



Touring Club Italiano



TOURING

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EROICA BY BIKE CYCLING ON VINTAGE ROUTES



Three bikers
following one of the
Eroica itineraries
in Chianti.

Toscana



AN HEROIC DAY TRIP

The historical non-competitive cycling event Eroica was born in Chianti but now has conquered the world. Five routes to repeat all year round. Better if wearing vintage clothes and riding a vintage bicycle

Written by MARIATERESAMONTARULI- Photo VITTORIO SCIOSIA



An Eroica moment near to the Brolio castle. To participate to the ride cyclist should have a bike built before 1987 and wear vintage clothes too.



Eroica has five routes with different lengths: 46, 75, 115, 135 e 209 kilometres. They all have in common unpaved roads and the Chianti style up and downhill. A real contest with more and more participants every year willing to cycle like in the past.

The first rule of the Eroica ride, is that the bike has to be vintage and built before 1987: steel frame, the brake cables must pass outside and over the handlebars, gears must have shift levers on the down tube of the frame. Even the clothes must be coherent to the bicycle age. Mine, a racing bike green coloured founded in the street in a winter night, was made in 1975. That was the bell bottom pants decade. Not exactly designed for cycling, that's why I had to study more: I took inspiration from Lauren Hutton's haircut, from Ali MacGraw's skirts, from Diane Keaton's pullovers and from the Italian singer Mina eyeliner. But most of

all I had to train to use the gears on the down tube.

Eroica took its name from those old school cycling where heroes stacked up miles and miles, struggling and eating dust every day. The nowadays ride – every first Sunday of October – is non-competitive with five possible routes up and down Chianti hilltops following gravel roads for the most part. But Eroica is also a sort of ceremony: the search for the bike, the wool vintage sweater, the legs to train cycling on unpaved rising paths. The idea is to go by bike like in the past, like Fausto Coppi or Gino Bartali, or maybe like Alfonsina Strada, the only woman – the daughter of two illiterate farmers –

that, in 1924, participated to the Giro d'Italia facing the common decency of those times.

The extraordinary and a little bit crazy idea of Eroica di Gaiole was born in 1997, from the bright imagination of Giancarlo Bocci, MD and bassplayer for a day, at the so called Barrino, the little café in Gaiole. The ride now takes place during spring time in Montalcino, but there are different editions all over the world, from England to Japan, California, South Africa, Uruguay... Bocci was sure that only bicycles could stop asphalt from deleting every unpaved road of Chianti. A cycling event could be the only cure. He had a vision made of old school wool sweaters, ◻



The Eroica success has conquered the world and now there are editions from England to Australia. In Italy there's another one in the Dolomiti but it's possible to participate only by invitation.



The typical Chianti landscape with vineyards, cypress and holly oaks covering the hills. Below, Volpaia castle bar. On the other page, a participant in vintage look.



candle lights to sign the paths, inner tubes used like braces. A romantic and vintage idea with a meaning.

For my first Eroica I was wearing: a one-piece swimsuit with a Seventies optical theme printed on it, black knee-length socks, laces men shoes. My memory is clear. 8.29 am: it starts to rain. 8.30 am: the ride starts. At the beginning is quite easy with the asphalt roads torch lightened until the crossroads to the Brolio castle. After that the path goes down and the overview seems a Giotto painting: vineyards, holly oaks, cypress and hilltops. The open eyes dream stops when dust and mud starts to cover the bike and me. My vintage look has to be covered by a not-so-elegant windjacket. The road sign of Vagliagli announces me that it is going to start a long rise up to the hill. I start to feel a discouragement and I keep asking myself: “What am I doing here?”. I have to find out a reason not to give up: my legs are not tired, my breast is dry, no punctures until now and my green bike is good on trying to avoid worst muddy holes.

I was drenched and chilled, but positive. Once arrived in a farm in Dievole the refreshment was served by an innkeeper dressed in traditional dress. I had tons of “bruschette” drinking wine as it was water. Meanwhile the sun found his way through the fog and it stopped raining. While I’m writing all this I have my green bike in front of me, at home. There’s a mud spot under the seat that reminds me those days. I think I’ll never clean it.

Eroica for dummies

Eroica has five different routes: 46, 75, 115, 135 and 209 kilometres. Every year six thousands cyclists, coming from 50 countries, arrive in val d’Orcia and Chianti. For every route the start is in Gaiole in Chianti, near Massellone stream, and the ancient Cantine Ricasoli are, during Eroica days, the core of the event. There is a vintage market, a café, the theatre for the presentation and the assignment of ride bibs. Who doesn’t go biking can enjoy Gaiole and Pieve di Spaltenna, a fortified village around Vertine castle, the former cloister now farm of Badia in Coltibuono and the Eroica café recently inaugurated near the Enoteca della Barone Ricasoli at the Brolio castle (ricasoli.it). Not too far there is the Ama castle where is possible to stay or just enjoy wine tasting or have a look at the contemporary art works made by Pistoletto, Anish Kapoor, Daniel Buren, Louise Bourgeois thanks to the hospitality of Lorenza Sebasti and Marco Pallanti (castellodiamia.com).

The uphill between the Brolio’s cypress, common to all five routes, followed by the descent in the vineyards is a sort of appetizer of what the ride means. All the villages the ride crosses are amazing: Radda in Chianti has medieval walls and narrow alleys and during Eroica turns back to its past with dozens of volunteers wearing traditional dresses and offering bikers food, drink and assistanc, the same you can find at Cecchini in Panzano (darioceccchini.com). If you want to try the perfect ribollita go to Fattoria di Lamone near Volpaia on the 75 kilometres route.

If you choosethe 135 kilometres ride the start is from Brolio at dawn and the skyline of Siena is the best way to begin the day. After that there’s Murlo with the Antiquarium museum of Poggio Civitate, and then the Crete Senesi to the Arbia river. It seems that local people has Etruscan dna. Arriving to the Crete of Asciano the worst moment starts: the Sante Marie uphill. Here the



**THE CHIANTI
LANDSCAPE
REMINDS
GIOTTO'S
PAINTINGS
WITH HILLS
AND TREES**





landscape changes: from the straight-laced vineyards to the dusty roads in Terra di Siena colour. The path crosses the Via Francigena walk, an ancient road used in the past by pilgrims going to Rome and now by trekking lovers.

But the true heroes are those who decide to follow the 209 kilometres route. They know that the most difficult moment is the uphill between Montalcino and Castiglion del Bosco. In 2010 it was a Giro d'Italia stage. The landscape is amazing: a gravel road passes through

an holly oak wood; a big green spot in the middle of the Val d'Orcia. At the peak there's a village transformed in a wine resort with golf court and wine cellar, with a medieval fortress and a little church built in 1300 (castigliondelbosco.com). The last part of the ride passes through Pieve a Salti, Buonconvento, Asciano, Castelnuovo Berardenga close to the Crete Senesi. These are stages to discover in every season, on the permanent route of the Eroica well suggested by the road signs on the longest path.

In the previous page, Eroica portraits. Below, the author of the article cycling along Eroica routes.



The pleasure of the pit stop

ALL THE INSTRUCTIONS TO ENJOY THE VINTAGE RIDE

Info

Details: <http://www.eroicagaiole.it/>, <http://www.eroica.cc/>, <http://www.eroica.cc/>. To find all the Eroica editions around the world: [<https://eroica.it/> <https://eroica.it/>]. It is very interesting the Eroica Dolomiti route settled for the 16th of September but it is only for Cycle Club members. It passes through San Candido, Dobbiaco, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Tre Cime di Lavaredo.

Eating

Lo sfizio di Bianchi, via Ricasoli 44, tel. 0577.749501, Gaiole in Chianti; www.losfizioidibianchi.it/. Le dolcezze di Nanni, pasticceria, via Roma, Buonconvento, tel. 0577.809016; www.ledolcezzedinanni.net/.

Sleeping and eating

Borgo della Spina, via della Tinaia 13, Lupompesi, tel. 0577.814605, Murlo; www.boscodellaspina.it. Pieve a Salti, Località Pieve a Salti, Buonconvento, tel. 0577.807244; www.pieveasalti.it/.

Eroica with Girolibero and Touring Club Italiano

Do you want to participate at the next Eroica with an organized tour? Tci members can choose a Girolibero tour and save 10% (roadbike.girolibero.it/eroica).



The amazing landscape from the Brolio castle. Below, cyclist pushing their bike over the hills.





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