



CLASSIC
EDELWEISS TOURS

AMA 100TH ANNIVERSARY ALPS CHALLENGE 3

“ Starting from Nice, France on the Mediterranean Sea, ride North into the French Alps and enjoy all their glory! ”

RIDING DAY 1 : SAINT-PAUL-DE-VENCE - BEGUDA

Standard Route (185 km / 115 miles)

There is no waiting around with idling engines on this tour through the French Alps. Right outside of Vence, the roads are scenic, narrow, twisty, magnificent, and breathtaking. They lead us right into the hinterland, into a deep, impressive gorge.

In the afternoon, we cross the border to Italy on Col de la Lombarde, the 20th-highest paved mountain pass in the Alps and the fifth-highest marking an international border. Needless to say, the scenery is absolutely spectacular!

We reach the Stura Valley and follow it downstream toward the city of Cuneo. In the village of Beguda, we find our typical Italian hotel for the night.

Highlights:

#1: Gorges de la Vésubie



Originating high in the Alps of the Mercantour National Park, the Vésubie River winds its way through its namesake gorge, until it joins the Var River and little later flows into the Mediterranean. Enjoy the ride alongside the river, take a picture of the blue waters and green flora, have a look at the ancient stone bridge crossing the river or even take a swim and cool down in the Vésubie River.

#2: Col de la Lombarde (2350m)



Col de la Lombarde (or Colle della Lombarda) is an interesting and light traffic passage across the French-Italian border and the main ridge of the Maritime Alps. The route is loaded with curves and switchbacks and is partly narrow (single lane). The summit area with its sparse vegetation shows high-alpine surroundings and an impressive panorama. Not far down the South ramp and on the French side you find Isola 2000, a typical skiing resort.

RIDING DAY 2 : BEGUDA - BRIANÇON

Standard Route (192 km / 119 miles)

Five passes are on our itinerary today, all of them giants in their own right.

From the wide Stura Valley, we take a single-track road that brings us up to two passes, both very high, but largely unknown. Colle dei Morti, the "pass of the dead" is number 9 on the list, and Colle d'Esischie takes 18th place. This is far off the beaten track in the Alps as you can get without leaving the asphalt behind.

At 2,284 m (7,494 ft), Colle di Sampyere is No. 27 on our Top-40-List and offers the kind of far-away-from-it-all feeling we like so much (but hardly ever get) when we ride our motorcycles through the Alps. It takes us from Valle Máira to the neighboring Valle Vareita, where we turn left and head back towards France.

Col Agnel, or Colle d'Agnello in Italian, is Europe's highest road border crossing and the third-highest paved mountain pass in the Alps, at 2,746 m (9,009 ft). The famous Stelvio is just 12 m higher but receives a hundred times more traffic. There is no restaurant up here on Agnel, no building whatsoever, just the views, some groundhogs or an ibex or two, and a sign that says "Welcome to France". Or to Italy, depending on your direction of travel. This pass is literally a highlight!

On the French side, we descend into the valley of the Guil River, take a quick look at the imposing Château de Queyras, and then follow the Izoard Valley up towards our next pass. Accordingly, it is named Col d'Izoard, 2,360 m (7,742 ft) high, and features one of the best motorcycle roads in the country, in the Alps, and probably in the world. We wouldn't blame you if you wanted to spend the remaining afternoon riding up and down this incredible mountain pass.

But you could also spend the rest of your afternoon in Briançon, a very, very pretty town with an imposing fortress and many cute little cafés. It's your vacation, the choice is all yours.

Highlights:

#1: Colle Fauniera / Colle dei Morti (2,481 m)



The Maritime Alps are considered to be the eldorado for motorcyclists. One of the many mountain passes is the 2,480 m (8,136 ft) Colle della Fauniera, also known as Colle dei Morti. Other passes such as Colle d'Esischie and Colle Valcavera connect here, too. Because of the partially single-lane layout of the mountain road, Colle della Fauniera requires your full focus. The closer you get to the top of the pass, the more rewarding are the views in these beautiful

and remote mountains.

#2: Colle d'Esischie (2,366 m)



Colle d'Esischie is part of a chain of mountain passes, starting in Ponte Marmora in the valley of Maira. Over some longer sections the road only allows single-lane traffic with only a few possibilities to give way to oncoming vehicles. Shortly after the top of Colle d'Esischie the road connects to Colle Fauniera, or Colle dei Morti and then

descends via Colle Valcavera down to Demonte in the valley of Stura.

#3: Colle di Sampéyre (2,284 m)



Coming from the south, the 2,284 m (7,493 ft) Colle di Sampéyre represents the westernmost connection between the Valle Maira and the Valle Varaita. The SP335 is a twisty road leading you up to the top of the pass, and then turning into a 3 km (2 mi) panoramic road with amazing views. Over a narrow, paved forest road you will reach the village of Sampéyre. From here you have the option to head north over Col Agnel and Col d'Izoard to

Briançon, visiting its old town and its famous fortification.

#4: Col Agnel (2744m)



Col Agnel, at an elevation of 2,744 m (9,003 ft), is a mountain pass between France and Italy. It is the third highest paved mountain pass of the Alps, after Passo dello Stelvio and Col de l'Iseran, and the highest pass in the Alps crossing a border. It is only open for 3-4 months during summer. It is one of the many locations suggested as the route taken by Hannibal in his march with elephants, to attack Rome at the start of the Second Punic War. A

memorial tablet, mounted on a rock on the French side, commemorates the event. The road can be narrow in places, but fortunately, usually, there is little traffic since the pass is not important for transit.

#5: Château Queyras (Queyras Castle)



This fortress complex was built in the 14th century. With its strategic location at the entrance to the Durance valley, it offered the inhabitants at the time perfect protection against enemy attacks. In the 17th century, the chateau was expanded and served as a military base until 1967.

#6: Col d'Izoard (2360m)



Rising up to 2,360 m (7,743 ft), the Col d'Izoard is only open during the summer months. It is rated as one of the toughest climbs of the famous Tour de France as the rocky mountainsides that surround the pass are almost bare of vegetation, offering no protection from the searing sun that beats down onto the cyclists as they make their way to the top. Good thing we've got a few extra horsepower.

#7: Briançon



After Davos, Briançon (4,334 ft.) is the second-highest city in Europe. Visiting Briançon's citadel is a must! From the terrace, you've got the best view over the area. Since ancient times, two great routes into Italy have met here, and so the town always played an important commercial and military role.

RIDING DAY 3 : BRIANÇON - SAINTE-FOY-TARENTEISE

Standard Route (208 km / 129 miles)

Today is the day you've all been waiting for: we ride the highest "real" mountain pass in the Alps! You could reach higher elevations in the Alps, of course, but then you wouldn't be on a pass but rather on some cul-de-sac culminating at a ski area or on some mountain top. Or you wouldn't be on a motorcycle but on foot or on a mountain bike.

Before we reach the King of Passes in the afternoon, we collect another one of our Top 40 in the morning, Col du Granon. Only the approach from the west is open to the (motorized) public, but that doesn't diminish the riding fun. Col de l'Echelle is only 1,762 m high (5,780 ft), but its location in a side valley with very little traffic guarantees plenty of riding fun.

Col du Mont Cenis, on the other hand, is an important connection between Italy and France and sees its share of traffic, but the riding is still magnificent. Thanks to the Tunnel de Fréjus a bit further west, there is no heavy traffic on this pass.

Col de l'Iseran is closed to trucks, coaches, and vehicles with trailers, so nothing stands in the way of having some riding fun. The pass doesn't offer the kind of switchback festival, though, as other passes do. But the views are top-notch!

We descend from the pass past the famous ski resort Val d'Isère and many tunnels later reach our destination, Sainte-Foy-Tarentaise.

Highlights:**#1: Col du Granon**

Col du Granon, the 15th-highest motorable pass in the Alps, is a one-sided affair. While the road leading up from the southwest is well-built and in perfect condition (and a lot of fun!), the connection down to the Val de la Clarée in the east is nothing but a rough dirt track. Due to its status as a military road, it is also officially closed to the public.

From the top of the pass, you can enjoy spectacular views of the surrounding mountains, some of which are over

4,000 m tall and snow-covered year-round.

#2: Col du Mont Cenis (2084 m)



At an elevation of 2,084 m (6,830 ft) the Col de Mont Cenis doesn't rank among the lowest Alpine mountain passes, but, at the same time, doesn't necessarily make you feel euphoric because of high altitudes either. But since the road is so perfectly carved into the mountain, the ride itself will be an exhilaratingly flowing experience for you anyways. The most mind-blowing moment, however, will surely come up when the panoramic view over the

turquoise lake of the same name opens up before your eyes.

#3: Col de l'Iseran (2764 m)



With an altitude of 2764 m (the sign even says 2,770 m), Col de l'Iseran is the highest motorable mountain pass in the Alps - the Col de la Bonette is 2715m high, the 2802m peak can be reached only via an additional loop, which is not a pass. The road is only passable in summer; in winter it is used as part of a ski slope of the Espace Killy ski area.

RIDING DAY 4 : SAINTE-FOY-TARENTEISE - SAINT-JEAN-DE-MAURIENNE

Standard Route (212 km / 132 miles)

Today, we won't cover a single one of the passes on our Top 40 list. To make up for that, we cover six other ones and they feature all the hairpin turns you can ever wish for.

Our first one, Col du Tra, is a warm-up for a true mountain pass legend, Col de la Madeleine. The Tour de France is a frequent guest on this pass so it's kept in good shape and the 48 km of twisties receive 10 out of 10 points for riding fun. Far less famous than Col de la Madeleine is our next pass, Col du Chaussy, a true hidden gem among the many gems in the French Alps. Especially the final descent is amazing, you're in for a surprise!

At this point you could - if you suffered from switchback fatigue - skip the remaining passes and head straight to Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne to enjoy some riding-free time. Why not visit the Opinel museum and maybe buy a knife or two as souvenirs?

If you want more twisties, you can check Col du Glandon, Col de la Croix de Fer, and Col du Mollard off your lists. The middle one is the most scenic, but the last one offers a thrilling ride through 41 hairpins. Let's see if you can keep count.

Highlights:**#1: Col de la Madeleine (1993m)**

This mountain pass connects La Chambre in Maurienne with La Léchère in Tarentaise. It is usually closed from November to the beginning of June. The road across Col de la Madeleine (2.000m) with its average gradient of 8% is one of the toughest climbs of the Tour de France. It was a part of the route 25 times since 1969.

#2: Col de la Croix de Fer (2067m)



The top of the mountain pass Col de la Croix de Fer at 2,067 m (6,781 ft) offers you a spectacular panorama over the fantastic French alpine mountain landscape. Enjoying the view over the Chaîne de Belledonne mountains to the northwest and the Aiguilles d'Arve to the southeast will be your award after tackling the pass' winding southwest ramp.

RIDING DAY 5 : SAINT-JEAN-DE-MAURIENNE - EMBRUN

Standard Route (248 km / 154 miles)

Today starts with a bang: Col du Galibier is the number five Alpine pass in terms of elevation and most likely the number one in terms of scenery. Its incomparable location at the border of Rhône-Alpes to Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur offers a 360-degree panorama of the most beautiful mountain massifs of the French Alps. In good weather, you can even make out Mont Blanc!

The remaining day is characterized not by mountain passes - though we have a few of those, too - but by the typical French balcony roads that are carved in the sheer rock faces. We will experience two of them before heading south toward the city of Gap. Beyond it lies the deep-blue, fjord-like reservoir Lac de Serre-Ponçon and at its far end, we find the town of Embrun, our destination for today. If 247 km (153 miles) sounds like a piece of cake to you, you can circumnavigate the lake and add about two hours to your ride.

Highlights:**#1: Col du Galibier (2642m)**

From the vista point of this pass at 2,642 m (8,688 ft.), you have a superb panoramic view of all the peaks reaching up to 3,000 m (13,000 ft) and more. The Col du Galibier was first used in the Tour de France in 1911. The first rider over the summit was Emile Georget, who, together with Paul Duboc and Gustave Garrigou, were the only cyclists not to push their bicycles up the mountain. The original summit was at 2,556 m (8,385 ft) but with the closing of the tunnel in 1976, the tour route now goes over the pass closer to the mountain peak at 2,645 m (8,677 ft). At the south portal of the tunnel, at the edge of the road, there is a memorial to Henri Desgrange, initiator and first director of the Tour de France. Whenever the tour crosses the Col du Galibier, a wreath is laid on the memorial. The "Souvenir Henri Desgrange" is awarded to the first rider, who crosses the summit of the highest mountain in each year's tour. Since 1947, the Col de Galibier has been crossed 31 times by the Tour de France.

#2: Col du Lautaret (2058m)



With its elevation of 2,058 m (6,752 ft), Col du Lautaret is frequently neglected and merely seen as the little sister of neighboring Col du Galibier. However, approaching the pass from the North, the road is spectacular and so are the views from the top. The pass was part of the Tour de France several times and it's open all year round.

#3: Lac de Serre-Ponçon



The L-shaped Lac de Serre-Ponçon is the largest reservoir in the Alps in terms of area. It is 29 km² in size, contains up to 1.2 billion m³ of water, and the power plant contained in Europe's largest earthen dam produces 10% of France's total hydroelectric energy. The lake is a water sports and recreational paradise, also for motorcyclists who are attracted by the winding roads along its shores and the sunny, warm weather.

RIDING DAY 6 : EMBRUN - BARCELONNETTE

Standard Route (199 km / 124 miles)

Today's route features four major passes. We start out with Col de Vars, a pass that caters to riders and not so much to photographers. The first town down the southern side is home to a small but interesting private motorcycle collection that we have to visit, of course.

After passing through Barcelonnette, our destination (later) today, we find our next pass, Col d'Allos. This Tour de France-favorite offers plenty of riding fun on a well-built road and lots of superb scenery. Col de Champs, a bit further down the road, is a bit lower and much narrower, while Col de Cayolle, our last pass for today, is part of the famous Route des Grandes Alpes and offers more space between the rock face on one side and the abyss on the other. At 2,327 m (7,635 ft), it is the 21-highest on our list and the highest one we ride today.

Highlights:**#1: Col de Vars (2108m)**

The Col de Vars marks the border between the departments of Hautes-Alpes and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, is part of the Route des Grandes Alpes and is repeatedly featured in the Tour de France. Scenically, the pass doesn't belong to the crème de la crème of Alpine passes, but it offers a lot of riding fun, especially on the north side. The top of the pass is not much pronounced. At just over 2100 (6,900 ft) meters, the Col de Vars narrowly

misses out on the list of the 40 highest Alpine passes.

#2: Col d'Allos

At 2,247 meters, the Col d'Allos is one of the 30 highest passes in the Alps. Not far from the top of the pass is the source of the Verdon River, which further south has created the famous Canyon du Verdon. The pass road is excellent thanks to its regular participation in the Tour de France and offers a lot of riding fun. However, on Fridays in July and August from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. it belongs solely to cyclists.

#3: Col des Champs



Col de Champs is the connection road between the two villages Colmars und Saint-Martin-d'Entraunes in the French region of Alpes-Maritimes. Not only is this mountain pass more on the narrow, twisty side, but also offers an incredibly impressive scenery. Should you ascend from the east ramp, you have the choice to either ride the new Route d'Ubac or the old section via the D278. Both routes

are worth the ride. It is the west ramp that shows the less perfectly paved part of the Col de Champs, which automatically rewards you with less traffic.

#4: Col de la Cayolle (2326m)



Despite the partly poor surface conditions and narrow sections, the Col de la Cayolle is one of the most beautiful and varied pass roads in the Western Alps in terms of landscape. Just South of Barcelonnette, the road takes you through the Gorges du Bachelard, a tight canyon. Higher up, the scenery changes, first into a surrounding with alpine forest and rivers coming down on both sides, then near the top, into a rocky high-alpine setting. In the early 1900s, for military reasons, the old mule trail over Cayolle was the first to be turned into a road.

RIDING DAY 7 : BARCELONNETTE - SAINT-PAUL-DE-VENCE

Standard Route (228 km / 142 miles)

Last but not least: it is time to reach the highest point on this tour and one of the highest you can - legally - reach by motorcycle anywhere in the Alps. From Jausiers, the road winds its way up in endless curves until it culminates at Col de la Bonette, officially the fourth-highest Alpine pass at 2,715 m (8,907 ft). The panoramic loop to the Cime de la Bonette is the icing on the cake. Have your picture taken next to the marker and enjoy the outstanding, breathtaking, sublime panorama!

A long descent brings us down to Isola (where we turned towards Italy a few days ago) and to Saint-Sauveur-sur-Tinée. A curvy road leads up to Beuil and into the famous Gorges du Cians, a narrow canyon offering beautiful photo opportunities. Past the pretty medieval town of Entrevaux we reach yet another canyon, the Gorges du Loup, which is not as spectacular as the previous ones, but still pretty cool. Vence, our final destination, is just around the corner now. What a pity. We could do it all over again, right away, at any time, right?

Highlights:**#1: Col de la Bonette**

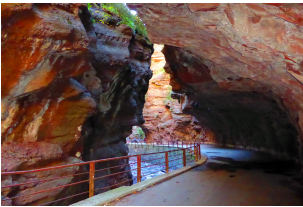
There is some dispute about this pass. Locals argue that Cime de la Bonette is Europe's highest paved road, but the highest point is not a mountain pass. A 'col' is a pass – a road that passes over the top of a climb en route to a descent down the other side – whereas the road around the Cime de la Bonette ('the peak of the Bonette') is just an extra loop for sightseeing, which elevates the altitude up to 2,802 m, versus the 2,715 m of the Col de la Bonette. Hair-splitting - don't you agree? Both the Col de la Bonette and Cime de la Bonette are well worth the ride, delighting us with plenty of curves and a spectacular view from the top.

#2: Cime de la Bonette



From the Col de la Bonette, the fourth highest paved pass in the Alps, a loop leads around the Cime de la Bonette and rises to 2,802 metres. Many see it as the highest asphalt pass in the Alps, but this is not true as this loop is not a proper pass but a panoramic road. Also, among all asphalted roads of the Alps, including the non-passes, it "only" takes the second place, number one is in Austria and provides access to a glacier ski area. Tragic. Nevertheless, the short route around the summit and the viewpoint at the summit itself offer breathtaking views over the French Alps and the memorial stone at the highest point is a must for all selfie photographers.

#3: Gorges du Cians



The deep gorge carved through the mountains by the River Cians undoubtedly is a first-class natural sight. It is made all the more spectacular by the contrast of the deep red of the exposed rock and the lush green vegetation in the canyon. The river descends considerably, by 5,250 ft in just 15 miles between the villages of Beuil and Touet-sur-Var. The narrowest and most spectacular part of the canyon is at Pra d'Astier, just in the middle between the two villages. Mostly wide enough, the road gets quite narrow in the tunnels, so pay attention to oncoming traffic.

#4: Entrevaux




Set on both sides of the river Var, the medieval walled town lies in the shadow of the above citadel. Entrevaux was founded in the 11th century. In 1658, a bridge guarded by towers was constructed over the Var; this is the modern Porte Royale. The citadel was last used during World War I as a prison for German officers. Entrevaux features an annual medieval festival and houses a motorcycle museum with a collection of early, mostly European models.

#5: Gorges du Loup



The river Loup (pronounced LOO) is in the Alpes Maritimes, France. It is 49 km (30 miles) long. Its source is a grassy hollow in the Vallon de l'Audibergue. It is fed by streams running down the north face of the Montagne de l'Audibergue. It flows through some of the most beautiful scenery in Provence and passes through the Gorges du Loup, then flows into the Mediterranean Sea at Bouches-

du-Loup.



We wish you a wonderful tour.

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