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Tape 1
Interview of Lou Maltese by Lisa Thayer.

(This interview was conducted over a period of weeks in the early 1980's? at Lisa Thayer's home in Nyack, N.Y. Lou's health was declining and the interviews ended when he was no longer able to travel. The first two tapes of interviews were given to Sydney Schuster. They were transcribed and printed in the January and February 1989 (Vol. 1, Nos. 1 and 2) issues of the CRCA newsletter. Except for the portions enclosed in {} brackets, which are inclusions by me, Jim Boyd, the following is an exact copy of what appeared in the newsletters.

From the January issue (assuming it to be from Tape 1):

Lisa Thayer: When was the CRC of America {Century Road Club of America} founded?

Lou Maltese: I really don't know, but I think it's in the papers down at the Richmondtown Museum {in Staten Island}. I think the papers were written by Captain Staubach.

At that time, one of the big things in the Club was that the members rode a registered 100 miles. That's why it's called a century.

Each member would pay 50¢ and get a century bar. As you rode each century you added a bar to a string of bars; they were all silver. And then we had double centuries, and even triple centuries — 300 miles. And some of the bars were gold.

Lisa Thayer: So, then, a group in New York City in 1897 broke from the National Society and formed their own?

Lou Maltese: The reason for the split was [the Treasurer who was] appointed for the New York State Division. The Treasurer was collecting the 50¢ pieces and the members weren't getting their century bars. That's how the trouble started.

He wasn't attending meetings, and [the NY CRC] couldn't get any financial reports. They couldn't have any commitments from the head office. What became the Association was a full group of members — you could say the whole state.

51 Everything that the Americas {Century Road Club
52 of America} had, the Association would use just
53 in reverse. Their jerseys were blue with gold
54 trim, so we have gold with blue trim. The emblem
55 was the same [but with] a big C and 100 in the
56 middle, signifying the century. And then all the
57 rules were kept the same. The constitution was
58 absolutely the same [until] 1948.
59

60 Lisa Thayer: When CRC of America events started, were they
61 races or rides?
62

63 Lou Maltese: There were races, yes. There were tracks in
64 different parts of the country. Most of the
65 tracks were made out of dirt.
66

67 [At that time], there were races on the high
68 wheels — the big wheels in the front — where
69 you have to be an acrobat to jump off the bike.
70

71 There were other races with regulation bikes.
72 They had a track in Floral Park, I believe, and
73 around the Westbury area which I never even saw.
74 When I raced, there were board tracks in seven
75 different cities.
76

77 Lisa Thayer: How did you get into racing?
78

79 Lou Maltese: There was a fellow on my block who bought himself
80 the best bicycle in the world — a Bastide. It
81 was French [with] BSA parts — Birmingham Small
82 Arms — that's English. For \$110, this fellow
83 had the best.
84

85 I had a junk bike. "Come on out for a ride!" He
86 liked to beat somebody. No matter whether you
87 had a truck bike or anything, as long as he could
88 beat it. So I wound up [buying] myself a Pierce
89 Arrow with BSA parts.
90

91 I use to go out with this fellow. I didn't know
92 anything about racing. He always beat me.
93

94 He said, "Hey, want to join a club?" I started
95 racing in 1923 {Lou turned 17 in 1923} in the CRC
96 {Century Road Club Association}. We called club
97 races "cork races."
98

99 Lisa Thayer: Why cork?
100

101 Lou Maltese: In the Tour de France, they have a yellow jersey
102 signifying the winner of the last stage. We used
103 to get a champagne cork and put a hole through
104 it, a little chain on it, or a ribbon, and tie it
105 under [the winner's] saddle. The winner of the
106 race pulled the cork off the other riders.
107

108 The Captain scored the races, and the only
109 prizes we ever got were at year-end when they'd
110 give out either three or five places. You can
111 believe there was a lot of competition for that
112 cork. You know, it's all in fun.
113

114 Lisa Thayer: So you got there and you learned something about
115 racing?
116

117 Lou Maltese: Yes, and of course ... we used to go out every
118 Sunday in the winter. 70, 80, 90, 100 miles.
119 For fun.
120

121 We used to go to Kensico Reservoir and fool
122 around on the ice — with our bikes. We played a
123 game of tag. They only used fixed wheels [then].
124 In all my racing, I never used brakes.
125

126 We had a special race once a year in Staten
127 Island. We called it the Midland Beach Handicap.
128 It was all merchandise prizes that members would
129 donate. But it wasn't like it is today; today
130 there's so much stuff available. When I raced,
131 if you took a \$5 bill, they turned you pro and
132 you could never ride with the amateurs again.
133

134 We used to race almost four or five times a week,
135 because there [were tracks] in New York, ... Newark
136 or Nutley, ... Philadelphia, ... Providence, ...
137 Boston, ...Hartford. We used to make the circuit.
138

139 I used to specialize in racing behind
140 motorcycles, because I had a weak mind and a
141 strong back. That's the necessary thing if you
142 want to ride behind a motorcycle. I turned pro
143 in 1929, mainly to do motorpace racing.
144

145 Lisa Thayer: Isn't it dangerous?
146

147 Lou Maltese: It is. It's how you look at it. You get
148 accustomed to the danger. It's exciting to the
149 public.
150

151 Most of the time, there's only room for three
152 motorcycles for passing. You have ... six
153 motorpace men on the track, sometimes seven. And
154 most of the races were 100 kilometers — 62½
155 miles.

156
157 Sometimes you'd have what they'd call a Golden
158 Wheel. It would be exactly one hour. We used to
159 do about 44 miles.

160
161 You have a special motorpace frame: the fork is
162 inverted; you have a 24-inch front wheel, and the
163 back is 27 inches.

164
165 Lisa Thayer: It's a very special bike, in other words.

166
167 Lou Maltese: It's all designed [to] stay close to the
168 motorcycle. Behind the motorcycle's rear wheel
169 you have a tube that's on bearings, going
170 straight across the back. It's usually 24 inches
171 wide. The trick is to stay as close to that
172 roller as you can. You can touch the roller; the
173 roller will spin. That roller has to be in front
174 of you; otherwise, you just touch anything and
175 you have an immediate blowout.

176
177 I had a blowout once. I was still amateur, and I
178 was training to become a pro. I used to sneak
179 off the job [as supply department supervisor] and
180 go up to the track. I did something that you're
181 not supposed to do: I just shellacked the tire
182 on. The tires should be shellacked on at least
183 48 hours ahead of time. I figured [it] might
184 stay for about four or five miles. All they
185 would take [amateurs for was] five miles of
186 pacing.

187
188 Well, this particular day was a beautiful day and
189 on the track we had, I'd say, America's best
190 motorpacer. I got on behind him ... and I was
191 actually flying. Felt good and all that. And
192 you could see everybody was watching. I was
193 doing about 45-50 mph. I felt this bump, and I
194 said to myself "I got to get off!"

195
196 I [was] saying "Allez!" — see, you gotta tell
197 the man when you're getting off so that he can
198 gas up the motor and go away from you. I had my
199 mouth wide open when the front tire blew. Thank
200 God I was on the bank. The tire flew right off
201 the wheel, got caught in the spokes and came back

202 ... and it locked the front wheel. That's what
203 saved my life. I slid all the way down, maybe
204 one whole stretch from one side to the other. We
205 had wooden rims in those days. You get on the
206 other turn without a tire on the rim, you know,
207 you'd fall right down. Wood doesn't hold against
208 wood.
209
210 Lisa Thayer: What were the advantages to wooden rims?
211
212 Lou Maltese: They were the best in the world. And they were
213 better than the best aluminum rims that are made
214 today. They're resilient. You hit a bump and
215 they don't bend like aluminum rims do. They used
216 to make our rims out of three pieces of ash. And
217 they used to come to a bead. Even today, there's
218 nothing better than that.
219
220 I still have a brand new rim and wheel that I
221 built up maybe 40, 45 years ago. I look at that
222 wheel and I look at an aluminum rim which I have.
223 [The wooden rim] is maybe ten times better. I
224 never used it because I stopped racing.
225
226 End of what appeared in the January 1989 CRCA newsletter
227 (assumed to be the contents of the first tape).
228
229 (End of Tape #1.)