

Tape 2
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 February issue (assuming it to be from Tape 2):

Lisa Thayer: How did you distinguish yourself as an amateur racer?

Lou Maltese: I was a good road rider. I made three new National records. The one-hour, 25-mile time trial record, at the time I broke it, was 1:05; I brought it to 1:03, and 1:02. And [another record is] 100 miles, from Union City to Philadelphia. [O]ur club promoted that with a club from Philadelphia; first place was a car.

Several days before the race, they decided to swap it for two motorcycles. I was lucky enough to win the race. Made a new 100-mile record: 4:33. And nobody on a fixed wheel has ever made better time than that.

Early in 1929 I broke the three-mile. We call them sprint records. We had an all-day race in ... different boroughs: Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn. And then they had an overall race, three miles. [T]he promoter wanted to get a record on the books, so the fastest winning rider in these four races would get credit for the record. I won the overall for all the boroughs of New York, I think around eight minutes and something.

In 1937 I won my last race. It was six days; you raced day and night for six days with a partner. The most famous of all were in the Garden. [W]e generally did about 2,200 or 2,300 miles. [T]he two men would relieve each other at either two-mile periods or ten-minute periods or fifteen-minute periods, depending on what was happening. We didn't get any sleep. Around 2:00 in the morning, as the people dragged themselves out of

the building ... the longest stretch we got in might have been [three hours] uninterrupted.

The promoter was a very wise person. Give the public sprints! Make good sprints! I want three-, four-up sprints! And he would get them. Because, don't forget, you're a professional. [And] his good will [determined] whether you rode the next race.

So, you'd give him good sprints if you were up in the front you would try to make it two-up, three-up, four-up. You might race 20 sprints. They're all two miles. And then you had what you'd call jamming — go like hell, trying to gain a lap. [Six-days are usually scored by the number of laps completed - Ed.] Then, just before the last two sprints, out of the corner of his mouth so the public couldn't really hear it, [the track man would] say, "The war is on, the war is on, the war is on!" So everybody would get the message the war is on, meaning: now you're permitted to go out for lap stealing.

Now, if anybody stole a lap when it was *finis la guerre* — that's "the war is over" — he wouldn't get credit for it because the promoter wanted the riders to be fresh for the sprints, fresh for the jamming. So then the riders used to take exception to these rebels who would go out and try to gain a lap while things were going slow.

Some nights in the Garden, the foreigners used to keep the war going half the night. If anybody gained a lap, they were a national hero. Six-day racing was a very big thing.

Lisa Thayer: So why did you stop racing?

Lou Maltese: Because there was no more racing. [Pro r]acing had practically dropped dead. Most of the tracks burned down.

Promoters had come around to try to get six-day races [but lost interest because] they'd have to build a track in a building. The professional organization just died. The promoters that made money, they got rich and quit. They didn't waste their money building tracks for six-day races. The last one in this country, I think, was 1968. We had one at the Armory up at 168th Street.

Lisa Thayer: So that's when things changed?

Lou Maltese: Road racing never changed; you never had pro road races in this country that I remember [only stage races] up in Canada. Every day you rode 150-175 miles on gravel roads — The Queen's Highways. Everything up in Canada belonged to the Queen. We used to curse the Queen every day.

Lisa Thayer: So if road races in this country are primarily amateur, what does the pro do?

Lou Maltese: Nothing. He starves to death.

See, what I have been trying to teach our riders [is that] professional racing is not the same as amateur racing. It's dog-eat-dog. I never had money to go anyplace. The most I ever got for any race was \$75 plus expenses. When I rode, we used to get a pair of wheels for \$13, built. Now you pay \$100. This is why I buy tires ... at wholesale prices and sell them to the members ... just so they can stay riding.

In the six-day races ... they supplied me with ... food, jerseys and tires. [I]f you had to buy a new frame or something, it would come out of your pocket. There wasn't much money in it. It was more the glory.

Even when I raced in Canada, I asked for six weeks off. I was in charge [of an Atlanta electric protection company] supply department. I used to rest on the job; I could handle [it]. It wasn't a real job; I used to make up orders, deliver them. We used to give them ladders and panels, buy all the supplies. They tried to get rid of me for 25 years.

[W]henver I took time of to do something I shouldn't be doing, the boss got his money's worth. I used to start a little earlier, go home a little later, get the job done. That was the important thing. Every new boss tried to figure out how to get rid of me. And then, when he had all the facts, I never had any problems. I was able to, after I stopped racing, run open races. I used to take a lot of time [off], of course.

Lisa Thayer: When you quit pro racing in 1937, how did you feel?

Lou Maltese: Oh, lousy, for two years. [Y]ou're like a lost soul — an athlete, quitting.

Lisa Thayer: So you started in 1939, running races?

Lou Maltese: I was a director of the Amateur Bicycle League of America. [It later became the USCF.] I used to get up at the meetings ... and say, "All you fellows here are my friends, but you're all a bunch of phonies. This includes me, because I'm the Director."

I'd say, "In Canada, our boys are being paid for racing." [They didn't] have the guts to ... turn them pro and don't let them ride any more amateur races.

I was always a member of the Club (CRCA), and I never got away from it. Even when I was racing as a pro, and I didn't have to wear my Italian jersey — sometimes they'd advertise you as coming off the boat — I always wore my gold and blue.

I used to go out [training] weekends up until 1948. I was going out with ... pros in Brooklyn; we used to ride along Long Island. I used to meet them some mornings and go out 50 miles and turn around and come back. Then I broke my arm on the job.

Lisa Thayer: Was that a sense of loss, quitting?

Lou Maltese: It was a tremendous loss. [But] we had nobody really taking care of the Club at that time. We had Club racing ... but they needed somebody that would be dependable. We had local captains that were good. And some were not too good. When it rained, they wouldn't show up. So somebody else would have to run the Club race. So, I started getting active.

I had always loved doing it. And in 1966, I think I broke the back of the Parks Department by soliciting Mayor Lindsay and Commissioner Hoving to close traffic in [Central] Park and let us run the races.

Most of the big races, I got involved with them. You have to have good men around you, so you'd say, "Look you be the Chairman, but I'll help you." I would help them, and let them have the honor and glory of being Chairman. As long as we had a good race, I never cared. Running a race — getting the program out, sending out letters, entry blanks, prizes and things like that — that's the activity that keeps me going.

(End of Tape #2.)