

## **7<sup>th</sup> RANCILIO Hand Bike Grand Prix Parabiago (MI) – 1 May 2005**

The athletes put on a great show for the "7<sup>th</sup> RANCILIO Hand Bike Grand Prix", organised by Gruppo Sportivo Rancilio which took place on 1<sup>st</sup> May in Parabiago (MI).

On the city circuit in the centre of Parabiago, 80 athletes, out of the 90 registered, from 14 countries battled it out fiercely much to the joy of the large crowds.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> competition on the European HandBike Circuit was enthusiastically welcomed by the whole town that has by now, after many years, learned to appreciate the athletes' first-class technical skills. It was a particularly hot day, making the race even more selective for the many competitors who are not yet used to competing in high temperatures.

Let's get down to the races:

Division C2 (paraplegics), got off to a really fast start with the two Dutchmen, Van Breukelen and Brujin, (both on the Double Performance team) and the Belgian, Declair, (Invacare team) setting the pace and breaking up the rest of the group. Their manoeuvre worked so well that by the halfway point (25 km) there were only 9 left in the leading group.

The action slowed up for several kilometres until Declair put in a series of spurts around the 10 km mark surprising the Dutchmen and leaving no room for doubt, he really had the situation in hand.

The last lap was breathtakingly fast (40,750 km/h average speed), with Van Breukelen who spurred his team mate Brujin on towards the second win of the season, after the marathon in Rome, and then heading the group chase in front of Declair and the Austrian Schmoll. The winner's average speed was 34,975 km/h.

Sternath (ABSV Wien team) from Austria gave an excellent performance in Division C1, and managed to keep up with the group of the best C2 athletes, together with Libanore, from Ticino, and Eberle (both on the Handbikesport CH team). This move meant podium positions for the 3 athletes who managed to leave the other competitors, who still weren't in top form, way behind.

Libanore and Eberle slackened off slightly over the final metres giving Sternath that minimum advantage for an easy victory.

In Division B, a steady pace was maintained for more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the race with the competitors displaying splendid strategic skills; Weber (Sopur team), from Germany, and the Czech Pipek (Handbike CR team) occasionally stepped up the pace and little by little eliminated the rest, remaining on their own to battle it out for victory.

As imagined, there was a two-man chase to the finish with Weber beating Pipek by a couple of meters, whilst Knecht (Otto Bock team) from Germany crossed the line at the head of the group chase.

The hot weather conditions also forced the athletes in Division A2 (tetraplegics) to run a strategic race. Shortly after the start, a trio was formed with the Belgian Hindriq (Handcycling Promotion team), Weber from Switzerland (Handbikesport CH team) and Schattauer (ABSV Wien team) from Austria.

The race then provided few surprises and maintained an even pace up until the final chase when the three athletes crossed the line one after another.

In Division A1, Jost (Rehability team) from Germany easily beat the first-rate Italian Milanese (Polha Varese) who won second place in the category.

The women's race in Category FC went off without a hitch and the Frenchwoman Martin (SGL Chatenois) outstripped her rivals right from the start and flew off to run her own personal race, winning by a good 8 minutes ahead of the Italian Natasha Isler (Polha Varese) who came second and Tatar (team Rehability) from Germany. A decidedly high average with speeds reaching 30 km/h.

The women's FB race however was completely different. It was played out with great tactical control leading to a final chase which saw Schwaller (Handbikesport CH team) from

Switzerland beating the German Dangl (SB Rosenheim) and the other Swiss competitor Schild (Handbikesport CH team).

As for the Italians, apart from Milanesi and Isler who we've already mentioned, there were excellent performances by Cecchetto (Polha Varese), Ceriotti (POP 84), Negri (Pol. Biella) and Arnaboldi (Beeandbike Brgenano) respectively placed 9<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> in Division B; an excellent 6<sup>th</sup> place for Rossetti (POP 84), with Giani and Villa (both from Polha Varese) 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in Division A2 and with Meriti (Icaro Assoc.) and Gatelli (Lonato Assoc.) 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> in Division C1.

The day ended with the customary prize-giving (€ 4.600 total prize money was awarded) which was followed by a "pizza party" and a free prize draw.

We must honestly say though that our athletes demonstrated their maximum potential considering that they have not come up against such high levels of preparation. However it was very comforting to see such a massive turnout at the event. This proves that finally there's a great desire to compete and pit ourselves against countries which are definitely the most prepared and the most experienced in the hand bike arena.

We can confidently say that the road to victory is finally open and from here on we can only get better.

As well as the fantastic show provided by the athletes, the crowd was also kept entertained by lots of other events.

The conclusion of the final phase of the "3<sup>rd</sup> School Project" was quite spectacular. This programme was created and backed by the Gruppo Sportivo Rancilio, with help from Rancilio macchine per caffè spa, the Banca Popolare di Milano and TNT. The programme included a series of "educational days" held in primary schools in Parabiago and Legnano; there were "lessons" on cycling and safety in which more than 1,000 schoolchildren took part.

A mass of children paraded through the streets of the city centre wearing protective helmets that had been given as presents during the lessons, highlighting the message that "safety comes first".

Displays by the Firemen from Legnano and the Civil Protection Canine Rescue Unit from Nerviano added the finishing touches to the event's programme.

Commentary by the editorial staff.