

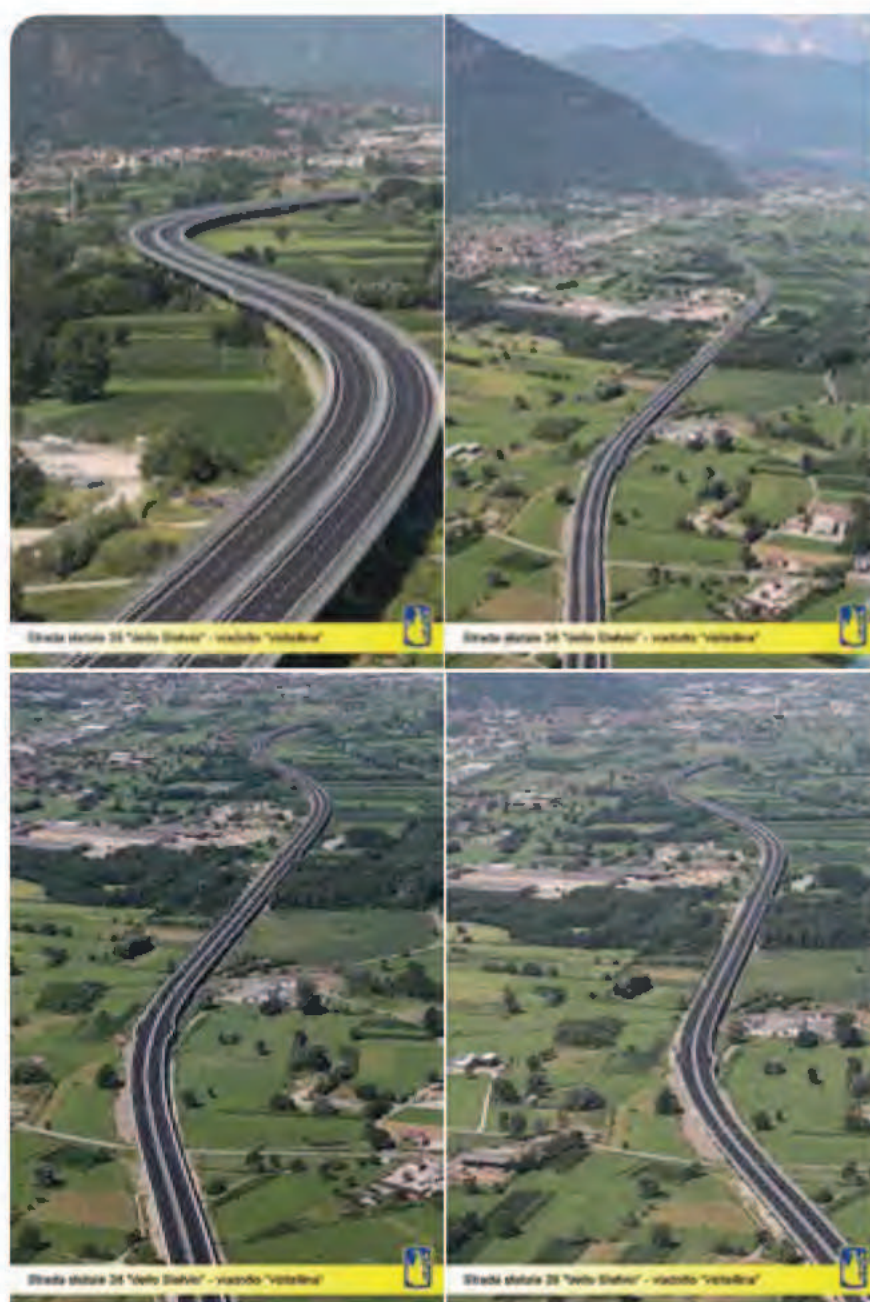
The beauties of the Stelvio Pass

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For good reasons, the Stelvio Pass could be defined as the most northern state road in the Italian territory that proceeds horizontally through 2 rich regions full of traditions, culture, landscapes and nature, i.e. Lombardia and Trentino Alto Adige. The Lombardian side, from Piantedo to the Stelvio Pass is managed by Anas (the Italian national roads agency); the other, from Stelvio to Bolzano, by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano.



SS 38 "dello Stelvio" – Valtellina viaduct

We are talking about state road 38 (Strada Statale SS 38) "Stelvio", 224 km long, that connects Valtellina with Val Venosta west to east, a marvelous territory that seems to connect mountains and sky, making it all in one, a fragment of paradise.

The heart, soul and shape of this road are dictated by the pass that gives it its name, which makes it real, unique and revolutionary in its dualistic conception. Not only for the current borders between the various regions, but also since it is a true gate to the past. It goes back to the period when the boundaries were blurred and when that same land wanted freedom and independence, even at the cost of enormous bloodshed of Germans, Italians, Austrians. One of the most important Austrian writers, Sabine Gruber, describes in her book, edited by Marsilio, and entitled *"Stillbach o della nostalgia"*, a novel strongly weaved with history, where the concept of borders is expressed as an element of separation and contact both between nations, languages and the individuals: the landscape as she travels by train toward Chiusa and then Verona crossing the border lines, appears new and different, fascinating and with different colors with respect to what she is accustomed to: *"across the window, guard-rails without paint popped into view from the highway, like rusty red colored stock cars. Even the Anas' maintenance workers road houses were rusty red. The tracks. Tree barks. Soda cans thrown around. Bridge pillars. Poles. Bars."*

ROAD STORIES

In these territories, history made its roots much before the domination of ancient Rome, which can be seen without difficulty starting from the numerous archeological remains found in the area near the Swiss border, near the Pass of Umbrail, also known as Gioogo di Santa Maria. The pass, 2,501 metres above sea level – the highest road in all of Switzerland – in the western Alpi Retiche, links the Grigioni Canton with the high Valtellina. Then, there are politics, culture and most of all sport that are key points in these areas. Just to name a few, not only does tourism play a key role but also the world ski cup championships (Bormio as well as Merano, both tourism locations crossed by the SS38 is indeed an important stop of the so-called white circle) and the cycling Tour of Italy (*"Il Giro d'Italia"*).

The importance of Umbrail Pass and the Stelvio Pass has consolidated over time, beginning from the time of the Roman empire until the Middle Ages, then further developing due to strategic and military importance and leading to the presence of workers with the precise duty of maintaining the road clean and free from avalanches and landslides.

The construction of a real road crossing the Stelvio Pass is the result of the project of Engineer Carlo Donegani from Valtellina, concluded only in the 19th century and precisely in 1825. This work was strongly backed by the Austrian empire, which at that time was the owner of that territory. They wanted to link Lombardia with Tyrol, avoiding the crossing of Venetian or Swiss territory. The Stelvio Pass was the most critical peak, and Donegani resolved it constructing a road with 34 curves on the Valtellinian side in order to overcome the 1,530 metres of elevation change and 48 curves to overcome the 1,870 metres on the side of Alto Adige. The average slope, deliberately maintained low, to ensure that also stage coaches and horse-drawn carriages could pass (the change of animals, as well as refreshments, were possible at one of the eight workers'



A - SS38 – Bends in the Bolzano province, 1930s
B - SS38 – Improving bends in the Bolzano province
C - SS38 – Road section in the Bolzano province

houses along the way), is 9%, with a few up to 11%.

Furthermore, up until the First World War, the Stelvio was the neuralgic international crossing open all year around (during winter only sleds led by horses to guarantee transit and supplies). It is only when both sides become part of the Italian territory that winter closure is established.

Alpine ski is not limited to the world cup. Since the 1930s and mostly after the Second World War and during the following years of economic boom, the Stelvio became also known for its summer ski. CAI, the Italian Alpine Club, built the Rifugio Livrio (mountain hut), where were forged many talents that have brought decades of success to the Italian colors. It must be mentioned that one of the great champions of this sport is from Valtellina: Deborah Compagnoni, a native of Santa Caterina Valfurva.

Analyzing the road under a more administrative perspective, it should be underlined that from July 1st, 1998, this stretch of road as well as the other roads has been given by Anas for management in the Trentino-Alto Adige Region to local authorities, but kept its name of state road within the boundaries of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano.

In Lombardia the road begins in Piantedo and is a continuation of the state road SS36 *"del Lago di Como e dello Spluga"* (after the opening to traffic of a new section of state road 38, as of October 6th, 2014 the former stretch of the SS38 between km 0.90 -Piantedo- and km 8,150- Cosio Valtellino- has been transferred to the Province of Sondrio, losing the classification of state road and becoming provincial road with the name of *"Orobica Occidentale"*). In Bolzano where the road ends, it links with state road 12 *"dell'Abetone e del Brennero"*. It has numerous variants: Morbegno, Tirano, Sernio-Bormio, Santa Lucia, Merano-Bolzano.

In December 2016, the President of the Lombardia Region, Roberto Maroni and the President of Anas,



SS38 – Raised road section and Fuentes junction in construction phase

Gianni Vittorio Armani signed a memorandum of understanding for the promotion of tourism of the SS38 *"dello Stelvio"* in the National Park area. As declared by the President of Anas, among the first changes to be made is to leave open as much as possible the state road 38 up to the Stelvio Pass during the winter season. For this reason Anas is preparing a study, including a specific monitoring system which evaluates the snow activities and avalanche risk in order to program snow clearance and emergency response.

The beginning of the road crosses, parallel to the Adda, the Valtellina area, touching Morbegno and passing over Sondrio (the crossing is avoided thanks to a freeway consisting of a fast moving variant with a single lane reserved for motorized vehicles in excess of 125 cm³ cylinders) and reaching Tirano. Throughout this stretch of flat area several municipalities are crossed or near borders and the speed limit is usually 70 km/h (reduced to 50 km/h in urban areas). Just beyond Tirano, between Sernio and Bormio, the original route, running through the valley and which was damaged by a flood in 1987, was closed. The new State road, which includes several tunnels, is a fast flow interurban freeway, without at grade-intersections and reserved for motorized vehicles exceeding

125 cm³. This variant ends before Bormio and the road connects to the ex SS300 *"Gavia Pass"* (2,652 m), seven times Cima Coppi. The route of the Giro d'Italia has included the Stelvio Pass (2,757 m) 11 times.

Beyond this important tourist location, the road runs up the valley of Braulio, perhaps mostly known for its famous and bitter digestive liquor, entering South Tyrol and crossing through the already mentioned Stelvio Pass and descending in Val Venosta through Trafoi, Prato allo Stelvio, Lasa, Silandro and Merano. From here until Bolzano there is a parallel expressway named *MeBo* that runs along the SS38. Hence, this road brings to drivers many emotions which unroll as in a film. In fact, it describes a film made up of a story, nature and hard work, in other words a story to hear and remember.#

ROUTES/ROADS

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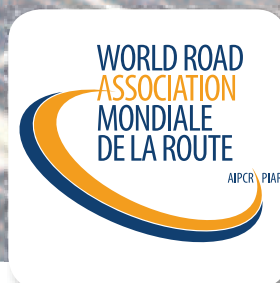


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