

NOTES

**More about
Velocar Road Racing
in 1934**

Arnfried Schmitz

author of

Human Power—the forgotten energy

This leaflet may be inserted between pages 30 and 31 of the above book.
References to 'Paul Morand' on pages 28 and 29 should read 'Manuel Morand.'

Arnfried Schmitz, Quartier Gallas, F84220, Lioux, Gordes, France

During one of the long sessions in which I talked with Georges Mochet, he lets me read a letter written in spring 1934. He makes it anonymous by covering the letterhead with his hand. The writer states that the Velocar must be an outstanding and excellent machine, if a mediocre rider like Manuel Morand can get such good results with it! He therefore proposes creating a pro-team of good riders for the next Tour de France. He offers to take responsibility for this and for finding sponsors and other support, such as masseurs. Mochet would only have to deal with the technical aspects: to build the Velocars.

Even now, this letter upsets Georges. "I cannot respect a man who denigrates his colleague and I definitely would not deal with him. So I didn't even reply to the letter."

What about Velocar racing? In February 2001, the archivist Jean Veneziano, who has compiled a definitive history of pro roadracing from 1900 to 2000, is "definitely convinced" that Velocar roadracing never happened: "I can affirm that none of the pros ever used a recumbent. The machine was too different and would have been dangerous in a pack. If you ever read about a Velocar leading the bunch, it could only be because the inventor had launched his rider somewhere along the route and the spectators thought he was in the race."

Unlike his father, Georges Mochet wasn't interested in archives. So tracing the Velocar in the old sports press proves very difficult and frustrating. Reports and results are well hidden. The pictures are relegated to pages dealing with curiosities seen alongside major sporting events. Perhaps I can find more in the future.

Match Intrans No.404, 5th June 1934 reports the Paris-Angers 310 km race. First, with a time of 9 hours 25 minutes 10 seconds was Vanderdonk, followed by Cornez, Lovet, Choque ... and in 14th place, Manuel Morand. Felix Levithan states:

All the early hours would have been desperately monotonous but for the Spaniard Morand, who rode a recumbent bicycle, and kept us amused. Then when he was leading the field he did an easy 50 kph for several kilometres at a time. This forced his rivals to work terribly hard. Fortunately for them, he did not rub it in too much, and uphill he was generally dropped

We don't have many bouquets to award. The worthiest recipients include ... Morand, who avoided us to arrive after sundown.



Left: "During the 'Paris-Vichy,' on the beautiful road to Fontainebleau, the 'Velocarist' Morand leads the pack at 50 kph."

Above: "But Lapebie checks the ardour of Morand, who seems happy about the deal given to the 'simple cyclists'." (Look at Lapebie's hand on Morand's shoulder.)

Source for both pictures: *Le Miroir des Sports*, No.769, 19 June 1934

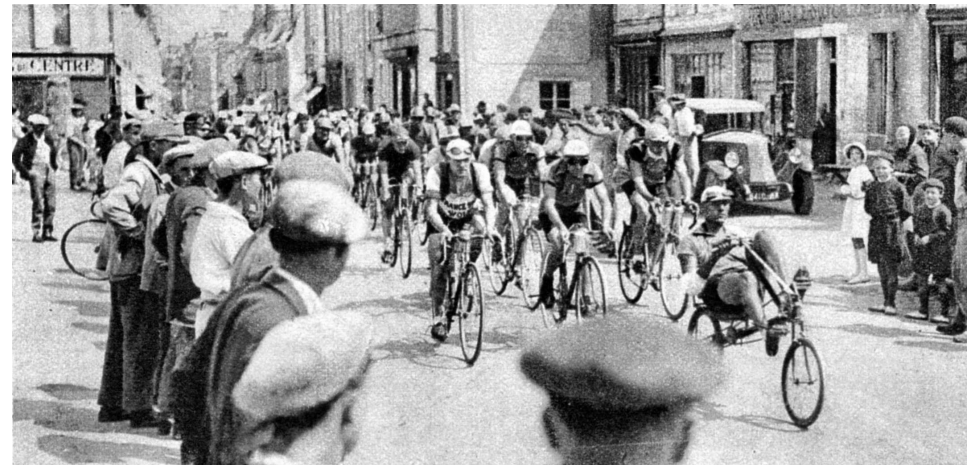
Three weeks later, *Le Miroir des Sports* No.769, 19th June 1934, reports the Paris-Troyes 255 km race, in which 48 riders started:

Up to then the whole field merely faithfully followed the 'missile' which the 'Velocarist' Morand takes out every Sunday on the roads of France, to the great curiosity of the spectators. The very high and consistent speed – about 50 kph – is a good thing to hinder breakaways ...

In a letter of 19th July 2001, a few days before his 86th birthday, Georges Mochet supplied the following information about Manuel Morand:

Morand was hired at the beginning of 1934 to take part in road competitions. He was not a super champion but a good, serious and conscientious professional racer. He practised on the Velorizontale with application. He participated in about 15 pro events with distances in the order of 250 to 350 km. I believe he finished them all and in honourabl e places. He was all on his own with no team-mates, no following car, nothing. Given the circumstances, his performances were admirable.

The Velorizontale was clearly superior and performed better than a classic bicycle. We had believed that Morand would win a classic race quite easily. However, we had ignored the fact that a bicycle race comprises a bunch of teams. These form very fast elements. If Morand could last against a bunch over 20 to 30 km, he had against him the 50 to 100 he would have dominated individually. But acting together, they left him no chance to finish first. His determination to keep going was admirable. He demonstrated that riding a Velorizontale was easy in a bunch. Despite the hostility of all, he finished these long competitive rides honorably, and he was a great and good chap.



Above: Picture from *Le Miroir des Sports*, No.787, 28 August 1934.

"The public coming to look at the pro road races is not yet used to the sight of some contemporaries who take part stretched out in their horizontal bikes. This is not without some scornful amusement. So, at the 'Paris-Limoges' the other Sunday, Morand was often seen ahead of the bunch. At the crossroads in Vatan, a spectator looked through his binoculars at the racers, less than 100 metres away. Suddenly he shouted, 'They're coming! And there's a very small one in front.' The very small one was Morand, who is actually rather tall [French = grand] and who will grow taller [grandira] because he is Spanish." This was a play on words, alluding to the fact that in Spanish a nobleman is known as a 'grande' (from which we get the English word 'grandee').