

Race across the Alps (RATA) 2002

The second edition of Race across the Alps (RATA) took place on July 12th-13th 2002. The race started in Nauders (Austria) and covered some of the most grueling climbs of Italy and Switzerland. It passed over:

- Reschen Pass (1.560m),
- Passo Stelvio (2.575m),
- Passo Gavia (2.652m),
- Aprica (1.176m),
- Mortirolo (1.846m),
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- 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 of height difference in 544 kilometers!!

The race started at 12.00 o'clock on 12th July 2002, with 41 of male extreme-cyclists and one female – Cassie Lowe, 2 times winner of RAAM. The favourites for the win were Wolfgang Fasching (three times winner of RAAM, two times World 24h TT champion), Marko Baloh (last years second place finisher, behind professional cyclist Gerrit Glomser), Paul Lindner (winner of many long distance races), Jure Robic (last year's second place at Crocodile Trophy MTB stage race)...

Lindner tried to imitate Glomser, who had jumped away from the pack in the foothills of the Stelvio Pass last year. He set such a high tempo, that just Baloh was able to follow him. After some kilometers, Lindner was alone in front, and Baloh went on with his own pace, counting on his ability to catch him later in the race. The first to cross Stelvio Pass was Lindner and two minutes behind him Marko Baloh (Slovenia), three minutes in front of Jure Robic (Slovenia).

That order remained until the descent from Mortirolo. Here is where the organisers made a big mistake in marking the route. They sent the first four riders left, when they should turn right. Lindner noticed the mistake and turned around after a few hundreds meters. Baloh went on for six kilometers (all uphill!) until the organizers caught him and sent him back. The damage was already done, since he came back in the race on 12th(!) place, instead of his hard earned second place. Even worse, the time difference between him and Lindner went from 15 minutes to almost 50 minutes (!). What that does to a mind of a racer, you can only imagine, but I can tell you that it was shocking. After intervention of our controller Reinhard Schröder the organizer recognized his mistake and granted us time bonuses for a lost time (Baloh 30 min, Robic 20 min and Lindner 10 min?).

After some dismal kilometers, my team (my wife Irma and a friend Herbert Meneweger) got me going again, saying to organizer that we won't even need the bonus of 20 minutes, because I will be finishing ahead of Lindner, anyway... Yes, this was a little morale booster! On Aprica I caught a group of 6 riders, who were really surprised to see me. So, I had a little company until Terano and the start of Bermina

Pass climb. Here my comeback started, as I caught and passed every one of the front-runners by the top, except Lindner. So, “my” second place was mine again, but what about Lindner? Despite the rainy and cold weather, I managed to lessen the difference to 40 minutes at the top of Fluela Pass. Here I began to feel the consequences of my midnight run (to reclaim the second spot) – getting very, very tired and sooooo cold! If I wasn’t at RATA last year and freezing in the snow on Stelvio, I wouldn’t believe you can be so cold going uphill. When I stepped from my bike on the top of Fluela Pass, I was shaking so much, that my team had to change my clothes themselves. My stop lasted almost 20 minutes in which Robic caught me and (without changing) passed me.

There I was, not feeling so great and being 15 minutes behind “my” second place at the bottom of Umbrail Pass. Fortunately, the rain had stopped and I was beginning to feel better and better. As we say, I was “on the up” and Robic seemed to be “on the down”, since I caught him on the top of Stelvio, 16 kilometers later. I had no information about the time difference between the leader and me, so I went as hard as I could on the last pass of the day – the Reschen Pass. It was so different to my last years finish – I could hardly move my pedals around then and this year I was “flying”. At the Finish, Lindner had more than half an hour advantage, so he was clearly the strongest on the day. Still, one can’t help but wonder – what if there was no mistake in marking the route? Maybe, the result would be the same, but the race itself would be more interesting – it would be a close fight for a victory (and not for a second place, as it had turned out to be...).

The final results were:

1. Paul Lindner (AUT)	22h 47min 25sec
2. Marko Baloh (SLO)	23h 19min 53sec
3. Jure Robic (SLO)	23h 39min 33sec
4. Marcel Knaus (FL)	24h 11min 08sec
5. Franz Venier (AUT)	24h 25min 43sec

What about next years RATA? With any luck in finding sponsors, I think I am well prepared to face the challenge of RAAM (Race across America). Maybe I can report from USA next year??

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

www.wassermann-radgiro.com

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