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WHEN IN THE ALPS,

WHY NOT CROSS THE ALPS!

In his first season with German team Topeak Ergon **Erik Kleinhans** experienced an extended European racing trip this South African winter. This is what he's been up to.

this year can for sure be marked as the biggest change in my cycling expedition. With what seems to be a totally new racing calendar playing the biggest part. A European calendar formed a more important part of my racing, and where I used to spend most of my time in Switzerland, Austria seemed to be my base this year.

Alpentour Trophy, World Champs, Zillertal Challenge, Dolomiti Superbike and the Transalps made up my five races with 16 racing days, 1130km and 43 400m of climbing in my seven weeks across the water. It sure was an exciting period of the year with some great memories and experiences.

We are really fortunate to have some great people in our Topeak Ergon team. Every staff member pulls his weight, more than what is expected, and even better is the fun and relaxed environment created. That is why I love the stage races, the family, camaraderie, the jokes and traveling through some stunning areas.

It was my first time at the Bike Transalps, it is a legend

and one of the oldest stage races in the world. The 2016 race is the 19th edition. The race starts in Imst, Austria, in the north of the Alps and finished 550km later (with 17 700m of climbing along the way) in Arco, Italy, in the Southern Alps.

"550KM LATER WITH 17 700M OF CLIMBING ALONG THE WAY."

You often hear that the race, like many others in the Alps, has too much tar and gravel riding and not enough trails, so I was happy to get the chance to go try it out for myself. I was even happier when I heard that this was the

most technical edition of the race and that they try making it a bit more fun.

But you cannot get away from the big, long, climbs! Some of them are well-known and cool to "tick-off" like the Gavia and the Umbrail Pass, but personally, it isn't that exciting climbing for an hour in the same rhythm, especially if it is followed by an unrewarding gravel road downhill. Those mountains are impressive though, up to 2 800m in altitude, and if you are not used to the sight of them, it is so awesome!

Everyday had its fun trail though, around Livigno even more so with some trails built specifically for bikes. We could certainly have done more stages around this lovely mountain village. But mostly when you hit a trail in the Transalps it was a very technical walking trail. The trails tested my skills to the limit and a trail-bike would have been ideal. But I smaaak these technical challenges!

Once again I raced with



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the fun American, Jeremiah Bishop, in support of Alban and Kristian. They were doing great and were leading the race, but on the third last day, Kristian crashed fracturing his collarbone and tearing some ligaments... game over. Another sad day just like at the Cape Epic where it looked very positive until Kristian's crash. It took the wind out of our sails as a team and JB and I finished slightly more relaxed in 13th position overall. Luckily Sally Bigham and guest rider Ben Thomas won the mixed category.

Coming back home after each of my European riding trips I'm always so happy

with what we have in SA. We have so many great races, not that the organisation of the Transalps is that bad, it is just that the events in SA are better! Also we have so many bike parks made just for biking, in Stellenbosch especially, we are so spoilt! But there is something to be said about their majestic mountains, the small towns, the cobbled village centres, and the gelati...

If you've never been in the Alps for a mountain biking trip, I can recommend the Bike Transalps. Go for the experience, take lots of photos and pray for some sunny weather! **fs**



Erik Kleinhans has joined the specialist marathon racing team of Topeak Ergon, but that doesn't mean you'll be hearing any less from the Lion King. Follow him on Twitter: [@erikkleinhans](https://twitter.com/erikkleinhans), or visit www.topeak-ergon-racing.com.

