

## ANDRE'S WEAPON

# BIANCHI AQUILA

**SIZE:** Medium  
**COST:** R300 000 (includes wheels, integrated cockpit, handlebars, grips, stem and Campagnolo groupset)



## Andre Bekker

**BIRTH DATE:** 5 April 1963

**AGE:** 54

**HEIGHT:** 1.83m

**WEIGHT:** 77.5kg

**BIRTH PLACE & RESIDENCE:** Johannesburg

**RELATIONSHIP STATUS:** Married to Julie

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:** Signing a UCI pro contract in 1992, setting a new course record at IMAC 2017

**TRAINING HOURS PER WEEK:** +/- 20 hours

### WEAPON LOGISTICS

I have been loyal to the Bianchi brand since the end of my pro career. I believe it is currently the best TT bike on the road. It works very well for me.

### OTHER TOOLS OF THE TRADE

**Helmet:** Garneau  
**Nutrition:** All natural food  
**Clothing:** 2XU  
**Shoes:** Pearl Izumu  
**Sunglasses:** Oakley

PHOTOGRAPHS: DIRK MOGEE, SUPPLIED

Editor Paul Ingpen got to know more about what makes this industry stalwart tick, and why shortcuts just won't cut it...

**Y**our race times belie your age; do you have a life or is age just a number?

I am a lifetime athlete, which dictates that I respect my body and the sport I do. I train hard and rest accordingly. I also have clear goals that I work towards, this keeps me grounded and engaged. Bottom line: respect your age and your health and your context.

**You are a relatively big guy and an amazing biker yet still manage to run so fast, constantly posting age group wins in half marathons etc. Do most of us just not work hard enough on our running?**

The problem with running in a triathlon context is that people are looking for shortcuts and the result is that they are training too hard, way too hard to catch up. Doing 30 x 800m two to three weeks before an IRONMAN is ludicrous. Joe Friel has repeatedly stated, "It makes no sense at all." Yet lots of athletes do this. Lots of long, slow running and building a base is key. Paula Radcliffe had to learn to run slow, and only then did she break the World Record. Race your races, not your training.

**Over the past 10 years, qualifying for Kona has become near impossible for anyone racing over 10 hours in the younger categories, which takes serious dedication and training. How would you explain that, and what would you say it takes for someone to reach that magical goal of a qualifying slot to the big island?**

Again, we are on the shortcut page. You cannot do sport for five years and think you have become a top sportsman and just qualify to go to Kona. Those days are gone. More and more we now see "specialists", cyclists and runners moving to triathlon. All these athletes have years and years of experience – you cannot compete with that. They are raising the bar as they

have been conditioned to train, and above all have the basics in place. No shortcuts anymore.

**You are a coach of some quality athletes. What are the biggest mistakes you feel athletes make in training and racing?**

Overtraining for the top age groupers and pros, and nutrition – it's crazy how little understanding there is of this.

**Please share your top five training and racing tips learnt over the years. Most notably for Jhb and Pretoria guys, how do you handle the traffic and dark, cold winters?**

- 1 Cycling is all about cadence, smoothness and efficiency. It is a learnt skill... and this is high cadence.
- 2 Don't ever do 20 or 30 x 800m intervals for running. It has zero value.
- 3 Nutrition: stick to natural food. I like to consume biltong, bananas and raisins on the bike. On the run, I take honey, no gels! And I mix red grape juice with water in my bottles.
- 4 Race your race, not your training. Strange how few people get this. When your training file looks like your racing file, you have lost the plot. Forget about beating your buddies or setting a new record on Strava, it means nothing.
- 5 Focus on the process, not the outcome. We live in an ego-driven world. IRONMAN is a prime example of this. Have fun and enjoy what you do. Your IRONMAN result does not define you as a person. As for training in Gauteng or any other city where the weather or traffic is a challenge, the key is well-structured indoor sets for the bike – these are of huge value.

**You have been very outspoken about the use of PEDs. Do you think it's becoming harder to not get caught, and thus less prevalent in recent years as science, or more prevalent as age grouper competition gets**

**fiercer and some feel it's justifiable to join them if they can't beat them?**

First of all, it is very easy to see who is "suspect" for me. I was a pro bike rider... I know what it looks like. In South Africa there are a few "obvious" suspects. However, by far and large I think most of the participants are clean. Funny thing is, I think a lot of the middle of the pack participants are taking PEDS. Again, looking for shortcuts or beating buddies. How stupid is that?! Then, I don't trust a single European. I've been there, and I just don't. As for the USA, I had the same opinion as the South Africans, until a physician said to me, "You are way too lenient with your opinion of the Americans." So I think we live in a society where instant gratification,



**Above: Looking fierce and powerful on the bike during the Rapport Tour in 1988. Left: Rapport Tour 1989. Below: Ready to roll, Rapport Tour 1987. Opposite below, from left: The KPMG Team Relay 1986; IRONMAN Chattanooga, Tennessee 2016 (finished 1st in his age group); Las Vegas 70.3 World Champs 2013 (finished 6th in his age group).**



PHOTOGRAPHS: SUPPLIED

**"Race your race, not your training. Strange how few people get this. Forget about beating your buddies. It means nothing."**

shortcuts and PEDS go hand in hand. IRONMAN is a business, testing costs money and will tarnish the image. If you look at the testing procedure at IRONMAN Kona 2016, testing was done in such a way that they would only catch the most "uneducated" dooper – then why bother?

**You have done so many races all over the world. Which would you rate as your favourites?**

My favourite race is Port Elizabeth. I am not biased, Paul has done a fantastic job with it. The vibe is unparalleled outside of Roth and Kona. Easy access and, above all, the foreigners have changed the colour of the race. As I have said before, IRONMAN is so ego-driven it is crazy, so the beauty of Port Elizabeth is that all the South African locals with the big numbers on Strava and the big egos get a reality check. The nice thing is they get a glimpse of what the standard looks like in Europe and America. Funny thing is, these foreigners are "not in shape". IRONMAN PE is only the start of their season!

**Who in your mind are South Africa's greatest ever amateur and pro triathletes? And who is the sports Greatest Of All Time (GOAT)?**



Raynard Tissink has paved the way, however, I like the youngsters – Murray and company. They are creating a whole buzz of their own, doing a great job of getting triathlon noticed. As for the GOAT, I must first say that I really love what Gomez and Frodeno have brought to the picture. In 2014 at 70.3 Canada World Champs, IRONMAN moved to another level, and the world of IRONMAN changed forever. Specialists moved onto the scene – efficiency, high cadence on the bike and speed on the run. Grinders were gone. But the Greatest Of All

Time has to be Bob Scott – I am in awe of this man. He represents everything I stand for, respect and admire. He is humble, educated, the most winningest IRONMAN of all time. Now 86 years old, and as Joe Friel said, "He will win almost every age category every time he races, when age adjusted." I have never met a more inspiring individual, he has done IRONMAN races for more than 45 years, won multiple age group titles, and I can call him my friend. 🍷

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