

LUCA'S VESCAPADE

Vespa man Luca Capocchiano has traveled 13,000kms on his dream trip. But he's far from done.

TEXT BY VISHAL RAI

Luca Capocchiano is a 36-year-old motorbike enthusiast from the Italian city of Genova. He is currently on what he calls the "project of his life", traveling across the world on a classic old yellow 125TS Vespa. Luca rode up to Nepal from India recently, which is when Fr!day caught up with the Vespa man for a short chat.



How did your love for motorbikes begin?

When I was younger, I dreamt of being a professional motorbike rider. I have always been fascinated by bikes - competition bikes, in particular. I also raced for a couple of seasons. I wasn't bad but I was not fast enough to get paid.

What happened next?

I decided that if I couldn't be a rider, I would join that world from another door. So I became a track engineer. A track engineer coordinates the entire team and has to regularly converse with the rider, so there's a psychological side to the job as well. In a way, you become a problem solver for the rider, and he must trust you. Good results are impossible if the relationship between the two isn't good.

You worked at the World Superbike Championship for eight years. Which teams and riders did you work with?

I have worked for Honda and Ducati among others. A few of the riders I've worked with are Rueben Xaus, Max Biaggi, Jakub Smrz, and Sylvain Guintoli.

You had a great job at Ferrari as well. Why did you leave it all for this trip?

Working at Ferrari was great but there was something missing - this trip, which I have been dreaming about for 10 years.

How did it all come about?

The summer before I graduated, I went to Spain. A lot of Italians do that over the summer, working small jobs. Before I left, I wanted a small vehicle, something cheap that I didn't have to care much for. So, I bought a 50cc Vespa. I have always liked fast motorcycles so a Vespa was pretty far

from my idea of a bike, but once I started riding the scooter, I fell in love with it. On the Vespa, I could pay attention to the environment and the landscape around me. It was a completely new way of riding.

In Spain, I traveled from the north to the very south until I reached the ocean. There, I made a promise that one day I would leave on a Vespa and nobody would stop me, not the oceans or the mountains. I would travel all over the world, and that's what I'm doing now.

Could you tell us a bit about your Vespa?

It's a 1966 125TS, not a very special model. I paid around €2000 for it, which is quite a lot but its cheap considering there are vintage Vespa models that sell for up to €10000. I painted it yellow because the one I rode in Spain was the same color. The TS was manufactured in just three colors - white, green, and red. In Italy, there are strict Vespa men who forbid painting the scooter in anything other than the original shades, but I still did it because I like the color.

What modifications have you done for the trip?

Nothing big. I just modified the suspension and changed the 125cc engine to 175.

What problems have you faced so far?

The engine broke down a couple of times. I was in Turkey the first time it happened and I had to order a new one from Italy. Since then, I've been traveling with a lot of spare parts. Right now I have a small but very heavy bag that's filled with spares. I'm quite organized in that aspect. What I'm not organized at all is with my personal equipment. I don't have much more than this jacket and these pants, although I did buy a sleeping bag and a tent in Thamel recently.

How did you design the trip?

The idea was to ride eastwards from my city and return from the opposite direction without visiting the same place twice. And I wanted to set foot on five continents while doing this. These are the chief characteristics of my trip.

Has everything gone according to plan?

The routes have changed a couple of times. In the beginning, I planned to pass through China but then I found out that if I wanted to ride my own vehicle there, I had to hire a tourist guide to escort me, which would cost me \$8000 for 20 days. So that was bye bye, China. I then thought of riding towards Pakistan, but when I was in Iran they denied me a visa and I had to change the route again. Instead, I had to take a boat from Iran to Dubai.

I have this line of the route in my mind and I feel satisfied when I feel like I'm moving forward in that general direction.

Is traveling into unknown territory scary in any way?

Not at all. Many believe that the people you come across are the biggest danger while traveling. I think that's completely wrong; that's not giving enough credit to humanity. I've met beautiful people all over and in some places they were special. In Iran, they were unbelievable. Actually, the biggest danger is traffic.

Of all the countries you have been to, which place had the most difficult roads?

India, for sure. It's not just the way they drive there but also the condition of the roads. For example, on my way to Varanasi, it took me ten hours to ride just 210kms.

Have you had situations where you haven't been able to reach proper accommodations on time?

I've had worrying situations like that in Turkey and Iran. I can't ride by night because the Vespa's headlight is really weak so I always try to get to a hotel before sundown.

I've been lost at times. The worst was in Oman when I was more than 100kms off course. I don't have a GPS, I use a normal map. I enjoy traveling that way, it's more romantic. I'm forced to talk to people for information. Some nice meetings on this trip were born in that manner. In Iran and Oman, I stopped to ask some people for information and I ended up spending days with them. The only situation I regret not having a GPS is when I enter big cities.

What countries have you crossed so far?

I have been to Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Iran, UAE, Oman, and India.

What other bikes do you own?

I have a Ducati Hypermotard 1100cc and an Aprilia 250cc. I also have two more Vespas - a 50 Special and a 125 GT '67. I could have made the trip with the GT as well but since it was given to me by my girlfriend, and since she's not at all happy about me making this trip, I didn't bring it out of respect for her.

Where are you headed next?

I'm going to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Australia on this side of the world. From there I'm going to South America and then to Africa. I'm expecting to be back home next summer. My entire route should be 40,000kms and I've traveled 13,000kms so far. So, I'm not even halfway through yet.