sections to relax.

Furthermore, in some places hidden in the woods the local shapers have been doing a great job. This winter I checked a loop popular with the locals going through the village of Trontano. With some trial and error and supported by Trail Forks I did find it: less technical (up to red/advanced), and the downhill part did put a wide ‘flow-grin’ on my face. Thanks a lot to the unknown trail builders!

Another great winter option is to enjoy the sunny side of the lower Bognanco valley. Linking picturesque mountain villages with partially very technical trails is quite my cup of tea. Early in spring I like to explore the Valle Cairasca above Varzo. So far I was rewarded with a killer technical trail, the ‘F6’, but I know that there is still more.

Also the forested slopes below the ski area of Domobianca directly southwest above Domodossola become interesting during spring. Several trails have been shaped there and are visible on Trail Forks. I thought: “This will be good to find, too easy a prey”.



“IN SOME PLACES HIDDEN IN THE WOODS THE LOCAL SHAPERS HAVE BEEN DOING A GREAT JOB.”



A wide-angle photograph of a mountain trail. In the foreground, two cyclists are riding down a grassy slope. The cyclist in front is wearing a red shirt and a backpack, while the second cyclist is in a blue shirt. They are looking down at a deep valley. In the middle ground, a large blue lake is visible, with a concrete dam and a small town at its base. The background is dominated by steep, rocky mountain peaks under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is one of a beautiful alpine environment.

“NEXT TO THE TRAILS THE VIEWS
DOWN INTO THE VALLEY ARE
DEFINITELY WORTH THE EFFORT”

So, I only checked them in early March this year for the first time. I was wrong. Many of the shaped parts that I checked were hard to find since they were covered under leaves – up to knee deep.

So far, I didn't find anything special, except for the trail signage that in some parts was quite 'creative'. I concluded to ignore the meaning of the various symbols and reduce it to "There is something coloured on a tree, it must be ok". But since there are several more trails in this area, my final verdict about it is still open. And a fresh round of trail maintenance will for sure change the picture a lot, so it's worth checking back another time.

If you are not happy with climbing to the trail heads yourselves, an E-bike is a good idea for this region. So far, there is no shuttle service in the area yet. This may change with growing popularity. Until then, I'm happy to lose myself in pedalling. Next to the trails the views down into the valley are definitely worth the effort, and most of the climbs are on small and quiet but paved mountain roads.

LOST IN SUMMER

In summer I wouldn't recommend riding these lower altitude trails – the forests are then filled with high fern and grass, and the trails sometimes vanish completely. Also, it can get pretty hot there.

Summertime is high alpine time – and bike park time! There are three bike parks in the region: One is located in Santa Maria Maggiore in Valle Vigezzo – it's high on my own to-do list and not a real bike park but rather a chair lift that gives access to several presumably technical hiking trails leading back down to the valley. The second park is in the ski area of Domobianca (www.domobianca365.it) – I haven't checked it, yet.

“RIDING DOWN TO THE PLAIN OF DEVERO FROM THIS HIGH CROSSING FOR THE FIRST TIME IS A MOMENT I WILL NEVER FORGET.”



The third one is located in San Domenico (www.sandobikepark.com) in Valle Cairasca above Varzo. I love its stunning high alpine views. It has a good main line and a couple of trail options in the upper area starting at 2'500 m a.s.l. For me this bike park serves an additional purpose: Its chair lift is the entry gate to some of my favourite remote high alpine backcountry adventures.

My summer highlight is the Alpe Devero. Its trail loop "Grande Est" seems to be the only route that is famous in Italy outside of the Ossola region. That's for good reason: When I did it the first time on a recce trip I was overwhelmed by the scenery: A single trail that winds through a flat, grassy high alpine plain

dotted with little lakes, crowned by views of the towering rock walls that form the border with the Binn valley on the Swiss side to the north. I could imagine such a landscape in central Asia but didn't expect it here.

But there is more in Devero: After I finally did overcome my fear of steep exposed terrain, I found a way to enter this paradise via a pass that most likely has seen few bikers so far. Riding down to the plain of Devero from this high crossing for the first time is a moment I will never forget. It's the missing link I had been looking for to integrate Devero into a multi-day alpine bike trip. Since I don't mind carrying my bike uphill I love losing myself in this wild region.

Another favourite of mine in terms of multi day high alpine tours is linking the Simplon region to Domodossola. With four more days of reconnaissance (after getting lost in the woods) I found a route to my liking – wild and a bit tough. A crazy adventure typical for the region, way off any beaten track or heat map.

LOST IN ZUCCHERINI AND CRODINO

Multi day means: Let's bring some dolce vita to the game! There are plenty of wonderful mountain huts in the region. On Alpe Devero my favourite place to stay is in the beautiful alpine village of Crampiolo, either in the hut 'La Baita' or the 'Agriturismo Alpe Crampiolo'.

The first serves great typical alpine Italian food, the latter has quite a sophisticated kitchen for such a remote place with local beers and alpine spirits.

Once I stayed with friends at a mountain hut in the region, and we were – as usual – pretty stuffed by the enormous portions of delicious food. After dinner the hut keeper placed a couple of jars on our table. They contained sharp sugar cubes – ‘zuccherini’ in Italian – sitting in liquids of various colours. We got curious since something was odd about that sight, but we couldn’t tell what. The following ceremony is literally burned into our memories. I won’t tell you more - you have to try it yourself.

Flashback again to the tiny, almost invisible trail on the ridge from the beginning of this story:

Now that I'm back to civilization and are safe, super exhausted and glad to be standing upright, I decide to name that trail after those mysterious sugar cubes: “Zuccherino trail” (super sweet, but really easy to get lost).

I head straight to the Piazza dell Mercato in Domo for a proper Italian aperitivo, something that by now has become a ritual of sorts. My personal favourite bar is ‘La Bolleria’ (closed on Sundays) – their drink and wine list and choice of local cold cuts and cheese to accompany the drinks is well assorted. By now the staff knows me and my bike, so I’m usually greeted with a smile and “Una birra per la bici e un Spritz per lei?”

“ THE FOLLOWING CEREMONY IS LITERALLY BURNED INTO OUR MEMORIES. I WON’T TELL YOU MORE - YOU HAVE TO TRY IT YOURSELF. ”





“ REFLECTING ON THE PAST RIDE TOGETHER WITH MY RIDING COMPANIONS, IT FEELS LIKE EVERYTHING IS EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD BE. ”

A good choice of Italian microbrewery beers and tasty vegetarian snacks can be found at Sali & Pistacchi just across the square. In summer they often have live music, too. If you are not into alcoholic drinks, go for a Crodino – a bitter lemonade produced in the village of Crodo north of Domodossola, which became quite famous.

Whenever I’m sitting at this market square reflecting on the past ride together with my riding companions, it feels like everything is exactly as it should be. It’s always tough to take the train back home, but here in Switzerland we’re lucky: it’s not too far to get lost again in Ossola!

For planning your own trip to Domodossola check out the tourist office website:

<https://www.visitossola.it/en/>
or scout the area on Google Maps here:
<https://goo.gl/maps/NtXker2oahS2wUGb7>

If you want to join me on any of the adventures in this region, book a trip through my guiding company Trail Therapy: <https://en.trailtherapy.ch/>

TECHNIQUE

WINTER SURVIVAL

With 2023 well and truly underway many of you will be digging deep to keep to those new year riding resolutions. Some of you will be doing a sterling job of hitting your goals to stay in shape or improve your skills, while others may find motivation waning as these winter months drag on.



Staying motivated at this time of year can be hard work, with the sun fading early in the day and tough trail conditions it can be tempting to ditch the bike and instead take on other projects. Not a bad strategy if it means more time on the bike in the summer but it will come at a cost, skills get rusty and fitness can melt away leaving you to play catch up through the summer months. The truth is you can never catch up for lost time, and instead of getting the most out of the summer months riding you end up on the back foot.

" CHALLENGES ON THE BIKE WILL COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, AND THAT IS PART OF THE 'MIX IT UP' PHILOSOPHY "

We all have different objectives and desired outcomes from our riding experience and this will be the driver of how you personally approach riding. Regardless of your approach, everyone (pros included) can benefit from mixing it up and using different tools to improve on the bike. Personally, I always struggled with rigid structures (excluding hard tails and BMX), and even now my workflow is not compatible with such plans, I have always needed flexibility and variety to engage both body and mind.

Challenges on the bike will come in all shapes and sizes, and that is part of the 'mix it up' philosophy for winter riding. For me it keeps it interesting, doing things differently keeps my brain engaged, and in my humble opinion it is a dam site better than spinning in the shed or being stuck in a gym. So how exactly do you keep motivated through winter and what tricks have I got to share with you to keep it interesting and more enjoyable.



" THEY DRY FAST AND THE DIFFERENT WEIGHTS AND CUTS CAN BE SELECTED TO KEEP YOU ACCLIMATISED. "

GEAR UP:

The more hours you spend in the saddle and the more times that your gear goes through the laundry you will start to see (and appreciate) the difference in quality and price points for various garments. When cold winds and water breach clothing layers a

mellow cruise can quickly become a miserable experience. Make no mistake, gearing up is going to cost, with such variable weather you will need several cycling wardrobes to get you through the year. I have three consistent variations of layering that get pulled out and used from Autumn to Spring.

Feet: Starting at the bottom a pair of waterproof boots is a must, they may look and feel a bit bulky but as our feet are exposed to spray from the front wheel they can make a huge difference to how you feel

on a cold winter's day. For cooler days when it's dry, I'll use a high-cut shoe combined with a pair of 100% merino wool socks.

Legs: Thermal tights, mid-weight tights, and three-quarter tights (or long knee warmers) will keep your legs warm, they dry fast and the different weights and cuts can be selected to keep you acclimatised. For real wet days where you know there will be water running down the trails you may want to opt for a lightweight over-trouser to go over your leggings (the added layer will add heat so a thinner pair of tights should be coupled with over-trousers).



Waterproof shorts can help keep the water off the thighs and seat area, suitable for riders who don't fancy running a rear fender, the downside to waterproof over layers is the noise. Another downside to fully waterproof outer layers is the added bulk, the lack of breathability can result in that 'boil in the bag' feeling when working hard on steep and long climbs.

Torso: A selection of base layers will wick away sweat and help keep the torso warm, some variants have windproof panels in the chest which can help you adapt to a lighter gilet over a bulky jacket.

" THE LACK OF BREATHABILITY CAN RESULT IN THAT 'BOIL IN THE BAG' FEELING "

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I'll often start a ride in a long sleeve jacket and once warmed up drop the jacket and don a gilet, the windproof fabric keeps my internal organs warm whilst descending and I can simply unzip it for more airflow when working harder in the techy stuff and on steep climbs.

Above the base layer, a long sleeve jersey with a thicker and tighter weave is preferable, you will find the perfect weight jersey through trial and error.

" COOL AIR PASSING OVER MUSCLES IN THE NECK AND SHOULDERS CAN LEAD TO UNNECESSARY ACHES AND PAINS EITHER DURING THE RIDE OR AFTER. "

A windproof outer layer is fine on clear days, the weather forecast will indicate if you need to pack a waterproof or not. As before I will also pack a gilet to swap out from a long sleeve garment, if I have to stop for a while to sort navigation, eat or fix something I will still have a second outer layer I can don to help keep the body at working temperature, layering is key.

The neck is a key area to keep warm, cool air passing over muscles in the neck and shoulders can lead to unnecessary aches and pains either during the ride or after. I have a thick thermal neck scarf and a light scarf to use depending on the temperatures and prevailing winds.

Head: Under the helmet, a thermal skull cap keeps the ears warm and stops that ice cream head feeling on colder winter days. If temperatures are more palatable then a headband can help keep ears warm but allow the air to flow over the scalp.





" ULTRA LONG RIDES CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO HEALTH, ESPECIALLY IN COLD AND WET CONDITIONS, TOP 24H RACERS WILL ONLY TAKE ON RIDES OF 4 TO 6 HOURS "

Waterproof garments rely on a Durable Water Repellent layer (DWR) and this wears off over time, especially through laundry cycles where no specific wash treatment is used. Top up waterproofing using wash-in or spray-on treatments to keep your gear in good nick. You may not need to shell out for a new jacket, trousers, or shorts just yet, a re-vitalising wash may be all that is needed.

Dressed for the occasion I opt to let the weather and trail conditions dictate the type of ride (yes there is more than one type of mountain bike ride to enjoy). An easy way to define your type of ride is by thinking about pacing and distance. Think in terms of short distance, medium and long, what that figure is in kilometres/miles is up to you, and will be tailored to suit your fitness level. Long is as long as you can handle and still be relatively capable of sorting your stuff out post-ride, ultra long rides can be detrimental to health, especially in cold and wet conditions, top 24h racers will only take on rides of 4 to 6 hours due to these effects.

As for the effort you put in, that can be based on easy, medium, hard, and mixed efforts. If you are following a program then you can see how this works and you are probably doing this already, just with a little more structure and data. If you have little or no desire to follow a program then this simple method will give you a variety of workouts but without the rigour of precise numbers and data to follow, let the distances and time fluctuate for each combo you put together. If it has been chucking it down then I'll avoid areas that are prone to severe erosion, and instead opt to ride hard-pack only, this may be a single-track day on the purpose-built network or I may opt for a longer mixed terrain ride comprising of forest road, quiet lanes and the odd bit of trail.



These longer rides can be done at any desired pace, slow steady rides where the heart rate is kept low will build base fitness which enables you to recover from hard efforts. Neglecting to do these types of the ride will reduce your ability to get fitter, if you have hit a ceiling with fitness then this could well be the reason.

" A GRAVEL BIKE AND A GOOD SET OF LIGHTS COULD GIVE YOU THAT ESCAPE BEFORE OR AFTER WORK "

When things are a little dryer and that superb tacky condition prevails its full-on trail time, more technical riding is adopted and this helps develop strength, flexibility, and skills. I am of course aware that you may not have that luxury of trails just outside the door, or the ability to capitalise on the breaks in the weather. For those of you who live a distance from trails and have routines that lack an element of flexibility, there are still ways to get bike time in and keep your fitness and skills honed through the winter months. Gravel bikes have become hugely popular as they offer a way to explore dirty back roads, bridleways, tracks, and various routes accessible by bike. More forgiving than a road bike and more efficient than many mountain bikes (given that a huge amount of people ride big bouncy rigs) a gravel bike and a good set of lights could give you that escape before or after work that helps maintain and build fitness. You will also have to pilot the thing so subtle skills are learned and maintained, stuff you may never think about like cadence and silky smooth gear changes. On that note, my preferred option given the plethora of forest roads here in Scotland is a 29er hardtail, set up with some light wheels and fast-rolling tyres. It is a do it all machine.

After much deliberation, I concluded I'd destroy a gravel bike on rough forest roads and be all too tempted to take it into trail terrain so I opted for a versatile MTB. This is my somewhat expensive solution to wet day riding and so it is donned with mudguards, the bouncy bike is left with a clean look sporting just a short front fender to help keep those fork stanchions clean. Of course, I'd lean towards riding tech trails over the mellow stuff and gravel grinders but the prospect of getting covered in cr@p with a soggy bottom on the wetter days does steer me to take the hard-tail out and cover some ground.

" WHY SUCK IN THE SUMMER WHEN ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS SUFFER A BIT IN THE WINTER! "

Another option that we will look at in more detail in the next issue is using pump tracks or BMX tracks, short sprint sessions and skills drills can be practised in these environments. If you don't have either nearby then you can still set up some skills drills in a quiet car park or street. When I was young I spent hours doing street riding in the winter months and if I didn't have the luxury of trails on the door I'd still be doing it now. My motivation has always been to be a good all-rounder on the bike, which means having strength, stamina, speed, and skills, all of these factors require some dedication to our art and therefore we have to practise. Why suck in the summer when all you need to do is suffer a bit in the winter!

Join us next time when I will expand on some skills drills and alternative riding shenanigans you can do in the comfort of your nearby surroundings. Until then, keep on keeping on.

Clive Forth www.mtbskills.co.uk





Of course IMB is not complete without a proper Tried and Tested section! In this issue we have put the Absolute Black Graphen pads to the test and gave the Code RSC's from Sram a couple of thousand metres of descending to handle.

We weren't left out in the dark either as Silva turned night into day with their Spectra light and as Fox Launched their shoe line, we got our hands on the Union SPD shoes to try out. Last but not least we used the Osprey pack these past few months to bring out snacks and extra kit on the trail and Dainese kept our hands warm on those frosty descents.

ACCESSORIES

- 01 ACS - Absolute Black Graphen pads
- 02 ACS - SRAM Code RSC Brakes
- 03 ACS - Fox Union MTB Shoes
- 04 ACS - Osprey Backpack
- 05 ACS - Silva Spectra A headlight
- 06 ACS - Dainese HGC Hybrid Gloves

TRIED AND TESTED

WORDS AND PHOTOS IMB TEST TEAM
PHOTO THIS PAGE JULIA BIGIO

BRAND ABSOLUTE BLACK MODEL GRAPHEN PADS YEAR 2023

"WHEN YOU ARE
LOOKING FOR
THAT EXTRA
EDGE IN
PERFORMANCE
THE ABSOLUTE
BLACK PADS
DEFINITELY
DELIVER."

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Absolute Black

Model: Graphen pads

Price: From 49,95 EUR

<https://absoluteblack.cc/graphenpads-worlds-best-disc-brake-pads-disc-27-xtr>

Ceramic GRAPHEN pads are a new benchmark for the braking pad industry thanks to the unique approach to the design of backplate cooling fins, bespoke backplate coating with graphene as well as a completely new friction compound, which uses specially modified graphene instead of toxic copper.

THE PRODUCT

Absoluteblack don't mess around when they make new products. They always aim to do something groundbreaking and boy, do these pads look funky. They spent 3 years on product development and managed to create a pad that not only looks amazing but also reduced friction heat up to 35% compared to the competition. That's big. Mainly because head build up is the number one cause for your brakes to fade on long descents and with brakes you want something to count on,

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BRAND SRAM MODEL CODE RSC YEAR 2023

"THEY ARE POWERFUL, ADJUSTABLE AND HAVE VERY GOOD MODULATION."

TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Sram

Model: Code RSC

Price: approx 300 EUR per wheel

<https://www.sram.com/en/sram/mountain/series/code>

The Code RSC's are Sram's top of the line, heavy duty brakes aimed at the Enduro and Gravity crowd. The 4 piston calliper brakes rely on DOT 5.1 brake fluid and have a bite point adjustment as well as a tool free reach adjustment.

THE PRODUCT

The classic Sram Code brakes are the top end line of stoppers from the red giant. Their RSC model comes with a bunch of features and has been recently reworked for improved performance. Let's go over the stats.

With rounded corners, no sharp edges, no lever rattle, and bearings rather than bushings at the lever pivot, the lever body is well-built and has a lovely, quality finish.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE



BRAND FOX RACING

MODEL UNION

YEAR 2023

"WE LOVE THE
FIT, FEATURES
AND DURABILITY
OF THESE NEW
SHOES "

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Fox Racing

Model: Union

Price: 159.95 GBP / 169.99 EUR

<https://foxracing.co.uk/mtb-shoes/>

Fox enters the MTB shoe market with their brand new Union shoes. Available for flats as well as clipless (SPD style) pedals with the top of the line model equipped with a double BOA closure system. The sole is designed using the Ultratac™ rubber compound, while the 2-bolt cleat system is designed to have a big amount of adjustment. The shoes come in Black, Red, Grey and a sexy Mocha colorway in size 37 EU - 47 EU.

THE PRODUCT

Fox's venture into the shoe market is not without research, and it shows. The Union Clipless features a lace closure system combined with a velcro strap on top to really fine tune the fit to your foot. The upper material is a lightweight mesh, coated with a TPU skin for durability and protection from the elements. Perforations on the top and side of the foot give that airflow needed to prevent overheating.

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BRAND OSPREY

MODEL TALON 11

YEAR 2023

"I HAD PLENTY OF SPACE FOR TOOLS, FIRST AID KIT, EXTRA LAYERS AND LUNCH."

TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Osprey

Model: Talon 11

Price: 110 GBP

https://www.ospreyeurope.com/shop/gb_en/osprey-talon-11-2021

The Talon 11 is Osprey's multisport daypack suited for hiking and mountain biking. It has a chest and waist strap system, helmet holder, snack pouch on the hip and comes in a S/M and L/XL sizing.

THE PRODUCT

Backpacks come in many sizes and shapes, and Osprey has always been on the forefront of pack design. Innovative features and materials can be found throughout their range, and this classic Talon 11 is no exception. It is available in two sizes and 5 different colors (black, blue, red, green and grey).

With a capacity of 11 litres, this pack is big enough for most day adventures in the mountains. It can easily store some spares, mini tools, pump, lunch and a water bladder. With a bit of convincing you even fit an extra layer or two if you're expecting bad weather. The dimensions of my L/XL version are roughly 45cm long, 25cm wide and 20cm deep.

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BRAND SILVA MODEL SPECTRA A YEAR 2023

"IT IS BRIGHT
AND HAS A
GOOD BEAM FOR
HIGH SPEED
ACTION SPORTS"

TO VISIT THEIR
WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Silva

Model: Spectra A

Price: 799 EU / GBP 669

<https://silvasweden.com/collections/cycling/products/spectra-a>

The Spectra A is an astounding headlamp that turns night into day, delivering an incredibly strong light output of 10 000 lumen. The headlamp holds 8 high power LED lights and is accompanied by a powerful 96 Wh battery. The lamp can be mounted either on the helmet or handlebars of the bike.

THE PRODUCT

The Silva Spectra A is as far as I know the most powerful light on the market. With a whopping 10.000 lumen, you really turn night into day. To power all this brightness, you receive a hefty 96 Wh battery that you can either stuff in the backpack or strap to your bike. For both options you can find the accessories in the box of the Spectra.

The rechargeable Li-Ion battery has a claimed burn time of 3 hours on maximum level, and up to 80 hours of burn time on minimum level.

[CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE](#)

BRAND DAINESE MODEL HGC HYBRID GLOVES YEAR 2023

"IDEAL FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS A THIN AND VERY SENSITIVE FEELING OF THE BIKE WITHOUT GETTING COLD HANDS."

TO VISIT THEIR WEBSITE, CLICK HERE



AT A GLANCE

Brand: Dainese

Model: HGC Hybrid Gloves

Price: 49,95 EU / 49.95 GBP

<https://www.dainese.com/gb/en/bike/apparel/gloves/hgc-hybrid-gloves-203819280.html?>

The Dainese HGC Hybrid Gloves are made for maximum comfort in cooler climates and seasons. The ripstop nylon fabric on the back offers protection against abrasion and the palm is designed to offer maximum handlebar grip. The palm is as thin as possible and the fingers are touch screen compatible.

THE PRODUCT

The HGC Hybrid gloves are available in black only, but come in a wide range of sizes from XXS all the way to XXL. So perfect for those out there with smaller or bigger sized hands. To make sure you get the best size, they have a size guide on their website.

Material wise, the palms are made from a synthetic stretch material, covered with a silicone screen print pattern for added grip.

CLICK OR TAP TO READ MORE



THE ANGRY INSIDER

WORDS & PHOTOS ANGRY INSIDER

THE RENTAL SHOP MANAGER

It's Saturday morning and I am just about to start my day. I'm still a bit sleepy, as yesterday we had an unexpected busy day which flowed into a need to have a double after work beer which may have turned into a liquid dinner followed by some dance moves in the nightclub. Life in an alpine town is tough.



" I CAN ALREADY SEE IMPATIENT INGRID AND HER ADVENTURE DATE MIKE WAITING OUTSIDE FOR THE SHOP TO OPEN "

I'm getting ready for a particular tough part of the week called the weekend... I am talking about hordes of Joey's, clueless Ken's and Wild Wilburs. All out to get 'RAD' on the bikepark today while trashing our poor rental fleet.

As I approach the shop, I can already see Impatient Ingrid and her Adventure date Mike waiting outside for the shop to open. Seriously, nothing is more annoying than opening a bikeshop with two people staring at you before you even managed to have coffee. And oh boy do I need a coffee.

In record time I move out the pop up tents, banners, flags, bike stands, smelly protective gear and 40 rental bikes that block my way to the coffee machine. Let's get Ingrid & Mike out of the shop and a dose of caffeine sorted before the masses arrive!

First sip of my coffee and the biggest group of the day arrives. Of course. 12 people to set up on E-MTB's, explain how they work, give them protective gear and take their money. I'm sure at least one of them will stack it at some point during the day so can't forget to let them sign the waivers. Where is that damn colleague of mine? He should've been here by now!



Halfway through set up he shows up and wow, does he look ragged. I told him to take it easy on the shots. Young kids think they're invincible! He pulls himself together though and in no time the group is out the door. Shall I grab a new coffee or...? Naw, I'll wait until all our bookings are on the trails.

We set up some more people with knee pads over their jogging pants, giving them directions to the skills park and best trails of the area, but I doubt they'll get there. You know the glazed look in someones eyes when they say "yeah yeah" but have lost you a looooong time ago. I'll just hand them a map and hope to see them before dark!

**" I'LL JUST HAND
THEM A MAP AND
HOPE TO SEE THEM
BEFORE DARK! "**



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" MORE OR LESS THE ONLY CHILL MOMENT OF THE DAY BECAUSE IT WON'T TAKE LONG FOR SOMEONE TO STACK IT AND RETURN TO OUR RENTAL SHOP WITH A BROKEN BIKE. "

This is the time where I get to recover and chill in the sun with a coffee. More or less the only chill moment of the day because it won't take long for someone to stack it and return to our rental shop with a broken bike.

Like clockwork we have the local kids crew stop by. Timmy is out of brake pads and James has a puncture. Both have no clue on how to fix their bikes, so I whip out the tools and sort them out quickly. Even though they're just 13 years old, they rip harder than 90% of the people on the hill today. They clear all the jumps and even do the big road gap that I prefer to avoid.

I hand them back their rides and tell em how much they owe me for the work and parts.

Of course neither of them has any money with, but it's ok. I know their parents and their family spend a fortune with us each year on bikes, parts and maintenance so we'll figure it out later.

By 4pm Ingrid and Mike return, miraculously both unscathed too. Some riders of the big group however were not so lucky. I see one tough guy limp out of the shop after he gave back the bike and Mr 'I don't need elbow pads' has a gushing wound on his elbow. He did a proper job on bending the brake lever too.



**" WHEN DRAGGING YOUR BRAKES
DOWN THE ENTIRE BLUE TRAIL,
YOU'RE DEFINITELY GOING TO COOK
THE PADS AND DISCS. "**

Next up is maintenance time. We try our best to keep them in shape, but when dragging your brakes down the entire blue trail, you're definitely going to cook the pads and discs. I know that one of the riders of the day loved a good skid. Last week I mounted new tires on this ride and he managed to skid so much the canvas is showing through!

As we pressure wash the bloody mud of the bikes, the bar next door brings us a round of drinks. It's still under work time but ah well. We deserved it!

LIGHTBOX

FABIO WIBMER IN HIS VIDEO GAME
PHOTO HANNES BERGER



Lightbox

More shots with no particular place
to go this issue, feast your eyes!

LIGHTBOX

ROOSTIN IN LENZERHEIDE
PHOTO NATHAN HUGHES

Lightbox

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

DUSTY WYGLE HUCKING IN THE JUNGLE
PHOTO TRANSITION BIKES

LIGHTBOX

Lightbox

PATRICIA DRUWEN STYLIN IT UP
PHOTO NIKOLAI STARK

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

ROB HERAN ON THE ROCKS!
PHOTO ANDREAS VIGL

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

KILIAN BRON ON MARS
PHOTO JB LIEUTARD

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

SUNSET SURF COMMUTE
PHOTO YT INDUSTRIES

LIGHTBOX



Lightbox

REMY METAILLIER
PHOTO TREVOR LYDEN

LIGHTBOX

DEFINING STYLE GEOFF GULEVIC
PHOTO STERLING LAURENCE / ORBEA



Lightbox

LIGHTBOX

BLINKINSOP ON THE EDGE
PHOTO CAM MCKENZIE / NORCO

Lightbox

The IMB website is crammed with news and videos every day, we only show the best videos, so to make it onto the site is an achievement in itself.

These are the 4 most popular videos that have been viewed on the site as voted for by you with your thumbs up likes in the last 2 months! Check out the full list [HERE](#), and if you see a video you like on the site, give it the thumbs up, it might just help to push it onto this page!

MOVIE NIGHT

#1

THE DREAM HOUSE

Starting from a neglected, run-down property on legendary Vancouver Island, Reece Wallace has spent the past year juggling a house renovation, a yard build, training, filming, and injuries. This movie will show you the process, the struggles and outcome of all the hard work.



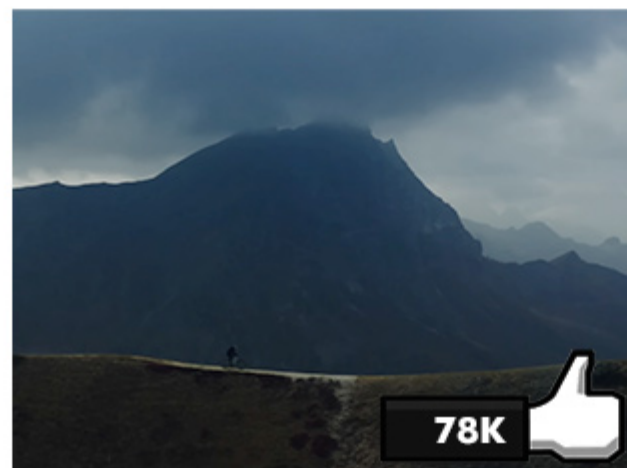
249K


[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#2

THE SKR

The Stone King Rallye is the evolution of backcountry MTB enduro competition. Containing the same blend of wild adventure and gravity racing that Trans-Provence introduced in 2009, blended in with a brand new course that has been refined in over a decade of trail scouting.



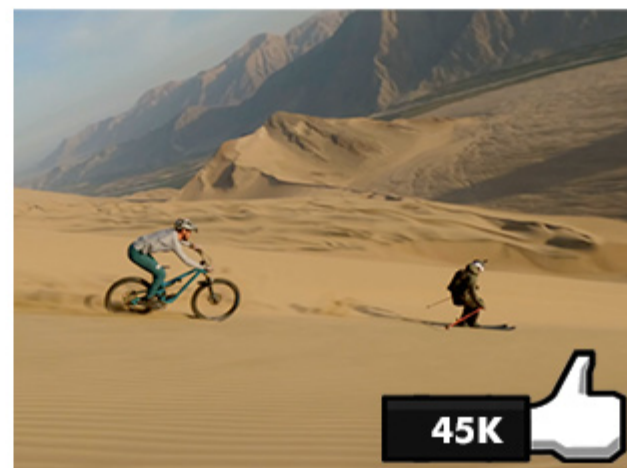
78K


[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#3

THE DUNE

Cinematic and Mountain Biking mastermind Kilian Bron teams up with skier Victor Broquedis for a unique adventure. The duo hikes up the world's highest sand dunes in Peru to race down on skis and bikes. A must watch video!



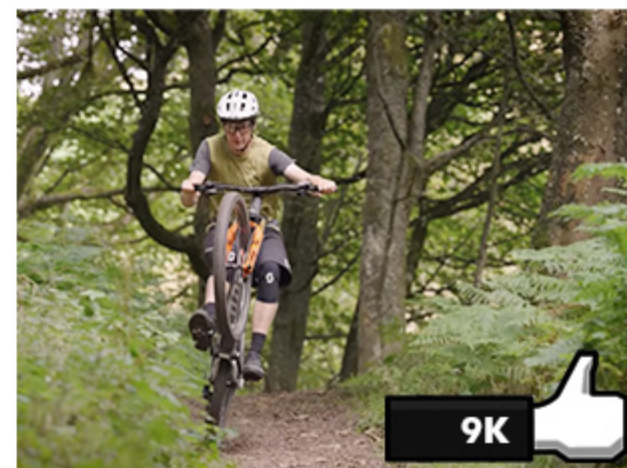
45K


[CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO](#)

#4

THE LOOP

Scotty Laughland takes you back to his old stomping grounds Bridge of Allan where he first started riding mountain bikes. The loop has a little of everything just a stone's throw from where he grew up taking you past the Craig, Uni Woods and Colesnor.



9K


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