

## Race across the Alps (RATA) 2001

Talking about extreme bicycle racing, RAAM is the race to beat. But from this year, we have a race in Europe, that is a strong contender for a second hardest - RATA! The Race across the Alps is surely worth its name, starting in Nauders (Austria) and covering some of the most grueling climbs of Italy and Switzerland. It passes over:

- Reschen Pass (1.560m),
- Passo Stelvio (2.575m),
- Passo Gavia (2.652m),
- Mortirolo (1.846m),
- Aprica (1.176m),
- Bermina Pass (2.330m),
- Albula Pass (2.306m),
- Flüela Pass (2.399m),
- Ofen Pass (2.149m),
- Umbrail Pass (2.505m) and Passo Stelvio (2,575m),
- Reschen Pass (1.560m).

That means around **12.600 meters difference in height in 508 kilometers!!** (look at [Profile of RATA](#))

The race started at 12.00 o'clock on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2001, with 30 of the Europe's best extreme- cyclists and one from USA – Rick Kent, 5 times finisher of RAAM. The favourites for the win were Wolfgang Fasching (two times winner of RAAM, two times World 24h TT champion), Herbert Meneweger (last years second in World 24h TT Championships, RAAM finisher 1999) and Geritt Glomser (professional in Post Swiss Team, in the last month 17<sup>th</sup> in general classification of Tour de Suisse and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Austrian National Championship Road Race).

Glomser showed his ambitions early, as he jumped away from the pack in the foothills of the Stelvio Pass. The others didn't bother much about him, thinking he would crack later in the race. Stelvio Pass greeted us with rain from the bottom, hailstone a little higher and snow blizzard at the top. The first to cross Stelvio after Glomser was Jörn Schwarzkopf (Germany), shortly followed by myself - Marko Baloh (Slovenia) and Paul Lindner (Austria). That all changed before the downhill, because the cold (the temperature was just above zero) made some of us stop and change to warmer clothing.

At the top of Passo Gavia Glomser had a huge lead of almost half an hour in front of second placed Paul Lindner. After him there were Schwarzkopf, Dotto, Knaus, Meneweger, Wildhalm and myself, more than 50 minutes back on the leader. In my second extreme race ever, I proved to be a surprise package of a race (not for myself, but certainly for others). My hopes before the race were high, but after I almost froze on Stelvio, almost fell downhill (because of a careless driver of a car), got a puncture and waited pretty long for my team to catch me and change the wheel, I felt pretty discouraged and was on the verge of abandoning.

On the Mortirolo I suffered like everyone else, its 18% gradient was simply killing my muscles, knees, back, arms, etc. But nevertheless, I passed my first opponent there as the sun began shining on us. On the top I changed my clothes once again and began chasing down others. I had some moral support from other riders, namely

Fasching, with whom I was riding for some kilometers (he told me that everything can change in the next 300 kilometers) and Meneweger, who believed I had a chance of catching Glomser and winning the race!

On Bermina Pass I dropped Fasching and passed Knaus, Dotto and Schwarzkopf, down the valley I passed Lindner and on Albula Pass Meneweger, who gave me some words of encouragement as I passed him. I was now in the second place and slowly, but surely closing in on Glomser. In the foothills of Stelvio Pass (from Switzerland) his advantage was »just« 20 minutes, which is not bad, since I was almost one hour behind him 300 kilometers before that. But here, at Santa Maria, »the man with a hammer« finally caught me and I had real trouble getting up those last two climbs. I was fighting just to keep rolling the pedals and to defend much deserved second place!

The final results were:

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|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Geritt Glomser (AUT)    | 22h 33min 20sec |
| 2. Marko Baloh (SLO)       | 23h 15min 13sec |
| 3. Herbert Meneweger (AUT) | 23h 17min 49sec |
| 4. Wolfgang Fasching (AUT) | 23h 29min 49sec |
| 5. Jörn Schwarzkopf (GER)  | 24h 19min 07sec |

You can get more information and the official results of RATA here:

[www.wassermann-radgiro.com](http://www.wassermann-radgiro.com)

and more about my career and results (for now only in Slovenian language, sorry!) here: [www.markobaloh.com](http://www.markobaloh.com)