

Inside the little hospital that heals our heroes...

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Clinica Mobile has been a fixture at the racetracks since it was conceived by Doctor Claudio Costa in the 1970s. It made its first appearance at Salzburg, Austria, in 1977 and has since established itself as a fundamental component of international motorcycle racing.

As explained on its website, 'the Clinica Mobile is the small travelling hospital which accompanies motorcycle racers, our dearest friends, on their courageous journey'. In order to understand more about the essential work they do in the SBK paddock, I spoke to Doctor Massimo Corbascio who oversees operations in this particular championship.

Once upon a time...

"I have been involved in the Clinica Mobile since 1971. I was working at the Orthopedic Institute of Bologna with Doctor Claudio Costa who, like his father, had motorbikes in his DNA. I was an anesthetist and he was an orthopedic doctor and one day I heard that he wanted to help motorcycle racers by providing them with a special service at

championship boss Maurizio Flammini, we started to attend SBK tracks with a proper clinic, to be able to help all riders."

"Now, almost 20 years on, there are normally about a dozen of us at SBK races. Our team is usually made up of four physiotherapists, a doctor, an anesthetist, an orthopedic doctor, a sports medicine doctor, a radiologist and a nurse. In addition there are two truck drivers and a cook. We are a small, close-knit team.

We are known across the world, and enjoy great relationship with the riders, the organizers and all of the personnel in the paddock. We have built a strong reputation over the years and are lucky to have good relations with top doctors and hospitals across Italy and also in many countries overseas, so we have that support in hospitals even when we are as far away as America or Australia for example."

The good...

"I love to be around these young people, with their passion for racing, they are always a lot more

now dedicate myself full-time to this job. I say 'full-time' because the riders call me at home, we see riders between races, they ask advice, they come to us if they get injured during a training session, or maybe they need rehabilitation between races, so there is always work to do, we are on call 24/7."

I soon see why the clinic needs to have four physiotherapists at the tracks when I speak to one of them. Cristian Esposito explains more about the services they provide both at and away from the tracks.

"Everyone can come and see us for treatment or for massage, riders from every category, if they want to. Then, in addition, we get mechanics, truck drivers... Let's say it's a clinic for everyone working in the paddock – even relatives or friends of a rider if they are taken ill at a race, so as you can imagine it's a long list! We give priority to the riders of course, and take into consideration the track schedule too, so if you finish your session first, you should come and see us as soon as you can, if you don't we prioritize the top class, so in this case that's the SBK class.

CLINICA

the track, and the initial idea of the 'Clinica Mobile' was born. We started by going to races at the Imola track, as we were based around there, so it was all on a very small scale at first.

Then we got to know rider Alberto 'Johnny' Cecotto and started to follow him in the international championship. This is how we started to travel. Then some big companies, such as AGV, got interested in what we doing and so together we came up with the first real 'clinic on wheels'.

At the start I worked closely with Costa but then in the early 1980s I broke away and went to follow the cross championships. Later, in 1989, I found myself in France, at the Paul Ricard circuit, where there was an Italian rider with a fever. This rider, a certain Giancarlo Falappa, was riding a Bimota in the SBK championship and, as I was an Italian doctor, Italian riders would come to me for help. So I helped Giancarlo that day, putting him on a drip (which wasn't seen to be doping back in those days!) and later that day he won the race! From then on he would ring me whenever he needed me.

By following Falappa, I got into the world of SBK, and got to know Francesco Batta who was managing the championship at that time. Falappa had some serious accidents over the next years and I was always there for him, he was my priority even though I would also help other riders if they needed it. Then from 1994, and in agreement with

grateful than those people you would treat in a hospital. For 365 days a year they have us as a reference point if they need us. We're talking about almost 130 riders who can come to us for the slightest thing. So we feel useful and do everything to help them.

"We enable those riders who may be classed 'unfit' by a doctor to race, and can treat them to get them back on track as soon as possible. Look at Haga in Salt Lake in 2008, or Haslam this year in Australia when he fractured his tibia. We sent him to a private hospital on the Thursday, they operated and he raced on the Sunday. Of course we only help those who WANT our help, and we don't push in if we see that the rider wants to find his own solution. Then there are sometimes cases, like Davies in Phillip Island recently, where the rider really wants to race but we have to say no...."

And the bad...

"Sadly I'm not 18 anymore and bear in mind that I have travelled for the best part of 40 years. So of course it gets tiring, we're away from home a lot, especially when you factor in the long-haul races. I suffer badly from jet-lag which gets harder the older one gets, but for as long as I am physically able, I will continue to do this job as it gives me so much satisfaction.

"I retired as soon as could from my 'day job' and

"Most riders also work with a personal trainer but then come to us for physiotherapy. We are located all across Italy and so are pretty accessible. At the tracks, riders come to see us even if they don't have a medical problem caused by racing – so we often see guys who have a sore neck from a long flight, or sore legs after bicycle training. Let's say that from Thursday afternoon to Sunday evening we four physiotherapists work full-time, all day, even through lunch.

"The SBK riders are generally very laid back; I couldn't say that there is anyone particularly 'demanding'. Some become a bit more demanding when they need strapping treatment. If they've had strapping done before in a certain way and it works, then they want it done exactly that way every time. Then some, maybe for superstitious reasons, always want to see the same physio so if one person treats them, and then they go well in a race, they want to see that same guy every time. Spies and Crutchlow for example always wanted to see me for example. It's not that one person is better than another, we all work well together as a team and it's natural that certain riders will form a relationship perhaps more with one physio than with another.

"We are not only kept busy at the tracks as riders come to us between races too. I work in the fixed clinic that the Clinica Mobile has in Imola, and



MOBILE



doctors will send us riders, or riders will contact us directly if they need assistance between rounds. Even if they are not transferred to us by doctors, some come just for treatments like normal patients would do. And some of the local guys, Melandri for example, come to see us just for a catch up and a chat!"

So why do this job?

"I came to work with the Clinica in 2005 or 2006. Corbascio asked me to come to one race to fill in, then I was asked to do the next one too and it went from there. Then I started to attend MotoGP races too and now I follow both the GP and SBK championships.

The best bits?

I love the travel, seeing new places and meeting new people of all nationalities. And we form strong friendships with the riders and team members, so that it's more likely that I'll exchange Christmas greetings with a rider who lives in the UK than with an old friend living down the road from me!

rabbit, or girl troubles – we hear more than the journalists do!

"I have been with the Clinica for 31 years. In 1990 Doctor Costa created the figure of Medical Director in the MotoGP championship (before creating the same role in SBK in 1998) and I have held that position in both GP and SBK since 1995, though in GP I share the role with Doctor Macchiagodena. The Medical Director has numerous responsibilities: to ensure continuity, keeping track of those unfit riders and ensuring they are re-examined after races; to maintain contact between the riders, the Clinica and the Chief Medical Officer (the head of the medical team of the circuit where we are racing); to spend sessions in Race Direction in order to be able to report any crashes immediately to the Clinica so that Corbascio and his team are there to meet the rider at the Medical Centre; to study, together with the CMO, the characteristics of the track and the best logistical way to provide support both around the track and at the Medical Centre."

You must have a lot of stories!

Noriyuki Haga: "The fact that the doctors of the Clinica are always present makes riders feel safer somehow. If it hadn't been for the Clinica Mobile helping me in Salt Lake, I doubt I could have raced, let alone finish sixth!"

Leon Haslam: "They're a part of my weekend and are always on hand whether you need a massage or you feel sick or you have something more serious like a broken bone. In Phillip Island this year, they got the operation sorted for me and then were on hand to strap it and take care of me post-op."

Davide Giugliano: "Even if you don't need their assistance medically-speaking, it's an environment that helps you to relax. You create relationships with those people and find yourself talking to them about many things! We live a nomadic lifestyle and, though you can't create strong bonds with everyone, you have those few with whom you can share a joke and a chat, and the Clinica team also provides that service!"

Jakub Smrz: "The Clinica is really important, maybe you don't need to go every weekend but knowing the guys are there when you need them



"And then there is the job satisfaction. Seeing a rider win a championship when you've helped him though the year is always wonderful, as you know that in some small way you've contributed to the rider's success. If I have to give you one particular stand-out episode? Maybe Noriyuki Haga in Salt Lake in 2008 when he fractured his collarbone in practice. He's a great and funny guy and has also been very lucky though his racing career as he'd never fractured anything prior to that. Anyway I treated him, and he didn't just take part in qualifying but he raced too! The collarbone causes shoulder and arm problems and we didn't think he'd be able to race but he raced and took important points – that was a very satisfying day for me.

"On the down side, the worst aspect of our jobs is the bad accidents, which we don't like to see happen but are part of life. Those small crashes, in which a rider suffers only minimal injuries, are just part of the spectacle but the big accidents are very hard to deal with, also because we know all of the riders so well. They tell us everything when they come in. They'll chat about the technical problems they're having with the bike, or talk about their sick

"I have so many anecdotes, amassed over 30 years, but one of my favourites is when Capirossi crashed in Australia – he crashed at a very fast point of the track and the medical centre declared he was unhurt but I diagnosed a collapsed lung, which was confirmed by the hospital and treated correctly. But I have been present in many difficult moments – I was with Rainey at Misano, with Checa at Donington, with Melandri, Gibernau and Capirossi at Catalunya, with Simoncelli when he was racing in 125 and fractured his wrist, with Jones at Brands, Laconi at Kyalami and, unfortunately, with Lascorz just a few days ago at Imola. All of these incidents, just a few of the many examples, have affected me but, at the same time, they encourage me to continue with this work, despite my age, as I know we are doing important work in helping them through difficult times. The relationship I have with these guys gives me so much, keeps me young, and makes me feel useful."

What do the riders say?

is very reassuring. I am often there for massages, also because I get some back problems and so they keep an eye on this for me. Once I had a very high fever in Magny-Cours but they helped be to race, another time I damaged the ligament in my knee but was able to race one week later thanks to their medical support..."

Marco Melandri: "When you are hurt, you realize just how important they are. I remember in 2003 when I had an accident at Suzuka in Japan, I had to spend three days in hospital – without the support of the Clinica's doctors in that moment, the experience would have been a lot harder to bear! I rely on them a great deal, and even when I don't need their medical support, I'll often pass by just for a chat!"

Carlos Checa: "In this world of high risk sport, the services of the Clinica are essential to the riders. In 1998 when I had the big accident at Donington the support of the Clinica doctors was really important for me."

