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A fair wind for Swiss cycle racing

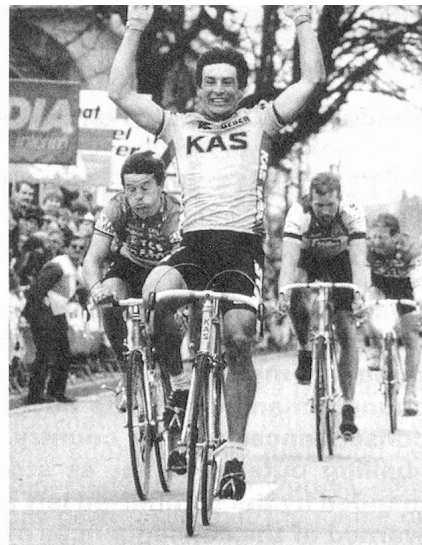
Rüttimann, Joho and Co. soon like Kübler and Koblet?

A new generation of hungry lions is growing up in Swiss cycle racing. Some day very soon it is capable of following in the wheel tracks of the already legendary Ferdy Kübler or Hugo Koblet. These challengers are, above all, Niki Rüttimann, Stephan Joho, Urs Zimmermann and Guido Winterberg, all of whom have in them the stuff of the triumphant racing cyclist. Besides these up and coming contenders, however, the figurehead of the Swiss racing scene continues to be the five-times world track champion Urs Freuler, a Swiss top sprinter from Glarus, currently engaged in Italy.

The younger generation of Swiss cycling professionals lives by the motto: if you want to be successful in cycle racing, you must go abroad. Many of them prefer the step beyond our frontiers to an engagement in the only professional team in Switzerland, Cilo-Aufina (which, incidentally, is to be dissolved at the end of the current season). Very many Swiss racing cyclists earn their money abroad, mainly in France. But this is not the only incentive: the Swiss «bike mercenaries» get thorough training in the internationally recognized sports groups such as La Vie Claire, Bernard Hinault's team to which Niki Rüttimann, Guido Winterberg and Othmar Häfliger are under contract, or KAS, for which Stephan Joho, Jörg Müller and Alfred Achermann ride. They can of course gain much from paragons such as Hinault himself or Kelly (in the

KAS team), and these champions, in turn, are glad to be able to enlist the services of the reliable Swiss. «Sean Kelly has often supported me in many a sprint, even sacrificing his own chances of success; and I have helped him too, more than once», reports Stephan Joho of Bremgarten, a twenty-four year old «discovery» of the 1986 season who, up to the end of July, was able to mount the winners' platform no less than seven times. And in the Tour de Suisse (in which, for the first time, an American, Andrew Hampsten, was overall winner), his performance and talents disproved his reputation of being strong only in the sprint. He finished the most difficult section of the 50th Tour de Suisse, from Bellinzona over the San Bernardino, Albula and Flüela passes to Klosters, in fourth place – even in front of the subsequent overall winners.

Niki Rüttimann during mountain time-trial racing on the Susten Pass (Tour de Suisse, 1986)



The season's «discovery», Stephan Joho, winner of the N. W. Switzerland Tour. Jürg Bruggmann came second. (Photos: Andreas Blatter)

Victory in this difficult stage of the Tour de Suisse fell to Guido Winterberg, the racer from Roggliswil, in his second year as a professional. The win was confirmation for this young talent that after a serious accident in April of this year, which seemed almost to have jeopardized the continuation of his whole racing career, he is really back again.

In Niki Rüttimann, the young farmer from Untereggen, a new massed-start specialist is emerging. Were it not for his marked weakness in time trial road racing, he might very soon be capable of carrying off another Swiss victory in the Giro d'Italia or the Tour de France. However, until he has managed to overcome this failing, Niki Rüttimann, who had another nasty fall in the Tour de Suisse (entailing a several weeks' break on account of injuries), the news of Urs Freuler's or Urs Zimmermann's peak performances and successes in mountain-stage racing should have travelled round the world, as outstanding Swiss achievements. Incidentally, Urs Zimmermann is the successor to Gody Schmutz as Swiss champion. ●

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