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PRE-WEDDING BLISS ON TWO WHEELS



IT WAS CRUNCH TIME: Just three weeks and 1300 miles away from home in New York to our destination wedding in New Orleans. So I popped the question. "Um, sweet Livia, we're done spending money on all the last-minute details for the wedding, right? How 'bout a motorcycle trip to Italy for 10 of those 21 days?"

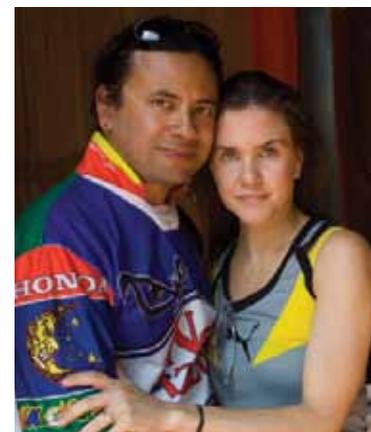
I got the response I was hoping for. And simple as that, we were on! The most important part of prepping for our first motorcycle tour together was to ensure that all the wedding details were in place. We didn't want to be in a foreign land, riding a Ducati Multistrada in motorcycle heaven, worrying about the florist, the caterer or the band's set list. We wanted to be doing things we love doing together—riding, eating and living *la dolce vita*.

With gear packed and passports in hand, off to Italy we went for this crazy, pre-wedding Edelweiss tour, which promised 600-plus miles of twisty roads, and fittingly started and ended in Bologna, Ducati's ancestral home.

During the welcome dinner, we got to know our tour mates, which included a bunch of South Africans, two Canucks, a few Yanks and three tour guides: two Germans and one Italian with a German accent. Go figure. Following the first of many lengthy meals, Marko Bauer, our lead guide, treated us to a walking tour of downtown Bologna. He added tremendous value to the experience with his vast knowledge of every city, village and landmark we visited throughout the trip—from ancient history to pop culture.

Our schedule for this Italian adventure was simple and efficient in a Germanic kind of way: Breakfast at 7:30; day's briefing at 8:30; kickstands up by 9:00. Then, ride, ride, ride. Stop for espresso, pictures and a kiss on the sly. Ride some more. See some sights. Take a leisurely lunch. More strong Italian java and great riding. Maybe a couple of more sights. Check in to the hotel. Dinner between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. Historical walk around town, holding hands. Next, more espresso and gelato. Off to bed with my honey by 1:00, and then...

Every morning, we were thankful that our luggage was hauled in a support



Fast bikes and good friends on the Edelweiss Ducati tour: our solution to pre-wedding stress. Hey, it worked.

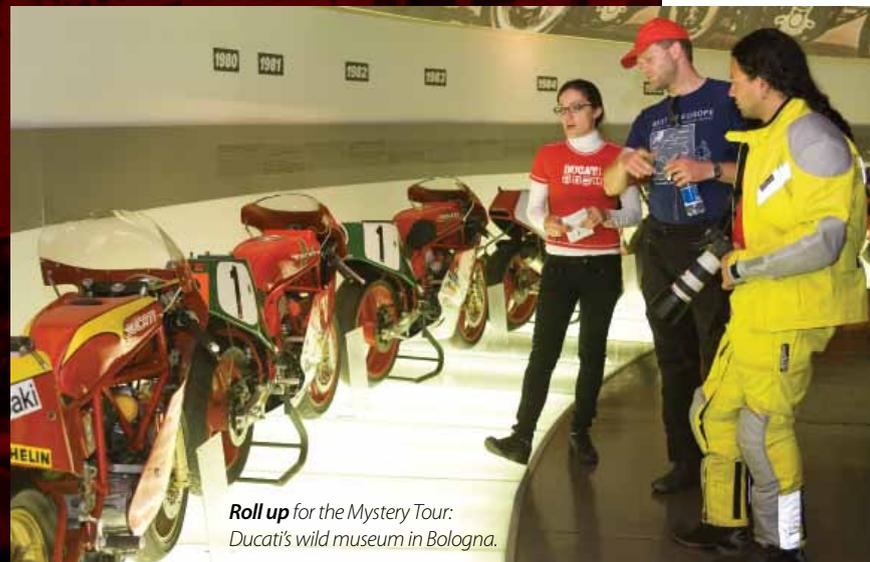


Clockwise from left: checking the tour route; pre-wedded bliss; wedded bliss in the future; the fortified ancient town of Assisi.



EDELWEISS BEST OF ITALY DUCATI TOUR

Words: **Stuie Mildener**, as told to **Eric Putter**
Photos: **PutterPowerMedia**



Roll up for the Mystery Tour: Ducati's wild museum in Bologna.

van. All we carried on our black S-model Multistrada were a few essentials in the integrated saddlebags and top trunk, leaving lots of room for the stuff gathered along the way: Olive oil, coffee, cooking gadgets and, of course, Livia's stylish boots from Florence, Italy's leather capital.

On day one, we rode through Ducati's not-so-high-security security gate, and were immediately shuffled to a curio shop, but not before getting our coffee fix. A soft-spoken 20-something tour guide showed us the factory. I was amazed at how little space was devoted to building bikes. We witnessed a Diavel assembly, a Monster being run-in on a dyno and lots of sub-assemblies.

For a gearhead like me, it was awesome, even though we couldn't hear the tour guide's spiel. Of course, my wife-to-be hung on my every word while I waxed poetic about Ducati details. Well, at least she nodded her head and smiled a lot. I'm sure she'll be doing a lot of this through the years. Afterward, it was off to Ducati's outrageous museum, a space that featured everything from pre-war radios, cameras and shavers to Casey Stoner's championship-winning MotoGP bike.

Once we mounted up and left Borgo Panigale, our tour's emphasis was refocused to aerobic motorcycling through thousands of corners—not frolicking around tourist traps. In five magical days of riding, we carved twisties over mountains with rapidly changing elevation, floated over rolling hills and meandered through towns with classical architecture and long-forgotten Roman ruins. As we rode around the beautiful Tuscan and Umbrian countryside, through olive groves and vineyards, we could smell the fruit being pressed for oil and the sweet scent of grapes still on the vine.

All over Italy, the cuisine is local. The meat, produce, bread, gelato and, of course, wine we enjoyed every day came from a place nearby that didn't require shipping via refrigerated truck



After we get married, that high-viz jumpsuit is history.



WEAPON OF CHOICE: 2011 Ducati Multistrada

With its 130-hp superbike motor, the Ducati Multistrada was the perfect tool with which to explore Italy. The integrated saddlebags and top trunk provided plenty of cargo space for the stuff we picked up along the way, and my wife-to-be was extremely happy with the passenger accommodations.

Every Multistrada rider on the tour fell in love with the bike. I was one of them. The three unfortunate souls who rode naked, bare-bones Monsters really missed out on the big Duck's amazing performance and comfort. Its motor revs quickly to the *Stradasphere*, has high-speed passing power and ample low-end grunt to get through the tour's endless supply of 2nd- and 3rd-gear roads.

Compared to the bikes in my garage, the Multi is positively space age. I kept the push-button suspension settings in sport and touring mode for two-up riding. While the ABS and traction control never kicked in on paved roads, solo riders said that these babysitters made for tough going on the tour's only off-road section, a twisty fire road with loose dirt in many corners.

Excellent luggage, perfect ergonomics, a cushy seat and adequate wind protection made for a smooth trip. After experiencing almost 1000 miles of good times on it, I highly recommend the Multistrada to anyone in the market for a unique, comfortable sport-touring bike. —sm



Multistrada Matrimony

to suppress the natural ripening process.

Even closer to the plate was our lunch at Ca del Buco. It's an "Agriturismo," or a fully functioning farm and bed & breakfast. Every morsel of our lunch originated on that plot of land. The dining room was in a converted barn. Needless to say, we had a fresh meal that would be the envy of any Zagat critic.

Each day culminated at a three-to-four-star hotel in a beautiful city that embodied Italy's crisp style and rich history. Our favorite overnight spot was Assisi on day three, an unreal, 2000-year-old town. As we approached from the lowlands on our Multistrada, the fortified Roman walls of this elevated city reminded me of Minas Tirith, J.R. Tolkien's mountain city in Lord of the Rings. Perched on a steep hillside, Hotel Giotto was the most beautiful of all the places we stayed, with breathtaking views at sunset and sunrise. After our "deliziosa cena," Marko delighted us with a tour of the basilicas that are integrated with Roman ruins, displaying the wealth of history this city claims.

Our only upset occurred outside San Marino, the world's smallest sovereign nation and oldest republic in the world. Long, crappy story short, the tour took a stomach turn for the worse as more than half the group succumbed to a nasty bout of food poisoning. Still feeling the effects of our San Marino Stomach Flu the next morning, many of us chose to blast straight back instead of spending the final day carving our way to Bologna. On the dash to the finish line, I unleashed the 'strada on the autostrada. Hitting 135 mph on a sporty bagger felt all cool, 'till I was brought down to earth by a Benz blowing past at what had to be at least a buck fifty. Luckily, we prefer the twisty bits over super slab! But other than being no match for big-motored Benzos, the Multistrada was the perfect tool on which to explore Italy. Loaded with electronic gizmos, a superbike motor and Öhlins suspension, it had all the sportbike prowess I could ask for, and proved super-comfortable. I found the seat-to-bar-to-body proportions, and wind



The Ducati museum's lightest racebike.

Best of Italy Cheat Sheet



Lodging

Edelweiss Ducati Tours www.edelweissbike.com



The BMW Boxer motor makes a convenient cooktop in a pinch.

protection to be exemplary. With our Chatterbox communicators allowing us to chat away, Livia and I were in moto-heaven.

Here's her take on what she called a high-performance magic carpet ride: "As a passenger, I found the bike easy to mount and dismount. The top case provided super back support. And after all the scrambling to make the wedding a dreamy affair, this bride-to-be wanted to relax. It was beautiful soaking up the sights at speed, holding on to my soon-to-be-hubby. That and I felt secure enough to shoot photos and video. The ride was so smooth that I actually fell asleep a few times. Guess I don't have any trust issues."

After waking up after a good night's sleep, we realized it was race day! We took a short train ride from Bologna to nearby Imola, for the penultimate World Superbike race of the season, at Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari. Strangely enough—even though this Edelweiss tour included a stop of the GP



WSBK Race day at Imola's Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari: a hardcore racing fan's wet dream.

series—our tour mates weren't rabid race fans like me. Oh, well. Spaniard Carlos Checa took a third and a win in the races for Ducati, then wrapped up the title a week later in France.

Livia and I felt like pampered stars on this amazing adventure. In many ways, I feel the tour was a metaphor for our relationship, something to aspire to in our new journey. In the twisting, turning road that is life, couples must get in gear together, ride through the rough spots and strive for *la dolce vita*—just like we did on this tour. **me**