

ITALY

The Sardinian jockey's dream



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Siena, Cortile del Podestà. Andrea Sanna, focused, about to enter Piazza del Campo to compete in a race.



The Siena countryside. Marco Bitti and Carlo Sanna head back to the stable after afternoon training. The jockeys usually do their training rides in the countryside around their stable.

Ever since the 1950s they've been emigrating from the Barbagia region of Sardinia to try and conquer the Palio di Siena

- ▶ Sardinian jockeys are among the best in the world.
- ▶ They started emigrating in the second half of the 1950s: the dream was to win the Palio di Siena.
- ▶ Andrea Degortes, nicknamed "Aceto", is the Sardinian champion par excellence: 14 Palio di Siena wins.
- ▶ Still today many young jockeys – mainly from Barbagia – try their luck in Siena.
- ▶ But this success requires commitment, discipline and endless training with the horses.

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Crete Senesi. Marco Bitti carries out his stable duties under the watchful eye of little Manuel, the son of Carlo Sanna, nicknamed Brigante. The Sardinian youngsters that come to Siena always start their apprenticeship by working in the stables of already accomplished jockeys.



Oliena (Nuoro), the Palio dei Vihinados. Antonio Mula celebrates at the end of the race.



Siena, a collection of bits all lined up and ready for use. One of the important skills that the jockeys must possess is to be able to understand exactly how to handle the horse that they are going to mount.

Almost sixty years have now passed since that June of 1964, when the unknown Andrea Degortes, nicknamed "Aceto", raced in the Palio di Siena for the first time. But the 21-year-old Aceto wasn't from Tuscany: he was from Sardinia, the island that has produced some of the world's best jockeys. Aceto emigrated like many others, fleeing poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, and found success in Siena: the Sardinian champion would go on to register a record 14 wins in the Palio.

Since then many young Sardinians – particularly from the Barbagia region – have tried to follow in Aceto's footsteps: to leave the island and realise their dream of one day winning the Palio di Siena. But this dream calls for talent, discipline and hard work: getting up at dawn to tend to the horses, training every single day, taking on other jockeys in training races, with just one goal in mind: to race, and win, in the spellbinding Piazza del Campo.



Siena, the Pian delle Fornaci racecourse. Paolo Arru just after dismounting from his horse after racing on a course where the going was particularly heavy.



The Palio di Legnano (province of Milan). Rachele watches on nervously from the terraces as her fiancé, Antonio Mula, races in the “provaccia” for the San Martino contrada (city quarter).



Siena, the Antonio Siri stable. Andrea Sanna tends to one of the stable's horses.



Siena, Cortile del Podestà. Fans and race workers watching the "night practice runs", which take place in Piazza del Campo a few days before the Palio.



Oliena (Nuoro). Sardinians never waste an opportunity to underline their sense of belonging to the homeland.



Siena, the Pian delle Fornaci racecourse. Andrea Zurru getting some help mounting his horse.



Siena, leaving Piazza del Campo. Antonio Mula, surrounded by supporters, wearing the jacket of Bruco, the contrada (quarter) he's just competed for.



Legnano (province of Milan), Provaccia del Palio. Marco Bitti exits the bend just behind the race leader. The Provaccia is the race that's run in Legnano exclusively for rookie jockeys, it takes place two days before the Palio. If you win you can never compete in the race again, but you've surely got a great chance of getting a ride in the Palio.



The Siena countryside. Antonio Mula carrying out his stable hand duties at the stable of jockey Andrea Mari, nicknamed Brio.



Oliena (Nuoro), the Palio dei Vihinados. Andrea Sanna being consoled after a below par performance.



Siena, the Zedde stable. Giovanni Puddu brushing a horse. A number of well-established jockeys also house around twenty horses in their stables. All the horses need to be cleaned and tended to every morning.



Siena, Piazza del Campo. The selection trials take place 3 days before the Palio, they are regulated by the municipality and their purpose is to select the horses that will then enter the draw for assigning them to the contrade (city quarters).



Siena, Cortile del Podestà. Giosuè Carboni, nicknamed Carbuero, already a well-established jockey, getting ready to mount his horse.



Siena, the stable of Luigi Bruscelli, nicknamed Trecciolino. Paolo Arru returning a horse to the stable after having given it a thorough clean.



The Siena countryside. Tabacco is waiting for young Andrea Sanna to finish cleaning his stable.



Oliena (Nuoro), the Palio dei Vihinados. Antonio Mula putting on the jacket of Luitti, the "vihinadu" (quarter) of Oliena that entrusted him as their jockey.



Siena, Piazza del Campo. Andrea Sanna watches the horses arriving that are due to take part in the "night practice runs".



Oliena (Nuoro), the Palio dei Vihinados. A young child imitating his idols. In Sardinia it's quite common to come across young children who are more interested in becoming a famous jockey than a famous footballer.



Siena, the stable of Luigi Bruscelli, nicknamed Trecciolino. A photo of a horse stands proud amongst the usual stable mess: Vittorio died when he was 29 years old, he raced 3 times, winning 2 Palio di Siena races, and had significant success away from Piazza del Campo. He eventually went into an enjoyable retirement at the Trecciolino stable where he will always be fondly remembered.

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