

by Hein Verbruggen*

Feelings

of a president

If I were asked, as president of the UCI, to express my innermost feelings just a few weeks away from the festivities to mark the UCI Centenary, which we shall be celebrating with all of our friends between Paris and Lausanne, I would allow the cycling lover that I am, and always have been, the privilege of answering.

What is more, the one could not have existed without the other. Nor without this passion for this fantastic sport, whose future undoubtedly has other unforgettable moments in store for us. I like cycling because I like bicycles, Can you imagine the evolution of our society without this marvellous technical discovery? Without that unique sensation of movement, and therefore freedom, that it has given to humanity? In his remarkable *"enCYCLEopédie"*, our friend and great expert on the history of cycling, Jean Durry, speaks of a magical intervention rather than of the delicate two-wheeled device. For this device freed humankind from its straitjacket of having no means of conveyance other than Shanks's pony or the inevitable recourse to animal traction. A world without bicycles would have been a far poorer one, deprived, among other things, of some of the most beautiful pages in the history of sport. Those who know them understand what I am talking about: races and men who have been with us for a century, and who occupy an important and frequently visited place in our memory. The Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia, the Vuelta a España, Paris-Roubaix, the Tour des Flandres, Milan-San Remo, Liège-Bastogne-Liège. These events are true landmarks in world sport, but above all they are unquestionably components of the historic and cultural heritage in their countries. As for the male and female champions of each era and discipline, any list

would be too long and is bound to be incomplete. I will therefore mention only two: Fausto Coppi and Eddy Merckx, symbols of a sport which has always been able to adapt to circumstances and changes; in short, to the times.

In this sense, the UCI Centenary will be a great moment of joy, which will enable us to note that the exceptional vitality of our sport is a direct result of the extreme wealth of its history, to which our federation is inextricably linked. But if the past is our strength, the future will be our challenge.

Given that cycling has become a social phenomenon whose scope extends far beyond the barriers of competition, we are convinced that our duty will be to participate, ever more actively, in the development of programmes and initiatives based on enhancing the value of the bicycle as a healthy and environmentally-friendly means of transport and leisure.

Touring cyclists are also racers. They do not compete for victory, admittedly, but deserve as much of our attention and commitment as the professionals or youngsters who dream of a career at the highest level. Cycling is a big family, which each child with his or her first set of stabilizers could, one day join. This is not a utopian vision, as the enthusiasm for cycling and its culture of tradition ensure eternal youth for cycling.

This feeling of continuity has driven us



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towards our most appealing project: giving the sport of cycling a modern and functional structure, able to guarantee ideal training and coaching conditions for athletes throughout the world, in particular those from less privileged countries. The construction of the World Cycling Centre in Aigle, which will be opened in 2002 and which will form the heart of our movement, perfectly encapsulates the UCI's approach to its Centenary: "A century looking to the future". This sums up our history and enthusiasm for the future.

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