

# Rouleur

## Daniel Bichlmann: the chimney sweep who raced the World Championships

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Photographs: William Donnarel/Stradalli-Bike Aid



**Just over a week before the World Championships team time trial, in Doha, Qatar, Daniel Bichlmann found out he had gone from first reserve to a member of the six-man Stradalli-Bike Aid team for the TTT.**

But before he could even think about flying to the Gulf, he needed to get the time off work from his boss first. She could hardly say no to a shot at cycling's annual blue-riband event.

"She's been so awesome about this," Bichlmann says. "She was like: 'I'm happy for you, but you have to work hard after the world championships.' I think I still owe her some hours. So, after the Worlds, there is no more time for holidays!"

Bichlmann is a part-time chimney sweep in his native Germany, getting up at half-four in the morning for a twelve-hour shift that involves lying on roofs to clean industrial stacks with long brushes. "You get dirty, really dirty," he says.

He got into the profession on the advice of former Six Day racer Michael Haase. It is hard work, but because it is part-time by German law, it gives him opportunities to trade his black boiler suit for lycra and race for German UCI Continental squad Stradalli-Bike Aid.



They are globe-trotters, competing in Europe, Asia and Africa, with a specific mission to support African riders; Bichlmann rode alongside Eritrean rider Meron Teshome in their World Championships line-up.

If you're looking for a good news story amid the WorldTour TTT boycott and criticism of the oppressive Qatar heat, this is it.

"You know the movie *Cool Runnings*? That's what we are, more or less," the Bavarian says, referring to the cult film based on the adventures of the Jamaican bobsleigh team at the 1988 Winter Olympics.

"For the WorldTour guys, it's like daily business; they go to the Worlds every year. For me, it's probably a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

"When I was young, I always had these posters from the UCI World Championships on my bedroom wall. Maybe I can make it onto one of the posters in another kid's room now."

Bichlmann dreamed of being a top-level racer. He was on the same junior team as John Degenkolb and had an offer to turn pro with Austrian Pro Continental team Elk Haus, which he refused.

"It was the best decision I ever made," he says. "Well, to be honest, my mum made it. She told me 'after you get a job, maybe you can do whatever you like for two years.' I'm pretty sure if I had signed that contract, I wouldn't be riding now."

Since joining Bike Aid in 2014, Bichlmann has enjoyed taking the long, exotic route to the World Championships, racing in countries such as Cameroon, China and Colombia. "You realise that you can't win the Tour de France, that you can't become world champion.

"But there's more to cycling than that. Cycling is such a passion. All this travelling, learning languages, meeting people, it's so nice."



*Bichlmann (l) and Stradalli – Bike Aid training in Mallorca*

For Stradalli-Bike Aid, a third-tier squad with no full-time mechanics and a small budget, Sunday's 40-kilometre team time-trial was like David's baby brother squaring up to the WorldTour Goliaths. Most of the team holds down a job alongside racing; Bichlmann's team-mate Joschka Beck is a university student in Kaiserslautern.

Bichlmann and company went all out and finished in last place, seventeenth out of 17 teams, 7-24 behind winners Etixx-Quick Step. But it didn't matter one bit.

"It's the pleasure of being there. We take it seriously and do our very best, but it's not about where we finish... it's rolling down this start ramp and the dream coming true."