

The true story of the roller engineer

It was the 22nd of February '95, my 35th birthday, when I received a pair of skates as present and I tried to use them for the first time. That moment was for me so amazing that I began to skate every day even if I realized at once that my predisposition was very poor. In fact, before then, I had never practiced any sport. Even when I was in high school I was exempted from gym because of my delicate health!

Still in '95 a number of the Italian inline magazine "Sportinline" caught my attention. It described a wonderful place for skating, Lausanne in Switzerland, the mecca of all skaters! So, I went to Lausanne and I met also Massimo Bavieri, the director of the Italian magazine, thanks to whom I became famous.

At the beginning I liked jumping, climbing down staircases and, obviously, slalom. At Lausanne Contest '95 I saw for the first time the slalom among cups at a professional level. I was struck to see some tricks from very talented skaters, such as Hedi Mabrouk and Radenko in staircases and slalom and Diego Correjero in microslalom. Already then, Radenko slalom speed performances among 20 cups were under 2.5" by one leg forward and under 3" by one leg backward or by backward crossed legs. He and Hedi were able to perform in downhill every kind of slides, also hopping crosswise in tip tap. After having left a moving car at 80 km/h they put at once their feet in parallel position and could stop after about thirty meters, maintaining always their feet in that position.

Hedi could go down any kind of staircase putting his skates in eagle and jumped without jumping over 130 cm of height. But his best trick was to jump in a cube, that is between two horizontal poles, the first 105 cm high, the second one 160 cm, bounding this space by two vertical poles placed at a distance of 60 cm. It means that he jumped across a space 60 cm wide and 55 cm high.

Diego practised slalom with traditional skates and could cross around the cones placed at a distance of 35 cm by one leg forward or backward.

Since then, Slalom included Style and Speed even if their meanings were different.

First of all, a same step was performed among the cones from the first cone to the last one. The switches didn't exist yet, so, during a Slalom run, there was no change between two or more steps. Moreover Slalom speed consisted in different performances, not only forward by one leg, but also other steps, like backward by one leg, in eagle, by crossed skates forward and backward, and so on.

Styleslalom consisted in performing the basic Ala step and few other steps, like some tip-tap, some tricks on toe-heel or toe-toe or also doubly crossing forward and backward. The more difficult step was the one that I called "Mabrouk Step", in memory of Hedi who died in July '95 of asthma.

Two months after, a skater performed the Mabrouk step at Zurich Contest winning the competition.

In those years there were two parameters that every skater tried to improve practising Styleslalom: the time taken to perform the same step among 20 cups and their distance. So, the goals were either to reduce the time of one step performance, setting the distance among the cups to 50 cm or 80 cm, or to reach the minimum distance to which some steps performance was possible. In this last case what was considered was the fluency of the performance not the duration of it, by pulling down as less cups as possible.

Coming back home, at the beginning of autumn '95, I began to put into practice what I had seen in Switzerland, trying to learn the steps I had recorded with my camcorder, using lines of 40 or 50 cups, placed at a distance of, respectively, 80, 50, and 40 cm.

My training was daily and lasted about 2 or 3 hours. I continued like that till the end of the summer of the next year, '96.

At the same time I began to make shows or demos for Sportinline Magazine and improved going down staircases or jumping by learning some tricks, like grab, method air, 360, ...

At Lausanne, in '96, I was quite well-prepared in Style and Speed: I had perfectly learnt all that I had seen the previous year, including the Mabrouk step. About this step I had spent about 6 months

to understand the expedient necessary for a correct performance of the antieagle rotation.

I came second in Style at Lausanne, fourth and seventh, respectively, in Style and Speed in Zurich.

But, unlike the previous year, I was charmed by downhill into which I ventured as soon as I returned home. I liked particularly the intention to become skilful in skating also at higher speeds. So, at the beginning I didn't start comparing downhills to the traditional way, that is forward on both legs bended and leaned on the ground ("egg" position). At the beginning I tried and learnt to go down in freestyle, that is by different positions, such as forward and backward by only one leg, eagle, ..., and changing them at gradually increasing speeds. My tests were always on downhills that ended level without requesting sudden slides, also because the various kinds of slide, parallel particularly, remained my failure for several times.

Style competition in Zurich Contest '96 was very useful to my training. In fact I saw some new steps such as the forward walk and an attempt of tip tap on one leg. But, above all, I was charmed by some dance skills performed among the cups using traditional skates.

In October, always '96, a friend of mine, who just come back from the States, copied for me a VHS tape about Inline Roller Dance that was performed in those years at Central Park.

I understood, already by the first shots, that dance involved me more than all the other skating branches, including also Slalom, and so dance became my goal.

In the meantime, on the last months of '96, I accomplished my Ala flowers among the cups. After having learnt the new steps seen in Zurich performing them both from one side and the other one, I got the idea to change step after some cups and then even after every cup: so I obtained great coreographies, compounded by simpler steps, that looked like new steps from an external observer.

The method was the following: to become ambidextrous in the performance of a step, such as the Ala step, then to alternate it among the cups from one side and the other one, using another step, such as the forward walk. So I obtained the two forward Ala flowers. By these steps, one day, I accidentally learnt the two backward Ala flowers playing the film on which I performed the forward flowers and pushing the bottom backward. At last, taking both the first flowers and the second ones, I accomplished the 4 flowers.

Using these rules to arrange the already known fifteen steps, I obtained about one hundred of mixtures that I listed and inserted on my training program.

The first competition in which I showed the 4 Ala flowers was the one called "Rollermania" at the beginning of '97 and I had no problem to win it. Since then my Styleslalom career began. Before every competition I studied the run to show. I took care that it included the highest number of switches between two steps and that it was perfectly symmetric, that is for every step there was also the same step performed by the other side. Moreover I tried also to perform the inverse steps, that is the same steps backward, with equal fluency. At last, to enrich a choreography, if it was possible, I watched the movie of my performance and pushing the bottom backward I noticed new skills to add.

Apart from Slalom, I took the opportunity given by a friend who would drive my car and went downhills or I tried to learn some dance skills from the roller dancers of Central Park, shown on my tape. However I realized that I could learn to dance only if I tried with them, so I took a decision: I went to New York for two weeks and remained all days long in Central Park filming the best dancers and trying their skills among them. It was not possible to learn at once all that I saw, so at the beginning I was satisfied to bring back home the shots and their teachings. Then the results came gradually in the following years.

Just come back to Europe, I knew Wayne Gordon, a Jamaican roller dancer living in London, who was as good as the dancers I saw in Central Park. His help was very useful to me. I met him many times in Lausanne and I also went to see him in London for dancing together. In our meetings he taught me the first step of break dance and the

basic movements to accomplish the best choreographies.

I finished 1997 winning several competitions and scoring some personal records in my activities:

My times in slalom speed across 20 cups were about 2,7" by only one leg forward, under the 3 seconds by one leg backward. Moreover I could reach the speed of 65km/h by only one leg backward along the downhill that let this speed, I went over two meters of height jumping by a 45 cm jump , I had learnt to go out of the jump showing the freestyle figures that I wanted: 360°, grab, method air, Buddha, pike position, ...Above all, I had become skilled in microslalom scoring one of my biggest records: in Turin I ran across 100 cups placed at a distance of 30 cm between each couple of cups in succession (23 cm of real transit space). I ran by only one leg backward and spent about 36 seconds, without making any cup fall. This performance would have been quoted in the Guinness book, but at the end it didn't happen and I still don't know why!

But '98 was the year that marked my bigger success both in competitive results and in my personal records. I reached the speed of 80km/h going downhill by only one leg backward, I ran across 20 cups placed at 80cm of distance by one leg forward in 2,48 seconds taking a run-up of only 8 meters or in 2,4 seconds taking free run-up. I also reached time of about 2,8 seconds running across 20 cups by one leg backward. In dance I felt my bigger emotion when I became good at falling on the ground in splits after one pirouette: it was the result of hard training kept in gym for about 4 years!

Unfortunately, at the end of that year, exactly on the 21st/11/98, I had an accident while going downhill across the mountains near Turin and I went into a coma for one week. My recovery was very slow and difficult. The winter helped me to recover almost fully and the following year I continued to win the competitions, I took part to, even though I didn't reach anymore in Slalom the speed I used to reach before, that is under 2,5 seconds, across 20 cups by only one leg forward. I came third and so I stepped on to the podium for a downhill competition, after two great skaters, Roberto "Ragno" and Gianmarco Rivella, who are noted in the guiness book for some skating records. This result gave me a very big satisfaction which I never felt in winning Slalom competitions.

In '99 I spent one week in August in Amsterdam with other skaters of MBE team for demos and shows. On that occasion I was a judge of the Dutch competitions in Styleslalom.

The dutch skating magazine gave a large space on our shows and we were also interviewed during a television program. It was an amazing and demanding week Unfortunately this week happened so shortly before Lausanne Contest than I should have gone from Amsterdam to Lausanne the night before Styleslalom competition. So I reluctantly abandoned the idea of taking part to the Contest.

I was sorry not to go to Lausanne because I had prepared new choreographies for that competition and I would have liked to win again. This would have proved me that I was perfectly restored by the accident of the previous year. However I received a confirmation that my ability was again like the one before (perhaps even better) when, some months later, I won the competition organized by Decathlon in Turin. Also the winner of the last Lausanne contest was there.

At the end of '99 I retired from Styleslalom Competitions and devoted myself only to demos and shows , as still now.

In the spring of 2000 Tecnica sent me to Paris for making shows and demos with Sebastian Laffargue, a friend of mine and skater of my team. Then, in the summer, I went to Les Deux Alpes as Tecnica skating promoter. I returned there also the two following summers, in 2001 and 2002.

In the same year I went to Lausanne in order to attend the Styleslalom as judge and to take part in the downhill competition where I reached the finals.

I finished the 2000 successfully, by attending the Bologna Motor Show together with all Tecnica Team from 7/12 to 17/12: three shows in front of about 2000 people every day and promotional campaign with the renting of skates every day.