

11th JEANTEX TRANSALP MARATHON 8 DAY RACE (19th - 26th July 2008)

This year, Bausch & Lomb were very proud to sponsor Mark Wevil, Consultant Ophthalmologist, in his attempt to cycle over 650km in 8 days and in the process raise donations for charity and, in particular, 'Sightsavers International'. Follow his exhilarating ordeal.....

"I competed in the 2008 Transalp marathon race in July this year which crossed the Alps from *Fussen* (south of Munich in Germany) to *Riva del Garda* (south of the Dolomites in Italy). With me was my team mate Hein and 1,198 other competitors. The ride passed through Austria and Switzerland with a biking distance of 650km and ascended over 21,000m along the way (i.e. Biking from London to Glasgow and climbing from the base camp of Mt Everest and over the peak 4 times during the journey).

Each team of two had to ride together for the entire race or face time penalties or even disqualification. Failure to complete a stage in the allocated time, or failure to comply with the race rules also resulted in penalties and disqualification. Each competitor carried a transponder on their bike which recorded start and finish times and split times at random points on the course to prevent cheating. The highest ranked international Mountain Bike professionals were also competing (with masseurs, mechanics and motorhomes!)

My team mate Hein and I rode in support of the charity "Sightsavers" and received generous donations for them.

The Journey To Fussen

My journey from the UK to the race departure point in *Fussen* was fraught from start to finish. Upon arriving at the departure airport in England, I discovered that although my flight was confirmed, the plane was full and I wasn't allowed on it - my bike and I were on standby! After much anxiety and numerous negotiations with the airport staff I fortunately made it onto the flight - tensions was running high already!

The German trains ran on time but I had to try to rush between platforms carrying a 35kg bike bag, car bike rack and tog bag, much to the amusement of other travellers. To their further amusement, I unpacked the huge bike bag on the final train and assembled the bike, checking for damage as I went.

Hein, my team mate, had already arrived in Germany only to find that his wheels had been bent by his airline. However, by the time Hein met me at the station in *Fussen* the evening before the start of the race, we had 2 bikes in good working order. We went and registered, signed the disclaimers, attended the first stage briefing and had a last good night's sleep in a proper bed in a local guest house.

The Daily Race

For most competitors each day followed the same format of waking up at 6am, usually in a school gymnasium in an Alpine village with about 400 other competitors. Some competitors booked rooms in hotels and B&Bs in the same or nearby villages but then they had to return to the village centre for briefings and bike repairs etc. I think these competitors missed out on the camaraderie and exchange of war stories and tips etc



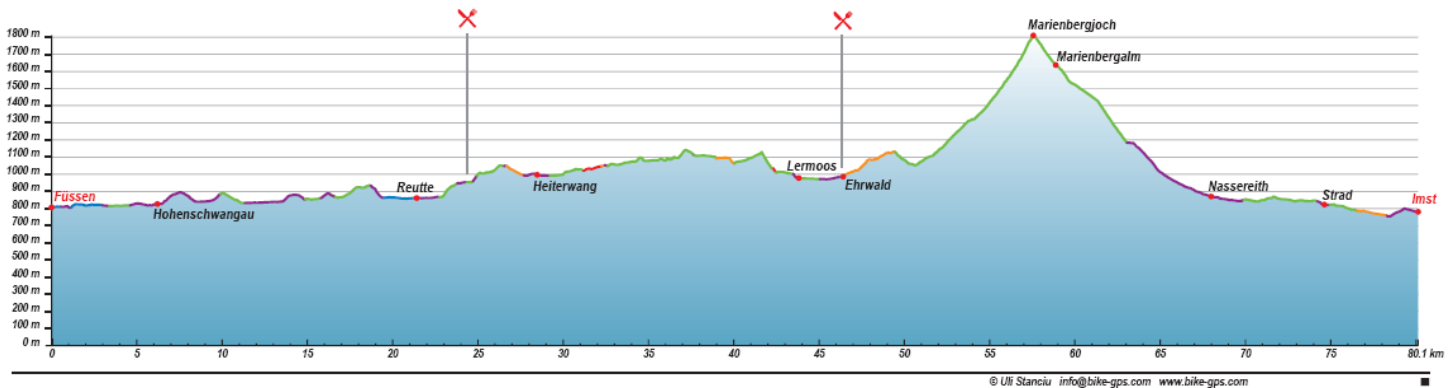
All clothes, sleeping bags, mattresses, bike tools and spares were packed into a Transalp tog bag which was transported by lorry to the next stopover. Essential food, energy drink and equipment for the day were packed into a small back pack. As much breakfast as was humanly possible to consume was eaten, bikes were collected, last minute adjustments made and then we assembled at the start for the day's race ahead.



THE RACE – 19th – 26th July 2008

Stage 1 – First Day 19th July

Stage 1 - 19th July 2008 - Füssen to Imst



Stage 1/8 - Füssen - Imst	
Total route	80,13 km
Altitude uphill	1962 Hm
Altitude downhill	-1988 Hm
max. altitude	1810 m

Twelve hundred racers crossed the start line for the **11th JEANTEX BIKE TRANSALP** mountain bike race on Saturday 19th July 2008 and rolled out of the small castle village of *Füssen* to the thumping beat of AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" and encouragement from a large crowd and the announcer.

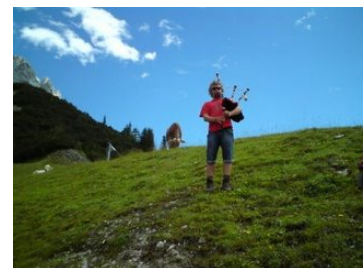
Each race stage started at 9 am, and on the first morning rode through the village's pretty and narrow streets then headed straight up one of the towering mountains surrounding the village of *Füssen*. Mountains, streams, passes and ridges were crossed for 8 to 10 hours (or less for the faster teams).

The 'race pack' seemed endless and initially accelerated to 50kph before slowing to a standstill. Despite riding fast and close there was little touching of wheels and fortunately few crashes. The start was deceptively flat and easy as we rode past the *Neuschwanstein Palace* and the *Schwanssee Lake* in Germany before crossing over the Austrian border. This first stage was 75km long with one giant climb up the *Marienbergjoch* mountain (2,000 m of total climbing!). Unbeknown to us at this stage was that this was the easiest stage of the race!

The profile was misleading as there were multiple steep climbs in the first few kilometres. The 'giant field of riders' started to splinter into smaller groups of 30 - 40 riders as we rode over a good mix of fast open roads and narrow gravel bike trails. At 50km we came into the first 'feed zone' after which was the start of the *Marienbergjoch* mountain. The 'field', now miles long, could be seen snaking its way up the road. The climb kept pitching upwards - steeper and steeper. The entire upper section averaged a 15% grade (a steep walk!). The sun shone and the views were beautiful and it was hard to remember that we were supposed to be racing. There were giant alpine peaks above and lush green valleys below, with the faint tinkle of cow bells from the grazing cows. At last a bagpiper welcomed us to the summit.

Nearing the top of the ski lift, we assumed we had reached the top but the trail turned left and pitched up again this time to 25%. It headed to a notch in the peaks above the ski runs. The leaders might have ridden this section but most of us were off our bikes and walking. Having ascended for over an hour through the thinner air at 2,000m, even pushing the bike was exhausting. Once over the top we enjoyed the same 25% grade down (gravity on our side this time) and we flew down the next 10km dropping 1,000m on fast fire roads before the last 10km of fast, flat dirt paths into Imst, another beautiful Alpine village.

Stage 1 was won by Karl Platt and Stefan Sahn from team 'Bulls', the eventual winners.



On arrival in the camp both bikes and bodies were repaired and cleaned, and every cyclist tried to eat and sleep as much as possible. We ate our first meal that day at 5 pm and another whole meal at 6.30! A pasta meal was provided each evening followed by an 'Awards' ceremony, the showing of video highlights of the day's racing and a briefing for the following day. We were exhausted!!

Stage 2 – 20th July 2008 - Imst to Ischgl

Stage 2 - 20th July 2008 - Imst to Ischgl



Stage 2/8 - Imst to Ischgl	
Total route	76,40 km
Altitude uphill	3171 Hm
Altitude downhill	-2598 Hm
max. altitude	1976 m

Last night we could hear the rain drumming down on the roof of the gymnasium which was not a good omen for the tougher day that lay ahead of us. Thankfully for us the rain stopped an hour before the start of Stage 2 as we immediately faced a 3,170 m of elevation gain and 76 km of riding. We were initiated into the tradition of starting with a steep climb, this one being of nearby mountain *Venetalm*, the top of which was cold and covered in mist.

The fast descent on forest roads was followed by another steep ascent up *Pillerhoehe*. Thereafter the descent was technical (slippery roots and loose rocks to master) down the historical *Via Claudia*. This is a 2,000 year old Roman-built road which, for many centuries, was the main commercial route across the Alps. The road was originally used for the transportation of wine, olive oil and oysters from the Mediterranean, but is now a perfect biking route through an area of stunning views and historic sites. The scenery was breathtaking and the “eyeballs out, lock up your rear brake while feathering the front one” descent on the *Via Claudia* made those uphill worthwhile despite how hard they were. We were to learn on this race that “what goes down must come up again”, so we were soon ascending up *Almstueberl* before another descent to *See* in *Paznaun*.

The final 20 km, along trails and dirt roads up the valley to *Ischgl*, seemed to go on forever. We had enjoyed sun and light cloud for much of the day, but with tired legs trying to keep going after over 6 hours of riding, we could see storm clouds getting darker and moving up the valley behind us. Hein started to become unwell and we had to slow down and didn't make it to *Ischgl* before the temperature dropped right down. The freezing rain came down in sheets and we were soaked to the bone. In my haste, I didn't notice the moss growing on the slippery wooden surface of one of the pretty bridges over the Alpine streams cascading down the mountain, and my front wheel washed out from under me. I came down heavily on my left hip and slid into the barrier. The weather turned to hail, but by this stage we were wet through, cold and hungry and just wanted to get to *Ischgl*. We rode on through the hail passing other cyclists huddling under the trees.

By the time we arrived in *Ischgl*, we were in no mood to clean and lube the bikes ourselves and eat another light pasta meal! While pushing our bikes up the main street, I saw a bike shop and we pushed our bikes in. The mechanic could have charged us so much more than 20 Euros to clean, lube and check our bikes over.



The camp for the night was over a kilometre away from the meal hall, so after getting warm and clean, we decided not to make it to the ‘pasta party’ but ordered 2 big steaks at the first restaurant we passed!

We went to sleep concerned about the following day. We had to be ready for the next stage and the mighty *Idoch* at 2,700m. Snow was predicted on the *Idoch* overnight and, if it was more than 50cm deep, we would not be allowed over it!

Stage 3 - 21st July 2008 - Ischgl to Scoul

Stage 3/8 - Ischgl - Scoul	
Total route	75,26 km
Altitude uphill	2547 Hm
Altitude downhill	-2696 Hm
max. altitude	2739 m

Rain! Rain! Rain! We awoke in the morning to a freezing cold drizzle. My hip hurt from the crash the day before and the graze was oozing. The start lanes were full of bikes but no riders - we were all taking shelter under the shop fronts! The announcer told us that, as only light snow had fallen on the *Idjoch* overnight, we were going over the top but were advised to dress warmly as it would be very cold. Some old winter snow would still be there as it doesn't melt completely, but thermal gear would be an unnecessary burden while we sweated up most of the ascent and particularly if it warmed up later in the day. So Hein and I decided to take the minimum amount of warm clothing. I wasn't looking forward to the day ahead.

We climbed up a gravel road, higher and higher with the gradient pitching up to over 20% in sections. The trees became more stunted and then disappeared. As the air became thinner, it became colder and we were greeted by a flurry of sleet in our eyes. Eventually there was no vegetation only shale and old snow, and after over 3 hours of ascending we were pushing our bikes and struggling to breathe. At over 2700m the strong wind blowing over the top lowered the temperature to 2° centigrade and we lost feeling in our toes and fingers.

We didn't stop at the top but flew down as fast as we could, dropping 1000m in 10km. The windchill at 60 km/h dropped the temperature to minus 5°. Controlling the bike at these altitudes, temperatures and speeds was difficult, but we wanted to get lower and warmer as soon as possible. After 30 minutes of descending and hard braking on loose gravel tracks, the hydraulic fluid in Hein's and other bikers' brakes started to boil and the bubbles caused the brakes to fail completely. Hein managed to nurse his brakes to the bottom of the descent, alternating front and rear and feathering them. Frighteningly a South African rider had to crash into the side of the mountain to stop himself when his brakes failed completely! My cable brakes were almost worn out but just lasted all the way down. It took over 30 minutes to be able to get the circulation back in our fingers and toes again before we started ascending the *Kobleralm*.



By now the sun was out and we were into Switzerland. The mountains and valleys were spectacularly green and lush again. We descended through woods on fast gravel roads which turned into some exciting and technically demanding 'rocky and root riddled' paths. My forearms were exhausted from squeezing the brakes but it was some of the best riding of the entire race. The hard ride along the last 30km into the historical centre of *Scoul* was on well built bike paths. By the time we arrived it was hot (over 25°) and we were sunburnt; a pleasant change from the conditions we had incurred during the day.

Scoul was beautiful too. It is set between the mountains with an old church perched on a rocky outcrop over the light blue glacial waters of the river. The town was

celebrating our arrival with a 'Festival' and the central square of the village was crowded with shops and stalls. Many of the bikers had taken off their shoes and were sitting with their legs in the fountain in the centre of the square. At one of the stalls I bought Hein and I the biggest, greasiest, saltiest bacon and ham kebab that I have ever eaten (with a bun skewered on top) and a huge coke. At the time, it tasted as good as any 'gourmet meal'.

I even managed to wash and dry some clothes in the sunshine that evening.

Stage 4 - 22nd July 2008 - Scoul to Livigno

Stage 4/8 - Scoul to Livigno	
Total route	77,16 km
Altitude uphill	2621 Hm
Altitude downhill	-1955 Hm
max. altitude	2290 m

In an event like this, friendships develop quickly. Surely, it must be something to do with communal suffering and helping each other. So what type of person undertakes an event like this? Well, there were the 'strong', 'young' professional racers - the likes of Martin, a Kiwi working for Credit Suisse in Zurich, who in the beginning helped me to assemble my bike on the train to the event. When his Aussie team mate crashed in front of me coming down the *Marienberjoch* I helped him up and collected his scattered possessions. Martin also lent me a lock to keep our bikes safe from the thieves that prey on events like these. We plan to do some riding in the Alps again together in the future.

Alberto is a South African orthopedic surgeon of Sardinian descent who rode with his anesthetist wife. The German maxillo-facial surgeon and his girlfriend were coping better than the couple from Florida who were on the brink of a divorce by day 7. A church minister from London is selling me some ultralight, bling bike bits to "pimp my ride". He finished in the top 100!

We shared a table in a restaurant with an investment banker and his mates from Frankfurt and I ate his pizza by mistake. We joked about it on the ascent the next day.

There were the Portuguese guys who encouraged us to 'do' the Portuguese equivalent; friendly Costa Ricans who were promoting their multi-stage event while racing. Dutch police officers, corporate lawyers from London, and the attractive 'posh' English girl team who could swear like troopers when confronted with the umpteenth steep, rocky ascent on a long day.

This stage was grueling, as usual, but the best for me so far. We gently ascended a typically green alpine valley between towering mountains, alongside a sparkling river to the saddle of *da Costainas* in bright sunshine. However, near the top, the 22km of continuous climbing, altitude and the preceeding 3 long riding days started to take their toll on our poor, tired legs.

The technical descent down the other side was a real adrenalin rush, heightened by the rescue helicopter landing to



evacuate a racer whose head was covered in bloodstained bandages. The temperature dropped again on the next ascent. We had anticipated a warm day and Hein hadn't taken any warm clothes. There was no fast descent to lower altitudes and he froze on the plateau, especially when sleet started falling and a cold wind came down from the towering peaks around us. The descent down the unique and beautiful *Val Mora* was spectacular. The sparse, green vegetation growing on the steep sides of the valley contrasted with the grey rocks and mountains and the ice blue of the river below us. The smooth trail of crushed shale twisted up and down the walls of the valley to the turquoise coloured *Lake San Giacom*.

The next climb up to the *Alpisella* saddle was tough again, and the descent along the "war road" to *Lake Livogno* was scary. The 1.5 m wide, old gravel road had no barriers at the edge and we were trying to make good time so rode down fast. We could have lost control around a corner on the gravel and caused a long fall down the 100m cliff.

Instead of taking the easy, flat route into *Livigno*, the race director arranged a little 'sting in the tail' by sending us up the mountains around *Livigno*. Hein was struggling up the hills, the energy drinks were upsetting his stomach and he couldn't eat much at the food stops. Most of the day had been at altitude and it had been cold. I had to push him up many of the hills. We were both very tired and cold by the time we descended into the cold and high resort town of *Livigno*.

Washing the bike with cold water, and then tuning the brakes, gears and lubricating it in the cold was very unpleasant. We were too tired to walk over a kilometre into town, so ate a very average pasta meal and attended the briefing.

The next stage was going to go higher (2768m) and further (122km) than anything we had ridden so far and it would be very cold up on the *Bocchetta Di Forcola*. The organisers didn't want to be looking for lost bikers in the Alps and in the dark so, in addition to the finishing cut off time, there was a 4pm cut off at the last feeding station at 70 km. We were warned "be late and you're out"!

Stage 5 - 23rd July 2008 – Livigno to Naturns

Stage 5 - Livigno to Naturns	
Total route	122,24 km
Altitude uphill	2909 Hm
Altitude downhill	-4240 Hm
max. altitude	2768 m

The sun was out but it was still cold as we started with the traditional steep ascent up a nearby mountain. After a fun descent down a fast trail, we started up the path to the saddle *di Val Trela*. It was a rough and rocky ascent with 1000 bikers trying to get up at almost the same time. This resulted in a huge traffic jam on the narrow trail. We were forced to push our bikes and it took over 2 hours to cover the first 20km. We still had 100km to cover, including the 2768m *Bocchetta di Forcola* and a time cut off to beat.

We had to make up time on the rough path down. Cautious bikers were getting off and walking tricky sections and across rivers, causing bikers to back up all over again. I was becoming increasingly frustrated, so I took a short-cut off the trail to 'leap-frog' about 40 bikers waiting to cross a stream. All of them turned to see if they should follow my lead. Unfortunately, it was very marshy downstream and my front wheel disappeared into a gully hidden in the grass. I gracefully somersaulted over the handlebars, landed in a splash of mud and emerged like a hippo after a mud bath to great applause and cheering!

We soon arrived at the bottom of the *Bocchetta di Forcola*. The old road, which winds up the initial 800m high ascent, once carried the Italian King and his troops to battle in the First World War, but rock falls had reduced it to a narrow, rocky path. Looking up from the valley below, the cyclists on the snaking path looked like ants near the top. We took a couple of hours to reach what appeared to be the top, then another half an hour to reach the actual top. Once again the vegetation slowly disappeared as we ascended until we were in an awesome martian landscape of red rock, ice and snow. Looking down over the saddle of the mountain, we could see the narrow, rugged, rocky path hugging the side of the mountain and descending into the distance.

When I tried to clip my right shoe cleat into the pedal I realised that I had lost it on the ascent. All bike racers now use cleats under their cycle shoes to clip into small, light pedals, in a similar way that ski boots are clipped into skis. The cleat is released by a sharp twist of the heel outwards. Learning to use this system is painful as you can imagine the consequences of stopping your bike and forgetting to release your cleat until it is too late. However, the advantages are great as you can increase power output by pulling the pedal upwards on the upstroke. You can corner faster by forcing the pedal down. The wheels grip better and you can lean the bike out and your body into the corner. On rocky paths the back of the bike can be positioned, guided, moved and lifted with your feet providing much improved control. The tiny metal pedal was slipping against the carbon fibre of the sole of my shoe and it would be impossible to ride down the rocky descent one legged, and difficult to complete the next 80km of the stage especially in the time left. I tied my soft camera case to the right pedal which reduced the slipping of my shoe and raced down the path as fast as I could.

Once again the views while descending along the steep ridge of the mountain were spectacular. The winding descent down the asphalt *Stelvio Pass* was also a challenge as I had to brake hard into right hand corners and take them very slowly. In addition, my rear wheel began to wobble badly which meant I struggled to control the bike at speeds over 50km/h. I looked at the wheel and tyre frequently but couldn't see a problem. We made it to the feed station 30 minutes before the cut off, but couldn't waste any time as I still had over 50 km to ride in 2½ hours with 1½ legs and a wobbling wheel. By now it was hot in the valley again and Hein was struggling to drink. He was getting too dehydrated and I had to push him up the hills again and ride in front of him into the wind on the flats to keep him in my 'slipstream' to make it easier for him.



As we neared the finish in *Naturns* we realised that it was touch and go as to whether we would make it by the cut off at 6pm. A slightly late finish would earn us an hour time penalty which we could ill afford to do. We rode the last 20km incredibly fast with my back wheel now hopping as if it was square. As we turned into the town we heard the church bells start to ring for 6pm. Hein was absolutely shattered, exhausted and very dehydrated. He stopped his bike 500 metres from the finish. I told him to get back on it as we didn't know if the church bells were on time. He said he couldn't - I shouted at him to get back on the bike (amazingly we are still friends!). As we crossed the line, the announcer told us we had made it by 45 seconds (after 9 hours of racing). Phew!

When I eventually checked my wheel, I found that the tyre had a 3cm cut in it and I had been riding on the bulging tyre liner (thin puncture proof lining placed between the tube and the tyre). Thank goodness the tube hadn't burst, especially on the fast *Stelvio* descent. The camera case was destroyed.

Hein was far too exhausted to get to the briefing that night and I was getting new bike bits, so after a pizza we crawled into our sleeping bags.

Stage 6 - 24th July 2008 - Naturns to Kaltern

Stage 6 - Naturns to Kaltern	
Total route	97,36 km
Altitude uphill	3930 Hm
Altitude downhill	-4063 Hm
max. altitude	1936 m

It was a subdued group that gathered in the sunshine at the start the next morning. We had survived a hard ride the day before and, with the fatigue still in our legs, we had to face what had been called the King's stage, the toughest of the race. We were facing 3930m of ascending. The race director had once again imposed a 4pm curfew at the final feed station, again 'late and you're out'.

I don't remember much about this very long day. We started with a traditional long ascent. The following descent was fast and technical over roots and rocks. I remember my shock absorbers starting to make a terrible sound like a ringing tambourine but they seemed to keep working. This lasted for the next 5 hours, but then mysteriously stopped. I remember endless uphill and downhill that blurred into a continuum of fatigue.

Hein struggled again with his fluids and couldn't eat much either, so I remember pushing him whenever I could. We made the final feed station with 10 minutes to spare and realised that we were never going to make it to the finish by the cut off. The rest station had run out of water and energy drink and so we waited until more arrived.

We eventually made it to the finish in *Kaltern* just under an hour late, this stage took us about 10 hours. Fortunately, due to the length of the stage, the heat and the lack of fluids at the final feed station the race director decided not to impose a time penalty. We were still OK!

The final descent through the forests above *Kaltern* was great. The town, with its vineyards illuminated by the late afternoon sun, lay below us and we flew down leaf covered, fast flowing forest paths.

All I managed to do that evening was lube the chain and get some food before crawling into my sleeping bag. Most of the racers were so exhausted that they just left their bikes outside the gym hall. Just before falling asleep, I decided to bring our filthy bikes inside and lock them up in a storeroom that I had found. The next morning a number of riders woke up to discover that their race was over. Thieves had stolen a number of bikes (the average value of a bike on the Transalp Race was about £2500).

Stage 7 - 25th July 2008 - Kaltern to Andalo

Stage 7/8 - Kaltern to Andalo	
Total route	74,61 km
Altitude uphill	3071 Hm
Altitude downhill	-2430 Hm
max. altitude	1817 m

Bike racers avoid carrying any extra weight on any part of their bikes or bodies, and will spend thousands of pounds to reduce the weight of their bike, and follow careful diets and be very diligent about their ablutions. Cyclists are obsessed with their bowels and no report of the Transalp Race would be complete without a reference to this aspect of the race!

Dehydration and exercise do not help, so emptying occurs in stages. Failure in the camp means a mountainside episode or some discomfort the whole day, carrying it all the way and a compounded problem at the next camp. I still don't know how the 400 or so racers staying at the camp managed to go a couple of times each, with as few as 4 or 5 toilets in some camps. Without going into too much detail, the toilets were in almost constant use with substantial queues at "peak times". Some so programmed would set alarms in the middle of the night! The toilets became less hygienic over the 16 or so hours they were being used. Timing is important if you are one of those who have a strong transient urge because you could find yourself still 5 places adrift in the queue with the urge fading.

Some of the facilities were interesting - one must have been designed for acrobats! The seat was on stilts with a precarious, high perch which collapsed into the bowl if you moved a muscle - some skill was definitely required to perform. Every day the performance pressure was immense because of the long queue waiting just outside the door. On one day this was exacerbated by a waiting German who delivered a running commentary on each person's performance in the row of stalls. He would rate each with a score out of 10 and encourage the queue to applaud particularly impressive noisy or smelly performances. It was wonderful to sit on a cold seat again after the race.

Well we had made it to the seventh stage. Although it was still a challenge, we had a sense that we were going to make it, and we could even afford a time penalty. On the 7th day the 'Lord' rested and so did we (a little). I had spent the last 6 days verbally and physically pushing Hein up mountains, and for the sake of our friendship, we both needed a rest. It was a beautiful, hot day and we each rode at our own pace. I chatted to people around me, and rested in the shade under trees near the tops of the mountains and enjoyed the beautiful Italian Dolomites.



Every day the courses were routed through tiny mountain villages, town squares, cobbled streets and through medieval gates in the town walls. People in the villages, some with cowbells, cheered us and this day I savoured the moments. I enjoyed the crazy descents which I could now do faster and more comfortably, dipped my hot head and neck in the fountains in the village squares and ate ripe fruit plucked from trees in the orchards as we rode through them.

The final 10km was up a beautiful, narrow valley and through a nature reserve. This became very steep (20%) at the top followed by a descent into the resort town of *Andalo*.

We enjoyed a last meal of venison in a local restaurant and we were ready for a short final day "ride to Riva".

Stage 8 - 26 July 2008 - Andalo to Riva - Final Day

Stage 8/8 - Andalo to Riva	
Total route	62,24 km
Altitude uphill	1480 Hm
Altitude downhill	-2463 Hm
max. altitude	1745 m

Short and tough but "gorgeous"! The view from the top of the mountain over the lakes was beautiful but the ride down from *Monte Gazza* was tricky. We were directed down a very rocky and steep descending long path. Many bikers walked down, but Hein and I rode much of it. I did go over the handlebars once and rolled down the steep hill - Hein asked me to do it again just to get it on video!

The final section went through the maze of lowland vineyards. I rode the last few kilometres hard with Hein tucked into my slipstream. A couple of Germans and an Irish team tried to stay in the slipstream too, but they simply couldn't stay with us.

After receiving our medals we were greeted by my family who had spent a relaxing few days at the lake.

The event was won by Stefan Sahm and Karl Platt of team Bulls in 30 hours. Hein and I completed the event in 59 hours and raised a fantastic amount of money for 'Sightsavers International'.

Mark's Achievement

"Done it, got the medal and finisher shirt. Eight days, 665 kms and cycled up Everest a few times!"

Mark's Conclusions

"Fortunately there were no major mechanicals or accidents. Would we do it again? – Well, ask me in a few weeks time. Each and every day was devoted to riding, eating and maintaining our bikes and bodies. It was a great adventure and a complete break from all the issues that normally consume me every day.

We met some good people. We discovered that we were competing against the 'Alps' not each other. To consider doing this you probably need a sick mind and a healthy body."

Mark

Letter from 'Sightsavers' to Bausch & Lomb – 20th August 2008



Dear (B & L)

Thank you very much for supporting 'Sightsavers' by sponsoring Mark Wevill on his recent 2008 Transalp challenge. We have now received the £1,000 you donated – thank you.

Your gift will be used to support a range of our work such as the prevention of blindness, provision of antibiotics to combat trachoma, restoration of sight through cataract operations and training of blind adults and children to enable them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Your donation will make a significant difference to someone's life. Last year alone we at 'Sightsavers' supported 297,392 eye operations and treated 3,590,896 people for sight-threatening conditions. Without supporters like Bausch & Lomb this work would not be possible.

Thank you once again for your support. Your gift will help transform lives, forever.

Kind regards

Sightsavers International

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75% of all blindness around the world could be easily avoided; 90% of children who are blind don't go to school. 'Sightsavers' is working through local organisations to change this. Find out more at www.sightsavers.org