

# The business trips of “Herr Filius”

By Volker Kluge



On 16<sup>th</sup> April 1896 a young Austrian journalist called Filius described his experiences at the Olympic Games in Athens. Because up-to-date reports at that time could only be transmitted as short and expensive telegrams, the article was published after the return from his business trip under the heading, “How I won my twelve-hour race at the Olympic Games in Athens”. It began as follows:

*It was a genuine Greek spring morning which found us at the start of the twelve-hour race which had been taken into the programme of the Olympic Games. The sun was just sending its first rays over the circular walls on to the white surface of the race track, from the nearby coast a light trade wind bore the breath of salt and the dull, never silent murmuring of the sea, and the sky beamed in that clear, gently differentiated blue, which is found only in Greece.<sup>1</sup>*

**The Velodrome in Neo Phaliron. As seven riders can be recognised in the photo, it might be the twelve-hour race. The Greek architect, Vellinis, built the velodrome on a piece of ground that belonged to the railway company of Athens-Piraeus. The plans for the 333 metre long track were obtained from Copenhagen, where in August 1896 the Cycling World Championships took place.** Photo: National Historical Museum, Athens

Although the author used a pseudonym, there was scarcely any doubt among the readers as to who could have written it. For Filius – his real name being Adolf Schmal<sup>2</sup> – was already a label which the author had acquired, not merely by his articles, which were written in a fluid style. He owed his fame partly to his father, Johannes Adolf Schmal<sup>3</sup>, a prominent Viennese journalist and citizen of the world. Born in the Rhineland, he undertook a number of excursions which led him to Asia Minor. Along with *Travel Letters* he also wrote fairy stories, poems and plays.

Despite his frequent absence, the family grew and grew. The first-born, who traditionally received a forename of the father, was followed by five more brothers and a sister. To distinguish the little from the big Adolf, it was natural to describe the former jokingly as "Filius".

### Struggling from Vienna to Paris

When Schmal junior described his own Olympic victory in 1896, he had long since stepped out of the shadow of his progenitor. After attending trade school, he had studied English and German from 1890 to 1892 at Vienna University. He was then occupied as a "sporting employee" with *Dillinger's Reise- und Fremden-Zeitung*, where his father edited the literary section. Additionally, he bought himself in 1895 the *Illustrierte Radfahrerzeitung*, so that Filius from the outset was guaranteed a "good press". But primarily he earned this honestly on a hard racer's saddle.

In the 1890s cycling was a blossoming sport. Its development to a popular sport started with the change from the high cycle to the safe low cycle, the rear wheel of which was driven by a chain. In countries like Austria where, until then, high cycles had been imported from England, efficient cycle factories began to emerge. By reason of the long period of peace, in 1893 even the Austrian Weapons Manufacturing Company in Steyr decided to produce civilian bicycles, which became known as "Weapon Cycles". They acquired the know-how in Coventry, at that time centre of the cycle industry.

Simultaneously, a certain Johann Puch in Styria acquired a reputation as cycle pioneer. He began by repairing bicycles of the officers stationed in Graz.

In 1894 he founded the Styria Bicycle Works, which in the next year employed 330 workers and produced 6500 bicycles annually.

To make their marques well-known, the firms initiated "distance rides", and the systematic sponsorship of modern sport began. Among the best-known races was Vienna-Berlin on 29/30 June 1893 with 117 participants, won by Josef Fischer<sup>4</sup>. For the 582.5 km long course, which led partly over unpaved roads, the Munich rider required 31:01:22.4 hours. More than three hours later the best Austrian, Franz Gerger, reached the line in third place.<sup>5</sup>

Stimulated by several clubs which participated in this tour, the magazine *Radfahr-Sport* was initiated and became the official organ of the Confederation of German Cyclists of Austria. It published regularly with categories subtitled "Record panels". From the first edition, one knew that the Frenchman Edouard de Perrodil planned a record trip from Paris to Vienna, to begin on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1894. He had proposed four and a half to five and a half days for the 1300 km route.<sup>6</sup>

De Perrodil, editor of the magazines *Le Petit Journal* and *Velo*, had been a celebrity since the summer of 1893



Filius – the Recordman. After his "city record" Vienna-Paris of 1894, the 22 year old Austrian journalist covered the route Rome-Vienna the next year on a "Waffenrad" in record time. For the 1246 kilometres he needed four days, 16 hours and 35 minutes.

Photo: Estate Schmal-Filius

when he had cycled in seven days and three hours from Paris to Madrid.<sup>7</sup> His sponsor at the time, the Gladiator Cycle Company, wanted to support him this time, as well as a whole team of five pacemakers and an interpreter.

Six weeks later *Radfahr-Sport* published a surprise announcement that a certain Filius also intended to make a record attempt on the same course – only in the opposite direction but with less expense. Schmal's pseudonym was not yet popular at that time. It was only known that "Herr Filius" had belonged to the Wiener Akademisch-technischer Radfahrverein since 1893 and that his comrades intended to escort him as far as the German frontier.<sup>8</sup>

A race against time. To be ahead of the Frenchman, Schmal started his record attempt on a borrowed Styria low cycle on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1894. As pacemaker, Franz Gerger had offered himself, but not without a vested interest. Gerger had the intention of joining de Perrodil on the return journey and, thanks to the experiences gathered until then, of breaking his as well as Schmal's record.

First, however, Filius formulated his own headlines. In *Radfahr-Sport* he reported extensively about his adventure, which led him over poorly paved roads and impassable paths, but also through beautiful countryside. He wrote about the assistance of the population, barking dogs, falls, wrong routes and the loneliness after sunset, when the search for a place to stay the night began.

German-Austrian group photo on the Acropolis. Schmal stands in the centre of the third row (x). Directly above him one can recognise the Olympic swimming champion Paul Neumann. Lying right at the front were the German gymnasts Carl Schuhmann (left) and Alfred Flatow. Behind them with top hat: IOC Member Dr. Willibald Gebhardt.

Photo: Albert Meyer



*One can imagine how happy we were when suddenly the question "Vienna-Paris?" rang in our ear. It was Parisian cyclists who brought us at racing pace over the last stretch into Paris. We rode through the Porte Dorée at 8 p.m. and had thus covered the 1260 km distance in 5 days and 13 hours.<sup>9</sup>*

It was a record that did not last long. Two weeks later de Perrodil, whom Gerger had accepted as his shadow only with gnashing teeth, started in Paris. As expected, there was a hard struggle between the two experienced riders, who made no gifts to each other. To take advantage of the increasing brightness of the days, they rode into the night, which proved a disaster for the Frenchman and his entourage. In the Black Forest the team got lost. When Gerger arrived in Vienna, after four days and 19.5 hours, and rode on without a pause to his home town of Graz, the rival had just crossed the German-Austrian border.<sup>10</sup> In Linz de Perrodil gave up. He covered the rest of the route by rail.

### With sabre and racing bike in the "Olympic train"

In the kingdom of the Danube monarchy, the rebirth of the Olympic Games had been missed. Not until 15 months after the founding congress in Paris did the *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung* publish the resolutions agreed in the Sorbonne and report about the Athenian preparations.<sup>11</sup> Two months later the newspaper printed the programme.<sup>12</sup>

While the Hungarians were already equipping an imposing delegation, the Austrians only jumped on the

"Olympic train" at the last moment. A feuilleton published by the *Neue Freie Presse* provided the stimulus.<sup>13</sup> The author was the Greek historian, Constantin Christomanos, formerly reader to the Austrian Empress Elisabeth ("Sisi").

In his article he named a series of prominent philhellenes who had donated considerable sums for the reconstruction of the Panathenian Stadium. An initiative originating with the member of the Austrian upper house, Nikolaus Dumba, well known as a patron of the arts and friend of Georgios Averoff, the main sponsor of the Games.<sup>14</sup> Count Hans Wilczek was also mentioned, under whose presidency a committee had been formed to ensure Austria's participation.<sup>15</sup> Information, it was said, was to be "most willingly" given by Theobald Harmsen, the private secretary of Count Wilczek jun.<sup>16</sup>

The response was small, although the committee took over the costs of the expedition. After some hesitation, the *Erster Wiener Amateur-Schwimmclub* with Otto Herschmann and Paul Neumann sent two representatives, while the fencing club "Haudegen" nominated two sabre fencers: Adolf Schmal alias Filius, engaged by several newspapers as a reporter<sup>17</sup>, and Giuseppe Caruso. But the native Italian missed the departure and never reappeared.

A quarter of a century later, when Schmal-Filius (in the interim his legal double name) freshened up his memoirs, he described the Olympic break-up thus:

*Fencing mask with sabre and a finely constructed racing cycle, that was the most important luggage with which on a March day of the year 1896 I stepped out of the Athens railway station into the bustle of the*



Fencing in the Zappeion under the eyes of the royal family. On the sofa – right – is the Crown Prince; next to him – in the armchair – Prince George. To his right presumably the King, reading the newspaper. Next to him Prince Andreas, just wiping his nose in the photo.

Photo: Albert Meyer

Greek metropolis, which stood completely under the impression of the forthcoming Olympic Games. As a fencer I felt strong, but my prospects as a cyclist were more or less zero, for when I left my Viennese home, the snow had scarcely melted from the streets, and I could not hope to compete successfully with the representatives of nations who had a good open air training behind them under a less raw sky. In any case I had two irons in the quiver, as far as one can consider a cycle and a sabre as irons.<sup>18</sup>

His participation in cycling, however, was still uncertain for one reason. The German Cyclist Confederation (DRB) had placed him on a "proscription list", and it was uncertain whether Schmal would be recognised as an amateur.<sup>19</sup>

Once arrived in Athens, people started to think. His status was not in question, but it was that of the Italian racer Carlo Airoldi, about whose adventurous journey the Greek press had reported extensively. Allegedly he had, according to the magazine *La BiciLetta*, covered the course from Milan to Athens in 28 days on foot.<sup>20</sup>

In order to get to know him, he was invited by the Greek Crown Prince, who was interested in cycling, to the palace. Airoldi, in a long conversation, also mentioned a money prize which he had received as winner of the Turin–Barcelona race. "That was enough for the race committee to exclude Airoldi [sic] from the gentleman riders and thus from the races", announced *Radfahr-Sport*.

Although a telegraphed answer from Minister Pisani–Toschi in Italy stated that there existed no differ-

ence between professionals and amateurs there, the committee remained by its standpoint. Even the Crown Prince, Honorary President of the Organising Committee, regretted the resolution. He offered to replace Airoldi's expenses, which the latter proudly declined.<sup>21</sup> Schmal was clever enough not to take part in this discussion.

### A "Knight of the Pedals" with 333 m lead

As Olympic reporter Filius was, however, still an amateur of the purest sort, as were the two other Austrians who also provided reports to the Viennese press. The different calendars (in Greece the Julian calendar was valid with a difference of 12 days) caused them serious problems.

One learns from an article written by Herschmann that the Austrians arrived in Athens on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April 1896.<sup>22</sup> Schmal, who before his departure had changed to the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*<sup>23</sup>, moved the preliminary round in foil fencing to the 5<sup>th</sup> April (or 24<sup>th</sup> March). It is known that the Games were opening the next day, and the fencing contest began on 7<sup>th</sup> April. On the other hand, his information was authentic that the Greek king, who watched the fights in the forenoon, had at lunchtime ordered the sabre contests to be moved to Thursday.<sup>24</sup>

"'Are the gentlemen ready? Attention, go.' The command was for me and my opponent, a youthful Greek, Karakolos, who stood opposite me on the sunlit plank in the hall of columns of the Zappeion. His blade lay softly quivering on mine and made it easy for me to guess that I was dealing with a nervous fencer."

Thus Filius described his Olympic premiere which he won. He also won the second bout, this time against the



For his Olympic victory in the twelve-hour race in Athens, Schmal-Filius received a diploma and a silver medal. He also had two third places in the track cycling, which were not rewarded with medals. Where he got the bronze medal which is in his estate remains a mystery. These medals in 1896 were only awarded to those who placed second.

Photos: Estate Schmal-Filius; Volker Kluge

Dane Holger Nielsen. And since his last two opponents, the Greeks Georgiadis and Iatridis, "were several classes below me, I rejoiced inwardly, for Olympic victory was waving to me, I had it securely in my hands." Some hope!

*Then an unexpected event entered the figure of the King of Hellenes, the Crown Prince, Prince George and the whole court. They appeared with much courtly ceremony. The referees, with the exception of a Frenchman only Greeks, met for a short advisory session, and the result was: we'll start again from the beginning.*

*I lowered the point of my sabre, for as a competitor, whose chances were not guaranteed by a judge of the same nationality, I had no chance of lodging a protest. Yet my confidence in victory had suddenly disappeared. An internal voice seemed to say: this time you will lose.<sup>25</sup>*

The inner voice was right. Schmal lost 0-3 to Karakalos and 2-3 to Georgiadis. Even Nielsen, previously beaten, kept the upper hand this time with 3-1. The only success was against Iatridis (3-2).<sup>26</sup>

Instead of the olive branch, which he thought securely in his hand, he attained only a fourth place finish. Filius about himself: "The two foreigners, Nielsen and Schmal, were too accustomed to the German way of fencing, while the committee had decided on the French method, which permits every blow down to the knees."<sup>27</sup>

He would have loved to see the black and yellow flag of Austria on the victory mast, but he had no time to mourn. On the sixth day of the Games, when all the Greeks were still intoxicated by the marathon victory of their compatriot, Spiridon Louis, the Austrians also had their experience of success.

"Special correspondent Filius" telegraphed to Vienna:

*Today the competitions were carried out in Phaleron. In the swimming two Viennese achieved victory. Neumann from the Erster Wiener Amateur-Schwimmclub won the 500 metre distance, Herschmann was third. – Ten cyclists took part in the twelve-hours race in the Velodrome; Masson and Flameng, two Frenchmen, and I were in front, the sprint lap took Masson into first, the Greek Nikopoulos second and me third.<sup>28</sup>*

The telegram that Schmal had handed in on the evening of 11<sup>th</sup> April (30<sup>th</sup> March) was faulty in several respects. Herschmann had not swum 500 but 100 metre. Whether he was third or second has still not been clarified. In the *Official Report* the Greek Efstathios Choraphas is named.<sup>29</sup>

It is correct that Schmal won two third places, for which at that time there were no medals. After the race over one lap (333 m) he contested the 10 km competition, which he ended behind the Frenchmen at the "Tête" (lead). The twelve-hour race mentioned took place as late as 13<sup>th</sup> April (1<sup>st</sup> April) and was described by Filius in this way:

*So I drew my second iron from the quiver, i.e. I sat on the eighth day of the Olympic Games at 5 a.m. in the electric express which took me from Athens to the race track in Phaleron, and where in the fresh breeze of an early morning on the dot of 6 a small group of lightly dressed cyclists was sent off on a twelve-hour race. I was in the middle of the pack, a little considered outsider. The bets were on an Old England victory. Kiping [sic]<sup>30</sup> was the rider favoured by the people. I was aware that I was starting with lead in my saddle. Only cunning could bring me victory. My untrained lungs and muscles would not have kept up a fast pace over a longer distance. Never has the saying more applied to a competitor: "It is speed that kills".<sup>31</sup>*



The competition did him the favour. None of the seven riders, among them four Greeks, was in a hurry. They rode comfortably lap by lap. Schmal made good use of the monotonous tempo. When Keeping was leading the peloton, he dared to make a thrust. He rode up a steep curve and used the slope to ride away from the rest by using all his strength.

Schmal's opponents allowed themselves to be rolled over. When he looked round, he already had a lead of 20 metres. The pursuit lasted six laps until the competitors, of whom none wanted to sacrifice himself by leading, grew weary. Two Greeks were the first to fall away, so that Schmal could soon link up with the chain. Without haste he lined up in the field. Sometimes he was in the lead, sometimes last.

*For the first time during the race I looked at clock. Only half an hour had passed. So another 11 ½ hours. I tried to imagine the end. It didn't work, it seemed impossible that the 11 ½ hours could ever end.<sup>32</sup>*

In the third hour, Schmal had involuntarily thought of his German friends who were certainly meeting at that moment in the "Asti" for breakfast. "As if Keeping had guessed my thoughts, he had himself handed a roll and butter. I followed his example."

Meanwhile, the field had lightened. Only one Greek was still ambitious. "This individual seemed to be a remarkable saint. He rode at most 15 kilometres per hour and was already lapped more than 50 times, but he did not get off his machine", Filius noted.<sup>33</sup>

In the fourth hour the sun began to burn hotter. The public arrived, and the first pacemakers – allowed by the rules – appeared on the track. Schmal received support from Theodor Leupold, a German rider, and from the gymnast Fritz Manteuffel, who relieved each other. The

race had become a duel: Austria versus Albion. The other competitors accepted that, whereupon one after the other disappeared to have lunch.

*"Do you not wish to eat something?" Kiping [sic] asked me. Until then he had revealed an obstinate silence. "Then we both dismounted."*

*He could not have expressed my thoughts in a more complete way.*

*"If you wish, yes", I said as calmly as possible.*

*"So let's eat." And so it happened. Cold fowl and similar was present in quantity. And we extended the break until we saw that the opponents who had disappeared from the track were again mounting their bikes to catch up the lost laps.<sup>34</sup>*

The game began again. The hands of the clock seemed to move forward slower than ever. The only noticeable thing: the tables of the lap-counter. Now and again one of the riders made a burst, only to be caught again. Schmal did not give up his lap advance. "I saw the figure clearly before my eyes: 333. I played with the three threes. Added and multiplied them in my mind and spoke them in the rhythm of the pedal strokes: three-hundred-and-three-and-thirty, three-hundred-and-three-and-thirty ..." <sup>35</sup>

The time crawled like a snail, and the wind increased. A cyclist on the outside swung on to his bike to pass to Schmal a glass of chocolate during the race. A dangerous situation, for at that moment he touched the rear wheel of his pacemaker and fell. Bleeding, Schmal at once climbed on his machine again, but his opponent waited in chivalrous fashion, until he had caught up to him.

In the ninth hour, the Crown Prince appeared with his retinue and watched for a quarter of an hour. A tandem appeared on the track and created a faster

Filius loved every type of sport – and also made good use of the camera to picture himself. He was not only active but took on responsibility. He organised athletics meetings and was on the committee of the motorcycle union. In the Austrian Central Committee for the Promotion of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1906, he led the cycling section.

Photos:  
Estate Schmal-Filius

Filius – the gentleman. In this photo he wears the cap of the Austrian Automobile Club. Filius was, at the same time, a practitioner and theoretician. He especially understood automobilism as sport. Far right: From bicycle to motorcycle – here even with sidecar.

Photos:  
Estate Schmal-Filius



pace. The spectators who had disappeared at midday returned. Among them many Britons, encouraging Keeping. He sharpened the pace, but Schmal kept up. Finally, it was the twelfth hour, in which there was no shortage of drama, when Keeping had to change his machine because of a puncture. Now Schmal was able to act graciously. He waited until Keeping was again pedalling.

A bell rang for the last ten minutes, which Filius described full of emotion three days later:

*„Pacemakers off the track!“ is shouted. Three minutes left. Encouraged by his compatriots, my opponent takes the lead. Rush Keeping! On you go Schmal! It rings out from all sides. Another minute. My opponent starts a sprint. I know he will cover the lap in 28 seconds, and I wait so long in second place, in order to pass him and beat him by a quarter of a lap.<sup>36</sup>*

Schmal had ridden in twelve hours, 886 times in the ellipse, and covered 295.3 kilometres. When in the evening in the “Asti” he met the German sprinter Kurt Doerry, he was asked: “Are you sure you won?” His answer: “O yes, even by 333 metres”.<sup>37</sup>

### In the intoxication of speed

One day before the end of the Olympic Games, the “Black List” of the German and Austrian cyclists was published, “who are to be regarded as professional riders according to the competition rules of the DRB”.<sup>38</sup> But this announcement did not reach Athens. Included in the message were, among others, the names of Adolf Schmal

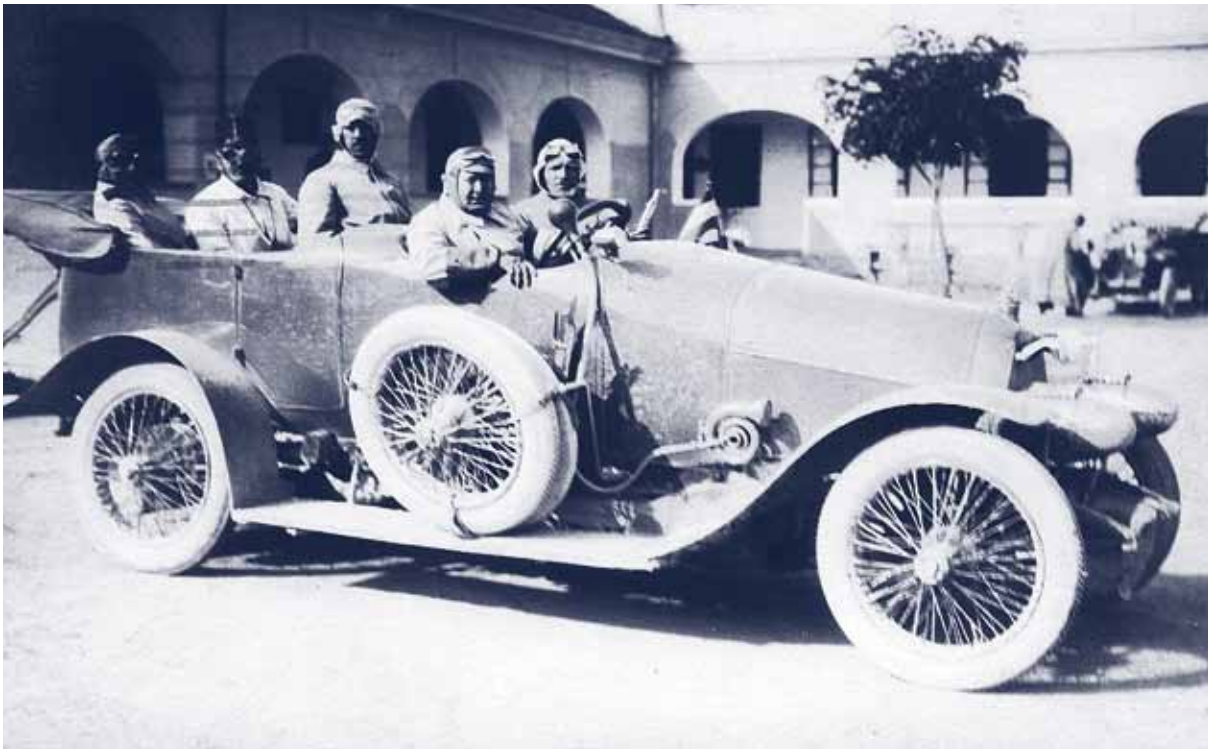
and his four years younger brother Felix<sup>39</sup>. Their amateur careers were thus ended. To be sure, Schmal was shortly afterwards reinstated, but by then he had left the Wiener Bicycle-Club.

He had long since had other ambitions. Motorised vehicles fascinated him. It had only been a decade since the German engineer Carl Benz had presented the first practicable automobile. With such a motorised tricycle Schmal made his first driving attempts in the spring of 1899, which led him initially to despair. Each time, the three-quarter horsepower engine gave up shortly before entering Prater<sup>40</sup>, where he wished to drive his laps. Since such a vehicle was still a sensation, a large number of inquisitive people gathered, which was not exactly helpful to the driver in his failed attempts.

Remarkably, the engine gave up always at the same point – next to the cab stand. On the first day Schmal pushed his vehicle home. The next day he had himself towed by a cab. On the third day the same coachman was waiting with a thick towrope for his “customer” ...<sup>41</sup>

At last the animal could be replaced by the machine, whereupon the racer’s bloodline announced itself. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1899 came the news that the editor Filius (Schmal) had covered the 200 km long route Vienna–Graz in the record time of eight hours and 56 minutes, corresponding to an average speed of 22.4 km/h.

From the motorcycle with three wheels came the four-wheeled automobile, which experienced its first boom from 1895. The worldwide leader was France, in which there were many factories that worked in metal; they had the advantage that the most important firms and suppliers had moved to Paris.



One of many Filius' ideas was the Alpine trip, first held in 1898. In the photo we can see him as passenger and as "Controller" in the vehicle of Count "Sascha" Kolowrat.

Photos:  
Estate Schmal-Filius

The development in Austria ran in a similarly swift manner. A certain Siegfried Marcus constructed a four-wheeled vehicle in 1888–89 with a four stroke petrol engine, but with slight performance. Ten years later, only 15 petrol-driven automobiles were en route in Vienna, and this was without any professional help.

The breakthrough came in 1898 when the firm of Gräf & Stift took up the production of a vehicle with front-wheel drive. In the same years the Austrian Automobile Club (OeAC) was founded, whose members were aristocrats, manufacturers and officers. To popularise their interests the Semmering–mountain race was invented, a race which was carried out in a favourite holiday destination of "fine society". In addition, the city of Vienna allowed the club members access to their houses in the 1<sup>st</sup> district; however, a horse had to be attached in front of the automobile.

At the start of the new century, on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1900, the *Allgemeine Automobil-Zeitung (AAZ)* was initiated and was, from its first day, the official organ of the OeAC. The editors were Filius and Felix Sterne<sup>42</sup>. The latter had led the sports section of the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* since 1896. Now he took on the post of editor-in-chief, while his companion slipped into the role of "racing reporter". Filius was created for this post.

It was a new world offered to the reader of the weekly paper. The first title page showed a Mercédès-Rennwagen.<sup>43</sup> On page seven was a photo of the new 24 hp Daimler racing car, celebrated as "victory of the human spirit over dead matter". The top speed of the "miracle car" was indicated as 80 kph – perhaps even 90. The target group of the journal: a clientele well able to pay.

Now it was a question of technical details, about which Filius informed himself during a visit to the car salons in Paris and Berlin. He learned about the extension of petrol stations, the introduction of obligatory attendance at driving school, the distribution of driving licences, the acceptance of an insurance law, about tolls on the Dolomite highway and the change of permitted maximum speeds, which in closed communities was at most 15 km/h and outside these 45 km/h. At a conference in October 1909 in Paris there was success in simplifying the international traffic of vehicles and unifying signs that prohibited or warned. Yet radical changes could not be achieved.

For Filius the most important thing was the spread of automobile thinking among the people, who in the majority were opposed to the new noisy vehicles. When he received an announcement from Chicago that women there had been refused a licence to drive, he commented: "It is unclear why ladies should be refused permission to be car drivers." As an example, he gave a certain Dolfa Filia.<sup>44</sup> Adolf und Adolfine: Schmal had married the sports enthusiast "Dolfa" Wachuda in November 1897. In the first years of marriage she accompanied him frequently on his excursions, while later she preferred to stay in a spa resort during his frequent absence.

In 1901 there was an accident on one of his many trips. When a horse carriage coming the other way had shied and driven into the ditch, Filius was keen to have a sample trial against himself. He wanted to clear up "the responsibility of the automobilist", as he proved to have operated the horn as he approached.<sup>45</sup> He was cleared, although it was expected of drivers that they should dismount and let a carriage pass.

Learning playfully and with fun. For his book *The Art of Driving*, Filius set up realistic traffic situations with the help of children's toys.

On the adjacent photo he wrote: "Such worries do I have".

Photo: Estate Schmal-Filius



### The man is himself – a praise of small cars

Further development of the bicycle was the two-wheeled motorcycle, whose series production began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While riding a motorcycle, Filius contested a "thousand kilometre trip" through Austria, in whose experiences he let his readers participate. His prophecy: from every cyclist there will be a motor cyclist, as soon as he possesses the necessary finance.<sup>46</sup>

In 1904 Filius published the *Handbook of the Motor Cyclist* "to assist with a pressing need", as stated in the foreward. It was a work as only a sports journalist could write who regarded motor cycling as sport. The person anxious for knowledge received for the first time a popular representation with advice about the handling of the machine, rules of behaviour and hints to remove defects. The single seat, wrote Filius, forces the motor cyclist to act alone. From now on it was "The man is himself".

It was the forerunner for the next book which he – more or less as the second edition – presented three

years later. With it Filius wanted to remove fear of technology from motorists who depended on the skill of a mechanic. The title alone was already the programme: *Without a Chauffeur*. Up until that time, it was obvious that the owner of an automobile employed a driver who drove around his gracious master and mistress.

The recession of 1907/08 marked a turning point. The manufacturers oriented towards luxury cars had overestimated the market and neglected the production of inexpensive types. Overproduction occurred. The demand collapsed.

In the introduction to his book Filius pleaded for the small car. The new link in the series of self-propelled vehicles was the "Voiturette" – a concept first used by Léon Bollée in 1895. First, the Frenchman constructed a three-cylinder three-wheeler, which was soon offered by other firms under licence with four wheels and two or four cylinder engines. In a short time the sporting two-seater enjoyed great popularity. It enabled the motorisation of that part of the population which could not or would not afford expensive automobiles.

*Without a Chauffeur* was a practical way to enable the reader to orient himself quickly. During the middle of the First World War – 1916 – the sixth enlarged edition appeared. Filius also presented the 376 pages book, *The Art of Driving*, and the reviewers surpassed each other with praise. Not a few asked themselves where the author found the time.

In the daily press he informed constantly about new trends. Scarcely an automobile exhibition between St.

*Without a Chauffeur* – his best seller which appeared in several editions after his death. Far right: the cover of *Through Hungary in Automobile*.





Adolf and Adolfine. Filius was one of the co-founders of the Voluntary Drivers' Corps, whose members had to support the Austrian Army in the case of war with private vehicles. However, he was spared going to the front.

Photo: Estate Schmal-Filius

Petersburg and Madrid did not see him in attendance. He reported on Grand Prix races in Lyon and Nice, inspected the Mercédès and Daimler factories and the Bollée works of Dietrich et cie in Lunéville. Old Carl Benz received him as did the Nestor of automobile constructors, Wilhelm Maybach. Filius discovered flying sport, praised the Brazilian Alberto Santos-Dumont, and rose with the first Austrian steered balloon. The military had long since discovered the use of motor driven vehicles for war purposes.

To be sure, the automobile industry had made enormous progress in the last decade, yet trips through the Alps, often over bad roads, were still adventurous. Even vehicles with 100 horsepower gave up, so that additional animals had to be harnessed in front in order to overcome mountain passes. The Alpine trips – encouraged by Filius and organised for the first time in 1898 by the cycling section of the Austrian Touring Club – developed into one of the most significant competitions for touring cars. Filius took part in every rally – as a participant, reporter and photographer. He was also, rather unwillingly, "Controllor" in the car of Count Kolowrat, a dazzling personality to whose circle of friends he belonged.

They had sought each other and found each other. The aristocratic colossus weighing 120 Kilos was an enthusiastic cyclist, and was also considered a "kilometre eater" who spent half of his life in his car. "Sascha", as he was called, was not just interested in pleasure. He possessed the instinct of an entrepreneur.

He founded, among other things, the Sascha Film AG, and with Ferdinand Porsche developed with Austria-Daimler the first "Volkswagen", known as "Sascha-Wagen".<sup>47</sup>

These were years in which Filius experienced his most productive time. He went on journeys of exploration, described in his books. A twelve-day tour over more than 2000 kilometres led him through the new territories which the K.u.k. monarchy had incorporated in 1908 as a condominium: Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>48</sup>

His tour through four Alpine countries Filius first published as a *Diary Sketchbook*<sup>49</sup> and later in book form with the title *Four Weeks in the Automobile*.<sup>50</sup> The first automobile travel description of the Magyar Empire – *Through Hungary in Automobile*<sup>51</sup> – appeared in 1914. Soon after the First World War began, which ended for Austria-Hungary in disaster.

### Olympic champion, awesome journalist and automobile pioneer without any enemy

Obviously, Filius had decided to work himself to death. Indefatigably he now wrote about subjects produced by the war: fuels to replace petrol, the usefulness of tanks, the treatment of lorries or problems of prosthesis wearers steering automobiles. In 1917 he brought out the seventh edition of *Without a Chauffeur*, into which poured "war experiences" from which he had expunged foreign words – "to a certain extent" because otherwise the work would be incomprehensible.<sup>52</sup> In the last



His son "Olef" often had to do without his father when the latter went on tour.

Photos: Estate Schmal-Filius

year of the war he called into life the "Filius Library". At a "propaganda lecture about Alpine trips" in the Imperial Automobile Club in Berlin, he enthused about automobile tourism, for which he predicted a great future.<sup>53</sup> He was no longer to experience this epoch.

Filius spent the first summer holidays after the end of the war with his wife and 16 year old son Olef<sup>54</sup> in Bavaria – without an automobile – completely unusual for him. On the way back to Vienna on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1919, at the railway station in Salzburg, the family was drawn into the confusion of the European new order, in which Austria was pushed back to its heartland. A riot arose on the platform surrounded by refugees. Suddenly, Filius fell to the ground. The heart massage by two doctors who happened to be present was in vain.<sup>55</sup> Adolf Schmal-Filius was only 46 years old.

Every Austrian newspaper of note published an obituary. There was talk of a "shattering Job's message"<sup>56</sup>. He was celebrated as an awesome journalist, as a pioneer and godfather of automobilism in Austria. That he was also an Olympic champion was almost forgotten. Felix Sterne certified that he had been the most popular sports journalist in Austria. He could claim the merit of having discovered the Balkan countries for automobiles.<sup>57</sup> He added a nice compliment in the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*. There it said about Filius: "About him one can really say: he had no enemy."<sup>58</sup>

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Filius left a great legacy. His books were made more popular after his death by his brother Erich Schmale<sup>59</sup> and, newly edited, became classics. With the "Filius-trip", in which numerous automobilists and motor cyclists took part each year, the Austrian Motor Cycle Union set up in 1920 a living memorial for its founding

member. This family meeting took place 18 times, until it was stopped after the "Anschluss". What remained is a turn of phrase. When the engine stops, one occasionally asks in this situation even today: "And what does Filius say?" ■

- 1 Adolf Schmal (Filius), "How I won my twelve-hour race at the Olympic Games in Athens", in: *Centralblatt für Radsport und Athletik*, Vol. 2, No. 18, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1896, pp. 3–5
- 2 Adolf Schmal was born on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1872 Dortmund, Germany. In *Dillinger's Illustrierte Reise-Zeitung* of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1892 he published for the first time an article with the title "A Walk through the Kampthal" under the pseudonym "Filius". From 1896 he also called himself Schmal-Filius, which later became his legal name.
- 3 Johannes Adolf Schmal (1846–1900) even as a student wrote for Berlin papers. After the German–Franco War he became editor of the *Westfälische Zeitung* and at the end of the 1870s feuilleton boss of the *Deutsche Zeitung*. In 1880 he switched to the *Post*. In 1886 he moved with his family to Vienna.
- 4 Josef Fischer (1865–1953) won in 1896 the first race of the later Classic Paris–Roubaix as well as in 1900 Bordeaux –Paris.
- 5 These results are easier to place in order in comparison to the distance ridden, which was started on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1892 at the same time in Berlin and Vienna. Its basis was a wager between the German and Austrian emperors about the use of cavalry troops. The fastest Austrian rider was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Count Starhemberg, who reached Berlin in 71:05 hours. For the opposite direction the German Premier-Leutnant Baron von Reitzenstein needed 73:06 hours. Both horses died immediately after arrival. Starhemberg received the prize money, offered by Wilhelm II of 20,000 marks. Reitzenstein, second in the general classification received the half from Emperor Franz Josef I.
- 6 *Radfahr-Sport*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1894, p. 22
- 7 Edouard de Perrodil, *Vélo ! Toro ! Paris–Madrid à bicyclette* in 1893, Paris 1893
- 8 *Radfahr-Sport*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1894, p. 11
- 9 *Ibid.*, No. 12, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1894, p. 10
- 10 *Ibid.*, No. 10, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1894, pp. 10–11. For the 1500 km from Paris via Vienna to Graz Gerger needed 5 days, 6 hours and 57 minutes.
- 11 "Wiederaufleben der Olympischen Spiele", in: *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1895, p. 972. The *ASZ* was founded in 1880 by Viktor Silberer (1846–1924) as the first sports newspaper on the European continent.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1895, p. 1194
- 13 "Die olympischen Spiele in Athen", in: *Neue Freie Presse*, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1896, pp. 1–3
- 14 Nikolaus Dumba (1830–1900), who had become rich through a cotton factory, had close contacts with Viennese painters like Gustav Klimt and composers like Johann Strauss and Franz Schubert.
- 15 Count Johann Nepomuk Wilczek (1837–1922) was the owner of the second biggest coalmine in the Habsburg Empire, a philanthropist and patron. He financed among other things the Austro-Hungarian North Pole expedition, which discovered an unknown archipelago on its search for the North-east passage and named it in honour of the emperor "Franz-Josef-Land".
- 16 *ASZ*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1896, p. 167
- 17 *Dillinger's Reise- und Fremden-Zeitung*, No. 11, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1896, p. 7. The "sporting employee" Filius cabled the names of the athletes announced, describing himself as "Ad. Schmal-Filius".
- 18 Adolf Schmal-Filius, "Wie ich einen olympischen Lorbeer verlor und einen gewann", in: *Sport im Bild*, 1919, No. 14, pp. 213–214. The article is based essentially on the contribution in the *Centralblatt* in 1896. It appeared with some changes as a new print in: *Neue Zeit*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1964.
- 19 *ASZ*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1896, p. 226
- 20 Manuel Sgarella, *La leggenda del maratoneta. A piedi da Milano ad Atene per vincere l'Olimpiade*, Macchione Editore, 2005
- 21 *Radfahr-Sport*, Vol. 4, No. 17, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1896, p. 388. Instead of accepting the bid, Airoldi offered the winner in the Marathon-Athens