

1948

Model	Rondine Road
Country of manufacture	Italy
Condition	Original
Frame no.	M115
Frame size	H58cm x L57cm
Colour	Silver blue
Lugs	Olmo
Fork ends	Campagnolo
Features	Campagnolo Corsa
Wheels	Hubs: Campagnolo Rims: Nisi Spokes: front 36, rear 36
Cranks	Olmo
Chain wheel	Olmo 48T
Pedals	Olmo
Gears	Campagnolo Corsa 4-speed
Brakes	Olmo
Head stem	Olmo
Bars	Olmo
Saddle	Brooks B17

Olmo

Owner **Roger Watts**

Giuseppe **Olmo** – Gold Medal Olympian, multiple Giro d'Italia winner, Italian National Champion, World Hour record-breaker in 1935 – began production of bicycles in 1939 with his three brothers. The company quickly became a success and they diversified into many different products, but never gave up bicycle production.

The 1948 Rondine pictured here, was found in Italy, reputedly in the long-term ownership of an **Olmo** team mechanic. Mechanically in excellent condition and wearing the beautiful patina that only age can bring, the frame is finely finished and extremely light for its day, and fitted with all the correct **Olmo** branded parts – a perfect survivor.

It features Campagnolo's first gear system – the curious Corsa. Here, the rear wheel axle has gear teeth cut in it that mesh with corresponding teeth on the fork end. This allows the wheel, when unlocked, to move to and fro, without losing its alignment. A second lever to the unlocker on the right-hand seat stay is used while peddling backwards to deflect the chain onto the desired sprocket. The first lever is then used to relock the rear axle. The basic flaw in the design is obvious – chain tension is 'hit and miss', generally resulting in it being excessively tight, with a resulting loss of peddling efficiency. As champion Gino Bartali said ironically after first testing the arrangement, 'it was nearly as good as a one-gear system and not a lot heavier'.



The system is manageable, but the chain does tend to over-tighten more often than not. Within two years Campagnolo had introduced the refined Paris–Roubaix model, which overcame the problem. A later variation allowed the change to be accomplished with forward peddling as well.

What is amazing is that Campagnolo was able to sell the ponderous Corsa and its refinements to the likes of Bianchi, Legnano and Olmo, and be ridden by the great Fausto Coppi and Bartali, when faster, problem-free arrangements from Vittoria, Osgear, Huret and others had been in common use in Italy since the early 1930s, to say nothing of the excellent Cyclo that was proven and had been in use in England and Australia even longer. Such are the puzzles of history!

This particular machine, affectionately known as ‘Old Man Olmo’ is another of those remarkable time warp survivors. How did they ride them, we might ask? Incredibly, this bike is light and responsive with outstanding directional stability, so very reassuring on those high-speed descents on mountain roads, while being infinitely repairable and durable, unlike the carbon of today.







