

# My Epoca Journey



It started harmlessly enough as I was on yet another long flight across Canada, reading one of the many cycling magazines I tend to hoard for those endless hours in the sky. I was reading a quick one page article about a small bespoke bike manufacturer in Italy that looked to have a fantastic niche in the custom frame builder category. While I had always ridden off the shelf, high end bikes (Wilier CentoUno Superleggara, Specialized Shiv, Orbea Orca, I always wondered what a fully customized bike would be like).

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As circumstance would have it, I would be heading to Germany in November for business that also required a stop in Milan so I thought why not make a quick little extra trip over to Rosa en Veneto. I had spent a year of University in Florence and Italy always has had a special spot in my heart so an extra bit of driving would be no big deal if it meant one more fantastic plate of spaghetti carbonara.

I contacted Epoca before my trip to see if I could have a factory tour. I was quite surprised when I received an immediate response to my inquiry from their head of sales and marketing. Ali was super friendly and advised he would be delighted to meet me for a visit. Game on.

I flew into Venice and rented a car for the short drive to Rosa. I was hoping to get there before noon as I had to be in Milan later that day but I was running a bit late. When I turned onto the street where the factory was located I thought this can't be right, it feels like a residential neighborhood. As I slowly drove up the street I spotted the Epoca sign outside a medium sized building that from the outside could have housed anything but didn't really look like a bike factory. There was one car in the parking lot and quite frankly not much else going on.

I went to the door and it was locked so I knocked and was greeted by Ali. He welcomed me with a warm smile and invited me in. There were a couple of beautiful frames sitting on display in the lobby which gave me some reassurance that this was a legit manufacturer. We went into his office and met with Valentino who was introduced to me as the artisan frame maker. Valentino could not speak English so Ali had to translate for him which honestly made the whole process more enjoyable. We spoke very briefly about the history of Epoca and Ali then

suggested it was lunch time. Who could argue. We found a ristorante that was open during siesta time so we sat and talked about the local bike history of the region while enjoying fantastic food. I did not realize the area was rich in its cycling heritage with manufacturers such as Campagnolo, Wilier, Miche, San Marco, Dede and others. I could have sat all afternoon and listened to them talk. After lunch we headed back to Epoca to take a tour and hopefully go for a quick test ride.

The factory itself was nondescript. There were lots of different tools and strange looking pieces of equipment around. As we walked through we spoke to a couple different guys who went through the different processes that go into building these beautiful frames. I was explained the difference between monocoque frames and carbon wrapped tubes. How they allocated more carbon in certain areas of the frame depending on type and weight of rider. How each tube is measured to match exact body dimensions. I got to touch and feel the raw carbon material and see where the frame would get baked, creating a unique one of a kind frame from all the tubes.

We then walked across the street and visited the paint studio which was surprisingly small down a steep set of stairs. It was neat to see how these frames would come to life with the final paint step.

Once I was done with the tour Ali arranged for me to ride one of their “racing specials” the RS99, which wasn't even a bike listed on their website but was a newly developed race bike for team Identity Racing out of the UK. This particular bike was actually Ali's. We were of similar shape (minus my extra winter weight). I had my shoes and pedals with me so he mounted the pedals and I was ready to go. The first thing that was apparent was the stack and reach was definitely more aggressive than my bike back home. I felt like I was in more of an

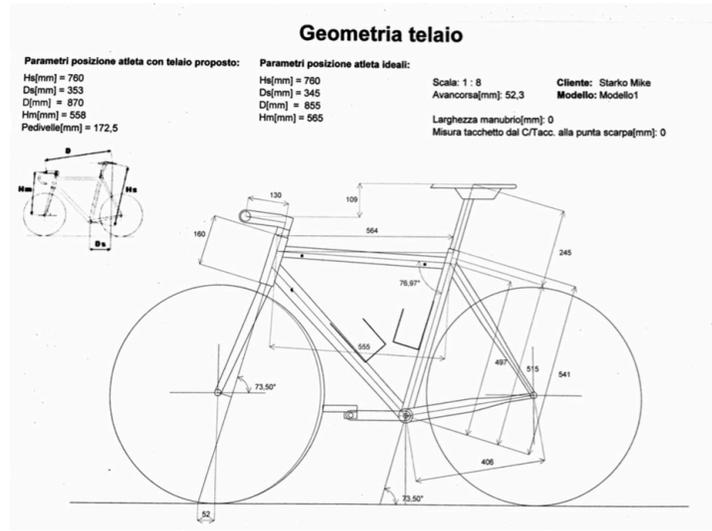


aero position, more like my tri bike than road bike. Ali got in his car and drove along with me as I rode. Talk about service. I felt like I had my very own caravan. As I rode the next thing I noticed is how smooth the ride was over the bumpy road. I had test rode a Trek Madone and the ride was so stiff and harsh. With the Epoca it just seemed to have a more compliant ride. My next thought was, if this bike is so smooth surely it won't be stiff enough for me. I got out of my seat and hammered as hard as I could to see how responsive it was. To my delight I felt a real direct connection between my output and the acceleration of the bike. This frame really felt like it had the best of both worlds. I didn't really know one frame could provide both a smooth ride and a stiff bottom bracket. Ali would drive up ahead and then watch me ride by, assessing my position and giving me feedback throughout. Before my arrival I had given him my current bike dimensions and he really felt like I was too crunched up on my current bike. He really wanted me to consider a more aggressive position that would actually relax my arms and shoulders and open up my core thus providing more power. It all sounded good to me but could my body adapt?

I looked at my watch and knew I had to cut the ride short but at that moment I knew I had found the frame for me. We headed back to the shop and I was measured up on some sort of old measuring system. There was nothing techie about it. It was just what I wanted.

I thanked Ali and Valentino for all the time they took to show me around, explain the benefits of Epoca and for just being so kind.

Driving toward Milan I had an excited twinge in my stomach at the thought of buying my own truly custom built bike.



Shortly after I got home I started sending notes to Ali to talk about a potential purchase. He always was very quick to respond to my question and concerns. Before they would do a mock up of the frame dimensions, Ali asked me to video myself riding my current frame so they could really understand what I was used to. Ali provided me with a drawing of the frame dimensions incorporating the recommended changes that I could compare to my current set up.

At this point in time I knew I was going forward with the build. I decided to make some adjustments on my current bike to start training my new body position. I lowered my bars by removing some spacers and I attached a longer stem. While it wouldn't be the exact new position it was definitely a change that I wanted my body to start getting used to.

It was such an exciting and yet nervous feeling. We talked about components that I would like for the build out. I had decided early on that this was to be a special once in a lifetime purchase and I knew it had to be an all Italian build. Even though the new Dura-Ace 9100 had just come out and looked beautiful, it seemed sac religious to not go all Italian (with a couple notable exceptions- Shimano pedals and Power2Max power meter).

Campy Record EPS V3 would be my choice for the groupset with the exception of Miche Brakes. Bora Ultra wheels with Veloflex clinchers, Deda bars, stem and seat post and San Marco seat would round out my Italian beauty. Ali seemed really focused to make sure I received exactly what I wanted and really went out of his way to deliver (including upgrading my pedals from ultegra to dura ace at no charge. He also had trouble getting the San Marco saddle in red so he had San Marco make one custom for me...again at no charge).

Then came the hard part. It was a simple enough email from Ali that asked a simple little question.



What Colour?

Oh god. What colour. It seemed like instant pressure. What if I come up with a terrible colour? I am not creative when it comes to colour. I wear all colours of clothes as long as they are blue.

I really wanted to try and capture the moment in time of this build. I was going to receive it in 2017 which happened to be the 150th birthday of Canada. This bike could be Italy's gift to Canada I thought. So this simplified

things greatly. The bike would be a combo of red, white and black, the three colours associated with Canada. I had seen some of Team Identites RS 99's on the Epoca instagram feed and really liked the matt red finish. I also wanted to show off some of the carbon weave on the frame. I also wanted to ad some Canadian specific details acknowledging the anniversary and the maple leaf.



I based my drawings on the team identity colours but changed things up. . Initially I did a drawing on a napkin with the basic concept and then sent details of the specific unique additions. After much back and forth nailing down specifics with Ali, we finally had the design finalized and Ali sent the final rendering. While it looked fantastic in the rendering, I would be nervous from this moment forward until my bike arrived and I could see it in real life.

I waited. Then came Christmas and I waited some more. I knew the factory would not be at full speed over the holidays and had no expectations that my bike would arrive until well into the new year.



I became really excited when I got an email from Ali giving me direction on how to open the bike box when it arrived. It was no ordinary cardboard box but a custom built wood box that had at least 25 screws in it, labelled by number in order to know which screws to remove first. Man everything was first class.

The day had finally come to pick up the box from the customs broker near the airport. I was so excited, yet really nervous. This was such an investment of time and money. What if I wasn't happy? What if the paint job sucked. All these feelings of worst case scenarios....

As I opened the box and slowly dismantled the box it was clear... everything had come together beautifully and it looked better than I had dreamed. The attention to detail was incredible.



The true test however would be in the first ride.

Again the first thing I noticed was how far forward the bars seemed when holding the brake hoods . It really felt like quite the stretch. It would take some getting used to. The other thing I noticed was that the drops seemed SO comfortable. I have never been that comfortable in drops as I always felt to crunched up bit with the bars further forward it just seemed like the drops felt so natural.

The ride was just as I hoped. Compliant on the rough roads and super stiff when accelerating or climbing. Just like the bike I had tested, It felt fast and responsive. I couldn't wait to see how my strava records would hold up to my new secret weapon once my fitness levels returned later in the season.

. The next thing I noticed was the Miche/Bora brake-wheel combo. The improvement in stopping was very significant from my current dura ace-zipp set up. Truly confidence inspiring on the descents. And speaking of descents, one of the issues I had with my old bike was speed wobble. Never fun, sometimes harrowing and always annoying. My first decent was a medium 3k hill near my house. Not super steep but am able to hit 75kmh on it. The bike was seriously calm. No wobble, just confidence inspiring stability.



It has now been a few weeks and I am so happy with my choice. I am getting used to my new position which just seems faster to me. The entire process was really gratifying. I can't thank Ali and the Epoca team enough. To know there is not another bike out there like mine just seemed to be the icing on the cake.