



KAYAK SESSION #42

the international whitewater magazine • kayaksession.com



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East Meets West

Springtime Throwdown

€ 9.99 / US \$ 9.99
CAN \$ 9.99 / £ 6.00
(recommended retail price)

SUMMER 2012

Display until August 28th 2012

INTERVIEW Aniol Serrasolses **MISSION** Acombamba Canyon, PERU

PROFILE Clay Wright **DESTINATION** Torino, ITALY

TREND Crossover Self-support in the Grand Canyon, USA





Enrico Lazaroto cruising in downtown Torino.

RIVERS AROUND TORINO, ITALY

FIVE UNDERRATED ALPINE VALLEYS



Clear, cold mountain water gushes over pale grey granite while views of the Italian Alps float above. Narrow gorges, steep slides, and continuous boulder gardens wind through thickly forested national park land and small farms and hamlets. This is Torino, and while often overshadowed by other Italian destinations such as Sesia and Ticino, it has a magic all its own. Renowned paddler Francesco "El Maestro" Salvato leads us on a tour of the creeks and beautiful canyons of his backyard in northern Italy.

Torino gained worldwide notoriety during the 2006 Olympic Games, but it is still relatively unknown as a whitewater destination. Paddlers new to the area will soon realize, however, that many of the rapids look vaguely familiar. Early iconic whitewater films such as Arnd Schaeftlein's *Mothership Connection* and Teva Tour series and Olaf Obsommer's first creations featured rapids from the Torino region, and slowly more and more European paddlers are recognizing what the area has to offer.

Capital of the Piemonte region in the northwest corner of Italy, Torino is one of the biggest cities in Italy. Sitting at the northern edge of the Po Plain, the richest and most productive area of Italy, it is ringed by the mountains to the east, north and west. More surrounded by peaks than any other city in Europe, it has the feel of a mountain town despite its industry and development. Beautiful women in high fashion

walk through open piazzas, locals and tourists alike enjoy delicious Italian cuisine at sidewalk cafes, and fancy cars and vespas zoom past art galleries, opera houses and ancient churches. Historically important as the very first capital of a unified Italy, Torino is now undoubtedly one of the cultural centers of the country.

Just an hour from the bustling city, when spring arrives and the snow melts, small riverbeds at the foot of the mountains turn into paddlers' delights. The province boasts several hundred kilometers of rivers in a small geographic area, giving it one of the highest concentrations of runnable whitewater in all of Europe. Most of the sections are found within four main areas: Val Pellice, Val Chisone, Valli di Lanzo, and Valli del Canavese.

Words: Francesco Salvato and Raphael Thiebaut - Photography: Raphael Thiebaut.



View from above the start of the class 4 section of the Germanesca.



Arndt Schaefflein boofing in one of the last rapids of the Germanesca di Massello.

VAL CHISONE - Rivers: Chisone and Germanesca

Far more industrialized than its neighboring valleys, dams, roads, and other signs of development become apparent while driving up the Val Chisone. The water in the Chisone River carries just a hint of milky white, enough to remind paddlers that some of the purest talc in Europe is mined here. Despite the impacts of industry, lush vegetation and forest still line the banks of the river and as you paddle through the run's several gorges, everything but the river drops away.

- Joining the Chisone part way up the valley is the Germanesca, a unique creek with many high quality rapids and whitewater for a variety of skill levels. Depending on the flow, and group motivation, paddlers can go higher and higher looking for the more committing and technical sections. Around the Rabbioso Bridge, the Germanesca divides into the Germanesca di Prali and the Germanesca di Massello. The di Prali is steep and continuous, but the di Massello is far superior, offering a wide variety of beautiful rapids and ending in a narrow, intense canyon. It is smart to walk up from the take out and scout the last canyon before putting on, as there is a nasty hole in it and, if the water is too high, scouting and portaging may be impossible once on the river. The drive to top of the run will not only earn paddlers numerous good rapids, but several nice camp spots as well.

Below the Rabbioso Bridge, the action continues for two more kilometers with some serious class 5 before the river turns into pleasant, class 4 eddy hopping. The last gorge above the town of Perrero is host to one portage and several other technical rapids.

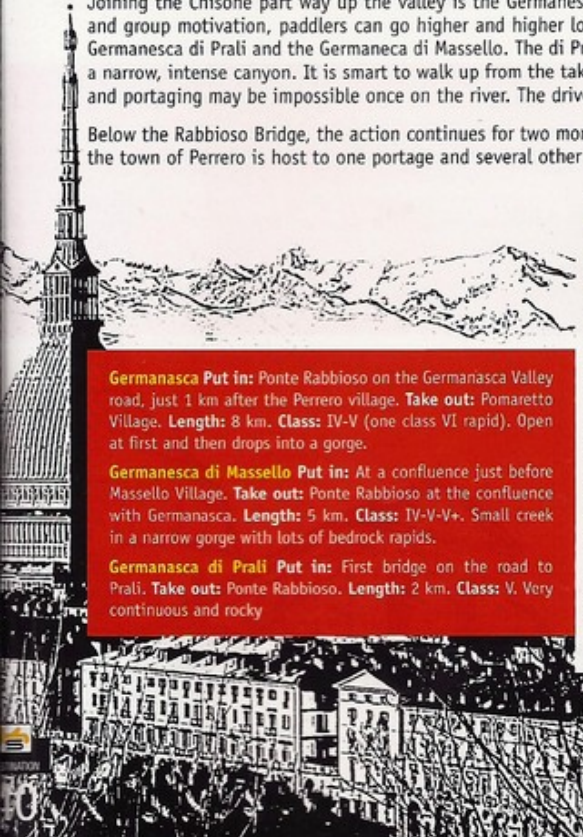
Germanesca Put in: Ponte Rabbioso on the Germanesca Valley road, just 1 km after the Perrero village. **Take out:** Pomaretto Village. **Length:** 8 km. **Class:** IV-V (one class VI rapid). Open at first and then drops into a gorge.

Germanesca di Massello Put in: At a confluence just before Massello Village. **Take out:** Ponte Rabbioso at the confluence with Germanesca. **Length:** 5 km. **Class:** IV-V-V+. Small creek in a narrow gorge with lots of bedrock rapids.

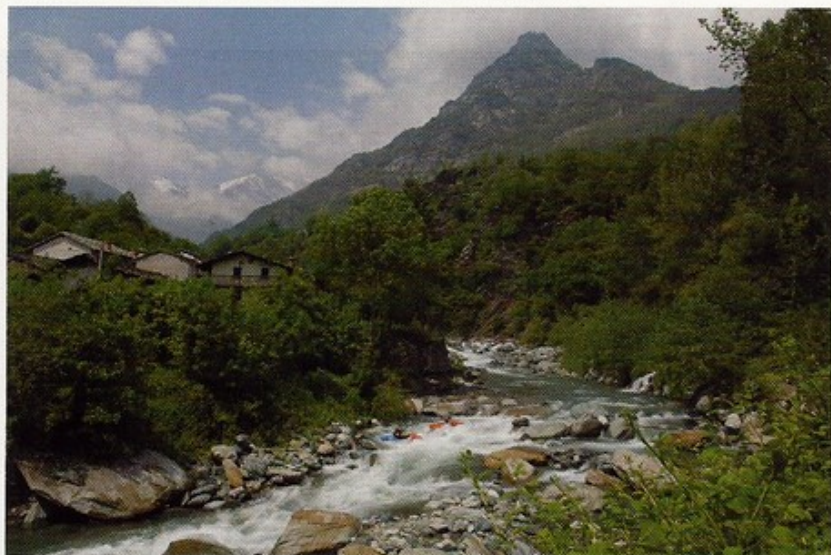
Germanesca di Prali Put in: First bridge on the road to Prali. **Take out:** Ponte Rabbioso. **Length:** 2 km. **Class:** V. Very continuous and rocky



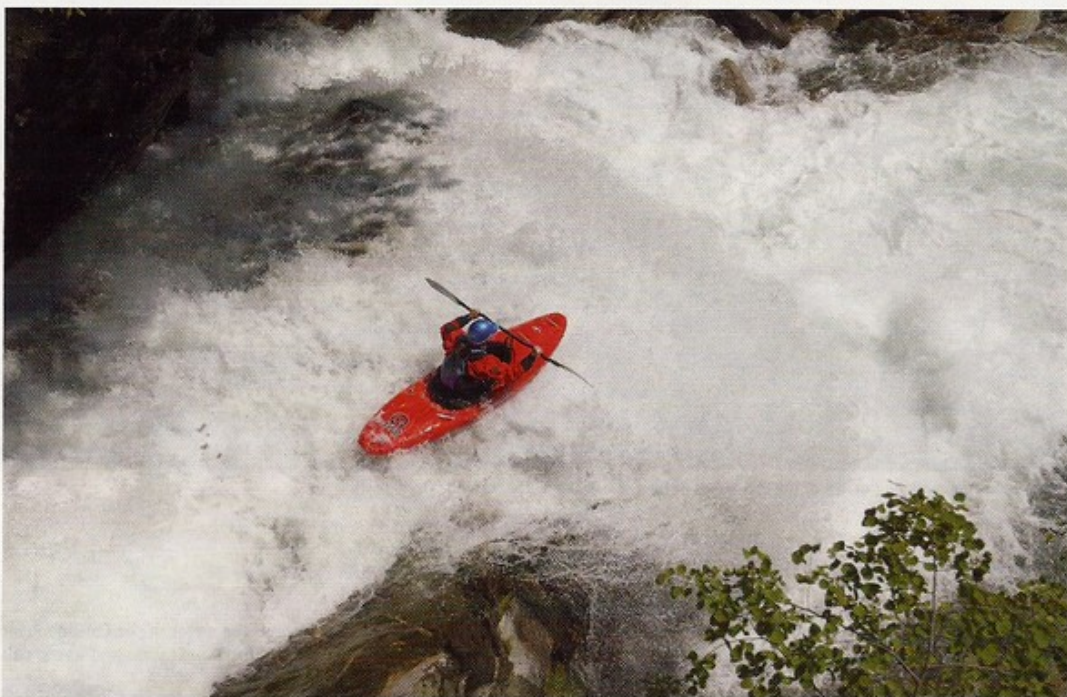
A group of paddlers cruising down the Chisone Gorge.



Beautiful view of the mountains at the end of the first section of the Pellice.



Torino is sometimes called "The Capital of the Alps."



Mariann Saether taking off on the lip of Salto Gurnie, Angrogna River.



Francesco Salvato entering the first canyon of the Pellice.

VAL PELLICE - Rivers: Pellice and Angrogna

An hour west of the city, old farmhouses and small fields are scattered throughout the picturesque Pellice Valley. As winter gives way to spring, lush green trees, snowy peaks, and dark boulders create a palette of colors in nature's rich hues. At the heart of the Cozie's Alps, this is one of the most remote and wild valleys in the area. Val Pellice has less precipitation than the others making it harder to catch good water levels, but given the quality of both whitewater and scenery, it is well worth the effort to try.

The Pellice River offers 20 kilometers of primarily boulder garden-style rapids. With good water levels, the main section turns into one long, nonstop class 4 rapid, with few places to catch your breath. The upper section begins in an intimidating gorge where several solid rapids are mixed in with fairly continuous class 5. The road is never too far away, but even when the river opens up it can still be challenging to exit in case of emergency. In the lower section the gradient mellows, though the unremitting nature of the run persists.

The Pellice has three main tributaries, of which the Angrogna is unquestionably the queen. This gem of a run is most well known for her first waterfall, the Salto Gurnie, a solid drop with a challenging entrance. Salto Gurnie alone would justify a trip to the Angrogna, but the rest of the run also has much to offer, with some technical rapids and a number of pure bedrock slides. A short, roadside run, paddlers can scout nearly everything on the drive up and finish the run with ample time to paddle a section of the Pellice in the same day.



PELLICE - Upper Pellice: Put in: The hydropower station 2 km upstream of Bobbio Pellice. Take out: Road bridge in Bobbio Pellice. Length: 1.5 km - Class: IV-V (one class VI+ rapid). Very technical short run but with one big surprise.

Lower Pellice Put in: Bridge just outside of Villar Pellice. Take out: Bibiana Bridge. Length: 12 km. Class: III. Nice run, with high water continuous class III, very fast; with low water better to start in Torre Pellice

Angrogna Put in: Barfe bridge. Take out: At the confluence with the Pellice River. Length: 8 km. Class: IV-V (one class VI rapid). Small creek in a forested surroundings; needs rain for the right water level.

VAL DE LANZO - Stura di Alla

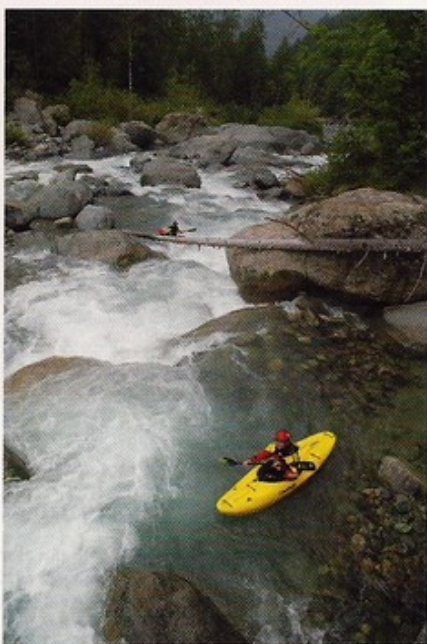
From Chisone, the next stop on the whitewater tour is Valli di Lanzo, due north of Torino. Territory of the stura, derived from the Celtic word meaning "to fall", this little piece of paradise hosts more than 50 kilometers of beautiful rivers: the Stura di Valgrande, the Stura di Viù, the Stura di Lanzo, and, most well known, the Stura di Alla. Driving up the Valli di Lanzo, one leaves behind the industrialized landscapes of the capital city. Development gives way to farmland, and soon the imposing peak of Gran Paradiso National Park appears above the trees.

Gran Paradiso is the oldest national park in Europe, established in 1856. Prior to that time the land had been a hunting park for the Italian king Victor Emmanuel II; but the forward-thinking monarch turned it into a protected area to save the bouquetin, a mountain goat that had all but disappeared from the Alps except in that area. Nowadays, visitors to the park can see these beautiful, wild creatures even from the road.

Above the tree line in the national park, the Stura di Alla begins with an impressive drop called Mondrone, first run in the 80s by a local Torinese paddler, Pietro Berga. Still a stout drop by today's standards, Mondrone hasn't seen many descents, but it's easy to put in just below it to start the run. The initial section, once high quality, has been severely damaged both by a major flood and then by the human efforts at restoration. It is now a succession of technical boulder garden rapids and artificial dams in a pretty open valley. Farther downstream, however, the river begins to pick up gradient, drops back into wilderness, and becomes one of the hardest sections in all of Italy. Definitely for experienced paddlers only, nearly all the rapids are runnable if taken one at a time and portages are possible since it is not a narrow gorge. A number of incredible slides await those willing to take on the run, including California Drop, a long slide with a monster rooster tail at the end.

Photographer Raph Thiebaut in the middle of Mondrone drop on the Stura di Alla..

A group of paddlers scouting Mondrone drop from the footbridge.



Steph Pion on the final section of the Stura di Alla.



Shuttle please!

STURA DI ALLA

Mondrone Run: Put in: Mondrone trail to the gorgia. Take out: Alla di stura. Class: V (one class VI rapid). Length: 4 km

California Run: Put in: Alla di Stura. Take out: Road to the fish farm 5 km below Alla di Stura. Length: 4 km. Class: V-VI. One of the most intense runs in Italy: mix of bedrock and boulder garden.



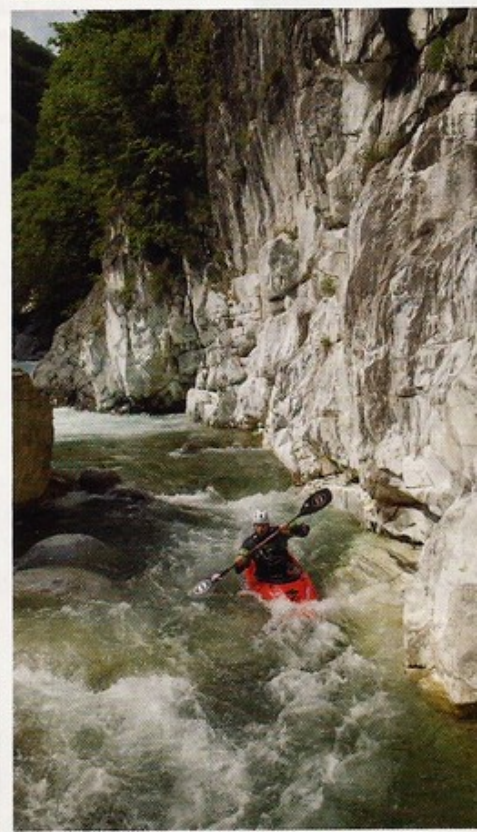
Upper Chiusella: Put in: Fondo, Val Chiusella. Take out: First road bridge down stream from Fondo. Length: 1 Km. Class: V-VI. Very beautiful; one of the best runs in the Southern Alps; mainly bed rock.

Chiusella: Put in: Road bridge 1 km below Fondo. Take out: Trausella bridge. Length: 6 km. Class: IV-V. Bedrock and boulder gardens; very technical.

Soana: Put in: Villanuova. Take out: Ponte Canavese first little road on the right when driving up out of ponte canavese. Follow the dirt road to a power station. Length: 10 km. Class: IV-V. Mix of bedrock and boulder garden in a deep gorge



Solid landing on the main drop of the Upper Chiusella.



Filipo Brunetti making his way down the Soana.

VALLI DEL CANAVESE

Rivers: Soana and Chiusella

Several kilometers to the east of Valli di Lanzo, the area of Valli del Canavese contains more exceptional whitewater on runs such as the Orco, the Soana and the Chiusella. The Soana and Upper Chiusella are the two absolute, not-to-be-missed classics of the area.

The Soana arises in the Gran Paradiso National Park and flows into the Orco. Dropping through a remote canyon it one of the most committing sections of the area, as there is no good way to exit once on the run. However, this is easily one of the best runs of the area, and maybe of the entire Alps, so it is well worth the effort. Red and white striated cliffs soar above the water. Boulder gardens and bedrock follow one another in succession for eight kilometers, with serious class 5 mellowing into class 4 with a few portages. A power station along the run makes a potential put in for those wishing to skip the more challenging upper part of the river.

Farther east and parallel to the Soana flows the whitewater treasure of the Chiusella. The river runs through the small town of Fondo, also the eastern entrance to the Gran Paradiso National Park. A quaint little village of old stone houses only an hour from Torino, it is a famous weekend destination for residents of the city. For paddlers, the Chiusella is the most well-known of the Torino area rivers, hosting the Teva European Outdoor Games since 2009.

The put-in for the Upper Chiusella has a wide-open, alpine feel but not far downstream the river drops into a tight bedrock gorge. Even if water levels look low at the put-in, there will likely be enough flow once the river narrows down. Here, in one action-packed kilometer, 15 steep and challenging rapids are stacked one on top of the other. Clear mountain water drops over and around pale grey granite, making for a beautiful yet intense run. After the first wild kilometer, the gradient eases up slightly but the run remains challenging. The lower section consists of more boulder gardens than bedrock and can be a good option if the upper is too high.

GENERAL INFO:

While images and video for the Torino rivers are becoming more common, topo maps and detailed descriptions are rare. It is also not a place offering easy, park-n-kayak logistics. Visiting paddlers have to find put-ins and take-outs on their own, try to guess at water levels from weather forecasts and snow coverage (or email Francesco), and search hard for campsites. Paddling here requires time and energy but those who make the effort will be rewarded with exceptional whitewater and the satisfaction of exploring remote and hidden gems on their own. Without a gauge to check, catching good water levels can be a bit of a gamble, but in the spring, sufficient water is nearly guaranteed. After high adventure on the region's mountain rivers, paddlers looking for a change of pace can float down the River Po to enjoy a well-deserved drink at Muzari, a famous pub in Torino. Enjoying the richness of true Italian living, anyone who has ever dreamed of being in an Italian movie with Mastroianni and beautiful Ornella Muti will revel in the experience. There are few places to paddle a remote river canyon by day and by evening dine on fine cuisine amidst high culture. This is Torino.

HOW TO GET THERE: Fly to Torino and rent a car - **WHEN TO GO:** May and June - **CAMPING:** Good camp spots are hard to find, as it's a fairly settled area, as well as national park - **FOOD:** Everywhere you'll find good little restaurant, but shops to buy food and cook on your own are less common.

HOT TIPS FOR CAMPING AND EATING:

Valli del Canavese: After paddling the Chiusella stop into the Luciana restaurant in Fondo for a traditional dinner or a plate with local cheese and meats, and you'll feel like you've stepped back in time.

Chiusella: Camping is available next to the nearby cemetery.

Soana: Camping at the top of the run is forbidden, as it is in the national park. There is a nice camp spot near the take out of the lower section.

Val Pellice: A few campsites can be found at the head of the Val Pellice or in Torre Pellice look for Cascina del Forte (<http://www.cascinadelforte.it/>), the beautiful B&B of paddler Carla Decker.

Stura di Alla: There is a camp spot at the take out of the lower section or next to the river in Alla di Stura.

Germanesca: There is a nice camp spot at the put in of the Germanesca di Massello section.