



## «Stella Alpina 2009» Text from Jasmine Langridge

### Like to ride off-road? I do.

Luckily I had already signed up for a motocross training course run by Marcel Künzler of KMS-Racing, so I had a chance to practise some of the skills I would need and get very, very dirty in the process.

By the end of that day I felt I could go up, round and across pretty much anything on a dirt bike. I arranged to rent a KTM 400 EXC from Marcel for the Italy trip.

**So when Urs Tobler asked if I was interested in a trip to Italy to do the Stella Alpina, a rally to the highest point in Europe that can be reached legally by motorcycle, I said yes immediately.**



One week later, the Stella Alpina weekend was upon us. Around 5:00 AM on Thursday morning Urs, Ernst, Roly and Peter set off by motorcycle. They had a 12 hour ride ahead of them, taking in scenic parts of the Swiss and French Alps. Meanwhile, I was still asleep. I didn't fancy the early start or the 12 hour ride, so instead I took it easy and joined Walter for the motorway cruise directly to Italy in Urs's minivan with the luggage and enduro bikes. It was definitely a more laid-back way to travel, with lunch at a lovely lakeside spot just over the border, though I have to admit I did question my decision when we got stuck in a traffic jam going past Torino.

One way or another, we all arrived in Cesana Torinese that evening and celebrated the start of the weekend with drinks and dinner.



On Saturday morning we fuelled our bikes and checked the tyres, and set off on a mountain ridge tour. We took it easy, sticking to paved and gravel roads. The views were spectacular and it felt like we had the Alps to ourselves. The day's riding was interrupted only by lunch at a pizzeria in a charming Italian village.



Once again we set off, this time up much steeper and rockier gravel roads. I only got stuck once, with Urs helping me get the bike up a tricky part, and by the time we reached the top I was feeling rather pleased with myself. I thought back to the motocross course, realising how useful it had been. I really could go up anything.



**Then it dawned on me that I didn't have quite as much confidence when it came to going back down**

**For the first few seconds the descent went quite well. Then I locked the front wheel and fell over. I was unhurt but a bit shaken and worried. Roly brought my bike down to a place where I could get back on, and Urs explained the proper technique and body position and calmed my nerves. I got back on, and was soon quite comfortable and enjoying the descent. Hooray**

**We stopped for lunch at a gorgeous mountain chalet, and then headed for Bardonecchia, where the Stella Alpina route starts**

**The ride up was quite gentle compared to the morning's adventure, and a lot of fun. The road was mostly fine gravel with a few rocks. (I know there were rocks because I managed to hit most of them.) There were a surprising number of people going up on regular road bikes, as opposed to enduro bikes like those we were using. I discovered later that many people enjoy the additional challenge of doing it on a completely unsuitable machine!**

**Eventually our path was blocked by a giant drift of snow. You could see motorcycle tracks teetering across it, but we didn't want to try our luck. Nonetheless we had climbed quite a long way already, and were happy to turn around and head back to town for our final celebration.**

**It was a wonderful trip, punctuated with exciting moments like finding ourselves on a 50cm wide trail next to an unpleasantly steep drop-off, and navigating a pitch black winding tunnel hastily cut through the mountainside to replace a road that had disappeared in a landslide**

**Many thanks to Urs for organising the trip, and to all the others for putting up with my complete lack of German! I've been looking forward to the next Stella Alpina ever since.**

**- Jasmine**