



6.000 km trip to Sardinia in June 2004

After our memorable but 11.000 km long trip to Norway of last year's, this time we decided to take a shorter trip to Italy, visiting Andorra, Florence, Rome and Sardinia, taking the opportunity to attend Italy's MotoGP when passing by Mugello on June 6th.

Since my sister and my brother-in-law Manuel decided for an even closer destination —the South of Spain — this year we only had the pleasant company of Teresa and Carlos Paz Ferreira on their Honda Pan-European.

As we always do, we planned this new trip in its smallest detail and, on May 18th, we were finally shipped our bikes to Lisbon.

Whilst in Lisbon we decided to exchange our old and already noisy Shark RSR Summum helmets for the new Schuberth S1. We bought them at Moto ponto, where I also presented Elisa with a new pair of gloves. As we had to transfer the intercom system headsets to the new helmets, Mário Moniz and his partner Carlos, from Mocasmoto — Autocom dealers in Portugal — kindly did it for us on the eve of our departure.

Day 1 – June 1st, 2004 – 1.122 km

The beautiful morning on this first day of June in Lisbon was promising another fantastic trip. We could hardly imagine that this trip, the shortest we carried through Europe till now, would be the most troubled one we ever had.

After the farewells at our apartment, in Lisbon, where our children hardly disguised their usual inquietude when watching their parents leaving for another two wheel "adventure", I came across with the first annoyance of the trip. I forgot my cell phone at my son's apartment, located in the other side of the city (Queijas), and my new GPS was not working. Because it was difficult to go back to Queijas at a peak traffic hour, I arranged a meeting with my son at Barreiro, close to where he works, so that he could deliver me the cell phone. Still without GPS, unfortunately we got lost at Barreiro, so we only met him at about 10:30 AM, which delayed our departure in two and a half hours. To recover the delay we rode fast in our way to Madrid, stopping for lunch and repairing the GPS at 14:30, less than 100 km far from Madrid. After lunch and thanks to the help of a breakdown-car mechanic, I found that the GPS problem was only due to a blown fuse. As I didn't have a replacement fuse and the GPS was needed to cross Madrid, I decided to make a direct connection to the bike's battery.

So, with the precious GPS help, we crossed the Spanish capital without any route mistake. Since I was receiving the detailed road directions through my bike's sound system, I rarely needed to look at the road signs. I only occasionally did I felt the need to check this information with the map running in the GPS colour display. This was my first experience with this fabulous navigation equipment, which efficiency and easy of use, was confirmed throughout the entire trip, to my delight.

The more we headed north, the less heat and difficulty we felt in riding this day 1.122 km planned journey. Meanwhile and after stopping for dinner at one of the many Meda's self service road restaurants, we only arrived at Lleida hotel at about 11:00 PM.

Day 2 – June 2nd, 2004 - 352 km

Since this day's journey until Perpignan was not too long, we left the hotel at 9:30 AM on route to Andorra Principedom. The beauty of the landscape increased as we rode the Pyrenees towards "Andorra La Vella". The sinuous mountain road, zigzagging between sunny lakes, scarps and valleys, makes the delights of any biker. On this day we rode slowly to enjoy Andorra's majestic landscapes. Some places were so beautiful that they reminded us of our previous trip to the Norway.

As planned we stopped at "Andorra La Vella" for lunch and to visit this city, full of restaurants and nicely priced stores, mainly electronics. We were sorry that our bike's cases were so fully loaded. Even so, our wives managed to find a small place to carry the perfumes and bijouterie that they couldn't resist buying.

At 03:00 PM we got back to the road heading to "Pas de La Casa" ski resort, located on top of the Pyrenees. On the way we stopped by the many belvederes with wonderful mountain sights. After visiting the picturesque "Pas de La Casa" resort, we got back to the road to start descending all the way down to Perpignan, where we spent the night.

On the descent towards the Pyrenees I had the first fright of the trip. In a sharp bend I suddenly faced a tourist bus coming in the opposite direction, just in the middle of the road. If my FJR wasn't equipped with ABS I would have been unable to avoid an accident. But before this incident, fortunately with no other consequence other than a big fright, I had already noticed that my bike's front wheel was pushing slightly to the right. Anyway I didn't give it too much importance and we continued on our way to Perpignan, at our normal pace. When entering the city and due to my natural lack of experience on GPS navigation, I missed one of the many auto-route exits and had to ride a further 24 kms to find the right way to the hotel again. Anyway I was surprised how fast the GPS recalculated the new route after this mistake of mine, leaving us exactly at Hotel Ibis's main entrance at about 07:00 PM.

Day 3 – June 3rd, 2004 - 534 km

We left Perpignan at 08:30 AM towards Menton, a small French city located near by the Italian border. We rode a Motorway during the whole day, which is always monotonous. Besides that we were fustigated by the usual South of France winds, which makes high speed bike riding even more difficult. In one of those auto-routes and when Elisa was trying to tune our portable radio, she lost one of her new gloves that I bought in Lisbon. High speed and intense traffic made it impossible to come back and pick up the glove, so she decided not to tell me anything.

Before lunch I started noticing a strange vibration in my FJR's handle-bars which was getting more noticeable every time I slowed down. I checked tire pressure while stopping for lunch and, since everything it was fine, we continued our trip arriving at the

colourful city of Menton at about 04:00 PM. Thanks to my GPS once again we quickly arrived at Menton town centre and found the Princess & Richmond hotel, a small but comfortable 43 bedroom unit reasonably priced and with an excellent sea front location. Because the weather was great we spent the rest of the afternoon at the hotel's solarium and Jacuzzi, located in the top floor, with a pretty view over the sea and the mountains.

After a pleasant walk on the seafront avenue, overlooking the French Riviera, we had a nice supper in a typical restaurant by the city's marina. When getting back to the hotel we were surprised by the first rainfall of our trip. Suddenly a loud thunderstorm echoed and it started raining heavily. Even though this evening we were a little wet when we arrived at the hotel, we were still nicely impressed by this picturesque city, full of small, clean and perfectly maintained gardens.

Day 4 – June 4th, 2004 - 483 km

On the following morning we were a little sad having to leave Menton so soon, when heading towards Florence, our trip's next stop. Fortunately the bad weather had gone and the sun was shining again.

Back on the road my FJR was getting more and more difficult to ride, so much that in Italy already, in a Service Area close to Genoa, I decided to call my Yamaha dealer in the Azores. After telling them what was happening and according to the bikes symptoms, at first they thought the bike could have a steering slack, so they suggested to me that I stop at the nearest Yamaha dealer to have it corrected. Since I always carry a complete trip dossier which also includes all Yamaha dealers in the countries I plan to cross, I called "Yamoto" in Genoa to arrange an inspection. Because of the stress those situations always cause, I almost dropped my bike. Fortunately I was helped by a kind Italian scooter rider who helped me at the exact moment I no longer had enough strength to hold the bike. However, my new Schuberth helmet didn't have the same luck and was seriously scratched when falling down from the bike.

Because we only arrived at Genoa close to midday, we had to wait patiently for "Yamoto's" lunch break. Only when the mechanic tested the bike he found that the problem was due to a huge bubble in the bike's front tire which I hadn't noticed before. We were lucky enough that this faulty front tyre did not blow up whilst riding at speed in a motorway. If this had happened I would have hardly been able to avoid a serious crash with serious consequences. Because my rear tire was quite worn out I decided to change both of them for new Bridgestone BT020. It was 05:00 PM before we were back on the road heading towards Florence again. But this was my "bad luck" day. When resetting the GPS in Genoa I entered the wrong coordinates of the hotel in Florence and ended up at the wrong hotel located in the opposing side of the city. After re-entering the right coordinates we only arrived at Holiday Inn Florence hotel at 09:00 PM.

After the usual refreshing evening shower we went Florence City centre for dinner and for a first walk in this beautiful city.

Day 5 – June 5th, 2004

Fortunately we had good weather during most of our trip. On this day we woke up early to visit the romantic city of Florence, so full of pretty and impressive monuments, intercrossed by medieval small streets.

During the morning we walked through the city and, during the afternoon, we took a guided tour visiting the city's main squares, monuments and palaces. We loved it!

Day 6 – June 6th, 2004 – 273 km

Finally one of the most exciting days of our trip had arrived – attending Italy's MotoGP. We left the hotel early in the morning to avoid the heavy traffic to Mugello's racing circuit. Fortunately, when my GPS optimized the route, it drove us into secondary roads with little traffic so, at 9:00 AM, we were entering the circuit. Anyway we still found an enormous crowd trying to enter the circuit, a typical big Italian confusion. We only arrived at Materazzi stand one hour later, exactly on time to attend the first race of the day, the 125 cc category. The circuit was completely crowded with about 100.000 spectators, one of Mugello's biggest crowds ever.

Before the race started I had the pleasure to meet Gianlorenzo Caccia, an Italy's FJR 1300 Club member, whom I had already corresponded with via Internet for some time and helped me to choose where to stay at Mugello stands. He also kindly posted online several detailed routes for nice rides in Sardinia.

After attending the 125 cc category race, won by Robert Locatelli in an Aprilia, we got more and more excited while waiting for the 250 cc and MotoGP races. And we were right. The 250 cc race was spectacular, ending in a great victory of Sebastian Port, also riding an Aprilia, followed by the MotoGP race, with Valentino Rossi Yamaha sharing the first row of the grid with Sete Gibernau and Niki Hayden's Hondas. It was curious to watch before the race the enormous applause that echoed all around the circuit when Valentino Rossi appeared on the circuit's giant TV screens. Opposed to that, Max Biaggi heard a big hoot when he appeared on the same screen. Being both Italians, we found it at least strange.

The MotoGP race was spectacular. I shall never forget the fabulous roaring of those powerful engines when passing by the "S" bends in front of our stand, where we watched Rossi making three fantastic over takings. Every time he passed in front of our stand the many "tifozi" stood-up and vigorously applauded their idol. The race was stopped due to rain 6 laps before the end which brought even more emotion and "suspense" regarding who would be the winner; Rossi or Sete Gibernau. But Rossi raced wonderfully and cut the finishing line in first place, leaving the majority of the crowd, including me and Carlos, in total delirium.

After the race we returned to the hotel in Florence where Elisa and Teresa were waiting for us to go to Rome, in this same afternoon. We arrived at Rome at about 09:00 PM.

When parking the bikes at the Express by Holiday Inn Rome East hotel we got the second fright of our trip. After checking in and returning to the bike to get the luggage, Elisa told me that her spare keys - that also include the alarm's remote control and the ignition key – which she had left in the top case weren't there anymore. Of course I panicked because anyone with those keys could steal my bike overnight. We all searched for the keys for about one hour, inquiring the hotel's door-keeper many times if he had seen someone near the bike while we were checking-in, without any success. I was getting desperate already and about to call the police when Elisa, "miraculously" discovered the keys. They were in one of the many pockets of her coat all the time, despite the several inspections she made to the entire coat. Fortunately this was just one of the many tricks she's capable of pulling out ...

Day 7 and 8 – June 7th and 8th, 2004

During those two days we much enjoyed visiting Rome and, of course, the Vatican City. Those are in fact wonderful cities full of fantastic monuments, moulded by thousands of years of history.

Our favourite places and monuments were Saint Peter's and Saint Paul's Basilicas, in the Vatican, and the Roman Forum, where we could clearly feel the more than two thousands years that separate us from the Roman Civilization. One great example of this was the magnificent Coliseum, built at the time to receive more than 50,000 spectators.

Day 9 – June 9th, 2004 - 148 km

It was time to leave Rome – one of the most magnificent cities I ever visited – and to head for Civitavecchia, 104 km away from Rome. There we boarded one of Moby Lines ferries to Olbia, in Sardinia Island, where we arrived on the same day at 07:30 PM. Because my bad luck hadn't finished yet, during the trip and due to unknown reasons I suddenly had strong fever. I only got better after taking some pills I always carry on my trips. Anyway, after arriving in Sardinia, I still had some difficulties to ride the 44 km long mountain roads from the port of Olbia to the Stelle Marine hotel, where we stayed, in the peaceful and beautiful Gulf of Arzachena (Smeralda Coast). Fortunately I started feeling better after a pleasant dinner and we enjoyed an excellent beach holiday in Sardinia for a week.

Day 10 to 15 – June 10th to 15th, 2004

We had a great time in the pretty Sardinia Island. Besides going to several beaches, we also made very nice bike tours in the island, thanks to the detailed routes that my Italian friend Gianlorenzo, from Italy's FJR1300 Club, kindly provided us. We totalled 1,021 km in Sardinia. Because Sardinia is very large (24,089 km²), we were only able to visit about 20 % of the island; all the North coast, part of the occidental coast up to "Cape Caccio", and part of the eastern coast - all the Emerald coast including Olbia.

Because Sardinia is quite an expensive destination, tourism on the island is very selective. Also the Autonomous Government of Sardinia seems to take a great care in what concerns tourist development. Nature is very well preserved and the many tourist resorts are very well integrated in the island's landscape, in a harmony of rare beauty. Also the island roads are of excellent quality. They are quite sinuous, surrounding the many coastal beaches and bays or tilting the mountainous interior of the island, in a succession of curbs extremely nice to ride on a bike. We came across one single motorway that crosses the island from North to the South.

We are all willing to return there to be able to visit the South coast of the island next time.

Day 16 - June 16th, 2004 - 156 kms

After our very pleasant staying in Sardinia, we were sorry to start our journey back to Lisbon. At 10:00 AM we headed to Saint Teresa di Gallura, on the island's Northern extreme, where we boarded the ferry bound to Corsica, a short trip that lasted less than one hour

After arriving at Bonifácio port, in Corsica, we took the road to Ajaccio, from where we were to board another ferry to Marseille. It was only a 132 km ride but Corsica's snaky and poor asphalt roads made it an eternity. I soon understood why Corsica Rally is one of the most selective asphalt races of the World. The curves were one after the other and the quality of the road was changing constantly, obliging us to a very careful

driving until Ajaccio. At 07:00 PM we shipped one of SNCM ferries bound to Marseille, where we arrived at the 07:00 AM the following day.

Day 17 – June 17th, 2004 - 1,755 km

After leaving the ferry and stopping for breakfast in Marseille's outskirts, we started the last stage of our trip, back to Lisbon again. According to the initial plans, we would make it in two days.

We crossed all the South of France at a good speed and had lunch in Spain already, after passing by Barcelona.

At this stage and because I always liked to test my limits, I started to defy Elisa, Teresa and Carlos for a non-stop trip to Lisbon. Although returning home earlier is always tempting when we were out for sometime, at first they didn't agree with me, of course.

Thus, after riding about 1,100 km, we crossed Madrid at about 07:30 PM efficiently guided by my GPS, on route to Badajoz and Lisbon. Although quite tiring, this non-stop trip allowed us to pass by the always very hot Spanish "Estremadura" in the evening rather than in broad daylight, when the temperature is always unbearable. Anyway, it was still 34 C at 09:00 PM.

After another stop for a fast meal close to Badajoz, we finally crossed the Portuguese border at midnight and arrived in Lisbon at 02:00 AM. On this day we rode 1,755 km for 15 hours! Despite the fatigue, we were very happy to be back home. Our children were waiting for us at the apartment in Lisbon, and happy to see yet another ending of an "adventure" of ours.

Statistics:

The best: Attending Italy's MotoGP in Mugello

The worst: The problem in my bike's front tire

Total Km: 6.054 (including 1,021 km in the Sardinia)

Total days: 17

Average consumption: 8.1 100 litres/km. The best average consumption I made was in the South of France – 5,84 lts./100 kms.

Technical problems: The front tyre problem that forced me to change tyres in Genoa.

Total cost of the trip: About 2.800 euros per couple, excluding our stay in Sardinia.

The countries we visited: Portugal, Spain, France (including Corsica) and Italy (including Sardinia)