

CHAPTER 18

DOUBLE DS IN THE DDR - 1967

First invite of the year came in. It must have been May time. East Germany. Three Grands Prix; Berlin; Leipzig; Dresden. I thought, *“Yeah, I’ll have a bit of that.”* The BCF (British Cycling Federation) sent me the invite, but it was via Jim Wallis because he was tied up with the East Germans. He phoned up and said, *“They’re inviting you over there Reggie. They like the way you rode on Good Friday.”* I thought to myself, *“Yeah, I bet they fucking did!”* Still hadn’t settled in my head that they’d given it to Geschke! To rub salt in the wound, they wanted me to go by train! Fucking train! I went, *“No, I aint doing that, not by train. I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’ll leave 48 hours before and I will go by car.”* So, anyway, the invitations were sent to me all in German because you needed all the paperwork to get through East Germany, into West Berlin and then out to East Berlin. So, I loaded up the bike, pushed off and came up through Belgium, across Holland, through Venlo, up through Germany to the border with East Germany and then crossed over at Checkpoint Charlie. Got a few stares from the guards, I must admit. Me in a 1958 black Beetle with a bike in the back; not your average tourist! I remember crossing the big square in front of Checkpoint Charlie, which I’d seen in films. The Yanks and the Brits were there and the guards at the checkpoint said to me, *“What are you doing up here in that, taking it home?”*

“No, I’m up here racing. Got a week of racing.”

The guards said, *“I hope you brought plenty of food, they got fuck all over there.”*

“I know the score Governor.” He was right, you used to go over there and get fucking meatballs every day with black bread. People think you’re joking, but it was the truth! I got to the East German post and there’s Eric and Fritz jumping all over the fucking place. English car, English plates. I had to pull the car over and they told me to get out. *“Raus!” “Out the car!”* Really nice, pleasant people they were, those fucking VoPos (Volks Police). The guard said in German, *“Du must hineingehen!” “You have to go inside!”* So, I get in the search room. I had my case filled with my smart street clothes and my racing gear, all clean and pressed, shoes polished. Well, I

couldn't fucking believe it. There was this big slab of white tiled concrete about 3 feet high, 6x6. They just turned the fucking case out, tipped all the contents out, all over this slab and then he started rooting through it.

I went, "*Oi, what they fuck do you think you're doing?*"

"*Attention!*" Anyway, as they're going through it, they found my vitamins. They were Revitalose Caffeine Houde; it's like a bit of a caffeine mix with Bs and B1, B6, B12 complex, vitamin Cs, but then they found some syringes, thin glass syringes.

They went, "*Oh! Was haben wir hier?*" "*What have we got here?*"

"*Vitamine.*"

"*Yeah, vitamine.*"

"*Look, do yourself a favour, put that fucking gear back in my case, I want to get off. There's my phone number; you have got to tell these people I'm here.*" The Federation already knew I'd arrived because a gentleman from the Federation came through the door with this lady. She was a liaison officer. I said, "*Tell Eric and Fritz here to put my fucking stuff back in my case.*"

The bloke said, "*Unfortunately Reggie, they have to do it. It's their job.*"

I went, "*Bastards!*" and I was going to start going on about the war and then I thought, "*No, I better not. Probably wind up getting locked up in Spandau.*" So, I put my gear back together, folded it all up.

He said, "*Reg', we're going to a garage now, leave your car and we'll take you to the hotel. You rest for the remainder of the day, and we'll travel to the stadium tomorrow. It's an evening meeting so you have got to rest a bit in the morning as well.*"

"*Okay, thank you very much indeed.*" He was an absolute gentleman, and she was a lovely lady. I couldn't take my eyes off of her blouse either. Fucking hell, she had the biggest pair of boobs I'd ever seen!

Anyway, we get to the hotel, I went up to my room and got cleaned up. They looked after my bike; they tucked it away with two or three pairs of wheels and everything else in a reception area somewhere. It was a massive hotel, but it seemed I was the only fucker staying there! When I checked in, the lady said, "*I will stay and have dinner with you; we'll have a chat.*" She had to go and do something else first and said, "*I'll be back.*"

"*Yeah, no problem.*" Later on, I came down for dinner and she was already there, this lady. She was going to eat with me; I guaranteed it would be fucking meatballs and black bread, and a bit of cored apple with some brown sugar on it for sweet! I'd been there before, so I knew what was coming. Anyway, while I'm sat there talking to her, I noticed that the buttons on the blouse that she was wearing underneath her uniform were struggling to keep it all in. She didn't have the Volks Police beige clothes on, but it still looked like uniform with the jacket, not like Colonel Klebb in James Bond, but she looked like she was somebody important. I remember thinking to myself, "*If that button comes off that blouse, it won't just take your eye out, it will blow the fucking windows out the hotel!*" Not that I was complaining, it was a lovely view! Anyway, we sat down and while we were eating, she said, "*You rode very well in*

London Reg' with our man Geschke; it was very close between you and him."

"Yeah, it was really close ma'am. They gave it to Jürgen Geschke, but it doesn't matter, he's a good sprinter, he's world class." He was a world class sprinter, so it really didn't matter, I'd gotten over it by then and it wasn't a fault to lose to a world class sprinter. Then this lovely lady said, "What we would like Reg', is if you would say some nice things about our Federation, our sport and our country for the DDR and in return, we think we could make you one of the best road riders in Europe? We will take you with the national team down to the Black Sea to our training camp and you would train, eat and sleep like all of our road riders in the DDR." If I was to go and train with the DDR "Deutsche Demokratische Republik" riders, for their country, it would have given them good publicity. It definitely wouldn't be about defecting. Nobody in their right fucking mind would even think about leaving their country for East Germany, it was that shit! Although I agreed, I thought, "Here we fucking go again. Someone else now wants me to be a fucking road rider. I've only just started sprinting at world level and I'm already being asked to be a road rider!" Well, you couldn't fucking make it up, could you? Anyway, the dinner arrived so we started eating and chatting about other stuff, not politics; they were not allowed to talk about politics, so I just carried on talking and waiting to find out what she actually wanted from me.

As we sat at the table, finishing off our meal and chatting, I asked her exactly what she did for a living and she said she was a liaison officer, but dealt with television, sport and that she was linked to the national cycling, their equivalent of the Federation. She was very intelligent, and I did eventually ask for her name, which was Amalia. She thoroughly enjoyed her work, but when I asked what it was actually like in East Germany, she said, *"It's very difficult for me to say."* As I said, they didn't talk about politics, but I'd learnt enough over the years. You couldn't help but feel a bit sorry for them because they had nothing to do but sport and they obviously excelled at that for various reasons I've mentioned before. I would have thought she had quite a high up position inside the DDR sports section. Time was getting on, so I said, *"Amalia, I've been travelling since I was in a motel on the West German border."*

"Oh yes! Sorry!"

"I'm going to go to bed and get rested up for tomorrow for when we start racing."

"No problem at all. You won't be able to get any drinks in your room though." There wasn't any room service, but even if there was, they didn't have anything to give you anyway; there were no such things as minibars in East Germany. She said, "I've got some apple juice upstairs in my room. I'll let you have some of that in case you get dry in the night."

"Oh, thank you, that's very kind of you!"

There was a lift in the hotel and as we got into the lift, she said, *"I can say now, good luck for tomorrow."*

"Thanks very much!"

I got out of the lift at my floor and she said, *"Oh, I'm on the same floor as you!"*

"There's not many guests here are there?"

"No, it's not a thriving industry, hotels, in East Germany! I'll get your apple juice."

I opened my door and went into my room and she went into her room. I didn't think any more of it, I just sat down and waited for her to come and give me a bottle of apple juice. As I sat down, there was a knock on the door; I was quite surprised when I opened it! She was standing there with the apple juice, together with two glasses and what looked like a bottle of spirit! She said, *"I know you don't drink, but I thought I might have a night cap. Do you mind if I join you just for the last few minutes?"*

"No, not at all, I don't mind." My mind was exploding a little bit from expectation as my thoughts rushed back to my time with the two ladies who *"looked after"* me when I used to deliver groceries. This was a whole different ballgame, this was! I remember just sitting on the blanket box at the bottom of the bed. I sat on that, and she poured me a drink of the apple juice. Then she poured herself one, adding the spirit to it and held her glass up. She said, *"How do you say this in England?"*

"You mean cheers?"

"Yes, cheers! Good luck for tomorrow!"

The drink wasn't all that bad if I can remember rightly, although I was not really paying much attention to the drink; I couldn't get my head around all that was going on and when she came and sat on the single seat by the dressing table, I must have gone about thirty shades of red! I was stumbling over my words because she was just stunning and she said, *"Would you mind holding my drink for a minute?"* I didn't know what she was going to do. Anyway, she started undressing! I thought, *"I can't believe this"* but she did, she undid her blouse to reveal this unbelievable figure. She had a very nice figure, huge boobs and was a typical German with the blonde hair and blue eyes. As she stripped down, well, I didn't know where to put my face, I didn't know whether to look away, or what to do really and didn't know what she was expecting. She just said, *"What do you think of this East German lady?"*

"You are very beautiful Amalia, very beautiful!" With that, she took the glass out of my hand, pulled me to my feet. She had taken off her high heels so was now at the same height as me and then she started kissing me. That was it! Oh mate. I can't begin to tell you what it was like. I'm supposed to be there prepping for the National Championships back in England and the World Championships in Amsterdam and here I am getting seduced by this very smart, very attractive lady! I thought, *"Oh bollocks, I'm just going to go with the flow"* and my word, did it flow. Naked in no time, into bed and that was it, but because of her huge boobs, it was like having three people in bed with you; she was a big lady up top! The rest, as they say, is history. Some historical moment in my life that was, but I couldn't wait to get some rest! She must have clocked on, so she said, *"I must go to my own room now Reg' and I will see you tomorrow."*

I remember joking, *"Would you like me to see you home?"* as it was only across the passageway, which was about 10 feet wide. She smiled at me and went, *"No, I think I can manage"* and with that, she gathered her clothes and got dressed as

much as she needed to, to get across the passageway. I waited for her door to shut until I locked my door and I just slumped on the bed happily exhausted. I couldn't get my head round what had just happened; I definitely did not expect that and certainly not in a place like East Germany, but what was I to do; I couldn't deprive the lady of her nightcap, could I?

I woke up in the morning, went down to have something to eat. There were eggs and sliced German meat "*Reisch*" with the black bread and no butter obviously. I put as much in my gob as I could get in to fill up, not knowing exactly what time I would be eating again. Amalia came in and said, "*Morning Reggie, are you okay?*"

"Yeah fine thank you love."

"How did you sleep?"

"Like a log!"

"Yes, I did as well. I'll make all of the arrangements for you today. You'll be picked up to be taken to the track at around five, the meeting starts at seven. I've spoken to the man you met yesterday from the Federation. You'll have a mechanic who will assemble everything for you. Tell him all what you need and what you want done. There is also going to be a masseur there."

"Unbelievable! Thank you very much. I'd like to get there earlier to have a good warm-up as I haven't ridden my bike for a couple of days." The concrete track wasn't very far from where we were staying and as it was quite an important meeting, it was going to be broadcast live on East German television. The race was The Grand Prix, Berlin. I had a good warm-up and I felt good after, and even though it was quite a mild evening, I kept my tracksuit on to keep the blood nice and warm. After my warm-up, I made my way to the centre of the track to have a sit down and this man came over and said, "*Guten abend*" "*Good evening.*" He continued in broken English. "*I am your masseur.*" My bike had already been taken and was hanging on a rail behind me and I told the mechanic I would ride a 90-inch gear, so I had 47-14 like I had for the warm-up which felt good, and I said to the mechanic, "*Yeah, leave that on, that's fine.*"

I got to the final of the sprint, I can't remember if I won it or came second. I know I won a couple of the big sprints behind the Iron Curtain, but I'm not sure if it was this meeting. The last race was 20 kilometres where I met an absolute legend over there by the name of Klaus Ampler. All of the older bike riders will probably remember the name.

Anyway, gun goes for the start of the 20-kilometre race. We started under floodlights. It must have looked pretty good at night. I didn't really sit on Ampler, I just sort of hovered around, about three or four feet back from him and then sure enough at the given time, he just attacked. Typical roadman, he was a long way out. I was higher up the banking than any of the lads in the race in the group so, I attacked over the top, ran down the banking quick until I was within 100 metres of Ampler, but because I rode up to him too quickly, I had to swing out. Went back up the banking; Ampler looked up at me and just kept going. Then, when I was ready, I dropped in behind him, but we had a good gap between us and the bunch, which I noticed as I

swung up. I still got stuck in with him and we shared the lead the whole time, up the banking, down the banking, in behind his wheel where I noticed his calves! He had massive calves! It looked like he had a 52-chain ring on there, so the rotation in his feet wasn't as quick as mine. Even so, he was so fucking powerful! After being out there for 10 kilometres, with about 10 laps to go, I came off the front again and he said, "*Engländer, zweiter platz!*" "*Englishman, second place!*"

"You can fuck off!"

"Nein, nein, nein!" It was like that as we were relaying and we kept going, I got stuck in and was feeling good, I was strong, you know, the rest that I'd had in the two days travelling up must have done me good and I had no ill effect from my nightcap the night before! Strange as it may seem, I felt good, felt strong and sure enough, a couple of laps later, he said "*Engländer zweiter platz!*" "*Englishman second place!*"

"I told you no, so fuck off!" and that was it then, it was too late for him to do anything. He wasn't going to lose me now. I mean, if a roadman tries to jump away from a sprinter, they don't have the acceleration of a track sprinter even as good as he was and fuck me, was he strong! He'd won the Peace race; he'd won everything possible that you could win on the road in East Germany... and around the world I might add! Anyway, coming through the bell, we were absolutely steaming. I had done the half lap up to the bell at the end of the straight; Ampler hadn't even tried to manipulate the positioning. We had one more lap to go at the bell and I knew he wouldn't be able to accelerate away even though he was fucking flying, the fella, he was steady at 30mph and I'm not going to lie, it was difficult to relay with him over 20 kilometres! Good job I had some road miles in my legs otherwise it would have been impossible! Anyway, he just looked back at me and said, "*Zweiter platz danke!*" "*Second place, thank you!*"

"Fuck off!" As I swung up at the end of the banking and he came through, I dropped down behind him and he held up two fingers behind his back, meaning second place. I thought, "*Yeah, I fucking will, won't I, especially after I got turned over on Good Friday by an East German!*" As I came round, near the 200-metre mark, I opened up and of course, when you are a sprinter against a roadman, they just haven't got the acceleration, so I ended up putting five to 10 lengths between us and across the line I went! I was feeling ecstatic, like it was payback time for the Good Friday debacle! So, it was now Reggie 1 - 1 East Germany! Ampler came up on the inside and I thought, "*Here we go, this will be good!*", but he just patted me on the back and said, "*Danke!*" "*Thank you!*" I thought, "*No, Thank you!*" But that was it really, it felt like it didn't mean anything to anyone, all the while I was doing cartwheels inside! It was all live on the television, but they probably would have cut me beating Ampler out and started reporting news about the building of a new fucking wall or something, anything but seeing an East German get beat in their homeland! I came off the track and the organisers gave me a big bunch of flowers; it was a ring of plant leaves, bit like a garland and it said East Berlin or Berlin 1967 on it. I then had to ride round the track and while I was doing the lap of honour, they took photographs for the

East German newspaper the following morning. I don't even remember if I saw it in the paper!

Anyway, back onto the bus after the race to return to our hotel in Berlin and Amalia came over and said, *"Congratulations, well done!"*

"Thank you very much!"

"You will be picked up in the morning from the hotel and we're going to Leipzig."

I think that was another night meeting. I'm pretty sure it was because factory workers used to come and fill the place up after a day's graft, not that they made anything there, but whatever they fucking did for a living, I don't know.

I got up the next morning and had eggs again, but they also had sausages that day! Nothing like the lovely thick Cumberland or Irish pork sausages that we have in the UK, but I still scoffed everything, including the shit bread they kept giving me! I also got given an apple, which I took with me so I wouldn't get hungry and then I was off to Leipzig, to the hotel. I was taken on a bit of a long journey to Leipzig as they liked to keep their opponents tired and uncomfortable. Anyway, got to the hotel, booked in and the mechanic had already unpacked my bike, stripped it and put the rubber tyre covers on the spare wheels. He must have been with the East German riders as well because he was working on whoever's bike needed adjusting.

I can't remember what we had to eat; it wouldn't have been anything fucking exciting I can assure you of that! After dinner, it was off to bed. After the long journey, I was shattered and I went right off as soon as I put my head on the pillow! Up and about in the morning, another nice day. Rested all day. I did ask for a set of rollers, but they weren't forthcoming. I don't know why, but it didn't matter anyway, I wasn't bothered; I would just get to the track and warm-up, which I did, and I was going really well in Leipzig. I'm not sure whether I won that Grand Prix. I wish I could remember, but I haven't got any pictures or anything now so I can't really comment on that, but I was riding really well in East Germany and I was very pleased with my form. Amalia was there and after the meeting, she said, *"Congratulations! Well done again Reggie, you're going very well! Very popular!"* and I thought, *"Very popular? You must be having a laugh!"* When I was coming off the track in Berlin, this fucking animal in a black leather coat and a bald head gobbled all over me! I couldn't fucking believe it! I'm not a fighter, but I did call him a few choice words, although I won't tell you what I said! Two security guards were there by the tribune where you go through to the dressing room; he must have been part of the Stasi as anyone else would have been arrested, but the guards didn't say a fucking word and the bloke just disappeared into the crowd! That was the only bad experience I'd had while I was on my own. I was getting used to being on my own, be it work or bikes. Over the years, I've learnt that you've got to be as strong as you can and be your own person. Be yourself, which I always tried to do.

That evening, I slept well again. Didn't have to leave early the next morning, so I just slept in and then, sure enough, as Amalia had said, the coach picked us up and we were off to Dresden, which was very successful for me. I won the sprint beating

Geschke. I was going well in the 20-kilometre race again, but I can't remember whether I won that race! The meeting in Dresden was super racing, so they had youngsters racing there as well. Even though they were only 16, 17 years old, they were built like proverbial brick shithouses! It looked like they were being well looked after! I stayed the night in a hotel in Dresden and Amalia came to see me, but she said, "I've come to say goodbye."

"I'm going to miss you. You've been very kind to me, and I thank you very much."

"Thank you for your kind words that you said about the Federation and the riders and the DDR."

"Yeah, I can only speak as I find, and your kindness overtook any problems I had."

"Auf wiedersehen. Vielleicht treffen wir uns eines Tages wieder." "Goodbye. Maybe we'll meet again one day!"

"I hope so!" It was a bit sad really and I felt a bit sorry for her. Then she just disappeared and whatever she had to do, I'm not sure whether she succeeded or not as I never heard from her again, but I never said anything detrimental in the interviews. I just kept it short and sweet and said, *"Thank you very much for the invite, great racing, love the people."* What else can you say when your planted in the shithouse state they had?

In the coach the following day, I was off to Berlin to pick up my car up and make my way home. Well, would you believe it, there was fucking Fritz and Eric on the fucking gate again! I'm not sure if they were the same ones, but they all look the same, they've all got these olive-green uniforms on. The man from the Federation was also there. He followed the coach round until the coach dropped me off by my car and he said, *"Dankeschön." "Thank you very much. Thank you for coming Reggie. You impressed the sports fans of the DDR!"*

"Thank you very much! It's been a pleasure."

"Would you come again?"

"Of course I will. Not a problem. Thank you for all of your help, the mechanic, the masseur and the liaison officer, Amalia."

"She spoke very highly of you Reggie. She said what an absolute credit you are to your country." Well, I nearly fell over. Nobody says that do they? I thought about her words as I loaded up the car, got my audit-like paperwork, which allowed me to take home what I'd won. I'd won Dresden china and some crystal, so I had to be careful with loading it into my car. I was hoping Fritz and Eric didn't start throwing their fucking weight around again and smash all of my prizes! They didn't this time, they were well-behaved, so I got back into the car, drove up to the barrier for them to let me out, up the barrier went (sigh of relief) and I drove up to the USA/British Control Zone. It was a Brit on there this time and he said, *"Alright mate, paperwork? Quick, only want to see your passport."*

"Yeah, do you know where I'm going now mate?"

"No, I don't, where are you off to?"

"Straight into that fucking restaurant" as I pointed to the same restaurant that

me and the three boys had been to in the winter of 1965-1966. It was like a beacon! I parked the car and went in and had the biggest fuck off steak with salad and chips! It was so nice to eat something with taste, all washed down with fresh orange juice. I'm not into sweets so I skipped dessert, and then I was back into my car on my way to cross Berlin into East Germany. As soon as I got there, I had to get all of my paperwork out of the boot again, together with my prize list as you're not allowed to smuggle anything out of the country, as if you'd fucking want to smuggle anything out of there anyway, but you have to comply with the rules and regulations! They waved me through. Next stop, West German border. Got through there piece of cake! I got loads of expenses from East Germany, but they weren't worth two bob! The East German Mark was worth absolute zilch! I had my own money with me and some Deutsche Marks, so I looked for a motel to stay for the night. Had a good night's kip followed by a decent breakfast and then I was off to the French coast to get back home to Blighty; I was looking forward to it!