



HOW TO SPEND 21 DAYS GOURMET BINGING IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, AND NOT GAIN A POUND! PROCEED IT WITH A HALF-IRONMAN IN MONACO. (OCT 2006)

BY DON EOVI NO

"Monaco Half-Ironman, Tour de France hills, French Impressionist Artists Residences, Country markets in South Provence, Racing Ferrari with bike rack, Gourmet eating and drinking of local foods and wines.

If this is interesting to you, read on about the excursion of a lifetime."



This trip was incredible, one of the best in my lifetime. We stayed at a boutique hotel -Le Metropole, 1/2 block from the Hotel de-Paris. I thought I had decently trained to run the 1/2 Ironman in Monaco, it ended up being one of the most difficult events I had done in my sporting career. I didn't know until one hour before the gun went off that this was the toughest bike portion in the entire 1/2 ironman series- the bike was a 12 mile climb out of Monaco and was told it would take an extra hour added to our normal bike time, it did!

I Just wanted to collapse after I got off the bike and was totally spent. I sure wasn't looking forward to a 1/2 marathon. But I just put one foot in front of the other on the run and I finished! I have done events longer before, but not racing all the way. My time was not great, but what a sense of satisfaction when completed. The bike course sped through 10 small villages, labored up four climbs equaling 28 miles out of 56, and then "kamikazied" down through the hills and cute towns like we were competing in the "Tour de France". I finished just under 7 hours vs. under 6 for my other races. Swimming in the Mediterranean in front of the Lavotto in Monaco with a beach full of Europeans was a thrill and foot racing down the harbor on the same course as the Formula 1 Grand Prix in front of the Monte Carlo Casino with the most outrageous yachts jockeying for berths for the upcoming World Yacht Exposition was a sight to behold, almost made me forget about my exhaustion.

The choice to splurge on renting a Ferrari was questionably the best decision to add to our adventure we could have made-(not quite sure my wife-Hiroko would agree however, for the trade off in comfort-I think she would have preferred a van!)



LET THE FUN
BEGIN...

With my coach Mike McMahon accompanying us, and acting as Navigator, and Hiroko site-seeing in the back, (the Ferrari was a four seater, a '92 model 456, that pulled g-forces coming out of the stop-signs), she protested a bit at our acceleration, but it still was an incredible experience each day. My spine tingled to the music of the roar of the exhausts and that combined with it's superb handling on the curved country roads convinced us that there couldn't have been better places to ride a car like that than all over the South of France. We packed bike on two days to Mount

Ventoux, and Alp d'Uez to experience two of the most famous Alp climbs on the "Tour de France". The views were breathtaking as were the fabulous town villages where we would stop to have lunch before the bike climb.

As an appeasement to Hiroko, she planned the other days after the biking and racing, in all the places where the French Impressionist artists lived, worked, and had museum's. We toured and stayed where Monet, Renoir, Cezanne, Van Gough, and Matisse lived and in the case of Van Gough, went to his hospital where he institutionalized himself and lopped off his ear lobe. Leaving Monaco, we stayed in two old world boutique hotels, called the Relais Chateau's, a chain of high quality Chateau's that were known for their services and restaurants. The first was Haute de Cagnes, a 12 century castle like-Villa spending 4 nights above Nice near St. Paul de Vance, and sweated bullets trying to park the Ferrari on the golf cart-like streets. Then 6 nights in Montefort- at Les Fiennes, an 18th century home built in Napoleonic style, in a sleepy village outside of Avignon.



INDEED A TRIP TO REMEMBER..

From there we were able to see all that we wanted. We got some fun stares by the local people including the hotel staff as we hummed through towns on the Ferrari with a bike rack on the back with two high tech bicycle's in tow. One highlight of the biking was the journey to Alp de Huez with Mike and I as Mike's goal was to conquer the mountain from top to bottom. With Hiroko pacified visiting the museums in St. Remy, Mike and I drove the 300 kilometers to the French Alps and I parked the Ferrari at the top and descended to meet Mike coming up. After cruising around the town on our bikes at the finish line of the famous race we agreed that Mike would race down the hill and I would follow him in the car. Mike careened downhill tailgated by the Ferrari bellowing out the high speed whine of the engine as we bobbed and weaved in and out of the 16 hairpin turns the route is famous for-accelerating in and out, bike and Ferrari as one, like two bullfighters in a arena, bobbing and weaving the S- turns all the way down the mountain. What a thrill!!

We spent a day with my assistant-Jimmy's wife's grandparents at their Condo in Nimes, and then to their 70 hectare vineyard with a remodeled 18th century Chateau and ate and drank way too much of the their food and wine at their insistence- including a giant Paella, the grandma worked all day on. We communicated via computer with their son by teleconference out of New Caledonia, to explain the missing parts of our conversation as they couldn't speak English and we couldn't speak French. We made it to the Coliseum in Arles, where Van Gough lived, and purchased tickets to a Spanish bullfight- Hiroko exited mortified after they brutalized the first bull, they killed five bulls in the arena that night, it made us question that kind of mentality, but quite a colorful and cultural experience. We toured about 10 small towns throughout the South of France all in Provence, most days going to their Country Farmers market where we would have lunch under an olive tree, or in a cute street restaurant, or on a park bench eating out of bags of fresh fruits, cheeses, breads, olives, and wines indigenous to that area. The early September weather did not require more than the shirt you were wearing including into the late night, where we usually ended the day at our villa relaxing outside after a swim by the pool drinking local French wine and eating their gourmet French food under a full moon. We slept like puppies. When I stood on the scale when I got home, the needle hadn't moved since I left. Indeed a trip to remember.

