

## From the Organizer: Behind the Effort to Host a Conference

When Jan Kralik asked me to organise the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Cycling History Conference (ICHC), I was happy but at the same time worried because I was already organising the 41<sup>st</sup> IVCA (International Veteran Cycle Association) World Rally and was as busy as a bee with AVI (Italian Velocipede Association) activities, so I was afraid of having too many irons in the fire.

The AVI Board of Directors enthusiastically approved the organisation of the conference as a great opportunity for the Italian velocipedist movement; moreover, the proximity with the IVCA event would put Italy at the centre of the world of vintage bicycle enthusiasts, so in the end I accepted. Another fact that contributed to the decision was the interest shown by the ASI (Automotoclub Storico Italiano) in vintage bicycles. This led us to involve Italy's most important classic vehicles organisation in our event.

The conference also represented an excellent opportunity for the city of Cremona, so I established contacts with the Civic Museum, which is the city's most important cultural organisation. I was looking forward to creating a partnership, but never thought that they would make the entire structure available to me.

I was also very surprised when Mario Marubbi, General Manager of the museum, told me that the Calciati draisine would be restored. The draisine was donated by the Calciati family to the museum. Earl Calciati was one of the most important citizens and represented one of the richest families in Cremona.

I knew this draisine, which had already been displayed in the exhibition I had organised in 2018 entitled 'Metamorfosi meccanica' in which the mechanical evolution from bicycle to motorbike was illustrated, but this same draisine was in need of restoration. Since actions speak louder than words, Manager Marubbi accelerated the restoration work in order to have the draisine perfectly restored before the conference, and then he asked me to set the conference venue in the museum's Lecture Hall. I was very happy with this proposal and realised at that moment that the event would start under a good star.

Furthermore, 2023 is the year of the Bianchi R Super's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. This model had been produced in September 1923 and presented at the Grand Palais in Paris and at the Olympia in London. When introduced, the media called it the most beautiful bicycle in the world and our conference provided the best context to celebrate one of the most important bicycle models ever produced in Italy and the first bicycle in the world with completely internal brake levers.

Thanks to the help of Jan Kralik and my son Carlo, it was possible to start organising the event, and, thanks to the commitment of our partner AVI, it was possible to set up the conference venue and the entire programme.

The Italian velocipede scenario has deeply changed since 2001, when the ICHC came to San Remo for its 12<sup>th</sup> conference. Thanks to the 'Eroica', vintage cycle collecting is now more widespread than in 2001, but the interest of Eroica enthusiasts is limited to racing cycles produced after the Second World War.

On the other hand, the collection of very old velocipedes is a phenomenon that has spread over the last 20 years and in the last 10 years has seen the organisation of several clubs. Among these, AVI is the most important in terms of the number of registered collections and ASI is the most widespread in Italy, so both clubs were honoured to organise the conference.

In drawing up the programme, we took our history into account and wanted to give conference participants and their companions the opportunity to learn more about our culture, especially with regard to the medieval and renaissance centuries.

The conference venue at the Museo Civico helped us a lot because it gave us the opportunity to admire many pieces of Renaissance and Baroque art such as paintings by Arcimboldo, Caravaggio, Mantegna and many other Italian artists.

On Monday, we organised a trip to the medieval village of Soncino, where participants were able to visit the castle and the house of the Jewish printers who published one of the first print versions of the Jewish Holy Book.

Since food is also a form of culture in Italy, we couldn't miss the opportunity to organise a typical lunch in one of our land's most famous restaurants, 'La mucca della nonna' in Soresina, where participants enjoyed typical dishes while drinking sparkling and Tuscan red wines.

After visiting the Velocipedes and Antique Bicycles Museum housing the A. & C. Azzini collection in Soresina, the conference ended in the conference room of this Museum.

If I had to ask myself what did this conference represent for me?

There is only one answer: it was not only a great experience in learning about history but also an opportunity to meet many people I already knew thanks to their publications.

*Alfredo Azzini, Soresino*