



POST RACE HAPPENINGS AT THE GRAND PRIX DE NICE



Sebi Orsi arrives late at the finish line at the Grand Prix de Nice, his Maserati having to be pushed across by a group of Italian fans.

Part 1: The Tale of Sebi Orsi, the Italian Race Pilot

Orsi mounted the Maserati, the warmth of the silent engine radiating through him. The roar of the crowd, the smoke, the adrenaline – it could have been overwhelming, but to him it was a relief from the intense concentration of one-and-a-half laps of high speed jockeying. At this point, he no longer needed the self control.

He looked back to the two French girls who smiled back. The Italian men behind the car pushed with all there might and the small car moved forward toward the finish line. Might it even hit what? Maybe 6 mph? Or 7? It would be hard to say. Not that it mattered much. In the end, Orsi had maybe 10 minutes to figure out how this all played out and what the events at the Grand Prix de Nice really meant.

He thought it through and shook his head slightly. A feeling like that of a doomed Greek hero descended on him darkly.

He had virtually predicted the entire stinking affair.



He had told the journalists that he hoped the Belgian didn't kill any one – and there it was. He wrote a note to Omalie expressing his desire to bump bumpers again – and there it was, though not perhaps the way he had quite meant at the time. And then the Englishman, John Milk – anyone could have seen that coming, such a wild driver after all. Yes, he felt like Achilles. Or Hector. He scratched his chin. He couldn't remember which one he should be – anyway, one of those guys.

The finish line slowly approached and the car finally pulled to a stop. Pietro, his trusted mechanic arrived with the photographers and the journalists. Yes, the photographers seemed to love the French ladies and they couldn't stop taking pictures. No doubt by morning, everyone in Nice would remember the name of Sebi Orsi. At this rate, he would be front page news. They might forgot who won the race, but they would certainly remember Sebi Orsi, the Italian, and his Maserati and the two beautiful French ladies that had ridden to the finish line with him.

Orsi lept off the car and helped the two ladies down. He took the first by the hand and kissed the back of it before leading her to the front of the Maserati. "Please, you must be photographed with the car," he said with a slight bow. The photographers were even more obliging. He headed back for the second before the first could respond. He took her hand and helped her down, and then gave the inside of her wrist a kiss. "Prego..." he gestured to lead her to the front of the car.

He quickly shook hands with the Italian men as they massed around the rear of the car and then returned to the front. He shouted aloud, "Ahh, the wonders of Nice!" He took his position between the two French ladies, his right hand resting above the Maserati logo as the cameras clicked away.

As the photographers finished, the journalists shouted out the questions: "What do you know about the events in the pits?" "How did you hit the Norwegian car?" "Is the Belgian driver going to be ok?" "Were you injured in the explosion?" "Are you going to claim you completed the race?"

Orsi smiled. "Thank you for meeting us here at the finish line, my friends," he began. He breathed in the bright Mediterranean air, glad to be alive. "I felt that the Maserati was a spectacular competitor in this race and it deserved completion."

He turned to motion toward the assembled Italian men who had helped push him to the finish. "I want to thank my impromptu crew for the assistance over the final quarter lap!" The Italian men cheered and the French ladies smiled and flirted. There were more clicks of the cameras and shouts from the press.



"I have no idea what happened in the pits, but I am sure the authorities will figure it out. Regarding the other incidents in the race, I hope that my fellow drivers are all well or will heal quickly. I am no medic or doctor, but I believe I left the Belgian in capable hands."

Orsi smiled and ignored more of the shouted questions.

"And now we are off to celebrate!" With a wave, Orsi and his impromptu crew headed off down the Promenade des Anglais toward the bar at the Hôtel Negresco. It would be a long evening of celebration.

Part 2: The Tale of Sebi Orsi, the Italian Race Pilot

Leaving Orsi and his entourage after the first case of champagne was finished, the Italian mechanic, Pietro, borrowed the motorbike and rode quickly to the the Hôtel Ruhl. He knew the bar inside was favored by the racing journalists who seemingly liked the gambling casino that the Ruhl had recently installed along the far wall – the staff there was careful to put drink charges onto the room invoice as laundry services, a practice that also drew the more veteran pressmen.

Pietro was not disappointed in his quest. Jack Billingham of the London Times sat at the bar, morosely sipping whiskey as he sketched out the days events on a note pad.

Billingham looked up as Pietro sat down next to him. "May I buy you another?" Pietro asked, motioning to the drink.

Billingham gave a noncommittal half-nod then softly intoned, "Right then, you are to tell me something to add to my notes."

"Not so much. We don't know much." Pietro shrugged.

"Then, mate, you are here to regale me with your wit? Tell me randy stories about your driver? Isn't he happy enough with the company of the French ladies?"

"I don't know this," Pietro replied, then lowered his voice. "I will offer that Sebi Orsi's opinions of his fellow drivers can be found in his interview in Algeria, but that he will not state those opinions aloud again."

"You came all the way to the Ruhl to tell me this? That's a bit of cheek," Billingham quipped. He shook his head. These Italians were so hard to understand.



Pietro didn't seem to pay the comment much heed. He glanced about the room apprehensively, "Sebi Orsi has a long history of good relations with the press – drinks to the press box, lots of access, and so forth. So he is interested in a little trade...."

Billingham smiled, now the Italians were starting to make sense. He would hear them out and see what they wanted.

Again Pietro glanced about the room which Bingham noted, his suspicions suddenly peaking as he considered the fires along the pit lane.

Yet Pietro seemed off on another tangent, one that made equally little sense to the Englishman. The short mechanic whispered, "If you are willing to question the Belgian government on whether they intend to honor Orsi in any way for his actions – si, a little pressure where pressure is due – then Orsi would be willing to give an exclusive interview, or some other level of enhanced access. You see it, no? The Belgian Ambassador should make a small gesture, no? A medal perhaps for the rescue of their driver? Something like that? Perhaps a party in Sebi's honor?"

Billingham grunted, feigning disinterest. There had to be more to this visit.

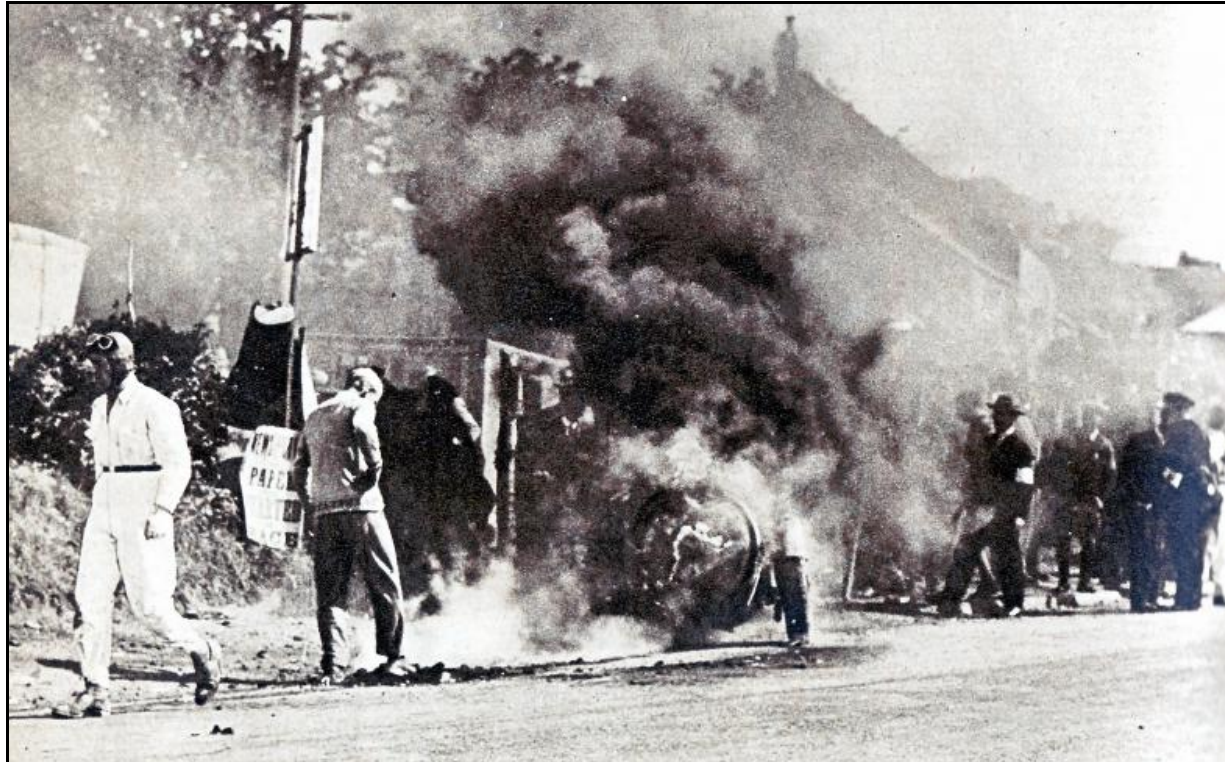
Pietro hesitated, then continued: "Of course, you know well, Sebi Orsi has no idea that I am here this evening. Prego, we are not asking you to do anything you ought not to do anyway, and we are not asking you to publish anything in particular, or to alter your reporting in any way. We just recognize that we are asking a favor, and are willing to give a favor in return. Just think it over – if we see you tomorrow, Orsi will remember that and give you a very good interview. And si, Orsi has no idea I am here, but this is what we want anyway."

It seemed to Bingham that the Italian was talking in circles.

Pietro added, "And if not, then we never had this conversation. Anyway, enjoy the drink." The Italian stood up, patted Bingham on the shoulder and without another word, left the bar.

Jack Bingham looked back at the hodgepodge of unfocused notes and grunted. Either the Nice race was the epitome of disaster – an almost pointless race – or perhaps he could write it up as the highlight of heroism and honorable sportsmanship.

Maybe by morning some information might be found at the pits. The fires were nearly out already. The police would undoubtedly make a statement of some sort. What kind of story to write? It didn't take much inspiration to see what his editors expected of him.



The disaster at Nice resulted in the Belgian Bugatti and the English Amilcar being completely destroyed in a deadly accident and fire conflagration that nearly took the life of the Belgian pilot. Only the fast actions of Italy's Sebi Orsi saved the Belgian from certain death, as he was pulled from the car moments before it burst into flames; a full recovery is expected for the driver.

Part 3: The Tale of Sebi Orsi, the Italian Race Pilot

In the early hours of the dawn the following day, Sebi Orsi was deeply exhausted as he stood in the garage surveying the orderly carnage at his feet. Pietro scurried amongst the dissected parts of the Maserati.

Many gears and bolts and pieces lay splayed outward from the naked frame, exploded into constituent parts. Pietro's tagging system provided a mosaic of tiny flags that covered the extent of the mess. Orsi knew that red meant replacement; orange: rebuild, yellow: review, and green meant "ok"; but he could never keep track of blue, black and white – these would always be a mystery.



The two men heard the door open and turned as one to see Jack Billingham enter the garage. Orsi smiled as he welcomed the Times reporter. He reached out and welcome him in with a shake of his hand. Billingham's dishevelled state of dress was a stark contrast to Orsi's crisp-and-clean shirt and slacks, which were a contrast to the greasy state of the garage's contents and Pietro's overalls.

"Well, I finally may meet the famous Jack Billingham. A great pleasure!" Orsi turned to gaze at the Maserati. "This is what Pietro has done to my car. He has done this so many times that I believe that lighting is no longer required for the operation."

Billingham gave an appreciative nod as he looked from Orsi to Pietro and to the pieces of Maserati spread across the floor. Billingham was quite certain that there were a dozen different dissections going on in Nice at the same instant. Parts would need to be ordered, machined, and so forth, and time was of the essence.

The train northward was due to depart on Wednesday evening – first to Molsheim for a visit to the Bugatti Factory, a by invitation only event offered by Ettore Bugatti himself. Thankfully, Jack had received a small invitation first, before the drivers, and knew of the event before even they did. The invitation even hinted at some new and great announcement to be made.

Orsi cut off his thinking with a direct statement. "Pietro tells me I owe you a favor."

Jack Billingham looked to Pietro in surprise – surely, Orsi must know of the deal. He stammered out a reply, "We did discuss a... what? A more candid ... interview." He cursed quietly to himself. I must sound like a fool.

Orsi smiled. "That's as I understand it – within reason, of course. Pietro? Are we going to need an entirely new gearbox?"

"I don't think so. New gears – that last curve cost us any chance as re-machining – but the basics are sound."

To avoid further embarrassment, Billingham decided to jump right in to his prepared questions: "Which drivers do you think are the ones to watch?" It was a stupid question, Billingham knew very well which drivers to watch, but he hoped that it would loosen up the Italian driver a bit for the hard questions to follow.

"France, Czech, Italy." Orsi turned to Pietro again, "What about the pistons?"

"New rings is all.... They look good."



“What are your thoughts about driving on ice?”

“I have not considered the matter. Is Agi going to be able to get all the dents out? I don't want to look like a gypsy in front of the Scandinavians.”

“Agi's working on it.”

“Do you care to comment on the supremacy of the French cars?”

“But for some bad luck, the singular Maserati would have won, and won handily. The Maserati outran all the Alfas and half of the Bugattis. Only the Salmson has any claim on supremacy. Do we need new wheels?”

“No, just tires.”

“What about the other drivers? Sorolla, Milk, Stephane? The others?”

“Let us not speak ill of the wounded. You are sure about the wheels?”

“I will yellow-tag them if you want,” Pietro offered.

“What motivated you to save Stéphane? He cut you off early in the race, costing you an early good position. In Algeria you called him dangerous....”

“God gave me the lead and God took it away to put me in that place. I only did what was required of me. What anyone would have done. Please, Pietro, yellow-tag them.”

“Si, got it.”

“Why have your car pushed across the line? Are you going to claim finishing points?”

“The car performed admirably, and deserved to finish – and our fans deserved the chance to help.”

“And the French girls who rode with you?”

“They were a help too, of course. Wheel bearings?”

“Algeria was pretty hard on them, I am thinking replacement.”

Billingham hesitated than directly issued his challenge in a flat and measured tone, “Did you or your men set fire to Rychly's garage?”



“No. Better replace them, then.”

Billingham narrowed his eyes. Might as well go all in, he considered, “You are telling me that you had nothing to do with it?”

“I believe I answered clearly. How’s the steering?”

“I was concerned after the last curve, but it looks good,” Pietro again replied.

Billingham coughed. “Then perhaps you can tell me what has happened to Vitez Rychly’s fiancée. As of this morning, she remains missing. If you didn’t know, the police are now involved.”

Orsi shrugged. So Bilingham continued, “Two bodies, unidentifiable, were found in Rychly’s garage – when the fires were put out, they found the remains.... They are calling it murder. Do you think that is justified over a grand prix race?”

Orsi looked Bilingham in the eyes, yet suddenly, a whimsical look of innocence crossed the Italian’s eye. It lasted only a fraction of a second, “You are not more interested in the French girls?”

“You... what?” Bilingham shook off the response. “Do you mean...?” Bilingham broke out laughing. What a thing to say. No, he knew it now, Orsi wasn’t involved after all. So what could that mean? Perhaps the German?

“I am not entirely selfless,” Orsi commented. “I hadn’t heard this news, maybe because I was up late with the ladies again. Can we put studs in the tires? Do studs work on ice?”

“I don’t know. I’ll read through the rules.”

“Pietro, we need to get some of that Benzene from the Englishman.... Or perhaps Bilingham can help us?” Orsi smiled and offered his hand as a final parting gesture, his own way to quietly signal that the interview was over.

“I can’t help with that.” Bilingham folded his notebook and turned to leave.

“Anything else of interest, Pietro?”

“The radiator is suspect, I’m ordering a new one.”



“Make sure Agi does a good job on the dents, Pietro.”

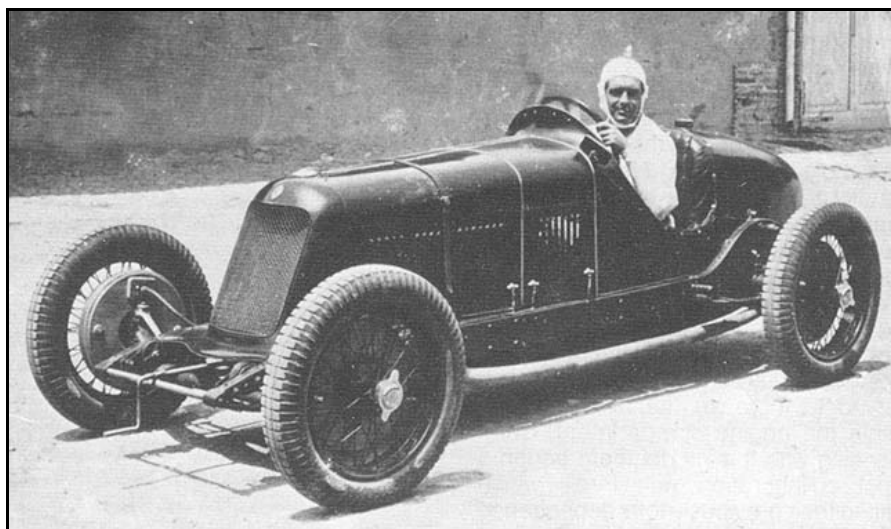
“Thanks, Billingham.” Orsi walked the befuddled Englishman to the door and ushered him outside.

Pietro looked up to Orsi, hopefully he asked, “About the French ladies....”

“They are gone, Parisians, you know. You are not really interested in them, trust me. Of course, the Englishmen, like Billingham, they never think about the ladies, so they say.... All that ‘proper’ this and ‘honorable’ that....”

Orsi patted Pietro on the back. “I need to see my tailor. I believe there is a party to attend once we get going and I don’t think we can find a good tailor in the cold north. Shouldn’t the ice have melted by now in Sweden? Good God, it’s late April!!”

Pietro didn’t look up as he said, mostly to himself, “I have much to do. Much.”



Pietro takes the Maserati 4CM out for a test drive around Veille Nice after readying it for transport northward to Sweden for the next race. The racer’s new tires sport a deeper tread for the ice circuit to come.