

THE CYCLING QUARTERLY

Conquista



ISSUE 17 / WINTER 2017 / £12



Being an endurance rider means I spend a lot of time on the bike, so I need kit that I know is going to stand-up to all possible conditions.

But I also want to carry as little as possible. The beauty of the RainMem Collection is that I can go out first thing in the morning and ride all the way through to sunset wearing just one bottom and top.

I don't need a waterproof.

I don't need a gilet.

I just need RainMem.

James Golding.



kalas
SPORTSWEAR

YOU KNOW YOU HAVE A GOOD IDEA
WHEN SOMEONE TRIES TO COPY IT



VELOCAST

THE ORIGINAL

Comment and analysis of all the Classics, The Giro d'Italia,
Le Tour de France and La Vuelta a Espana

velocast.cc





MÉTIER

METIERCYCLING.COM



The SOFTSHELL Jacket.

Built with extremely breathable yet wind block and water repellent, technical Schoeller® softshell WB400 fabric. For weather conditions from -5°C to +10°C. The minus degrees won't put an end to your rides this winter!



KATUSHA



SUBSCRIBE

Conquista

THE CYCLING QUARTERLY

4 issues £44 inc. UK delivery (£60 RoW)

conquista.cc

Online

conquista.cc

Twitter

@conquistacc

Instagram

@conquistacc

Facebook

facebook.com/conquista.cc

Writers & Photographers

Want to contribute to Conquista? Please send
a short précis to *hola@conquista.cc*

Partnerships

We are open for business, so don't be shy
hola@conquista.cc

Copyright

All imagery is either owned
or licensed by:

Conquista Cycling Club Limited

Unless permission is provided in writing,
no collateral use can be made of the text and
imagery in this magazine.

Cover Image:

Matt Grayson

All rights reserved
© Conquista Cycling Club Limited 2017

Editor

Trevor Gornall
trevor@conquista.cc

Assistant Editor

Matthew Bailey
matthew@conquista.cc

Sub-Editor

Tom Owen
@OwenTCharles

Creative Director

Benji Holroyd
benji@sb-studio.co.uk
@sbstudiobenji

Designed by

SB
sbstudio.co
@SBStudioLtd

Published by

Conquista Cycling Club Limited
Company Number 8598108

ISSN 2397-2130 (Print)
ISSN 2397-2149 (Online)

Conquista is available in
Print, on Kindle, Apple Newsstand
& Google Play

Printed in the UK by Premier Print Group
premierprintgroup.com

16

Editorial

Trevor Gornall

18

Too Bad, Too Sad

Tom Owen

30

Two Hundred Beats Per Minute

Damian Field

40

CX World Cup Part I: Koksijde, Belgium

Chris Auld

56

World History

Suze Clemitson

102

Last Two Standing

Tommy Mulvoy

112

Number Twos & Coming Eighth

Holly Blades

122

Torino-Nice

Peta McSharry

134

National Hillclimb 2017

Matthew Bailey & Matt Grayson

146

CX World Cup Part II: Bogense, Denmark

Chris Auld

164

Briefings

The Peloton Brief

168

Ups & Downs: Adrian Timmis

Russell Jones

182

Postcard From Kühtai

Tom Owen

RETURN TO LA LA LAND

Was I the last person on the planet to catch the critically acclaimed Hollywood blockbuster featuring an aspiring musician and an ambitious actress who fall in love while striving to realise their respective dreams? As a genre, musical rom-com drama is not my typical Saturday night fodder, honest, but I recently found this movie captivating from opening scene to final credits. Against the visually stunning backdrops seemingly present in every scene, I predictably found myself rooting for our two protagonists, as the inevitable stresses and strains of life, love and career tested their relationship to breaking point. Sacrifice and compromise cruelly expose their all-too-human frailties as they fight to manage the conflict of their personal ambitions and stay together. The beautiful presentation of each scene served only to make the impact of the inevitable outcome more uncomfortable to absorb. It just all looked so good, so how could it possibly go wrong? The pivotal gut-wrenching scene hit me like the proverbial truck. Surely it's not supposed to end that way?

But, as we are often reminded, real life can be stranger than fiction. The world of pro cycling remains as colourful, engaging, exhilarating and – ultimately – heartbreaking as any invented Hollywood tale. Anyone who saw the recent BBC programme *British Cycling Superheroes: The Price of Success?* might be forgiven for thinking they had returned to La-La Land. How else should one explain the individual emerging with most credibility from a plot that featured Sir David Brailsford, Sir Bradley Wiggins and Shane Sutton, being professional reformed doper / full-time fopster, David Millar?

The use of the term “superheroes” should signal a red flag, as friend of Conquista, Matthew Brammeier hinted way back in Issue One, in his piece *No Fairy Tales*. They are not superhuman, no one is. Just ask Phil Gaimon, he knows, apparently.

Against the glitzy backdrop of the Tour de France and the gleaming yellow jersey, or the shiny gold medal of the Olympic games, were our heads turned and our eyes diverted?

Did we look the other way when they were ‘gaming the system’, or playing in the shadowy grey areas? Has the line been crossed, or blurred (hey, hey, hey)? Did it all look just a bit too good to be true? Given the lack of evidence, who can really say?

But it does feel very familiar. I was personally delighted when our reader Tommy Mulvoy submitted his essay, *Last Two Standing*. It's the tale of his break-up with another LA, Lance Armstrong. It made fascinating reading for me as it resonated deeply. For all that has gone on – and I appreciate this is not a conventional or especially defensible opinion – I still quite like Lance. This both confuses and amuses me in equal measure, and I know I'm not alone in that.

Whatever anyone thinks of our ‘cycling superheroes’ or Hollywood megastars, what seems clear is that time and again, when people are pushed to the limit of their abilities, pressed to achieve the seemingly impossible in their pursuit of lifelong ambition, driven to the very limit of human endeavour, then passions are going to run high and fallible humans risk making mistakes. Some people can get hurt and some dreams can die. There are inevitable casualties along the path to glory, but a change of tack does not automatically mean failure, merely a new direction. Talented, driven and focused people can realise success in a variety of scenarios, when the environment is right for them. I'd like to think that for each gold medallist standing on the top step of the podium there is a dude taking centre stage every night in his very own jazz club.

To everyone who ever pursued a dream or tried to make tomorrow just a tiny bit better than today, we salute you, for you are our fellow Conquistadores, and this world needs you.

See you on the road...

TOO
BAD,
TOO
SAD:

By Tom Owen

THE CHANGING FACE OF RED HOOK CRIT



Raphaële Lemieux enjoys a moment
of calm before the gun

We've covered the Red Hook Crit before in Conquista, but never in such detail, or with such access to the racers who have come to define this unique subgenre of cycling. Raced on track bikes, on road circuits roughly one kilometre long, it's a brash and pugnacious discipline that has taken root, then flourished to global visibility, in just the last 10 years. Tom Owen asks what the future holds for the discipline widely touted as 'the future of bike racing'.

By now, you probably know the story of how Red Hook began. Named after the Brooklyn docklands on which the first crit was run, Red Hook started when David August Trimble threw himself a birthday party – with bikes. Now that 'birthday party' has four distinct rounds tied together by a series-long general classification. Red Hook Crits can be raced – by anyone with the entry fee and a desire to go fast – in Brooklyn, Milan, Barcelona and London.

A Red Hook Crit is not really like a bike race at all. Part festival, part riot, part gladiatorial combat – the bikes are almost incidental. The fans play as much of a part in the show as the riders, and are kept fed and watered (and supplied with cowbells) by an army of catering trucks, offering, among other things, free espresso (courtesy of one of the team sponsors) and – of course – beer. And there ain't no waiting around, either. Racing is near-enough continuous throughout the day, with a longer break in the late afternoon for people to reload on provisions before the finals in the evening. This race day does not follow the traditional, 'scale a mountain, wait for six hours, see 45 seconds of bike racing, wait an hour before the course is open, go home' formula that has been the norm for a century in traditional cycle sport.

Founder, Trimble, is refreshingly upfront about his level of bike race organisation experience prior to Red Hook.

"I'd never organised anything before the Red Hook Crit, so really had no idea what I was doing and have learnt over the years what works, what doesn't work.

"From an organisational standpoint it has definitely changed a lot as it's gotten bigger. I would say the peak difficulty with organising was actually a few years ago. Especially this year it's become a little bit easier, as you become more experienced and you get a better team, bigger budget, so we can hire more people. And also the racers know a lot more about what's going on, so they're more skilled and understand the event. It's becoming a little bit easier to organise.

"Probably the most stressful one was three years ago in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, when it had like one really bad crash in qualifying and the whole day was just kind of crazy with a lot of bad crashes. It was super exciting and people look back at that race like the craziest, most exciting Red Hook Crit ever. But as an organiser it was pretty out of control."

Back in the day, Trimble struggled even to get his friends along to the early Crits. Dan Chabanov is a long-time buddy of Trimble's, as well as a three-time Red Hook Crit Brooklyn champion. But he was reluctant at the outset.

"I knew David from the very beginning, we were pretty good friends. He invited me to the first one, the famous birthday party, but I think I told him it sounded stupid and didn't go. Then when it came round again the next year I think I said it sounded stupid again. Didn't go.

"Finally, I went to the third one and I had a really nice time [Chabanov is being modest: he won the third edition, and the fourth and fifth]. But even then I think I only went because I heard the race was going to be based out of an art gallery with a show there, and he finally got me there by letting me show some of my pictures in the exhibit."

A photographer as well as a bike racer, Chabanov has since joined the Red Hook Crit organisation, helping to put on the races as well as capturing some spectacular images of the action along the way.

"I definitely don't want to see the UCI involved," says Chabanov when asked how he'd like to see the race go. "I don't want any governing body involved. For me the best people to run this are current people. Honestly, I do want it to get bigger, but I don't know how much bigger. I want the riders to make good salaries, and for the organisers to as well, but I don't want it to get so big that we lose the atmosphere, the fact that fans can get so close to the riders. I still want everybody to come to the pre-parties and the after-parties."

Parties are important to the Red Hook Crit. In Milan, where there have been eight editions already, it has become quite difficult for Trimble and his team to find a location for the after-party, as the hard-drinking, heavy-partying bike racers and organisers are rarely 'invited' back to the same venue twice.

Chabanov recalls the Barcelona 2017 after-party.

"They told us when we booked it that we could have the venue on the condition that nobody went in the pool. From that point, there was only one thing that was going to happen. I think actually David was the first in."

Hipster Bike Racing

It is perhaps this perception that the Red Hook series is one long party that has hampered its recognition as a genuinely impressive and specialised athletic pursuit. It only takes one visit to stand on the barriers and watch the riders at the sharp end tearing strips off each other to see that this is indeed a brutally tough bike race.

Trimble is clearly irritated by the perception that Red Hook is just about 'beards and tattoos'.

"It's frustrating to me that cycling media can be so ignorant, not even spend a bit of time trying to learn about it beyond just what they perceive. But beyond that, I mean, we've also got tons of press and people actually seeing it for what it is now.

"It's a great sport, I think it's a sporting event that is a really solid foundation at this point you know. It's not just a gimmicky Red Bull event, where they just throw it together and want something exciting to happen. It's actually fundamentally a strong sport, the rules are strong, the competitors understand what's going on.

"It should definitely receive more respect at this point as a sporting event than it does from the cycling media. I'd like to see that continue to grow and I think it will. Once it becomes easier to follow, people will understand that it's a serious sport."

For many cycling fans, the only time they become aware of Red Hook is when a crash video goes viral. Last year saw a particularly dramatic crash when a race moto stalled and wave after wave of racers ploughed into the back of it with nowhere to go. Videos of the incident were picked up by the Huffington Post, Daily Mail and CBS News, reaching well beyond the cycling media. Again, this is a source of frustration for Trimble.

"You watch that video and you'd think the event was just a pure chaotic shitshow if you weren't there and weren't one of the competitors. Even one of the competitors involved in the crash realised that it wasn't the case, but of course people want to judge you on your worst moment and they don't really care to know the real story."

When something like that happens, it's a wrench.

"You're just thrown into the middle of a firestorm in many ways, it can be pretty stressful, but also at that point you've just got to sink or swim and get through it and make the event happen. And you know with the moto crash in the video, it looks really bad but you just clean up the track and get the race going and afterwards the race was going really clean and exciting so the event still went off pretty well."

Top: Colin Strickland of Intelligentsia Racing on the hunt
Below: Dan Chabanov interviews Maria Sperotto



Top: Raphaelle Lemieux in the hard-fought women's final in Milan
Below: The impressive moustache of Tristan Uhl



The stature of some of the riders who have tried their hands at Red Hook is testament to just how difficult it has become. At the London round this year, Team GB Olympic gold medallist Calum Skinner didn't make it out of his qualifying heat. Dani Rowe (*née* King), meanwhile, who dominated the 2016 women's race in London, saw her efforts largely neutralised by a savvier, stronger peloton than even the year before – eventually placing fifth.

Canadian rider Raphaele Lemieux won the women's final that day, becoming the London champion and rocketing into the top three on the series GC. Lemieux lives in Montreal and works full-time as an optician and – to repeat – she beat Dani Rowe, three-time world champion and Olympic gold medallist.

"It was funny to race with Dani; she was really strong, she attacked a lot. And it was funny because we have two kinds of girls in that race: the girls who attack really strong who were maybe a bit afraid of the corners with the rain, and the other girls would turn really well, but have a little less power. To win you needed a mix between that, and for me that was good because I have pretty much both – and I was not afraid about the rain.

"It was pretty exciting and I remember following Dani on the last corner of the last lap in qualification, and I thought to myself 'Maybe I can pass her,' and finally I passed her. And it was exactly the same for every sprint, and the final of the first lap I thought 'Maybe I can really do that and sprint for first,' and I did it I was like 'Yeah! I did it, it really worked. I want to do exactly the same thing for the final!'"

It's described by some of the competitors as the Mixed Martial Arts of cycling. There is no one fixed genealogy that produces a great Crit rider. Track stars, former road racers and even MTB riders come to the sport and excel – or fail. Lemieux's background is in speed skating and she thinks that too has a benefit on the way she races bikes.

"It's funny, but it's a little similar with the qualification in that you warm up, have a qualification, then you warm down then you warm up for another race – and it's a long, long day. Speed skating has helped me to know what to do throughout a day like that.

"The efforts you make in skating and in the Crit are really, really similar. I was doing a short track in speed skating, the track is really short but at the same time you have to lean but have to turn really tight to lean. And doing a lot of speed skating it's funny, but it's exactly the same movement. I am not afraid to lean into the corners and to push at the end of the corner – that's helped me a lot."

New World Order

Sometimes though, the pros just prove to be unbeatable, even for the specialists.

The final round of the Red Hook Series is Milan, the second-oldest location after Brooklyn. This year, the men's final was won by Ivan Cortina, who got let out of school early by his usual employers, a little outfit known as Bahrain Merida Pro Cycling.

Cortina attacked at the start of the second lap in the final and forged away with Alessandro Mariani. As far as the chasing peloton was concerned, they were never seen again. Cortina played to his strengths and – perhaps more importantly – limited his exposure to the areas where he lacked experience. By being off the front he could hit bends with plenty of room, not from within the frantic maelstrom of elbows and legs that constitutes the Red Hook peloton.

The victory, and particularly the dominant nature of it raised some hackles among the Red Hook faithful. They said for a top professional rider to enter was not in the spirit of the race, which has always been an amateur affair. Some fans even saw it as the beginning of the end. However, this is not a sentiment shared by the racers.

Colin Strickland, 2016 Red Hook Series champion, is all for a faster, stronger peloton.

"I think it's fantastic, I don't know how you could fault it. I don't know how you can be disappointed that there's faster riders racing. The spirit, well, I think it's Dave's race and he wants to grow the race. I don't think it matters what the fuck anyone cares. They can throw their own alleycat and grow it into whatever they want it to be, to what they consider their perfection and they can just hit the freeze button right where they think it's perfect.

"You know, everything is always growing – nothing is cool forever. I see them saying it's too big, it's too much attention. Well everything is constantly changing and nothing stays the same – you want a simpler race, start your own fucking race. If you want a slower race with more hipster tattoos, go start your own race. It's just compelled to get faster and more fun."

Eamon Lucas, who rides for Specialized Rocket Espresso, the closest Red Hook has to a superteam of *galacticos*, echoes those sentiments. You'll probably pick up quite quickly that he hails from California.

"The racer in me says 'That's bike racing, mate, you should train harder.' If you're not at the front then you should probably go train harder, so that you can get to the front and be at the front. Like, I don't want to hear bitchin', you came to a race and that's a race. Too bad, too sad.

"I don't care who rocks up to the race, you should be ready to race as hard as you can race and if you can't go that hard then you should go and train more. I don't care, sorry. If David didn't want WorldTour guys there, he wouldn't have had WorldTour guys there."

Lucas was on the front of the bunch for most of the final, trying to reel in the break. He responds bullishly to the suggestion that perhaps – as often happens in road racing – the peloton let the break go away in the expectation that they would tire and neutralise themselves.

"I don't think anyone gave him anything. When you do a Grand Tour and the fricking road Worlds [Cortina raced the Vuelta and the Bergen World Championships earlier this season], you're just at another level. You're not giving anyone anything. You just can't do it, it's physically impossible.

"I started on the grid 12th, I didn't clip in the fastest, so for the first three laps I needed to get to the front and I heard on the loudspeaker that there was a seven-second gap and I knew I wasn't going to win that day. And you know, I'm not slow and I wasn't slow going into Red Hook. The week before I did Milan I did 450 watts for 20 minutes, my best 20-minute I've ever done in my life.

"I was flying, I've won 15 races this year. I had the best year of my life and signed pro for Europe for 2018, so, you know, I'm good. I rode on the front for 31 minutes at an average of 48 kph [to try and peg back Cortina] and I couldn't do anything except watch the gap grow.

"I rode 'til I dropped and couldn't catch him, so hats off to the gentleman. He deserved to win and did it in commanding fashion – I'll respect the man even more."

Chabanov points out that Cortina raced only one Red Hook event in the 2017 series, meaning he was no threat on GC. The series standings are calculated on points awarded for finishing position, not time difference.

"It's very clear to me that if you were actually paying attention to the race, it wasn't because he was stronger, it was because the Italian teams were watching each other."

The Italian teams to which Chabanov refers are Team Bahumer and Team Cinelli-Chrome, whose leaders, Filippo Fortin and Davide Vigano, sat second and first respectively on GC at the start (and end) of the final round. By attacking early, Cortina effectively removed the possibility of Vigano's series lead being overhauled by anyone but Fortin – and so both were happy to sit and wait, leaving all the chasing to Lucas and his Specialized teammates.

Chabanov continues, on Cortina.

"The guy didn't even win his qualifying heat, he came third to a Dutch medical student! This kind of thing happens in the last few days of a Grand Tour too – you get the stage hunters who appear out of nowhere. They can only go off in the break because they're 40 minutes down on GC. It's just race dynamics."

For Lucas, like Strickland, the Red Hook brand can only be improved with more top-class competition.

"I would like to see more WorldTour guys come. It would be cool if David and the Trimble Racing family [The official race organisation for Red Hook] could bring on a bigger sponsor so we could make it on TV and really show the world what it's about."

This lack of TV or streaming coverage is a continual source of debate among the Red Hook community. Tune into the official Instagram account come race weekend and you'll find scores of comments to the effect of, "Why are you not streaming this?", "Anyone have a live feed?", and on and on and on.

You can see easily how it's also an obstacle for greater brand involvement and commercial support, with the exposure sponsors can get severely curtailed by a lack of global live audience. Trimble says there are two sides though.

"Everyone's always asking where it's growing, when are we doing live streaming, when are all these things happening. But I think when these things do happen people will look back on this period now very fondly and be nostalgic for it – you know, growth isn't necessarily good for the enjoyment of the competitor and spectator."

This last point is an important one. It's hard to think of a sporting event, whether in cycling or out of it, that has cultivated a more recognisable aesthetic than Red Hook. It's a bike race known around the world on the strength of its dedication to hype-building and showmanship.

Of all the riders that stand out as showmen and show-women at Red Hook – and there are many – Lucas is among the most visible.

"Yeah for sure I love the reaction, man. I live for the reaction. It's new school, it's not like this old, 'chicken and pasta and bed at nine'. It's not. It's cool, it's energetic, it's engaging – you can be whoever you want at Red Hook and be accepted for that. In the professional road scene you have to be some image, and if you're not that image you don't get a contract. And if you're not that image you don't go to bike races, so it gives those characters a place to shine and if you feel accepted then you want to go. It's like a family and not a..." Here, Lucas struggles for the right word, before settling, finally, for "It's not a corporation."

Strickland, too, sees it as his job to perform for the crowds, as much as to win races.

"Eamon's got exactly the right idea – that's the work. Our job is to make people interested in what's going on, so the more interesting we can be, the more we can animate the race, the better job we're doing in my opinion. Nobody cares about our individual glory, you know. Athletics is an entertainment business."

"I don't think showmanship and athleticism are mutually exclusive. I think if you're a good athlete then you can do both. That's the way I've approached it and it has worked for me this last couple of years."

Ever The Showmen

Eamon Lucas raced Red Hook for the first time this year, but he is already a true believer.

"It was my first year there and now I'm hooked. I made sure in my new contract with my new team for next year that I could participate in every Red Hook event, because I truly want to spend my time there – I want to commit to being an image in the Red Hook. I love it, I really do."

"It's incredible to watch it move from what I first experienced five years ago into this, just a bigger, better, higher-octane, more competitive version of the same event. The soul is still the same, it's just so much faster with more fanfare, more interest, more eyes on it."

Lemieux also sees the performance and the spectacle as fundamental to what makes Red Hook special.

"It's really great for the spectator – it's a big show and I think that is something that is fun for us too. For the athletes, the ambience is really good. It would be cool to have maybe one more race to have five Red Hooks for the year – that would be great, but at the same time not too much. It's funny, I'm a full-time worker, if there are too many I will not be able to do the whole series."

And that, really, is the crux of the whole thing. While more and more road races disappear from the calendar every year, Red Hook continues to grow apace. Trimble and Chabanov have cultivated a huge, passionately enthusiastic and invested audience, but there is not yet enough of a season for its racers to turn pro. Riders like Lemieux must continue to fit their Red Hook adventures around their day jobs, then, four times a year, compete against some of the world's best.

Red Hook is doubtless leading the way, with a slew of imitators appearing around Europe. These races lend a semblance of a continuing season to the scene, with competitors building form and fine-tuning tactics in the lower-profile crits, before bringing their A-game to Brooklyn, London, Barcelona and Milan. If this is to continue though, there has to be more investment from somewhere, and more riders with a professional contract to their fixed-gear teams.

Can Trimble make it work? This fine balancing act of growing while also staying the same?

"I definitely want to see the race grow you know, I think of the Red Hook as the Formula 1 of cycling. The fact that it's a global championship is really interesting and I think makes it fun to follow for the fans and the riders. That being said, it's just going to grow organically at this point – we don't have big investors to throw money at it to let it grow and see what happens, everything has to go step-by-step at this point. As opportunities present themselves we'll pursue them, but at this point I think it's going to be a slow expansion.

"You know this is the first year I've really felt on top of it as an organiser. Where I felt like everyone on my team knew exactly what they're doing, and I didn't have to micromanage everything, so could enjoy it more personally. And also, the whole community felt bigger, but also closer and everyone seemed like they were having a good time. The parties were the best, they were this year. It's like as the race has grown, it's become more of a community and more personal, yeah, the highpoint has definitely been this season."

Top: Not all prayers are answered...
Below: Eamon Lucas in the Top Antagonist jersey at Barcelona



**TWO
HUNDRED
BEATS
PER
MINUTE**

Man I hate boats, I really do, which is strange really as I love the sea.

Whether it's paddleboarding, kayaking, surfing or coasteering, I've given it a go. However, the thought of being inside a metal box in the middle of the ocean gives me The Fear – yet here I am leaving Portsmouth Harbour and heading out into the Channel. So, in the words of Talking Heads, "How did I get here?"

Well sometimes you have to take one for the team. The team on this occasion being Conquista's head honcho, Trevor Gornall and I.

For the past few years my clubmates and I have usually ended our seasons at the legendary cycling gatherings of the Braveheart Fund in Scotland, or most recently the Qhubeka Gala in Girona. However, as this year neither were an option, an alternative plan needed to be hatched.

"Have you heard of the Duo Normand two-up team time trial in France?" I casually dropped into conversation when out on a training ride. The seed had been sowed.

Once home, the WhatsApp message pinged on my phone.

"Duo Normand? Really? It's a 1.1 pro race!"

That's the attraction of the Duo, in that it is a professional race, but has categories from elite down to third cats, juniors and even a corporate section allowing amateurs to pit themselves against continental professionals. I had first heard of the race some 15 years ago. At that time (pre-children), weekends were for racing, with most evenings during the week spent training. I never quite got round to riding the Duo though. A full season always had me a bit spent towards the end of September. So by the time children arrived, all thoughts of it had been long forgotten. That was until recently, when I was clearing out some old boxes of start sheets, results and notes that had long since stopped serving any real purpose. I came across a handful of pages torn from a magazine that had sparked my interest in the Duo all those years ago. With my daughters now that little bit older, I made a return to racing of sorts this year to varying degrees of averageness. But at least I was competing again. While you could count the hours I spent training each week on one hand and still have a couple of digits spare, maybe, just maybe I could ride the Duo?

With around 400 teams of two, the Duo Normand is a unique race, probably best described in the wonderful pidgin English of its website:

Photography by Stéphane Lebel



A fine performance by David Boucher,
with Timothy Stevens, in the colours Pauwels Sauzen

“Duo Normand is a time trial race by team of two on a road of 54 km that occurs each year at the end of September. The time trial is a special exercise, made for specialist: each team has to have technical and feeling similarities to run the good race. Since the first edition in 1982, Duo Normand has grown each year.”

The race was created by the ‘duo’ of Mary-lene Hurtel and René Gautier and is run from the little town of Marigny, in the heart of La Manche, just an hour’s drive from the port at Caen in Normandy. It’s a magnet for British testers [time triallist slang for time triallists]. In fact, more than a hundred teams from the UK typically feature in the field at the Duo.

In the late 1990s the race was won on three occasions by Chris Boardman, each time with a different partner. Boardman, who could be considered British time trialling royalty, held the course record for several years with Jens Voigt. Now, there’s two guys you wouldn’t want to be on the receiving end of in a team time trial. Other big name winners of recent years include Bradley Wiggins, Jonathan Vaughters, Sylvain Chavanel and Filippo Pozzato. The event has lately been dominated by the Canadian-Australian pairing of Svein Tuft and Luke Durbridge in the colours of Orica-Scott. They also snatched the course record from Boardman and Voigt in 2016.

So with our entries sent off for the corporate race, time was running out for the serious business of not only ramping up our training, but looking the part too. Having been granted a long weekend pass-out from our respective other halves we needed to do this in style. Our watchwords would be, “Never sacrifice style for speed.” With this in mind new kit was designed and – along with a game-changing new aero helmet to test – we would at least look the part. Hell, we even had off-the-bike leisure wear.

On French Soil

We arrived in France after a mercifully uneventful crossing.

In the previous week we’d been remarkably organized in not only thinking about accommodation, but actually booking it in advance. We had toyed with the idea of going for the full rural gîte experience, but erred on the side of caution and plumped for the ubiquitous safety of the standard ring road Euro-hotel.

By the time we had left the ferry and negotiated the *périphérique* to arrive at the hotel, it was approaching 11pm. Having checked in and dumped our bags we needed to grab something to eat and unwind. With the ring road restaurants closed, we made the short trip into Saint-Lô town, only to find that the bars and cafes had shut up here too. There was only one thing for it: the Castel Pub. It wasn’t hard to find, opposite the castle walls, as it appeared to be the only place open in town, apart from *le discothèque* which was definitely a non-starter. Having secured a couple of stools at the bar and started to look over the menu, we were greeted by the landlord who asked us where we had come from. The answer of Liverpool was met with a loud “You are very welcome!” and so we made ourselves at home. We had one drink and reluctantly left leaving a happy crowd of locals of all ages. OK, we had two drinks, but were back at the hotel around midnight.

After a fitful night’s sleep, the talk over breakfast was about recceing the course ahead of the following day’s race. Apart from a small map on the website we hadn’t really much to go on. Trevor had managed to glean some information from a contact who had ridden the race before, but there is nothing that calms the nerves more than knowing the roads for yourself. Driving into Marigny we found half the town locked down constructing the finish line gantry, grandstand and other infrastructure needed to put on such an event.

Marigny itself is quintessentially French. The town centre comprises a market square dominated by a church and surrounded by a handful of shops, which naturally include the boulangerie, café bar and tabac. We purchased a copy of *La Manche Libre*, to see if this could shed any light on the course details. The newspaper contained a pull out feature on the Duo, but no route information.

Feeling a little stressed we looked for a place to park up and gather our thoughts. With much of the town barriered off, the only place we could see to pull up in was the local post office car park. Unfortunately the car park also had a big sign pointing out that under no circumstances should non-post office workers even think about parking here. But surely, on a Saturday ahead of the race we'd be fine for a couple of minutes?

Suddenly there was a knock on the window. "OK, here we go." I thought and wound the window down.

"Monsieur, your hair. You are Paul Weller!"

After cycling, another passion of mine is '60s music and fashion, mostly of the mod variety. In the week prior to the Duo I'd swapped my '1967-era Steve Marriot' barnet for something a little more streamlined and modfather-like. A five-minute conversation ensued covering The Kinks, The Who, Small Faces and how our man had seen The Jam in Paris back in the '70s. Feeling more at ease in our surroundings, our new friend bid us "Bonne chance" for the race and went on his way. Music, like sport, it seems, has no borders.

This chance conversation had the effect of settling us down enough to get our bearings eventually find a Strava segment of the whole course and pair it up with the sat nav. We needn't have worried though, as once we set off the course had already been signposted, along with road markings and – brilliantly – large kilometre markers. As we drove the route we passed many riders checking out the course either as pairs, or as well-drilled squads with fully liveried-up team vans following them.

The course starts with a two-kilometre climb out of the town centre, before settling into around 10 kilometres of flat roads with a couple of drags thrown in to break up your rhythm. As the route heads north it passes through the occasional village or crossroad, before entering an exposed area of marshland with a brutal cross headwind. At around the 35 kilometre mark the real climbing begins. The climbs start steep and then flatten out into harsh drags. Taken individually they are not too fearsome, but it is the cumulative effect of the repeated climbs that saps the strength.

Go too hard on the early part of the course and these hills will punish you. There is no respite on the descents either. They are technical with a few off-camber turns approached at high speed. Full concentration is vital, especially if you are still in the red from the climb.

The course then winds its way back to Marigny, where it climbs up into the town square past the grandstand and through the finish line to a final 12-kilometre loop. This straight, out-and-back road will either finish pairs off who have struggled in the hills, or allow teams who have paced themselves well the opportunity to empty the tanks knowing that only a few more minutes of pain remain. Unlike the tricky climbs and descents tackled earlier, these last few kilometres do not require too much brainpower. A three-kilometre drag is followed by another three-kilometre descent to a 180° dead turn, which means all that remains is to get over the final climb in one piece before powering down to the finish.

No sticking it in the 54-11 and riding to the numbers, this was a proper roadie's course. I was glad I'd fitted an inner chainring on the TT bike the week before. It was definitely going to get used in the hilly parts, no shame in that. This echoed the advice of our local pro-in-the-know, Mark McNally: "Use all your gears".

We could now finalise our game plan. The first thing was not to get carried away and go eyeballs out from the start ramp. In any TT the temptation is always to go out hard, especially as you never really 'feel' the first minute of effort. But accelerate too quickly and go into the red and you will pay several times over and compromise your whole race. With all the excitement, being called up to the start ramp in front of other teams and supporters it would be easy to give in to this urge.

No doubt - Clothilde Duru will fill out
her registration form very early in 2018



The second was to play to our relative strengths. Having ridden a few two-ups together over the season we had stuck to the basic pattern of around 45 seconds on the front before swinging over. While this was OK for flat courses, the Duo required a bit more thought. I would set the tempo on the climbs, while Trevor would punch a hole through the air on the descents.

The climb back into Marigny for the first pass by the grandstand would need attention too. Again here it would be all too easy for the rider on the front to be carried away by the cheers of the crowd, embark on a bit of showboating and put the hammer down. We agreed that it was better to keep as a nice tight unit, rather than drop a teammate for the sake of one's ego. Once through this point we could then give whatever we had left for the last 12 kilometres. Leave it all on the last climb and then hurtle down to the finish line.

The Duo website had pretty much advised a similar approach:

"Duo Normand is a technic race: you must not begin too fast but you have to win time before Montcuit because the end of the race can be very hard. The best way is to train many times before running... against the time!"

Another point which caught my attention was the zone after the finishing line. The dash to the line was slightly downhill which would be hit at top speed, and the barriered finishing area was also downhill, with a 90° right-hand turn thrown in for good measure.

"We need to make sure we put the anchors on after the line," I said

We'd seen enough so it was time to sign in and pick up our race numbers. As there was just the two of us we had no driver for a support vehicle. However, we were still given a nameplate for the car which made a great memento.

Back at the hotel we had time to kill. This is the part of being a professional that you don't normally consider, the ability to do nothing. It's actually quite a challenge to switch off, stop tinkering with the bike or your kit, put the iPhone down and just 'be'. It was a case of putting our feet up until the restaurant next to the hotel opened and we could fuel up and hopefully get to sleep at a reasonable hour.

With the alarm going off at 6am, this was a relative lie-in. UK events can often *start* at six to avoid the worst of the traffic that blights our roads. Our start time was 9.53am, which gave us a pretty relaxed period to breakfast, pack the car, and get to the start in plenty of time to avoid any unforeseen issues and warm up.

Marigny was already busy with the early starters, other competitors arriving and warming up and the whole throng of officials, helpers, gendarmes at junctions and schoolchildren selling programmes. It seems that the whole town embraced the race, there were no signs of protest at the fact that their town centre and roads were closed for the day, a far cry from the antipathy that is reserved for bike events in the UK. As someone who has organised races in the past, the outright hostility from people who are slightly inconvenienced for a fraction of one day out of 365 never fails to sadden me. Not in this part of the world though. At times I had to stop and remind myself how good this was and take it all in.

Race Faces On

I was glad when the warm-up was over, that nervous sick feeling was in my stomach and I wanted to get on with what we had spent so many weeks preparing for. With fewer than five minutes before our start we joined the queue of riders at the start house and waited for our names to be called out over the PA system.

"Numero deux cinq deux: Trey-vor Gor-narl et Day-me-an Fee-auld"

This was it. Climb the steps of the ramp, nod to the starters, clip in, focus, race face on, make it look like we do this week in, week out.

We get the full treatment. Photographers snapping away as the timekeeper counted down and did the classic 5-4-3-2-1-go hand gesture.

Having resisted the urge to go out too fast we kept it under control for the climb out of the town and then settled into our rhythm. Before long we were catching other teams. The quiet villages we had ridden through the previous day now had spectators stood in their front gardens offering an encouraging "Allez!" Coupled with the closed roads and the occasional buzz-by of a motorbike outrider – complete with photographer riding pillion – this had to be worth an extra 10 watts!

Entering the hilly part of the course, our speed and cadence was interrupted, but we had the confidence from our recce to judge our efforts. However, tackling them at race pace hurts and we were definitely maxing out as we approached the top of the climbs. The heat was taking its toll too. An autumnal French morning was proving to be more akin to a warm British summer's day.

The kilometre markers indicated that we had around 18 km to go. We kept it tight as we approached the grandstand in Marigny as a pair. Everything had gone to plan so far – in fact I'd say we'd pretty much nailed it. All that remained was the out and back finishing loop. The drag out of Marigny seemed longer than I'd remembered. I'd hoped to keep it in the big ring, but I was struggling to keep on top of the gear and slipped back down into smaller chain ring. Over the top we kept the pressure on and picked off a few more teams. We were surely on to smash the time that we had set ourselves as a target.

Then it happened.

As I freewheeled in Trevor's slipstream at over 70 kph my heart tripped out and rocketed to 230 beats per minute. Disaster.

About 18 months previously I'd had a series of episodes where, when riding steadily, my heart rate would suddenly race to over 220 beats per minute. It would not come down for around 15 minutes despite being sat on the floor. Then just as instantly as it accelerated my heart rate would suddenly drop back down to its resting level. I had initially put this down to the perfect storm of too little sleep, too much caffeine, stress from work and a touch of dehydration. The consultant at my subsequent hospital visits debunked my theory. Apparently everybody has these extra heartbeats, but the heart immediately corrects itself and you are not even aware of them. But for some people, their hearts cannot kick themselves back into rhythm and it carries on firing away at breakneck speed. The medical term is *supraventricular ectopic activity*. In order to try and pinpoint why this was happening I had been fitted with a closed loop monitor, which was the size and shape of a jelly bean under the flesh of my chest. This clever piece of kit talks to a device on my bedside table and at 2 o'clock every morning sends the day's data to the hospital, leading me to be christened 'Half Man Half Garmin' by a witty clubmate.

Since having the loop fitted however, I'd not had an episode for over a year.

Top: The town's team of marshals were on hand at the Arrival area, efficiently and thoughtfully caring for the finishers, as always
Below: Final check of the Garmin before the countdown begins



Of all the times for this to happen, why now? When it had happened before I had just been bimbaling along and could get off my bike to let it pass. But not now, we were so close. There was no way I was going to climb off.

We freewheeled the remaining part of the descent and circled the dead turn to attempt the final climb, but I just couldn't push the pedals. It was excruciating. I had no strength left. The sensible thing to do would have been to stop, but not now, not here. This wasn't in the script.

We crawled up the climb and some of the teams we had passed rushed by us. I'm sure they were laughing at us. "Look at this pair of fools, going out too hard and blowing up" – classic cyclist *Schadenfreude*. Mentally and physically it was unbearable.

After what seemed an eternity we eventually made it to the top. Our target time and hope of a high placing had evaporated. The finish couldn't come quick enough, my heart still firing away off the scale – even turning the pedals going downhill was a major effort. I was starting to feel incredibly light-headed by now and had a real fear of blacking out. Crossing the finish line wasn't quite the rush I'd imagined. To be honest I felt embarrassed at not being able to give it my all.

I slipped off the bike and sat on the floor. Hopefully my heart rate would drop again with a few minutes of inactivity. This wasn't to be. I guess carrying on really hadn't helped matters. After several more minutes of sitting on the kerb I was beginning to feel a panic washing over me and my vision was starting to blur. Trevor had alerted one of the marshals who was now making his way over just as I got the overwhelming urge to puke. Somehow hurling over my shoes must have flicked a switch as immediately my pulse dropped down. Another minute or so and I was back on my feet.

We slowly made our way back to the car and peeled our way out of the skinsuits. There wasn't much chat. Although my body had failed me, I felt that I'd let my teammate down. After all it was my suggestion to come out here in the first place. We were so close to doing ourselves justice. I felt embarrassed.

We sat in the grandstand among the friends and families of other riders, who raucously cheered as they passed by. My spirits were slightly raised by how many pairs had ten, twenty metres or more of daylight between them as they climbed into the town square. Certain riders were clearly enjoying putting the hurt on their teammates and dropping them. We had at least looked pro at that point. Never sacrifice style for speed, remember?

We stayed around for an hour or so to watch some of the elite and professional teams pass by, but we had a ferry to catch and so had to bid farewell to Marigny. Despite the way our race ended, I was hooked by its charms and have vowed to return next season to address some unfinished business. I would most definitely recommend this race to any amateur rider wanting to have the experience of racing in a professional environment. It's perfect for a veteran tester who's looking for something above and beyond the repetition of the UK scene, or an up-and-coming junior rider who'd like to try their hand in a race on the continent without having to be on an academy squad. Not just for the race itself, but for the whole ambience of the weekend that the people of Marigny conveyed in putting on this bike race.

So, until next year...

CX WORLD CUP PART I:

By Trevor Gornall

KOKSIJDE, BELGIUM



**Chris Auld is never
afraid to stick his
wellies on and get
amongst it.**





He's been out clocking up the miles this winter travelling to a variety of the Telenet UCI Cyclo-cross World Cup events. This is the first of two galleries in this issue, from the event in Koksijde, Belgium.

The event played out over a tough, sandy, 3.1 km course, situated close to the North Sea. Dutchman Mathieu van der Poel once again dominated the senior men's race. Reigning World Champion and van der Poel's arch rival, Wout van Aert, suffered badly with mechanical issues and finished third. Britain's superstar in the making, Tom Pidcock won his U23 category.

















WORLD HISTORY

Suze Clemitson digs deep into the legends of the World Championships in this absorbing and engaging read, telling the story of the rainbow bands through the prism of the bike riders and the bureaucrats who have come to define it.

Photography by Cor Vos



Theo Middelkamp

Theo Middelkamp was one of those riders whose career was neatly cloven in two by the second world war. Born at the start of the first, the Dutchman turned pro aged 21 and was national champion three times during his career. He was a double Tour de France stage-winner in 1936 and 1938. A natural *sprinteur-rouleur*, Middelkamp won the seventh stage both times, writing his name into the *palmarès* of the Tour by scaling first the heights of the Col du Galibier and then the Pyrenees. The 22-year-old had otherwise devoted his career to winning big in the lucrative, pan-flat races of the *kermesse* circuit. Maybe he simply looked at the mountains like a flat *parcours*, sideways.

The 1947 World Cycling Championships, the twentieth edition of the professional race, was held on a featureless course around Reims in north-eastern France, among the Champagne vines that dominate the region. Crucially, the title would be won or lost after 35 laps of an eight-kilometre course. It was a gift for a *kermesse* specialist like Middelkamp.

But even the dullest *parcours* can spring a surprise – a dog in the road, an untimely puncture. In Reims it was the weather: the dull oppressive thud of the *canicule*, beating through the temples and sapping the riders' energy. 31 riders started in the shadow of the high Gothic cathedral. Only seven would cross the finish line, among them Fiorenzo Magni, who would prove his *grinta* at the Giro and the Tour of Flanders; Édouard Fachleitner, who had been the revelation of the summer with his second place at the Tour; and Albert Sercu, prolific winner in the Belgian semi-classics.

But it was Middelkamp who burned the bridges of politesse and struck out for the *arrivée* alone, finishing 10" ahead of his friend and rival Sercu. He was the first Dutchman to pull on the rainbow stripes of the world champion, an inspiration to the coming generations. In 1950 he would again finish on the Worlds podium, that time second behind Brick Schotte. He was 36 years old.

The World Championships have been organised since 1900 by the *Union Cycliste Internationale*. It is the UCI who are responsible for awarding the trademarked jersey with its five coloured bands in the major cycling disciplines – road, track, cyclo-cross, mountain biking, BMX and indoor cycling – for women, men and paracyclists. But it's the road race that remains the blue riband event, bestowing on the victor the right to wear the discreet blue, red, black, yellow and green piping of the world champion on their sleeves in perpetuity. Though only in their discipline – a road champion shall not wear the bands in a time trial, nor a time triallist his stripes upon the road. There are strict rules governing the wearing of the *arc-en-ciel*, a catechism for the 83 men and 56 women who have the right to do so.

The UCI was born in 1900, out of the ashes of the International Cycling Association founded by Henry Sturmey – he of Sturmey-Archer fame and a cycling industry pioneer. The ICA's lofty ambition was to define the terms of amateurism in the sport and to organise World Championships

There was trouble from the start. The whole issue of 'amateurism' was contentious, with the French and Americans preferring a looser definition of the term that allowed their riders to compete for prizes and money. Britain's National Cycling Union, the strongest federation in the sport and organisers of the unofficial Worlds, were known to prevent members from the *Union Vélocipédique de France* (UVF) from competing in their races.

Worse, when the ICA met for the first time in 1892 in London, Sturmeý invited the *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* and not the UVF to participate. Then came the shambles of the ICA's inaugural World Championships, organised in Chicago and won by Augustus Zimmerman, a rider the NCU had banned from competing in Britain because his federation, the League of American Wheelmen, embraced a concept of amateurism that involved the winning of pianos, land, jewellery and bicycles, plus, it was feared, a sponsorship deal with Raleigh. The Americans, unsurprisingly, dominated proceedings, winning two out of the three available gold medals.

By 1893, the French magazine *Le Veloce-Sport* was openly ridiculing the ICA and its Corinthian attitudes: "This absurd and ridiculous manner of enforcing a barrier between amateur and professional riders seems to be a return to ancient caste laws – is the professional so low, so ignoble that we find contact with him offensive?"

They would go on to appeal for what they termed a *Union Latine*, where 'continental' professionalism would sit happily alongside 'Anglo-Saxon' amateurism.

The ICA would organise the World Championships until 1900, when the event was to be held in Paris. The final Worlds under the auspices of Sturmeý's ICA took place in Montreal in 1899 under a challenge from the openly professional American Racing Cyclists Union (ARCU). An imperious Sturmeý declared that the rebel organisation would not be recognised by 'his' ICA and the best in Europe decided it wasn't worth making the trip across the Atlantic. A 20-year-old American called Major Taylor ran out as 1 mile world champion, having been robbed of the half-mile win in a controversial decision. Nicknamed the 'Black Cyclone', Taylor was the first black rider to triumph at the highest level of the sport.

The ICA met in Paris in February 1900. Resentment shimmered in the air like a heat haze, the Latin countries increasingly unhappy at the perceived dominance of the British. *Le Vélo*, which had waged a campaign of attrition against the ICA, characterised their fixation with amateurism as a "denial of reality" claiming the whole idea was "nothing more than a mummy wrapped in bandages." Their star journalist, Victor Breyer, would end up as a signatory to the newly formed UCI on behalf of the American National Cycling Association.

The meeting broke up in disarray, though possibly not as terrible as reports in the French press and especially *Le Vélo* made out, and was reconvened on 15 April at the Grand Hotel de Russie at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens and the Rue Drouot. The themes that were teased and spun in those rooms would haunt cycling down the years.

Did France's insecurity over the dominance of Britain reflect, as Hugh Dauncey suggests, a wider sense of insecurity about France's place in the world after defeat by the Prussians and the terrible depredations of the 1870 Siege of Paris, still well within living memory? Whatever motivated the French power grab, it was clear there was little love in European cycling for the autocratic way in which Sturmeý ran the ICA. Despite the Englishman's machinations – he'd appointed a close friend to act on behalf of the New Zealand Cycling Union and was himself at the meeting representing the Cape Cyclists' Union – the ICA were forced to accept a new voting structure that placed France and Italy on an equal footing with Britain. And from now on the British would be represented by a single team that would have to include members of the Empire too.

Sagan wins his third title in Bergen 2017





Adriano Rodoni

If Britain was the birthplace of the safety bicycle, whose DNA permeates the diamond geometry of every racing bike, then Europe was the spiritual home of mass start and stage racing, cemented by the inaugural Tour de France in 1903.

But where the Europeans had hoped for checkmate there was stalemate. Sturmeý refused to be ousted from the leadership of 'his' organisation. The delegates from France, Italy, Belgium, America and Switzerland retired from the battlefield, only to issue a declaration. Henceforth, they would withdraw from the ICA and create their own rival organisation, the *Union Cycliste Internationale*. It would be the UCI that would meet in Paris in the summer of 1900 and who would run the Worlds that August. As if to cement the change in control of the sport, four of the signatories were French and the new president a Belgian, Emile de Beukelaer. From now on things would be done differently.

In substantive terms there was actually no change at all. The Worlds continued as they had, confined purely to the track, amateur and fledgling professional riders fighting it out for the honour of being the official world champion. The French dominated the event winning three of the four golds on offer, with a Belgian taking the other. It wouldn't be until 1927 that professionals and amateurs alike would hurtle round Germany's Nürburgring in the first World Championship road race.

Emile De Beukelaer started his career in cycling with the Antwerp Bicycle Club, established in 1882 by the sons of the city's bourgeoisie and based on the upper class British St. Charles's Bicycle Club. Emile was an immediate success, his long lean shape ideally suited to whipping round the track at speed. The most successful Belgian cyclist of the 1880s, he dominated the national scene on his collection of tricycles and high-wheeled ordinaries from the most famous marques of the time – and was unofficial world champion in 1887 to boot.

But by the age of 22, De Beukelaer's time as a serious rider was over. Instead he juggled the demands of managing the *Ligue Vélocipédique Belge* and later the presidency of the UCI with his career in the family business. In his photos the Belgian looks prim, almost feminine, his long thighs clad in skin-tight shorts, his high-necked jersey clinging to his torso, but he had a reputation as being a dictator and ruthlessly pushed through the professional agenda that would defeat 'perfidious Albion'.

If Britain was the birthplace of the safety bicycle, whose DNA permeates the diamond geometry of every racing bike, then Europe was the spiritual home of mass start and stage racing, cemented by the inaugural Tour de France in 1903. It was a clean break from the dominance of Anglo sports like football, and from the supposedly British values of 'fair play', chiming with European ideals of building strong and healthy young men capable of leading their nations to glory, whether on the sports field or the battlefield.

Of course, the fledgling UCI had no influence over Henri Desgrange and his experimental race, and Desgrange had already written dismissively of the UCI as a chance to "say useless things in a lot of different languages." It was an era where the UCI met to set rules, while the race organisers and the powerful conglomerates of velodrome owners went about their business unperturbed.

De Beukelaer dropped dead suddenly at the age of 55, victim of the second great 'flu epidemic that raged in the post-war years. The reins of power would pass to a Frenchman, Léon Breton, and it was under his presidency that the first UCI World Road Race Championships would see amateurs and professionals alike tackle a 182.5 km loop around Germany's newly constructed motorsports circuit, the Nürburgring.



Fausto Coppi

As the pros and the amateurs lined up at the Nürburgring, goggles on foreheads and tubs coiled like passive pythons round their chests, the question in the peloton was simply: which Italian rider would take the rainbow jersey? From a team of six the *squadra azzura* had four genuine contenders: 1927 Giro winner, Alfredo Binda; Gaetano Belloni, winner of the Milan-San Remo/Giro d'Italia double in 1920; winner of the previous year's Giro del Piemonte, Domenico Piemontesi; and Costante Girardeno, a rider who had captured multiple Milan-San Remos and had twice won the Giro notching 30 stage wins.

After two circuits the Italians were in control, after six Girardeno attacked on the most difficult of the steep, sharp climbs and only Binda could follow his brutal assault. The peloton simply blew to pieces under the fierce acceleration. But Binda, the *campionissimo*, followed with ease and had no difficulty dropping Girardeno on the next circuit, winning with more than seven minutes' advantage over his teammate. Piemontesi was the third rider over the line to clinch a clean sweep for the Italian armada.

The Belgian sprinter Jan Aerts placed fifth and took the amateur title. In 1935 he would become the first rider ever to win both the amateur and professional World Championships when he captured the jersey on home turf in Floreffe, Belgium.

The 47th Congress of the UCI took place on 5th February 1928. The Italians helped to vote down the idea of the Worlds being solely an amateur race and the professionals were granted their own championship. Finally, any professional in the sport could leave it all on the road in pursuit of an official world title. Georges Ronsse, the Belgian cyclo-cross rider, won the first of his back-to-back rainbow jerseys in Hungary in the heat and the dust, attacking early and finishing more than nineteen minutes ahead of Germany's Herbert Nebe. Precociously talented, Ronsse had won Paris-Roubaix at the age of 21 and would be a double world champion by the age of twenty-three. The *squadra azzurri* would have to bide their time, cleaning up in the amateur Worlds, delivering Binda to the top of the podium in Liège in 1930, and again in Rome two years later.

Meanwhile, Breton seemed an immovable object, a somewhat stolid leader who had obstinately ridden out a number of challenges to his leadership. He was not, it appeared, in any immediate danger at the 1936 Congress until a vote was held on a new regulation: could the sitting president stand as a candidate in the forthcoming election or not?

The vote tied at 52-52, Albion raised its head. Claiming not to have fully understood the question, the British delegates backed the existing president to stand as a candidate. By the afternoon the atmosphere was ugly, the mood unpleasant, delegates whispered in corners and the sitting president – his authority undermined, his position untenable – was finally forced to withdraw his candidature. Max Burgi, a Swiss journalist, threw his bowler hat in the ring as he had done a year before. According to *Le Matin*, Breton was moved to opine, "I rubbed you out last year, but this year you've erased me." The final vote was 40 in favour, 62 abstentions and 2 blank papers. As the only candidate, Burgi became president of the UCI for the next three years.



Luis Puig

**Cadel Evans on his way to victory
in Switzerland 2009**



The 69th UCI Congress took place in Paris on the eve of the Critérium International de Cyclo-cross. But proceedings were less like a sporting federation and more, as *Le Journal* noted, “perfectly in the image of the League of Nations.” Ireland would once again use this Congress to ask that they be given control of cycling in Ulster. Holland fought for, and got, a World Pursuit Championships. And the Germans wanted German to become the language of the UCI, *natürlich*. Amid the madness, the UCI would vote on whether, as *L’Intransigent* put it, “M. Max Burgi, the current president of the UCI, has accomplished, to everyone’s satisfaction, the mandate for which he was responsible.”

There was no official candidate for Burgi’s successor, but there was one name on everybody’s lips: Alban Collignon. A Belgian journalist and race organiser, Collignon had parlayed passion and a small inheritance into a series of sports magazines. He had also crossed swords with his eventual successor, Achille Joinard, in 1931, when officiating as a finish line judge at the World Track Cycling Championships in Copenhagen. Collignon declared – against all evidence to the contrary – that Denmark’s Willy Falk-Hansen had crossed the line first ahead of Frenchman Lucien Michard. Collignon adamantly refused to climb down from his position, despite Joinard’s intervention.

The 1939 World Track Cycling Championships at the Vigorelli in Milan – *la pista magica* – lasted through to 3 September, two days after Hitler invaded Poland. German rider Teddy Richter, the most reluctant wearer of a swastika jersey, took the bronze medal but silver and gold were never awarded. A clash of wheels and a tangle of handlebars and Jef Scherens and Ari van Vliet came crashing to the track. Scherens was unable to ride again and Collignon determined that van Vliet should not profit from a crash of which he was deemed to have been the cause. Both men, it was declared, would run off at a date to be determined. But there was no later date, and the Worlds wouldn’t take place again on either track or road until 1946.

‘L’aigle noir’. It was a nickname that clung to Marcel Kint’s skin like the dark jerseys he wore. Orphaned at six years old, by 14 he was working in a factory, the sadness of his story reflected in his aquiline profile and large, dark eyes. For Kint, the bicycle was the route out of a life of drudgery and he seized it, becoming world champion before his 24th birthday, playing with fire in a cat and mouse sprint on the Valkenberg course. *The arc-en-ciel* would be emblematic of Kint’s career, peppered with wins in the classics like Paris-Roubaix, bisected by the second world war, during which he was held prisoner. He lost his best years then, impatient to race once again for the rainbow jersey he’d pulled on seven years before.

On a rain-drenched day in Zürich, Kint would come so close to touching the jersey again he could almost feel its wool against his skin. The local favourite, Hans Knetch, an over-enthusiastic teammate called Rik Van Steenbergen and a group of fans would conspire to wrench it from his grasp. Within sight of the finish line Kint sat on Knetch’s wheel, ready to launch the final blistering sprint, when four or five young men jumped into the road to cheer on their compatriot. A hand on the saddle, a line lost. Knetch crossed the line 10 seconds ahead of the Belgian. Then several months later, racing with Van Steenbergen at the Vel d’Hiv in the Paris Six Day, a terrible crash. A fractured skull, then brain surgery, an abortive attempt at a return in 1947. The heart willing, the head and the legs deserted him. Kint’s last real race was that fateful day in Zürich when the rainbow jersey flew forever out of his reach.





"It's good to be King!" Lance wins in Oslo, 1993

**Jeannie Longo wins the women's world road
title in Villach, 1987**



Freire wins in 2004



**Aperitifs play
a minor role in
the history of
the UCI, but an
important one**

The UCI emerged from the second world war under the leadership of Achille Joinard, who had transformed the UVF into the *Fédération Française de Cyclisme*. An ultra-right-winger, Joinard was a co-founder of the anti-Semitic pro-Royalist *Ligue de la Rose Blanche* and was no stranger to trouble – as a member of the right-wing youth group *Les Camelots du Roi* he was frequently involved in violence during left-wing rallies. In 1907 he was given a 15 franc fine and a two-day prison sentence for yelling ‘Clemenceau is an assassin!’ at the then prime minister. He seems to have mellowed in later life, though his political sympathies never wavered, and encouraged French riders to get involved in the Peace Race, dubbing it the ‘Tour de France of the East’.

Aperitifs play a minor role in the history of the UCI, but an important one. From 1947 to his death 10 years later, Joinard would steer the UCI into the brave new world of *extra-sportif* commercial sponsorship, meeting with the great *baroudeur* of the French peloton Raphaël Gémiani to discuss his newly inked deal with the makers of quinine-based Saint-Raphaël in 1955. It was beautiful symmetry that brought product and rider together, and it was serendipity that quinine saved Gémiani’s life after he went to ride in Burkina Faso in 1959. When he and Coppi caught malaria, only Gem survived.

Joinard was seduced by the idea of the Geminiani – Saint-Raphaël deal without giving it the UCI’s official seal of approval. When ‘Gem’ lined up at the start line of Milan-San Remo in his beautiful new jersey, the director of Saint-Raphaël was entranced. Joinard fired off a telegram to the organisers of La Primavera to say that Geminiani rode under the rules of the FFC: “He should wear a jersey with only sporting publicity. Stop. Participation is forbidden if to the contrary. Stop.” But by the time the telegram reached the offices of the race organisers *La Gazzetta dello Sport* the race was long gone.

They called him the Boss, Rik I, who reigned over the kingdom of the sprinters for twenty years. His sense of placement, his sheer finishing speed were born on the track and honed on the road. The year before his first world title, Rik Van Steenbergen won Paris-Roubaix at an average speed of 43.612 km/h – *le Grand Rik*.

1949 promised little – 290km of pan-flat racing round Copenhagen, a thirty-man peloton – but the sixteenth World Championships delivered an extraordinary tactical battle between two riders who were almost negatives of each other. *Il Campionissimo*, Fausto Coppi, with his long lean legs and slender profile, and Van Steenbergen, 1.86m tall and weighing in at 83kg. If ever a race was chess on wheels it was this, composed of carefully placed attacks and counterattacks, the Italian finally checkmated by the king of the sprint.

Van Steenbergen would win again in 1956 and 1957, in Copenhagen and Belgium, battling the wind and the rain and the cobbles as much as his adversaries. The equation was always simple – you did not take Van Steenbergen to the finish because he would always finish you in the sprint.

In 1957 Britain tabled a simple motion that a women’s Worlds be held. The subsequent press release was equivocal, stating that the UCI weren’t opposed in principle but that a World Championships for women was envisaged to be ‘only a few sprints’. The idea of a road race was systematically excluded, but at least the decision overturned forty years of women’s exclusion from racing at the highest level.

There's an oft-told story about Beryl and Charlie Burton's adventures behind the Iron Curtain on their way to the 1960 Worlds in Leipzig. Stranded in East Berlin, trudging the streets for hours, penniless and with not a word of German between them, they went to the nearest police station to ask for help. As soon as the officer on duty saw the name on her passport, he was on the phone arranging hotel accommodation at the East German sports ministry's expense. The pair left the next morning without breakfast: "We hadn't a bean between us and they offered us breakfast. We refused, not knowing how we were going to pay for it. We didn't know we didn't have to pay for it and we were absolutely starving," she said. There were armed soldiers on the train back to Leipzig and Charlie was all for heading back home to Yorkshire.

But a little thing like an empty belly wasn't going to stop Beryl. She dominated the opposition in the individual pursuit, winning in a world record time, then used all her time trialling skills to crush the field and win the road race by more than three minutes. She went home a double world champion at 23. Unstoppable.

By 1958, Italian Adriano Rodoni was the president of the UCI and France were tasked with organising "on a trial basis, a female World Championship in three disciplines (60 km road, 3 km pursuit, 500m sprint)." Rodoni celebrated his silver, gold, diamond and platinum anniversaries married to cycling, first as president of the Italian Cycling Federation and then as the longest serving head of the UCI. Rodoni's first Worlds saw Luxembourg's Elsy Jacobs become women's road race champion, his last the arrival on the scene of a pugnacious Frenchman who would win the Tour de France in the rainbow jersey the following year.

Rodoni's career straddled the golden age of Italian cycling – he started with Binda, had a hand in uniting Coppi and Bartali for the staggeringly gifted Italian team that dominated the 1952 Tour and was still around when Francesco Moser arrived on the scene. It was an extraordinary act of longevity.

Born from intense poverty in Milan – the two-roomed hovel, the cold winter mornings dragging feet of lead to the factory gates – Rodoni, like Kint, found his escape through cycling. Though he would talk of his regret at never having been to high school, his capacity for action made him ideal for a job where passion and the ability to see the bigger picture trumped any depth of intellectual thought. He was cycling's Napoleon, its de Gaulle, a benevolent dictator, a born decision-maker who wasn't afraid to grasp the thorniest thistle, from setting up the UCI Medical Commission in 1964 to splitting the UCI into a professional and amateur governing body in 1965 after the IOC threatened to exclude cycling from the Olympics for its outright professionalism. But what else to expect from a man who at fifteen had set up the Genoa Cycling Society?

Under Androni's steady leadership the UCI made the first tentative steps to combat doping, introduced a junior World Championships and stealthily globalised the sport sending the Worlds to Montreal and Leicester as it ventured outside the confines of mainland Europe for the first time since the end of the nineteenth century.

LeMond takes the win in 1983





"He would say 'Okay Pat, those are your options. It's up to you to make a decision. I leave that with you. I'm off to have a little glass of Irish whiskey and suggest you do the same when you are finished.'"

Stephen Roche wins in Villach, 1987







Only one rider has pulled on the fabled jersey four times and that is Édouard Louis Joseph, baron Merckx. A record among many other records, Merckx wore the jersey first as an amateur at the age of nineteen in 1964 then picked off three others at the beginning (1967), middle (1971) and end (1974) of his relatively short and meteoric career as a professional.

It nearly came off the rails two years after that first Worlds triumph when Merckx was the nailed-on favourite for 1967, having won stages at the Giro and Paris-Nice, scoring numerous wins on the track and bagging his second Milan-San Remo in a row. In a hotel room in Savona, Italy, where Merckx was ejected from the 1969 Giro within sight of a third triumph, the Belgian was given the benefit of the doubt. Adriano Androni would whisper in his ear, just loud enough for the nearby press to hear, "Eddy if I hug you it's because you're an honest lad. I don't make a habit of embracing Judas."

In 1971 it was a different Merckx who lined up in Mendrisio in Switzerland. The Cannibal was determined to rub everyone's noses in his superiority after receiving criticism over his third Tour win – prompted by the withdrawal of Luis Ocaña when the Spaniard was leading Merckx by eight minutes. Attacking after just 48 km on a course for once worthy of a World Championships, Merckx drove a five-man break clear of the peloton then used the penultimate climb of the ramp of the Novazzano to launch a winning attack. Only Gimondi stayed in his wheel and it was Gimondi who launched the sprint 200 metres from the line. Merckx was ready for him, cruising effortlessly past the Italian to win a second rainbow jersey.

If Merckx was in his pomp in '71, by '74 his career was already winding down. But he was still good enough to beat Moser, Bitossi, Thévenet and Poulidor on the hilly circuit around Montreal. Merckx would race for the rainbow bands three more times, finishing his last Worlds in Venezuela 33rd and dead last.

By the time Luis Puig assumed command at the UCI in 1981, he'd already been involved in sport for half a lifetime. The Spaniard revolutionised bike racing in his home country, professionalising and modernising the peloton to the extent that Luis Ocaña said of him, "he was an innovator, because his methods are now commonplace and naturally accepted by riders, it is the strategy of modern cycling." It was Puig who helped to save the Vuelta when it was days away from dying in 1979. More troubling – or interesting depending on how you like your UCI presidents – it was Puig who, as the great Spanish climber Federico Bahamontes' team manager in the 1957 Tour, administered an illegal shot for a nagging shoulder injury. He was not invited back to the race the following year.

Spain was a relatively new cycling superpower with no presence at the UCI. "We are nothing, we have no support or representation. The power is on the Italian and the French," Puig said, setting out to change his country's status with the same iron will that had driven through his reforms in Spanish cycling. Rising from a position on the Technical Committee of the International Professional Cycling Federation (IPTF), the professional arm of the UCI, he became vice president of the Amateur Cycling Federation (FIAC) in 1977, beating out the British candidate Eileen Gray – the same Gray who had lobbied long and hard behind the scenes for a women's World Championships. It was the first time a Spaniard would lead the sport's governing body. A woman has yet to do so.

In 1981, however, Carla Giuliani was elected Secretary General of the FIAC. She had served for fifteen years as the administrative secretary of FIAC, then taken charge of international affairs for the Cycling Federation of the National Olympic Committee. For the two years before she took over as Secretary General of FIAC she had been a member of the Medical Commission of the UCI. Yet in all press reports of the time, the most memorable thing about Ms Giuliani is that she is a wife and mother of two children "with a lively, cheerful character." But, like Eileen Gray, she was pushing her foot through the door and politely refusing to budge.

Puig's presidency is marked, above all, by the events of the 19 July 1988. Like Androni before him, Puig would be forced to make a mercy dash to a race leader in trouble. But unlike Merckx, Pedro Delgado would be allowed to race the next stage, and the stage after that – all the way to Paris in the yellow jersey, with Puig's words ringing in his ears, "Tomorrow you go out and make a big stage. Tonight you have to sleep, be confident."

The Delgado decision was a typical UCI fudge – Probenecid was on the IOC banned list, not yet that of the UCI, under whose rules the race was run – so Delgado rode to Paris without even the customary 10 minute penalty for failing a dope test. Better yet, the Spaniard was quite open about taking the masking agent.

"I took probenecid just after that Alpe d'Huez stage. We used it to assist draining from the kidneys. It was also used to mask anabolic steroids, but if I'd wanted to hide something in that way I would have had to have used it every day and it only appeared on that one control."

Puig had applied the letter, if not the spirit, of the law. It didn't stop the Spaniard being re-elected to his post by an overwhelming majority in 1989, and he continued as president until 1991 when he died of a stroke at his home in Valencia.

Between 1985 and 1989 she stood on the top step of the podium in Gavia del Montella, Colorado Springs, Villach and Chambéry alongside Joop Zootemelk, Moreno Argentin, Stephen Roche and Greg Lemond. The undisputed queen of world cycling during the 1980s, Jeannie Longo's *palmarès* include more than a thousand race wins, 59 French titles, 13 world titles and an Olympic gold.

In 1987 the Worlds ventured to Austria for the first time. Stephen Roche arrived with the best legs of his career, after winning the Giro-Tour double, as part of the five-man Irish team. Only Eddy Merckx had ever achieved the Triple Crown by going on to win the rainbow jersey in the same season as a Grand Tour double. There to play the perfect teammate to the ambitions of Sean Kelly, Roche told his friend, "It's a shame you're here to win because if you weren't it would be me taking that jersey." It was a self-fulfilling prophecy – having been an *équipier de luxe* throughout the race, Roche found himself in the leading group with Kelly marooned behind as the race flew under the *flamme rouge*. Roche put his head down and drove for the line, 150m, 100m, 50m and then with a yell and a clap of his hands over his head he had taken the Triple Crown.

It was Greg LeMond who had shown the way, the pioneer of tri bars and aero helmets showing his most human face at the Worlds. The LeMond of 1989 was stronger, more powerful, arriving in Chambéry on the back of an historic 8th win in the Tour de France. He would battle Laurent Fignon again over sinuous rain-soaked roads in the Rhône-Alps region. Fignon rode like the swashbuckler he was, but LeMond checked him every time. When the sprint was launched, it was LeMond that bulletted over the finish line with barely time to raise his arm in victory.

And alongside them on the podium, Jeannie Longo year after year, the most successful athlete ever to ride the UCI World Championships road race.

Greg LeMond in the rainbow jersey



Hein Verbruggen will leave
the ambiguous image of a man
at once cultivated and venal,
full of humor and cynicism, who
sincerely loved cycling but
equally power.

He wasn't an ex-rider or a sports journalist or a coach or a team manager. He trained as an economist and worked as a marketing manager for Mars. He was, as Jean Pitallier would snarl, 'a businessman', a characterisation that Hein Verbruggen claimed was in fact an unjust caricature. The Dutchman had racked up twenty years' experience in the sport before he was elected president in the wake of Puig's untimely death, claiming he had even been approached to take on the job as director of the Tour de France. But he remained in many ways a dangerous outsider, bringing in ideas bred in the boardroom and the business school.

What Puig had begun throughout the 1980s, Verbruggen would supercharge into the '90s. This was the age of internationalisation on steroids – or EPO as it would turn out. With the FIAC and the FICP unifying in 1992 thus abolishing forever the line between amateur and professional, and paving the way for elite cyclists to compete at the Olympic Games, the UCI was eager to shed its blazers and stopwatches image. Verbruggen with his modernising business brain was the perfect man to head up a UCI eager to extend its reach beyond the Worlds. Puig's UCI had initiated the BMX, Trials and Mountain Bike Worlds, knitting the cycling disciplines closer together. Verbruggen would introduce a time trialling championships for men and women in 1994.

More controversially, it was under Verbruggen's presidency that the keirin – the esoteric betting race so beloved of the Japanese – muscled out other long-standing track disciplines to take its place in the 2000 Olympics. Astonishing for a discipline that was due to be dropped from the Worlds in 1992. The UCI flatly denied that expenses for Verbruggen's trips to Japan plus a \$3 million payment were anything to do with keirin's presence at the Games.

"UCI looked into this matter when questions were first raised by the BBC in early June. A thorough examination of our records and interviews with those involved has turned up no evidence that this was anything other than a straightforward, completely proper arrangement to promote track cycling."

It passed the smell test eventually, but the aroma lingered.

Verbruggen was a man of contradictions. After his death from leukemia in 2017, the Swiss journal *Le Temps* said "Hein Verbruggen will leave the ambiguous image of a man at once cultivated and venal, full of humor and cynicism, who sincerely loved cycling but equally power." Like those other power brokers of '90s sport, Sepp Blatter and Lamine Diack, Verbruggen did what he had to do to force through the reforms he wanted to make, to create his legacy of a sport fashioned in his image. Famously litigious, he claimed he was only ever defending the image of the UCI, though where the UCI ended and Verbruggen's own interests began seems moot.

On the corniche at San Sebastian, a lanky, slightly scruffy-looking rider with a ratty ponytail and a red bandana attacks under the *flamme rouge* and sends the French commentators into a tizzy of gruff excitement. The threat of Udo Bolts, the German hard man is ever-present, but it is Laurent Brochard who waits and waits, and finally times his sprint to perfection – crossing the finish line to become the 1997 world champion. His teammate Richard Virenque breaks down in tears.



Rik Van Steenbergen

It started with rumours. That it could turn a plodding donkey into a flying thoroughbred. Blood doping wasn't new – Zootemelk had used transfusions during the 1976 Tour, the US cycling team had swept all before them using blood doping techniques in the 1984 Olympic Games, while Francesco Moser was preparing with Dr Francesco Conconi for his successful Hour record attempt. But this was different, this could substantially reduce exhaustion and increase VO2 Max by 6–12%. Comparatively cheap and ultra-effective, EPO was soon the go-to drug of the peloton.

Verbruggen responded, protected the goose that laid the golden eggs. In 1997 he imposed the infamous 50% haematocrit level that was widely viewed as tacit permission to dope. To contextualise the decision, this is the year that a jacked-up Brochard pops out of the pack at San Sebastian, the year Tyler Hamilton would eventually confess he had started his doping adventures. Brochard presented a backdated TUE for lidocaine. Verbuggen's response? "If a doctor wants to cheat, he can do so before or after the race."

In an interview in *Cycle Sport* the same year, Verbruggen stated his position.

"If there are certain products that enhance performance when taken in large quantities which are also dangerous to health, why not prescribe limits, check the blood and the urine and say that as long as you stay within determined limits where there is no risk to health, that's fine by us?"

As if to clarify the official position of the UCI, Dr Lon Schattenberg sent a letter to the riders at the start of the season, noting that blood tests "guarantee that the abuse remains within certain limits", that uncontrolled use of doping products "can cause damage to health", and that "the presence of medical monitoring does not mean that doping is eradicated either now nor in the future."

A year later, the cluster bomb burst as a peroxided Virenque was led away from the Tour de France in snot-bubbling tears. Verbruggen disappeared, leaving vice president Daniel Baal to deal with the fallout. Bruno Roussel, the Festina manager, said later:

"If Virenque had come to explain everything, say 'yes I am doped and that is why', 'yes I am a victim of the system', then, yes, probably things would have turned differently... cycling missed its revolution!"

He also claimed at the tense and fractious trial in Lille in 2000, when the entire sport fell under the watchful and impartial eye of Daniel Delegrave, that an angry Verbruggen had cornered him in a hotel corridor at the 1993 Tour of Flanders and threatened, "*Si vous ne faites pas le nécessaire, je peux vous faire un coureur positif.*"

In a six-hour cross-examination, Delegrave wondered why it took Verbruggen more than half a decade to pump significant funds into anti-doping efforts, having been told of the problem in 1989. He also noted that the UCI seemed more concerned about controlling reputational damage than tackling the doping itself. The letter, not the spirit of the law.

But lessons were left unlearned. Already, in 1999's laughably-titled 'Tour of Renewal' an American romped to a victory that left *L'Équipe* grasping for the encoded vocabulary of doping, breathlessly praising Lance Armstrong as an 'extraterrestrial' as he motored up the climb to Sestriere in foul weather, catching the two leaders "as if they're standing still", as Paul Sherwen put it.

Brash, arrogant, riding it like he stole it. The 21-year-old Texan blew into Oslo in the stars and stripes of the US team and blew out again in the rainbow jersey. Exactly ten years after Greg LeMond became the first non-European to take the world title, Lance Armstrong stood on the top step of the podium after an audacious late attack on the rain-slicked roads of the Norwegian capital. It was a race marked by endless, pointless crashes, more or less severe – the American twice found himself on the tarmac – the icy cold and the fatigue turning it into a war of attrition that only the strongest would survive.

Racing into the last 200 metres Armstrong raised his arms aloft in victory, blew kisses to the crowd, punched the air with aggressive delight. “They say he’s a bit of a show-off” intoned commentator David Duffield, “but he’s earned it.” Three years later Armstrong was undergoing surgery and chemotherapy for testicular cancer. The rest, as they say, is infamy.

Poster boy of the EPO years, Armstrong took home seven yellow jerseys and manufactured a myth as potent as it was toxic. Verbruggen, ever with an eye to the commercial exploitation of the sport, recognised the huge untapped potential that the Armstrong story represented. It is this queasy relationship that characterises Verbruggen’s presidency – one that was not, according to the Cycling Independent Reform Commission, exactly corrupt, yet gave the American “significant advantages.” These included allowing Armstrong’s lawyers to draft the Vrijman report, Verbruggen’s rebuttal to *L’Équipe*’s accusations that Armstrong had doped repeatedly during that infamous 1999 Tour. The CIRC concluded that the emphasis of the UCI’s anti-doping policy under Hein Verbruggen “was, therefore, to give the impression that UCI was tough on doping rather than actually being good at anti-doping.” Nothing should be done to kill the cash cow that was Armstrong and the publicity generated by those millions of little yellow rubber bracelets.

In typical fashion, the bullish Verbruggen hit back after the CIRC report’s publication in 2015, creating a website to give a detailed rebuttal of the claims against him. It’s a fascinating portrait of a man setting the record straight and settling old scores, out of step with the mood of the time, full of whataboutery and bluster. He denounced the CIRC report as “unfair, biased and incomplete in its methodology, in its substance and in its conclusions.” Yet he also writes “I accept that some will disagree and some will never change their minds.”

He had raced just 11 times in 1999 following knee surgery, but when Spain’s Óscar Freire burst like a cork out of a bottle to win the rainbow jersey in Verona he was setting out on a career that would lead to three Milan–San Remo titles, a green jersey and seven stages at the Vuelta. Freire, at just 1.70m, wasn’t the height or build of a typical sprinter, but he used strength, speed and guile to mix it with the big men. It was that race craft that took him to three world titles and one bronze, culminating in a textbook sprint in Verona in 2004. By the time he hung up his cleats, *Oscarito* was the equal of Binda and Van Steenbergen, having ridden from total obscurity to the very top of the world championship rankings. He was no longer the unknown kid from Covadonga.

Pat McQuaid’s tenure as the president of the UCI is now defined by its end, the moment in 2013 when he lost the leadership to Brian Cookson, a rather grey little man from Lancashire who came from a local government background and liked to ride a bike a bit. But Cookson was ‘anyone but McQuaid’, so the Irishman’s goose was boiled, barbecued and flambéed – though the final vote was about as close as it could have been under the circumstances, with Cookson emerging triumphant by 24 votes to 18.

McQuaid arrived at the UCI's annual Congress with a reputation as another of cycling's great dictators. Having been mentored by Verbruggen for many years – the two met in 1984 when the Dutchman helped the Irishman secure the Nissan International Classic – and it was Verbruggen who appointed McQuaid to head up the UCI Road Commission. McQuaid was his natural successor, although it was European Cycling Union president, Vladimir Holecsek, who made the actual nomination in 2003. In a highly unusual move, McQuaid was then put on what amounted to paid work experience with Verbruggen. Expected to be the only candidate, McQuaid's succession did not eventually go unopposed, with Darshan Singh Gill from Malaysia and Gregorio Moreno from Spain throwing their respective hats in the ring just before the deadline on 25 June. And then, at the last gasp, Verbruggen too decided to stand for re-election.

"I had, of course, no intention to be a candidate against McQuaid. I wanted to be a candidate against Singh and Moreno in order to prevent the UCI coming under the influence of ASO [the Amaury Sport Organisation, organisers of the Tour de France] and so giving ASO an even more dominant position in cycling," writes Verbruggen on his website.

Moreno had criticised the Dutchman's ProTour reforms, as had the organisers of the three Grand Tours – although Verbruggen neglects to say that he was also at loggerheads with most of the stakeholders involved in his naked power grab for control of the sport.

Verbruggen's gambit worked and McQuaid was duly elected as the ninth president of the UCI at a fraught and ill-tempered Congress. He would continue to support his Irish friend throughout the ongoing wars with the ASO, who remain in control of the finest portfolio of cycling properties in the calendar.

The relationship between the two men continued to be close, with McQuaid writing in remembrance:

"He would say 'Okay Pat, those are your options. It's up to you to make a decision. I leave that with you. I'm off to have a little glass of Irish whiskey and suggest you do the same when you are finished.'"

It wasn't that Pat McQuaid was unsuited for the top job in world cycling. In many ways he was ideally qualified, having raced at elite level – he rode in apartheid-era South Africa and earned a lifetime Olympic ban for his pains, was Irish national champion, then the first rider to win the Tour of Ireland twice when that race was a big deal. He then worked his way up through race organisation to director of the *Grand Départ* of that ill-fated 1998 Tour de France at which the Festina Affair unfolded before the world's eyes.

From 2005 onwards he worked his way through the ranks of the UCI, the clownfish to Verbruggen's many-tentacled sea anemone. This was the era of the ProTour reforms that were intended to seal Verbruggen's legacy, to some a much-needed and legitimate vision for the future of cycling, for others a colossal and cheeky power grab that sought to put control of cycling's major events firmly in the hands of the UCI not the race organisers. Its objectives – to unify the calendar, to globalise cycling beyond the European heartland and to bundle TV rights to races owned by the likes of ASO, RCS and Unipublic together with the Worlds – are still disrupting the sport.

McQuaid's eight-year presidency wasn't without its positives, most notably the introduction of the biological passport. Even then there are questions over its legitimacy and whether, if the net is truly closing, whether the holes in it are – paradoxically – still large enough to let the bigger fish swim free.

**David Lappartient with 2014 world champion
Michal Kwiatkowski**



Hein Verbruggen and Pat McQuaid



McQuaid's time at the top is characterised by pugnacity, confrontation, ill-feeling and dodgy dossiers. It's true that the allegations of corruption that were rife as the Lance Armstrong myth unravelled in the wake of the USADA Reasoned Decision were found unproven by the CIRC report. But the bending of the rules to allow Armstrong to ride the 2008 Tour Down Under, the conflicts of interest with family members involved in the sport as agents and race organisers – "if any element of their work ever touches on the UCI and there's a discussion of that work in the UCI then I step out of the discussion" was McQuaid's solution – the silencing of Contador before his clenbuterol positive broke, the outright attacks on 'scumbag' Landis and the granting of the 2015 Worlds to Richmond, Virginia with Pat's brother Darrach front and centre on the organising committee all leave a nauseating taste in the mouth, like the shadow of a norovirus.

He was the man who never attacked. The rider with the crabwise style and the brittle temper. The nearly-man from a Land Down Under, who was dogged with bad luck. But not today. Under achingly blue skies, riding on roads he knew from living, training and racing around the Swiss town of Mendrisio, butted up against the Italian border, Cadel Evans was nursed and shepherded by a strong Australian team into contention before the unthinkable happened. The compact Australian stamped on the pedals and was gone, using all those years of disappointment and ability to drive himself clear of the chasing pack and maintain a 14" advantage over the last ascent of the day. It was all downhill to the finish for the first ever professional Australian world champion. Evans would take the jersey to Geelong the following year, the first time the Worlds had ever been held on the continent of Australasia. Thor Hushovd would become the first-ever male Norwegian champion a mere sixteen years after Monika Valvik pulled on the rainbow stripes.

Brian Cookson was elected on a manifesto no one could deliver and an 'anyone but McQuaid' ticket that would bite him on the arse just a few short years later. Though Max Burgi served a shorter time, Cookson is the first one-term UCI president, summarily dispatched by the 2017 Congress in a landslide for Frenchman David Lappartient.

How, in four short years since the triumphal unseating of McQuaid, had Cookson sunk to the depths of such unpopularity? Cookson had, after all, continued the Anglo-Saxon lineage of the UCI, making bold noises on the separation of anti-doping from the work of the UCI and going so far as to move the newly independent Cycling Anti-Doping Foundation (CADF) down the hall from his office.

In the social media age it was perhaps inevitable that Cookson should fall prey to cynicism about his performance. Eager to embrace the new cycling media, he fell foul of it at the first hurdle. Dubbing the cycling kit sported by the Colombian cycling team IDRD-Bogotá Humana-San Mateo-Solgar "unacceptable by any standard of decency." Cookson seemed to have hugely overreacted to some gold, lycra-covered chamois leather, whilst women riders were being abused and left unpaid by unscrupulous team managers.

It's a mark of just how far British Cycling had risen up the world order that Mark Cavendish could rely on a full complement of teammates to work for his 2011 rainbow jersey success. Thomas, Stannard and Wiggins all buried themselves in their roles as *domestiques de luxe*, leaving the Mozart of the 11-tooth sprocket to seal the deal. Like the great sprinters who had won in Copenhagen before him, Cavendish made no mistake as he powered for the line, his rush proving irresistible. "We've established Great Britain as the dominant force in world cycling," the new champion crowed. It was a display of power and planning disguised as manifest destiny.

Thomas, Stannard and Wiggins
all buried themselves in their roles
as *domestiques de luxe*, leaving the
Mozart of the 11-tooth sprocket
to seal the deal.



Cay wins in Copenhagen

There were good things about Cookson's reign too – every UCI president has generally had a positive impact on the sport – and women's cycling in particular has benefited from increased investment and exposure, although underlying issues of professionalism and equality remain unresolved. There was an upside – the more than capable Tracey Gaudry became the first-ever female vice president of the UCI, although her frustration at trying to turn the UCI supertanker after 113 years of male domination sometimes leaked through.

But then came the indecision, the invisibility, the meetings where Cookson's proxy, Director General Martin Gibbs, held sway. Cookson had promised a 'collegiate' presidency, but was increasingly distant and unavailable, leaving Gibbs – widely rumoured to be unpopular at Aigle, the World Cycling Centre in Switzerland that houses the UCI offices – in control. McQuaid accused Cookson of abrogating his responsibility and leaving Gibbs to take all the meaningful decisions. Cookson, the Irishman declared, was a fraud.

Gibbs had steered Cookson's successful campaign, backed up with a £120,000 investment from British Cycling that allowed him to travel the globe. Conflict of interest? Nothing to see here, declared both parties. There was still nothing to see when it emerged that Ollie Cookson, Brian's son, was working for Team Sky – a team on whose managing committee Cookson himself had sat during their early days. Was the UCI out of the frying pan and into another fine mess?

When Damian Collins MP – chair of the Culture Media and Sport select committee investigating the tangled web of jiffy bags, cortisone and lost laptops at the heart of Team Sky's parasitic relationship with British Cycling – declared that Cookson should not seek re-election, it seemed that the jig was up. But in the end it seems it wasn't the culture of fear that Cookson had apparently allowed to develop at British Cycling during his presidency, nor the sickly perfume that was beginning to envelop Sky, or even a sense that the Anglo-Saxons had irreversibly taken control of the sport, but simply his lack of political smarts that did for Cookson. A lonely figure with a backpack, the Lancastrian had none of the easy charm of McQuaid or even the aura of Verbruggen. He was simply a man in a suit, standing alone, out of his depth.

Unlike the shambles that was Doha, where cycling and rider health was sacrificed on the high altar of globalisation and money, Bergen was a festival of bike racing to gladden any aficionado's heart. A challenging *parcours*, stellar field and spectacular backdrop combined to create a Worlds of real beauty. Peter Sagan proved himself the master of the bike throw, timing his dive past local hero Alexander Kristoff precisely to the millimetre, making history by winning the rainbow stripes for the third successive year.

And so we come to the new man in the job. David Lappartient couldn't be more different to Cookson. He claims to be a president for the 21st century, who will rid the sport of the scourge of motor doping and provide the strong and effective leadership the UCI has lacked during the Anglo-Saxon years. Critics say he is in ASO's pocket, that he has single-handedly killed women's cycling in France, but there is a grudging recognition that the sport needs a Lappartient – a consummate politician and networker – if it is to be fit for purpose over the coming decades.

Has the UCI come full circle, with perfidious Albion banished once more by the triumphant Latins as cycling heads into an unknowable future? And can the Frenchman steer a course between the perilous rocks of self-interest and the greater good, ethics and pragmatism, corruption and professionalism and deliver a cycling fit for all? *Peut-être*.



THE LAST TWO STANDING

As I sat on the floor
cleaning my locker
at the local Westy Self
Storage in August of
2013, I was surprised
at how sentimental I had
become over my breakup
with Lance Armstrong.

Shedding tears was not really an option, I had never even met the guy before, but nostalgia and anger pervaded many of my thoughts about the man I had wholeheartedly and vigorously defended to my friends and family throughout the years.

My memories shifted to those July mornings in the early 2000s when, after returning from my masters swim practice, I would make a pot of coffee and watch Lance fly, leaving his opponents mentally and physically shattered. I still remember all the great moments as if they happened yesterday. Lance hitting the tarmac and cracking his bike frame after clipping a spectator's musette during the ascent of Luz Ardiden in 2003. Not fazed in the least, he remounted and with new-found aggression, pedalled to a stage win. His 'mountain bike' excursion on the descent to Gap, all to avoid colliding with Joseba Beloki, whose spectacular crash shattered his femur and his career. The three consecutive stage victories during the 2004 edition, one of them the spectacular time trial up Alpe d'Huez where, with his legs resembling the pistons of a Detroit muscle car, he passed opponents as if they were overweight weekend riders enjoying a nice summer day. Perhaps the most memorable of all, 'the look' Lance gave Jan Ullrich as the two battled it out on Alpe d'Huez in 2000. The list could go on, seemingly as long as the Tour itself.

Over the years, I saved almost everything ever written on Lance, from *The New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Outside*, and *VeloNews* articles to his autobiography and coffee table books. It would be so cool, I thought, to share them with my kids some day. Maybe frame the newspaper covers and put them on their bedroom walls to motivate them to greatness, or pull them out while we were watching the 135th edition of the Tour and talk about how I used to get up at 5 a.m. to watch entire mountain stages from start to finish, just for the chance to see Lance doing the impossible. Sadly, it turned out, he was doing just that.

That morning in Westy, I ended up throwing away all of the newspapers and magazines that I had so carefully stored.

A year ago, as my wife and I packed our apartment to move to Switzerland, I found two coffee table books that never got put into storage stuffed onto the bottom of the bookshelf in our spare room. I hadn't opened either of them for years, but I thought long and hard about whether or not to bring them with me. My history with Lance went back almost two decades and throwing away the last two vestiges of my connection with him was more difficult than I imagined.



Lance assaults the ITT to Alpe d'Huez in 2004

Lance hits the deck at Bagneres-Luz-Ardiden in the 2003 Tour



**Beware Texans bearing gifts - on the Ventoux
with Pantani at the 2000 Tour**



Lance catches Ivan Basso during the ITT at the 2004 Tour



Thanks to Lance, I got my first bike in the winter of 1999 and have been addicted to riding since that moment. Soon thereafter I was racing sprint triathlons and marathons. It might sound odd as a spur to action, but getting up at 5:15 a.m. for swim practice or to start prepping for a 100-mile bike ride was always easier when I knew that Lance was doing the same thing somewhere in Europe.

In early 2012, after Lance's second retirement from cycling, I eagerly watched him work his way back into triathlons. I religiously watched all of Lance's races on the internet, devoured his training exploits as if I were his coach and stayed up way too late at night reading stories about his staggering success. Around that same time, I started to plan my own 'comeback'. I was eight years removed from my last Ironman race, but seeing Lance back in the sport made my brick sessions and repeats on the track that much easier. And although my comeback was not cast in the public eye, it had, in my mind, as much significance. Most importantly though, even after he was barred from competition in late 2012, I continued with my return to racing and that September finished my first triathlon in almost a decade.

The Sunday before I left for Switzerland, I put more than 50 books on the stoop outside my apartment. It was a random collection of graduate school textbooks, novels, auto-biographies, and the last two pieces of my once extensive Lance Armstrong collection.

When I walked out to the stoop the following morning, only three books remained, two of which were Armstrong's. Falls from grace are often measured in decreased Q Scores, but seeing these two books on the sidewalk seemed a better representation of how far Lance Armstrong's star had truly fallen.



Armstrong on the comeback trail in 2009

"Cheat? Me?" Lance takes a short cut on the descent to Gap in the 2003 Tour



**NUMBER
TWO
AND
COMING
EIGHTH**

Holly Blades gives
us a story of perseverance,
panache and poo at the
World Championships.

Ah, the end of the year. The nights are drawing in, the 'cross season is in full swing and many professional road cyclists are sitting back and thinking about the end of season events they're attending. One of the last major races of the year is the UCI Road World Championships, drawing elite men and women, as well as junior racers from around the globe.

It's a long day during a long week but a far more immediate reward than a three-week Grand Tour, and the winner gets the snazzy rainbow stripes for a whole year. If nothing else, it makes them the most instantly recognisable rider in the peloton. So, with the memory of Peter Sagan's win in Bergen in mind, let's take a look back at the intricacies of the race. Oh – and that was probably a spoiler if you've been living under a rock (or more likely in your garage with your turbo trainer) since the end of September.

And if you didn't see it, you missed the best bit of cycling never shown on TV, as the cameras failed in the last 4 km and the only view for a good three minutes was of the finish straight as the riders sped unseen towards the corner. Personally, I think all final kilometres should be aired liked that for the nearest 'I'm actually at the race' feeling possible.

Although it's a pretty straightforward 'first across the line' race, usually angled towards the sprinters or the climbers, its history is slightly more complicated.

Now, obviously, the week of the World Championships features the men's and women's individual road race and time trial, as well as the men's and women's team time trial, the under-23 men's road race and time trial, the junior men's road race and time trial, and the junior women's road race and time trial, but due to word limits and timing I'm going to concentrate on the men's road race.

Like the Olympics, the World Championships began as an event for amateurs, with the first edition in 1921. The inaugural Championships was held in Copenhagen, with four men of each nationality permitted to compete, and was won by a Swede, Gunnar Skold – which is pretty much the most Swedish name you can get really. In 1927 the event became split into amateur men and professional men, continuing like this until 1996 when the amateur event was replaced with the under-23 race.

The list of winners of the World Championships reads like a Who's Who of professional cycling, dating back to the first ever professional event when Alfredo Binda won the first of his three rainbow jerseys.

It's a long day during a long week but a far more immediate reward than a three-week Grand Tour, and the winner gets the snazzy rainbow stripes for a whole year.



Óscar Freire in the rainbow jersey

We've looked at Binda's work quite a lot here at Conquista as one of the greatest cyclists of the 1920s, and, lest we forget, with one of the greatest nicknames, "The Trumpeter of Citiglio" – because if you're from Citiglio and you play the trumpet, that's the best you're going to get. Eddy Merckx (who?), future wildman Rik van Steenbergen (Note to Ed: that guy needs an entire article to himself) and Óscar Freire are the only other riders to have won as many times.

I love the history of bike races, I love all the characters and the stories, to the extent that I can sit through my husband's, "That time I pooped myself at the World Championships" story every time he tells it. Which led me to thinking, who better to hear about the biggest one-day race in the world than from someone who's ridden it, like, seven times? Probably. Maybe six, I don't know, I may have zoned out.

We all know about the winners, we know about the curse of the rainbow jersey. What we don't know is what it's like to be in far-flung corners of the world, racing with the greatest names in your field, along some of the hardest courses seen in pro cycling. So bear with me while I send an email.

Matt [Stephens, former British national champion, better known round here as Mr Blades], apparently raced six editions of the Worlds between 1989 and 1997, and the infamous poo event was the last one in San Sebastian. Maybe there are some things you just can't move on from.

However, his favourite memory from the event is far more touching (and in this telling, involves far less poo).

"It has to be my ride at the Worlds in Duitama, Colombia in 1995. I'd taken a month off work as unpaid leave and had trained and focused like never before. There was added importance as the race was essentially a qualifier for the Atlanta Olympic Games the following year. As such there was more funding than before and British Cycling took us (and the track squad) to Colorado for a two-week altitude camp. With the road race being held at 2,590 metres (8,500 feet) above sea level, this was rather essential.

"After the camp we headed to Colombia for a further two weeks leading into the race. I was very light and stronger than I had ever been. The race climbed 300m every lap (1000 feet approx) so I thought the best policy was to attack, as I thought many of the field would approach with caution. I got away early in a very solid group. We stayed away all race, the field shattering behind.





Abraham Olano rides to victory in Duitama 1995

I remember the surges
of adrenaline each lap up the
climb, urged on by thousands of
Colombian fans. It was incredible
and still sends shivers up my spine
when I think back, even though
22 years have since passed.

"I remember the surges of adrenaline each lap up the climb, urged on by thousands of Colombian fans. It was incredible and still sends shivers up my spine when I think back, even though 22 years have since passed. My big mistake was that I went a little too hard too early and faded later, losing ground on the climb on the penultimate lap."

"Even so, the brutal course had caused so much damage that the next rider was around 3 minutes behind me. I remember rolling across the finish line utterly spent, unsure of where I'd finished as I was so focused on my own effort. My team manager Doug Dailey embraced me after the line, bellowing in my ear that I'd finished eighth [later promoted to seventh after the third-placed rider tested positive] and qualified the GB team for the Olympics. I'd beaten some of the finest riders in the world as I'd been given the time to focus, train hard and prepare. I was immensely proud. And I still am."

So there you have it. Not everyone who rides the Worlds is riding to win. Some are just riding to be there, so give that a thought when you sit back and watch the best and brightest, and the not so great and slightly possibly duller, representing their country on the World Championships stage.

TORINO -NICE RALLY

I spring up from the darkness and yell, "No, don't do it!"

A hand yanks me back into the darkness of my cinema seat as roars of laughter ring out around me. I'm responding as any normal nine-year-old would, or should, when the villainous actions of the diamond thieves divert the Monte Carlo Rally down a gravel road in an attempt to recover their loot from Herbie's petrol tank.

When I heard about the Torino-Nice Rally, an unsupported point-to-point bikepacking ride, the dirt roads from *Herbie Goes to Monte Carlo* sprung to mind. I downloaded the film to remind myself of the joyous childhood innocence. Like bikepacking there are many things you can't influence by yelling out, but that should never stop you from trying.

Taking in 700 km on a mix of tarmac and gravel, and reaching altitudes above 1500m, the second Torino-Nice Rally attracted a wide range of riders and a relatively large field of 135 riders. The ethos of the rally is to turn up on whichever bike you have in your stable and give it a go with the suggestion of a large dose of social interaction. The variety of bikes at the start was a testament to just giving it a go: full-sus 29er MTBs, a childhood Dawes recovered from the shed, a £700 bike bought just for the rally and shod with some gravel tyres.

My steed of choice was my trusty Blue Norcross cyclo-cross bike. It's served me well through all my bikepacking misadventures and daily journeys to and from work. Running a 10-speed on a short cage put my lowest gearing at a 34x28. With nine kilograms of bike, six of camping kit and two and a half litres of water in the Camelbak, it was as light as I could get the set-up for a "luxury" tour.

Ignorance is bliss, as the spontaneous, naïve nine-year-old inside me can testify. We ate a dinner of well-chosen food and wine in the relaxed atmosphere of an Italian square. The very civilised start time of 9am meant no one rushed home to grab an extra hour of sleep and there was plenty of note swapping. The Rally is about taking in the scenery, enjoying the social side and riding whichever sections you or your bike can muster – a far cry from the stomach-knotting pressure of the bikepacking races I've attempted. It was time to ride and enjoy.

After an extended photo shoot below the horse statue in Turin's Piazza San Rocco, and a final wave to webcam where family and friends were squinting to make out the riders, we picked our way out past some of the historic sites, while dodging the copious tramlines that crisscrossed the street.

Tarmac turned to gravel
as sweat beaded upon my brow.
I took a long slow breath of fresh
mountain air as the final particles
of London's toxic smog left my
lungs, all my worldly worries
vaporised in the turning of the
pedals and the crunch of gravel
under my tyres as the gradient
slowly crept up toward
double figures.







Spotting a cluster of bikes outside a supermarket a mere 35 km outside of Turin I wondered if this was my cue to stock up. Still dialled in to my lightweight racing mentality I grabbed some Babybel cheese and chocolate. In the queue was a chap with a fruit crate filled with sausages, a four-pack of beer, focaccia, crisps and a few other tasty-looking snacks. I chuckled at my idea of luxury – I'd added a blow-up pillow, mosquito net, tarp, Jetboil and Camelbak to my regular race setup and figured that would do me just fine. For a moment I felt rather envious of this well-stocked riding rig.

Murmurings of the first climb started among some of the riders, more notably from those who'd ridden the first edition of the Rally. One rider vowed to take the valley road around the first climb. My internal voice muttered 'lightweight' as I turned left towards the base of the climb.

The intensity of my focus on the agonising slow progress of tyre over gravel came abruptly to a halt as a drop of Dead Sea-like sweat trickled into my eye and I squeezed my lids together against the burning sensation. I willed the tears to come, but my body clung desperately to its internal water source. The sound of gravel crunching under cleat lacked any semblance of rhythm as the toe on my shoe kicked a stone. The pounding in my chest bubbled towards the surface as if ready to make a hasty escape, when a patch of shade beckoned me to sit down and allow homeostasis to return.

I fear there is something I missed in the planning process, like that glitch in the Matrix: you can see all the green numbers falling on the screen, but you can't make head or tail of them. It doesn't matter how long you stare at the ride cues or contour lines on a map, they never translate into the shape of the mountain bearing down on you as you attempt to conquer it.

The shared suffering of pushing a 15kg bike up a 1900m gravel climb overrides the psychological defeat that would often beset you in a solo situation. With gradients between 10 and 15 percent, riding was not an option.

Three other riders were walking up alongside me and we shared the suffering with laughter and comments on how crazy it was to be walking – yet none of us could get any traction on the gravel. One rider on a mountain bike struggled on a 23-34 bottom gear, so I resigned myself to a whole heap of walking with my 34-28.

This is the Colle del Colombardo. It kicks off the second Torino-Nice Rally with 15 km of the steepest gravel of the ride. If this doesn't break you nothing will.

Our merry gang of riders changed daily, but the core folk were Rolf, David and myself. Rolf, a Swiss rider, was in the final stages of a two-year sabbatical, taking the opportunity to ride many of the bikepacking races: the Tour Divide, TransAm Bike Race, Route 66. This put him into a different league. With his 29er full-sus MTB he'd often leave us for dust and pop up later along the route reading his Kindle in the company of a few beers at a local cafe while he waited for us to catch up. He kept looking at my bike, saying "I have no idea how you are doing it on that bike!"

David was a rookie bikepacker but a seasoned camper and wilderness kayaker from Canada. He was an über-camper by our standards. With a rig weighing 25kg, he fed us pretty well en route, with his mantra being "Please help me eat this food so my bike weighs less". His steed of choice was a 29er hardtail MTB.

After half a day of pushing the bike up the climb I realised I'd brought a knife to a gunfight. The summit came at last. With a sigh of relief I donned my rain jacket, zipping it up while eyeing the heavenly trail of dirt snaking down the mountain. Switching hand positions onto the drops, guiding the front wheel around the chunky rocks scattered on the road, I felt the gradient pitch all my weight heavily onto my hands. My usually comfortable riding position suddenly felt way too aggressive and as my bike bounced off a large rock I realised actually I'd brought a toothpick to a gunfight.









The cue notes offered some descriptive places, like "Little Peru" and the "death road" – both fairly apt descriptions coined in the initial running of the rally. Sitting at over 2000m Little Peru is a ridge road on some fairly rough gravel. Most of the riders on this section were on mountain bikes and left me pedalling alone. The sharp peaks pushing through the sandy-coloured, vegetation-free mountains were a distraction from the painfully slow pace. Suddenly the Garmin beeped 'off-course' and I looked down to see the breadcrumb trail I'd been following gone from my view.

Back to where I reconnect with the trail and looking around I see the only 'road' is a goat track. I started pushing the bike up the steep track. "You've got to be kidding me," I mumbled as I remounted and used my knees to balance the bike, pedalling tentatively along the track. Several forts emerged from the mountainside as discernible shapes. I was reminded of the hardship endured through war.

Rain began to fall as my panic started to rise. Another steep scramble up the goat track brought me out into an incredible landscape, but my panic obscured it a little. In the distance I could see a jeep. I started yelling for it to wait up. The panic demanded I try to hitchhike out of there. I found out that the jeep was going in the wrong direction, but not before the driver pointed out where the gravel road finished on the horizon. After making it to the tarmac road I found a *refugio* and settled down with one of the best hot chocolates of my life before descending another narrow road.

James, the organiser, warned us of the "death road" with notes of caution about the rock fall and lack of railings. Picking my way gently down the very narrow, single-carriage road clinging to the side of a cliff, I snaked around all the rock fall taking note of sections with no railings. I was descending like a granny on Prozac and turned carefully into a 90-degree corner. The next minute I found myself hurtling over the handlebars and hitting the ground with a massive crack. I looked up and saw the railings inches from my nose.

Rolling into a seated position I tried to get a breath into my winded lungs. "Don't like the sound of that crack," I said out loud, pressing my fingers into both collarbones to see if they were both still where they were meant to be. Phew. I checked both arms, legs and my ribs.

All fine. So what the heck was that crack? I looked up to see all my tea bags – how very English of me – scattered across the road. I then remembered the camera in the pocket of my Camelbak. Turns out its heavy steel case saved its innards too. I got down to the base where Rolf and David were waiting. I mentioned that I stacked it on the descent and Rolf piped up, "Oh yeah I saw that gravel and thought I might wait to warn you, but then thought you'd be OK."

The incident was the perfect excuse to check into a hotel and what followed was the most wonderful four-course meal.

As with every other day, the morning started with a ride straight up a climb – we'd descend to sleep as the autumn weather at altitude was starting to get a little chilly. The lightweight travel option means altitude becomes your enemy at night, especially if bivvying out. Still aching from the previous day's crash, I rolled out of the hotel and turned left, straight into the next climb. It's a beautiful ravine with steep sides and sunlight catches the leaves as they're changing colour. As I emerged from the ravine the day's brutish climb unveiled itself. While the format of each day remained largely the same – spend all day cycling up a climb, descend to sleep – each new day brought a variety of terrain with some of the most incredible scenery.

And all along the route I kept my eyes peeled, scanning the roads to spot the location of that infamous and memorable scene from *Herbie Goes To Monte Carlo*. When I saw a similar path, the child inside jumped up and yelled "No, don't do it!" But those thoughts are a far cry from my feelings towards the Rally. We were transported to some wonderful roads and scenery, shared them with some wonderful folk, and washed them down with some good food and drink.

The next edition of the Torino-Nice Rally begins on 3 September 2018.

**ONWARD
AND
UPWARD:**

By Matthew Bailey

THE UK NATIONAL HILL CLIMB CHAMPIONSHIPS



With a few scant minutes and a single attempt at setting your best time, nothing boils bicycle racing down to its essence quite like a hill climb.

Britain's unique hill climb season runs through September and October every year. Most events take place in the Midlands and North of England, traditionally – though not always – over short and very steep courses of around a mile in length, with an average gradient in excess of 10%. The format is a simple time trial: competitors set off at one-minute intervals and the quickest to the top is the winner.

Huge crowds attend the bigger events, especially those held in town centres, bringing a whiff of the mountain stages of the Tour de France to decidedly non-mountainous corners of our island. And for sheer intensity the highly condensed action can rival the Tour: the Nationals, which take place on the last Sunday in October, traditionally bring the domestic racing season to an end and so represent one last all-out effort before the first pies and pints of the off-season.

For some it can be an out-of-body experience. For others, it can bring a state of hyper-awareness. Our photographer, Matt Grayson, approached this season with the idea of creating a series of multiple-exposure images. Grayson explains.

"Multiple exposure images look like some digital editing trickery done on a computer, but in fact this is all shot 'live' within the camera on the day. In the age of digital, it made me think more about every facet of a shot than at any time in my 10 years as a photographer. It tells the story in a new way.

"By capturing two moments in one image like this, you capture something of what it feels like to ride one of these absurd, intense races," he continues. "When you're pushing that bike up the hill as hard as you can, it feels like there are aeons between every moment.



A multiple exposure image plays with our sense of time in much the same way, freezing two moments simultaneously and exaggerating the gap between them."

The World's Oldest Bike Races

The first recorded competitive hill climb took place on Reigate Hill, Surrey on 4 September 1880. The date is significant for coming well before John Kemp Starley invented the "safety bicycle" (in 1885) and John Boyd Dunlop patented the pneumatic tyre (1888), meaning that the first competitors swayed up the rough, unmetalled roads of the day aboard penny farthings shod with solid rubber. Consequently, result sheets from early events often record only the names of those who made it to the top – an achievement in itself – and times were not always taken.

This changed as the "safety" took over, making the climbs more manageable, and increasing the number of both participants and events. The Catford Hill Climb, first held in 1887, was far from the first, but has survived to this day, making it the world's oldest continuously staged bicycle race. Last year it drew 127 starters and immense crowds to the leaf-strewn and slippery York's Hill course near Sevenoaks, just 707 yards long (perhaps as a result of its inherently British nature, hill climbing generally uses imperial measurements).

The UK National Hill Climb Championships were first held in 1944 and have taken place every year since, overseen not by British Cycling or its predecessors, but by Cycling Time Trials, the UK's national governing body for TTs.

In the early days the nationals were dominated by Vic Clark and Harold Worthen of Manchester Clarion Cycle Club. Masters of the art of pacing, they prided themselves on "finishing fresh" – starting conservatively and crossing the line with a little left in the tank, having expended just enough energy to head the field. They would certainly have disapproved of the frothing, gurning riders of today, as they attempt to live up to modern cycling's unstylishly lavatorial entreaties to *Empty Yourself and Leave It All On The Road*.

In the years since, many great stars of the road have competed in and won the National Hill Climb Championships. Brian Robinson, the first British rider to complete the Tour de France, took the title in 1952. Tom Simpson was favoured to win in 1957, but was told by an official on the start line that he could not compete as his bike lacked a locking ring. He remedied the omission and was allowed to start, but, furious and flustered, took off too hard and blew up before the top. Simpson suggested sabotage by the CTT, as that same year he had won a competing version of the event organised by the British League of Racing Cyclists. Malcolm Elliott took the title in 1980 at just 19 years old, before embarking on a hugely successful pro career at home and on the continent. And the mighty Chris Boardman – world and Olympic pursuit champion, hour record holder, wearer of the yellow jersey – was champion four years in a row from 1988. Boardman's preparations were as thorough for hill climbs as for his many other great achievements. In the year of his first national title an early-season minor race was scheduled on the nationals course. Boardman decided to participate in order to familiarise himself with the route, meaning a 6am start – the morning after his wedding day.

But the feats of other, less well-known riders are no less impressive. Take Jeff Williams, for example, who in 1982 both won the hill climb title (his third) and became national road race champion – a feat never replicated.

Others are remarkable for their stories as well as their performances. Darryl Webster was national hill climb champion four times in a row between 1983 and 1986, proving unbeatable on a variety of routes, making him unquestionably one of the all-time great hill climbers. However, Webster had no affection for the discipline, repeatedly and loudly declaring his loathing for hills and being dismissive of the event's history.

His sole motivation was money, specifically the bonuses and generous expenses he was paid for winning hill climbs by his sponsor, Jack Fletcher, owner of Trumanns Steel and the force behind the wealthy Manchester Wheelers team that dominated British cycling in the 1980s. Webster would later attempt to build a professional road career, though his revulsion at the prevalence of drugs in the peloton meant his heart was never in it. Despite riding for a Spanish team he continued living in the UK, travelling to and from races on the continent. After a single season he gave up cycling altogether, cementing his status as one of the country's great lost talents.

Stuart Dangerfield was national champion five times in the six years from 1992 to 1997 (1994 saw the sole victory of Jeff Wright, who placed second six times). Dangerfield was also national TT champion six times and broke Graeme Obree's national record over ten miles. A tester from tri-bars to toe clips, he was renowned for his immaculate pacing, invariably riding a negative split – shades of Clark and Worthen's "finishing fresh". Nonetheless, Dangerfield remains little-known and under-appreciated, even domestically. His achievements were overshadowed by Boardman's of the same era and his attempts to achieve selection for international events were often frustrated, the British Cycling Federation (whose funding depended on taking medals) being reluctant to send a TT specialist to international events (thus depriving a road rider of a place on the team) unless he had a chance of winning. The arrival of EPO in the pro peloton made life for Dangerfield harder still – though, in a development not without irony, he did ride the 2004 Olympics after David Millar withdrew because of a doping investigation into his team, Cofidis.

The latest in the line of hill climbing greats is Jim Henderson, who came to the discipline only because, on becoming captain of the Oxford University Cycling Club in 1994, he felt honour-bound to enter as many races as possible, of whatever kind. There being no shortage of hill climbs to take a crack at, he quickly discovered a talent and a taste for the short, sharp, steep stuff. Like Boardman, Henderson took a deeply analytic approach – before his first nationals win, at the Rake in 1999, he rode the route over twenty times to learn the best lines and familiarise himself with all its features.

But even the feats of such greats as Boardman, Robinson, Elliott, Webster, Dangerfield and Henderson don't qualify them for the title of the undisputed greatest hill climber of them all. None can quite compare with the great Granville Sydney, who, bearded and hairy-legged, witty and intense, took the national title six times – more than any other rider. He and his club, the Huddersfield Star Wheelers, were known not only for their Boardman-like meticulous preparation, but also for their teamwork, discussing gearing and strategy, riding a route together to pool knowledge of its details and, on race day, posting team members to give split times at key points on the climb that would otherwise be rendered unrecognisable by the crowds. Unsurprisingly, the Star Wheelers would take the team prize on ten occasions in the 1960s and 1970s.

But what marked Granville out from even the best of his rivals and teammates was his sheer capacity for suffering. After winning his fifth title in 1972 he fluctuated between consciousness and delirium for fifteen troubling minutes, all colour gone from his skin. The following year, when he took his sixth and final title, it took longer still before he recovered and was able to recognise his surroundings and teammates. Clearly this was a man equal to any of the pain cycling could generate. But, for all its extremity, cycling can offer nothing to compare with the banal sufferings of everyday life. On Valentine's Day 1974, at the height of his extraordinary powers, Granville Sydney committed suicide.

Head For The Hills

The leading riders are not the only stars of the hill climb scene – the great routes are just as fêted, if not more so.

Perhaps the most celebrated climb of modern times is the Rake, of Ramsbottom, Lancashire, which has an average gradient of around 12% and a final murderous stretch in excess of 20% (there is a handrail for pedestrians). Its sheer severity and town centre location guarantee large crowds and an intense atmosphere.

A hill climb has been held on the Rake annually since 1929, but it was in 1991, when organisation and promotion of the event was taken over by the Lancashire Road Club, that it started to become the spectacular institution it is today. Showing admirable entrepreneurship, the club secured numerous generous sponsors, enabling it to offer prizes including cash amounts of up to £1,000 and, on more than one occasion, even a Rolex watch. Unsurprisingly, many top riders have been attracted to the self-styled “Richest Cycling Race in the World” (on a pounds-per-minute-of-effort basis this claim may even be true).

The Rake always attracts huge attention, but it only hosted the nationals for the first time in 1999. Other routes have a deeper history and are at least its equal in difficulty and atmosphere.

The Nick O’Pendle rises from the Lancashire village of Sabden up and along the exposed spine of Pendleton Moor. The setting is no less bleakly atmospheric for being home to the Demdike and Chattox families, ten of whose members were hanged for witchcraft in 1612. Exposed to the October wind and rain, covering 1,300 yards, rising 1,514 feet and crossing a rhythm and spirit-shattering cattle grid at halfway, it is a connoisseur’s course. The Nick has hosted the nationals five times, though not since 1988. A return is surely overdue.

Derbyshire’s Winnats Pass was the original unofficial home of the Nationals, playing host ten times between 1947 and 1977. Combining a natural amphitheatre with a challenging *parcours* – the gradient averages around 10% and touches 20% in places – Winnats became

the blue riband route in the eyes of riders and spectators alike. It would doubtless retain that status had landslides not resulted in the closure of other roads in the area, sending more traffic up the course and putting an end to its use as a competitive route.

The early years of the present century saw a controversial shift away from the traditional short, steep courses towards longer, shallower routes – perhaps with an eye to attracting bigger fields and bigger names from the pro peloton (no less a figure than Sir Bradley Wiggins declared that he would ride in 2007, though he characteristically changed his mind before the event).

The trend began in 2001 when, to general dismay, the course of the Nationals went up the shallow side of Bwlch Penbarras in Clwyd, North East Wales. If the purists were disappointed at the choice of such an easy route, they were horrified at the decision of the organisers not to have the road closed, which predictably led to chaos as rider after rider saw his start time delayed and his progress up the course impeded by vehicles. Winner Jim Henderson had to overtake a tractor and trailer just before the finish line.

The following year’s ride up Derbyshire’s Cat & Fiddle brought more of the same, attracting as it did the likes of Michael Hutchinson, winner of national time trial titles at every distance from 10 to 100 miles, but by no stretch of the imagination a natural hill climber. Hutchinson would finish second. On such an unorthodox *parcours* the otherwise unbeatable Henderson could only manage fourth.

Subsequent races took matters further into standard time trial territory, notably at Cheddar Gorge in 2007, which has a tough start before levelling off to an average gradient of only around 4%. 2011 saw the race move to Long Hill near Buxton in Derbyshire, which averages only 3% over its four and a half miles.

However, since then the event has returned to its roots, as shown by visits to the Rake, Jackson's Bridge (the "home" route of the Huddersfield Star Wheelers, covering one mile at a 10% average gradient), Pea Royd Lane near Stocksbridge, Sheffield (0.7 miles, 11.5% average, peaking at 20%), and the Stang of Arkengarthdale in the Pennines (2.3 miles, average gradient 6.8%, peaking at 18%).

Historically, the winners on such traditional short, steep routes invariably rode a fixed gear. It isn't hard to see why. For one thing, it means one fewer thing to think about as you struggle and suffer. For another, the risk of slipping a chain is almost completely removed. This, of course, is a real issue when pushing hard on a steep incline during such a short event, where there is no time to recover. In 1976, reigning national champion Gareth Armitage unshipped his chain during a clumsy gear change on the Horseshoe Pass in North Wales. Putting a foot down would have meant disqualification, so he took the only route open to him and rode back down the hill while he reattached it. Somehow Armitage still finished fifth. He would win again in 1978.

Much the biggest issue, of course, is weight. At one time, a specialist fixie could be as much as a third lighter than a geared bike. But fixed-wheel frame development slowed and road bikes got ever lighter, so that now almost the whole field runs gears.

It is not only the routes and the machinery that have changed over time: there are no more Vics, Harolds or Granvilles on the start sheet. But the historical roots of the UK National Hill Climb Championships are deep. Many riders come not from an orthodox racing background, but from the UK's long and unique traditions of cyclo-tourism and youth hostelling, discovering a talent for the short climbs almost by accident during immense weekend rides. Many of even the most serious competitors still represent not teams or sponsors but their cycling clubs, some of which have existed for a hundred years or more.

Vic Clark was still attending events until well into his nineties. Three-time national champion, Peter Graham (1958, 1961 & 1962) still organises and commentates (sometimes acidly) on events on the Rake.

Further links to the past derive from the sheer longevity of many course records, meaning that modern competitors are directly taking on the greats when they approach the start line. Most famously, Phil Mason's 1'47.6" on the Catford course at Yorks Hill has stood since 1983 and shows no signs of vulnerability. Boardman's 1988 winning time up the Nick of 3'29" remains unbeaten. And Malcom Elliott set the record for Monsal Dale at 1'14.2" in 1981, before which time it was held by Tom Simpson.

And the place of hill climbing in British cycling history received perhaps the ultimate acknowledgement when the 2012 Tour de France was routed up Holme Moss, one of the great courses, located in the heart of hill climb country on the border of Yorkshire and Derbyshire (and used twice for the Nationals).

But a proper veneration for history should not extend to antiquated attitudes. It is greatly to the discredit of the event and its organisers that women did not compete until 1998 (the first event was won by Nicole Cooke, then just 15), and that CTT did not grant female winners a national title until 2003. Since this absurdity was remedied the women's event has attracted an ever-stronger field, though, like the men's, it has tended to be dominated by a small number of riders. Ann Bowditch of Guernsey and Canada's Maryka Sennema have both won three titles, one fewer than Lyn Hamel (who missed a fifth title in 1999 by less than half a second, losing out to German rider Anna Fischer).



2016's nationals were held on Bank Road, Matlock, Derbyshire, and brought a raft of surprises. In the women's race Sennema could only manage seventh behind convincing winner Lou Bates, who set a new women's course record. True, joint favourite Adam Kenway's victory in the men's race was his tenth of the season, but still counted as an upset given that it came just nine days after he was airlifted to hospital following a serious crash in training. The other joint favourite, Joe Clark, finished a disappointing fifth, while defending champion Richard Bussell could only manage seventh place behind the unknown Leon Wright in sixth. Another newcomer, Kieran Wynne-Cattanach of Rhos-on-Sea CC, excelled himself to come in fourth, with Isaac Mundy of Oxford University CC continuing in the tradition of former club captain Jim Henderson by finishing an impressive second. James Lowden of Team ASL360 completed the podium in third.

This year's Nationals were held at Hedley On The Hill, Northumberland, a new course for the Championships, but one in the old tradition, covering 1.1 miles with a gradient averaging 7.5% and touching 14% just before the hairpin at halfway. With the award-winning Feathers Inn close by, it was a good route for spectators too, who lined its top half and greeted each rider with the traditional cacophony of cheers, catcalls and cowbells.

In the wintry sunshine defending men's champion, Kenway (Raleigh-GAC), put up a brave effort against a very strong field, but was beaten into second place by 2014 winner Dan Evans of Assos Equipe UK, who reportedly averaged more than 500 watts during his winning run of 3'54.3", breaking the course record by a massive fifteen seconds in the process. Kieran Savage (Team B38 / Underpin Racing) completed the podium. Joscelyn Lowden (Lewes Wanderers) took advantage of Lou Bates's absence to snag a maiden women's win by just one second from Mary Wilkinson of Yorkshire RC, who herself was just a second faster than third-placed Hayley Simmonds (Team WNT).

So it goes with hill climbing – ever onward, ever upward, but never entirely leaving the past behind.



CX WORLD CUP PART II:

By Trevor Gornall

BOGENSE, DENMARK



Chris Auld was back on point for us in Bogense, Denmark, as the picturesque harbour town hosted the first ever Danish round of the UCI Cyclo-cross World Cup.



The inaugural race will serve as a test event for the 2019 UCI Cyclo-cross World Championships.





Rain overnight ensured the race on the 2.9-kilometre circuit was a muddy affair, but the contrasting conditions to the previous round in Koksijde didn't have much effect on the outcome, with Mathieu van der Poel once again battling to the top step of the podium. This time Wout van Aert managed second place, ahead of his brother Toon in third. Belgium's reigning Women's UCI World Champion Sanne Cant overcame a dropped chain on her final lap to overtake Britain's Helen Wyman and secure a hard-fought victory. Helen was delighted to be back on the podium after a while. British wunderkind Tom Pidcock soloed impressively to victory in the U23 race.



















BRIEFINGS

**Briefings from the ground
in Girona, and wherever
we travel.**

Bike Breaks Boutique

New shop alert! Bike Breaks, our beloved local bike shop has just extended its reach with a new location, across the street (well, plaza really) with a shop dedicated to the sale of ex-pro kit. Of course, the first up for grabs is for those in the know, that can come into the physical shop, but they also have a selection online. Check out shop.gironacyclecentre.com for all the goods. Or go in, and chat with Dave and Saskia, the owners. Dave can school anyone on mountain bike legends and lore so come prepared.

Sierra Prospect

Pete Stetina's just started his own *gran fondo* out in the Sierra Nevada. Mainly and most importantly, his beer sponsor made bottles with a picture of him on it. We're pretty sure if there is one way to legitimise your event in the first year, this is it. It supports the High Fives Foundation, which works with athletes with life altering injuries. Pete says: "Our main theme in Stetina's Sierra Prospect is 'Choose your Expedition.' With this in mind, we wanted the event to be as customisable to each participant as possible; to help them find what 'striking it rich' in cycling means for themselves.

"We have made sure the entire event can be pieced together with individual preferences. I don't want just another *gran fondo*. I want an event in Lake Tahoe to be what it deserves – quality, epic, fun, inspirational, and a true celebration of all the components both on and off the bike that make cycling great. I want to keep with this theme, however that idea morphs over the years."

Japan Cup

The Japan Cup is for sure one of the best races on the cycling calendar, and seriously under-covered. A punchy 10-kilometre circuit with a 2 km climb in it: this race throws out some awesome winners, and exciting racing every year. Also, the local fans show up with green tea-flavoured Kit Kats for the riders, and tons of other creations. They might be some of the most passionate fans we've come across. This year Marco Canola won the race, and the crit the day before, both in pouring rain, as a typhoon swept up the coast. Good on him for holding form so late in the season, and winning in absolute style. We'd tell all pros and fans to come check this race out, it's a bucket lister for sure.

"Briefings" are brought to you by
The Peloton Brief

www.thepelotonbrief.com
[@pelotonbrief](https://twitter.com/pelotonbrief)



Photography by The Peloton Brief

THE UPS AND THE DOWNS:

ADRIAN
TIMMIS

Russell Jones completes his enthralling series of conversations with former members of the legendary ANC-Halfords team that went to the 1987 Tour de France.

Browsing through some of the memorabilia from his racing days, Adrian Timmis pulls out a results sheet. It's from the *Midi Libre*, dated 22 June 1987. Timmis takes the stage ahead of the likes of Luc Leblanc, Claude Criquiellion, Rudy Dhaenens and Sean Kelly. "Internationally that was ANC's best win. Me winning that stage was the final tick in the box and not long after that we knew we were in the Tour. I think we had two weeks to get ready."

ANC Boss Tony Capper had finally succeeded in the goal he had set for the British team, although behind the scenes it seems the flaw to his 'in at all costs' business plan was that there was never any thought for 'what next?'. The ANC-Halfords house of cards, and indeed a promising 23-year-old from Stoke-on-Trent, were about to witness the whirlwind that is the Tour de France.

"When I started off, I was pigeonholed as a pursuiter," Timmis says, pointing out a Great Britain team patch from the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. "I'd won the Junior Pursuit in 1981. I trained in Newcastle-under-Lyme, rode in the evenings, lots of motorbike stuff, lots of stuff that made you want to spew up afterwards. When it came to the Nationals I was absolutely flying and broke the track record, so yeah, that pigeonholed me as a pursuiter until after the Olympics."

His progress as a youngster was rapid in the senior ranks, picked for the Worlds team pursuit as an 18-year-old, riding the L.A. Olympics the next year. "That was a massive experience, but I left the track despondent. I was done with pursuing, I just wanted to concentrate on the road."



A solid road season followed, with a top five in the Tour of Normandy and selection for the Worlds team in Italy confirming his talent.

"I got carried away that day and did too much work on the front, but both me and Paul Curran rode the Olympics together and we both transferred to the road. I think the same weekend I won the Tour of Lancs he won the Girvan.

"After that I'd planned to go to France as an amateur as Martin Earley had sorted something out for me, but then ANC came along. I turned them down to start with as I wanted to go to France, but then they came knocking on the door again. Their programme was mixed, a bit here and a bit over there, so in 1986 I turned pro.

"I trained like mad over winter, all weathers, snow, hail. I didn't have a turbo trainer back then, so it was just get out in it. My first race with ANC was the Ruta del Sol, the first weekend of February, 200 riders, shit myself. All the Italian pro teams were there, Saronni was there, Kelly was there, Hinault too. I was just shit scared I was going to knock one of them off!

"This was before all those races in Australia like they have now, so Spain and the South of France were massive for early-season racing. Griffo [Phil Griffiths] was DS, I think Capper might have been there too. The kit was a bit last minute, I had one jersey and one pair of shorts, so we had to wash them in the sink every night. We'd had the team presentation the week before and nearly hadn't got the kit in time. Phil ended up dashing to the presentation after picking the kit up straight from the airport. We were behind the stage still and he quickly handed out one jersey and one pair of shorts each.

"Anyway, I think I finished 12th overall and I had two top fives, making the main break in the mountains. Beat Kelly in the sprint, which was a bit surreal when you've been reading about him in the paper and magazines, but once I'd settled in it was fine and Kelly gave me a compliment in Cycling Weekly saying I'd done well.

"It's not like today, you were amateur and then you turned pro, so it was a big step, and it's not like you could do any research either – no Google Maps or Strava to have a look at the profile of the hills. Other than the experience of Graham Jones and Steve Jones, those guys had ridden those races, you were riding blind. You just turned up the day before and were given the race manual.

"But 1986 was the first big push by Capper to get in the Tour, he had a dream and he did it in the end. They'd done a little bit the year before, Joey had been up there, so that helped us to get back into those races – Paris-Nice, Gent-Wevelgem, Amstel Gold, Flèche Wallonne. We had a Belgie guy help us get the contracts and we had someone in Spain too. A lot of it was on a wing and a prayer but that was the way it was back then. I suppose we were lucky to get invitations to those races, bit like a domestic Brit team today suddenly getting an invitation to ride the classics.

"I've got a photo from that Gent-Wevelgem taken from the back. It was howling winds that year and all you can see is probably six echelons up the road and I'm in the last one. I remember it wasn't too bad for about 100 km until you turn left on the coast just after a feed, I think I had the musette wrapped around my neck for the next 10 km, should've just binned it. We turned left and it was just 'bang', echelons and tramlines everywhere."

Returning to the UK, ANC dominated the domestic scene, Joey McLoughlin winning the Milk Race.

"I always liked working for people and the Milk Race is one of my favourites of all the races I've done. It's your home race and there's not many two-week stage races any more for amateurs. Wales and the North Yorkshire Moors, they were always good stages, tough as hell those days."

Timmis took time off after the National Championships due to sickness, returning for the late-season Nissan Classic.

"I always loved racing in Ireland too, tough roads, heavy roads. It was huge then, peak time for Kelly and those crowds were unbelievable. Every town you went through it seemed everyone was out to cheer, kids at the finish asking for your bottles or your jersey, which was always funny.







"That year we had the Gap of Dunloe on a hard-packed road for 10 or 15 kilometres. We were just on skinny tyres and that was when it all split. I made the break with all the big hitters – Bauer, Van der Poel, Teun van Vliet; ended up fourth overall."

Make Or Break Year

Capper ramped up the pressure in 1987, still trying for that golden ticket of a Tour spot.

"Gent-Wevelgem, Flèche Wallone, Amstel Gold, Paris-Nice, Critérium International, Tour of Romandie, Liège-Bastogne-Liège, Het Volk, Three Days of De Panne, all them. In 1987 we were starting to push for the invitation so we were trying to get into the races that would get us noticed. No one was expecting it that year, but Capper and Grippo were behind the scenes pushing and pushing to get us in, they were in contact with the Tour all the time."

With a strong classics season behind him, Timmis went into the Midi Libre in form, his stage win into Beziers and an eventual eighth overall proving so.

"It was probably one of my best stage races, that style of racing too. The Nissan, Ruta del Sol and Étoile as well, that style of racing suited me. But I also proved to myself, in my quiet way, that I could compete with those guys. I was never one to shout my mouth out, it was just me proving to me that I could do it.

"Back then the Midi Libre was the big pre-Tour race, but it wasn't the high mountains, maybe 10 km climbs, stuff like that. They weren't big mountains like I'd find out a month later. Nothing like today, we had no training camps in the mountains, no going recon-ing the climbs. My first experience was literally the first day up the Marie-Blanque, so it really was a baptism of fire."

Out Of The Frying Pan

"It was a hot, hot summer, just sweltering, and it was the first year there was no *patron* in the Tour. You read about how they promenade for five hours and race the last hour – didn't see any of that! It was flat out, 207 riders, and that's a big field racing around the streets of Berlin. The one thing I remember about those early stages was how, with two hours to go, the speed just increased and increased. It was all Superconfex, the sprint team, not like today where you have like ten lead out trains, it was just them and the speed just kept going up and up. Even talking to [Robert] Millar, he was saying the racing was just uncontrollable, everyone thought they could win that year."

Timmis had jumped at the chance to ride the Tour, but the team started rockily.

"We were losing teammates before we even started in a way, some didn't want to be there, which I just couldn't understand. The first week was really tough, but I felt OK, felt I belonged there maybe, but for others it was survival. In that first ten days to two weeks we lost most of the team."

The mountains beckoned, but not before the first real GC shakeup, an 87-kilometre TT to Futuroscope.

"A 25-miler was the furthest I'd done, and that was as a junior. It was hot, and it felt like it was uphill all the way. I think we had a feed in it too, handing bottles up, you don't get many of them in time trials nowadays! I even rode the 10 km back to the hotel, but I could hardly sit down."

The team had a small high when their designated sprinter, Malcolm Elliott, placed third on the stage in Bordeaux. However, the next day, the first in the mountains, would bring everyone back down to reality.

"I'd only ever seen the mountains from a distance, so the Col de Marie-Blanque was my first and you suddenly realise you are not a climber. Being light is one thing but you have to be strong as well. I punctured on the descent, crashed. I think I was using too much front brake as I remember looking down at the tyre and it was a little bit bigger than it should have been.

"I was about to call for service when the tyre blew out. I just ripped myself to bits, I've still got scars on my hands now and I burnt my fingers getting the wheels out. I got going again then there was another crash around the corner, one of the guys went over the edge and got helicoptered away. Everyone was crashing because the glue had melted and all the valves had crept round.

"That is when you realise what it's all about, that we'd only been playing up until then. I was trying to race my best each day, I didn't want to get dropped and I didn't want to be in the *gruppetto*. I think I was trying too much instead of sitting in and settling for 100th, maybe I should have been saving myself for one big day. I was trying to hang on too much each day and that probably caught up with me in the end."

After 17 stages – nine of them more than 200 km long – the Tour finally stopped for its first rest day. Next up, a time trial up Mont Ventoux.

"Yeah, I got carried away, I think we had 15 km first from the start in Bedouin and apparently I was fifth fastest to the base of the climb. I'd pushed hard on Ventoux and I ended up finishing 31st, which was OK, but when I rode back to the hotel I got lost. I'd thought it would be 20 or 30 minutes down to the hotel, turned out to be two hours looking for team vans outside every hotel, and I was just empty with no food. The next day Martin Earley bollocked me for going too hard, saying that I'd pay for it. I did, especially the day after Alpe d'Huez, that was really the only day I didn't think I was going to finish.

"It was full gas from the start. Roche put his men on the front and just drilled it. I actually sat up after a few kilometres, but Paul Kimmage shouted at me to get back in the line, saying it was too early to sit up. It's basically 50 km of climbing from Bourg to the top of the Galibier and eventually it did split, but because it was so early we just had to keep riding and ride as hard as we could over the Galibier. Then it was through and off along the valley road, up the Madeleine, a 20 km climb, and it was only when we got onto La Plagne that the old guys in the *gruppetto* knew we had enough time to back off, that we could lose 10 minutes or whatever and still be within the time limit. I was knackered, I was just so tired and it was starting to catch up with me.

"By then there was four of us left on the team. Capper had disappeared too, never to be seen again. I was dimly aware of the situation, but not how bad it actually was, but by then I just wanted to finish the Tour. Really, if I'd have been told that the team was finishing and I wouldn't have got paid I'd have still ridden the Tour, it's what you dream of."

With a final time trial the day before Paris, Timmis knew he had it in the bag, just looking forward to spotting the Eiffel Tower. "That was probably one of the nicest sights. You come over a hill and finally see Paris and that's when you say to yourself 'Yeah, you've made it all the way around.'"

"There wasn't a big ANC after-party or anything like that, we had a few beers and just drove back the next morning as we had a crit to do in York on the Wednesday. It was a big anticlimax. You are so used to the same routine every day for almost four weeks and all of a sudden it's over and you are like 'What do I do?'. I went out for a ride on the roads around Cannock Chase, some guy caught me up and started chatting with me, asked me where I got my tan from. I said I'd been touring around France for a few weeks, he just said, 'Oh great' and just rode off."

A Changed Man

Timmis was the last of the ANC riders I spoke to about their experiences with the team. Firstly, all of them seem grateful to Capper and Griffiths for the experience they gained during their time with ANC, whether as a shop window for their next step, or simply the chance to ride those top tier races. Secondly, all of them, and other pros I have spoken to of that time, have stated how they considered Timmis to be the real rising star of the squad, but how his career was dampened by that 1987 Tour.

I was supposed to be
the next Robert Millar
– according to the
Guardian that year –
but basically I was
just knackered.

"I was supposed to be the next Robert Millar – according to the Guardian that year – but basically I was just knackered. I know now that it was just too much for me. Even at the time there were other riders who were my age but they were better looked after and better prepared. Maybe if someone was guiding me, looking towards the future, like today a new pro would have been asked to climb off after ten days, just get the experience of a mountain and that's it, but no one said that to me and it never even crossed my mind. I was never going to climb off – it was the Tour de France.

"Based on what we know now it wasn't the best in the long run as I was never the same afterwards, and that's being honest. I probably had chronic fatigue before that word was out there, plus looking back, mentally, and physically, I was just up and down.

"I had no coach at that time and I'm my own worst enemy as I keep too much to myself, I should have had someone. I know more now about sports psychology, but I can't remember that word being spoken of back then."

With ANC-Halfords in tatters, he didn't think long when a contract came in from Roger Legeay's Z-Peugeot, joining his former teammate and inaugural Tour of Britain victor, Joey McLoughlin, on the legendary French team.

"I had a two-year contract, but it didn't go well that first year. My head wasn't constant. I'd moved to Belgium and had an apartment. Joey was meant to stay with me, but he ended up coming home because he had a knee issue. This was before the internet and mobile phones and stuff like that, so I was on my own for quite a bit. As I said, just up and down mentally and physically, so towards the end of 1988 Legeay said he didn't want me for the year after. I was young, naïve, didn't know what to do, I think it was all in the small print of the contract.

"I'd had a couple of results but I was not the same, I think the Tour did finish me off. It took a lot out of me and I didn't search for help to find a way out of it. That's me being honest now. Maybe I haven't been honest in the past about that, the mental side of things – I've never talked to anyone about before."

Signing for the Raleigh-Banana squad upon his return to the UK, Timmis continued to struggle for consistency, continually swinging between form and sickness. "I'm not a Kelly, you could throw anything at him and he never gets sick. Maybe I overdid it at times and then I'd get ill." Timmis lost his spot on the Raleigh team as they switched focus from the dwindling road scene to the new mountain bike series, a terrain Timmis was actually very at home on.

"I'd trained all winter for the 1990 season, but probably because I was depressed my head had dropped off and I couldn't be bothered to go down to the first road race of the year at Eastway. I'd done the odd mountain bike ride with Dave Baker and Tim Gould in the Peaks, so Dave said I should go and do the first of the National Points Series mountain bike races. Simon Burney (Gould and Baker's Peugeot team manager) gave me my first pisspot helmet and lent me some wheels for my Swinnerton mountain bike. I ended up finishing second to Gouldy – I don't think any of the commentators knew who I was for a few laps!"

Like other domestic professionals, Timmis juggled the two disciplines with some success for the next few years, eventually pulling the plug towards the end of the 1996 season.

"I'd been going really well in 1995, I won a TV crit, I won two National Points Series mountain bike races, but I don't know. Maybe it was the monotony of the daily training, maybe I should have talked to someone about it. Maybe I was depressed and that had been underlying for quite a few years and I was just not talking about it. I think a lot of sportspeople go through it, you live in a bubble and it's not the real world, and when part of it is not working and you don't have a group of people around you to help then you don't know how to sort it out.

"I've never been diagnosed, but if I'm brutally honest I've had depression at times throughout my life, maybe I've still got it. I just deal with it in different ways. I ride my bike every day, love the fix of exercise, it keeps me mentally healthy. I'm not an ex-pro that needs to go out for three to four hours to get that, I'm happy with 20 to 30 minutes.

"I now know that there might be a little bit more to the reason why I was so up and down all the time too, I've since been diagnosed with an autoimmune problem. It's called Sjögren's syndrome. I never used to spit that much on the bike and at night I'd get a really dry mouth. I was tired all the time, but weren't we all? I had some tests eight or nine years ago and they noticed something in my blood. Because of it I have a low blood count, my haemoglobin was 10 or 11 and my haematocrit was 38 [The World Health Organisation considers adult males with haemoglobin levels below 13g/dl to be anaemic and normal haematocrit levels to be within the range of 40-54%], plus from a child I've always had a bad back too, trapped nerves that reduce the power, but I suppose I've always just got on with it. It's funny, doctors have told me I shouldn't have been able to do what I did on the bike, maybe it was never meant to be."

Fit Yourself Fitter

Although retiring from racing, Timmis never really left the sport, drifting into a bit of DS-ing here and there, eventually finding his place helping others.

"I did a bike fit for someone, and this is where the internet has its pluses, someone asked online on a forum and I got a recommendation. This is before bike fitting got really popular, probably eight or nine years ago, and it just snowballed from there. I use an online booking system and in eight years there's probably been less than 14 slots not taken. I like the fitting, and I know it makes a big difference for people. I don't use any fancy gizmos, I've got a few of them, but any fitting tools should be there to back up the fitter, not to be used to fit. It's a bit like me going to B&Q and buying all the best carpentry tools and suddenly calling myself a carpenter – it all needs to be used in the right way. Bit like a physio, they are watching you as you walk through the door. I can tell by looking at the bike what we need to do before that person even gets on it."

Among the old racing memorabilia Adrian has his old ANC-Halfords team bike, which fell recently back into his hands.

"I'd sold it in 1988 and had regretted it ever since. Six years ago someone contacted me on Facebook to say that they had it. He'd raced it as a junior and it had been damaged, but he'd had it repaired and resprayed.

"Anyway, I made him a deal, got it back. Got it sprayed, got the decals made. The orange Turbo saddle was the original one that took me around France, but there's no orange Benotto tape around anymore. So I went on eBay to see if I could find any and the next thing there's some guy selling orange 'ANC-Halfords' Benotto tape in Chesterfield! He actually sent me an extra roll once he knew who I was.

"Three years ago for my 50th I rode it up Alpe d'Huez, 28 years to the day since I rode it in the Tour. I had my old ANC jersey and my old Oakleys as well. Coming down was the best though, you forget what steel is like, just so much fun. You could nail it into every corner and it just soaked the road up. It was just fun, I had the biggest grin."

Sjögren's syndrome is an autoimmune disease that affects the moisture producing glands of the body. The commonest symptoms are dry eyes and a dry mouth but it is often associated with fatigue, muscle and joint pain, and depression.



POSTCARD
FROM

KÜHTAI

Innsbruck is a phenomenal place to ride a bicycle.

In every direction out of the city there are mountains. Big ones, with those uncannily perfect road surfaces you seem to get in Europe.

Why is that, by the way? Why do European countries have brilliant tarmac and no traffic, while Britain's byways are chock-a-block with four-wheeled tin cans and crumbling away at the edges? Oh, I see.

To the west of the city is perhaps the most spectacular climb of them all, the mighty Kühtai Saddle, which rises from 500 metres above sea level to a lofty 2,050 metres of altitude. The foot of this climb is just 10 kilometres from the city centre. Think about that for a second. What could you ride to within 10 km of central London? More London, mainly. Not quite as far as Croydon, which is still most definitely in Horrible London. A ride of this length from Manchester's heart would get you as far as Denton, made famous as the location of many grisly murders in *A Touch of Frost*, but home to exactly zero high mountain passes.

And did I mention how you get to the start of the road to Kühtai? It's a dreamy scoot along a segregated bike lane that skirts the River Inn. Of course it is. Because Europe.

Unbelievably, I am here climbing Kühtai in the company of Leon van Bon, three-time Grand Tour stage-winner and third at the Worlds in 1997. Van Bon and I are here with a group of other journalists to sample the riding in the Tyrol, ahead of the UCI Road World Championships which will be held in Innsbruck next year. Van Bon is a photographer now, as well as a bike tester for Holland's *Fiets* magazine. Some people get the worst jobs.

I say 'in the company of', but on the lower slopes Van Bon rises out of the saddle and kicks with the consummate ease all born bike riders have, gliding off out of sight, leaving the rest of us to make our own way to the summit, in pairs or solo.





And did I mention how you get to the
start of the road to Kühtai? It's a dreamy
scoot along a segregated bike lane that
skirts the River Inn. Of course it is.
Because Europe.

I enjoy the peace and solitude for a bit. Then I disturb the peace and solitude by playing songs through my phone's loudspeaker, with the butt of the phone poking out of my jersey pocket just enough to let me hear the strains of Father John Misty.

I'm turning the pedals and admiring the view. This is not a day for pushing through the burn or counting watts. I'm no ornithologist, so bear with me when I say 'a big bird' soars overhead. If I was put on the spot, I might go further by classifying it as 'one of those big birds that eats other birds', but that's as much detail as I can give you. I watch it hover above the road for a moment, eyeing up its next miniature mammalian meal.

All of a sudden, a yellow van roars past me. There has been no other traffic on this road, and the contrast of the sudden noise is stark. Kühtai is a ski station, so of course in the summer it is closed. Anyone who has ridden the Tourmalet from Sainte-Marie de Campan will attest to just how lifeless a shut-down ski station can be. There's no reason to go there, and certainly no reason to get there in a hurry.

I am perplexed for a moment, but the van is soon out of sight and forgotten.

I go back to enjoying the scenery. The climb is steep at the beginning, but it rises and then falls, making you work for your elevation then snatching it back quite cruelly. Eventually though, it levels out a bit. I wave cheerily to the trip photographer as I trundle along this welcome flatter section, no doubt ruining his artistic shot intended to capture the 'spirit of suffering'. Looking ahead I can see the last parts of the climb. It is a magnificent place. Quiet, lonely and beautiful.

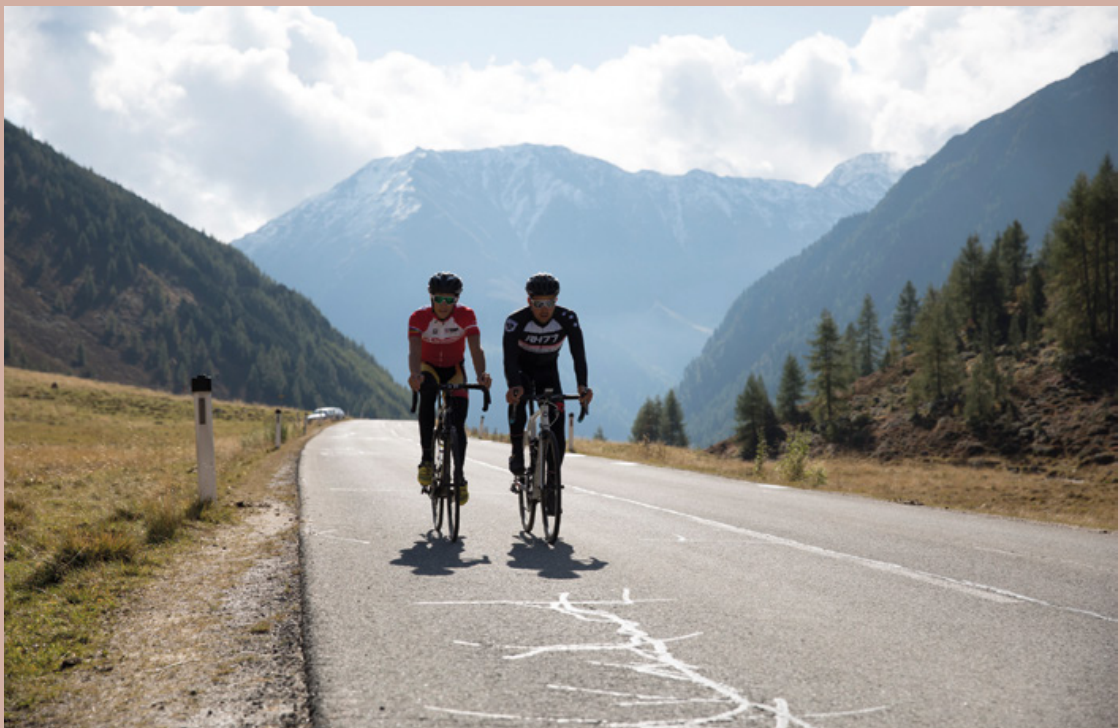
Eventually I reach the top and see the van that ripped past me. The driver is out of the cab and faffing with something attached at chest height to a lamp-post by the road. I realise he is putting up a bus timetable. The clear plastic door that protects the paper from the rain is open as he pulls out the old sheet and replaces it with a fresh one from his van. There are no other people in sight. Quite who he expects to use the bus, timetable or no, is beyond me.

You see people do some strange things when you're riding a bike, I think. And then I go and find Leon van Bon, who has clambered off up some scree to try and get a better photo of the view back down the way we came.









CONQUISTA.CC

