

Shelly Hits The Big Time



• In a race that lasts for three weeks, support crews are nearly as important as riders, because without adequate support no rider would last three days. Soigneur Shelley Verses has earned a reputation among American riders and that made her first choice on the 7-Eleven support crew. But by including her on the Giro team the Americans amazed the male-only European cycling establishment, and incidentally received quite a bit of press for that alone.

Before taking up race support Shelley was living in Santa Barbara, California while studying sports medicine. After becoming involved with bike racing as a masseuse, she worked for the U.S. National Team in 1984. In 1985 she started working for the 7-Eleven team, several of whose riders she knew from the Olympic team.

"All of a sudden my 'fun' involvement got more serious. I learned all the specialized techniques by watching the other soigneurs. I had what I learned in school, plus what I learned working in the training room, then I learned all the hot stuff especially for cyclists by watching a German soigneur, a Czech or a Pole. I have a combined technique, and I've developed it so it's my own style."

Shelley worked through the Olympics, handling all the road riders, men and women. That's quite a load. "I started at 3 a.m. and finished at 10

p.m." This year Shelley has worked exclusively with the 7-Eleven team, getting to know the riders and their needs. "They talk to me on a personal level, and they know I can keep things to myself."

Credit the riders with getting Shelley to the Giro. She was not scheduled for the trip until a week before the race started, but the riders pressed for her inclusion, and at the last minute she got the call. "I was nervous. I didn't know whether I would be accepted by the other massage people who were working with us, and I didn't know whether I would be harassed or whether the team would be embarrassed, so when I got there I was really quiet and careful. People thought I was somebody's girlfriend or wife or something. But after the news started going around they figured out what I was doing."

Shelley wasted no time getting involved with the Giro. "At the prologue I was cleaning up Davis (Phinney) when Moser came over. He said, 'You work for the team?' I said yeah, and he asked me to rub his legs. I said no, and he said 'yeah.' And Davis said, 'Moser wants you to rub his legs. Do it.' So I said 'okay,' and started to rub his legs, and immediately all the cameras started coming over."

Shelley's massage must have been effective. Minutes later Moser won the prologue time trial.