



A POSITION

FIT FOR PINK

Italian pro **Valerio Conti** went from twisted pelvis to pink jersey thanks to years of intensive bike-fit help from **Giuseppe Giannecchini**. *Simon Smythe* hears their story

Top-flight fitting

Does every WorldTour pro bring their own bike-fitter with them?

"It is very normal for pro riders to have their own trusted biomechanic, as your own riding position is most likely something you will have established well before joining a professional team," says Valerio Conti. "I'm not sure about other teams, but at UAE Emirates we do not currently have an official team biomechanic. We did a team check-up, last winter, with a biomechanic/bike-fitter for all of us in the team, on which occasion we did not change anything to my set-up, as we agreed I was perfectly happy. Who knows, things may change in the near future, but a riding position is too delicate a matter — at the moment, I do not see the need of a team biomechanic, to be honest."

Giannecchini's passion won Conti's trust from the outset

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e're all looking for our work to be appreciated in some way, but if you're an Italian bike-fitter and one of your clients rides himself into the maglia rosa, that's got to be the ultimate validation.

Valerio Conti, 26, became the toast of Italy when he took the pink jersey from Primož Roglič on stage six of this year's Giro — and a small but perfectly fitted handful of British riders were celebrating too: Giuseppe Giannecchini, who had worked with Conti on his position since he was a junior, has also worked one weekend a month in the UK for the last 10 years, and is currently doing so for Racer Rosa in east London.

Giannecchini explains how a similar arrangement with bike shops in Italy originally put him in touch with Conti:

"The first time I met Valerio was in 2010. He was a *juniores*, age 16, racing for the Guazzolini Coratti team. I used to go down to Rome to do the bike-fits for a shop, and one weekend Valerio's coach Antonio Fradusci brought him in for me to assess his position. Antonio told me that Valerio was suffering some serious lower back pain when climbing and in longer races."

After evaluating Conti at that first session, Giannecchini discovered that the young rider was affected by a significant pelvis rotation, with around 4cm difference between left and right leg, and consequently the muscle mass of his legs was hugely different between one side and the other. The rotation had likely been caused by a fall that Conti had suffered a few months earlier and which had been improperly treated.

"His riding position was also too far backwards with too much saddle setback and a handlebar positioned too high and too close to him. There was a lot of work to be done, and not everything could be sorted immediately — it was going to be a long journey."

How did Conti feel about Giannecchini's diagnosis? Was it the first time he had been told that the problem was related to these things and did he believe that the fitter could fix him?

"I trusted Giuseppe from the beginning," says Conti. "I was very young and had no experience or knowledge of biomechanics before, and it is in my character to put my trust in someone anyway. Furthermore, I started to feel the benefits straight away from day one, in the first outings."

It was a breakthrough moment for the youngster.

"I remember other people telling me about my postural issues before, but no one really being able to help with a solution. The work we did with Giuseppe was very big and important; it took a long time, working with an osteopath and correcting the riding position gradually."

Before consulting Giannecchini, Conti had only had a basic fit, in addition to some DIY tinkering, admitting that he "never had any certainty" about achieving the correct set-up.

Once the pelvic rotation had been reduced, says Giannecchini, it was time to tackle Conti's position on the bike.

"After a few months, I saw Valerio again and there had been a considerable improvement — the pelvis rotation was still too prominent, though, at 2.5cm. That season was ending and we said we would carry on like that, with the postural re-education, until the routine check-ups at the start of the new season."

The changes were taking effect on the road too.

"Gradually, in the following season — his second one as *juniores* — Valerio's position got better, little by little, with very good improvements, both in his posture and his muscular volumes."

After that season, in which Conti's form had started to improve and he was reporting less pain, he changed team, still in the amateur ranks, with the Mastromarco team. After two years of work, his postural problems were mostly in the past. According to Giannecchini, he was very close to his current physical situation.

"I remember that, on Valerio's second year in that team, I managed to get Renzo Formigli to produce a made-to-measure



Precise measurements establish a baseline for biomechanical tweaks



The new-bike quandary

How to stop a new bike leading to old problems

How does a pro like Valerio Conti deal with having to change bikes each time he changes team?

"Valerio's morphology is well

proportioned for his 172cm height and fortunately he had never had any particular issue in transferring his riding position across the different bike brands in his various team changes," says Giannecchini.

"At the beginning of each season, we determine which size is the right one for

his body, depending on the different bikes. We then do a routine check-up, identifying the right components specification — which bars, stem, saddle, cleats, shoes, seatpost etc.

"Every time, there is a lot of work to be done: the check-up of the bike is not an easy one and we must do it extremely precisely. For example, Valerio is very sensitive to the position of his cleats, which we therefore verify every time he has a new pair of shoes.

"Depending on the different frame geometries, he can vary from a 100mm stem length to 110mm, with top tubes that vary between 530 and 535mm, basically a size S. At the moment, he rides a Colnago V2-R in size 48, sloping, with a 110mm stem.

"Unfortunately, in his first year with Lampre, Valerio had a knee problem, as a consequence of an error made in setting up his saddle by the team... this is why now we keep everything under a very close eye. Over the years I have always pushed Valerio to pay the same attention to the TT position as he has to the road one, as I believe he can be good at TT races, which are very important for stage racing."

frame for him. The whole team was racing with Formigli standard-sized bikes during those years. One regret of mine is that Valerio that year did not manage to race in the under-23 World Cup after he had a great season full of important achievements, especially considering that that year's course was very suitable for his characteristics."

Conti is more philosophical: "Well, the national team call is always an odd one: they don't always call athletes based only on merits... Let's say there are other dynamics also to be considered. I felt bad at the time but I wouldn't call it a regret. I got over it very quickly, as the important things happened as a pro."

Conti joined Lampre as a stagiaire in 2013, riding Merida bikes.

"Thinking about it now," says Giannecchini, "I believe that if Valerio had not solved his postural problems as a *juniores*, he might well have given up racing altogether."

Does Conti agree that quitting was on the cards?

"Frankly, I don't remember considering quitting at any point. I think if you believe in something you will always find a solution. I was very young at the time and lucky to find a solution pretty early on, but I like to think that I would have found it in one way or another."

I think that type of problem can be part of the growing-up process in those youth categories."

The experience made Conti a very attentive pro who keeps an eye on all aspects of his biomechanics; he continues to work with Giannecchini and sports physiologist Professor Claudio Gallozzi.

"We also got him insoles made specifically for him by orthopaedic

"I was young at the time and lucky to find a solution early on"

technician Pierpaolo Paoli," says Giannecchini, "who I have been collaborating with for years to correct a slight imbalance in Valerio's foot support, which at some point was causing some tension in his lumbar region."

Everything is now evidently in order and meticulously monitored.



A one-to-one session will dial in an optimum racing position

"We now keep everything under close control, and every year we do a biomechanical assessment. We then make a plan of action with very specific check-ups — a few sessions that take place directly face to face, but sometimes these can also be done just by telephone."

After Conti's strong defence of the pink jersey, which he held for five days, he is optimistic for the future. Can he be a GC contender?

"I don't have a crystal ball, but I see that I am continually improving and feel I am very competitive in the one-day/one week races, even in the most

important WorldTour events.

"For the big three-weeks stage races, I am definitely confident in stage victories at the moment and in the near future, but not yet as a GC contender. As much as I'd love to, I would be cocky to say I can be among the GC contenders in the near future." The Italian is biding his time, knowing that physically he is spot-on and making progress.

"At the moment, I am one week short, and I know that to be a GC contender in a big WorldTour race, I need a bit more time... but I don't put limits on the future, everything is possible."

UK bike-fits with Giuseppe Giannecchini can be booked through racerrosabicycles.co.uk

CONTI'S GOLDEN RULES

Bike-fit your way to racing success

CW asked Valerio Conti for his best bike-fitting advice relevant to racers at all levels

Get fitted before you race

"Being fitted correctly is extremely important and vital in racing, not only to perform at your best but also to avoid physical troubles that would keep you away from the races."

Ignoring fit is false economy

"I am not sure about the UK, but here in Italy

I see plenty of amateur riders who spend thousands on a new bike but are reluctant to spend two or three hundred on a bike-fit. This is a huge mistake, as the first thing should be the correct riding position: the 'engine' is our body, which needs to be set up correctly. The bike is only a tool."

Don't take the risk of DIY fitting

"Achieving a good riding position without a professional biomechanic might even be possible, if you're extremely careful and

lucky, but in my opinion, in nine out of 10 cases people would get it wrong, if doing it by themselves."

Respect your physical uniqueness

"As to the most important areas to pay attention to, it's difficult to generalise, as everyone has their own physical problems. We're all different, that's why there are biomechanics who can help us to find that 'perfectly tailored suit' to wear — a no-brainer really."



Conti's bike-fit unearthed his time trialling ability



The maglia rosa was the ultimate reward for Giannecchini's efforts



Giannecchini leaves no stone, or gear shifter, unturned during the process



A level-headed approach makes for ultimate accuracy