

FOCUS ON WINNERS: IVAN BASSO

Making winning a habit

Italian cyclist Ivan Basso is enjoying a glittering career and his passion for road racing clearly hasn't dwindled since he first started competing on the world stage. Nicknamed Ivor the Terrible, he started entering cycling competitions at the age of seven in Cassano Magnago, Lombardy, where he grew up. He remembers his father giving him his first bike, made by Italian bicycle company Olso, and spending the whole evening just staring at it in sheer admiration.

Uphill climb

As a youngster he racked up several wins for the GS San Pietro team and started to work his way up through the ranks. He moved on to race for GS Gornatese, where he spent six years and won the Coppa d'Oro in 1993. He went on to ride for Zalf-Euromobil-Fior, becoming Under 23 World Champion in Valkenburg, Holland. His major rivals at this time included fellow Italian riders Giuliano Figueras—who recorded 14 professional wins during his career—and Danilo Di Luca, whose nickname was The Killer.

Mr Basso started racing professionally for Riso Scotti in 1999 and, in 2001, he moved to Fassa Bortolo under the guidance of sporting director Giancarlo Ferretti. He managed to secure several victories in 2001, the same year he made his debut in the Tour de France. Another major highlight included winning stage 12 in the 2004 Tour de France ahead of eventual winner Lance Armstrong.

The cycling champion describes the emotion and fear he experienced when he made his debut in the Giro d'Italia, which he went on to win in 2006 while he was racing for Team CSC. He finished nine minutes 18 seconds ahead of the second-placed rider José Enrique Gutiérrez, the largest margin of victory in the Giro d'Italia since 1965. However, on reflection, he says that despite winning the much-coveted maglia rosa (pink jersey), he cannot pick out one point in his career as being his happiest moment. "I love my job in the sun and in the rain," he says. "every year I have good times. I don't have one particular highlight."

Ivan Basso currently wears the Outwet brand's Cardio Heartbeat top during training and competitions.

Way Point



On the right track

Having been riding and competing for more than 20 years, Mr Basso has seen vast improvements in the apparel, footwear and accessories available to the cycling market. He explains that being comfortable and protected while you ride is really important, a goal shared by Italian sports textiles manufacturer Way Point, which supplies technical underwear for his current team, Liquigas

Way Point, which owns the Outwet brand, has been producing technical underwear for many years and describes its products as "revolutionary". Its garments offer a range of benefits, ranging from heart rate monitoring to mineral supplement release. And Mr Basso believes the firm's cycling gear, including the Cardio Heartbeat and Protego Active underwear, has made a real difference to his performance.

"The new technology available is really fantastic. For the first time you can stay dry all day and all the sweat is removed," he says. He explains the importance of the moisture management and thermal regulatory apparel he uses, which can have significant physical and mental implications. "First, you are more comfortable," he says. "And second, you don't get sick. You are always dry and that's important."

Protego Active is a special treatment that turns base layer garments into "energy dispensers". Nano-particles, which can absorb substances such as minerals and vitamins and then release them within a predetermined time, are applied to the garment. These particles can be reloaded by washing the garment, made using Aquafil's Dryarn microfibre, in a special solution. According to Way Point, Protego Active can help improve performance, enhance comfort levels and reduce sweating and the wearer's need to drink water. Meanwhile, the Cardio Heartbeat vest also uses Dryarn, which is water-repellent, thermo-regulatory and breathable. Wearers of the vest attach a transmitter to the front of the vest and sprinkle the electrodes with water, allowing them to detect their own heart rate.

Not only do these products maintain the body's natural temperature and protect the wearer from extremes of hot and cold, they also help to reduce unpleasant odours, even after intense activity. Perspiration is drawn away from the body and cause sweat to evaporate outside the fabric so that the wearer remains as dry as possible. "I feel dry all the time," Mr Basso says, "It's very good stuff."

He adds that many of the companies that provide kit and equipment for the team are really focused on each individual athlete's needs. He says that, in instances where something has not been quite right, most companies are happy to make modifications to suit their requirements. This is true of Way Point, which he says is "really



open to creating a good feeling for the rider" and of the company that provides the team's footwear, Sidi.

Best foot forward

Established in 1960 by mountain sports fanatic Dino Signori, Sidi Sport produces high-quality footwear for cycling and motorcycling. The Treviso-based company's emphasis is on comfort and design, which it recognises is continually changing, and rapidly. As a result, it devotes a lot of its time to research and development in order to provide footwear technology that is up-to-date and effective.

Towards the end of 2008, Mr Basso visited the company to check out its new range for 2009 and to be measured for a custom-made pair of cycling shoes. His relationship with the company certainly goes beyond being purely professional. He has worn Sidi shoes for many years, claiming they are extremely comfortable and help to boost his performance.

This year he is wearing the company's Genius 6.6 Carbon model, which is said to be extremely lightweight. The upper is made from a high-tech synthetic leather lookalike called Lorica and nylon mesh. It is water resistant and breathable as well as being resistant to tearing, splitting and scratching. The soft instep closure system distributes pressure evenly over the arch area and is adjustable from both sides. It has a reinforced heel to keep the foot firmly in position and prevents the shoe from becoming misshapen. Its Full Carbon sole is thinner in the toe to provide slight flexibility so that the sole is rigid but does not compromise blood circulation in the foot.

It certainly seems the advanced products available to Mr Basso are giving him an extra boost. In April he claimed overall victory in the Giro del Trentino, and he seems determined to make winning a habit in 2009. 

Ivan Basso (left) with Lance Armstrong (right) at the 12th stage of the 2004 Tour de France, which he went on to win.

 Petrusbarbygere/Wikipedia