

PARIS-ROUBAIX



QUEEN OF THE CLASSICS

INSIDE THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST SPORT Procycling

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



ZEN AND
THE ART OF
DESCENDING
FAST

CYCLING'S GREATEST
CHAMPION TELLS US WHY
SHE HAS MOVED TEAMS
AFTER 15 YEARS

MICHAEL MØRKØV

WHY WOMEN'S RACING
IS MORE INTENSE

MARIA CANINS

DION SMITH

HOW BRITAIN
BECAME A GREAT
CYCLING NATION

Marianne Vos
photographed
by Bram Berklen
exclusively for
Procycling

"I DON'T LIKE
TO SIT STILL!"

TAYLER WILES ON HER BUSY, BUSY LIFE

MAXIMILIAN
SCHACHMANN

WHY THE BORA RIDER MAY BE THE
NEXT GERMAN TOUR WINNER

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PREFACE

ISSUE 280 / APRIL 2021



**EDWARD
PICKERING**

EDITOR

Both editions of Strade Bianche were brilliant races, the best of the year so far. That's reason enough to celebrate them – I could just sit back and enjoy two exciting races, though a note to the TV people: show much more of the women's race already.

They were also excellent primers on How Cycling Works. The women's race demonstrated the nuances of teamwork and how it operates in cycling. In 2020, Trek-Segafredo worked out a very effective way of fighting against the superior strength of Anna van der Breggen; in Strade Bianche 2021,

Van der Breggen's SD Worx turned the tables right back on them, putting Chantal van den Broeck-Blaak on to Elisa Longo Borghini's wheel, where she stayed all the way to the final climb. There, the energy she'd saved doing none of the work could be used in a race-winning attack. Fingers crossed, we're in for some more great battles this spring.

And in the men's race, the variety of body types and specialisations which can thrive in cycling were on show as the eventual winning break contained Mathieu van der Poel, who's great at cyclo-cross and flat-to-not-too-hilly classics, Julian Alaphilippe, who's great at hillier classics and climbing middle-sized mountains, and Egan Bernal, who's great at grand tours and climbing the high mountains. I was so excited that I drew a Venn diagram to try to understand why you might find Van der Poel and Alaphilippe but not Bernal contesting Flanders, and Alaphilippe and Bernal but not Van der Poel contesting Lombardia, but would probably only find all three going head to head at Strade Bianche.

It's things like this that have kept me coming back to cycling for way longer than any of these riders have even been alive. Back in the day, maybe more riders contested all the races, but I think modern cycling has found a good equilibrium, and this variety and unpredictability is part of what makes the sport great.

HIGHLIGHTS



MARIANNE VOS

Sophie Hurcom speaks to the all-conquering Dutchwoman about changing teams, longevity and why, after 16 years, she loves racing more than ever. Page 30



TAYLER WILES

I caught up with the irrepressible Trek-Segafredo rider to talk about her path into cycling and her status as one of the few openly gay pro cyclists. Page 42



STATE OF THE NATION: BRITAIN

British riders have dominated grand tour racing since 2012. Richard Moore asks whether it can continue in the latest of our series on nations. Page 62

Images: Bram Berkien (Vos), Claesson/Getty (Wiles), De Waele/Getty (Britain).

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A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair tied back, smiling and looking off-camera to the right. She is wearing a dark grey hoodie with yellow drawstrings and a yellow zipper. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting with a window showing greenery.

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INTERVIEW: MARIANNE VOS

“There are a lot of beautiful goals to work towards this year, starting with the Olympics”

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GALLERY

THE WORLD'S BEST CYCLING PHOTOGRAPHY





UAE Tour Stage 1, Abu Dhabi

21 FEBRUARY 2021

The peloton is rent asunder by strong crosswinds on the opening stage of the UAE Tour. With the wind coming from the right, the only shelter from it is to the left of the rider in front, which means that the width of the road limits the number of riders who can enjoy that shelter. The riders in the echelons behind can only hope that the speed drops at the front, otherwise the gap will either grow or at best stay the same. See the isolated riders on the left of the road? They're all going backwards relative to the group in front - no matter how hard they ride, they won't match the speed of an echelon. They are riding in the wind, while the rotation of the echelon ensures that the riders skilled or strong enough to make it never spend more than a few seconds in the wind. On this day, the race never came back together, and the splits formed had a definitive effect on the race. Twenty-three riders would finish eight minutes ahead of the rest. The front group included defending champion Adam Yates of Ineos Grenadiers and 'home team' rider Tadej Pogačar of UAE Emirates. The pair would fight out the race between them, and with little to separate them on the two summit finishes, the Slovenian's superior time trial gave him the overall win.

Image: Tim de Waele/Getty Images





Le Samyn Dour, Belgium

2 MARCH 2021

Stijn Steels slithers across the slippery surface of the stones of La Roquette, near Dour, in Hainaut province, Wallonia, during Le Samyn. The midweek one-day race has grown in stature in recent seasons and with Mathieu van der Poel on the start line, it attracted a lot of attention from cycling followers. The race finishes with four laps of a circuit around the municipality of Dour and the Dutchman looked to be in a strong position to win, having attacked on the final cobbled sector. However, three dozen riders came back together for the finale, just as Van der Poel's handlebars snapped. His race was over, but Belgian team-mate Tim Merlier, who is enjoying his best form ever, deputised capably in the sprint and came home first ahead of Rasmus Tiller of Uno-X and Andrea Pasqualon of Intermarché-Wanty.

Image: Kristof Ramon





Strade Bianche Tuscany, Italy

6 MARCH 2021

Jumbo-Visma start to apply the pressure midway through Strade Bianche, stringing out the peloton to breaking point. As the team of defending champion and race favourite Wout van Aert, Jumbo took responsibility for maintaining the gap to the early break, then made the pace to set their Belgian leader up for an attack. Jumbo's work reduced the size of the peloton considerably, and Van Aert duly surged to force an elite selection clear. But he was either not as strong as last year, when he rode away to a solo win, or he overcommitted. When attacks from Julian Alaphilippe then Mathieu van der Poel put the pressure on, Van Aert slipped backwards. Van der Poel would contest the finish with Alaphilippe and Egan Bernal, but with the Dutchman in supreme physical form, neither Alaphilippe nor Bernal could match his fierce race-winning attack on the final climb in Siena.

Image: Gruber Images

PROLOGUE

PROCYCLING: AT THE HEART OF THE PELOTON



➔ 2021 GIRO D'ITALIA ROUTE

Star studded line-up descends on the Giro

This year the startlist of the Giro d'Italia could almost be swapped with the Tour de France. Egan Bernal, Thibaut Pinot, Vincenzo Nibali, Simon Yates, Mikel Landa and Romain Bardet are all down to ride the first grand tour of the season. Plus João Almeida, who spent a fortnight in the pink jersey last year. It will be a challenging race, too, with over 47,000 metres of climbing across the 21 stages, six mountain finishes, and sections of gravel and dirt roads to add into the mix. For Matt White, directeur sportif with BikeExchange, whoever wins the Giro will be a "very complete bike rider".

The Giro has become more of an option for the sport's biggest stars, as it is a different test to the Tour. White thinks that the field will be especially strong this year because of the Olympics, with the road race scheduled for late July, close to the finish of the Tour. "Also the amount of time trial kilometres this year at the Tour is scaring some guys away. If you saw 60km of time trialling in the Giro as well, you might get some guys that would focus on the Tour instead."

Pinot and Bernal have decided to focus on the Corsa Rosa this year after failing to impress at last year's Tour. The pair both suffered from injuries, but they are possibly looking

▲ Passo Pordoi has been a Giro favourite since 1940 and returns on the tough stage 16 in 2021

to reignite their careers away from the intense spotlight of the Tour, where the world's media and cycling fans all descend, something White calls the "fishbowl effect". He says of the Tour: "In a normal year, minus covid, everything is just amplified, because of the crowds, the media. It's our world race." With Pinot at the Giro, Groupama-FDJ can instead centre their Tour squad around their star sprinter, Arnaud Démare.

White refutes the idea, however, that the Giro offers any less pressure: "I definitely wouldn't say the Giro is less pressure, it's just a different environment than the Tour. At times, it's a more demanding race. There are a lot more surprises, put it that way. The weather in May is a lot more unpredictable, the roads, the length and the difficulty of the stages... I think the hardest stage at the Tour de France any year is probably like the fifth or the sixth hardest stage in terms of climbing metres in the Giro. There are stages at the Giro that are 5,500m plus of

6

Summit finishes in this year's Giro route, starting on stage 4



“At Trek, I’m known as the emotional one. If anybody needs to have a cry with somebody, I’m the person to go to. I’m a big softy and I love to feel the feels”

Tayler Wiles talks about her role at Trek-Segafredo **page 42**

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE
22.4.21

climbing. It’s just different; there’s a different feel to the race.”

One could argue could argue that last year’s Giro was lacking in star power, even more so after Jumbo-Visma and Mitchelton-Scott went home. Not that Tao Geoghegan-Hart and Jai Hindley’s battle was any less entertaining or deserving, but this year’s startlist will mean a different race. “The big game-changer for us is Bernal being there, and the team he’s going to start with,” White says. “They’re going to come in with the strongest team, he’s going to be the favourite, so that does change tactics. If they had come in with Tao, for example, it would be a different team. You do adapt your plan depending on who your opponents are.”

The Giro has a brutal final week, as is traditional, because it finishes in



“I definitely wouldn’t say the Giro is less pressure, it’s just a different environment than the Tour. At times, it’s a more demanding race”

Matt White, BikeExchange DS

the north through the Alps and the Dolomites, something White says is “like nothing else in our calendar”. Stage 16 has over 5,700m of climbing, and goes over the Passo Fedaia, the Passo Pordoi and the Passo Giau in the Dolomites. However, there are tough stages throughout,

including a finish up Monte Zoncolan on stage 14. Stage 9 up to Campo Felice ends with two kilometres of dirt roads, and three days later stage 11 features 34km of gravel roads in the final 70km, with steep climbs and descents on strade bianche. White says that the gravel will create “extremely chaotic” racing, and that the dirt stage could be a game-changer in the race for pink.

While there aren’t the amount of time trialling kilometres that there are in this year’s Tour route, the final day 29.4km TT into Milan will be in the back of minds, as it could be an opportunity for a rider who is good against the clock to snatch a win. If not, it will affect the racing earlier on in the Giro, as the favourites attempt to build up a time buffer ahead of that final test.

Pinot returns to the Giro after two years of heartache at the Tour de France



ADAM BECKETT
STAFF WRITER

SPORT IS POLITICAL

Quinn Simmons has not learned his lesson. Last year the Trek-Segafredo rider was suspended for what his team called “conduct unbefitting a Trek athlete”. Last September, the American posted a tweet that included the word “Bye” and an emoji of a black hand waving, in a reply to a journalist’s tweet saying that supporters of Donald Trump could unfollow her. This incident was alleged to be racist, but half a year on when Simmons was asked whether he understood why he was suspended, he said: “If I’m honest, no, not really.” This is despite diversity training during the off-season. He also told *Cyclingnews.com*: “I don’t feel like I deserved the suspension... This is really something new that I don’t fully understand, and a lot of people don’t understand.”

There was quite a contrast between Simmons’ attitude and the words of Tao Geoghegan Hart. In an interview with *the Guardian*, the Giro winner argued that “everything is political”. Geoghegan Hart is right. Everything is political. The way that the sport of cycling intersects with gender, race, and international relations has a real impact. Cyclists should use their platforms to fight for change, and question the ways they are used as tools, not just ride on in ignorance. The pay disparity between men’s and women’s cycling was given widespread exposure after the prize money for the different editions of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and Strade Bianche was revealed. It took crowdsourcing to gain parity at Strade Bianche. Yet there are more problems in women’s cycling than this, whether it’s the ongoing battle to get the biggest races on television, or abuse within the sport. This is all political. The bicycle is an emancipatory machine, and yet within an often traditional sport, progress seems far off sometimes.

Cycling has just as much responsibility for changing society for the better and tackling racism as any other part of society. Sport is political.

GIRO D’ITALIA 2021 STAGES

1	8 May	Turin > Turin	9km TT	12	20 May	Siena > Bagno di Romagna	209km
2	9 May	Stupinigi > Novara	173km	13	21 May	Ravenna > Verona	197km
3	10 May	Biella > Canale	187km	14	22 May	Cittadella > Monte Zoncolan	205km
4	11 May	Piacenza > Sestola	186km	15	23 May	Grado > Gorizia	145km
5	12 May	Modena > Cattolica	171km	16	24 May	Sacile > Cortina d’Ampezzo	212km
6	13 May	Grotte di Frasassi > Ascoli Piceno	150km	17	26 May	Canazei > Sega di Ala	193km
7	14 May	Notaresco > Termoli	178km	18	27 May	Rovereto > Stradella	228km
8	15 May	Foggia > Guardia Sanframondi	173km	19	28 May	Abbiategrosso > Alpe di Mera	178km
9	16 May	Castel di Sangro > Campo Felice	160km	20	29 May	Verbania > Valle Spluga-Alpe Motta	164km
10	17 May	L’Aquila > Foligno	140km	21	30 May	Senago > Turin	29.4km TT
11	19 May	Perugia > Montalcino	163km				

COMMUNIQUE

NEWS • GOSSIP • CHATTER

1,362

The number of watts at which **Mathieu van der Poel**'s final attack at Strade Bianche peaked. The Dutchman released all of his power data on Strava following the race.



“I love Amstel and it might be my favourite race. It might not be the one that’s best suited to me and it’s a bit like playing Mario Kart”

Michael Woods on targeting the hilly classics after he was ruled out of Tirreno-Adriatico due to bronchitis.

Giro time

Tadej Pogačar has indicated that he will ride the Giro d'Italia next year, once he has defended his Tour de France title and ridden the Olympics and the Vuelta a España this season. The 22-year-old was speaking at Tirreno-Adriatico.

“He needs to do what’s best for him and what’s going to make his life better, and only he knows what that is. We’ll support him whatever he does”

George Bennett says that **Tom Dumoulin** has the backing of his Jumbo-Visma team-mates whatever his decision is, following the Dutchman stepping back from the sport last month.

Minimum standards

BikeExchange has raised the minimum salary of riders on its Women’s WorldTour squad to match the required base wage of riders on men’s WorldTour teams. This follows **Trek-Segafredo**’s example. Their rider **Teniel Campbell** told *The Cycling Podcast Féminin* that the news meant she could now support her family back home in Trinidad and Tobago.

“It is no pleasure for the UCI to strongly recommend all concerned to refrain from hugging at the finish”

The UCI has told riders not to hug team-mates after races finish due to the ongoing pandemic. Although the risk of transmission is deemed as low, the UCI said the precautionary measures were necessary.

17

 km

The distance of the closed circuit that the **Amstel Gold Race** will be raced on, due to covid restrictions in the Netherlands. The men’s and women’s events will take place on 18 April. Last year’s race was cancelled due to the pandemic.



Dangerous race finishes banned

The UCI has introduced new guidance on finishes to races. These will eliminate dangerous finales such as the one used at the Tour of Poland in Katowice, where **Fabio Jakobsen** crashed last year. The new rules mean that elevation changes that result in the speed being increased by 15-20km/h are not allowed in finales when sprints are likely. Each race will also be given a safety manager.

“THERE IS LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL AND I’M GOING FOR IT!”

Fabio Jakobsen has said that he is nearing a return to racing after his horrific crash last year at the Tour of Poland. He has gone through multiple operations on his face, and is waiting to have new teeth fitted.





“Everything is political”

Tao Geoghegan Hart insists that sport is inseparable from politics. Speaking to *the Guardian*, the British rider said that he deplored racism and called on British Cycling to increase accessibility and diversity in the sport.

Barring accidents

Canyon was forced to issue a ‘stop ride’ notice for its top-of-the-range Aeroad CFR model after the handlebar on Mathieu van der Poel’s bike snapped at Le Samyn in the closing kilometres of the race. Van der Poel could be seen throwing the broken part of his bars away, but still managed to help lead out team-mate Tim Merlier who went on to win. The Dutchman rode an adapted model for his win at Strade Bianche a few days later. Canyon is continuing to investigate the issue.

“I have thought about leaving it behind and taking a step aside, because there are complex situations: the pressure, the sacrifice, the exhaustion, the injuries”

Miguel Ángel López has spoken of feeling similar pressures to Tom Dumoulin, who stepped away from cycling. In an interview with newspaper *El Tiempo*, López said that he wants to keep going because of his passion for racing.

→ Marion Sicot appeals to CAS

Former Doltcini rider Marion Sicot has appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport over the UCI’s lack of transparency in the harassment and abuse cases surrounding former team manager Marc Bracke and Health Mate team manager Patrick Van Gansen. Sicot is asking for better communication with victims involved.

Simmons speaks out

American rider **Quinn Simmons** has said that he doesn’t feel he deserved the suspension he received from his team, Trek-Segafredo, last year. He was suspended after making posts on social media that Trek considered “divisive, incendiary, and detrimental to the team, cycling and its fans”.

Pain in the back

Ineos Grenadiers leader **Egan Bernal** said that he would have to live with back pain for at least a year. In an interview with *La Gazzetta dello Sport* the Colombian said that his goal was to get back to enjoying racing and attacking. The 2019 Tour winner abandoned last year’s race, and was later diagnosed with spinal condition scoliosis.

2 years

The amount of time since **Mark Cavendish**’s last podium finish before the sprinter finally broke his dry spell with second place in the Grote Prijs Jean-Pierre Monseré, a one-day race in Belgium. Before that, Cavendish’s last podium placing came on stage 3 of the Tour of Turkey in 2019 when he finished third.



“To be honest it feels like I’m coming back home”

Michael Matthews has described the feeling of returning to BikeExchange after four years with Team Sunweb. The 30-year old Australian said that it was like he had never been away from the team, having ridden for them from 2013 to 2016. Matthews won 18 races during his first spell with the squad.

NIAMH FISHER-BLACK

The SD Worx Kiwi rider on sourdough, Manuka honey and the beauty of languages



Where's home?

Currently it's Girona in Spain, I've been there over this past winter.

New Zealand is really home for me, but I haven't been there for a while now. I'm from Nelson, at the top of South Island.

What's your favourite race?

Last year was my first year, so I've only had one taste of most of them. But it would probably be the Giro Rosa; it was amazing. I'm really looking forward to the Trofeo Alfredo Binda this year. I lived around there, so I know the roads really well. I love hard races.

What's your favourite climb?

Any of the climbs around where I lived in Italy, near Lago Maggiore. There are some amazing ones around there. You're always going up and down.

Where in the world would you like to get lost on your bike?

There are heaps of gravel roads around Girona. I could get lost on those for ages, in amazing scenery.

What's your secret talent?

Over lockdown I got really good at making sourdough, but I don't know if that's a secret talent.

What's the best prize you've won?

When I won the national jersey, I won a pot of honey as well, a really expensive pot of New Zealand Manuka honey.

If you had one extra hour in the day what would you do?

I would use it to practice a language. I'm so fascinated by how there are so many different cultures in cycling, and languages. I'm always wanting to learn more. I really worked hard on my Italian last year, but I'm not fluent in any



"There are heaps of gravel roads around Girona, and I could get lost on those for ages, in some amazing scenery"

other languages than English unfortunately. I want to learn Spanish but also Dutch now I'm on a Dutch team.

When were you last star struck?

The other day we were in Barcelona airport, lining up to check in with Mark Cavendish. All

through my childhood I looked up to him, so that was pretty cool. I didn't go as far as chatting to him.

What advice would you give your teenage self?

It wasn't that long ago, but it almost feels like it. I would probably say just don't take anything too seriously. Just enjoy

it, enjoy school and stuff, make the most of it. Don't hurry into things.

What's your best cycling hack?

When you're really struggling, just put on a good podcast. I really like listening to them on long rides. I listen to so many.

What's been your toughest day on the bike?

Strade Bianche last year. It was my first WorldTour race and the temperature was 40 degrees, I didn't drink anything, either. What an introduction.

What result are you proudest of?

My performance at the Giro Rosa last year followed by the World Championships. It was a good couple of weeks for me, and it was my first realisation that I could do this, and I'm proud of the form I had there.

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ANTTI-JUSSI JUNTUNEN

The Finnish champion who is cutting his teeth in Estonia



What do I need to know?

Antti-Jussi is 21 and is from Korso, Finland, near Helsinki. He rode last year for Estonian Conti team Tartu 2024-Balticchaincycling.com, which is now called Ampler Development.

What kind of rider is he?

The young Finn describes himself as a puncheur: "I'm not really a climber or a sprinter, I'm somewhere in between. I think races like Liège would suit me. I like those short climbs of about 3km, especially when they're steep. The harder, the worse the weather it is, the better." A classic hardy Finn, then.

Why is he at an Estonian team?

Antti-Jussi was at a French development team as a junior, but ended up in an Estonian team at U23 level because he went to school there, across the Baltic, and so can speak the language. He tells *Procycling*: "Last year there were two of my classmates riding on the same team, but they have moved on now. I knew the team manager as well."

Has he had any good results?

A few good placings, but the highlight so far is his win in the 2020 Finnish nationals. "It was one of my goals for my whole career. It's a proud moment every time I wear the jersey."



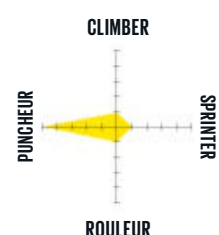
How did he get into cycling?

Through his brother and father. "My brother was also a cyclist, and my father was involved with the local cycling club, which was more mountain biking. I rode on mountain bikes as my first discipline."

What's his dream in cycling?

Antti-Jussi says: "My dream would be to race for a WorldTour team, ride the Tour and all of those classics. Last winter I improved a lot of my level, and I feel that I have improved a lot."

RIDER TYPE



We highkey cannot wait until Antti-Jussi reaches the WorldTour, where he should be suited to the hilly classics

Anything else I should know?

Interestingly, Antti-Jussi is just completing his six-month national service duty with the Finnish army. He tells *Procycling* that it's a bit easier for him as an athlete, as he gets to train when he's not on forest camps. There have also been advantages: "I think it has given me a lot of mental strength," he says. "You have to concentrate all the time. I'm not sure it has helped me physically, but it has helped me mentally."

COACH'S CORNER



TOMS FLAKSIS
COACH, AMPLER
DEVELOPMENT TEAM



Antti-Jussi is like an Ardennes classics rider, good at short punchy hills in the one-day races.

He's good at finishes from small groups. To be honest, I think he's quite promising as a cyclist, with a lot of potential. The first two years when he started to race seriously, he was in a French amateur team, and no one was really looking after him; he was on his own. When he joined the team last year he now

has a complete programme, and has training camps with his team-mates. He has progressed from when he joined up to the end of the last year. He's under a bit of pressure because he is one of the older guys on the team, and he has to perform in order to get to the next level. That's always a big step for a cyclist. I think that if everything goes well this year, he will have to move on from this level. With Ampler Development

Team, we start this spring in Belgium, we have races in Poland too, and even in the Tour of Estonia there are Ardennes-style days that suit him perfectly as well. We are hoping for good results - some podiums from him. He needs to gain a little bit more self confidence, and to keep cool when it comes to decision making in races. At the moment he is doing his national service with the Finnish army, so I hope that will help his development.

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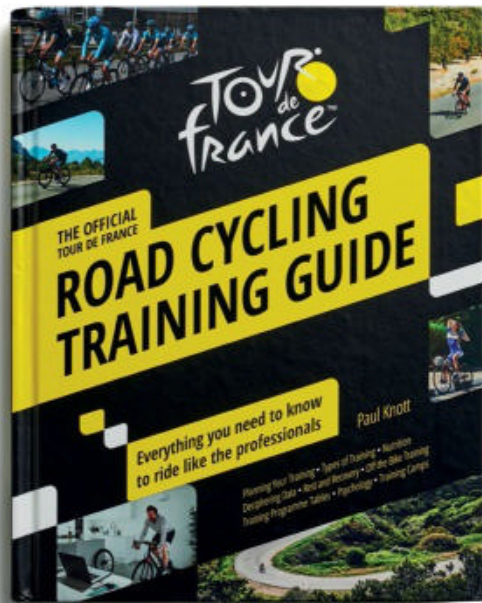
PROLOGUE

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

T H I S M O N T H ' S E S S E N T I A L G E A R



The Urban Jacket from Labo Mono is fully waterproof and breathable, built for urban adventurers and the planet. This is the Super Sour colourway, made to make you stand out on and off your bike, £159 | \$225 www.labomono.com



Get tips on nutrition, tech and exercise plans to ride just like a pro from cycling writer Paul Knott, £14.95 | \$20.67 www.wellbeckpublishing.com



Become as aero as possible on your bike with the help of the Aero Socks, tested by Alex Dowsett, £22.43 | \$31.60 www.thighsclub.com



Ride in comfort with the Women's Signature Jersey from Velocio, perfect for spring and summer, £161 | \$169 www.velocio.cc



Wear a heart rate monitor without needing an extra strap with this cleverly integrated sports bra, £49.99 | \$59.99 www.myzone.org



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WOUT POELS

The experienced Dutch rider on becoming a leader at Bahrain Victorious

I feel really good in this team. Last year was always going to be a weird year, but now, you get to know people a little bit better and how they work. I'm pretty happy here. You just crack on with it, there's a really good vibe in the team, and we've started this year pretty well.

I always quite like to ride iconic climbs, the big names. It's pretty cool to ride on those climbs. You only normally ride Mont Ventoux in the Tour de France, so it was nice to ride it in the Tour de la Provence. I quite enjoyed it. I always enjoy the big, big climbs. There are climbs like the Angliru, Alpe d'Huez and the Stelvio, where if you can do them, it's super nice, and you're part of cycling history for it.

As a grand tour leader, you have to be fully focused for three weeks. When you work for someone, you can sometimes have some of the day off. But my role hasn't changed a lot. I've led at races like the Tour Down Under, Tirreno and the Tour of Poland.

At the Tour de France last year I had that crash where I fractured my rib. I couldn't do anything any more, which was a bit sh*t. When you crash on the first day, you keep hoping you're going to get better. By the end of the Tour it was a little bit better, but not amazing, of course. Because it was such a weird year in 2020, I was not sure how many more races I would do. Nothing was certain. I thought I'd better carry on racing. It was my own choice, the team didn't force me.

RIDER PROFILE

Born: Limburg, Netherlands
Age: 31
Turned pro: 2009

TEAM HISTORY

2009 Vacansoleil
2014 Omega Pharma-Quick Step
2015 Team Sky
2020 Bahrain-McLaren

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2010, first, stage, Tour of Britain
2014, first, stage, Vuelta Ciclista al País Vasco
2015, first, stage, Tirreno-Adriatico
2016, first, Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana
2016, first, Liège-Bastogne-Liège
2018, first, stage, Tour of Poland
2019, first, stage, Critérium du Dauphiné
2020, sixth, Vuelta a España

▼ Poels wins Liège-Bastogne-Liège 2016 after a race hammered by freezing rain

I did some amazing things with Team Sky. Winning Liège, of course. I think I did seven grand tours and was in the winning team six times. Four Tours, one Giro and one Vuelta, so I have great memories. I'm really thankful for my opportunities there. We always had a nice group and I enjoyed the training camps. It was pretty special every time, but at one point I felt like I had to move on.

It would have been easy to sign another contract and choose the safe way, just doing what I did for five years. But you also want to ride for yourself. I don't regret that I worked so much as a domestique, but at some point it's really nice to get the best results for yourself. I wanted to go for it, and it was exciting to come to a new team, get a new bike and meet new people.

When I won Liège, I didn't know that was the first monument for the team. I thought they must have already won one. I'm super proud of that. It's even nicer that I won the first one for such a big team. To win a classic is something you dream of.

I remember wins like Liège-Bastogne-Liège when I start to speak about it, but it's not like I remember every detail of the whole event, or every stone in the road. It was a pretty long race. I remember throwing my gloves away, because I knew I was going to have to sprint for the win. You go on automatic pilot a bit, you have to rely on your racing instinct to make the move.

My brother was always riding his bike. He started with our father at the weekend with some friends. As he became older, he took it more seriously, and I thought it sounded fun. I started because of him, because I saw him do cool things. I caught the virus: the cycling virus. My first two years, we were at the same team, and at one point he had to make a decision to leave. He's really happy for me now.

I change my favourite race every interview I do. I like Flèche Wallonne. It's not the biggest race, but the Mur de Huy is so iconic, you have to wait for it and then it's the quickest up it who wins the race. It's a short, steep motherf*cker. It's just on a Wednesday, but that little mountain is fully packed with people. If I had to pick one race to win, I'd really like that. It would be nice if I could do better than fourth.

I love the freedom that comes with cycling. When I was 14 I could cycle, like, 30km away from my house. Normally you'd have to wait until you were 16 and buy a scooter. I really like the game of racing too, trying to be good, and you get to go to some nice places.



ACCESS DENIED

JEREMY WHITTLE
WHY CYCLING'S UNIQUE MODEL OF
ACCESS MUST BE PRESERVED

When journalist Albert Londres pushed his way through the throng and sat down with the Pélissier brothers, Henri and Francis, in the Café de la Gare in Coutances in June 1924, he realised he had a scoop. Exhausted, disenchanted and enraged with Tour de France organiser Henri Desgrange, the Pélissiers slugged hot chocolate and poured their hearts out, railing against the inhumanity of the race, pulling cocaine, chloroform and pills from their pockets.

The article that Londres wrote, 'Convicts of the Road', became legendary. His stories had as much impact as those produced by *Le Monde* during the notorious Festina Affair of July 1998, when the revered daily called for the drug-addled Tour to be stopped.

These days, Londres' headline is emblazoned on T-shirts and mugs, while ASO, promoters of the Tour, make great play of the race's historically close relationship with media and fans.

But the coping strategies for racing in the time of covid-19 have come at a price to those traditions.

In his beautiful book, *Tour de France Intime*, French journalist Philippe Brunel wrote about cycling's special relationship with the media, a relationship which is now under threat, not just because of covid.

At last year's Tour — a race, don't forget, founded and mythologised by journalists — the media were kept at arm's length, maintaining the sanitary bubbles that were understandably instigated by the French government. Initially, it was temporary, and safer for everyone. Now however, that distance seems likely to stay and something unique to this sport will be lost. Most teams prefer it to the old days, when the camera crews and photographers besieged riders at start and finish areas. They want things to stay this way.

Now instead of journalists asking questions, we have team PRs circulating recorded WhatsApp messages to the media, usually corralled in a press room. There are no more huddles at the start village or on the finish line. The PRs edit the WhatsApps and decide who to invite into Zoom calls, and who to exclude.

There is an important difference here. Press officers protect their sponsors' interests; journalists serve the interests of their readers. But in a sport still struggling, even now, with transparency and



Jeremy Whittle, a former editor of *Pro Cycling*, is the *Guardian's* Tour de France correspondent and is the author of *Ventoux: Sacrifice and Suffering on the Giant of Provence*

accountability, there remains real and important value in face-to-face access. As the pandemic forces continuing restrictions, what little access remains is becoming even more important: in fact, it's vital.

Think of all the revealing moments that would otherwise be lost: the confrontations between Lance Armstrong and the media; think of Bradley Wiggins at Ax 3 Domaines in 2010, admitting at the stage finish: "I'm f*cked mate, I ain't gonna lie."

With access so limited, what will happen to asking riders directly about their credibility? This is not a question that is ever well received, but it's one that has been put to grand tour winners from Froome to Roglic. Given the context of the sport, it's fair to expect to go on the record if you are successful in cycling.

Restricted access reduces the opportunity to explore those issues, which as the Richard Freeman inquiry and the Operation Aderlass investigation show, have not gone away. The need for the sport to be held accountable is as strong as ever.

But it goes beyond that: in a sport with such a tradition of stirring writing, WhatsApps and Zoom calls are no substitute for body language and eye contact.

So don't be surprised to hear a media corps weary of Zoom calls, controlling PRs and 'last question please!' press conferences, wax lyrical about the ease of access at lowly races such as the Étoile de Bessèges, in which the ambience of the good old days still lingers.

And the Café de la Gare in Coutances, scene of Londres' most famous interview? It's no longer standing, sadly. It was demolished — in the summer of 1998.

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DAN MARTIN

ISRAEL START-UP NATION

It's crazy to say, but it was nine years since I had raced the Tour du Haut Var, now called the Tour des Alpes-Maritimes et du Var. Bizarrely I got 14th in 2012 and 15th in 2021. The name may have changed but the character of the race is intact. I was not scheduled to attend this year, preferring to head even further south in February like other years and race Valencia and Ruta del Sol, but the covid cancellations brought me back to France.

Racing on French roads is nervy and stressful. The structure of the races in Spain is more simple, the roads are usually bigger and stages more defined. Haut Var is similar to many of the French amateur races, and I spent my formative years in the area racing on the very same roads with VC La Pomme Marseille. By this I mean they are hard roads. Twisting and turning, up and down, a lot of road furniture demanding a high level of concentration. Only on stage 2 was it really clear how

► Dan made his 2021 debut at the Tour des Alpes-Maritimes, where he supported team-mate Woods

tactics would play out, as it was a short steep climb to the finish at Fayence. The other stages were too hard for sprinters but with stage 1 having a long steady climb to the finish and stage 3 having a 25km descent and flat section from the last climb, there was no true mountaintop finish for the climbers to really get their teeth into. It was far from the ease into the season that many want.

My form had been excellent in training but I came down with some kind of virus 10 days before the race and although I was healthy at the race, my legs were not quite firing. I spoke honestly with the team that we should ride for Mike Woods. It was a lot of fun to play a support role as it's something I haven't done much in the last few years and especially to ride for someone who is a good friend. It sums up the atmosphere of our team. We had

a great group, with quality dinner table chat, something that having 'older' guys with experience really improves. We don't sit there talking about power numbers or even what happened in the race. It also meant that we all gave it everything to conserve Mike's yellow jersey on stage 3 but it wasn't to be, and the faces at the finish line told the story. I'm excited to get back racing with the same group.

I was supposed to be at Tirreno but I've been struggling with a lingering illness. It's something that is difficult to handle mentally. You go to bed every night hoping to be better the next day. There is zero pressure from the team, it's just a personal ambition to not let the months of hard work over the winter go to waste but sometimes, you need to listen to the body and remember the big picture. DM



DAN'S LIFE IN CYCLING

'10

I entered 2010 with more expectation after my results from 2009. Slipstream was always a great environment to race in, where you didn't feel so much pressure, but I was becoming one of the leaders, or at least a rider capable of getting results. The season started pretty average. Unusually for me, I can't remember if I had sickness, but things were a bit of a struggle. Paris-Nice was brutal, and I was

improving towards País Vasco. After the Ardennes, which were another learning exercise, the team asked me to go to the Giro, to see what I could do. It was an incredibly tough edition that lives long in people's memory; the wet strade bianche stage and the 50-plus breakaway that escaped on a stage which was longer than 250km and flipped the GC on its head. Day after day of rain. I was exhausted by the end

and took weeks to recover. But once recovered I was flying, going on to win the Tour of Poland. The season ended with me crashing hard in Lombardia in the pouring rain, despite arriving in top condition after finishing second at Giro dell'Emilia. I recovered to win the Japan Cup, which was a lot of fun. It's a serious race with not the strongest peloton but it was a great fun way to finish the season.



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CHARLIE QUARTERMAN

TREK-SEGAFREDO

What happened again? Ah yeah, something about me riding into the back of a car at Omloop Het Nieuwsblad. I wouldn't necessarily say too many, but I've definitely made a lot of jokes about the crash I had at the opening weekend in Belgium, which resulted in a concussion and some sore muscles. It's certainly not a funny thing, and the fact that I've tried to win a few laughs off the back of it doesn't mean at all that I haven't been taking things seriously. I've had numerous scans all over my body and regular testing from the team's doctors to work out how things are, and of course I've been following their advice as much as possible to get me back in training as soon as possible. But given that this sort of injury stops me training, and even affects the things I enjoy doing off the bike, I think doing things such as blaming my poor performance in card games on the head injury, or pretending I forgot about being told to do the washing, is perfectly fine.

As a professional cyclist, the disappointment and pain from an injury is greatly exacerbated by the pressure and desire to ride and race (all of which is self-imposed, by the way). My



My wonderful team Trek-Segafredo has been incredibly patient, supportive, and level-headed in dealing with the situation

wonderful team Trek-Segafredo has been incredibly patient, supportive, and level-headed in dealing with the situation. But this crash is on the back of a few other misfortunes I've had in the transition from a very productive winter to the race season, and this means my motivation is difficult to contain as the desire to show the world what I can do becomes stronger. However, enjoying a bit of time at home after two long training camps in quick succession has done a good job in taking my mind off things. Given that, all I can really do is wait.

Putting a smile on my face with some furniture shopping

and going for relaxed strolls in nice weather between the mountains here are the best things I can do, I reckon.

Going back to the concussion, it's good to see this being taken seriously. I remember from my last concussion (aged 14 in a rugby match) only being advised to not continue playing, and then also being allowed to play again the following week if I was careful, despite the tiredness and the fact everything seemed to have a yellow tint for a day or two after the incident.

Being in a professional cycling team, with some of the best support in the world, does of course mean

a lot, but safety protocols seem to be very different nowadays. I was taken to hospital straight after the crash this time and several scans were done there. And the following week I had a call with the doctor every other day, a 'HeadCheck Health' test every day which checks memory, balance, and symptoms against a benchmark set at a normal time, and I've had many team-mates and staff asking after me to see how things are progressing. This is clearly a horrible situation but it's heart-warming and reassuring to experience the support of the team and the people around me. **GO**



1
DAYS
RACING



4,959
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RIDDEN



60,385
METRES
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BRODIE
CHAPMAN
FDJ NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE

What gives you energy? We know what drains it: long travel days, for example. But if we think about what gives energy, what is it? What is it that makes you want to push the pedals?

If I think about this question in the context of racing, I can answer it easily. The feeling of a 'team mission,' ambition, the landscapes you get to experience... and the crowds. Oh, how the crowds (yes, you the fans) truly bring out the best in me, and I'm sure I speak for many other riders.

I remember watching Strade Bianche before I was a pro, and one of the most compelling memories is the passion of the crowds lining the ascent of the climb into Piazza Del Campo. They form a canopy over the narrow roads, their roar providing a few extra watts.

The same goes for Flanders. There is no feeling like riding up the Oude Kwaremont. With the smell of beer and cigarettes hanging in the air, it feels like a festival and you are the main act. "Watch me punish these cobbles good people of Flanders! Never mind that I feel like they are punishing me!"

This year at Strade Bianche, the crowds were sparse, as pandemic protocols require. So I have to make sure I pay

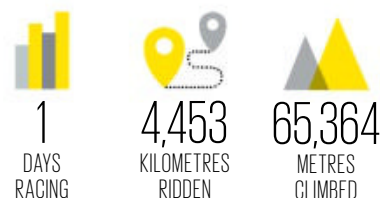
attention to other aspects of racing that give me that vibe.

If I am honest, I am inspired to train mostly as a necessary step to get to race. I often recall the crowd filled, chaotic moments of a race in order to get through hard sessions.

To revisit my initial point, racing towards Siena just yesterday at Strade Bianche, my team-mate and I found that for this particular race, it was the landscape, the hazy golden afternoons and sweet smell of a new spring that heightened our senses. We were buzzing just to ride around this part of the world. The energy it gave both of us only increased when we shared the stoke. That, coupled with a huge amount of gratitude to even be able to race, inspires every cell in my body to make it count.

It is important to gather these moments, these feelings, and keep them for when you need to revisit why you are getting on your bike. Some days for me it's the social aspect. What could have been a mentally tough, lonely training session suddenly feels fun when you roll out with a crew, taking turns and enjoying a lunch stop together after the work is done. Other days when it's perfect riding weather, I pay a lot of attention to the feeling of the warm sun, or to the signs of the changing seasons in the trees. Even taking a different route, or riding your favourite one in reverse, is enough to feel a sense of newness.

So ask yourself, as I do, where can I borrow energy from today? What do I look to, to keep going? Enjoy riding! **BC**



KÉVIN
RÉZA
B&B HOTELS P/B KTM

Since the last Tour de France, the demands have increased. The Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum through 2020, a year I was the only black rider to start the biggest race in the world, and my media profile grew, both at home and abroad.

A few years ago, I had difficulty expressing myself on the question of racism, but things have changed. The 2020 Tour allowed me to take a stand and to understand what I wanted to express to the media and the public. I realised that what I think and say carries weight. This is a 180-degree turn for me, and today I feel empowered to send whatever message I want to get across. So much the better if that can give a voice to those who feel that they are not being heard. We must not be silent on issues where we are right.

My story is that of an athlete who encountered racism at the age of 15 or 16, on arrival at the sport school of La Roche-sur-Yon, in the Vendée. I was the only black kid in the school, while back in Paris I had grown up in a melting pot of religions, colours and social background. Cycling isn't a sport where black people are over-represented and I have had to live with everything that entails.

Comments, looks, certain gestures... but I guess there are more serious problems in life.

I've had to answer the same questions since the start of my career, and I've had to often revisit the incidents involving Gianni Moscon and Michael Albasini. That's fine, although I'd rather be asked about my own results and performances than these sorry stories.

I've had many invitations to join associations to promote diversity, but I don't want to do this as a part-time job or just be a figurehead. The job of a professional cyclist is very demanding and I want to devote myself to it 100 per cent. If I join a fight, I have to be fully engaged. There's no question of participating from a distance.

For the moment, I never refuse to speak out. I don't mind the questions from journalists but I do want to be consistent. During the last Tour I thought hard about lining up on the front row at the start with a mask on which was written "No to racism". I spoke at length with Bryan Coquard and my team-mates. Just having them standing behind me made me feel better about doing what had to be done. I don't need 10,000 people supporting me - only those who matter.

And now for some sport! My race calendar in March is sparse, out of necessity. I'm giving myself time to build up the intensity and get in good shape for the summer. Now that the team has received a Tour invitation, I feel calmer. It is now up to me to get everything lined up for my fourth Tour. **KR**





MARIANNE VOS

THE BEST VERSION OF HERSELF

She has been a professional cyclist for 15 years but Marianne Vos is still at the top of her game. For 2021, however, the greatest rider of the modern era, who counts 285 wins, has changed teams, for the first time. She tells *Procycling* why she has made the move to Jumbo-Visma

Writer Sophie Hurcom Portrait photography Bram Berkien

IM

Maybe after 15 seasons as a professional bike rider, you'd think a sense of routine would have long set in when a new year comes around, that familiarity would have overtaken the novelty and anticipation that riders at the start of their careers feel when a new season begins. There's a comfort that comes with routine. You know what to expect and the effect of that is grounding, even when the routine of a pro athlete means

travelling around the world and never staying in one place for long. The never-ending cycle of racing, to off-season, back to the start of a new season, is entrenched in an athlete's psyche. The calendar is familiar, the race programme, by now, would be fairly consistent. Even the hotels riders stay in tend to stay the same year-in, year-out, while the knowledge of how to get the best out of yourself would be fairly set. You'd imagine it could feel even more routine if you've won almost everything there is to win in your sport, sometimes multiple times.

Marianne Vos, however, is looking ahead to the 2021 season with a renewed feeling of excitement. Fifteen years after lining up for her first race as a professional road rider, Vos seems full of the same bright-eyed enthusiasm you'd expect from a neo pro.

Vos has good reason to be looking forward to the new racing year. For the first time since she turned pro back in 2006, she has joined a new team, having transferred to Jumbo-Visma's women's

squad, after spending her entire career within the same team structure – albeit one that changed title sponsors on five occasions during that time. It's a challenge she's hugely embracing.

"It wasn't easy to leave my former team. I've been around for so many years, I knew the people and I felt in my place, I felt comfortable," Vos tells *Procycling*. "A new challenge could trigger me, could help me, could challenge me in a positive way. There is a lot of experience in the team and a lot of work and details that can help me in where I can improve. But also the reservation that it's a new environment, and you have to invest."

"There are two sides of a new environment that trigger you. It's new and it's a little bit scary. I've found the challenge more significant than the risk so I took a chance."

She continues: "I feel this very high motivation, excitement in the new team, that will help me to get the best out of myself as well."

It's mid-February as we speak and Vos is coming to the end of an altitude training camp in Tenerife, a last fine-tuner before her season begins at Strade Bianche. Physically, she's feeling good, even if the past winter brought little time for an off-season. Having finished road racing in October, Vos jumped straight into the cyclo-cross season, as she has every year of her career, even after the intensity of the covid-altered 2020 calendar. She competed in the black and yellow of her new Dutch team for the first time on January 3, and from the mud of the cross season she went straight to Alicante, Spain, to meet her new teammates at a training camp, before this latest camp in Tenerife followed. Just hearing Vos's schedule for the past few months alone is a signal of how non-stop the life of a pro athlete can be.

"This might be my 15th, maybe even my 16th year... I don't know. It's quite a lot," Vos says with a laugh. "It sounds maybe a little weird after being pro for so long. You think, 'She knows everything, she has nothing to learn, she's done with the sport.' But, no. I'm pretty much learning every day. I'm improving every day. Of course, I still make mistakes and try to make as few mistakes as I can. This is also part of the learning experience."



◀ Vos makes her breakthrough, winning the 2006 Worlds at age 19

“It’s really nice being in this new environment. There are some new lessons and things I’m able to improve. There are a lot of beautiful goals to work towards, starting this year with the Olympics. It’s a big year.”

Victories came quickly to Vos once she’d turned pro. She became an instant superstar in cycling after winning the World Road Race Championships in 2006, aged just 19, in Salzburg, months after winning the

rainbow stripes in the Cyclo-Cross Worlds for the first time. Her record of victories in the sport since is quite unprecedented. On the road she starts 2021 with a tally of 285 wins. By way of comparison, none of her peers today have even passed 100. Among those are three road world titles, an Olympic road race gold medal, three Giro Rosa victories, 28 Giro stage wins, and wins at almost every major one-day race. Branch out to cyclo-cross and the track and you add even more (including seven world titles in cross and one on the track).

Vos’s status as the greatest rider of her generation, if not the greatest rider ever, has long been certain.

It’s also little coincidence that Vos’s success has coincided with the growth in women’s cycling over the past decade. Marianne Vos is women’s cycling as we know it today. Her longevity and domination is part of the reason the sport has gradually reached a wider market, and isn’t the same as the one she started out in all those years ago. Vos has captivated a new generation of racers and fans in cycling, and has both directly

and indirectly been a driver behind more sponsors and teams seeing viability in investing their money.

Still, Vos has always given the impression that her feet have stayed well and truly on the ground. Few riders on the men’s side of the sport who hold a similar profile can be as accessible and amicable to interview. Her family famously follow her around the world in a campervan, her dad regularly acts as her pit-man at cross races, and for years the sight of her beloved cat sitting outside the van was the only indicator you needed that Vos was on the startline. Marianne Vos the racer and Marianne Vos the person have always seemed to exist in relative harmony and balance.

A level of success like Vos’s, however, inevitably brings with it more exposure, and with more exposure come more obligations and more responsibilities. With success also comes pressure for more success. You only need to look at Tom Dumoulin, Vos’s compatriot and team-mate on the men’s Jumbo squad, to see how pressures off the bike can become overwhelming. Aged 30, the former Giro d’Italia winner confirmed earlier this year that he is taking an indefinite break from the sport to reassess whether it’s where his future lies, citing the relentless lifestyle. Or Marcel Kittel, who retired in 2019 also aged 30, blaming the pressure to perform and how it had taken the love of cycling away for him. Vos experienced her own period of physical and mental burnout in 2015. She spent a year away from the



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

MARIANNE VOS'S BIGGEST WINS, YEAR BY YEAR



2006

Aged 19, Marianne Vos takes her first road world title in Salzburg, Austria. As part of an elite group that includes Nicole Cooke and Judith Arndt at the finish, Vos wins the sprint to the line.



2009

For the third year in a row, Vos wins Flèche Wallonne, becoming the first woman to do so and preventing Nicole Cooke from taking a fourth title. Beats Emma Johansson in the Mur sprint.



2010

Wins Trofeo Alfredo Binda at the start of the season, which helps Vos end the year with the Women’s World Cup title for the third time. She wins by 61 points and counts another 17 wins.





sport, and at the time no one knew if she'd return, and if she did, whether the same racer who won almost every event she lined up for would return.

"I think everybody has this struggle of being on the edge. You try to push yourself to the edge, I mean, that's what top sport is about," Vos says. "In terms of getting the maximum out of yourself you have to push your limits and it goes in ups and downs. I think looking at the bigger picture made me realise that maybe the downs aren't, most of the time, as bad as you think. They are in the moment. I've also learned to see a challenge in trying to get out of it and to get satisfaction from little baby steps afterwards. It's actually not a competition with others or races, it's trying to get better even after a setback. That keeps me going."

Looking back now, Vos cites that year away almost as a blessing in disguise.

While not made by choice, it gave her a needed break from cycling, an opportunity to jump off the treadmill. She says it is part of the reason she's been able to spend so long at the top of her game.

"It really was a time that I learned this is what I love most, and I missed it so much that I was really looking forward to trying to get back," Vos says. "Of course it was a challenge and it took time to get back to my level, and it had some ups and downs on the way, but it got me refreshed. I also knew, okay, there were nice goals and now it makes me look towards the future without any hesitation. I know a top sport career will end somewhere, but I am not afraid."

"I'm doing what I do now and as long as I am able to do this in this way; healthy and having this motivation and fun on the bike, then I am a happy woman."

Yet it wasn't only the relentless lifestyle and non-stop racing behind Vos's halt in 2015. As her achievements garnered herself, and the sport, more attention, the Dutchwoman inevitably came to be seen as the go-to spokesperson, the advocate and figurehead representing a whole peloton. Race organisers wanted her on their startline, the media wanted her opinion on every subject, organisers and sponsors wanted her backing for every project. While Vos wanted to give back to the sport, and play her part in the push for change – she was among the riders who lobbied for a race at the Tour de France, which led to the creation of La



Course in 2014 – the fact that everyone also wanted a piece of her gradually became too much.

"I think being out in 2015 was partly down to this. It wasn't the fact that I was overtraining myself, it was just the stress around cycling. The combination of racing, feeling the responsibility towards team sponsors, towards media, towards federations, that in the end it got a little too much physically. Then the body just said, no, no, it's enough," Vos says.



Images: Luc Claessen/Getty Images (right)



2011

Dominates the Giro Rosa, winning five stages out of 10, on her way to taking the GC title for the first time. A highlight is a solo win over the Mortirolo. Has her most successful year ever, with 31 wins.



2012

On a rainy day in London, Vos wins Olympic gold in the road race on The Mall. Follows it a few weeks later with a second road world title in Valkenburg, matching Nicole Cooke's 2008 exploit.



2013

Fills one of the few gaps on her palmarès by winning the Tour of Flanders, having been second and twice third previously. Escapes on the Kwaremont in a group of four, and wins the sprint to the line.



2014

Takes the overall win at the first ever Women's Tour, then, having led a campaign to create La Course by Le Tour de France, she wins the inaugural race on the Champs-Élysées.

Timeline: Getty Images



“I just love riding my bike. I think the biggest motivation is just trying to get the best out of myself. To try and every day stand up and think, what do I do today to get better?”

“It’s not a role that I really took, but it came onto my path along the way, that I felt a responsibility to because I got so much from the sport. The sport has brought me so much joy and life lessons that I really wanted to give back, and I also saw the opportunity for the sport to grow. I wanted to take the responsibility towards the different

▲ Vos makes her debut for Jumbo-Visma at the World Cup cross race in Hulst on January 3

unions, towards the different federations. But, getting into that

role I also felt, okay, it’s not about me. I wanted to be able to step aside, and show women’s cycling instead of Marianne Vos.”

When Vos was away and then making her comeback, the peloton gradually grew around her. Before 2015 she was almost unbeatable. In the years 2012–2014 she won 20, 22 and 21 races. But in the years afterwards, riders such as Lizzie Deignan, Anna van der Breggen and Annemiek van Vleuten were breaking through at the top level. The peloton Vos returned to was stronger and had more depth than the one she’d left behind. It’s raised the level of racing but also meant that Vos doesn’t have to shoulder the entire weight of responsibility alone.

“I think over the last years I have tried to make this step a little bit more. I’m there and I want to be there to share my thoughts or experiences or ideas if I can help somewhere. But I also know there are a lot of people who have much more capabilities in running management or whatever, or time, because at that moment I also really wanted to focus on cycling, on what I was doing as the base,” Vos says.

“I’m pretty happy how the sport has evolved over the last decade and I think my role has changed. I’m pretty happy to be part of the group but I didn’t want to be *the* one, *the* spokesperson for women’s cycling. There are a lot of people who have the opportunity and have great ideas and capabilities to do this.” 🍋



2016

Having taken a break from cycling in 2015, Vos confirms her comeback is on by beating Coryn Rivera on stage 4 of the Tour of California in Santa Rosa, her first top ranked race win in 20 months.



2018

Vos is a consistently high finisher in the spring classics, though the big win eludes her. Takes GC wins in the BeNe Ladies Tour and Tour of Norway, along with the Crescent Vårgårda WWT round.



2019

Wins 19 races, her highest tally in a year since 2014, to end the season as the most successful rider in the peloton. Includes multiple wins at the Giro, Tour of Norway, Yorkshire and Ardèche.



2020

Takes her total number of stage wins in the Giro Rosa to 28, by adding another three at September’s race. It’s a total of road stage wins only comparable to Mark Cavendish’s Tour stage win record.



▲ Attacking with Van Vleuten, both in new teams, at Strade Bianche

“I just love riding my bike,” she says. “I think the biggest motivation is just trying to get the

best out of myself. To try and every day stand up and think, what do I do today to get better? Of course, you do two steps forwards and sometimes one step back, but in general, it’s really nice to think about how I can improve and now, in this new team, I’m excited to race with those new team-mates. The calendar is changing. Over the last few years we have some great additions to the calendar but it’s not that I need new challenges. There’s enough challenge to be your best self. That’s a challenge on it’s own. Luckily enough, I can still do what I love most and that’s riding my bike and training as well as racing.”

Vos will turn 34 this May, and she’s closer to the end of her career than the start. This season, the Olympic Games in Tokyo, where she wants to repeat her gold medal winning ride from London 2012, will be one of her main targets. The Worlds in Flanders, where she’ll be aiming for a fourth rainbow jersey, is her other big goal. How does the woman who’s won it all define success these days?

“Definitely not an amount of medals or jerseys, or whatever,” Vos says. “It’s just being able to get the best out of yourself and being happy at the same time.”

It’s easy to take a rider like Vos for granted; she’s been racing for so long and winning for so long, maybe we think she’ll always be there. One day she will retire, and we’ll all have to get used to racing without Marianne Vos, who has defined the sport for a generation.

“I think I’ve learned over my career that in a race there’s only one goal and the finish line is the most important thing in the world. But after the finish line, I also know that the next day will be the next day, and it’s not the end of the world,” Vos says.

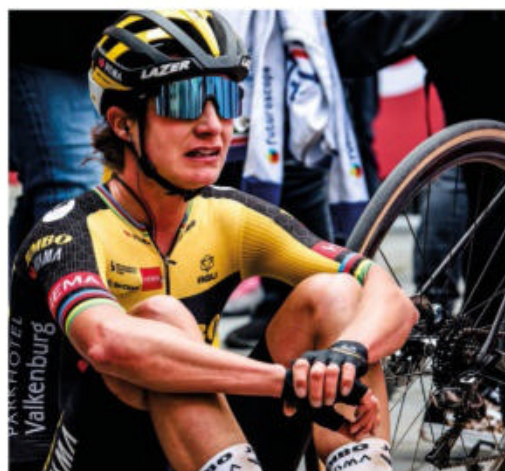
“Perspective is one thing I’ve learned a little bit more. To live a little bit more in the now, instead of in the future. At the beginning of my career I was working towards a goal as if my life was a goal, working towards the goal. Now, I’ve learned more how to live in the day and also enjoy what I’m doing.”

And why would you want to stop when you’re enjoying yourself so much? 📌

At Jumbo this season, Vos will be the undisputed number one rider, although passing on what she’s learned to her younger team-mates is also part of the process these days. Six of her 11 team-mates are aged 25 and under. Still, it’s funny to hear a rider of Vos’s calibre say that she still has plenty to learn herself. When you’re Marianne Vos, winner of 285 road races, what can you have left to learn?

“Everything. I am changing so I have to adapt training and try new things. If you keep doing the same you’ll get passed. You won’t improve any more,” she says. “I started with a new coach two years ago, this is also really, really nice to feel that, okay, this works really well and maybe that is not the best option for me.

“There are a lot of new insights in cycling. If you think about training, if you think about nutrition, if you think about rest and how to balance everything. It’s really good to think about just the base; rest and good food is important but those details on



equipment, where Jumbo-Visma is also working on those details, that can make the difference on the highest level.”

Perhaps this attitude is what makes athletes like Vos different, and a cut above. The desire to keep pushing, to keep trying something new, is the reason why, in her 16th season in the sport, Vos is still excited to be here, and still performing at the top level. There’s

▲ Vos recovers from her seventh place finish at Strade Bianche

also the fact that Vos simply loves cycling. It rings through in everything she says.

COUNTERPOINT



COACHING A CHAMPION

Marianne Vos's coach tells Proccycling what sets the Dutchwoman apart and how you train such a unique rider

There'll be a time, probably not too far in the future, when Marianne Vos will have retired and cycling will have to reckon with having witnessed a once-in-a-lifetime rider. No other rider in history has a spread of victories as vast and as varied as the Dutchwoman. Her wins include world titles across three disciplines in road, cyclo-cross and track, and she has had a long, long career.

What is most remarkable about Vos is that she is still prolifically winning and looked as strong as ever as the 2021 season began at Strade Bianche. 2019 was one of her best ever in terms of results, and produced 19 victories, her highest tally since 2014 and the most in the

peloton that season. Last year, despite a disrupted season that produced limited racing, Vos won three times, placing her in joint fourth on the list of wins for the year. It was fitting that her three 2020 wins all came at the Giro Rosa – two from flat bunch sprints, one atop a steep, short hill – as looking back through her record at the Italian race showcases Vos's calibre. As well as having won three Giro GC titles, Vos has now won 28 stages there. Her first stage win came in 2007 and in the years since, she's won at least one stage here for nine editions of the race. Every time she has lined up in Italy, she's come away with a victory.

Writer Sophie Hurcom
Image Luc Claessen/Getty Images

There's no question Vos is immensely talented. But her success isn't simply down to that. She's come up against other hugely talented, world-class riders throughout her career – classics riders like Nicole Cooke, climbers like Emma Pooley, sprinters in Giorgia Bronzini and Ina-Yoko Teutenberg in the early years. Then more recently others of the calibre of Annemiek van Vleuten, Anna van der Breggen and Lizzie Deignan. Still, Vos's record is unique.

"Obviously she is physiologically very special," says Louis Delahaije, Vos's coach since 2018. "She has a lot of talent to ride the bike and a phenomenal aerobic level. But on the other hand she is a real racer. She loves to race. She loves to play and I think that makes her so phenomenal. I compare her on that level with Óscar ►

Long-serving Dutchwomen

In terms of longevity in women's cycling, there is only one other active rider who comes close to matching Marianne Vos's winning streak over the last 15 years: Kirsten Wild. While Wild is older by five years, and signed for a pro team two years before Vos in 2004, both Dutchwomen recorded their first pro road victories in 2006. Vos's came on stage 5 of the Gracia-Orlova Czech stage race in April, and Wild's six weeks later at the Omloop door Middag-Humsterland one-day race in June. Vos's total win tally has since eclipsed Wild's - 285 compared to 111 - but both have impressive continuous winning streaks. Vos has won no fewer than three races every season since 2006, the only anomaly being 2015 when she took a break from the sport and didn't win. Wild similarly has a constant record of victories, and has won at least once every season since her first in 2006 up to 2019. Last season, when the 38-year-old only raced the Giro Rosa, was her first year without a win.

Freire, I worked with Óscar as well a long time ago and he was the same - he just loves to play. He wasn't scared to lose, was willing to take a risk in a race. Then you look forward to the race and I think that is one of her strengths, beside the fact that she can do it. I mean, if you cannot follow the peloton, maybe you like to play but there is nothing to play for. She has the level, but she also loves the fun of cycling."

Delahaije and Vos began working together little over two years ago after a recommendation from Van Vleuten, who the Dutchman also coaches. They met over dinner and instantly "clicked". At the time, even in 2018, Vos was still building form after her year away from cycling in 2015, and Delahaije says the aim was to get her back to her previous level by focusing on her natural talent and her biggest strength, which is her explosiveness. To do so, they needed to build up her endurance and fitness.

"For Marianne to put it in one sentence: cycling is fun. So let's not over-complicate

▼ Vos, a three-time Giro Rosa winner, wears the leaders' jersey during last year's race after winning a hat trick of stages. She has now won 28 stages

things. What do you need to be a good cyclist? Marianne Vos is a naturally explosive type of athlete, you need endurance, and you can do that very easily," Delahaije says.

"She didn't want to have a really complicated programme with all kinds of different targets and exercises, no, we just made it as simple as possible... We increased volume and the second is we did a lot of sprinting but that's quite simple, five and 10-second sprints. We did a lot of that."

For years Vos was self-coached, and so her partnership with Delahaije, at this point in her career, is revealing. As Delahaije says, a rider of the calibre of Vos doesn't need support in the same way others may do. He says training is secondary to his role as a coach, a confidant and figure to share ideas or ask for advice. Providing off-the-bike support is often more important for him.

"You are not teaching Marianne how to ride a bicycle race, tactics etc. There she probably has the most experience of anybody in the peloton. But she can still learn to improve physically and in how to deal with setbacks," Delahaije says.

"The most important thing, and I always mention it to my riders, is that a happy rider is a good rider. One part of my job, I always say, is quite simple. It's to keep them happy and you can do that with training or with a good talk or a nice dinner, whatever is needed at that moment. It's never about keeping them motivated - they *are* motivated, otherwise she wouldn't have done this for 16 years at this level. Motivation is not the problem."

With Vos having relied on herself for so long, Delahaije points to the

28

Vos's total number of Giro Rosa stage wins

3

Wins in 2020 for Vos, all which came at the Giro



"You are not teaching Marianne how to ride a bicycle race, tactics. There she probably has the most experience of anyone in the peloton"

- Louis Delahaije, Vos's coach



▲ The three-time world champion swapped CCC for Jumbo this year

importance of taking the decision-making pressure off Vos. Rather than questioning what she has done in training, whether it is enough or too much, Delahaije has the distance to make those calls on her behalf. It was something Delahaije says Vos was missing in the years before.

“At specific moments you need a coach to tell you not to do things. When you coach yourself, you say, ‘I have to do that because I cannot skip a day,’ and now she was calling me and saying, ‘I feel a little bit tired’ and I’d say, ‘Stay at home, take a rest day; you’ve worked very well.’ These simple things make the difference,” Delahaije says.

“I have a lot of riders who tell me, ‘I did the four by four minutes, at 400 with this, this and this watts,’ but I don’t care. I can see that in the file. I want to know how did it feel, how were the legs, how was it mentally, how did you recover? Marianne is very good at giving that kind of information every day, so then it is very easy to work with somebody and make decisions for somebody.”

Added to that is simply the fact that Vos is always eager to learn, to do more, to keep pushing. Delahaije calls her a rider with a “growth mindset,” someone who is constantly looking to improve, to grow. That, he believes, helps sets Vos apart from others. “The best of the best, they are really interested in the process, and the result of that is that they are really successful.” **P**

MULTIPLE ROAD WORLDS WINNERS

With three victories, Vos sits in third on the table of all-time Road World Championships winners



5
JEANNIE LONGO
1985-87, 1989, 1995

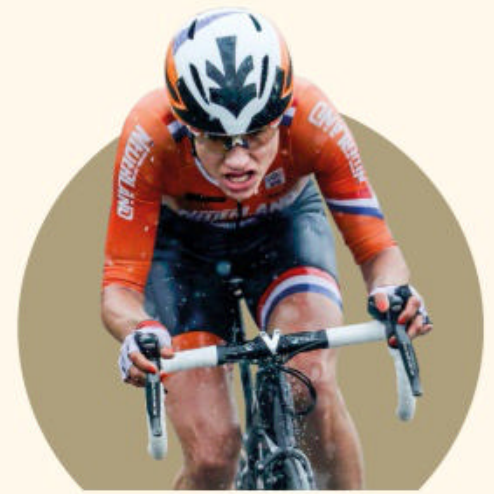


4
YVONNE REYNDERS
1959, 1961, 1963, 1966



3
MARIANNE VOS
2006, 2012, 2013

RIDER	WORLDS TITLES	YEARS
Anna van der Breggen	2	2018, 2020
Giorgia Bronzini	2	2010-11
Susan Ljungskog	2	2002-03
Leontien Zijlaard-van Moorsel	2	1991, 1993
Geneviève Gambillon	2	1972, 1974
Anna Konkina	2	1970-71
Keetie Hage	2	1968, 1976
Beryl Burton	2	1960, 1967



GOING BACK FOR GOLD

The 2020 Olympics will be Vos's fourth Games. Who else has placed highly at multiple road races?

Rider	Years	Positions
Marianne Vos	'08, '12, '16	6th, 1st, 9th
A.v an der Breggen	'16	1st
Lizzie Deignan	'12, '16	2nd, 5th
A. Moolman Pasio	'12, '16	16th, 10th
Alena Amialusk	'12, '16	15th, 13th
A. van Vleuten	'12, '16	14th, DNF



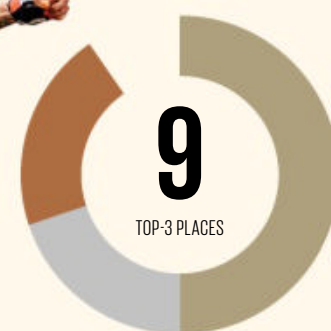
ALL AROUND THE WORLDS

Marianne Vos is the only rider to ever win world titles in road, track and cyclo-cross. But what other active riders have performed well at the Worlds in multiple disciplines?

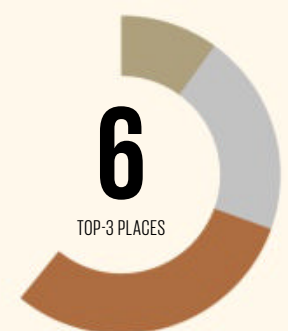
Rider	Track	Road	CX
M. Vos	1	3	7
L. Deignan	1	1	-
P. Ferrand-Prévot	-	1	1
G. Bronzini	1	2	-
K. Wild	6	silver	-
A.Dideriksen	silver & bronze	1	-
M.Cavendish	3	1	-
W. van Aert	-	silver	3
S.Küng	1	bronze	-

UCI'S TOP RANKED RIDER

Marianne Vos has consistently finished high on the UCI's individual rider ranking



MARIANNE VOS



EMMA JOHANSSON

Year	First	Second	Third
2009	M. Vos	K. Wild	E. Johansson
2010	M. Vos	J. Arndt	K. Wild
2011	M. Vos	E. Johansson	J. Arndt
2012	M. Vos	J. Arndt	E. Johansson
2013	E. Johansson	M. Vos	E. van Dijk
2014	M. Vos	E. Johansson	L. Deignan
2015	A. van der Breggen	L. Deignan	J. D'Hoore
2016	M.Guarnier	L. Deignan	E. Johansson
2017	A. van Vleuten	A. van der Breggen	M. Vos
2018	A. van Vleuten	A. van der Breggen	M. Vos
2019	L. Wiebes	M. Vos	A. van Vleuten
2020	A. van der Breggen	E.Longo Borghini	A. van Vleuten

A FINE BALANCE

Tayler Wiles is a key part of Trek-Segafredo, bringing both race wins and emotional intelligence to the American team. She lives with her wife in California, works a part-time job to keep her mind occupied and her first sporting dream was to play in the World Cup. She tells Proccycling why she is on a quest to find the grey areas which lie between black and white



acing cyclists, we are told, are busy doing nothing a lot of the time. The portions of their life that they spend riding their bikes can obviously be frenetic, but the bits in between, which add up to quite a lot of time, are for rest and recovery (and airports). The harder they rest, the harder they can ride. Siri, show me what inactivity looks like: a professional cyclist in recovery mode. This is not true of Tayler Wiles.

Writer

Edward Pickering

Portrait photography

Jojo Harper

“I don’t like to sit still,” the Trek-Segafredo rider tells *Proccycling*. “I always like to be doing something. I’ve always been the kind of person that needs to be productive, to feel a sense of worth.”

Wiles spends part of her spare time working a part-time job, as a customer services manager for a friend’s cycling clothing company. Trek-Segafredo was the first team to give their female riders salary parity with the men, and her moonlighting is not out of financial necessity. It just works mental muscles that cycling cannot reach.

“In my down time I spend time answering emails and solving problems, which I really love. I love solving problems and mentally I need to be doing lots of things besides riding my bike,” she says. “It gives me balance and helps me ride my bike well and gives me something else to focus on. I can focus on training, then have something on the side to keep my mind away from the”





bike. That's a positive thing. It makes me more balanced and well rounded, and I get to be a part of something besides just cycling. It connects me to a lot of people."

Wiles used to blog regularly on an elegant Squarespace website, with beautiful pictures of bowls of healthy, exotic food – Cashew and Goji Berry Salad To Die For! Gluten-Free Quinoa Granola Bars! Bibimbap! And a 10-step and very specific process for the perfect coffee pour-over – but she's migrated to Instagram in the last few years, where she shares sunny selfies. She is a thriving member of the gig economy. She has four parents. She has a wife, with whom she lives in Fairfax, California – the pair were featured in a *Bicycling* magazine feature called 'Cycling's coolest couples'.

Wiles says coming out in the world of women's cycling was straightforward. "It was the easiest place in the world to come out," she says. "There are so many

"There are so many gay women in cycling that I felt it wasn't hard to tell anybody. I'm grateful that I got to come out in that environment. It's not the same with the men"

gay women in cycling and for me it felt it was not even hard to tell anybody. I'm grateful that I got to come out in that environment. It's definitely not the same on the men's side – I don't know a single male gay cyclist. It's very welcoming and accepting on the women's side and I hope it gets to be that way on the men's side as well."

Wiles says that Fairfax is her spiritual home. "It's my oasis," she says. "The riding is beautiful – you have the ocean and the mountains, and it's known as a little hippy town. I've finally found my culture and people!"

♥ Wiles works with a sports psychologist to better understand her talent and ability

If you were to conclude anything from Tayler Wiles' life, and observing how she operates, it might be that she is squarely, incontrovertibly of her time. It is 2021, and the world has changed.

A LONG JOURNEY

Wiles talks about having found her place in Fairfax, and it's been a long journey, physically and figuratively, for her to get there. She grew up in a suburb of Salt Lake City in Utah, a gifted soccer player and straight-A student who wanted to play in the World Cup and to study to be a cardiothoracic surgeon. She wasn't a perfect fit, however. Utah is majority Mormon, but she was not, and her parents divorced when she was young, which was unorthodox among her friends, and also explains why she now counts four parents – both remarried.

"They got together far too young, things happened and they got divorced when I was four," she says. "They both remarried people who I adore, so I got very lucky. I think of all four as my parents and I love them all the same. And it was cycling that kind of brought them together. My parents didn't really speak for 20 years, but when I started cycling they started coming to races and became friends again and now all four travel to races together. It's one big happy family, and that's been the biggest blessing of cycling for me – it brought my family together."





Her memory of Utah is gently critical, though she professes to have enjoyed her childhood. “It’s a strange place, very white, very conservative, very religious,” she says. “Growing up there probably taught me a lot about myself but it wasn’t the easiest. I’m gay, so growing up in a conservative place is not an easy thing. I had divorced parents, and in the dominant religion divorce is not really a big thing. And I didn’t grow up in the dominant religion so was always a bit of a black sheep, and I always knew I wanted to leave Utah.

“My town was about 95 per cent Mormon. All my friends were Mormon and I had some wonderful friends, but I was always seen as a little bit different. I was a straight-A student and never did anything wrong, but some friends’ parents still saw me as the bad kid. There are plenty of Latter Day Saints people who are lovely, but also a lot of judgement, which is

35

Professional career podium finishes

▲ Wiles says that her greatest asset is her ability to hurt herself in a race

rough when you are growing up, especially being judged on things you don’t even understand.”

And just as the journey from Salt Lake City to Fairfax has been a long and convoluted one before she finally found her place, it was quite the journey from teenage soccer player to Trek rider.

Wiles played right midfield on the soccer field, and her ambition was to make a career of it. But when she was offered two university scholarships, one at a small school to play soccer and the other an academic scholarship to a bigger school, she chose the latter. “I don’t know that I was good enough to get to a professional level. The bigger school was a more direct line to medical school, so I stopped soccer, which is a regret, but maybe I’d have never found cycling. Who knows if it was a good or bad decision?”

A boyfriend at the time got Wiles into cycling in her second

year at school, and two weeks later she was on the start line of a local 60-mile race, where she got “annihilated”. But she was also hooked. Though she dreamed of being a surgeon, she also started dreaming of bike racing. Full-time academia turned into part-time academia plus cycling, with one semester on and one semester off, but when she got into UC Berkeley, they told her it was all or nothing. Six credits short of her undergrad degree, she took a contract offer from the Specialized-Lululemon and definitively became a cyclist. “It’s a bit of a regret – I could have finished it off and probably still be where I am in my career, but I couldn’t turn down Specialized-Lululemon. I’ll finish my degree some day,” she says.

Wiles spent three years with Specialized-Lululemon, then spent a season with Orica-GreenEdge. She’d have liked to stay longer, but budget cuts got



▲ En route to 10th place in the 2018 World Champs time trial

in the way. “All the Aussie riders were paid by the federation at the time, and only the international riders were paid by the sponsor. But they got a budget cut and could only have one international rider, and it was either me or Annemiek van Vleuten. That was a hard sell,” she says wryly.

The only issue was that this happened late in the day, and she was left scrabbling for a team. “They cut me and didn’t tell me until September, so that was a bummer,” she says. “I got cut super late and there weren’t a lot of options because most teams were already full. That’s why I went back to race in the States with UnitedHealthcare. I did a year there, then came back to Europe to race with Drops. And then I helped form the Trek team, and here I am.”

From the outside, it looks like when Wiles came to Trek, she finally found her place.

*“No matter how I feel, even if I have really sh*tty legs, I can pretty much do everything possible to do my job for the team”*

THE TIES THAT BIND

Wiles’ development as a cyclist appears to have been relatively straightforward – she’s physically gifted, so training input resulted in power output, and that can be motivation enough. Of course, sometimes it was a case of one step forward and two back – Wiles was unafraid to be thrown in at the deep end, and there were glitches along the way. After early success in local and regional races, she took part in the national level Redlands Bicycle Classic. Her memory of the criterium stage is

of being pulled from the race and sitting in the parking lot crying as the race went on without her. She went to Europe very early on, possibly before she was really ready. “I think about a year after I got my first bike, my coach somehow negotiated a trip with the national team and I came over and raced Binda, Flanders and Flèche Wallonne,” she says.

“I was totally in over my head,” she continues.

But Wiles’ results as a cyclist are good. She’s won eight races – a mix of stages, time trials, plus the GC of the Tour de l’Ardèche,

which is renowned as being a tough and varied event. She's the archetypal cycling all-rounder, and she says her primary weapon is her tenacity.

"I'm really good at suffering," she says. "No matter how I feel, even if I have really sh*tty legs, I can pretty much do everything possible to do my job for the team. I think I have a good head that way. Physically I'm an all-rounder, and it depends on the day. I'm a good stage racer and I really like long stage races, so it's a shame that on the women's side we don't have so many of them. I can do just about anything besides sprint."

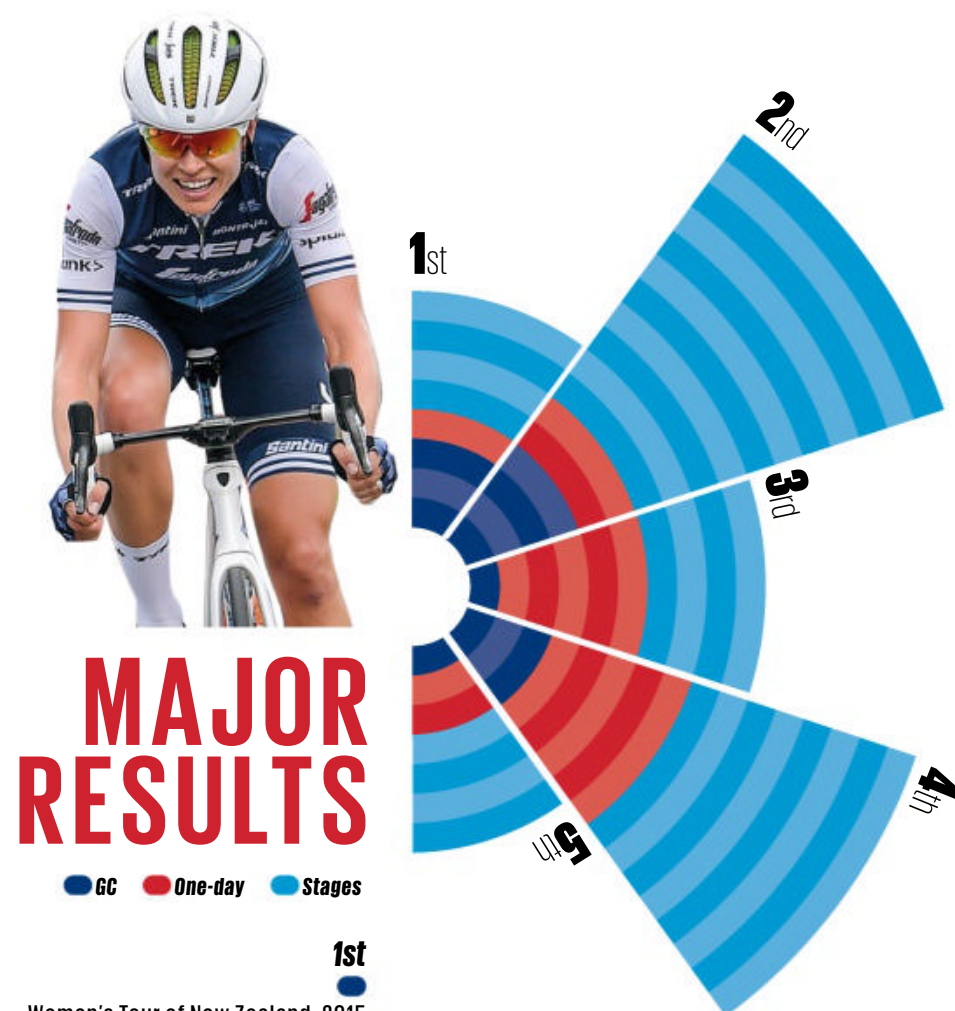
Wiles is neither leader nor domestique, but can do both. However, more importantly, she's part of the glue that binds the Trek-Segafredo team together.

We often view cycling teams as a collection of bodies, which are good at pushing pedals around, and we measure teams' effectiveness by their results. If character comes into the equation, it is usually measured in terms of sporting ambition and how it manifests in racing style, and we

don't hear much about how personality types work together. But Wiles is in full ownership of how she fits into the group at Trek-Segafredo.

"I'm super optimistic, so I bring a lot of positivity to the team, and a lot of balance," she says. "I'm not one of the main leaders, but I still think I have leadership qualities that help off the bike. I like to think I can be a shoulder to cry on, someone to talk to. We spend so much time together we become like a family. I'm known as the emotional one; I'm very emotional. If anybody needs to have a cry with somebody, I'm the person to go to. I'm a big softy and I love to feel the feels."

"I've worked with a sports psychologist for three years now, and we talk about stuff besides work, and it's probably the most healthy thing I've ever done – to explore why I think certain ways and why I act in certain ways in certain situations. I love learning more about myself and trying to grow as a person. I'm very self-analytical and I think that's a good thing. It's positive. I've learned



1st
 Women's Tour of New Zealand, 2015
 Tour de l'Ardèche, 2015
 Tour of the Gila, 2017

Chrono Gatineau, 2014

Women's Tour of New Zealand, 2015
 Tour de l'Ardèche, 2015
 Internationale Thüringen Rundfahrt der Frauen, 2017
 Emakumeen Bira, 2019

2nd

Tour de l'Ardèche, 2014
 La Route de France, 2016
 Tour de Feminin, 2017
 Amgen Tour of California, 2018

Pan American Champs TT, 2017
 US National Champs TT, 2018

Tour de l'Ardèche, 2012, 2015
 Tour de Feminin, 2016, 2017 (2)
 La Route de France, 2016
 Tour of the Gila, 2017 (3)
 Amgen Tour of California, 2018
 Giro d'Italia Femminile, 2018

3rd

Tour de l'Ardèche, 2012

US National Champs RR, 2015
 Chrono de Gatineau, 2015, 2018, 2019
 Race Torquay, 2020

Tour de l'Ardèche, 2012, 2014
 Gracia-Orlova, 2013
 Emakumeen Bira, 2019

4th

Tour de Feminin, 2016
 Boels Ladies Tour, 2018
 Emakumeen Bira, 2019

US National Champs TT, 2014, 2019
 US National Champs RR, 2014
 Chrono de Gatineau, 2017
 Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race, 2020

Internationale Thüringen Rundfahrt der Frauen, 2015 (2), 2017
 Energiewacht Tour, 2016
 Tour de Feminin, 2016
 La Route de France, 2016 (2)
 Tour de l'Ardèche, 2018

5th

Internationale Thüringen Rundfahrt der Frauen, 2017

US National Championships TT, 2017

Tour de l'Ardèche, 2014
 Amgen Tour of California Women's TT, 2015

Tour de Feminin, 2016
 Tour of the Gila, 2017
 Boels Ladies Tour, 2018



“In cycling I’ve had to learn to live in the grey. You can do everything right and still not win the race. I think my black and white thinking has been a flaw, and my sports psychologist would say the same”

a lot about why I’m such an emotional person, and I’ve learned how to think of that as a strength and not a weakness. I used to think that it was bad that I felt so many things, but I now realise I just have a lot of emotions and I’m learning how to navigate them.”

Wiles is trying to apply a similar rigorous approach to learning how bike racing works. Like many who come to the sport late, she has struggled to understand the nuances of the peloton and dark arts of tactical racing.

“I wish I was more tactical,” she says. “Often I’m a bit too physical and maybe that’s because of how I started. I was just really strong, and I never really had to be savvy. I think riders who aren’t quite as strong learn early on to be super savvy, because they have to be. I think my strength made me not learn as much, and I’m still learning about tactics now. I’m more savvy now, but for a long time I relied on brute strength. There are a lot of people who are intuitive racers, and they just have that skill of reading a race and reading the moments. You can learn it, but some people are just better.”

Wiles describes herself as an A-type personality, and says she likes things to be black and white. The logical process of training and getting stronger on the bike appeals to her. “I like to tick boxes, so I really trust my coach and do what I’m given,” she says. “I always train as hard as I can,

sometimes to a fault. I don’t listen to my body enough sometimes – if there are 10 intervals on the plan, I have to do all 10, even if I’m really tired by the end. I’m working on listening to my body more but I’m usually all-in, all the time.”

At the same time, cycling is a sport that largely exists in the huge grey area that lies between black and white. If cycling was fair, the strongest rider would win, but in a bike race, results do not necessarily correlate at all with input or work.


“In cycling I’ve had to learn to live in the grey,” Wiles says. “You can do everything right and still

not win the race. I think my black and white thinking has been a flaw, and my sports psychologist would say the same.

“When I first started I was super impatient and just wanted everything straight away, but you have to learn to adjust things, and there’s not always a correct tactic, not even close. It’s good for me to have to try to be more balanced.”

At 31, Wiles is in the prime of her career, and her late start may give her longevity as a cyclist. She points out that she has still spent more of her life as a soccer player than as a cyclist, and is only a decade into her life on the bike. At the same time, she values the variety of experiences her path through the sport has given her.

“It’s kind of funny, because you’re the young rider, and all of a sudden you realise you’re the old, experienced rider,” she laughs.

Wiles describes her journey as one of self-discovery and learning about herself. But after listening to her talk, it’s clear that she already knows herself very well. 

◀ Wiles piles on the pressure during the 2019 Trofeo Alfredo Binda



Images: Tim de Waele/Getty Images (left)



THERE'S NO OTHER RACE LIKE IT

PARIS-ROUBAIX

Paris-Roubaix is a unique race in cycling, dating back 125 years and covering cobbled roads only seen once a season.

Procycling asks people who have a special relationship with the race what makes the Queen of the Classics so special

INTERVIEWS ADAM BECKET, SOPHIE HURCOM, EDWARD PICKERING

vingt-neuf de PARIS POURAIV 2010

PARIS
UBAIX
PUIS 1896

WON PARIS-ROUBAIX IN 2014



NIKI TERPSTRA
Rider, Total Direct Energie

Roubaix has a special place in my heart. When I was a little kid and I started cycling, Roubaix was one of the races I admired the most. I was watching the television like the cyclists were the heroes, because on the television it looks tough but if you see it in real life it's even harder. I thought it was a special race and when I was a first year professional and had the opportunity to start there, it was a really special feeling.

The route hasn't changed for a lot of years. You can't compare the cobbles with other cobbles, because in Belgium the cobbles are rough but in the north of France it's even rougher. And also we don't race there any other time of the year. It's really one day of the year. In Flanders, we have a lot of races here and you

do the cobbled sections and the small hills in another race and it's just another mix of those roads. But in Roubaix, you race those roads just once.

Everybody has got a luxury team bus where you can shower – but sometimes I take my backpack out of the bus and go to the showers there. These small things make it extra historic, I think, and heroic. It's almost unbelievable that I won there. It sounds silly, but it's really a dream come true. It is a race that suits me well. I knew it, but actually finishing it off, I will never forget that moment. Maybe later on I will realise it even more. Every winner has their name on a plate in the showers, and when you see your plate against the wall there with all the other big names, it makes me proud.

▼ Terpstra celebrates in the Roubaix velodrome as he wins in 2014



READY FOR THE INAUGURAL WOMEN'S RACE



EMILIA FAHLIN

Rider, FDJ-Nouvelle Aquitaine

After doing the recon ride, I understood why you should, because it is unique. It is really like nothing else we've done before. I've always watched this race; it's one of my favourites. I watched it when we had a Swedish winner in Magnus Bäckstedt when I was young. Sitting on the sofa watching the TV, you see it's rough and you see it's hard but riding it is something unreal. Some of the sectors are crazy.

You need pure power and you need a good day to be able to produce the power, but it's also the technique to have the right gear and to float on the cobbles. You need a bit of practice, and you need good equipment and you need equipment testing – tyre pressure and tyre width. All of the small details in a race like this are important. And also the right feel on the cobbles, the right pedal stroke and the right movement of the body and how you hold the bars. It's sort of like making music on the bike over the cobbles. It's something we don't have to focus on normally.

It's super big that there's finally a womens' edition. We're lucky enough to have some of the big iconic races, but we are missing a few and this is one of the most special ones on the calendar.



FOUR TOP-FIVE FINISHES IN THE LAST DECADE



**SEP
VANMARCKE**

Rider, Israel
Start-Up Nation

▲ Vanmarcke had
to settle for second
behind Cancellara
in the 2013 race

I think it's the most heroic race of the year. It's the most spectacular one as well and obviously it's one of the most known in the world. It is so different and hard that everybody goes to their limit and over it. Even at the finish – I was just talking about it with a team-mate – even if you're 50th or 70th, you still sprint, because you don't know where you are in the field any more and you want to get the best result. That's basically the only race where you do that; it's very special.

As soon as I became a pro, I found I could ride Roubaix very well, so I started to love it even more. It's really hard terrain, really rough; not just for the legs but for the whole body. People who have no experience of the cobbles will ride it in the wrong way. They will pump the tyres too high and hold the bars too hard and suffer even more. You have to find some small adaptations on the bike, but the way you ride on the road is not the same way you ride on the cobbles, and you have to get

used to it as well. It's very demanding. I've basically always been in the front group, so that's my level.

To win, I think everything has to fall into place for me. I need a perfect day, but I need perfect circumstances. I've had bad luck many times with punctures and crashes, and I've always got back into position, but it takes a lot of energy. It's sad that we didn't do it last year, but I don't think this year will be any different because everybody has found their normal rhythm again.

PHOTOGRAPHED ROUBAIX FOR DECADES



**GRAHAM
WATSON**

Cycling
photographer

I rode my bicycle from Calais to Roubaix early one morning and I saw the 1980 Paris-Roubaix, come by me with about 15 kilometres to go. I had a camera lens in a little handlebar bag and just attached it to the bike and rode from the car ferry in Calais to try and find the race. That's the bare beginning, and I saw the race every year since. I'd been doing cycling photography for three years then. I'd seen the Tour de France three times, but never seen a one-day classic and I was attracted to doing it as part of my growing interest in the business.

Every year you learn something more about the route, but in the beginning, probably for 10 years, I always made a point of going out during the week before and reconnoitering the course, sometimes with teams, sometimes by myself with the car, and every year you'd really refresh your mind and make notes. Even if you're in the race you

make a lot of diversions around the race, so your experience counts to know where to be and when to be there, but also the knowledge of having been out during the week and refreshing your memory about which cut-through to take and when to stop and what to expect. Gradually you go back to the areas of the race where you got your best shots, you remember a favourite corner; you have to be in the Arenberg Forest, you have to be at Troisville where the cobbles begin, you have to go onto the Carrefour de l'Arbre at the end. Between those, you've probably got four or five other opportunities.

It was definitely my favourite one-day race. There's this eternal debate about Flanders and Roubaix. I always say Flanders is the most difficult race to win, the hardest race to win, whereas Paris-Roubaix is the greatest one-day classic. It's a freak, one day out on ridiculous cobblestones, it's an adventure for everybody in it, especially the photographers who are guaranteed to get some great shots. Even on a bad, dusty, dry day you go there knowing you're going to have a great day out. It makes your enjoyment of the race that much greater than Flanders. If it's a wet day you're really excited. Because you're part of the Tour de France family it has a prestige that Flanders doesn't have, you know there's going to be really worldwide attention.

Being inside the velodrome as the race arrived was like being in the coliseum awaiting a gladiators' duel.

▼ The 1980 edition of Roubaix was Graham Watson's first taste of the race



Images: Tim de Waele/Getty (Watson), Graham Watson



When it rained at Roubaix, like it did in 2001, it created a lot of spectacular shots



REPAIRS THE ROUBAIX COBBLES



FRANÇOIS DOULCIER

President, Les Amis de Paris-Roubaix

We have 320 members, we have former riders and we have different nationalities. We have French people, Belgian people, from Europe but also from the United States, Australia, China, Japan, Canada... The association is worldwide. It was 2001 when I got membership, so now it is my 20 year anniversary.

The first time I watched Paris-Roubaix on television, I was maybe eight years old. The first time I rode my bicycle I was maybe four years old. Now I am 56. When I was young it was better for me to ride on the cobbles.

I have been living in the north of France for 30 years, I live in a flat near the Roubaix velodrome – from my balcony I can see the

velodrome. I know all the cobblestones, the roads we have in our area, so it is very easy for me to be involved in this beautiful race.

This race started in 1896 and has a very great heritage. Most of the cobblestone roads disappeared during the last century; it was awful for us. We had to change the route many times to find new roads. The main roads that were cobbled now have asphalt. Now the local government is able to repair the sectors if necessary, and we try to protect them. There are 100km of cobblestones available, and the race uses 55km. We have some potholes and we try to avoid danger for the riders. Each year we try to fix the cobblestones to have a safe route.

▼ The Roubaix pavé is rough and has ruts, which require maintenance



MISSED THE TIME CUT BUT KEPT RIDING



EVALDAS ŠIŠKEVIČIUS

Rider, Team Delko

It was an incredible day when I finished ninth in Roubaix, one of the most beautiful days in my career, in 2019. It was the day that everything went well – I had no punctures, no problems. I had super legs, I made a good tactical choice, everything went really well and I really enjoyed it.

I have a real history with Paris-Roubaix, with what happened the previous year. The race has given me a lot. It is cool that I can participate in the legend of Roubaix.

The year before, my team manager said to me that Roubaix has a history, and you need to respect the history of the race. It's important. A lot of riders have done this race before, and that's why I rode to the finish outside the time limit, an hour after the winner, to respect the race. I just wanted to go to the finish, I cannot explain why or what was happening in my head at that moment. Even my wife told me that she didn't know why I did that, I guess I just got the idea in my head. I didn't do it when I rode Roubaix before, but this was a year where I wasn't dead. Sometimes when you ride the race you're so tired that you can't go on any longer, but that year I wanted to go to the finish.



WINNER OF THE 1955 PARIS-ROUBAIX



**JEAN
FORESTIER**
Former pro cyclist

▲ Forestier solos through the cold weather to win at the 1955 Roubaix

I won Paris-Roubaix on Easter Day, which was always an auspicious day for me – I'd already won two races on Easter Day.

That year, the weather was terrible, it was cold and rained. I had no plan at all in the morning that I was going to win. I knew I was in good condition and that my form was good, but I wasn't thinking of the win. In those days the race really did start in Paris, and the race split up early, with me in the fourth echelon.

There was a hard climb in the last 40km, the Côte de Doullens, where Louison Bobet rode very hard. I attacked, to join Bernard Gauthier, then attacked alone with 30km to go and they never caught me.

Behind me, Fausto Coppi and Louison Bobet were in the next group. But they were watching each other and there is no doubt at all that day that I benefitted from their rivalry. Their main plan was that they would not help the other one

to win, and that meant that they didn't chase me. I still had to ride hard, and I was exhausted – so empty at the finish that I couldn't feel too much emotion. I was cooked, cooked, cooked. But the next day, I was very happy – Paris-Roubaix is the queen of classics, the biggest race.

My training secret was that I did a lot of cyclo-cross during the winter, which taught me balance on the bike, and I think that helped me to win Paris-Roubaix.



Hammond is one of only three Brits to ever finish on the Roubaix podium



FINISHED THIRD IN 2004 AND NOW WORKS ON THE RACE AS A TEAM MANAGER

Roubaix in 2004 was one of those moments that was fairly life changing for me. I remember that day vividly. Riding for a smaller team had its challenges, but I'm a firm believer that Roubaix is one direction, and there's a lot less that can go on than in Flanders, for example. It's one of those races where you make your own luck. In the 10 years I did it, I only got one puncture. My team-mates got me out of a lot of trouble, because it was a day that I was really nervous, and didn't realise how much until I found out I'd forgotten my food at the beginning, so without any team-mates that would have been the end of my race. Although they finished a long way behind – I think my first team-mate finished after I did the podium ceremony – they did the job they needed to do.

When you're in that front group, getting closer to the finish, it's amazing, with the noise, the atmosphere and the excitement, and it's hard not to get carried away with it. Coming into the velodrome I could hear other people changing gears, really localised noises. The only thing I could hear outside of that was the flapping of the flags, which was really bizarre. So many thousands of people there. You've got your plan, and you're just so focused on executing it at that point in the race. I knew I'd be tired when I got there, with low sugar in your brain and a high heart rate. You're not going to make the right decisions, so you have

a predetermined plan. I absolutely loved the race. You don't do Roubaix because you're paid to, you do Roubaix because you love it. Otherwise nobody would go there. I never thought that I shouldn't do Roubaix just in case I injure myself for Romandie, so I loved it, I obsessed about it, I loved how you had to pay attention to your equipment.

There was a flow to the racing, it was a monument, so you were riding a familiar race to Merckx, De Vlaeminck, all of the greats. I was always dreaming of a wet Roubaix because then my skills could come to the fore, but sadly you can't choose the weather.

I wish every single rider would get into the car and do a Roubaix like that, they should be obliged to before they criticise a DS again. I take every opportunity to apologise to every DS I had in the past.



ROGER HAMMOND
Team manager,
Bahrain Victorious

▼ Hammond narrowly missed the podium in 2010, finishing fourth



Images: Tim de Waele/Getty Images (right), Corvos (main).

ROUBAISIEEN AND WRITER OF SEVERAL BOOKS ON PARIS-ROUBAIX



**PASCAL
SERGENT**
Author

▼ Two-time winner
Franco Ballerini is
the archetypal
Roubaix rider

Roubaix is an old industrial city, and like any it faces challenges. Unemployment is quite high and life isn't always easy here. Through the 20th century, its wealth came from the wool industry and it had one of the biggest wool factories in Europe in the 1950s but it shrunk through the 1960s and 1970s and it has closed now. Roubaix reinvented itself, and La Redoute, the mail order company, was the biggest employer, but the city is in transition now to a service economy. But while it's one of the poorest cities in France,

the name is known everywhere and the race exports the name everywhere.

People may not know about the city, but they know the name of the race. For the people of the Nord region, the race is special. Life here has been about working in mines, then factories, and life has been hard. Paris-Roubaix represents that difficulty a little, and though the mines and factories have closed, the collective memory of the people still appreciates the effort of the riders.

Paris-Roubaix itself is such a hard race and it has an aura.

It is unique, and I think it should stay unique. It's been around over a hundred years, so it has a long history, and that has allowed it to resist progress, while the great champions have all won it. You just have to look at the winners' list – Merckx, De Vlaeminck, Coppi, Bobet, Maes, Pélissier – to understand that it's an important race. Without that depth of winners, maybe the race would have disappeared or sunk down to the lower categories like Paris-Brussels.

If I have an image of the race it is of Franco Ballerini, who was a friend of mine and who won it two times. There's a picture of him which we put on the cover of one of my books, with him, the dust, the crowds and the cars following. For me, the archetypal Roubaix riders are him and Francesco Moser – they were motivated mainly just by that race; they lived for it.

The race allows us to understand how much harder things were in the past, but at the same time, the race is much harder than it was in the 1950s, for example. They used bigger roads, and the riders could ride alongside the cobbles on the pavements. It was only when those roads were improved and they started using the farm tracks that it got very hard. The strongest and best Roubaix riders come to the fore on these tracks – they ride through the centre of the track, to avoid going to the edge and getting a puncture, but it takes great power and technique to ride at speed there. Roubaix is a specialists' race – you have to have skill, and be very very strong to win.





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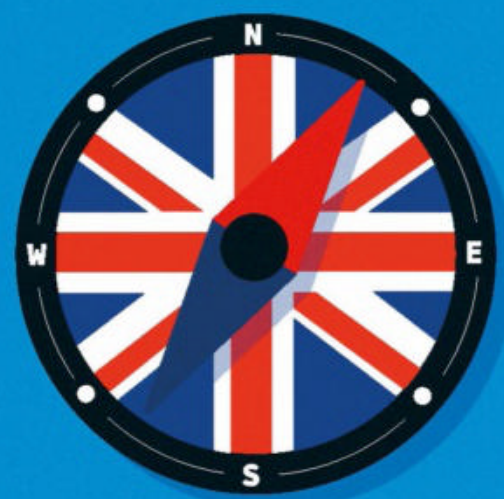
STATE OF THE NATION

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

According to popular wisdom, the British cycling boom began with the 2008 Beijing Olympics and peaked in the summer of 2012, as Bradley Wiggins won the Tour de France. But there has always been more to the sport in the UK than that. *Procycling* looks at a nation that has always done things a little differently

Writer Richard Moore // Illustration Neil Stevens

GREAT BRITAIN



PHILIPPA YORK

EDINBURGH



CHRIS BOARDMAN

NEWCASTLE



MARK CAVENDISH

YORKSHIRE

LIVERPOOL



CHRIS FROOME



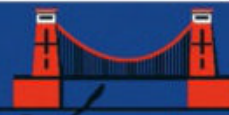
GERAINT THOMAS

DAVID MILLAR



TOM SIMPSON

CARDIFF



BRADLEY WIGGINS

LONDON



TOM PIDCOCK



CYCLING IN BRITAIN BEGAN IN TWO THOUSAND AND EIGHT (WHICH WAS RATHER LATE FOR ME) BETWEEN THE END OF DAVID MILLAR'S BAN AND BRADLEY WIGGINS' FIRST TOP THREE

With apologies to Philip Larkin and the opening lines of his famous poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, which are butchered above. Writing in 1967 about 1963, Larkin was referring not to cycling but to another physical activity. He was not being literal.

But this is 2021 and we are living in the age of no-nuance Twitter, so let's ignore that, take it at face value, and call 2008 year zero: British cycling's *annus mirabilis*, when its cyclists won eight Olympic golds and Mark Cavendish won two stages at the Giro d'Italia and four at the Tour de France.

That was 13 years ago – a full generation and more in sporting terms. It means there's as much distance between then and now as between Tom Simpson and Robert Millar, or Chris Boardman and Bradley Wiggins.

What should that mean? Perhaps that cycling as a sport, previously marginal, has come of age. Which in turn would mean that the sport was broadly understood and taken seriously, and that British cyclists were consistently successful internationally.

Caveats apply, but cycling is taken seriously. British riders are consistently successful. Moreover, when major races are held on British roads they attract enormous crowds, the equal of just about any race in the world and a lot better than most.

Yet taking the current temperature of cycling in Britain is not easy. Wiggins, who did so much to help the sport hit the

mainstream, is long retired. Cavendish is still racing but a diminished force. Chris Froome, who turns 36 in May, talks of a fifth Tour win that few can imagine. Slightly younger, Geraint Thomas might be a slightly better bet for another yellow jersey, though it seems more likely that he has started a gentle descent.

Hugh Carthy and the Yates twins, Simon and Adam, are at the top of their game: solid and frequently spectacular performers, and yet it is easier to imagine them winning grand tours (as Simon has already done) than becoming household names in the UK.

And herein lies one of the caveats. As the case of Simon Yates demonstrates – he was sanctioned for what the UCI described as “non-intentional doping” in 2016, with his team admitting fault – doping stories are bigger news, even when involving relatively unknown riders, than grand tour wins.

For good or ill, this tends not to be the case in countries where cycling's roots are buried deeper in the sporting landscape. If

cycling in Europe is an old oak, in Britain it can seem more like a sapling, in need of care, attention and time if it is to establish itself.

Still, a tree, even a sapling, is at least more robust than a bubble. For five or six years after the explosion of interest that came with the 2008 Olympic Games there was an assumption that this is what the popularity of cycling amounted to. There was a sense of fragility and a lack of permanence, the British cycling boom an edifice built on sand. As everyone knows, bubbles eventually pop and sandcastles collapse.

There have been scandals – jiffy bags sent to races with unknown contents, testosterone deliveries, bullying – though perhaps a more likely threat, when the sport's popularity seemed so dependent on individual, charismatic, race-winning stars, was always the simple passing of time.

Cycling's popularity and status in the UK seemed to survive Wiggins' retirement – and even the shadows over his legacy thrown up by the now infamous, and never



BRITISH CYCLING

◀ Cavendish's Tour de France breakthrough came in 2008, when he won four stages

▼ Tom Simpson remains Britain's most successful one-day racer

▼▼ Tom Pidcock is spearheading a new generation of successful Brits



satisfactorily resolved, jiffy bag story – and Cavendish's decline, partly because in Froome and Thomas, British riders were still winning the Tour de France.

But when Froome and Thomas were left out of the Ineos Grenadiers lineup for last year's race it seemed a significant, possibly era-ending moment. No longer wrapped in a Union Jack, as they had been since their launch as Team Sky in 2010, Ineos now appeared to have a more international, cosmopolitan flavour. They were led into the Tour by two South Americans, Egan Bernal and Richard Carapaz.

Then came failure at the Tour followed by unexpected success at the Giro d'Italia with Tao Geoghegan Hart, a Londoner.

"An international team with a British heart" is how Dave Brailsford describes the squad's latest iteration, though the British accent seems even more pronounced in 2021 than 2020 with the arrival of Adam Yates, and the long-awaited unveiling of a 21-year-old, Tom Pidcock, who seems to have been around forever.

Even the publicity pictures announcing Pidcock's first day as an Ineos Grenadier on 1 March, at the conclusion to the cyclo-cross season, appeared loaded with meaning. With his confident gaze, little black earring and a medallion tossed over the collar of his team jersey, Pidcock looked like a cross between Pete Doherty and Robbie Williams.

It might seem silly to dwell on the significance of publicity shots, though not, perhaps, in this case. They were the pictures chosen by the team, after all. And Pidcock's exuded attitude. They conveyed a swagger and an individuality that might have been at odds with the 'old' Team Sky.

What this says about the 'new' Ineos remains to be seen, but whatever happens, you imagine Pidcock – whose skills range

from mountain biking and cyclo-cross to cobbles, stage races and mountains – at the centre of it.

AN EXOTIC SPORT

But before gazing into the future, it's worth scrolling back and debunking a few myths, including the one about the sport barely existing in the British popular imagination prior to 2008 – not least because it ignores a hugely significant event in 2007, when London hosted a spectacular grand départ of the Tour de France.

As the crowds in London and Kent suggested, there was an appetite for this. And the huge surge in popularity that came after the following year's Olympics does not seem indicative of a phenomenon that came from nowhere. It suggests instead a latent interest that was just waiting to be realised, like a tap waiting to be turned on.

It had been in evidence before, admittedly on a more modest scale, when Simpson was winning major races in the 1960s, Millar was winning grand tour mountain stages in the 1980s, and Boardman was taking his time trialling talent to the continental stage in the 1990s.

Cycling had a following and a healthy club and racing scene, but its form in Britain was always different and unique. Like a twin separated from their sibling at birth, it developed in a different environment and therefore in a different way. It followed an alternative path, maybe only partly explained by the channel that separates Britain from mainland Europe.

It's difficult at this point to avoid the B-word: Brexit. If Britain was never quite fully part of Europe, it might help explain why British cyclists always felt that their



RICHARD MOORE

Richard Moore is the co-owner and presenter of *The Cycling Podcast*, and the author of several award-winning books about cycling, including *Slaying the Badger* and *Sky's the Limit*. He has been covering the sport since the early 2000s.

sport in its purest form – as represented by the Tour de France, with most of the other European road races some version of it – was exotic and ‘foreign’. There was a cultural gap between the sport in Britain and Europe that could be hard to bridge. Like the languages of the places where the races were held, cycling was difficult to understand and hard to penetrate. Perverse as it may seem, this went a long way to explaining its appeal to those of us who went to considerable lengths to follow it.

The effort could prove rewarding, but it was an effort. There was no Eurosport, no internet, and only the odd mention in the ‘sport in brief’ column in the newspapers. But so much for fans; for ambitious riders it was harder.

Disregarding the politics of Brexit, in practical terms young bike riders today will be given a taste of what Paul Sherwen, Graham Jones, Robert Millar and Sean Yates had to go through to live and race in continental Europe in the 1970s and 80s, before the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht formalised people’s rights to live and work throughout Europe, and before the Eurotunnel and cheap air travel also made it easier.

One such rider is Joe Laverick, who rode for Ag2r’s U23 team in 2020 and for 2021 signed for Axel Merckx’s Hagens Berman Axeon. Laverick intended to move to what has become the international capital city for professional cyclists: Girona in Spain.

This proved far from straightforward. As an EU citizen, he could have moved, lived and worked anywhere in the EU. From 1 January 2021 he couldn’t: a fact that only really sunk in in mid-December 2020, when the Brexit deal’s terms became clear.

He could still live in Spain with a residency permit, but although he could complete the first part of the process in the UK, he had to do the second part in Spain.

In summary, and with covid-19 travel restrictions, Laverick couldn’t travel to Spain without his residency papers. But he couldn’t get his residency papers without travelling to Spain.

He eventually got there by taking the Eurostar to Brussels then flying to Spain, but it was a nervous undertaking, with Laverick convinced at every stage – leaving London, arriving in Brussels, leaving Brussels, arriving in Spain – that he was about to confront an insurmountable hurdle.

Laverick was relatively

fortunate; he had a contract with a team and could make a reasonable argument that he needed to be in Spain to do his job. For other riders, amateurs but also on some continental teams, it could prove more difficult. It seems almost certain that fewer riders will be able to take the great gamble of going to Europe to try and turn pro.

This comes at a time when, perhaps mainly thanks to the explosion in popularity of the sport over the past

decade and a bit, there are more British pros spread among more WorldTour teams than at any point in the past.

In 2010, when Sky launched, there were eight British riders in the 27-man squad (in 2021 there are also eight at Team Ineos), but in establishing that first roster they had arguably signed every British rider capable of riding at that level, except Cavendish, who joined two years later.

These days, as well as the eight British riders at Ineos, there are another 17 riding at the highest level – 25 in total. More significantly, 13 of the 19 WorldTour teams have British riders in their roster. The hurdles imposed by Brexit could see a decline over the next five, 10 years.

Or perhaps not, since teams are now actively seeking British talent in a way that they certainly weren’t five, 10 years ago. And as Laverick points out, there are more Australians and Americans riding for European teams than in the past, despite the hurdles that stand in their way.

THE FOURTH GRAND TOUR

To try and get a sense of the current state of the sport in Britain I spoke to Mick Bennett, the director of the Tour of Britain. Bennett is also a former rider, a medallist in the team pursuit at the 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games, so he is well placed to cast an eye over the way the sport in Britain has changed over five decades.

The Tour of Britain is the country’s flagship event: a barometer, perhaps, for the sport’s health. And in the status and the fate of the race is perhaps the real story of cycling in Britain.

Last year it was a casualty of covid-19, like many races. But it is interesting to consider the events that did go ahead, and why. In Belgium, for example, the classics re-scheduled for October, when the country was suffering the start of a second wave of coronavirus cases, did go ahead. Once the dates were set they never seemed in real doubt.

They were held behind closed doors – a public advertising campaign encouraged people to stay at home – but it was clear that there was serious political capital invested in making sure the races went ahead. It was important – it mattered to Belgium – that the Tour of Flanders, in particular, happened. ▶



“We always had one or two riders who could perform internationally, but never so many at one time, and Bradley, Mark, Geraint - they gave the people local heroes. Bradley is a big part of where we are today”

– Mick Bennett, Tour of Britain race director

Tao Geoghegan Hart is the latest British grand tour winner, having triumphed in the 2020 Giro d'Italia

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Similarly in France with the Tour, an event that is clearly more than a bike race, with enormous national and cultural significance. And in Italy, with the Giro d'Italia, and Spain, with the Vuelta a España, there was a sense – previously underappreciated – of a political dimension to these races. Far more than just sporting events, they were national institutions and showcases and expressions of defiance and pride. As in Flanders, it seemed to matter that they went ahead.

I asked Bennett if he looked enviously at these races, wishing there was the same political capital invested in the Tour of Britain. “I don’t think you can compare,” he said. “If you start to think like that you lose sight of the purpose of the race, which is about promoting health and wellbeing and taking the event to the public.

“We couldn’t run the Tour of Britain or the Women’s Tour without the public and the schools there. That’s where we’re different to the Tour of Flanders. So we don’t compare, because we realise how important it is to have a live audience – and I don’t mean one that’s socially distanced.

“If we ran the race without an audience, to me, it wouldn’t be worth doing,” he added. “It’s the crowds that make the Tour of Britain and Women’s Tour the events they are.”

Bennett is proud of the Tour of Britain, re-established in 2004, and the Women’s Tour, which was first run in 2014 and sets a high bar for other women’s races. The men’s tour is the latest incarnation of the national tour, following the original Tour of Britain (1945–57) and Milk Race (1958–1993), and the Kellogg’s Tour (1987–94) and PruTour (1998–99). It came along just as there were signs that something might be stirring in British cycling.

For one thing, and even before the emergence of Wiggins and Cavendish, the crowds were more than respectable. And they increased every year. In 2012, the high water mark of British success when Wiggins and Cavendish both rode the Tour of Britain, the audience didn’t just materialise from nowhere – Bennett’s race had been helping to grow it, and if anything it has carried on growing since then.



“We proudly call it the fourth grand tour,” Bennett said. “I know other people, and other countries, will probably think, well, it doesn’t come near. But to us it’s the fourth grand tour.”

The Tour of Britain is eight days long, much shorter than the 20-plus days of the three grand tours. But what Bennett means, and how he makes the case, is that the crowds at the roadside compare easily with those in Italy, Spain and France. Watch footage of the race – not just when it is in towns and cities, but also on remote climbs – and it is hard to disagree.

It is impossible to measure the impact of events in developing a culture around a sport.

But as well as the Tour of Britain, the Tour’s grand départs in London in 2007 and Yorkshire in 2014, and to a lesser extent the Tour de Yorkshire and 2019 Worlds in the same county, must have helped cycling establish a stronger foothold.

Bennett is broadly in agreement with that assessment, as you might expect, though he concedes that people have been perhaps more significant than events. Specifically Wiggins, Cavendish, Thomas and Froome – but especially Wiggins.

“We always had one or two riders who could perform internationally, but never so many at one time and Bradley, Mark, Geraint – they gave the people who came out to support our race local heroes. I think Bradley is a big part of where we are today.”



◀ Huge crowds came to watch Wiggins and Cavendish at the 2012 Tour of Britain

▶ The 2019 Worlds in Yorkshire confirmed cycling’s ongoing popularity in Britain

▼ Chris Froome’s continuing success at the Tour kept cycling in the public eye in the UK

▼▼ Mick Bennett, race director of the Tour of Britain and Women’s Tour



THE NEXT GENERATION

In mid-February it was announced that for the second year in a row, and again because of the ongoing pandemic, the Women's Tour would not be held in its usual June slot. Bennett and his team are trying to secure a date in October instead.

He remains hopeful for the Tour of Britain. But unlike some of the major races in Europe, he refuses to consider an event that's closed to the public, mainly because it wouldn't satisfy funding partners who are dominated by local authorities.

"We've managed to keep our slot in September [5-13] for the Tour of Britain," said Bennett. "But a lot might depend on the vaccination programme and the covid precautions that are in place at that time. We're looking at about £250,000 to implement all the covid precautions for the men's and women's tours. It's difficult to get your head around that."

To redeploy the tree metaphor to illustrate the difference that remains between the sport in Britain and Europe: if covid-19 is a storm raging through a forest, with only the biggest, sturdiest and oldest trees left

standing, then the younger saplings are extremely vulnerable. This applies to lots of smaller races in Europe, too, but not to events of national significance in countries where cycling is considered important.

"I think we're in a better place than we've ever been," Bennett said. "Covid is a big challenge to everyone, but I think when we get back to normal the sport will be in a better place and the public will be hungry for the Tour of Britain and the Women's Tour."

"When we started the Women's Tour seven years ago, we wanted to be the best women's stage race in the world. And we achieved that. We didn't do anything different to the men's tour: we just provide the same facilities, the same prize money and the same logistics."

The Women's Tour, which had no problem attracting large crowds from day one, tells us a lot about the culture of cycling in Britain. In mainland Europe, women's events tend to be newer and held in the shadow of the men's events, and they can struggle to create the same buzz: as though

they are competing against history. Consider the differences between the Women's Tour and men's Tour of Britain: one is recognised as the best in the world in terms of organisation, crowd support and prestige; the other is among the best in the world in terms of organisation and

crowd support, but not prestige

What do the coming years hold? It almost certainly comes back again to individuals. Could Geoghegan Hart, Ethan Hayter and Pidcock – or Fred Wright, James Knox, Mark Donovan or Jake Stewart – be the new Wiggins, Thomas and Cavendish? Pidcock, since


he won junior world titles in cyclo-cross and time trialling in 2017,

has been marked out as the next big star. It's his versatility that impresses; he's as adept in the mud of a cyclo-cross race as on a mountain pass – in 2019 he won at La Planche des Belles Filles in the Tour Alsace, then in 2020 won three stages and the general classification at the Baby Giro. Think Mathieu van der Poel crossed with Remco Evenepoel.

"I remember when Pidcock rode the Tour of Britain," said Bennett. It was 2018, Pidcock was 19, a first year senior, and the moment that sticks in Bennett's mind is stage 6, to Whinlatter Pass. It was a brutal stage of crosswinds and climbs ripped apart by Quick-Step Floors for Julian Alaphilippe as he tried to take the leader's jersey from Primož Roglic.

Pidcock shone, finishing sixth on the stage, 0:21 behind a group containing the winner Wout Poels, Alaphilippe and Carthy, and ahead of many big names. "He didn't quite make it into that elite group at the end," recalled Bennett. "But he almost did. At 19, it was pretty astonishing."

Though Bennett doesn't say it explicitly, history would suggest that Pidcock, or one of the other very promising young riders coming through, could hold the keys to the future popularity of cycling in Britain.

As Bennett does say, the biggest lesson is to not compare. Cycling in Britain is, always has been and perhaps always will be different. It can be a weakness – the Tour of Britain will never be the Tour de France – but also a strength, best embodied by the Women's Tour. 



BRITISH HEROES

British riders have been world beaters since the 1960s, though the modern era has seen much more consistent success, with 11 grand tour wins since 2011, more than twice as many as any other country



TOM SIMPSON

Career: 1959-1967

Most known for wearing yellow and dying tragically on Mont Ventoux during the Tour, Simpson still remains GB's best ever one-day racer. He won San Remo, Flanders, Lombardia and the Worlds, with a high point of sixth in the Tour.



BERYL BURTON

Career: 1958-1986

Denied a large amount of international success by the dearth of a big women's scene, Burton was hugely successful, winning the Worlds RR twice, and the Worlds pursuit title five times, as well as over 40 national road TT championships.



NICOLE COOKE

Career: 2004-2012

The only British rider to have won an Olympic road race gold, which she did in 2008 in Beijing, Cooke also won the Worlds RR title, along with Fleche Wallonne, Amstel Gold Race, the Tour of Flanders, Giro Rosa and the World Cup.



BRADLEY WIGGINS

Career: 2002-2016

Britain's charismatic first Tour de France winner spearheaded the modern popularity of cycling. Wiggins also won multiple world and Olympic titles on the track, was a world TT champion, and held the Hour record.



MARK CAVENDISH

Career: 2007-present

Holder of the modern record for Tour de France stage wins with 30, Cavendish revolutionised sprinting. He has won Milan-San Remo and the Worlds, along with points jerseys at all three grand tours, among 146 career wins in total.



CHRIS FROOME

Career: 2007-present

Froome is Britain's best ever grand tour rider, with four yellow jerseys, a Giro win and two Vueltas. Froome has achieved a further four podium places in the grand tours, and five WorldTour stage race victories in total.

BEST RESULTS IN THE BIG NINE

RACE	WINS	SECONDS	THIRDS
TdF	Bradley Wiggins 2012 Chris Froome 2013, 2015-17 Geraint Thomas 2018	Chris Froome 2012 Geraint Thomas 2019	Chris Froome 2018
Gdl	Chris Froome 2018 Tao Geoghegan Hart 2020	Robert Millar 1987	-
VaE	Chris Froome 2011, 2017 Simon Yates 2018	Robert Millar 1985, 1986 Bradley Wiggins 2011 Chris Froome 2014, 2016	Hugh Carthy 2020
MSR	Tom Simpson 1964 Mark Cavendish 2009	Ben Swift 2016	Brian Robinson 1957 Ben Swift 2014
RVV	Tom Simpson 1961	-	Tom Simpson 1963
PR	-	-	Barry Hoban 1972 Roger Hammond 2004 Ian Stannard 2016
LBL	-	-	Barry Hoban 1969 Robert Millar 1988
WLD	Tom Simpson 1965 Mark Cavendish 2011	Mark Cavendish 2016	-
IL	Tom Simpson 1965	-	-

TdF Tour de France, **Gdl** Giro d'Italia, **VaE** Vuelta a España, **MSR** Milan-San Remo, **RVV** Tour of Flanders, **PR** Paris-Roubaix, **LBL** Liège-Bastogne-Liège, **WLD** World Championships, **IL** Il Lombardia

NUMBER OF GT POINTS/KOM WINS



BRITAIN'S BEST-RANKED RIDERS



TAO GEOGHEGAN HART

Ineos Grenadiers
UCI Ranking: 13th



LIZZIE DEIGNAN

Trek-Segafredo
UCI Ranking: 5th



SIMON YATES

Team BikeExchange
UCI Ranking: 38th



LIZZY BANKS

Ceratizit-WNT
UCI Ranking: 26th



ADAM YATES

Ineos Grenadiers
UCI Ranking: 47th



HANNAH BARNES

Canyon-Sram
UCI Ranking: 38th



HUGH CARTHY

EF Education-Nippo
UCI Ranking: 51st



ALICE BARNES

Canyon-Sram
UCI Ranking: 44th



GERAINT THOMAS

Ineos Grenadiers
UCI Ranking: 62nd

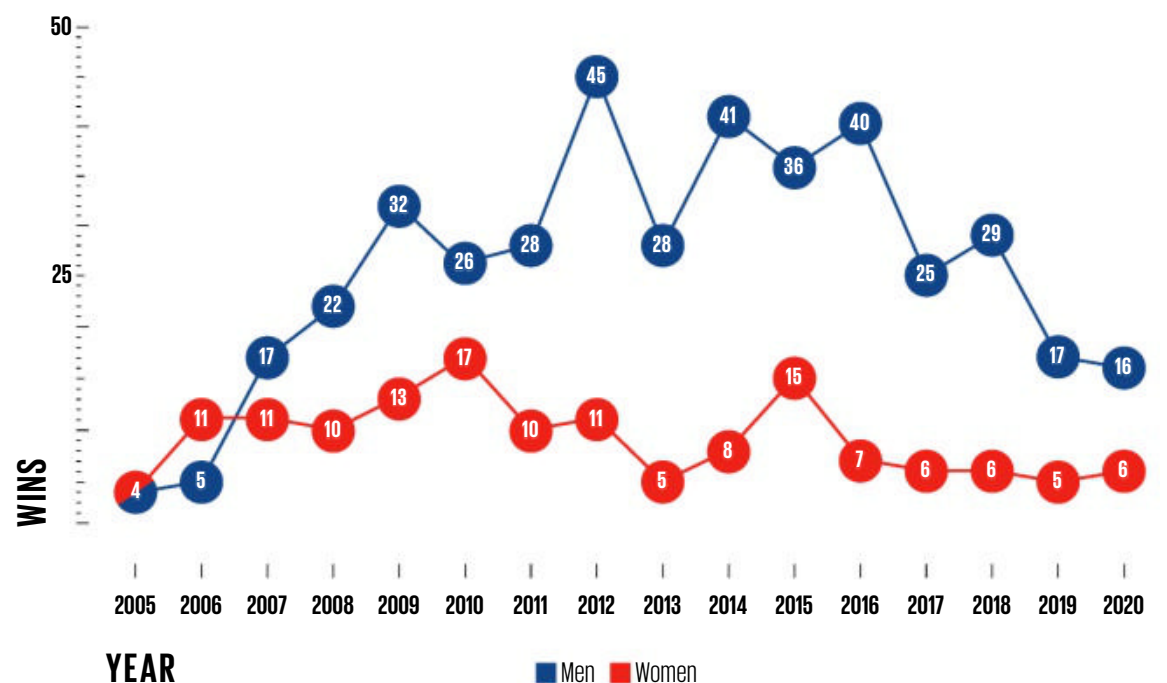


JESSICA ROBERTS

Team BikeExchange
UCI Ranking: 408th

WINS BY YEAR

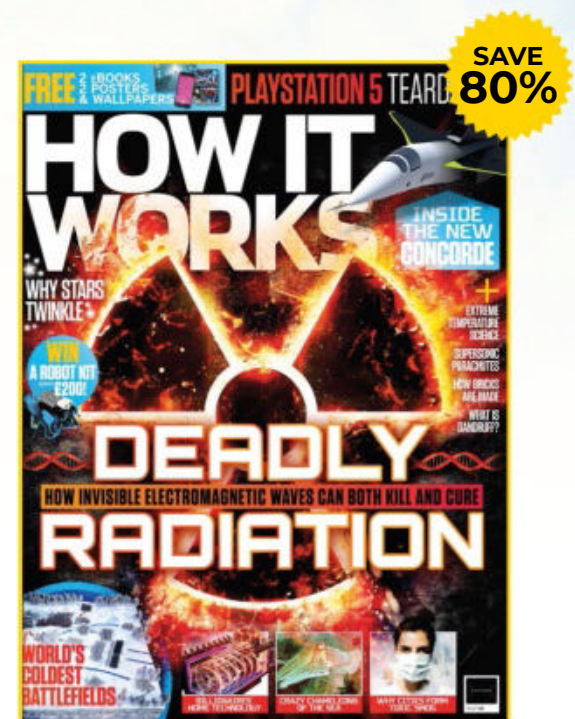
International wins ranked .1 and above by British riders, WorldTour era. (Women: .2 and above)



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ZEN AND THE ART OF

Writer Emil Foget // Image Gruber Images





Descending is one of the most important parts of a rider's skill set. Procycling looks at how modern pros are training their brains to enable them to go downhill at speed and, most importantly, safely

GOING DOWNHILL FAST



he distance between the best climbers in the world has shrunk considerably in recent years. A dozen riders finished within 34 seconds of the first rider home on the HC-ranked Col de la Grand Colombier in last year's Tour, for example.

Tactics aside, climbing is a matter of a rider pushing him or herself to their physical limit and staying there. So where to make the difference? In modern cycling, descents have increased in significance. They've occasionally been battlegrounds in the past, but they're now an opportunity to be seized. Just ask Chris Froome, who laid the foundation of his 2016 Tour de France win on the descent of the Col du Peyresourde.

Descending is technical, intuitive: it's an art. If climbing is a fight with the body, descending is a fight with much more – brain, limits, insecurities... Overconfidence leads to crashes. Fear leads to time losses.

The great descenders are viewed as either gifted or mad. Riders must be clear-headed as they exceed 80km/h down twisting roads. Each corner is a potential trap. The slightest mistake can turn into a career threatening injury, or worse, a question of life and death.

"I've tried waking up in the middle of a descent, thinking, 'If I hit that lamp post or ride off that cliff, I'll die.' You have to silence those thoughts quickly," says Matti Breschel, a former rider and now directeur sportif for EF Education-Nippo. "Every single sense is sharpened. Descending is fuel. It's the adrenaline riders live off. It feels amazing."

Riders win races on descents, like Froome at the 2016 Tour, or Vincenzo Nibali at Il Lombardia 2015. Riders also lose races on descents: Nibali experienced the other side of the coin when he crashed out on a likely Olympic gold medal in Rio de Janeiro. Steven Kruijswijk crushed the opposition on the climbs of the 2016 Giro d'Italia; then his hopes of the pink jersey were equally crushed when he hit a wall of snow coming down the Colle dell'Agnello.

And in rare, tragic cases, descents alter the trajectory of lives. Wouter Weylandt lost control of his bike going 80 km/h in the 2011 Giro d'Italia and died.

"I was deeply affected when Wouter Weylandt lost his life," says Breschel. "I started thinking it could have been me. When you're going 90 kilometers an hour, every mistake can be the end of you."

But he also adds: "Fear is your biggest enemy. If fear starts seeping into your mind, you've already lost."

FEAR OF FALLING

According to sports psychologist Dr Josephine Perry, who runs the Performance in Mind psychology consultancy in London and who has worked with cycling world champions, the rational fear of crashing is the main thing holding cyclists back on descents.

"There's a part of our brain called the amygdala, and its function is to keep us alive and

safe. When we risk our safety, the amygdala tries to stop us," she says.

The amygdala is switched on for an excellent reason: descending as fast as possible is not a safe thing to do.

"They're travelling incredibly fast, and they don't always feel in control, and that makes our amygdala scream: 'Don't do that, it's a foolish idea.'"

But while thinking is a necessary part of descending, overthinking can cause a mental blockage, making descending both slower and paradoxically less secure.

Early in Thibaut Pinot's career, the Frenchman consistently got dropped on descents. It came to a head in 2013. Pinot pulled out of the Tour after suffering torment in the Pyrenees. He was paralysed by fear when descending fast. In one stage, he lost 25 minutes and came in with the back markers, in tears.

"Some people are afraid of spiders or snakes. I'm afraid of speed. It's a phobia," he confessed.

The phobia stemmed from a crash he suffered in his youth, resulting in him being tentative on descents, even though he was a world-class rider by that point, with a stage win and top 10 in the Tour.

One crash can lead to a severe fear of crashing again, says Dr. Perry. "You know how much it hurt the first time, and you're aware of the mental pain of not being able to race. You realise how it's

▼ Ilmur Zakarin came to grief on the descent of the Colle dell'Agnello in the 2016 Giro





going to affect your health,” she says.

The human brain is good at remembering negative events. It’s safer for the brain to remember a crash than the 10 times it went smoothly because it is trying to keep the body safe.

Pinot overcame his fears, and his descending became if not superior to his rivals, then at least not the Achilles heel it once was. All it took was a meeting with an eccentric Spaniard whose whole life has revolved around descending.

BIRTH OF THE SUPERTUCK

If you were to build an altar dedicated to the greatest descenders of all time, you might put Paolo Savoldelli above it as a modern-day Messiah. Nicknamed ‘Il Falco’ (The Falcon) for his unique, graciously arrogant descending style, he was one of the first to truly weaponise the artform, winning the 2005 Giro thanks in large part to a brilliant ride on the downhill of the Colle delle Finestre.



“When I don’t know the road ahead, I watch the motos in front to see if a corner is sharp or not. I can see them accelerating away in shallow corners and braking hard if a corner is sharp”

Matej Mohorič, Bahrain-Victorious

Just beneath Il Falco are Matej Mohoric and Nibali. They are alike in their way of picking lines and braking correctly, but with subtle differences. Mohoric, 26, has the madness and creativity of youth. Nibali is the more senior statesman, a fine-tuned machine always picking the optimal line.

Mohoric first caught the eyes of descending connoisseurs when he won the U23 World Championship road race by supertucking as he pedalled his way to the finish line. The position – now banned by the UCI – hadn’t been seen before, even if its invention was prosaic.

▲ Froome lets loose on the descent of the Col du Peyresourde at the 2016 Tour, laying the ground for GC victory

“I started doing it as I was often late to the training meeting point when I was

young. I had a slight downhill from the start, and I realised that pedalling in the supertuck, I would be able to get there fast without burning all my matches before the real ride even started,” says Mohoric. Mohoric wasn’t the fastest descender in his youth, but he perfected his technique through trial, error and crashes.

“When I was younger, I was constantly looking for an advantage in races, and descending proved to be an asset,” he says.

Where Mohoric learned descending through ripped lycra and road rashes, Nibali views it more as a gift – albeit a gift that riders can sharpen.

“Even if you’re a born descender, that’s no reason not to train,” he says. “And if you know you’re not very good, there’s ▶



always room for improvement. There are workouts, especially when you're young. I always try to hone my skills in training."

Both Mohoric and Nibali agree that descending is mainly a question of a rider knowing their strengths and weaknesses. And perfect cornering. When barreling downhill, the main focus is the corner in front, and halfway through, it's what's coming next.

"Most of all, you need to know your limits. You can only learn that by trying and learning from your mistakes. You need a good feeling for that perfect line you take in the corners, as well as feeling when you reach a limit leaning your bike without losing grip and sliding out," says Mohoric. Nibali compares the perfect descent to that of a motorcycle.

"Approaching a curve, you have to take maximum advantage of the road on the outside trajectory, then bend and take advantage of the space on the inside, letting the bike roll as much as possible, and then relaunch the speed."

If a rider knows the route, they already have an advantage, as they will know how to approach curve after curve, where the best trajectory is and know where to brake.

If a rider doesn't know the route, it's a good idea to keep an eye out for the motorcycles.

"When I don't know the road, I watch the motos in front of the race to see if a corner is sharp or not. I can see them accelerating away in shallow corners and braking hard if a corner is sharp," says Mohoric.

He's never fearful when going downhill. Instead, he feels in complete control, even when he crashes.

"I get so immersed that I sometimes forget physics has a different idea to what I see. I'm always fully focused on catching that perfect line, braking as late and strongly as possible, accelerating as much as I can out of the corners," Mohoric says. "I enjoy going as fast as I can."

Over the years, Nibali's goal has been to clean up the lines of his descents, coming into the corners in a more linear trajectory, without changes in direction or swerves.

"You can be the best descender in the world, but you should never forget that there's always a risk. The determining factor in giving you confidence in the descent is the grip. The feeling that the bike is attached to the asphalt and you, the cyclist, manoeuvre it to perfection," says Nibali.

LETTING GO

For over a decade, Oscar Saiz has worked with WorldTour teams as a descending coach. He helped Pinot conquer his fears, worked with riders like Stefan Küng and Michael Woods, and has helped many WorldTour teams. If you ask him, the teams still don't focus enough on descending.

"Training for the descents is still kind of exotic," Saiz says. "Not only do the riders get faster and save energy, but they also get safer, and that's the most important part to me," he says.

According to Saiz, riders get scared because they aren't skilled enough. He sees it more and more because teams tend to pick up young riders judged on their physical values and not technique.

"These days, you can become a top road cyclist without a lot of bike skill. You can reach WorldTour level without really knowing how to handle your bike. You'll be amazed at how many riders don't know how to use their brakes properly. That skill

▲ Vincenzo Nibali is renowned as being one of the bunch's best descenders

► Oscar Saiz demonstrates descending as Marianne Vos and her team look on during training in 2018

set is the difference between the very best and those beneath,” he says.

For him, a talented descender controls four things: the ability to read the road, having a good sense of anticipation, being skilled at using their brakes and finally having a good position on the bike.

When moulding riders, he dives into their fears and weaknesses – repeating their mistakes repeatedly, doing braking exercises, and having off-road sessions.

“In the peloton, they think that if someone is good, they’re either crazy or gifted, but all riders are gifted. If you work on it, you can get to the top of the sport, and you can be an amazing descender.”

While Saiz looks at the logic and nitty-gritty of descending, Olivier Haralambon looks at the abstract. Haralambon is

a French author, former elite amateur rider and holds a Masters in philosophy, and he was never a great descender because he couldn’t “unplug his brain”.

Haralambon compares descending to ideas outlined in the book *Zen in the Art of Archery*, by Eugen Herrigel: how a physical activity becomes effortless when it is done out of muscle memory, without conscious control. “The paradox of the human condition is that we are reduced to making an effort whatever we do. Try to let yourself fall into the void. It’s a huge effort. Letting go is an effort,” he says.

His second point is that descending is like painting, like a brushstroke.

“If the first curve is not perfect, if the brush comes off the canvas, the entire descent will be a failure,” he says.

BRAIN TRAINING

As Breschel’s family grew he started losing his edge, letting fear become a mainstay in his mind. “Having my first kid didn’t change anything. My dreams overshadowed what I had at home. But then came the second and third kid, and that was the end,” he says.

While Breschel wasn’t able to overcome his fears, it isn’t impossible, says Dr Perry. A rider can trick their brain into thinking it’s descended a mountain a million times, using visualisation techniques.

“Working with clients, we’ll do something called imagery, where you create a certain situation in your mind and then practice it over and over until your brain starts to feel it’s physically done it,” she says.

Together with the client she writes a script usually lasting two or three minutes and bringing all the senses into play. The athlete will say what they see while descending, the sounds, and the feeling when they grasp their handlebars.

Athletes then record this on their phone and listen to it repeatedly until the brain has built up evidence they can already do it. “So when they get to the mountain, their brain goes, ‘Yeah, I’ve done this 10 times before,’” she says.

But paradoxically, it’s counterproductive to want to get rid entirely of fear. It stops individuals from being irrational and harming themselves. The aim is to soothe the fear by giving it the knowledge that the act has been done before, and confidence in equipment and skills.

“You want to find your zone of optimal functioning, where you’re switched on the whole time, but have that confidence that calms down the level of anxiety. And you build that confidence through lots of preparation, building up slowly,” says Dr Perry.

To Breschel’s surprise in switching the bike for the team car, he experienced a different fear. A fear way worse fear than being in the handlebars.

“In the car, I’m close to sh*tting myself when they descend. I’m thinking, ‘Jesus, that was me, once. How did I do it?’ They’re going at crazy speeds down a twisting road in Lycra, relying on a 23-millimetre rubber tire. It’s insanity.” **P**



“Not only do the riders get faster and save energy, but they also get a lot safer, and that’s the most important part to me”

Oscar Saiz, descending coach





SCHACH

*Multi-talented **Max Schachmann** is among a crop of riders spearheading a resurgence in German cycling. The 2020 Paris-Nice champion speaks to Procycling about his aggressive style and big ambitions*

ATTACK

Writer Barry Ryan // Portraits Mjrk Boensch Bees



ax Schachmann can't help it if he enjoys the work. "I'm not stupid, I don't do this in training," he joked after sprawling onto the roadside on a hilltop in Portugal. It was at the Volta ao Algarve last spring, and his chest was still heaving from having tried to outmatch Remco Evenepoel on the Alto do Malhão, but he could already laugh at the intensity of the effort he had just summoned.

Professional cycling may demand ever increasing levels of asceticism, but the German manages to retain his enthusiasm for the endeavour. In those heightened moments when the peloton's rivets come loose, Schachmann typically wears a grimace that looks a lot like a grin. Maybe it's both.

"I like it when you don't have to play the normal game with the team, when you just can try something," Schachmann explains now to *Procyling*. "I like to entertain the spectators, all the people at home watching, because this sport is better if someone tries something instead of just being there and waiting for the final 100 metres."

Schachmann left a calling card for his gently bobbing style at Flèche Wallonne in 2018, and his stock has barely stopped rising since he all but rode to a standstill on the Mur de Huy

that afternoon. A Paris-Nice win last spring underlined his status as German cycling's coming man and convinced Bora-Hansgrohe to offer him a contract extension of striking length: along with Tadej Pogacar and Wout van Aert, Schachmann is among the happy few in the peloton with employment through 2024.

News of the deal broke shortly before Schachmann restarted the pandemic-interrupted season with third place at a riotous edition of Strade Bianche. "A really nice race, action from kilometre zero," he grins, but his year risked coming to a halt two weeks later when he was beset by a less welcome kind of disorder at Lombardia, and was knocked off his bike by a car that was somehow on the course.

The outcome could have been much worse, but he was still left with a broken collarbone and doubts over his Tour place. Yet Schachmann responded to the absurd crash in measured tones. "I don't want to become a rich man because of this. I just want to have safer races," he said, and even now, his first thought is for his team manager, who had already seen Emanuel Buchmann fall heavily at the Dauphiné that same afternoon. "I think it must have been one of the worst days of Ralph Denk's life," he says.

The Tour, understandably, proved an ordeal, even if Schachmann's perseverance brought him close to a stage win at Puy Mary. "I learned once again that a broken bone takes a lot of energy" he smiles. He prefers to focus on how 2020 maintained his career's upward trajectory rather than dwell on the disappointments of an interrupted spring and a compromised Tour: "In the end, I was really happy with everything I did that was under my control, so I made another big step forward."

STEADY PROGRESSION

When Schachmann was 13 in 2007, his father brought him to see the Tour. They waited in blazing sunshine on the Col de la Colombière, rapt by

the sound and sight of the caravan, and when the race came past, a fellow countryman was out in front. Linus Gerdemann would win the stage and don yellow, but that afternoon did nothing to arrest the painful unwinding of German cycling.

A year earlier, Jan Ullrich's career had ended in ignominy with Operación Puerto and shortly before the Tour, Erik Zabel had made a partial doping confession. By the time Schachmann got home to Berlin, the race was no longer on state TV, with live broadcasts withdrawn after Patrick Sinkewitz's positive test. T-Mobile left the sport, and Gerolsteiner and Milram would later complete the exodus of German sponsors. Boom had begotten bust.

Schachmann had been too young for Ullrich-mania – "I never had a role model," he says – and though 2007 was German cycling's darkest hour, he was undeterred. "I never thought about it. I remember Zabel doing that interview, but I didn't care about it. I was busy with school and cycling," he says. "I just know that as a junior, I told myself that I didn't want to do a dirty sport. If I had to do something that is in the end criminal, I would stop."

By then, it was already clear where Schachmann's future lay. He had started racing aged 12, encouraged by his ease on two wheels during his

11
CAREER WINS
SO FAR





school commute in the outer borough of Marzahn. Living on Berlin's eastern fringe meant he had open countryside in which to train and the skills developed in the flatlands beyond the city limits swept him to bronze in the 2012 Junior Worlds TT.

Shortly before his Tour debut in 2019, Schachmann, who counts building loudspeaker systems as a hobby, confessed to *Bild* that his dedication to cycling had limited his social life so much that he had never attended a concert. "I am boring," he laughed, though his teenage years were hardly one-dimensional. Strong results in the Abitur, Germany's school finals, meant he could pursue a university degree of his choosing, and he picked engineering management in Erfurt.

The new town was not selected by chance, given that it was home to Jörg Werner's Thüringer Energie amateur squad, which had hot-housed Marcel Kittel, Tony Martin

and John Degenkolb. Within six months, however, Schachmann realised he couldn't balance study with Werner's elite finishing school. "To do them both seriously, I would have needed a 28-hour day, so I decided to focus on cycling," he says. "I said if I didn't turn pro in four years, I'd go back to university."

That year in Erfurt, Schachmann's legs did not yet match his aspirations, but the potential was evident. When Thüringer Energie disbanded, he remained under the tutelage of Werner, who became his agent. A season at Giant-Shimano was followed by two in Quick Step's U23 structure, Klein Constantia, and each campaign brought progress.

Silver medals in the U23 time trial at the Richmond and Doha Worlds reinforced his credentials as a rouleur, while victory ahead of Pavel Sivakov atop Piani di Tavagnasco in the Giro della Valle d'Aosta showcased his improved

▲ Schachmann (in second) sprints with Evenepoel at Algarve 2020 stage 2

climbing. "It's been a linear progression through all my career," he says. "I've never had a year that was worse than the previous one."

Patrick Lefevere likes his riders to aim high, so he could only approve when Schachmann confessed a lofty dream soon after turning pro at Quick Step in 2017. "Some riders laughed when he said that one of his goals was to earn so much that he could one day buy an apartment block in Berlin," Lefevere told *Het Nieuwsblad* in 2020. "He is not too modest, but I like ambitious young riders."

Quick Step, in turn, provided a structure that allowed Schachmann to sink firm foundations. "On some teams, you sometimes just ride your bike during a race, but I always had a task, whether it was in the final or somewhere in the middle," he says. "It was quite hard at first, because you felt a kind of pressure, but it developed you as a rider, because you had something to do." 🇩🇪

Early on, Schachmann made a spirited contribution to Philippe Gilbert's Amstel Gold Race victory, and within the team, he won admirers for his rapid recovery from the broken heel that ended his debut season prematurely. By his sophomore year, he was ready to win. Stage victory at the Volta a Catalunya was followed by a signature triumph at the Giro d'Italia, where he punched his way clear of the break on the final climb to Prato Nevoso.

That Giro success increased Schachmann's market value, and Bora-Hansgrohe had already been a persistent suitor. Lefevere blamed his eventual departure on his agent Werner, though Schachmann maintains he was ultimately persuaded by the prospect of racing for a German team. "As a German, that fits together," he says. "But it wasn't an easy decision, because almost everyone who left Quick Step didn't improve any more."

Schachmann speaks secure in the knowledge that he has been a rare exception to that rule, beginning with a remarkable sequence in April 2019, when he took a hat-trick of stage wins at Itzulia Basque Country and then capped an all-action week in the Ardennes with third at Liège. A German national title as Bora swept the podium only reiterated the success of the homecoming. "I've never regretted it," he says.

ALL-ROUND ABILITY

These days, Schachmann makes his home among the German expats on the Swiss shore of Lake Constance, where he counts Jumbo-Visma's Tony Martin as a neighbour and training partner. At Bora, meanwhile, he now cohabits with four German contemporaries – Nils Politt, Pascal Ackermann, Emanuel Buchmann and Lennard Kämna – though none of them can quite fathom how they all seemed to blossom at once. "We don't really know the reason for it, because I think in the German youth

system, there is still space to improve," he notes carefully.

This German core has seen Bora wean itself off its Peter Sagan dependence, yet one wonders if their ambitions can all be sated. Another star-studded Bavarian team, Bayern Munich, was dubbed 'FC Hollywood' in the 1990s due to the constant airing of dressing room grievances, but Schachmann insists the mood music is harmonious aboard the Bora bus.

"We're a good group, we have a good atmosphere and I think everybody's ready to sacrifice himself for a team-mate in a race, because he knows he will get it back," he says. "If you're in good form, you'll get your chance"


Schachmann has developed the useful habit of seizing the chances that come his way, and his Paris-Nice victory seemed a watershed. Winning the rain-soaked and hilly opening stage in Plaisir was typical of his pugnacious style, but the assured, week-long defence of his yellow jersey suggested a man on the verge of something bigger. He's had to linger on the threshold a little longer, but he approaches this April with considerable expectation.

"It opened a new door. I brought myself into a new role in the team," he says. "In most of the races I do

this year, I will also be in a leader's role, with a chance to fight for big successes in races like the Ardennes."

Schachmann's all-round gifts mean that he is reluctant to restrict his range to hilly classics and week-long races, however, preferring instead to take on as much variety as his bandwidth can handle in the years ahead. "I'm not just focusing on one, two or three races," he says. Last autumn, he came away from his Tour of Flanders debut vowing to return, while his ability against the watch hints at still untapped potential in the grand tours. He has only ridden three in his career to date, after all, and his two Tours were blighted by broken bones.

"I will probably not be the fastest climber in the world. *Probably*. Maybe I will be, but I don't know. You should never say never, you know..." Schachmann says. Moments later, he is thinking out loud. "I'm 27 now, so even if I try next year, there are many examples of riders who only started to be a GC rider at 28 or 29. I think, why not? I have to try. I have to improve in the high mountains, that's not a secret. But if I make that step, then maybe it's even possible."

Whatever happens, he gives the impression he'll immensely enjoy finding out. 



1st 2nd 3rd
4th 5th

WINS

Paris-Nice 2020
Stage, Paris-Nice 2020
National Champs RR 2019
Stage, Itzulia Basque Country 2019 (3)
Stage, Volta a Catalunya 2019, 2018
GP Industria e Artigianato 2019
Stage, Deutschland Tour 2018
Stage, Giro d'Italia 2018

SECOND

Stage, Paris-Nice 2020
Volta ao Algarve 2020
Stage, Volta ao Algarve 2020
Stage, Volta a Catalunya 2019
Faun Classic 2018

THIRD

Stage, Tour de France 2020
Strade Bianche 2020
Liège-Bastogne-Liège 2019
Stage, Volta a Catalunya 2019
Deutschland Tour 2018
European Continental Championships TT 2018
Ster ZLM Tour, stage 2017

FOURTH

Stage, Volta ao Algarve 2020 (2)
Stage, Volta a Catalunya 2019
BinckBank Tour 2018
National Champs TT '18, '17
Stage, Giro d'Italia 2018
Ster ZLM Tour 2017
Stage, Tour de Romandie 2017

FIFTH

Stage, Tour of California 2019
Flèche Wallonne 2019
Amstel Gold Race 2019
Stage, BinckBank Tour 2018 (3)
National Champs RR 2017

► In yellow at Paris-Nice 2020, where Schachmann led from start to finish





Schachmann made the stage 13 break at the 2020 Tour, but faded to third

DION SMITH

is a Kiwi who took the long road to signing for BikeExchange, heading to Europe via California, the UK and Belgium. And after five years as a pro, he won his first race in 2020. He tells *Proccycling* why he feels he's finally getting there

THE LONG WAY ROUND

Interview Edward Pickering /// Photography Tim de Waele/Getty



Proccycling: How are things from the perspective of early 2021?

Dion Smith: I'm in Spain, and we've got a couple of restrictions in terms of curfews but I can still get out and train. The first few races in Spain were postponed and it was looking a bit like last year but hopefully things will only improve. It's a little bit up in the air but we just have to crack on and keep training. Last year, it was different. We had no idea it was going to be so bad and it all happened suddenly. We did a couple of races at the start of the year – I did the SunTour and the Cadel Evans race, then the only races I did in Europe were Omloop and Kuurne. Not too long after that, everything was cancelled and we were in lockdown before we knew it.

How are you coping?

Everybody is in the same boat. Trying to keep motivated when races get cancelled or postponed is hard, especially if you have a big target that has just been wiped away. You have to keep perspective. Cycling is just a small bubble in the world and people have it a lot worse than us. I still have a job. I guess that kept me in a positive mood, and there are worse places to be than Girona.

Can motivation be difficult?

Maybe on occasion, especially when races are cancelled and you have to keep training. I like training, but I like racing better.

Where are you in your career, at 28?

It's a good question. Looking at all the young guys coming through, it's hard to say. I like to think I'm still on the up, and reaching the point where I'm in the prime of my career. Last year was a bit disruptive but I still felt like it was one of my better years, even with less racing.

What was different in 2020?

Everyone peaks differently and there are guys who are super good when they are 20, 21... I guess I'm a bit of a slow developer. I've always

kind of been here, but I've got some more experience of racing in Europe, and everything is clicking. I can't really pinpoint why, but I think I've had better preparation. We had so much time to train last year and I guess I had the team behind me working for me specifically. I got stronger. Older and wiser.

Improving at cycling isn't just a case of getting stronger. You train more and better, but you can improve tactically, and get mentally more resilient. Do these attributes all bring each other up?

That's it. Maybe I'm stronger physically, but it's as much that I'm more mentally resistant and technically a bit better. I'm more calm. I'm not a guy who wins a lot, and that's also maybe another thing in the back of my mind – having some self confidence.

You were sixth at Milan–San Remo in your debut at the race last year. Were you surprised by that result?

I was feeling good and tactically I felt really comfortable in the bunch, found myself in the right position and it all kind of went smoothly. Sometimes in races, you don't even think; your body is nice and relaxed. I was confident in my form. Obviously, there's a little bit of luck involved. It was a bit of an unknown and maybe what helped was that there were no real expectations to

win, but just be there and go through the process of being in the best position possible, not thinking about the result.

Were there any challenges, or were you just on a good day?

A race never goes 100 per cent the way that you think it will but there were moments of carnage. Coming down onto the coast road, on a big highway, it was almost impossible to hold position. We had five guys doing a full leadout. Some moments you get swamped. There's a bit of luck involved, but that is when you've got to trust the process, be where you need to be at the right time and trust your team-mates to position you. Obviously, you need the legs, and on the descents it can split up with guys crashing. Some moments it's out of control but you soon find yourself back where you need to be. It was a washing machine, so it was very hard to stay together as a group. But I always had one or two guys there.

How was the Cipressa?

Going into it was super fast, with guys everywhere. Everyone is being told on the radio they need to be in the top 20 going into these climbs. Maybe on the Cipressa I was a little too far back, but I managed to claw my way up on the actual climb, to a better spot. I was behind Sagan going down the Cipressa descent, which was fine. I've watched the race plenty of times but it's different to be in it. Watching it, for sure you have an image in your mind, where you need to be and what's coming up but no training can replicate a race.

The race got strung out over the Poggio. Where were you then?

I was in a super position, top 15 going over the top. The further back you are, the more of an elastic band it is. It all came together nicely. I knew there were guys who were a lot faster in the group and found myself on Philippe Gilbert's wheel, which I thought was good. He ended

▼ Smith (centre) launches his sprint at San Remo 2020, where he was sixth





"I just cracked on, which I think was the best attitude to have. If you start stressing or being selfish, it can bite you in the arse"

up going early, which brought me to the front and then I came off him and went for it. Michael Matthews and Peter Sagan came past, and Nizzolo, and that was it.

Were you happy with sixth?

The goal in my head was to be in the top 10. I thought that was realistic. We were sprinting for third – I knew the other two would stay away. There was a moment I thought I could be on for a podium but got passed with 50m to go by the three others. There were mixed emotions, but predominantly I was pretty happy. It sets a bar. I can be a contender in these kinds of races.

Tell us about the Coppa Sabatini win.

I'd done that race before, a couple of years ago, with Wanty, and I knew it was a finish that suited my

characteristics. I was eighth with Wanty, and that was from not too much team support. This time, the team was working for me. I didn't have to do too much apart from follow and sprint the last 200m. It clicked into place and I had the legs to finish it off.

You've had many top 10s, so how did it feel to finally win a race?

It felt like a monkey off my back. It's lingered – I'm always there, so why can't I finish it off? It was definitely a huge relief, and also good for my position in the team, to show them that I can win races. I might not win all the time, but when I get the opportunity and the team rides for me I can deliver.

You also came close on a couple of Vuelta stages...

We were unsure if it would go ahead, and it was hard to stay fit and motivated for such a late start. Going into the race, mentally I wasn't really there. It was nice to race, but there was so much around

it and so much speculation that it would be cancelled. It wasn't until a couple of weeks in that I got the rhythm again. The last week, I had a couple of top fives which I was happy about. But also a little bit sour in terms of wanting more. I knew I had the legs.

What was the difference there?

The day I got fifth I had a good position going into the uphill kick with 300m to go. It was a wet and cold day. The last guy on the team leading me out flipped off with about 350 to go and I kind of hesitated, thinking it was too far. But in the wet and cold, nobody really had a super kick, so thinking back, I should have gone early instead of waiting. A few guys came over the top and boxed me in. I'm not saying I'd have won if I'd gone early but maybe I could have got second instead of fifth. And the other one, I was on the wrong wheel. I chose the guy I thought had the best kick in the group – Sütterlin from Sunweb – and it turned out

▲ Smith rides himself into form at the 2020 Vuelta a España

he had nothing left. He had two guys helping him out so I thought that was a good wheel, but looking back I shouldn't have chosen a specific person but trusted in my own instincts to put myself in a better position. I know I could have won or done better.

What was your path into cycling?

In New Zealand, the school programme is quite good. I started through my school with a bunch of mates. None of my family cycled, I just wanted to try a different sport, and kicked off from there.

Were you good?

I was alright. I wasn't terrible. But I wasn't breaking any records. All I had for comparison was the other guys in my school and guys from other schools. I entered the National Championships. I went to the Junior Worlds in Copenhagen. I was doing well and enjoying it, and made the decision to head to America to ride for a team in California, just a local team who raced crits and local road races. I went over with my parents' support and started from there in 2013. I went through a few different teams there on the amateur scene, and did the Philadelphia Classic. The Champion System team were there and I knew a Kiwi guy, Clinton Avery, who was racing for them. I came sixth and won the KoM and they contacted me and wanted me as a stagiaire for the last two months of the year. It all happened super fast. I was in an amateur team in California in February, and went to Europe by August. I was offered a contract for 2014, but then the team folded. I got contacted by Hincapie back in the US to ride for them instead. The US scene was thriving at the time, so it was a great opportunity.

Were you getting a lot better?

2014 was a year to get in the groove and then 2015 was even better, with a couple of good UCI results, especially at the bigger races, where you get some WorldTour teams.



"I might not win all the time, but when I get the opportunity and the team rides for me I can deliver"

How did the contact with One Pro cycling in 2016 happen?

I didn't want to stay in America the rest of my career. I could have got stuck doing that because it's great racing and everybody speaks English, but my goal was to get to Europe and One Pro looked like the next stepping stone. I didn't have heaps of options, but with One Pro I could live in Europe. I signed with them for two years and they got into some really good races. In 2016, I had a really good year, one of my best. But they went back to Conti level in 2017. I didn't really want to do that. I wanted to keep moving forward, so that was a difficult time. It was in November or December they said they were going back to Conti level. There were big pay cuts, so that was a bit of a mess for a couple of months. It wasn't until January that I got contacted by Wanty. They had seen me in the Four Days of Dunkirk, where I'd done quite well. Initially they said they couldn't pay me and I'd have to

▲ Finally, Smith gets his first pro win, at the Coppa Sabatini in 2020

ride for free, which I was considering. I would rather do that and move forward than maybe race in the UK scene. It turned out one of Wanty's riders retired – Lieuwe Westra – and a spot opened up for me on a two-year deal. I signed that in January.

If the same had happened last year, with the results you have, you'd have found a team much more easily. Did this happening at the end of 2016, when you had fewer good results, make it more of a challenge?

December 2016 was bleak. My agent was keeping things pretty positive, and I was confident that I'd had a good year and had results to help my case. It wouldn't have been the

► Smith spent three days in the KoM jersey at the 2018 Tour de France



end of the world if I'd signed back with One Pro and did whatever races they did. I was close to doing so, but miraculously the opportunity came about with Wanty. Then five months later I was on the start line of the Tour. It was pretty surreal.

How was Wanty for you?

It was a good experience and I really enjoyed it. It took a few months to adjust to the way they worked. There were some language barriers but it turned out that the predominant language was English. At some of the Belgian races I felt like the odd one out, but it didn't get to me. I knew I was getting some great experiences in the races.

Did you get support?

That was the big difference. At ProConti level, some guys are trying to make it to the WorldTour, so there's a bit of selfishness. And sometimes there wasn't too much direction. I was more than happy to work with people, but not all the guys were happy to work for me, so it could be a bit cut-throat. Not that anyone was nasty, but you had to do what you had to do.

How did you navigate that?

I knew the guys who would help me. And I knew if I helped them they would help me. I was also, especially in the first year, not bothered what races I did. I just wanted to try my hand at whatever they sent me to. I made the Tour selection, but I was also just happy to have a contract. I just cracked on and did my thing, which I think was the best attitude to have. If you start stressing or being too selfish, it can bite you in the arse.

You signed with Mitchelton in 2019. You're a New Zealander, who went via the USA, the UK and Belgium to sign with the biggest Antipodean team. Does it feel like you went the long way around?

I didn't think they were interested in me initially. But Julian Dean, a Kiwi who is a DS there, contacted me and

said there was an opportunity if I wanted it. It was a dream come true. I knew a lot of the guys and it always looked like a fun team to be on, the way they worked for each other. It's such a cool team and I wanted to be part of it. They didn't sign me as a leader, at least not initially. I had good results, but they didn't know where my trajectory would take me, or where I would fit in. They knew I could sprint a little and climb good. In 2019 I was working for a lot of different guys, which was fine, and I just had to work my way up. I'm still not a main leader, but I'll get more opportunities now.

What are you good at?

To be specific, a race like Amstel Gold, with punchy climbs. Group sprints like at the Vuelta. They suit my characteristics. I'm not good at dead flat sprints, but uphill kicks. I'm a bit versatile in terms of what I can do but to win a race, it has to be a finish with around 50 guys.


Do you like cycling or do you like being good at cycling?

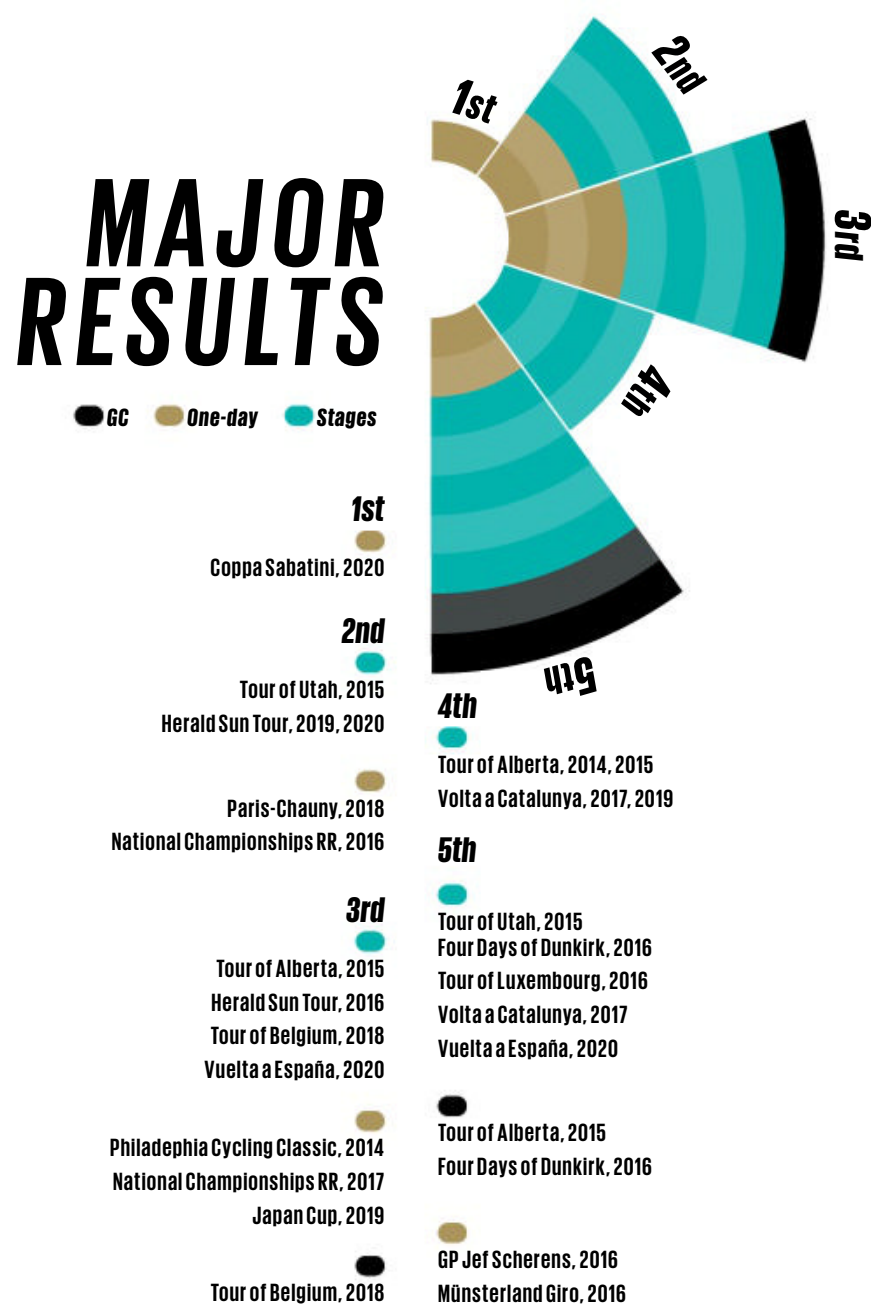
I do like it, but training gets a bit old for me. I do like training but I like to be in a race much more.

Why is that?

The competitiveness, the adrenalin... I like cycling but I also like disconnecting from it. I like a good balance – for me that works.

Are you primarily a physically gifted cyclist, or more tactical?

I'd say more tactical. Physically, to compare watts with other riders, I'm not breaking any records. It's nothing impressive. I'm not saying I have bad power numbers, but that's not all that matters. I can handle myself in the bunch and get myself into position when I need to, and I'm good at saving energy. If you've never been the strongest then you learn to save where you can and be a bit more savvy. I also don't like to get too much information in a race. It complicates things a little bit. I like it pretty simple. 



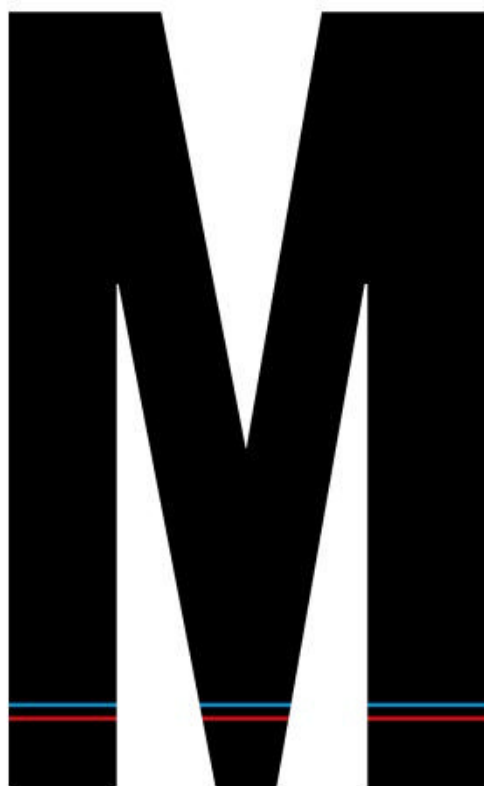
MØRKØV

— QUITE THE TRACK RECORD —

DECEUNINGCK-QUICK STEP'S **MICHAEL MØRKØV** HAS CARVED HIMSELF A NICHE AS THE BEST LEAD-OUT RIDER IN THE PELOTON. BUT HE IS ALSO A TRACK WORLD CHAMPION IN THE MADISON. HE TELLS *PROCYCLING* HOW HE BALANCES HIS ROLE AS A DOMESTIQUE ON THE ROAD WITH HIS AMBITION TO BE AN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALLIST ON THE TRACK

Writer: Chris Marshall-Bell // Image: Chris Auld





Michael Mørkøv is like every other selfless domestique who suffers for the benefit of his or her appointed leader. His results rarely reflect his sacrifice, and as he points out: “It’s never me standing on top of the podium with the flowers and the prize money.” But where the Deceuninck–Quick Step rider differs from his peers is that being a good domestique on the road prepares the Dane for individual glory. Mørkøv leads a double life: he is both domestique and serial winner.

As well as delivering Sam Bennett to numerous sprint wins, Mørkøv is the reigning world champion and 2019 European champion in the Madison, with Lasse Norman Hansen, and the Danes are the favourites to win the gold medal in this summer’s Tokyo Olympics. As well as being arguably the best lead-out riders in the current peloton, he gets on his bike every day focused on his own triumphs. “Every day I train, I am thinking about the Olympics and telling myself that I am a current world champion,” Mørkøv tells *Procycling*. “When I am on the track, I have the mindset that I have to be at the level which will make me the best. I am not putting my goals any lower than that.”

His desire in pursuit of track glory is such that Mørkøv even uses the Tour de France as a training block. “I see it as the best preparation coming into the Olympics. It will give me optimal preparation,” he says. Very few riders would describe the Tour as a training ride, especially one who shoulders the responsibility of having to help his team win multiple stages.

But then very few riders have a skill set as broad as Mørkøv. He’s won five pro road races himself, though he’s better known as an individual who late in his career has emerged as a lead-out specialist,



▲ A rare road victory: Mørkøv wins a bunch sprint at the 2013 Vuelta

and he carries the hopes of a nation on the Olympic track. He’s as indispensable to his country as he is to his trade team, and is bucking current trends in cycling while approaching his 37th year. Young riders have been performing spectacularly well in the last few years, but Mørkøv has been hitting career-best form in his mid-30s. “I am turning 36 soon and I feel better than ever,” he says.

NEW AMBITIONS

In 2016, Mørkøv was a respected domestique at Tinkoff–Saxo and an occasional bit-part player in the sprints. It had been eight years since he had claimed a silver medal in the Beijing Olympics in the team

ROAD CYCLING'S TRACK STARS

The key riders currently racing in the men's WorldTour who are also targeting the Tokyo Olympics on the track this summer



SIMONE
CONSONNI


BEST RESULT
2020 Worlds:
Team pursuit, bronze



FILIPPO
GANNA


BEST RESULT
2018-2020 Worlds:
Individual pursuit, gold



ETHAN
HAYTER


BEST RESULT
2018 Worlds
Team pursuit, gold



ROGER
KLUGE


BEST RESULT
2018-2019 Worlds
Madison, gold



MICHAEL
MØRKØV


BEST RESULT
2020 Worlds:
Madison, gold



pursuit, and in the intervening years he'd taken numerous victories in Six Day races, along with stages of the Vuelta a España and Tour of Denmark, and the first of three career wins in the Danish road race nationals. But though he was ambitious in the sprints, he wasn't winning prolifically, which was partly the consequence of his team's ambitions at the time.

"At Saxo Bank it was all about the GC and climbing," he says. But there

was more to it than that: whenever he involved himself in a sprint, he never really threatened to win.

"I clearly remember sprints that I tried to be involved in as a young rider and I couldn't stay at the front," he says. "I couldn't hold the wheel I wanted and I'd pass the finish line with 35 other guys trying to sprint for the victory. I remember how difficult it is to be at the front trying to win a sprint, and I have huge respect for those that do

▲ Hansen throws Mørkøv into the fray at the 2020 Track Worlds Madison

because it's something I never experienced, nor will do."

In 2016, Mørkøv concluded that he couldn't win sprints himself. A move to Katusha followed and he became a crucial part of Alexander Kristoff's support team. "We had some success together," he modestly says of their 16 wins. After two years with Katusha, he moved to Quick-Step Floors. "I found myself and renewed myself a little bit," he says. "I really developed as a rider at a later age."

Working mostly for Elia Viviani, an Olympic gold medallist on the track, but also Fabio Jakobsen and Álvaro Hodeg in his first two seasons with the Belgian squad, he helped the trio win 26 races. In 2020, new arrival Sam Bennett won seven times with Mørkøv leading him out, including on the Champs Élysées at the Tour. He's started this season just as strongly, assisting Bennett to two victories in the UAE Tour and riding to third place himself on the opening stage. On eight occasions with DQS where his sprinter has



LASSE NORMAN
HANSEN


BEST RESULT
2020 Worlds:
Madison, gold



SEBASTIÁN
MORA


BEST RESULT
2020 Europeans:
Madison, gold



ELIA
VIVIANI


BEST RESULT
2016 Olympics:
Omnium, gold



MATT
WALLS


BEST RESULT
2020 Europeans:
Omnium, gold

Images: Maja Hitt (main), Jose Jordan (left)/Getty Images.



26

TOP-THREE FINISHES ON THE ROAD

won, he's been so fast as a leadout that he's finished in the top 10.

The statistics illustrate his effectiveness, while the plaudits illuminate the work he does. Bennett has described him as "incredible", while Viviani, who scored 20 wins with Mørkøv by his side, says he is "unbelievable".

"He does an amazing job. He is the best in choosing the time and he does it perfectly," said Viviani. Since leaving Deceuninck-Quick Step, Viviani has failed to win.

"I am really flattered about all of the compliments," Mørkøv says. "In this role, I am very happy when people see what I am doing. Their nice words about the big part I play in a victory means a lot."

His assist tally at Deceuninck could have been bigger, too. "Many times as a lead-out man you do a super good job, a perfect lead-out in the situation, but then the sprinter doesn't win. You can do the

best lead-out in the world but if he doesn't win, no one cares what you did."

Mørkøv feels that the 2020 season has been his strongest so far. "Last year was my best year on the road. I've shown I can do this job of being the best at delivering." He owes that to his worldliness, refining his expertise, studying his rivals, always trying to develop, and being part of the WorldTour's most successful winning team.

"When I am in the race against some of the other best lead-out men, I try to analyse them and how they prepare and deliver their sprints," he says. "I focus on myself and my own development because it's not easy, definitely not. But sometimes when I look back at a sprint, I think how easy it actually was to get the sprinter delivered in terms of getting the right position. But I can only credit that to experience and the years I have already done, as well as basing what I do on instinct."



▲▲ Mørkøv has made himself a central pillar of the DQS team

▲ Celebrating with Sam Bennett, after his first Tour stage win in 2020

His age and his experience as a world class track rider allow him to thrive in his position as Deceuninck's penultimate pilot, taking the speed up a final few kilometres an hour. "It's rare to find a young rider who accepts this role in the team. If they are young and have ambition, and think they are the team's future sprinter, it is rare



he can really sacrifice himself for another rider. But for me, I have the track, and maybe without thinking about it, it's easier to accept being a domestique who doesn't take as many personal victories. I know in the background I have my track racing and when I am on the track it's only about me, and me and my partner when I do the Madison. The track is where I have my main focus to build my own results."

It was only in June 2017 that the Madison was confirmed as being returned to the Olympics after being pulled from the schedule in 2012 and 2016. "Straight away I knew it would be a big goal of mine and a big motivating factor," he says. "The Madison is the best discipline in cycling. It's a complete event – you need to be fast, have really good endurance, be tactical, clever, technically good, all of these and work with a partner. There are so many aspects in that race that I really like."

▲ Sprinting for himself at the 2021 UAE Tour, Mørkøv is third on stage 1

He has forged an all-conquering partnership with team-mate Hansen. "We can't expect to travel to Tokyo to pick up the gold medal, but the ambition is definitely to go for gold."

Mørkøv is an engaging listen, a thoughtful master of his craft. On the track he has already won 12 national titles and 12 Six Days, including two at the competitive Gent Six. And he seems to prefer talking about track racing than road racing. In our 30-minute conversation, he says three times that his "big passion is for the track", twice, "I love track" and once, "I know my heart is with track racing; it's why I keep coming back to it." At the same time, he refers to it as a "pastime", compared to his day job at Deceuninck-Quick Step.

There's also an acknowledgement that being good on the road carries more weight. "I love track racing more than I do the road, but the only thing is that we cannot deny the

prestige is much bigger on the road," he says. "To be happy about a victory, there needs to be some amount of prestige in it. If I win a race that lots of riders want to win, it's a better feeling than if not so many wanted to win it. That's what it is on the track – it's more specific, a niche, guys who are specialists in their field."

The track is his pastime and the road is where he collects his pay stub. But he does still get a sense of fulfilment from road racing. "With the years I feel like I have learned to enjoy team-mates' victories like it was my own," he says. "Look at Procyclingstats and I won't figure as part of Sam's win on the Champs-Élysées and it won't go on my palmarès. But what is a palmarès? We all ride around for experiences, and a life experience for me is to win with my team on the Champs-Élysées. It's a huge experience to be part of winning the green jersey in the Tour de France, an extremely proud moment.

"It's the same as many of the victories that I helped Viviani take. I am not shy of being proud of being part of a victory. It's not so important for me that the victory is dedicated to me – I know myself that I had a part to play. Maybe I can look back at the sprints and realise my role was a game-changer, I can see the move I did was the move that made it a winning sprint."

If a fast finish is on the cards, the sport has learned in the last five years that Mørkøv will play a pivotal role. And though he's entering his late 30s, he is ambitious to remain the best lead-out in the world and to perhaps win an Olympic gold medal. "Almost every year I expect that this will be the year that I will start to lose my level, not be as fast as I once was," he says. "But every year so far I have proved myself wrong. I think I'll be carrying on at least a few more years." He'll do so as a central figure, whether that's on the road or track. **P**

WOMEN'S TRAINING

33 PER CENT IN ZONE 4

RAISING THE INTENSITY

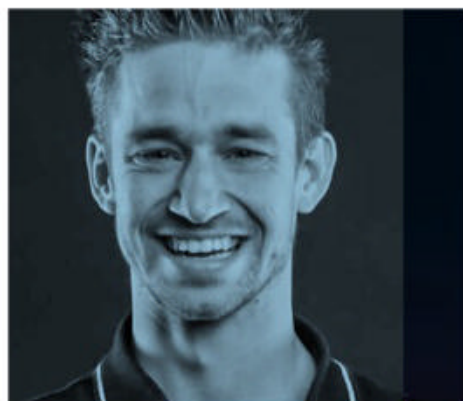
RESEARCH SHOWS THAT FEMALE CYCLISTS AT THE TOP LEVEL RACE WITH MORE INTENSITY THAN THE MEN. *PROCYCLING* LOOKS AT HOW SPORTS SCIENCE IS TAILORING THEIR TRAINING TO HELP THEM

WRITER JAMES WITTS /// IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

Should women race the same distance as men? Put another way, would equalising distance validate women's racing? Sit through the first half of a men's race, especially a sprint stage, and the answer's an unequivocal 'no', for the sake of our boredom thresholds. Flip to the women's events, which are 50-100km shorter, and there's no dead time. It's foot down from the get-go, or at least that is how it looks. And according to research using elite riders, that's exactly how it is. "My study shows that women race at a higher intensity than men," says Dutch sports scientist Teun van Erp. "This is potentially revelatory and should guide how women train."

Van Erp spent nearly nine years at Team DSM and its various incarnations before leaving last year to study a post-doctorate at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Van Erp is one of those figures who upsets the purists and romantics – he loves numbers, algorithms and finding solutions to questions most fans haven't even considered. It's why for four consecutive years, he collected training data from 20 male and 10 female DSM cyclists. During those seasons, the women's team finished in the top 10 of the elite rankings; for the men, the first year's data derived from ProConti efforts, followed by three years in the WorldTour. The merry-go-round that is pro cycling meant individuals' data sets varied from one to four years with some riders' race calendars curtailed due to either fitness or form.

"From the outset, I knew there'd be significant differences because of race distance and number of race days," Van Erp tells *ProCycling*. "When it comes to the men, the longest one-day effort is up to 300km and the longest multi-stage race is a grand tour at 21 days. For the women, the longest one-day race is around 160km, while the longest multi-stage race is the Giro d'Italia Femminile,



◀ Teun Van Erp was a coach at Sunweb/DSM before leaving to work on a post-doc

which features 10 race days. Despite that, I had proof that women's races were of higher intensity and that potentially they could tolerate higher levels of pain."

That's despite distinctly different profiles and power outputs from Van Erp's cohorts. The men averaged 27 years old, were 185cm tall, weighed 73kg and their 20-minute maximum power output came in at

389 watts. The women averaged 25 years old, measured a whisker under 170cm, weighed 61kg and had a 20-minute max of 256 watts.

Obviously, absolute power – the maximum amount you can generate on the flat – is higher for the testosterone-fuelled male than the female rider. Another key difference is the proliferation of fast-twitch muscle fibres. Unlike the endurance-loving slow-twitchers, these are the powerhouses that are naturally higher in men, especially sprinters.

"Despite this genetic advantage, the women spent longer periods in the higher heart-rate zones," he explains. "In zone four, men spent 20 per cent compared to women's 33 per cent. Zone five was even



In the women's events, there is no dead time
It's foot down from the get-go, or at least
that's how it looks. And according to research
using elite riders, that's exactly how it is

more noticeable: men 3-4 per cent compared to the women's 12 per cent. Overall, the men spent longer in the lower zones." Why is this important? A basic principle of training is that riders train to race. "That's why it would be better for the elite women to, say, do a three-hour ride with five hard efforts of five minutes while the men follow this template over a five-hour ride," says Van Erp.

Is this race-loading profile reflected in the upper echelons? It's a good question.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

We catch up with Lizzie Deignan via Zoom. Deignan is in Tenerife with husband, coach and former Sky rider Philip and three-year-old daughter Orla. Deignan's career palmarès and 2020 renaissance that saw her end the season number one in the rankings means she's been granted time for her own training camp beyond the previous month's two- to three-week Trek effort in Denia. "I pay for it, though!" Deignan clarifies.

Unlike many riders who gravitate toward fighting gravity on the largest of the eight Canary Islands, Deignan's not here for altitude efforts ascending Mount Teide, whose 3,715m peak is the highest point above sea level of the Atlantic islands. Instead, it's a focus on family time and quality miles. "Take today," says the Trek-Segafredo rider. "I rode three hours including two climbing intervals. It was a reasonably intense effort for 15 minutes including spikes every three minutes where I dipped into zone four. It's a session that replicates the race environment."

The race-specific nature is key, says Deignan, echoing Van Erp. You target



Van Vleuten's resilience and capacity to absorb huge volumes of training without falling ill are legendary – so much so that she often trains with men's teams

a race and, with your coach, work back from that point with training efforts matching the loads of, in the case of when we chatted, Omloop Het Nieuwsblad at the end of February. For Deignan, anything more is wasted miles.

"I'm goal orientated and do what's necessary to win those races," she says. "We don't have many races that are longer than four hours yet you have women who are training for six. It's a bit like a bloke training for 10 hours."

"That said, it does depend on the athlete's engine, and I don't benefit from doing long endurance miles," Deignan continues. "Doing too many miles makes me slow and tired, so I err on the side of quality not quantity. That's why an average week will be 15-20 hours." That adds up to around 20,000km of training and racing each season, says Deignan, which is less than around

28,000km for the men but more than the 13,000km-17,000km Van Erp recorded in his study. "It works for me," says Deignan.

Deignan reflects that while she uses a power meter and Training Peaks software, she sidesteps heart rate and trains heavily on feel. "I can tell when it's not worth pushing as I'm on the verge of falling ill; other days, I'm stronger than what's on the programme so put in an extra effort. It's valuable to push your body at the right moments. That ties in with race instinct but also training instinct. Too many riders rely on technology and lose that feeling."

Deignan credits her father for her sharp intuition: while her mum will use a GPS on long rides across Europe, her father's

accompanied by an old-fashioned map. You also suspect Deignan's focus on quality over quantity

▲ European champ Van Vleuten is legendary for her huge volume of training miles

is not solely personality driven. She's a graduate of British Cycling's Olympic Podium Programme, her track career peaking in 2009 when she took a Worlds team pursuit gold alongside Wendy Houvenaghel and Jo Rowsell.

THE ULTIMATE OUTLIER

While Deignan's instinct for intensity over volume matches Van Erp's analysis, there are outliers. "Just look at Annemiek [van Vleuten]," says Martin Vestby, directeur sportif for Team BikeExchange's women's squad. Vestby saw up close the efforts of the former world champion before the Dutch rider moved to Movistar this winter. "She racked up over 30,000km in 2020. That's more than the men. I asked her if they were necessary, she answered, 'No.'" Van Vleuten's resilience and capacity to absorb huge volumes of training without falling ill are legendary – so much so that she often trains with men's teams at training camp. Her performance physiology might not have needed the miles but, says Vestby, "It bolstered her

"I have proof that women's races were of higher intensity and that potentially they could tolerate higher levels of pain"

Teun Van Erp, former coach at Team DSM

resilience – broke down mental barriers that readied her for racing."

I mention Van Erp's findings to Vestby. He replies that the higher-intensity, lower-volume model is generally about right, though historically it was hard to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach due to the lack of depth in the women's field. "That's changing. Now, you have more specific riders for different races. Whereas before you might have had 10 world-class riders, now there are 20, 30... if not more.

"One of the sport scientists who worked with us looked into this disparity in talent

a few years ago," Vestby says. "You should look up the studies."

I do. The author was Paolo Menaspà, who emailed over several papers, including *Demands of World Cup Competitions in elite women's road cycling*. In short, Menaspà concluded that there was a clear split between the top 10 and the rest, the main takeaways being:

power outputs between 30 seconds and two minutes was much higher for the top 10, as was the ability to ride at high intensity (more than 7.5 watts per kilogramme) for longer periods.

"We'd recommend matching training sessions to these race results," Menaspà proposed. "That means three-and-a-half hours at a mean intensity of 3.3 watts per kilogramme with 45 10-second efforts at more than 7.5 watts per kilogramme." The evolution of women's cycling means these results, obtained between 2012 and 2015, are probably out of date – that this physical profile is now ticked off by the top 20 or 30, not just the top 10. Why the historic chasm between riders? It's down to several forces. On a basic level, lack of coverage meant lack of sponsorship meant lack of investment meant lack of money to train and recover properly. Only the stars, like Marianne Vos, and those supported via other avenues, like Lizzie Deignan receiving funding from UK Sport early in her track and road career, could maximise physical and psychological adaptations and truly be called a professional rider.

Jumbo-Visma launching a women's team, led by Vos, and Deignan's team, Trek-Segafredo, and now BikeExchange guaranteeing a minimum wage equal to the men are bridging the gap and highlight the growing professionalisation of the sport and, by virtue, training. A further exemplar is the growing number of support staff allocated to women's

teams, to identify and satisfy the individual rider's needs. Take DSM, formerly Van Erp's Sunweb. ➔

◀ Deignan is a scientific trainer, but is adaptive and listens to what her body is telling her





12%

TIME WOMEN SPENT IN
ZONE 5 HEART
RATE ZONE
DURING RACING

4%

TIME MEN SPENT IN
ZONE 5 HEART
RATE ZONE
DURING RACING

STRONG AND STABLE

In 2019, the German team officially opened the doors to their Keep Challenging Centre in Sittard, Limburg. “We have 23 apartments where most of our female riders and men’s development team live,” explains Liz Nijbroek, the head nutritionist across all DSM teams. “It’s a fantastic facility where we support staff can regularly meet the riders.”

Nijbroek says the women’s team have their own full-time nutritionist and a chef at all the big races. “We didn’t use to and that has made a huge difference,” she says. “Increasingly, whether it’s feeding or training, the female riders are enjoying a tailored approach.” Does that stretch to personalised plates, often employed by the men?

“We’re particularly sensitive with the women riders and eating but this is actually something they’ve asked for, so we’re looking into it. They know this leads to stable body composition and stable

bodyweight throughout the season, which is the healthy ideal.”

Not the unhealthy malpractices of many. According to acclaimed nutritionist Anita Bean, up to 30 per cent of “thin-build sports ladies” (thin build is weight-related sports like cycling) suffer one or all of the Female Triad of disordered eating, irregular periods and osteoporosis. Deignan more or less maintains an all-season race weight of around 56kg. It wasn’t always so.

“Before I met my husband, I used to do stupid things like skip meals and think that was the way to get leaner. Then my husband moved in and was like, ‘What are you doing?’ He was a climber, so being as lean as possible was important. But, he told me, the way to be lean

is to eat and not make yourself overtrained and in calorie deficit all the time. Once I’d sorted my nutrition, I saw a big increase in my performance.”

Stable body composition is key. At the DSM off-season training camp, each rider will have a DEXA scan before reverting to the more parochial calipers throughout the race season. “This is important,” Nijbroek adds. “We don’t say you need to lose 1kg or add 1kg because this is insensitive. It’s more so we can create a base level of corporation and they don’t do stuff on their own. Rapid weight loss is still common in the women’s peloton – and the men’s – but our set-up keeps the communication channels open and helps both the rider’s health and performance.”

While the men will naturally consume more calories, both teams follow a periodisation model of nutrition, meaning fewer calories and carbohydrates in the off-season. “But we’ll then look to

▲ The numbers show that females race at a more intense level of effort than the men

carbo load for the spring classics,” says Nijbroek. “The main difference between nutrition plans is in-race feeding – which women used to be terrible at but are improving thanks to our handlebar plan (a cockpit when-to-feed sticker) – and supplements. For example, women’s iron levels tend to be lower because of the menstrual cycle, though we’d blood test them first before prescribing this or any supplement to see if they really need it.”

MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Whether it’s plummeting iron levels or not, the impact of menstruation on a female cyclist’s output is very real. Georgia Bruinvels, a researcher at UCL, found that 41.7 per cent of female athletes felt their menstrual cycle affected their performance, be it an increased risk due to hormonal changes or having to deal with cramps. While Van Erp’s research focuses on session intensity, it doesn’t account for the impact of menstruation. “Some riders are affected more than others and it’s something coaches are increasingly aware of,” says Vestby. “They might increase or

“Before I met my husband, I used to do stupid things like skip meals and think that was the way to get leaner”

Lizzie Deignan, Trek-Segafredo

decrease session length, or raise or lower intensity, depending on the hormonal profile at that time, but in general, the training doesn’t change much.”

Nijbroek concurs. As for Deignan, “There’s a week in the middle when I’m ovulating where I feel awful on the bike. Some riders feel great ovulating. I’m definitely not one of them. I don’t train too differently, though. It’s more psychological as I don’t expect PBs on those days. I used to restrict myself when I felt hungrier but I read that you need an extra 300 calories a day in the run-up to

your period, which has proven beneficial!”

I then mention to Deignan that the likes of runners Liz McColgan and Sonia O’Sullivan were reported as feeling stronger post-baby. Does she, post-Orla? “Not really. It’s been a right slog to get back to this position.”

But this slog, I reply, could explain why

according to Van Erp’s research and several other sporting and non-sporting studies, women can tolerate higher levels of pain. Let’s flick back to Van Erp’s study briefly. He mentioned that the women race at a higher intensity. This was reflected in their average heart rates, which corresponded to 79 per cent of their maximum compared to 69 per cent for the men. Despite the women working harder, on the rating of perceived exertion scale, that runs from six to 20, both men and women perceived the effort at the same intensity – 15.4.

It’s mooted that the menstrual cycle and childbirth are two key events that bolster a women’s physical resilience. There’s also research that suggests men remember their pain differently; that women forget while men don’t. It’s a footnote but does highlight that beyond Van Erp and Menaspa’s research, there’s scope to better understand the female rider. There’s hormonal evidence that the first half of the cycle will maximise high-intensity exercise, for example, and aid digestion and recovery, while the second half enables women to metabolise fat more efficiently so is perfect for longer sessions. There’s also a growing belief that if women strength train in the first half of their cycle, they enjoy greater adaptation.

What does the future hold? “For training, things will become even more precise, for both women and men,” says Vestby. “As for women’s cycling as a whole, it’ll become more about team

tactics and the depth of fields will continue to grow.” Like the men’s, in fact. Just don’t train like them. **P**

◀ Jumbo-Visma’s women’s team, led by Vos, is raising the professionalism level of the sport



RENAISSANCE WOMAN

Italian Maria Canins won the women's Tour and Giro in the 1980s, as well as being a world-beating mountain runner and cross-country skier.

Procycling looks at the career of one of the greatest athletes in history

Writer William Fotheringham

Image Cor Vos

A new women's Tour de France may finally be in the pipeline again, but it's a long time since the Tour organisers ran anything of the kind. Those of us who followed cycling in the 1980s might imagine it's not that distant, because that's how the memory bank works, but it's now almost 35 years since Maria Canins won her second Tour Féminin on the trot in 1986.

To put that into perspective, go back another 35 years from Canins' double, and you are into the years of peak Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali. That gives an idea of how distant is the era when the climber the Italians nicknamed 'la mamma volante' dominated the Tour. That nickname might seem a tad patronising today, but Canins' career was all the more remarkable because she combined high level sport at several disciplines – skiing, cycling and triathlon – with being a mother.

Canins always seemed a somewhat distant figure, and appeared nervous and introverted, at least compared to her big rival Jeannie Longo, whose strength of character was remarkable, almost tangible, and who gained more attention at the Tour because of her nationality. Outside

Italy, where Canins was voted sportswoman of the year in 1985 and 1986, the story tended to be 'Longo loses' rather than 'Canins wins'.

"Maria has closely cut hair and eyes of bright blue, the colour of the Italian *azzurra*," noted the late doyen of sportswriting at *La Repubblica*, Gianni Mura, in an article from 1984, adding, "She shows her 35 years with a few lines on her face and a wealth of courage inside."

"She doesn't eat very much, and she doesn't talk very much," observed the Italian national trainer of the time.

Once the road went uphill, however, Canins devoured the road and her legs spoke louder than she ever did in any post-race interview. "La Maria è una bestia," said her rivals and team mates: Maria is an animal. It wasn't said as an insult, but as a tribute to her supreme physical ability, and her capacity to go deep.

Like most great climbers, the Italian was not physically imposing, with a slight 52kg frame. "Not very big. Lean. Muscular," was the impression of the British cyclist Denise Burton, who finished the 1986 Tour, and was among those left in Canins's wake. Burton retained her diary from the race, and now notes that "whenever there was a first category climb, she won the stage". ▶

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Prendas  Ciclismo



The Italian came relatively late to the world of cycling. Born in 1949, she had started out with downhill skiing at school – she originated from a village, La Villa, with only 800 inhabitants – but then dropped the sport when she started work in a hotel after leaving school, on the grounds that she didn't want to risk her job by falling and breaking bones. She had begun cross-country skiing in her native Alta Badia region in 1969 and had become a prolific winner of national titles, taking 15 at distances from five to 20 kilometres.

She had also become a multiple winner of winter mass participation cross country ski marathons such as the legendary 70km Marcialonga, where she landed 10 wins in a row, from 1979 – the second year the race accepted women – to 1988. In 1984, the year she finished fifth in the Los Angeles Olympic Games cycling road race, she had come 44th among both sexes in the Marcialonga, leaving over 6,000 men in her wake.

The crossover between cross-country skiing and cycling has been known about for many years; the 'classic' mode of cross-country skiing, where the skis remain parallel most of the time in pre-cut tramlines, is similar to road cycling in the type of effort and the muscle groups called upon, particularly in the coordination between opposing arms and legs. "They are very complementary," Canins says from her home in the

province of Bolzano. "Both endurance sports, and training on one trains the other. You have a ski season of maybe three or four months, so the bike is great for summer training."

Sometimes, as when Greg LeMond spent winters at his Minnesota home skiing cross-country, working the sticks creates unhelpful upper body muscle; in Canins' case, the cross-over seems to have been largely beneficial. Coming late to cycling did, however, leave

her relatively low on confidence when it came to riding in a group, she recalls now.

"I wasn't good at being in a bunch. I was afraid the other riders would make contact with me and I'd fall off. When there was a sprint I was always at the back. It was partly that I didn't ride in a group when I was young, partly that being over 30 I didn't want to break anything. I had a family, I had other things to do. I never wanted to take risks. My brain would tell me to slow down."

Paradoxically, Canins was much happier descending; she had no trouble holding her big rival

Longo when the road went downhill, she recalls, and was happy flying down passes with Francesco Moser. There's a reason for that, she believes, which is that whizzing down a mountain on skis teaches you to read terrain at speed, and gives you the instinct for leaning into a curve that makes a difference on a bike.

Canins got on a bike seriously in 1975 on the advice of her coach and husband, Bruno Bonaldi, another member of the azzurri ski team, who felt that she needed a summer activity that would complement her ski racing in winter; it was Bonaldi who had encouraged her to resume sport after they married. She made her international cycling debut in 1982, when her daughter Concetta was four years old; having won the Italian road championship that summer, she immediately landed the silver medal in the World Road Race Championships at Goodwood behind Mandy Jones of Great Britain. Back in her village, the church bells were rung to greet her when she returned with her medal.

That year marked her zenith as a polyvalent athlete, as she was Italian national champion in four separate disciplines: road cycling, mountain running, cross-country skiing – titles at five, 10 and 20 kilometres – and 'summer skiing' in which rollers are put on the

ski blades. Five more cycling world championships medals followed in the next seven years, including a gold medal in the team time trial

In 1982 Canins was Italian champion in road cycling, mountain running, cross-country skiing and summer skiing



◀ The two Tour winners in 1985 - Canins & Hinault, on the Paris podium

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Prendas  **Ciclismo**

at Renaix in Belgium in 1988, and she would take two national and two world titles at mountain bike cross country, though she never quite managed to win an individual road race Worlds. Canins was notable for her lack of sprinting ability on a bike and she persistently lost major races to specialists such as Connie Carpenter at the LA Olympics, and, most notably, to her biggest rival Longo. When she won, it was almost invariably solo.

► Canins took the silver medal behind Jones at the 1982 Worlds in Goodwood



The women’s Tours de France of the 1980s were exploratory affairs, largely because the men who ran the sport didn’t really have much idea what women could do or what they wanted. This led to some situations that now seem completely bizarre. Take the 1985 race. A year previously for the inaugural Tour Féminin, the field hadn’t been the strongest because of the potential clash with the Los Angeles Olympics; in 1985 the 10 invited countries were expected to send their best riders, but the response of the Americans – who had won the inaugural race with Marianne Martin – was to schedule their World Championships qualifying events to clash with the French Tour, to ensure their best riders didn’t ride both the Tour and the Coors Classic.

MARIA CANINS’ MAJOR PLACINGS

Tour de France Féminin	1st	1985, 1986
Giro Femminile	1st	1988
Trofeo Binda	1st	1984, 1985, 1990, 1992
Tour de l’Aude	1st	1987
National RR Championships	1st	1982, 1984-1989
National TT Championships	1st	1987-1990
Coors Classic	1st	1984
Tour of Norway	1st	1985, 1986
Tour de France Féminin	2nd	1987, 1988, 1989
Giro Femminile	2nd	1990
World Road Race Championships	2nd	1982, 1985
World Road Race Championships	3rd	1983, 1989
Olympic Games road race	5th	1984

The 1985 race shadowed the men’s Tour from the get-go in Brittany and was divided into two parts, an initial 12 stages and a second standalone event of five stages, with a convoluted points system – such as only the French bureaucratic mind could have devised – to decide the final overall winner. The race ended up, inevitably, as a duel between Canins and the French favourite Longo. Longo dominated the flat stages early on – although the pair finished in a dead heat in stage 4, the 18km time trial from Sarcy to Reims – while Canins came into her own in the mountains, where there were three summit finishes: Morzine-Avoriaz, Lans-en-Vercors, and Luz Ardiden. Of the 17 stages, only two were over 100 kilometres in length.

The writer Owen Mulholland described the scene on the second mountain stage, which finished at Lans-en-Vercors, not far from Longo’s home town of Grenoble. “Jeannie fought desperately to keep the flying Italian mama in sight. On the last climb, Jeannie blew up spectacularly, dismounting three times. Only her years of experience gave her the courage to continue.” Longo, “crawled in”, as Mulholland put it, in 14th place.

Another who tried to match Canins and failed was the American Phyllis Hines, a 22-year-old riding for the US ‘B’ team, which was actually made up of their better riders. (Most of the US ‘A’ team were in their first year of racing.) Hines tried to stay with Canins on the Col du Tourmalet during the second part of the Tour, and collapsed on the climb to the finish at Luz Ardiden. “She shook for the next hour,” wrote Mulholland, who added that “dizziness and fatigue were with her for another 48 hours.” ►

Images: Cor Vos (World Champs), Offside L’Equipe (with Hinaut)



The margins Canins opened on the summit finishes were decisive. At Morzine, she won from Longo by a manageable 2:50, but on the following day's stage to Lans-en-Vercors, the next rider in was France's Dominique Damiani, 8:17 behind, and at Luz Ardiden, although Longo did finish second, she was at 9:13. That explains the organisers' decision to run the race on a points basis; it was the only way that Longo – who picked off rolling stages and time trials at will – could be kept remotely in contention with her Italian rival, thus maintaining a minimum of interest in the overall outcome. Had the 17 stages been run in the conventional way, Canins would have been a Coppi-esque 22 minutes ahead.

"The best memory? Finishing in Paris on the final day in the first year. It was all new to me, the whole race, the roads we were on, the places, the people by the roadside. It was all beautiful. And I will always remember standing on the podium in Paris next to Bernard Hinault, a pretty straightforward character and a fan of women's cycling."

The 1986 Tour was still more extreme, although the organisers saw fit to include road stages that were under 30km – the penultimate stage into Nevers was a derisory 22km – as well as the massive mountain passes that suited Canins so well. This time round, the women's race started a week into the men's event, with an opening

▲ Canins sets the pace ahead of rival Jeannie Longo on stage 8 of the 1985 Tour de France to Morzine

time trial at Granville in Normandy on July 7, which Canins won. Longo returned as world champion, but Canins won 6 of the 15 stages, taking four out of a possible five between

stage 9 and 13, the latter finishing on the Puy de Dôme.

The pattern was a familiar one: almost two minutes over the Peyresourde into Luchon, almost six minutes at the finish in Serre Chevalier, two minutes at Saint-Étienne and 90 seconds at the Puy de Dôme. This time, the race was decided in the conventional way, and Longo trimmed Canins' margin back to less than 16 minutes. By 1987, however, Longo had improved her climbing, and was able to dislodge Canins sufficiently to take the overall title from the Italian, and in 1988 and 1989 it was a similar picture.

The rivalry was a great one, said Canins, but the pair had contrasting attitudes to sport. "When Jeannie won she was happy, but she wasn't happy when she lost. I think that's a negative outlook, because sport is beautiful whether you win or lose. I liked to smile if I lost, because if you lose, it's not the end of the world. You think of the next day, of other races."

As for the future, Canins feels there is no point in women's racing simply aping events that were set up

Image: Offside/Equipe (1985 TDF), Sirotti (1986)

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RETRO

MARIA CANINS

for men. “I didn’t like the World Championships, 140km, it was long and I got fed up watching it.

We need short, hilly, exciting races. You don’t want people fed up in front of their televisions. Racing needs to be spectacular, beautiful. We have to develop in our own way. Paris-Roubaix is great, but it can’t be the same length as the men’s race. No, no, no.”

► In 1986, Canins took her second consecutive victory in the Tour Féminin



Asked at the LA Olympics in 1984 by an Italian journalist why her husband had not travelled to support her, Canins replied, “What use would he be? I’m perfectly able to look after myself.” She remained a fan of the late Felice Gimondi, delicately finessing the fact that the 1965 Tour de France winner said, “Women should be at home doing their knitting rather than riding around on bikes.”


“That may apply to his wife and daughters,” said Canins, “but not to me.” We discuss this briefly, and she says now, “It was the Italian mentality, that women couldn’t do certain things that men did. I think I opened the door a bit, inspired women to ride, for pleasure, not just for sport.” After we come off the phone, she messages me a reminder that Gimondi’s daughter Norma was elected vice president of the Italian Cycling Federation in 2020. The irony is delicious.

After winning her brace of Tours, Canins went on to take victory in the first women’s Giro in 1988. The eight stages went from Milan to Rome, totalling 764km; Canins took the race lead from the German Petra Rossner on the penultimate stage into Siena. One report of the race describes a peloton of two halves, one consisting of riders in proper teams with contracts, training camps and expenses, the other of amateurs in the old sense, who financed their racing themselves.

“Longo had a team, with sponsors and money,” said Canins, who paid for her racing by working as a ski instructor during the winter. “I rode for expenses,

and the prizes were what you lived off. But there weren’t enough of them. We were passionate, but impoverished.”

Canins’ last major international success was the Trofeo Alfredo Binda in 1992 – she won this classic one-day race four times in total – and she was still racing in 1995, taking fifth in the Italian national time trial championship and winning the Giro del Piave. After retirement, she continued working as a mountain bike guide in her native mountains, until covid-19 put paid to organised outdoor activity.

Truly polyvalent athletes are rare, and those who excel in more than one discipline simultaneously are rarer still – most often, multidiscipline success is a matter of winning in one area then moving to another, as Rebecca Romero did with rowing then track cycling. This prompts one final thought: are such athletes rare because they are true outliers, or is it a matter of opportunity and mindset that drives sportsmen and women to focus on a single discipline where they might excel at several? Answers on a postcard please. 

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Debrief

A N A L Y S I S • I N S I G H T • D A T A



➔ RACE OF THE MONTH / STRADE BIANCHE / 6.3.2021

Van der Poel reigns alone in Siena

The period between 1260 and 1355 was Siena's golden age. The city grew to around 50,000 people and the significant architectural landmarks – the Duomo, and the gothic Palazzo Pubblico on the Piazza del Campo –

were built, giving the hilltop city the look it retains to this day. Siena was ruled by the Noveschi – the Government of the Nine – a banking-mercantile oligarchy who were quite democratic by the standards of the time. As elected officials, they defended the interests of the people


▲ Van der Poel is streets ahead of Alaphilippe and Bernal on the final climb to Siena

of the city against the rich families who had presided over decades of anarchy and strife, and their structure was given architectural permanence in the nine triangles into which the stones of the fan-shaped Piazza del Campo are divided. The Nine sponsored the pre-Renaissance artist Duccio to create his masterpiece, the Maestà altarpiece at the Duomo (though in a pragmatic show of mercantile tightwadness, they paid him as a wage labourer and he would die in obscurity), and they ruled the city as a co-operative.

So when a working co-operative of nine riders broke away 50km from Siena during the 2021 Strade Bianche, it was not the first time a nonet of prominent individuals had come together to divide and rule in this scenic corner of Tuscany.

The hill kingdoms of Italy are no strangers to violent uprisings and revolutions, however. A country in which the senators lined up one by

RACE RESULT

RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1 Mathieu van der Poel 	Alpecin-Fenix	4:40:29
2 Julian Alaphilippe 	Deceuninck - Quick Step	at 0:05
3 Egan Bernal 	Ineos Grenadiers	at 0:20

29

Career wins for Mathieu van der Poel



EDWARD PICKERING
EDITOR

Ed thinks Van der Poel's rivals have got their work cut out to beat him, but is looking forward to seeing how he deals with the entire peloton ganging up on him.



SOPHIE HURCOM
DEPUTY EDITOR

For years Boels-Dolmans' were *the* dominant women's team, and with the strength in depth of their 2021 incarnation SD Worx at Omloop and Strade, Sophie can see why.



ADAM BECKET
STAFF WRITER

Adam can't stop thinking that the Van der Poel-Van Aert rivalry is looking like becoming one of the defining aspects of the 2020s in professional road racing.

one to stab Julius Caesar in the back would not have been surprised to see this ruling coalition usurped, and Mathieu van der Poel twice trisected the leading group, reducing it to three riders with a first violent surge with 12km to go, then going it alone with 500m to go, dropping world champ Julian Alaphilippe and 2019 Tour winner Egan Bernal.

When Duccio's Maestà was completed in 1311, it was carried in celebratory procession through the city to the Duomo, to the sound of cheering, trumpets, castanets and pipes. Van der Poel's march to victory, through the deserted streets of the covid era, was a quieter, more deadly affair, but there was no less a feeling that an event of huge significance had taken place. Siena may have been ruled peacefully by the Noveschi; the dictator Van der Poel's reign looks to be an altogether more violent affair.

* * *

The 2021 Strade Bianche couldn't match the heat of last summer's edition, but it still took place under azure skies, against a backdrop of rolling Tuscan landscape dotted with blossoming trees. Jumbo-Visma

▼ Gogl leads Bernal after the pair got into the leading selection of nine riders

raised the temperature by riding at a scorching pace

in the middle third of the race, eroding the peloton, especially on the brittle sterrato sections. Jumbo's leader Wout van Aert, the defending champ, duly surged with 50km to go, on the long Sector Eight, which broke the peloton and put nine riders just ahead of a chasing group of eight, and the rest nowhere.

At this point, the race became very political. The leading nine - Van Aert, Van der Poel, Alaphilippe, Bernal, Pogacar, Simmons, Gogl, Pidcock and Geniets - worked hard to make sure the next group didn't catch them, and the gap remained under 20 seconds for well over 20km. The same reason they didn't want the group to catch them, however, was exactly the reason the group *couldn't* catch them: the presence of two Alpecin and two Qhubeka-Assos riders, sitting on the back and refusing to help. If they'd got back on, Van der Poel and Gogl would have had reinforcements.

An attack from Alaphilippe put Van Aert in trouble. But Van der Poel definitively broke the lead group up with his first big attack, with 12km to go, and it took Alaphilippe a long time to claw his way up to the Dutchman's wheel, and Bernal even longer. From that moment, it was clear who was going to win, but the manner of the denouement was still startling. A lot was made of the fact that the final trio consisted of a cyclo-cross world champion, a puncheur and a grand tour specialist, but when all was said and done, the winner was simply the strongest rider.

Van der Poel definitively broke the lead group up with his first big attack, with 12km to go, and it took Alaphilippe a long time to claw his way up to the Dutchman's wheel

A RACE FOR EVERYBODY

Is there any such thing as a Strade Bianche specialist? Virtually all kinds of riders have won it, and though three of the last seven have been won by current or former world cyclo-cross champions, other victors have included Julian Alaphilippe, a hilly one-day race specialist, and Fabian Cancellara, who was a multiple world TT champ and cobbled classics winner. At the same time, grand tour winners have been close to winning - Egan Bernal came third this year, and Romain Bardet was second in 2018.

If there is a theme to the winners, it seems to be that the best riders in the world at that time have a history of doing well. The race was a smaller affair in 2011 when Philippe Gilbert won, but that was the season he won the Ardennes classics and Amstel Gold, and wore the yellow jersey at the Tour. Kwiatkowski's best seasons have been 2014 and 2017, when he won the Worlds and Milan-San Remo respectively, and he won Strade Bianche in both those years. Tiesj Benoot might not be the best in the world... except when conditions are really really cold and wet, and that's how the weather was when he won in 2018.

WINNERS AND THEIR TYPES

YEAR	RIDER	RIDER TYPE
2011	Philippe Gilbert	<i>Puncheur, hilly classics specialist</i>
2012	Fabian Cancellara	<i>Rouleur, cobbles specialist</i>
2013	Moreno Moser	<i>All-rounder</i>
2014	Michał Kwiatkowski	<i>All-rounder</i>
2015	Zdeněk Štybar	<i>Former cyclo-cross specialist</i>
2016	Fabian Cancellara	<i>Rouleur, cobbles specialist</i>
2017	Michał Kwiatkowski	<i>All-rounder</i>
2018	Tiesj Benoot	<i>Cobbles specialist, all-rounder</i>
2019	Julian Alaphilippe	<i>Puncheur, hilly classics specialist</i>
2020	Wout van Aert	<i>Cyclo-cross rider, rouleur, cobbles</i>



→ PROCYCLING PICK / STRADE BIANCHE DONNE / 6.3.21

SD Worx make their numbers count

When Chantal van den Broek-Blaak attacked with 6km to go in Strade Bianche Donne, taking Elisa Longo Borghini with her, it's not clear whether Van den Broek-Blaak's SD Worx team knew that they were on to a good thing. On the positive side, they had a rider up the road, which is an excellent way to win a bike race, especially that close to the finish. On the other, Trek-Segafredo's Longo Borghini is a better climber, with better results than the Dutchwoman, and a previous winner of this race, in 2017. In five attempts at the race, she'd never come lower than fifth; Van den Broek-Blaak had a single fourth place to her name.

The situation just before Van den Broek-Blaak's attack was this: a 12-rider lead group were well clear

of the rest, and recovering from the effort of chasing down a strong attack from Movistar's Annemiek van Vleuten and Jumbo-Visma's Marianne Vos. The politics of the group were fairly straightforward – Vos and Van Vleuten were their respective teams' sole representatives. Also isolated were BikeExchange's Amanda Spratt, and Canyon-Sram's Kasia Niewiadoma. FDJ-Nouvelle Aquitaine had Marta Cavalli and Cecille Uttrup Ludwig, while Longo Borghini had Ellen van Dijk for support. Meanwhile, SD Worx had four riders of the dozen: Van den Broek-Blaak, Anna van der Breggen, Demi Vollering and Ashleigh Moolman Pasio.

Really, all SD Worx had to do was make sure that they either keep things together for Van der Breggen to use her superior climbing strength to win on the final climb to Siena, or to put a rider up the road, to force the others to chase. So when Van den Broek-Blaak attacked, it looked like a clever move, until Longo Borghini joined.

SD Worx looked to be dithering a little. They clearly didn't have confidence that Van den Broek-Blaak would win, because she stopped co-operating with Longo Borghini, sitting in and refusing to come through, while Moolman Pasio and Vollering made attempts to get across the gap. SD Worx were effectively chasing a break with an SD Worx rider in it, though this isn't



▲ Former world champ Van den Broeck-Blaak leads a mid-race break

◀ Italian champ and former Strade winner Longo Borghini had to settle for second

as bad as it looks – if it had come back together, Van der Breggen would have been the favourite. They were turning a situation where it looked like they had a less-than-50-per-cent chance of winning into one where they had a more-than-50-per-cent chance.

But up ahead, Longo Borghini had committed, and her efforts meant that the lead pair went into the final climb with a winning margin. Yet her efforts had also dulled her kick, and while she led most of the way, she had no answer to Van den Broek-Blaak's attack in the final few hundred metres. The Dutchwoman surged away to win, while Van der Breggen proved that she was indeed the best rider in the group behind by riding to third.

Times are changing in women's cycling. Van der Breggen is in her last season and Van Vleuten and Vos



RACE RESULT

RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1 Chantal van den Broek-Blaak	SD Worx	3:54:40
2 Elisa Longo Borghini	Trek-Segafredo	at 0:07
3 Anna van der Breggen	SD Worx	at 0:09



Number of SD Worx riders in the top 11 at Strade Bianche



can't go on forever. The two-up attack that Van Vleuten and Vos put in with 12km to go might have won one of them the race two or more years ago, but they were gradually closed down. The anticipated battle of the big teams between SD Worx and Trek-Segafredo fizzled out when Trek's leader Lizzie Deignan pulled out with illness in the week before the event, and on this occasion Longo Borghini finished second on strength, rather than teamwork - Van Dijk also made the lead group, but had already been on the attack and brought back earlier in the race. That left SD Worx to use strength in numbers to win, even if they didn't look entirely convinced that they hadn't blown it. Strade Bianche might not have gone exactly to plan for SD Worx, but it was an effective demonstration of their strength in depth.

→ KUURNE-BRUSSELS-KUURNE / 28.2.21

VIEW FROM THE TEAM CAR

STEVEN DE JONGH
DS, TREK-SEGAFREDO

Former world champion Mads Pedersen sprinted to victory in Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne. The day before at Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, their highest placed rider finished 63rd. Trek-Segafredo directeur sportif Steven de Jongh explains how the team turned it around to win

/// We were very happy with Mads' win because the day before in Omloop the team underperformed. Then we had a short meeting, and I told them I had a sh*t day and we told them to just make it good on Sunday. They did a really good race, so I was super with that. They knew it wasn't good enough, and they were sorry about that. I said, 'Guys, we can speak long or short about this, but the thing to remember is that tomorrow is another day, and I know you are good, because we had a productive training camp.' I sent Mads a screenshot of my result in 2008, when I won Kuurne for the second time, the night before. He came back and said that he would win. And he did, so he kept his word.

It was quite tense in the car, whether they'd bring they break back. There were a few teams that wanted to go for a sprint, so we didn't do the work pulling

► After catching the break in the final kms, Pedersen wins the Kuurne sprint

behind actually, we saved Jasper Stuyven for the lead-out for Mads.

Mads has been doing better sprints for the past year, and he was going well in Bessèges, so we didn't have to think about that or make a decision. It was already planned that Mads would go for it. The guys are in good shape, the whole team actually from the start of the year, and we're going to try and continue this as long as possible. Form is good, so we're looking forward to the rest of the classics. There are good competitors, mainly Van Aert and Van der Poel, but there are lots of teams that are interested in making races hard and isolating, so we now have to make our plan for the next races.

I think Mads has always been fast, he has always won a lot of races from small groups. We have a good lead out train, and I think this is getting better and better. ///



RACE RESULT

	RIDER		TEAM	TIME
1	Mads Pedersen		Trek-Segafredo	4:37:04
2	Anthony Turgis		Total Direct Energie	st
3	Tom Pidcock		Ineos Grenadiers	st

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

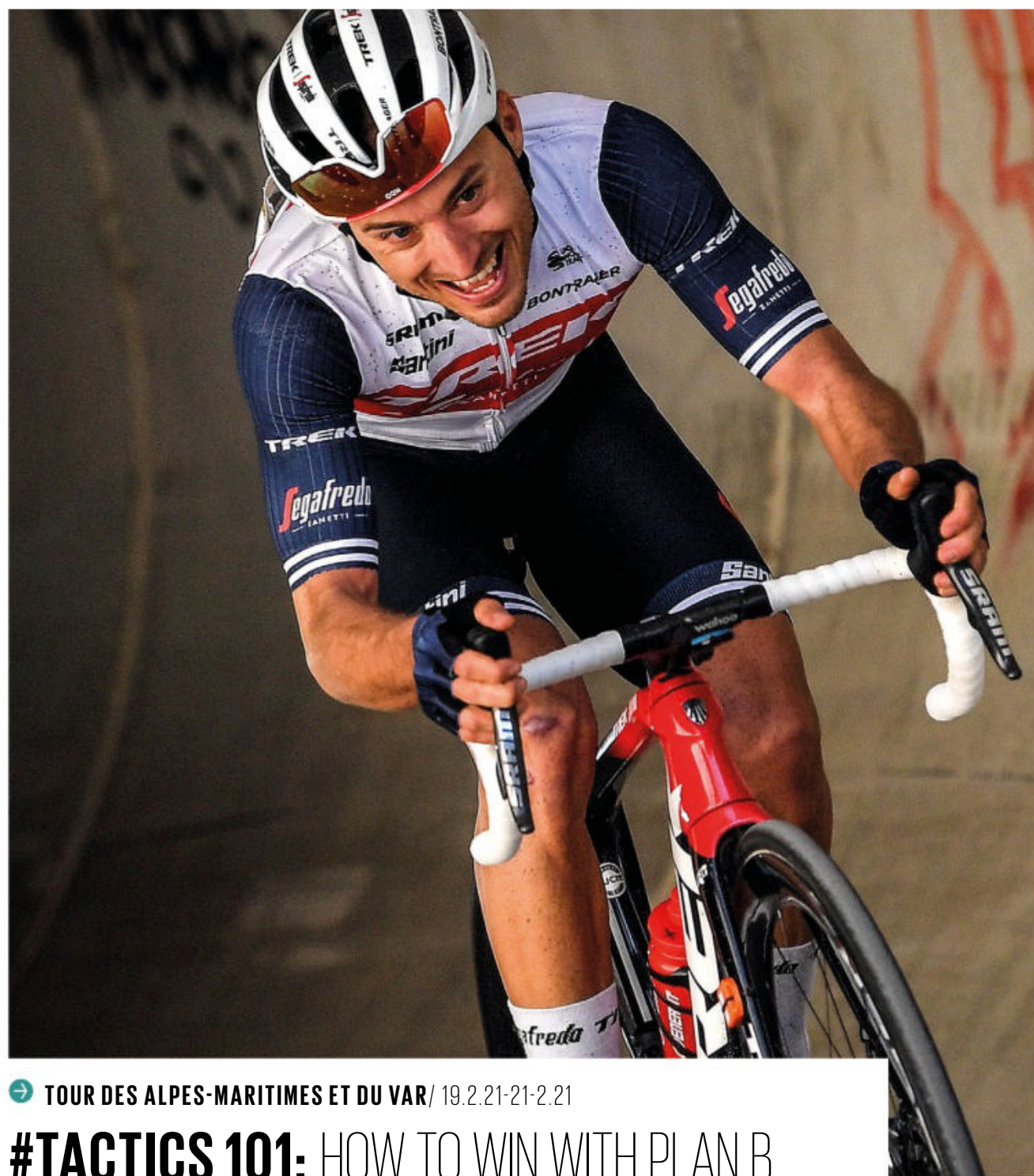
DECEUNINCK HAVE THE HEX ON THEIR RIVALS

Is it too soon to start talking about other teams having a Deceuninck-Quick Step complex?

The final 20km of Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, normally one of the most aggressive and dynamic races on the calendar, was not much more than a 30-minute-long leadout for Deceuninck's Davide Ballerini, who won the final sprint very easily. Apart from Gianni Moscon going away over the Muur van Geraardsbergen, Deceuninck controlled the unusually large lead group on the run-in to the finish, and nobody took the opportunity to attack.

However, it's more complicated than that. The wind, though not strong, was in the riders' faces, and of the 55 or so who'd made the lead group, five were from DQS. No other team had such numbers, and UAE Emirates were also keen for a sprint, with three riders in the group including Alexander Kristoff. However, Ag2r, Ineos and Qhubeka-Assos, each with four riders and none of them sprinters, had the numbers to try something. That they didn't was probably down to the tiring efforts they had made to contain Julian Alaphilippe's daring mid-race raid – Pidcock and Moscon had both been highly visible.

Deceuninck win a lot of one-day races, with an impressive number of riders. In Omloop, they controlled the final kilometres and delivered their best rider to the win. It's up to the other teams to disrupt this.



→ TOUR DES ALPES-MARITIMES ET DU VAR/ 19.2.21-21.2.21

#TACTICS 101: HOW TO WIN WITH PLAN B

There was an intriguing three-way battle on the final stage of the Tour des Alpes-Maritimes et du Var. In the first two stages of the race, Michael Woods had put himself into the race lead, and his performance on the steep Mur de Fayence made it look like he was strong enough to carry that lead to the finish. He was a second clear of Bauke Mollema, who had won the uphill finish on day one.

However, things got very complicated on the third stage. A dangerous group got away early, and it included the Groupama pair of Valentin Madouas and Rudy Molard and Mollema's team-mate

Gianluca Brambilla. Molard was only 10 seconds behind on GC, while Madouas and Brambilla were only another three seconds adrift. This was good news for Groupama – if they stayed away, Molard would win. It was also good news for Trek, because it excused them from having to help Woods' Israel Start-Up Nation team with the job of chasing.

And as things turned out, it was even better news for Trek, because Brambilla was climbing better than Molard and Madouas – though Groupama outnumbered the Italian towards the end of the stage, the race was decided on the final climbs, the Madone and Col de Nice.



▲ Brambilla soloed away to the stage 3 win, to take the GC title, one of two Trek riders on the final podium

Two against one is often a favourable situation in a bike race, but not on a climb, where the one is riding faster than the two. By the time Groupama realised what was up, it was too late, and they had to just ride as well as possible to try and get on to the final podium.

Meanwhile, Woods launched an impressive chase, but with Trek's erstwhile team leader and second overall Mollema marking him, it was a lose-lose situation. If he'd somehow caught Brambilla, Mollema would have attacked. If he didn't, Brambilla would win. Trek had used their Plan A to mark their most dangerous rival out of the race, while their Plan B had won.

→ LE SAMYN DES DAMES / 2.3.21

Press Conference:

LOTTE KOPECKY



What was it like to win your first race of the year?

It was really good. I had a good feeling in Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, and also generally we have a really good team at the moment. Coming into Samyn, I could feel that the team was confident and we also showed it in the race. To finish it off for the team was really nice, especially as it was only the second race together.

Was the plan for you to go for a sprint at the end?

It wasn't the plan for me to sprint; not at all actually. Before the race it was more like just making the race and seeing what kind of situation it would be at the finish. At the end, we were all grouped together with 4km to go, and then it was all in for the sprint for me.

Were you confident in your sprint?

I was feeling really good, and we reacted well to some late attacks. So if we just stayed in the bunch and waited for the final, I had a sprint, and if the break stayed out, we had a lot of team-mates.

You finished third last year, is it a race that suits you?

Yes I think so. It's not that long, but it has a few cobbled sectors, and it's a very nervous race. It's good that

the cobbled sections can make a bit of a difference, meaning that you go to the finish with a smaller group.

This was your second race with Liv. Are you happy with the way things are going?

Yes, from the first team camp everyone has been really welcoming, and I feel good with the girls. It's really important to feel good in myself in the team.

What's it like being at a new team?

When I was switching, it was a bit strange because I was with Lotto for such a long time. But now it doesn't feel strange at all.

Is it extra special winning a race in Belgium in the Belgian jersey?

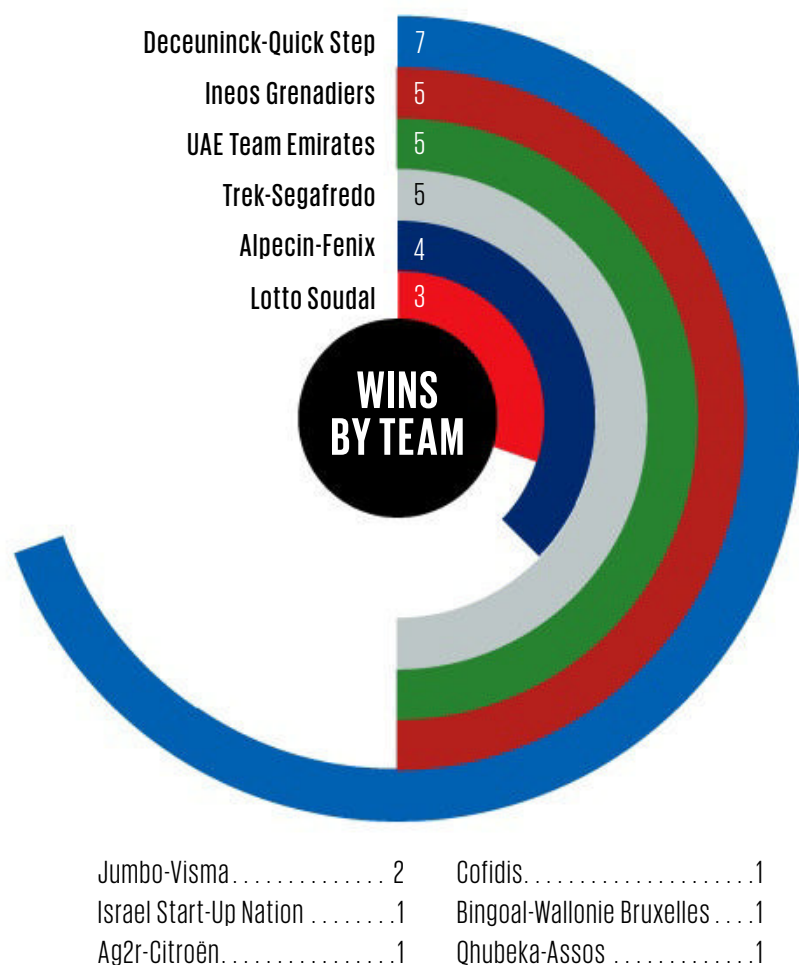
It's really nice to do that, but I think it would still be special if I was just in a normal jersey too. I hope the fans will be there soon again, too.

▼ Belgian champ Kopecky gets her first win in the national stripes



RACE RESULT

	RIDER		TEAM	TIME
1	Lotte Kopecky		Liv Racing	2:20:04
2	Emma Norsgaard		Movistar	st
3	Chloe Hosking		Trek-Segafredo	st
4	Gladys Verhulst		Team Arkéa	st
5	Maria Van 'T Geloof		Drops-Le Col s/bTempur	st



ONE-DAY RACES WINS UP TO MARCH 7

Quick Step live up to their reputation as one-day experts, with a hat trick at Omloop, Drôme Classic and GP Industria & Artigianato, to tie with Alpecin's three at Le Samyn, Strade Bianche and GP Monseré.

Deceuninck-Quick Step	3
Alpecin-Fenix	3
Trek-Segafredo	2
Ag2r-Citroën	1
Qhubeka-Assos	1
Team BikeExchange	1
Jumbo-Visma	1

MEN'S WINS BY RIDER



Iván Sosa	2	Ineos Grenadiers
Sam Bennett	2	Deceuninck-Quick Step
Tadej Pogačar	2	UAE Team Emirates
Mathieu van der Poel	2	Alpecin-Fenix
Bauke Mollema	2	Trek-Segafredo
Ryan Gibbons	2	UAE-Team Emirates
Gianluca Brambilla	2	Trek-Segafredo

STAGE RACE WINS

Ineos Grenadiers stay in the lead thanks to Adam Yates' second place at the UAE Tour. Tadej Pogačar's victory there gives UAE Emirates their first GC win, while Gianluca Brambilla's win and Bauke Mollema's third place at Tour des Alpes Maritimes puts Trek on the table, too.

TEAM	WINS	PODIUM	POINTS	KOM	TEAM
1 Ineos Grenadiers	1	3			1
2 Trek-Segafredo	1	1	1		
3 Lotto Soudal	1			1	1
4 UAE Emirates	1				1
5 Deceuninck-Quick Step		2	1		
6 Bora-Hansgrohe		1	1		1
7 Jumbo-Visma			1		1
8 Delko				1	
9 Cofidis			1		
10 Israel Start-Up Nation		1			

MEN'S WINS BY COUNTRY

Two wins for Gianluca Brambilla at Tour des Alpes Maritimes, another TT win for Filippo Ganna at the UAE Tour, plus back-to-back wins for Davide Ballerini and Andrea Bagioli at Omloop and the Drôme Classic mean the Italians are streaking ahead at the start of 2021.



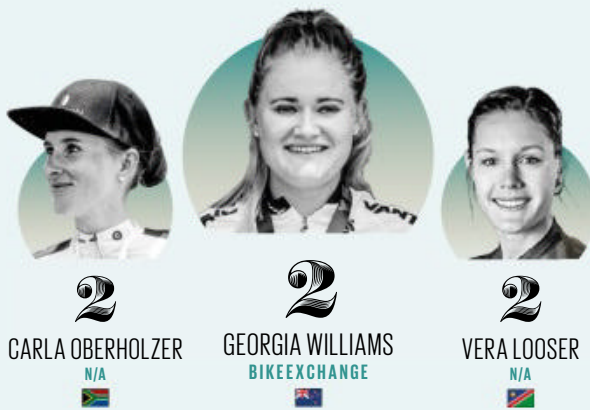
BEST TT SPECIALIST

Proving why he's the time trial world champion, Filippo Ganna has already won two races against the clock in 2021, with his win on stage 2 of the UAE Tour his sixth WorldTour level TT win since August 2019.



FILIPPO GANNA
INEOS GRENADIERS

WOMEN'S WINS BY RIDER



CARLA OBERHOLZER
N/A

GEORGIA WILLIAMS
BIKEEXCHANGE

VERA LOOSER
N/A

Sarah Roy		BikeExchange	1
Sarah Gigante		Tibco-SVB	1
C. van den Broek-Blaak		SD Worx	1
Anna van der Breggen		SD Worx	1
Lotte Kopecky		Liv Racing	1
Hannah Tserakh		Minsk Cycling Club	1
Olivia Ray		Rally Cycling	1

MOST CONSISTENT

Out of the 19 riders who rode all three major European races so far this season - Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, Le Samyn and Strade Bianche - the Belgian national champion Lotte Kopecky was the most consistent, placing fourth, first and 17th in the three races.

19



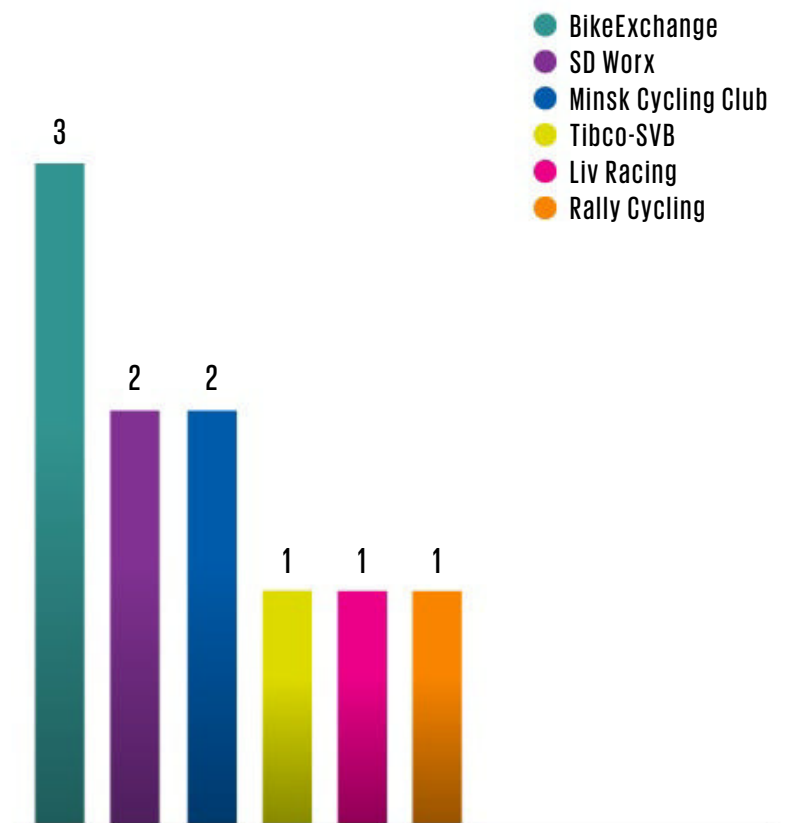
LOTTE KOPECKY
LIV RACING

ONE-DAY RACES WINS UP TO MARCH 7

The BikeExchange team currently lead the way with three wins, although theirs have all come thanks to the Australian and New Zealand national champs. In UCI-ranked races, SD Worx take an early lead thanks to wins at Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and Strade Bianche in early spring.

BikeExchange	3
SD Worx	2
Minsk Cycling Club	2
Tibco-SVB	1
Liv Racing	1
Rally Cycling	1

WOMEN'S WINS BY TEAM



TOP TEAM RESULTS

SD Worx's strength in depth is already visible. As well as winning Omloop and Strade Bianche, they placed another rider on the podium in each in third place. In fact, at Strade Bianche, the team had four riders finish in the top 11 places.

TEAM	WINS	2ND/3RD	4TH/5TH
SD Worx	2	2	-
Liv Racing	1	-	1
Trek-Segafredo	-	3	-
Movistar	-	2	1
Arkéa-Samsic	-	-	1
Drops Cycling	-	-	1
Canyon-Sram	-	-	1
FDJ Nouvelle Aq.	-	-	1

WOMEN'S WINS BY COUNTRY

While there's been limited women's racing so far in this early part of 2021, after the races Down Under were cancelled, the Dutch have already taken an early lead with victories through Anna van der Breggen and Chantal van den Broek-Blaak. Elsewhere, Belarusian riders picked up wins at the 1.2 ranked GP Velo Manavgat and GP Mediterrennean in Turkey.



Debrief

THE NUMBERS

THE BEST STAGE RACERS

Alejandro Valverde hasn't won a race since 2019, yet is still the rider with the most stage race GC wins, which is what happens when you keep racing until 40. Chris Froome and Nairo Quintana are next on the list, but Froome hasn't won a race since 2018, so is in danger of being overtaken. As for the women, where there are fewer stage races, Marianne Vos is way out in front, and it's improbable that the Dutchwoman will be caught during her career.



ALEJANDRO VALVERDE

Chris Froome	17
Nairo Quintana	16
Vincenzo Nibali	13
Primož Roglič	12
Jakob Fuglsang	10
Tony Martin	10
Richie Porte	9
Edvald Boasson Hagen	9
Geraint Thomas	8



MARIANNE VOS

Kirsten Wild	11
Ellen van Dijk	9
Anna van der Breggen	8
Lisa Brennauer	7
Trixi Worrack	7
Annemiek van Vleuten	7
Kasia Niewiadoma	5
Elisa Longo Borghini	3
Lizzie Deignan	3



THE GOLDEN TRIO

Stretching back to Milan-San Remo last year, the trio of Wout van Aert, Mathieu van der Poel and Julian Alaphilippe have dominated one-day races. With the exception of Il Lombardia, which only Alaphilippe rode, two of them have finished in the top 10 of the following major classics. The trio all rode Strade Bianche last August as well, which Van Aert won, but the others finished out of the top 10.

YEAR	RACE	VAN AERT	VAN DER POEL	ALAPHILIPPE
2020	Strade Bianche	1	15	24
2020	Milan-San Remo	1	13	2
2020	World Championship RR	2	-	1
2020	Brabantse Pijl	-	2	1
2020	Liège-Bastogne-Liège	-	6	5
2020	Gent-Wevelgem	8	9	-
2020	Tour of Flanders	2	1	DNF
2021	Strade Bianche	4	1	2

THE FIRST WIN OF THE YEAR

With the start of the 2021 season delayed a little due to the ongoing pandemic, some teams have had to wait quite a while to get their first win of the season on the board, and some are still without a victory. Considering Movistar only took two wins in 2020, it is already looking concerning for the Spanish outfit, while perennial underperformers Cofidis have already notched up a success.

TEAM	DATE	RACE	RIDER
Ag2r-Citroën	31 January	GP Marseillaise	Aurélien Paret-Peintre
Cofidis	3 February	Etoile de Bessèges, stage 1	Christophe Laporte
Lotto Soudal	5 February	Etoile de Bessèges, stage 3	Tim Wellens
Ineos Grenadiers	6 February	Etoile de Bessèges, stage 4	Filippo Ganna
BikeExchange	7 February	Aus National RR Champs	Cameron Meyer
Deceuninck-Quick Step	11 February	Tour de la Provence, stage 1	Davide Ballerini
Jumbo-Visma	14 February	NZ National RR Champs	George Bennett
Bahrain Victorious	14 February	Tour de la Provence, stage 4	Phil Baus
Qhubeka-Assos	14 February	Clásica de Almería	Giacomo Nizzolo
Trek-Segafredo	19 February	Tour des Alpes-Maritimes, stage 1	Bauke Mollema
Israel Start-Up Nation	20 February	Tour des Alpes-Maritimes, stage 2	Michael Woods
UAE Team Emirates	23 February	UAE Tour, stage 3	Tadej Pogačar
Groupama-FDJ	27 February	Faun-Ardèche Classic	David Gaudu

*yet to win as of 6 March: DSM, EF-Education Nippo, Astana-Premier Tech, Intermarché-Wanty-Gobert Matériaux, Bora-Hansgrohe, Movistar

The Guide

RACE CALENDAR / APRIL 2021



ADAM BECKET
STAFF WRITER

WHY I LOVE...

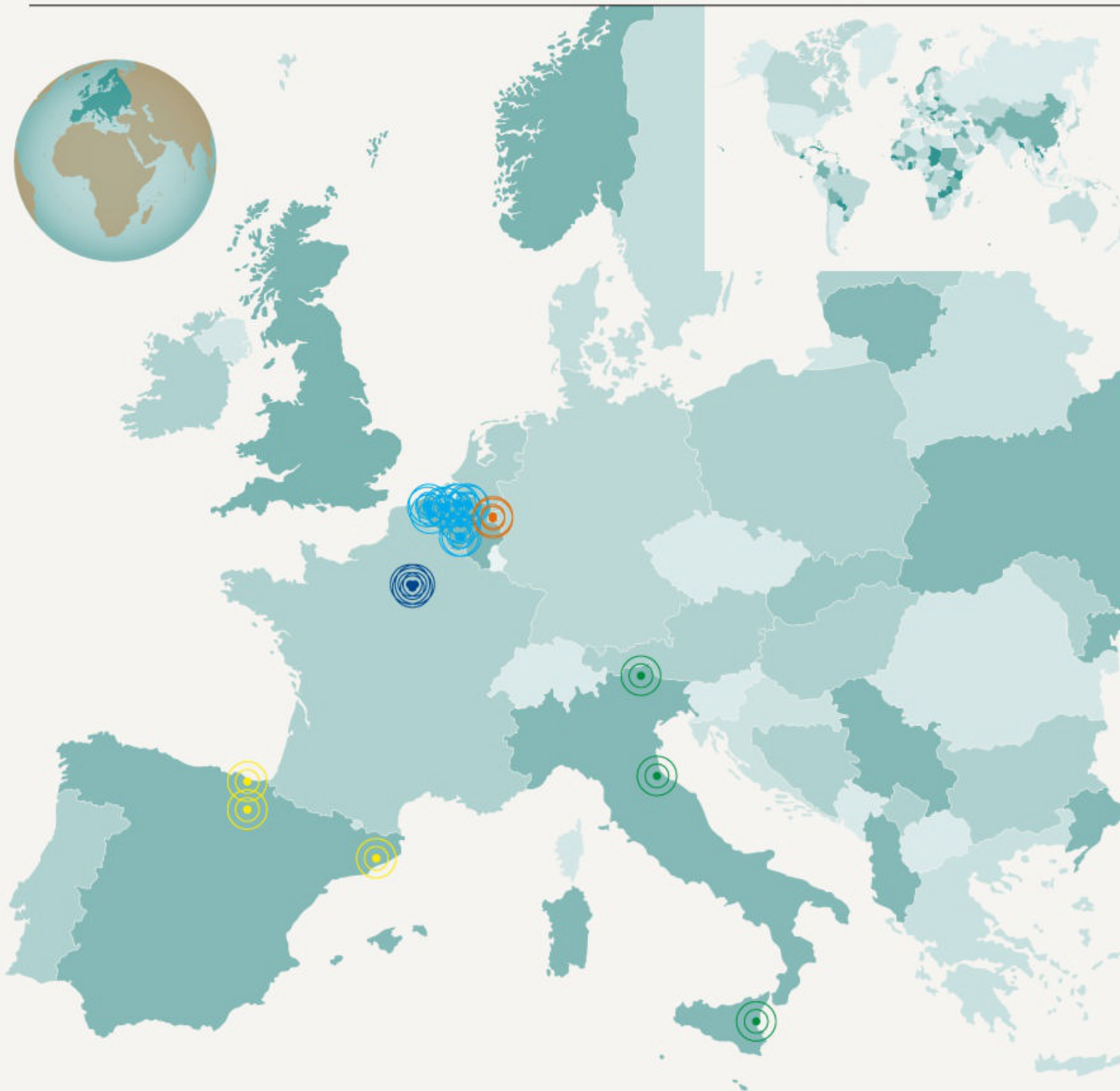
E3 SAXO BANK CLASSIC

26 March | Belgium | 1.UWT

The race that heralds the start of Flemish week holds a special place in my heart. The build up to the Tour of Flanders is well and truly on when E3 Saxo Bank comes around, with the next 10 days also featuring Gent-Wevelgem and Dwars door Vlaanderen. It is heaven for those of us who love the Belgian classics.

E3 is more than just a 'little Tour of Flanders'. It is a great race in and of itself, with only the very best riders conquering it. It uses many of the same cobbled climbs: the Paterberg and the Oude Kwaremont, but has somehow got more edge to it, a less corporate feel. Fans rush from sector to sector in order to try and get a glimpse of their favourites, something that is almost impossible at Flanders just over a week later.

It is also a race for the very strongest - I have good memories of Geraint Thomas winning in 2015, ahead of Quick Step duo Ždeněk Štybar and Matteo Trentin, which many thought heralded the start of a great classics career. He's the only man to have won both E3 and the Tour de France, though, which is pretty cool.



DATE	RACE	CAT
22-28 March	Volta Ciclista a Catalunya	2.UWT
23-27 March	Settimana Internazionale Coppi e Bartali	2.1
26 March	E3 Saxo Bank Classic	1.UWT
28 March	Gent-Wevelgem	1.UWT
28 March	Gent-Wevelgem	1.WWT
31 March	Dwars door Vlaanderen	1.1
31 March	Dwars door Vlaanderen	1.UWT
31-3 April	Giro di Sicilia	2.1
3 April	Gran Premio Miguel Indurain	1.Pro
4 April	Ronde van Vlaanderen	1.UWT
4 April	Ronde van Vlaanderen	1.WWT
7 April	Scheldeprijs vrouwen elite	1.1

DATE	RACE	CAT
7 April	Scheldeprijs	1.Pro
5-10 April	Itzulia Basque Country	2.UWT
11 April	Paris-Roubaix	1.UWT
11 April	Paris-Roubaix Femmes	1.WWT
13 April	Paris-Camembert	1.1
14 April	Brabantse Pijl dames	1.1
14 April	Brabantse Pijl	1.Pro
18 April	Amstel Gold Race Ladies Edition	1.WWT
18 April	Amstel Gold Race	1.UWT
21 April	La Flèche Wallonne	1.UWT
21 April	La Flèche Wallonne Féminine	1.WWT
19-23 April	Tour of the Alps	2.Pro

1.WT: One-day UCI WorldTour race / 1.Pro: Major one-day race / 1.1: Minor one-day race / 2.WT: UCI WorldTour stage race / 2.Pro: Major stage race / 2.1: Minor stage race / WWT: Women's WorldTour race



The men have a long history of racing Roubaix, ahead of the women's race debut

NOT TO MISS

PARIS-ROUBAIX FEMMES

11 April | France | 1.WWT

Finally, it's here. The big one. For the first time in Roubaix's 124-year history, women will be allowed to race over the cobbles of the Hell of the North. The inaugural edition was supposed to happen last year, but a pandemic got in the way of that. Safe to say the women's

peloton are rather impatient to ride such an iconic race, so expect fireworks on the pavé and in the Roubaix velodrome.

The women will tackle 116km across Northern France – compared to the men's 257km – including 29.2km of cobbles, which are split into 17 different sectors. Among them are the five-star sectors of Mons-en-Pévèle and the Carrefour de l'Arbre, although the big absentee is the

famed Arenberg Forest. While the men's race rolls out from Compiègne, ambling north with the cobbles all packed into the second half of the race, the action comes quick and fast for the women, who start in Denain almost immediately on the pavé.

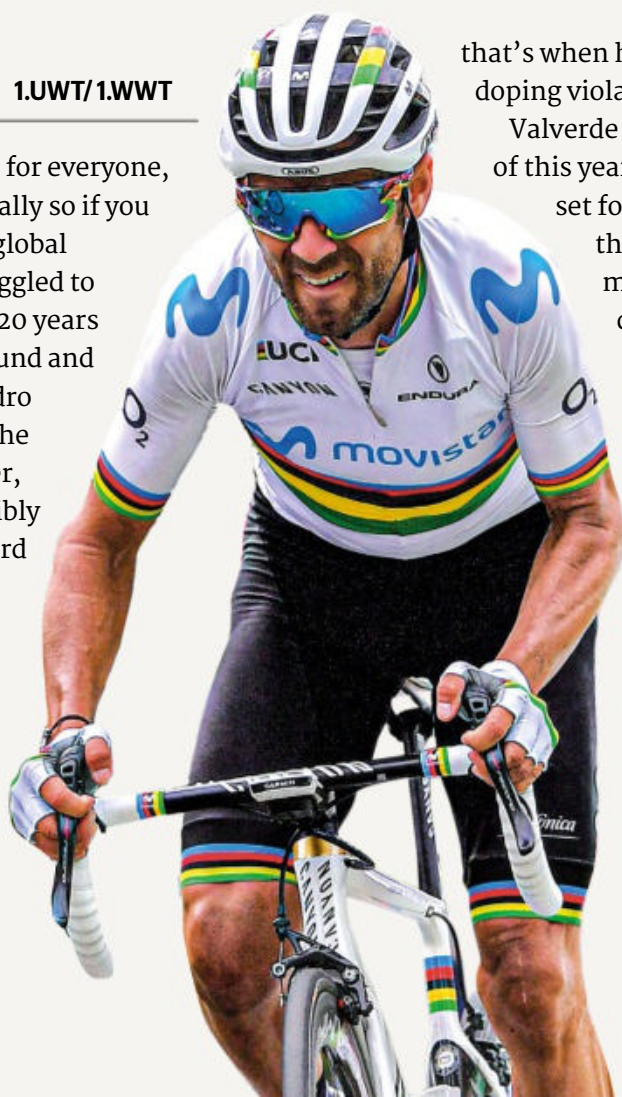
Expect every rider to be desperate to write their name in history as the first ever queen of the Queen of Classics.

Last chance for Valverde

LA FLÈCHE WALLONNE

21 April | Belgium | 1.UWT/1.WWT

Last year was tough for everyone, but probably especially so if you turned 40 during a global pandemic, and struggled to adapt while people 20 years younger zipped around and won things. Alejandro Valverde is now in the twilight of his career, with his powers visibly waning. The Spaniard has not won a race since stage 7 of the 2019 Vuelta, which may not sound like too long ago, but 2020 was the first year that he did not win a race since 2011, and



that's when he was suspended for doping violations.

Valverde is due to retire at the end of this year, meaning the scene is set for one final tilt at the race that has brought him the most success. The Mur de Huy has been a place of celebration for the Movistar rider five times, including four years in a row between 2014–2017.

He's also finished second twice, the last time in 2018. He chose the Tour-Vuelta double over Flèche last year, with Marc Hirschi claiming the victory. Agonisingly for Valverde, the Swiss is aged only 22.

FLASHPOINT



VOLTA CICLISTA A CATALUNYA

22-28 March | Italy | 2.UWT

The last time the Volta a Catalunya included the summit finish at Vallter 2000, in 2018, the climb was shortened due to snow (well, it is a ski resort during winter). The organisers will be hoping for less snow when they return in 2021, with the 2,125m climb the highest point in this year's race. It has pitches of up to 10 per cent over its 12.2km, although it comes early in the race, on stage 3. Its 7.8 per cent average gradient will test those going for general classification.

SPRINTERS IN THE CLASSICS SEASON

SCHELDEPRIJS

7 April | Bel | 1.1/1.Pro

One of the few one-day races that finishes in a bunch sprint, Scheldeprijs has long been a happy hunting ground for the peloton's quickest men. This year the women get a chance, thanks to their new race. The rider who wins in Schoten will be able to lay claim to having the speediest kick in the bunch as this is one of the unofficial sprinters' world championships. Caleb Ewan won last year.

A TEST RUN OF THE WORLDS COURSE

BRABANTSE PIJL

14 April | Bel | 1.1/1.Pro

Brabantse Pijl might get a few more riders lining up for it this spring, thanks to the cobbled Moskesstraat climb which features in the finale and also happens to be a key component of this year's Worlds road race course. It's only 550m long but it's steep, averaging eight per cent, and peaking at 18. This mid-week race also ushers in the Ardennes classics, with Grace Brown and Julian Alaphilippe winners last year.

WINDY RACING

GENT-WEVELGEM

28 March | Bel | 1.WWT/1.UWT

Always expect crosswinds at Gent-Wevelgem, as the opening 100km of the men's race are well and truly open to the elements. The route crosses northwest Flanders before heading back towards the scarred countryside of the France/Belgium border. Since 2015, the race has borne the suffix "In Flanders Fields" to mark the battlefields it passes through, which are still strikingly visible, 100 years on. Peter Sagan will hold the record for wins if he triumphs once more to take his tally to four.

Kasia Niewiadoma

2019'S WINNER ON...

AMSTEL GOLD RACE LADIES EDITION

18 April | Netherlands | 1.WWT

I feel like I don't want to aim for the same race; I don't want to repeat my victory. If I've won something, I feel like I'm satisfied with it, and I'd like to focus on another goal. It felt good winning, but I don't want to feel like I have to come to that race and do the same thing, as if that's my obligation. It's great because I still remember the

feelings I had throughout this race. I was really doubting myself at the beginning. The longer I raced, the better I felt, feeling like I could do something here.

Some of my team-mates didn't finish the race, so they were there standing at the finish line. It was really good to celebrate with somebody, and feel like you're not the only one there. I raced up the Cauberg a couple of times, and I won there during the Boels Ladies Tour, so I knew when to go on the climb. It's a two-minute climb, which is one of my strengths, and you don't want to wait too long at the top because the flat is really, really long to the finish. It's just 1.6km but it feels really long. I was lucky because I had a tailwind, and everyone at that point is super, super tired.



VAN DER BREGGEN'S FINAL

RONDE VAN VLAANDEREN

4 April | Belgium | 1.WWT/1.UWT

After world champion Anna van der Breggen continued her form from the end of last year to solo to victory at Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, few would bet against her performing well at the Ronde in April, in her swansong season. The women's edition of Flanders dates back to 2004 and Van der Breggen won here in 2018. But in a sign of how unpredictable the racing can be in

recent years, only two riders have ever won it twice – Mirjam Melchers and Judith Arndt. Chantal van den Broek-Blaak, Coryn Rivera, Lizzie Deignan, Elisa Longo Borghini, Annemiek van Vleuten and Marianne Vos are among other recent winners, and all should also start.

With the first women's Paris-Roubaix just a week away, the stars might have one eye on lifting that famous cobblestone. But the Ronde is hardly a warm-up race, and will be tackled like the monument it is.

▲ The world champion hopes to become a double winner in Flanders

NEXT ISSUE



EGAN BERNAL

Nizzolo / Giro d'Italia preview / Cordon-Ragot

ON SALE
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Future PLC Quay House, Bath BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Edward Pickering**
edward.pickering@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor **Sophie Hurcom**

Senior Designer **Mariëlle Scholten**

Staff Writer **Adam Becket**

Contributors

Simon Barnes, Brodie Chapman, Emil Foget, William Fotheringham, Chris Marshall-Bell, Dan Martin, Richard Moore, Charlie Quarterman, Kévin Reza, Barry Ryan, Laurens ten Dam, James Witts.

Cover photography

Bram Berkien

Photography

Chris Auld, Phil Barker, Bettini, Mjirka Boensch Bees, Olly Curtis, Jered Gruber, Ashley Gruber, Getty Images, Neil Godwin, PresseSport/Offside Sports Photography, Kristof Ramon, Sirotti, Carolina Upegui, Vélofocus, Cor Vos, Graham Watson, Simon Wilkinson.

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THE LAST WORD

LAURENS TEN DAM

Laurens shares the best advice an old pro could ever give: pack your rain bag

I have been retired as a pro for 15 months now and I still know the drill. I don't want to be that guy, who acts like it used to be just champagne and caviar in the old days. For sure, I can also remember the more miserable days in the bunch and often they were around the week-long races in March, which saw snow cancel stages and bitterly cold weather. In all three of these races, Paris-Nice, Tirreno-Adriatico and the Volta a Catalunya, I ask my friends who are still racing this one question: is your rain bag prepared? Some guys smile, some guys call me a dick, but the question is always important enough to extend our conversation by at least five minutes. If you're taking part in these races, you need your rain bag.

For those of you who aren't as fortunate as the guys and girls racing bikes for a living, I'll explain. The rain bag is a small bag for each rider filled with spare clothes. It sits in the trunk of the team car within arm's reach of the mechanic. Some younger riders who have just come over from the development ranks will keep only a rain jacket and arm warmers inside that bag. But as the years in the bunch add up, and their experience of racing in bad weather grows, the rain bag typically gets more filled. An old veteran will have everything inside that bag to keep him warm, all ready in a tiny team car waiting with the wet, miserable riders after a stage is cancelled mid-race due to snow. I've had that experience (more than once) and that bag saved my life while I wasn't on the bike any more. I was warm and dry in the team car while my team-mates next to me were shivering in their wet clothes for more than two hours, begging for a hot hotel shower. They learned their lesson. Clothing which sits in your suitcase travelling from hotel to hotel at a race is useless. Their rain bags were topped up the next day.

The rain bag typically consisted of the usual rain gear and gloves – lots of spare gloves. But there is more. I dare to say



▲ Riders must be prepared to face any weather conditions in a race, but a well-packed rain bag helps

that I could have easily changed halfway through a stage into totally dry kit, which I honestly did a few times, stopping the team car and emptying my rain bag onto the hood of the car. My bag even held a pair of race socks. I would never have thought of changing socks in the middle of a race in my life, so initially they weren't in there. But then I learned the hard way, after a mid-stage cancellation in the Volta a Catalunya. I had to wear those socks you put OVER your shoes for two hours – the socks with holes at the bottom. Since socks don't take a lot of space in your bag, they quickly went in.

Yes, space is limited, so you have to pack smart. The size of a rain bag is typically one of a large shoebox, and eight of those bags are carefully put in place in the back of a team car. If a rider is clever he puts the stuff he might think he needs the most on top of that pile of clothes. Imagine being that mechanic at the back of that car, pulling rain jackets out of eight bags at the same time. Think of this, then multiply by the 20 teams in a race. There is chaos behind the bunch when it starts to rain, and you will become the mechanics' best friend if that bag is organised and neat. It's a pro tip I still like to give to my former colleagues when on the phone during March.

Laurens ten Dam is an ex-pro cyclist. He lives by his motto, 'live slow, ride fast', while doing podcasts, organising gravel events and running a coffee brand and clothing label. 2021 goals? Back to gravel racing!

As the years in the bunch add up,
and the bad weather experience grows,
the rain bag typically gets more filled.
An old veteran will have everything
inside that bag to keep him warm

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Max Power
2200 W

Power Accuracy
+/-1%

MOST REALISTIC RIDE FEEL

VIRTUALLY SILENT

