



It can be difficult now to comprehend just how dominant steel was in the bicycle making industry before aluminium came along in the nineties. It was supremely dominant and even when aluminium did begin to take over, it still managed to hold its own because aluminium has such a comparatively harsh ride. But its death knell as a serious contender really began when carbon fibre took over. Riders who wanted a lightweight bike without the harshness of aluminium could choose carbon and steel was somewhat relegated. Now of course, steel is popular again, albeit on a smaller scale and while it is extremely unlikely that it will ever dominate the marketplace in quite the same way, there is enough demand to keep some of those original frame builders in business.

One of these is Tiziano Zullo, an Italian craftsman of handmade steel bikes that were once common in the European pelotons; who lives with his Dutch wife, Elena at Castelnuovo del Garda, between Milan and Verona. If you have read Spotlight in this issue, you will know that Zullo once provided bikes for the Dutch team, TVM including our very own Scott Sunderland and Phil Anderson.

“He was a lovely man,” Elena

remembers of Phil. “He was never any trouble. Sometimes, when you sponsor a team a rider wants or needs something done. My God, some of the riders, they would shout and swear, but Phil, he was always polite. He was always a gentleman and I think this came across to the fans as well. He was always very popular with female cycling fans.”

Phil gave Tiziano’s Dutch wife, Elena his Zullo lo pro as a keepsake after the 1990 edition of the Trofeo Baracchi, which passed close by the Zullo factory near the shores of Lake Garda. Anderson was finished with TVM and was off to ride for Motorola. After that season Zullo continued to supply bikes for another two years before TVM switched to the Dutch Gazelle bikes, who reportedly paid three million guilders for the deal.

“We had to take some things to the race, which of course, was not very far away. And at the end Phil came up and gave us the bike. He said, ‘Here, you take this to remember me. Thank you for everything’. Well, TVM, they tried to claim that the bike belonged to them. But I told them it was a gift and they couldn’t have it.”

And so, the bike is still there with the Zullos. You can go and visit it yourself at their factory. It sits inside the showroom,

not in a glass case or anything, but just there with the other bikes for sale. No doubt many people who visit the shop don’t even notice it.

After a short racing career, Tiziano Zullo learnt his craft in Milan, where a number of other historic frame makers were based. He named the bikes ‘Zullo’ as a remembrance of his home village, Zulli, in the North of Italy. At the time of their sponsorship of TVM, the factory was turning out around 4000 frames each year. Due to their relative proximity Tiziano manufactured almost exclusively in Columbus steel, the two companies working for mutual benefit. Indeed, Zullo was one of the first manufacturers to use the then, new technology of Columbus Max tubing. This was the first bike tubing to be elliptical rather than purely round. Very simply, elliptical tubing is stronger because the major axes are opposed in the direction of the stresses. For example, the down tube may be vertically oval where it joins with the head tube, but horizontally oval at the bottom bracket junction. You still see this idea on a lot of today’s frames, even though they’re less likely to be purely oval, as carbon is better suited to a range of shapes.

The real trick when doing it in steel is

# Zullo Inquibo



The lunchroom also serves as a frame storage area.



Phil's bike doesn't usually sit out like this. It's usual home is against the back wall behind the current models.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Frame	Dedacciai EOM16.5 heat treated steel.
Fork	Dedacciai carbon
Head Set	N/A
Stem	WR Compositi carbon fibre
Handlebars	WR Compositi carbon fibre
Saddle	Selle SMP Stratos
Seat Post	WR Compositi Carbon Fibre
Shift Levers	Campagnolo Super Record 11sp
Brakes	Campagnolo Super Record 11sp
F Derailleur	Campagnolo Super Record 11sp
R Derailleur	Campagnolo Super Record 11sp
Cassette	Campagnolo Super Record 11sp 11-25T
Chain	Campagnolo Record
Crank	Campagnolo Super Record Carbon 53-39T
Bottom Bracket	Campagnolo
Wheels	WR Compositi Carbon Tubular KSI
Tyres	Veloflex
Pedals	N/A
Weight	74 kg without pedals
Price	\$3,500 (Frame and Fork)
Distributor	Cycling Projects 02 97992407

connecting one elliptical tube with another and not using lugs. Lugs at this time were beginning to be seen as passé, mainly due to the extra weight they created on the frame. Weight was still the major consideration of frame builders although aerodynamics were beginning to make their mark, as evidenced by the 650 front wheel on Phil Anderson's lo pro. Tiziano Zullo solved the welding problem by fillet brazing the tubes, a laborious and finicky job if you want it to look good. In fact this is one of the things frame aficionados look for when viewing frames of this era because it was a matter of pride with Italian frame builders of the time to create as seamless and smooth looking a join as possible on their top frames.

At Zullo's height, around 10 staff were employed simply as frame builders, but those days have long gone and the company now has a staff of three. If you visit the Zullo factory you could be forgiven for thinking that the company no longer has much output. The building itself is a fair size with a lot of machinery, very little of which was in use when I visited. However, looks can be deceiving as the company is now experiencing something of a 'boom'. It seems that Tiziano's decision not to completely move to carbon (he does offer one frame, the Nero Per Caso) and to stick with the steel he knows best has paid off and the original handcrafted frames are in demand, especially in Europe and Japan. In fact Japan is a major market for Zullo. You may remember our article in issue #157 on the Japanese single speed craze? Well handmade bikes like the Zullos are being welcomed in Tokyo, with a number of Japanese on a waiting list for bikes.

These days you get the impression that Tiziano Zullo has struck a nice balance in his business. He puts out somewhere around 200 frames and bikes each year and while he is busy, he's not too busy to take visiting journalists out to lunch at the local restaurant. "Of course you must eat with us!" says Elena. "It won't take very long,



Just a snack." Not long and just a snack are quite different in Italy than they are here and after I had polished off a large plate of pasta e funghi, I was asked what I would like for 'secondi'. Feeling full, I declined, but it was interesting to see how much time they had to spare for lunch and to chat afterwards. We discussed the cost of Eurobike stands, singlespeeds and various differences between Australia and Italy. And all the while there was no urgency to get back to work, no twitching and no stress. Just an acceptance that work would have to be done, but when you're relaxing, you should do it properly. Wouldn't it be nice if more of us were like that?

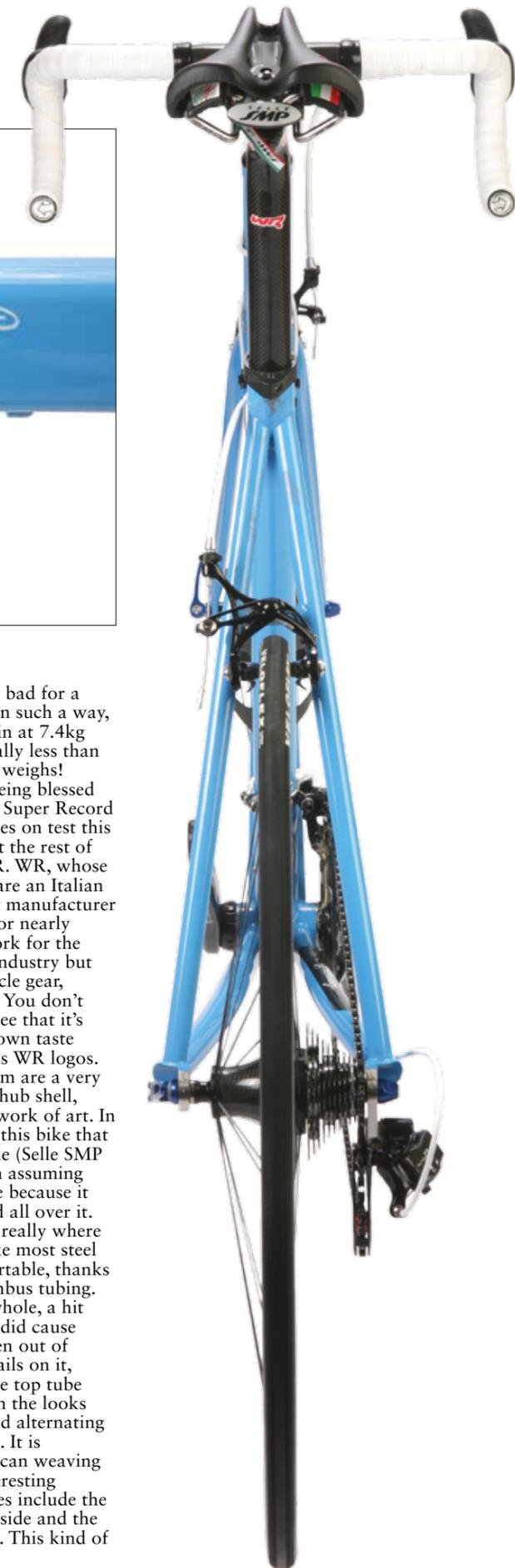
Zullo offer no less than nine models from their workshop. The aforementioned Nero Per Caso which is a custom made carbon, a double butted CrMo single speed called the Metro and the stainless steel Vergine. Then there's the TIG welded Tonica, which is available in road and track versions followed by a wonderful frame called the Tour 91 which is identical to the 1991 TVM bikes and crafted from Columbus' Spirit Niobium. Then there's the Pista '85, a double butted CrMo track bike which is absolutely gorgeous. There's the Maxsilenus, made from Columbus Max and the Vintage, made from Columbus SL CrMo. The model we have on test here at Bicycling Australia is the inqubo, Zullo's dedicated race bike.

Race bike? A steel race bike? Yep that's right, the inqubo is Zullo's race bike, available in both road and track incarnations. You know, I would have struggled to believe it myself, despite testing a Pegoretti a few years back, but this really is a raceable bike. The frame is made from Dedacciai's EOM 16.5 heat treated steel and stated weight is 2,320g for the 55cm version with fork and headset. That's around 1.4kg for the

frame on it's own which isn't bad for a steel frame. And it is spec'd in such a way, that our test model weighed in at 7.4kg completely built. That's actually less than my current carbon fibre bike weighs!

Some of this comes from being blessed with Campagnolo's 11 speed Super Record groupset (notably all the bikes on test this issue have Super Record), but the rest of the components are from WR. WR, whose full name is WR Compositi, are an Italian carbon and cnc'd component manufacturer who have been in the game for nearly 20 years. They do a lot of work for the automotive and motorcycle industry but also have a full range of bicycle gear, including one or two frames. You don't have to look very closely to see that it's pretty nice stuff, though my own taste would lean towards a few less WR logos. In fact some of it, like the stem are a very pleasing shape. And the rear hub shell, well, for carbon lovers it's a work of art. In fact the only components on this bike that aren't from WR are the saddle (Selle SMP Stratos) and the bar tape. I'm assuming the bar tape is something else because it doesn't have WR emblazoned all over it.

The Zullo frame though is really where the heart of this bike lies. Like most steel frames it is supremely comfortable, thanks to the aforementioned Columbus tubing. The blue finish was, on the whole, a hit with the BA office, though it did cause some remarks when first taken out of the box. It has some nice details on it, most notably the stripe on the top tube which does a lot of favours in the looks department. It is very thin and alternating white, yellow, green and blue. It is reminiscent of Central American weaving patterns and provides an interesting optical illusion. Other features include the small signature decal on one side and the fairly understated Zullo logo. This kind of





understatement, to me, says class, in the same way a Dior little black dress differs from a Dotti.

The fact that the fork is carbon fibre surprised me a bit. I think that because it is painted the same blue as the frame itself I expected it to be steel. But it isn't and combined with Campagnolo hoods and the WR stem and bars, it makes a comfortable cockpit. Rake for the fork is a fairly standard 43mm. Interestingly, the chain stays look very similar to those on Phil Anderson's lo pro, being square at the bottom bracket end and becoming round at the dropouts. All up, a very nice package.

In the road bike market these days, there's very few duds. But that's not to say they all ride the same. There's some bikes which you test that you have to work your way into and you come to like them after you've put a number of miles in. Other bikes hit the sweet spot straight away and you look forward to every outing on them. The inqubo comes quite firmly into the latter category. Many people have more than one bike, a fast carbon fibre model and an older, aluminium or steel bike.

Usually, the carbon fibre is an upgrade on the former and tends to be the one ridden more often. Sometimes the older one gets turned into a single speed, or into a wet weather commuter. But every now and then you climb back onto the old bike and if you're lucky, you'll think, "Hey this bike is OK. I should ride it more often." Well that's exactly how the Zullo inqubo felt for me. Bear with me if you're under 40, but does anyone remember that ad for Softly washing detergent where the girl knitted the guy a pullover and said "He wore that jumper everywhere"? Then you see shots of this blonde bloke zooming round on a scooter at uni then wearing the same jumper with his kids. After that you see her pulling it out of the washing



Kinda hard at work. The pace of life in this part of Italy is nice and steady.

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machine and rubbing it against her cheek. Well, the Zullo for me, felt just like that. The comfort of familiarity.

I realise that may sound a bit silly, but that's how it was. Sure, there's other bikes on the market that will climb better, quite a few probably. And there's a number of bikes that will sprint better. But riding the inqubo you'll find that it isn't really off the pace. If you were doing a 10km climb with some riders who had super stiff carbon machines you might be a bit slower, but not by much. And I bet you'd still be able to take your turn in the bunch without any hassle. But the point is, in both situations you'd be a lot more comfortable doing it and a lot less aching afterwards. We have a number of hills around the Bicycling Australia office and I like to train with our ad manager Ben at lunch times. On each occasion that I was on the inqubo and he was on his seven grand carbon machine the difference in our speeds uphill and on the flat was the same as almost every carbon bike I've ridden.

Two issues ago we ran a test on the Van Nicholas Astraeus which had Spinergy carbon wheels and I remarked that the combination of titanium and carbon was an extremely good one. I'm now even more convinced of this, though in the Zullo's case it's steel not ti. Both of these bikes had the characteristic of a very comfortable ride, with the carbon fibre componentry and wheels providing a race like feel. After riding the Zullo and feeling at home both at speed and simply riding up the road to work, I wonder if we'll see more of this type of combination in the future. As Asian carbon fibre bikes become more and more mass produced there will probably be a growing market for bikes like this. 🚲

## SUMMING UP

### Quality

A handmade frame from one of Italy's renowned traditional frame builders is always going to be good and this one didn't let us down. The welds can hardly be seen, the paint job is lovely and there's a few little fashion details but not overly so.

### Performance

Striking. Zullo advertise this as a race bike and it is just that. At 7.4kg it has a respectable weight and enough stiffness in the wheelset to keep you up with anyone. The Campagnolo Super Record was excellent as always.

### Value

For a hand made frame \$3,500 is pretty good. It's even better when you consider that you're getting a hand made performance race bike. This price is with the standard Dedacciai fork but you can request other options and of course, the distributors, Cycling Projects can meet any other requests.

### Overall

I'm predicting that we'll see more bikes with this combination of steel and carbon components. The two marry together so well that the Zullo inqubo is a joy to ride. With this bike not only are you getting a handcrafted product from a well known frame maker, you're also getting a performance bike. A wonderfully comfortable performance bike.