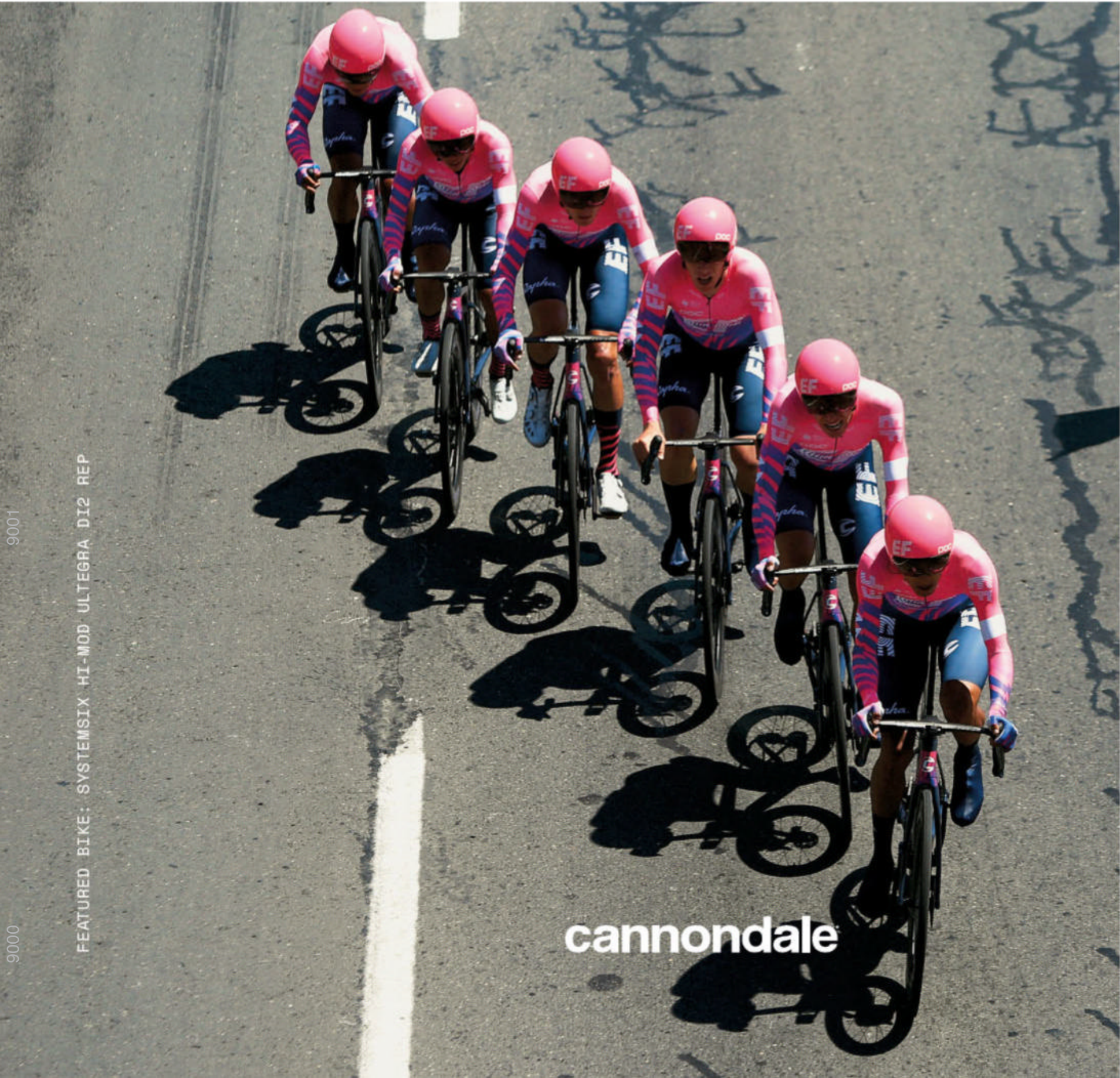


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TOUR DE FRANCE



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Pro cycling

THE TOUR REVIEW ISSUE

TADEJ POGAČAR

How the youngest victor since 1904 turned the Tour on its head

PRIMOŽ ROGLIČ

His heartbreaking defeat, and why he can come back stronger



SAM BENNETT
Ireland's green jersey hero

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GOOD BREAKAWAY?

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HOW LIZZIE DEIGNAN
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PREFACE

ISSUE 274 / NOVEMBER 2020



**EDWARD
PICKERING**

EDITOR

Well, we got there. A Tour de France which we thought might not even happen got all the way to Paris. Not only that, but it was a cracker. Eventually.

I'm fascinated by what makes a good race. My preference is for unpredictability, emotional engagement and open racing, which meant that I found the first 19 days absorbing, like a good Test Match, rather than exhilarating. Jumbo-Visma were going to close the race down, in the style of Sky/Ineos, and I thought Primož Roglic was imperious. The Jumbo modus

operandi didn't have me jumping out of my armchair, but there were some interesting sub-plots.

For example: stage 7, which started with Bora duffing up Sam Bennett and Deceuninck, and ended with Ineos and Jumbo putting Tadej Pogacar out of contention for the yellow jersey, so I thought. Or Bennett giving as good as he got and outriding Peter Sagan for the green jersey. Or Sunweb, who came to the Tour with a bold and innovative strategy and were rewarded with three stage wins.

But then came a turnaround the likes of which I have rarely seen in cycling. From the moment that very early graphic suggested that Pogacar had already taken 12 or 13 seconds out of Roglic, a few kilometres into Planche TT, I was transfixed. It was the greatest end to a Tour de France since 1989, and it turned the race into one of the all-time classics. It wasn't just the excitement of watching Pogacar. It was how the experience made me feel. I'd spent 19 days thinking Roglic was a robot, and suddenly he was humanised, in raw defeat.

Two months ago, we were thinking that the Tour might not happen. Now we've been privileged to watch one of the greatest ever editions. I hope you enjoy our review of the race as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Ed P.

HIGHLIGHTS



HOW THE TOUR WAS WON

My in-depth analysis of the 2020 Tour de France, held under the most unusual circumstances and with the most unexpected finale. See page 28.



TADEJ POGAČAR

Alasdair Fotheringham was in France watching as the 21-year-old Slovenian wunderkind won yellow and turned the Tour on its head on the final day. Page 40.



SAM BENNETT

How the Irishman became the top sprinter of the Tour, winning two stages plus the green jersey. Sophie Hurcom followed his progress. Page 114.

Images: Petit-Tesson (Roglic), Steele (Pogacar), Poujouat (Bennett) / all via Getty.

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TADEJ POGAČAR

*How the young Slovenian
saved the best until last*

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GALLERY

THE WORLD'S BEST CYCLING PHOTOGRAPHY





Tour de France Stage 6, Mont Aigoual

3 SEPTEMBER 2020

Ineos Grenadiers lead the peloton up Mont Aigoual, one of the highest points in the Cévennes, where the impressive views extend across to the Alps, Pyrenees and the Mediterranean. Despite advice from race organisers for fans to stay at home, the (mostly masked) crowds came out to cheer on the peloton as it passed by. Michał Kwiatkowski and Richard Carapaz set the pace for their leader and defending Tour champion, Egan Bernal, who is third wheel. Behind, Adam Yates in the yellow jersey is followed by the conspicuous team jerseys of Jumbo-Visma. Primož Roglič, to the right of that group in his Slovenian national champion's jersey, is closely marked by Tadej Pogačar in the white jersey. Up the road, Alexey Lutsenko of Astana won the stage, surviving from a strong breakaway that also included Greg Van Avermaet and Nicolas Roche. It was the first time that Mont Aigoual had been used as a summit finish by the Tour, and the climb is famous as the setting in Tim Krabbé's book *The Rider*, where a semi-fictional race takes place on it. In reality, while the breakaway raced for their lives, the GC riders marked each other out and rode together to the top.

Image: Gruber Images





Tour de France Stage 13, Le Puy Mary

11 SEPTEMBER 2020

No, it's not Dutch corner on Alpe d'Huez. On a surface that looks more like a chessboard than a stretch of mountain road, the leading three riders surge to the Pas de Peyrol, beneath the Puy Mary peak. They ride past a rowdy orange-clad group of fans, marking each other as they go. With camper vans and cars banned by the organisers, any fans who wanted to watch the race pass by had to trek up the 5.4km climb by foot. With just 800 metres to go, and a gradient that steepened to 18 per cent on the bend, Dani Martínez of EF Pro Cycling sets the pace ahead of Bora-Hansgrohe duo Lennard Kämna and Max Schachmann, the last men standing out of a large break that had over 15 riders in it at one point. Schachmann had initially attacked but after being chased down by Martínez, who towed Kämna up on his wheel, he was the first to be dropped with 700m to go. Martínez then outsprinted Kämna in a tactical coup over the Bora pair, for what was the Colombian rider's first grand tour stage victory.

Image: Chris Auld





Tour de France Stage 17, Col de la Loze

16 SEPTEMBER 2020

The effort of race leader Primož Roglič's attack is etched across his face as he climbs the vertiginous Col de la Loze. He is chasing Miguel Ángel López, who had launched the day's biggest offensive with 2.5km to go, while attempting to gain more time over Tadej Pogačar, who can be seen chasing further down the road. The climb had punishing ramps of 18 and 24 per cent inside the final kilometres, and at over 2,000m above sea level, every pedal stroke was made to feel that bit more difficult in the thin air. Despite only looking to be a few metres behind Roglič, the gradient of the road meant that Pogačar was actually more than 10 seconds back on his compatriot, a gap that would expand to 15 by the line. It was the first time since the crosswinds on stage 7 that Jumbo-Visma had managed to distance Pogačar.

Image: Gruber Images

PROLOGUE

PROCYCLING: AT THE HEART OF THE PELOTON



➔ COBBLED SEASON HAS A NEW LOOK

Spring classics races turn into autumn

WRITER SADHBH O'SHEA

In a world where life has been turned on its head, it is only apt the cycling calendar follows suit. Here we are entering October, the Tour de France has happened, the Giro d'Italia is starting and we're just reaching the cobbled classics. The relentlessness of October 25, with two grand tours, a monument and the first women's Paris-Roubaix seems like the fevered nightmare of a cycling website editor.

Having come to a halt in March shortly after the opening weekend, version two of the cobbled season will look a little different, though the UCI has done its best to

maintain the rhythm of the schedule. There are some differences with no opening weekend repeat and no E3 or Dwars door Vlaanderen.

Despite the efforts to reflect the spring calendar, it will still feel strange for many fans to sit down in October to watch Flanders and Roubaix. October does have its advantages and the potential for challenging weather conditions will give the races more of a classics vibe than we might have had at another point in the year.

"It's getting colder now and windy, so it suits better than June"

▲ The cobbled climbs of Flanders will be bereft of fans when the peloton finally contends the spring classics... in autumn

Sep Vanmarcke tells *Procyling*. "In September and October you have the Worlds and Lombardia so you have some classics feelings.

"Some bad weather conditions could be possible, especially if you think about Roubaix. I think that's a scenario that not one rider who is a pro now has experience of. It would be special for everybody if that happened."

As much as the weather may add to the authenticity, covid-19 restrictions will mean many fewer fans on the road side. At the Tour of Flanders, the climbs will be shut to spectators to encourage fans to watch from home. Like the mountains at the Tour de France, the Flanders hellingen are like an amphitheatre for the sport as fans cheer their favourite gladiators from the road side.

"It's just an extra dimension that we won't have," says Vanmarcke. "It's such a hectic race and with the atmosphere and the public on the side of the road you get motivated

4

Big races on Oct 25: Giro, Vuelta, and two Paris-Roubaix



“My story with the Tour has been pretty topsy-turvy. But to finally be going into Paris on the podium is the icing on the cake”

Richie Porte reflects on his dream podium finish at the TOur, page 88

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE
10.11.20

even more. Some riders can make mistakes because they get too excited and do an effort that they regret afterwards.”

In addition to the general weirdness of it all, the helter-skelter calendar means that the riders have taken a hugely varied approach to build their form. With the Tour de France and the Giro Rosa both in September, many contenders already have a grand tour in their legs. Others, through choice or circumstance, have taken a different path. Vanmarcke has probably raced less than most due to his team’s decision to contest only WorldTour races during the season reboot.

“I am curious about it,” Vanmarcke says. “Normally after a grand tour you have the extra gear in your legs. They have the advantage of having done a three-week race but then they have already asked a lot of their body. Some people will be good until October and some will slow down. Then you have riders like me that didn’t do the Tour. It’s a different build-up because you don’t have the grand tour feeling afterwards but you can still manage to train more towards the classics rather than training towards the Tour.”

The Tour de France has shown us it is possible to race in a bubble and

“Some bad weather conditions could be possible, especially at Roubaix. That’s a scenario that not one rider who is a pro now has experience of”

Sep Vanmarcke, EF Pro Cycling

keep it from the outside world, but it will still be a massive challenge as the coronavirus pandemic rages on. Vanmarcke has taken extra precautions by driving to all of his races, even to Plouay in northwest France.

The strange season provides us with uncertainty about form, but the early season races were an

opportunity to see who has come out of lockdown better than others. Annemiek van Vleuten was flying until she broke her wrist at the Giro Rosa. She’s unlikely to let that get in her way and, if she’s recovered, she will be a big threat. Trek-Segafredo have also been on strong form and the dual talents of Lizzie Deignan and Elisa Longo Borghini could be formidable.

In the men’s peloton, everyone will be watching out for Wout van Aert, but it remains to be seen if he can maintain his Tour level. Fellow cyclo-cross contender Mathieu van der Poel has had a much less race-heavy build-up, but he has also looked in mean form. It may end up being a classic classics season.

◀ Vanmarcke is anticipating an unpredictable classics season



SOPHIE HURCOM
DEPUTY EDITOR

SAFETY MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

What will it take for real action and change to be made to ensure cyclists’ safety in races? Remarkably, the spate of horrendous incidents over the summer don’t seem yet to have been enough. The kind that saw Fabio Jakobsen left in a coma after his high-speed crash at the Tour of Poland. Or Remco Evenepoel with a fractured pelvis and lung contusion after careering into a ravine at Il Lombardia. Or Max Schachmann with a broken collarbone after a car drove onto the course in the finale of the same race. Or a mountain descent at the Critérium du Dauphiné that ensured that Primož Roglič, Egan Bernal and Thibaut Pinot all started the Tour de France battered and bruised, that Steven Kruijswijk missed it altogether, and which Tom Dumoulin called “a disgrace”.

On August 25, the UCI said it was “reinforcing its inspection at events” and announced a “major overhaul of safety conditions for riders”. But here we are, a few weeks later, and incidents such as this were still happening. At the Tour of Luxembourg in September the riders refused to race after conditions were so poor on the opening day - cars parked on both sides of the road, including a bus. Then on stage 5 it got worse when a truck somehow drove onto the course and a number of riders went down. Thankfully no one was seriously injured, but it’s beyond shocking how it was able to even happen. The Tour of Luxembourg, remember, is a 2.Pro-ranked race, the level below the WorldTour.

Procedures should have been implemented after the incidents in August. In 2017 the UCI appointed ‘technical advisors’ whose job is to attend WorldTour events (2019 for Women’s WorldTour events) and, among other things, check the conditions of the race routes. It doesn’t seem to be enough. Crashes are a part of cycling but riders shouldn’t be put in unnecessary and unavoidable danger. The UCI is responsible for cycling. It’s their responsibility to change things.



CLASSICS SCHEDULE

Some races are missing, but the overlap with the Giro and Vuelta will make the autumn classics schedule a packed one

RACE	DATE	TYPE
Gent-Wevelgem	October 11	Men and women
Scheldeprijs	October 14	Men
Tour of Flanders	October 18	Men and women
Driedaagse Brugge-de Panne	October 20	Women
Driedaagse Brugge-de Panne	October 21	Men
Paris-Roubaix	October 25	Men and women

COMMUNIQUE

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Trucking hell

A lorry on the course at the Tour of Luxembourg caused a major crash, where a number of riders went down. The vehicle was parked on the corner of a climb on stage 5, and was one of a series of incidents to raise safety concerns at the race which also led to a rider protest on stage 2. The UCI said the incidents would be reviewed at their Management Committee.

“I do not have, and have never had, anything to hide”

Nairo Quintana spoke out after his hotel room was raided by the French police during the Tour de France. Quintana and his brother, Dayer, attended voluntary police interviews following the race. The investigation was ongoing as *Procycling* went to press.



4000

The amount of Swiss francs **Jumbo-Visma** were fined by the UCI for incorrect placing of the rainbow bands on **Tom Dumoulin** and **Tony Martin's** skinsuits during the Tour de France's sole time trial. It capped an already underwhelming day for the Dutch team.



Jumbo-Visma “raced stupidly” according to five-times Tour de France winner Eddy Merckx. The ‘Cannibal’ was scathing about Jumbo-Visma’s tactics at the race, in an interview with *L’Equipe*. Merckx said he could see Pogačar’s win coming from a mile off. The Belgian great suggested that Jumbo should have attempted to drop Pogačar earlier in the race, rather than leaving it to a 57-second gap in the final time trial.

Superman flies away

Astana are set to lose their grand tour leader, **Miguel Ángel López**, at the end of the season due to budget restrictions, it has been reported. López, who has finished on the podium at both the Giro d’Italia and Vuelta a España, and just led the team at the Tour, coming sixth, turned professional with the Kazakhs team in 2015.

7 days

The time Tour de France race director **Christian Prudhomme** spent away from La Grand Boucle after he tested positive for coronavirus on the first rest day. Prudhomme then returned, and was pictured with French president Emmanuel Macron at the finish of stage 17.

Movistar move

The Austrian climber **Gregor Mühlberger** is to move to Movistar from Bora-Hansgrohe at the end of this season. Mühlberger has spent five years at Bora, but is moving to the Spanish team in order to give their GC riders more support in the mountains in the grand tours.

Bernal to Vuelta?

Ineos Grenadiers rider **Egan Bernal** could head to the Vuelta a España later this year after he pulled out of the Tour de France with a back problem. The young Colombian is looking to get his season back on track after he failed in his defence of the Tour. Ineos are already reportedly sending Chris Froome and Richard Carapaz to the Vuelta, so there could be a few leaders.



YATES WINS TIRRENO

Mitchelton-Scott’s **Simon Yates** won Tirreno-Adriatico, as he warmed up for the Giro d’Italia. The British rider won stage 5, which ended in a summit finish, and held off Ineos Grenadiers’ Geraint Thomas in the stage 8 time trial to take the GC title, and famous trident trophy. Other riders that impressed at the eight-stage race included Michael Woods, Pascal Ackermann, Mathieu van der Poel and Rafał Majka.



“I can say that I was closer to stopping than I was to continuing”

Tom Dumoulin revealed that he came close to quitting cycling following a knee injury and bowel problems that blighted him last year, and then the global pandemic. He told Dutch broadcaster NOS that despite finishing seventh at the Tour de France, he still doesn't feel comfortable on a bike.

Bardet suffers haemorrhage

Romain Bardet suffered concussion and a small brain haemorrhage following a crash on stage 13 of the Tour de France. The French rider finished the stage, but was later diagnosed with concussion, raising concerns about the head injury protocol in cycling.

→ Vollerling signs for SD Worx

Highly rated Dutch rider Demi Vollerling is to ride with SD Worx next season, after ending her contract with Parkhotel Valkenburg one year early. The 23-year-old was third at this year's La Course, and joins the team formerly known as Boels-Dolmans.

→ Bike manufacturer merry-go round

BMC are to supply bikes for the Ag2r Citroën team next year, replacing Eddy Merckx. Meanwhile, Jumbo-Visma are to ride Cervélo bikes, and reports say Sunweb are taking on Scott, while Mitchelton-Scott are in talks with Bianchi.

Zeeman kicked out

Jumbo-Visma sports director **Merijn Zeeman** was removed from the Tour de France after he allegedly intimidated and insulted a UCI employee during a bike check on stage 18 of the race. Zeeman was also fined 2,000 Swiss francs.

De Bondt's tricolor

The Belgian federation managed to squeeze their National Road Championships in between the Tour de France and World Championships. Winner in the men's race was Alpecin-Fenix rider Dries De Bondt, who finished six seconds ahead of 11 more riders. Lotte Kopecky won the women's race from Jolien D'Hoore.

€624k

The amount of prize money that **UAE-Team Emirates** and **Tadej Pogačar** won at the Tour de France. Pogačar claimed €500,000 for winning the general classification, €20,000 for the young riders' classification and €25,000 for winning the mountains classification, too.

Van der Breggen in pink

Anna van der Breggen of Boels-Dolmans won her third Giro Rosa title, taking the race lead after Annemiek van Vleuten fractured her wrist in a crash on the penultimate stage. The Dutchwoman also won the title in 2015 and 2017.



LETIZIA PATERNOSTER

The Trek-Segafredo sprinter on the best routes in Italy and the joys of a simple life



Where's home?

I live in Riva del Garda in Trentino, but my home town is Revò in Val di Non. Both are in Italy.

What's your favourite race?

I don't have a favourite race at the moment, but after racing in Belgium last year I got impressed by the mood. And I liked it a lot.

What's your favourite climb?

One to Tenno Lake [in Trentino], a not very long but steep climb, which starts from Riva del Garda, then up to Deva and finally the finish. The climb is really challenging and after a strong effort, you get paid back with an amazing view.

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

In Australia, without any doubts.

What's your secret talent?

My friends say that I'm a good cook. I want to believe them... even if I'm not sure if they are saying that for real or just to please me.

What's the best prize you've ever won?

The silver medal in the Track World Championship [in 2019 and 2020], in the omnium category.

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

Meet with my friends first of all and enjoy time with my family. Personal relations are the most important thing for me. And then, cultivate my passion for fashion.

How do you let your hair down?

I'm a very quiet girl. Although I like to go out with friends, in the little free time I have away from racing, the best way to relax is going for a walk, enjoying nature and my mountains. Or, much more simply,



"My friends say that I'm a good cook. I want to believe them...even if I'm not sure they are saying that for real or just to please me"

to visit my parents and spend time chatting to them. Simple things.

What advice would you give your teenage self?

Make the most of your free time to study, cultivate personal interests and have fun, in an intelligent way. The more the years

go by, the more commitments and responsibilities grow. I think that a young person should be ready for this in the best way.

What's the last app that you downloaded?

Zoom. I needed it a lot during the quarantine period to get in touch with friends and to do interviews.

What's been your toughest day on the bike?

Last year at the Boels Tour; I can't remember exactly which stage. At one point the peloton exploded in a few echelons. I was with my teammates and I had to catch up to the first group. After a considerable effort, we were just a few metres behind and I heard Elisa Longo Borghini screaming, 'Leti, one long sprint to close the gap!' I did it, we closed the gap, but after that effort I wanted to stop and vomit.

What result are you proudest of?

The bronze medal this year in the Track World Championships, in the Madison. The specialty requires a lot of chemistry. My partner did not come [into the race] from an easy period but together, working more on the head than on the legs, we managed to get a result that made us very proud.



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NILS SINSCHEK

The Dutch climber who combines racing with studying business

Who's this guy?
Nils Sinschek is a 22-year old climber/rouleur from the Netherlands, going into his second year at Development Team Sunweb, the feeder team connected to the men's and women's WorldTour squads.

What kind of rider is he?

It's early to say definitively, but Nils is a climber and good time triallist, who has shown promise in some small stage races. He explains: "I'd say I'm more of a time triallist developing into a climber. My explosiveness is not that great, so I don't think I'll be a sprinter in the future." Alongside riding, Nils has also been studying International Business at Maastricht University.



How did he get into cycling?

Just like many of us, Nils watched cycling on television in the same year that a lot of people in the UK did. "It was in 2012 that I started. I watched some of the Tour de France on TV, and I got started on my city bike," he says. Maybe Nils was hooked on Wiggo-mania, too.

What does he think of Sunweb?

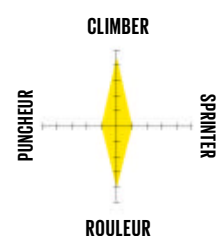
He's had a good time at the German team so far. "We get a lot of chances at Sunweb," he tells *ProCycling*. "We have a lot of expertise in the team,

because it's directly linked to the WorldTour team and the women's team. It's a really good place to develop yourself as a rider."

What of his results so far?

Nils has done well at Le Tour de Savoie Mont Blanc, a 2.2-ranked stage race in southeast France, the last two years. In 2019, he finished ninth in the GC (and fourth in the youth classification), ahead of riders from ProConti level Arkéa-Samsic. This year, he crashed on stage 4 and

RIDER TYPE



Nils has the potential to totally yeet himself up mountains. Now it's up to him to deliver on that in the races

could only finish eighth in the youth classification, otherwise feeling he could have done better. Last year, he finished third in the National U23 Champs time trial, before coming fifth in the road race this year.

What's his 2020 been like?

This could have been his big year, but the few months of lockdown got in the way. "Coming back was about getting used to cycling again, I had to get into the race rhythm, but I think every day I made a step forward."

COACH'S CORNER



ROY CURVERS
COACH, DEVELOPMENT
TEAM SUNWEB

I like working with the younger cyclists at the other end of professional cycling. Nils is doing so far so good. Racing being back is good [for him], but it's still not an optimal situation. Nils is a talented climber and he has a really good TT as well. In the under-23 ranks it's always hard to tell where someone's potential is, or where it will lead to. But I certainly see qualities in Nils' climbing and time trialling. When you look at WorldTour

racing nowadays, these are qualities that are [required] in 90 per cent of races. I see him as a guy who definitely can make it.

If you look at his potential, you can see the form he showed last year and this year at Le Tour de Savoie Mont Blanc, before the crash. The crash actually ruined the race for him. He's not really explosive, but he's an engine, which is why a race like Savoie suits him. At the U23 level he can go for GC, that's for sure.

He has potential in the WorldTour, but it's hard to tell. He's combined racing with university studies, which nowadays is more of an exception than the standard thing. You see a lot of riders at U23 level going full professional from an early age, whereas Nils combined it with his studies. We haven't seen the best of Nils yet, especially because this year he hasn't been able to do a full season. The coronavirus jumped in at a bad time for him.

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OFFICINA BATTAGLIN



ALENA AMIALIUSIK

Canyon-Sram's long-serving all-rounder on growing up in Belarus and life in Italy

I grew up in a very small town in Belarus, where I did artistic gymnastics for four years. Our coach left to go to another bigger city and in my town there wasn't another coach who could train me. After that, I went to athletics and was a runner for a year and a half. One day I won a little town competition, and I met a cycling coach. He asked me if I'd like to come and try and ride a bike. In June 2001, I was 12, I went to the cycling school; it was the first time I'd tried cycling and I've been doing it ever since that day.

We had regional competitions and county competitions – not national championships but those for young children – and I started to win. I was winning in normal running shoes because I didn't have cycling shoes, and didn't have my own helmet. I was riding a bike twice my age that was 20 years old.

In every region in Belarus we have sports schools. At age 15 I got an invitation to go to one of the schools. I had a long discussion with my parents to ask them to let me go there, because I had to go and live in another city. After some evenings talking to them, I said it's my decision and I will take responsibility for it, and my parents said it was okay for me to go. For them, it was a really big decision.

You live in the building for the school. It's a big area with a stadium, school, a place to eat, a place to study, a place to live. It's like the sports army. In the morning we'd have an alarm at the same time every day, at 7am, then

RIDER PROFILE

Born Babruysk, Belarus
Age 31
Turned pro 2012

TEAM HISTORY
2012 BePink
2015 Velocio-Sram / Canyon-Sram

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS
2012 first, La Route de France, stage
2013 first, Tour Cycliste Féminin International de l'Ardèche, stage
2015 first, Gracia Orlová
2015, 2018 first, World Championships team time trial
2011-18 first, National Championships time trial (6)
2011-18 first, National Championships road race (5)

▼ Racing with Canyon-Sram at the 2018 Worlds

you'd do a warm up. After that we had breakfast and would start school, until the middle of the day. Then lunch, then a little time for rest, and in the afternoon we had bigger sessions for training. Then dinner and homework for school. You'd have people making sure you went to sleep at a good time.

I got an invitation from the national team to join the track team at the age of 16. Until 2012 I did only track; track racing was more popular, we had really good track cyclists in Belarus, including an eight-times world champion. On the track, I was doing the individual pursuit, team pursuit, scratch race and points race. On the road we didn't have many athletes, so they would call us up to the road, too.

It's flat in Belarus. The highest point is 340-something metres. We have really good roads for training, with not that much traffic, but in the last five years cycling has started to grow in Belarus. I'm happy with that. We have so many people who are riding their bikes and it doesn't

matter if it's a mountain bike, road bike, or just a normal city bike, but more and more people are riding their bikes. In Minsk, we have 65 kilometres of bike paths in the city so everybody who comes to Belarus has really nice roads to ride through the city and see how beautiful it is.

In 2007, I got my first medal in the European Championships in the ITT on the road. After that I started to think I would like to try racing on the road. In 2011 I won a silver medal in Offida, Italy, in the U23 European Champs road race, and I got some offers from Italian road teams. Then in 2012 I joined Italian team BePink where I stayed for three years.

I moved to Italy when I joined BePink. When I signed with Ronny [Lauke – Canyon-Sram team owner], I decided I really liked Italy and started to look for a place to stay. I moved to another side of Bergamo, to the beautiful Lake Azure, where I live now. It's very close to three airports, and they have really nice roads here for training; I have flat roads, I have really steep mountains and soft climbs, whatever I want. In Belarus we have six months of cold weather and it's impossible to train well at home.

I've raced with Ronny and the team for six years. It's a really important part of my life, it's like my family. I feel so comfortable in the team, I had some really bad years with bad luck and had so much support from the team. Now, everyone has a chance to win races, and we never have only one leader.





DAN MARTIN

ISRAEL START-UP NATION

Sixteen days before the Tour de France started, I found myself flying over the handlebars at 50kph and landing on my bum, to put it bluntly. I barely had a scratch on me but I knew something was up. For the first time in my life, I wiggled my toes just to be sure. Good, they worked, but I couldn't stand up. After what felt like minutes but was probably seconds, the numbness began to subside. I have often said to my wife that I'm fine unless I stay down. So, I got back on the bike and tentatively took my first pedal strokes, as my team-mate Nils Pollit passed. "You okay?" he asked. "No, I broke my ass," I replied. It's strange how you just know.

Fast forward and, as I write this, we are on the way to the last stage in Paris to finish a race that I perhaps should never have started, but with such an inexperienced team, I always knew that my presence at this race was important beyond

► Dan made it into the breakaways later in the Tour, including here on stage 17 in the Alps

results. Starting what is renowned as being one of the hardest sporting events in the world not 100 per cent fit was tough mentally, although with the number of crashes on stage 1 in the rain around Nice, I was soon joined at the back of the peloton by a number of injured comrades.

Until the first rest day, I could feel that I was pedalling differently, lacking muscle activation in my glutes – one of the primary sources of power, especially when climbing. My quads had to compensate, accumulating fatigue and muscle soreness like I've never felt. I felt quite helpless and by stage 8 or 9 I began to question why I was at the race. I am a competitor, and although I was playing a huge role in the team tactically and acting as a road captain, I could not race how I wanted to.

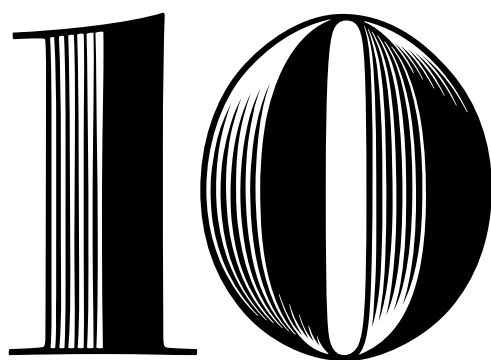
The turning point came on that rest day. Fractures of the type I had

suffered take around four weeks to heal, so by this point I got the okay to see the team osteopath. The relief when he adjusted my blocked vertebra was immense and I immediately felt better. I felt like I had a purpose at the race again.

Entering breakaways instead of riding conservatively is a completely different mindset. Your race is the first hour, not the last. I have to admit to missing the intensity required to fight in the GC but this has also been an enjoyable Tour for me. I didn't get the results that we set out to achieve, but that was always going to be difficult. I've learned a lot about myself as a rider but also having that distance from the GC enabled me to watch from afar and observe, hopefully making me a better rider tactically. All that remains is the ride up the Champs-Élysées, and at least it's only a 10-month wait til the next edition! DM



DAN'S CYCLING HACKS



Forget the roadbook, technology makes race preparation a lot easier

Technology has completely changed the way that we prepare for races. It began with platforms such as TrainingPeaks where you can keep track of training data and even have a prediction of form.

But since the introduction of Strava and Google Earth, they have combined to give accurate information regarding course profiles, road conditions and size as well as difficulty. In fact, the fabled roadbook for each race is becoming largely irrelevant, especially the seemingly hand drawn course profiles that most races provide us with. Now with the VeloViewer platform, which

plots the gpx file for each race on Google Earth, we can start a race knowing exactly what each metre of road looks and will feel like. Strava can then tell you the fastest times on various sections so you can really see how hard the road is.

The good old 'the roadbook wasn't accurate' excuse which some riders used to use is now a thing of history!

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ROGER
KLUGE
LOTTO SOUDAL

I'm satisfied and the team is satisfied with the Tour de France. We had a goal to win a stage; it was pretty simple. And we won two stages. I don't have anything where I can say it could have been better. Maybe the last day in Paris, but there are days where we lose or we can't win – someone else is faster or things didn't work out in the final as we wanted. It was a little bit disappointing to leave without that win, especially as last year Caleb won on the Champs-Élysées – that's the best feeling going home from a race. But as soon as we remember the two stage wins, when some teams didn't get any, we are happy. It was a good Tour.

We lost John Degenkolb and Philippe Gilbert on the first day. We knew with the guys we had left that if we played it well in the final we were still able to win, but the chance would have been higher for more if we had John and Phil. Still, we proved pretty quickly on stage 3 that we can win with a small team. That gave us confidence.

Us lead-out men know that it's pretty simple with Caleb; he needs to be dropped in a good spot with 1km to go and then he finds his way himself. Caleb was quite lucky in those two sprints he won, but he also showed that he was the fastest



or he had the best timing. When you look back at those stages in detail, with 1km to go he was up in front and then it was his decision to drop back, to 10 or 15th position because there was a bit of headwind and it was a little bit uphill. He knew if he waited he could save a bit of energy and that would give him what he needed in the last 200 metres. He timed those sprints to perfection.

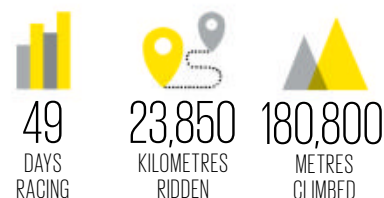
I may have ridden the most of anyone in the wind, even compared to guys who spent time in the breakaways. I was in a breakaway, but behind the bunch not in front! It started in the Pyrenees. Caleb realised he lacked a little bit of threshold power, the climbing legs that he had last year. Then with how it was raced this year and the speed – there were some pretty hard starts in the mountain stages and in the first half an hour with the race for

the breakaway, or if it started on a climb. Caleb is probably the most pure sprinter of all in the bunch if you look at his body. The muscles, if they go in the lactate zone he really needs time to recover from such efforts and that's why he struggled in the first climbs. We'd drop back, two or three minutes behind the grupetto. Maybe in the second hour he'd find his rhythm and recover, but we were already behind.

In the valleys I was pulling; one or two days it was just me and him, but on other days we had Jasper and Frederik and did a team time trial. We'd get the time information from the sports director, but it's the gap to the front that matters to see how many minutes you can lose. It was a lot of calculating but with Jasper and Fred we had good horsepower. For me, until the last day in the Alps I never really had to go on the limit on

the climbs, because I was always dropping back for Caleb. With my experience from other grand tours, most of the time in these situations it's calculations but also feeling, and if you time the whole effort well over the day I was pretty sure we'd make it. Caleb wasn't, especially the day to Lyon he said two or three times we are all going home, but if you start thinking about it, it gets harder and harder to keep pushing and stay focused to finish. I stayed more positive, trying to motivate and say, 'We can do this power to the end, and if you can hang on to me we can make it, no worries.' RK

▲ Roger spent a lot of the Tour racing at the back, keeping Ewan within the time cut





JAMES
KNOX
DECEUNINCK-QUICK STEP

I was a bit busy racing at Settimana Internazionale Coppi e Bartali and Tirreno-Adriatico for most of the Tour de France but I did get to enjoy the last week, from the comfort of my own sofa in my dressing gown all day. And what a finale to the race we had.

Looking back now it's perhaps surprising Pogacar was so overlooked after his monstrous performance at the 2019 Vuelta a España, he also rode an unbelievable stage 20 there, and again he produced an unbelievable performance to snatch the Tour right at the death. It was, of course, incredibly enjoyable to watch Sam [Bennett] finish off the job for green and win on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. For all the teams and sponsors I'm sure it was a huge relief to see the race arriving in Paris too. Despite the pandemic, it was their biggest moment of the year by far.

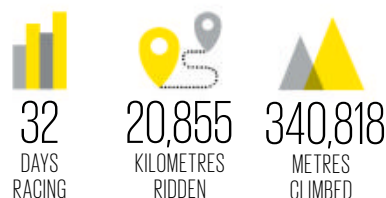
As for me I've been going alright too, a nice change from last month's diary anyway. I felt better and better at Coppi e Bartali, getting stuck in for our young lads João [Almeida] and Andrea [Baigoli] and then found myself mixing it with the big hitters at Tirreno-Adriatico. In all honestly it was a pleasant surprise, and a huge relief. An

important reminder that when I'm on it, I can be knocking about at the pointy end of big races, and to take away seventh on GC was hugely satisfying after a hard block of racing on Italian soil. It was an important lesson, of course, you have to get your head down and keep doing the work and then the results will come.

Not always as fast as we would like but they will come nonetheless. Personally, I think getting the race days in the legs helps me hugely too, something that just can't be replicated in training.

I'm currently en route to Imola, I'm very excited to join British Cycling on one of the rare occasions you get to represent your national team in this sport, something that is always an honour to do. It's also a nice change of scenery; different staff and set-up, of course. I know all the riders but usually never as team-mates. It looks like a tough course, I've yet to see it personally but it is set up for a vintage World Championships, I think.

As for my own expectations in the road race, it's difficult to say. I've definitely got my confidence back and some good legs too, but being there in a race of this calibre and with the race distance is something I've yet to prove. As for who are the contenders, it's a tough one. The winner's going to need the punch to make the difference, but the climbing legs to be there in the end as well. My pick: Wout van Aert. Guess we'll see if I have any idea what I'm on about by the time you read this. JK



HEIDI
FRANZ
RALLY CYCLING

Great news my friends, I have racing to report on for the first time in seven months! I tried my best to keep my check-ins not too mundane over my time away, so thank you for bearing with me. Our eager team arrived in France after various quarantines and fascinating travel adventures and we prepared our stale racing legs for a nice and easy, relaxing, low-key race called La Course. With the only non-Dutch winner at the time, Chloe Hosking, on our squad, it was a huge deal for our team to be on the start line. It's the most prestigious one-day race on the WorldTour calendar and it was our first since Omloop Het Nieuwsblad. No pressure! But really - no pressure.

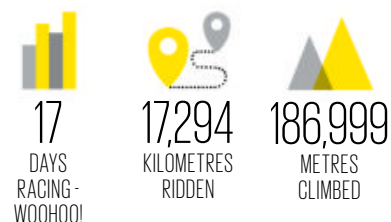
We went into the race with a plan for the win as always, but with no expectations. We knew that the band-aid had to be ripped off. With 96km and the climb only 2km after the start, Chloe told us to refamiliarise ourselves with intensity as much as possible, no matter where we were in the race.

I took my team leader's instruction about familiarising myself with intensity very seriously, so after being dropped on the second lap and finding some company to ride into the finish with, I proceeded to do something I always swore

I would never do: I sprinted for 57th place. To this day I feel ashamed about it and I want to personally apologise to my grupetto of five for my behaviour. I blame Chloe.

In the end, the results on the paper do not reflect the efforts that we made. We came back and locked into our modus operandi: never allowing ourselves to sit in the peloton and let the big teams pull us around. We always involve ourselves in the moving pieces and make an impact on the outcome, and each rider on the team contributes to that. We had caught a glimpse of what we had together in Australia, when on our first day racing together at the Tour Down Under, we won. I could tell that it was going to be an exciting year for our team and even with a seven-month hiatus, we picked it up right where we left off.

Heading to the Tour de l'Ardèche after, I was feeling an excitement for racing that I hadn't felt in a long time. The results that followed validated every bit of potential I felt we had. Two stage wins, five podium finishes, the sprint jersey, and a top-10 on GC. Each rider had the opportunity to get a result and I think that's very rare and special to have on a team these days. I firmly believe that Ardèche is the most unappreciated and underrated stage race on the women's calendar. It's grippy, dynamic, exhausting, beautiful, and on paper rivals the Giro Rosa for difficulty. Give the organisation a few more Euros and a few TV motos, and we have a women's Tour de France. It already exists - but no one knows about it. HF





REVIEW

A VERY SLOVENIAN COUP

For a long time, the 2020 Tour was dominated by one team, Jumbo-Visma, and one rider, Primož Roglič. Until 21-year-old Tadej Pogačar upended the race and created sporting history on a single climb

Writer Edward Pickering /// Image Gruber Images







REVIEW



he warm glow of a mid-September evening in Paris illuminated the final actions of the 2020 Tour de France. In July, the sun sets behind the Arc du Triomphe, its last rays pointing straight through and south east down the Champs-Élysées, but this late in the year the sunset is due west. It cast an unusual light on an unusual Tour, with the podium backlit from a different angle.

Everything was a little different at this year's Tour – the riders had started in Nice, raced 21 stages and reached Paris as planned, but the shadow of covid that loomed over the race and threatened to stop it in its tracks was given expression in the sharp light and long penumbra of the autumnal afternoons through which the peloton raced. It was familiar, but different.

The owl of Minerva, Hegel wrote, spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk. Meaning, history can only be written at the end of the day. Only when we look back, after all is said and done,

► Pogačar leads Roglič on stage 9, but it looked at that point that Roglič would win

▼ The Tour existed in a bubble, with fans encouraged to distance and wear masks

can we understand the meaning of what we have seen. All at the Tour could reflect in the Parisian gloaming that to be there at all was something of a miracle, but they could also reflect on a Tour which was decided in the most dramatic final day of GC racing since Greg LeMond won the 1989 Tour by eight seconds.

We thought we already knew the story of the 107th edition of the Tour. The shape of the race looked to be cast from a mould created by successive iterations of Team Ineos since 2012. Jumbo-Visma were the new Ineos; even better than the original, it looked. They may not have won the pre-Tour Dauphiné, but they asserted themselves there as the strongest team, with the strongest rider, Primož Roglič. Into the Tour, and Roglič looked like the champion elect. Every time the road tilted upwards, a line of riders in yellow and black asphyxiated the race, and while other teams were reduced to one or at most two riders in the final selection, Jumbo regularly counted at least four riders. Roglič didn't put a foot wrong: a stage win at Orcières-Merlette on the fourth day, into the yellow jersey on stage 9, imperious through the Massif Central, Jura and Alps, and he went into the Planche des Belles Filles time trial with a 57-second cushion over his compatriot Tadej Pogacar.

This, we knew, was how the Tour is won. Finally it was Roglič's time. Jumbo-Visma had built, built and built over the seasons, testing their strength against Sky and Ineos in 2018 and 2019, always coming up a little short, but learning, shoring up their foundations and reinforcing their team until finally in 2020, they were ready. They had the right leader, the right team, the right plan and for 95 per cent of the Tour, the right route. The only thing they didn't have, along with the rest of us, was the imagination to see what Pogacar was capable of.

Nobody will ever know exactly how the Tour was lost for Roglič. But we knew roughly when. The 🏆



Images: Kristof Ramon (left), Gruber Images (right).





REVIEW

Slovenian rider rode down the starting ramp of the Planche time trial as a yellow jersey and anointed champion; he struggled up the final ramps a broken man.

He looked like sh*t, Roglic, in those final few kilometres. The impression he gave in the earlier mountain stages was of focused, controlled, seated power. Now he was awkwardly standing on his pedals, all knees and elbows, his face pale with shock.

Many minutes ahead, Pogacar was unleashed. The young UAE rider had hidden in plain sight throughout the Tour, and so he did even during the time trial. He'd looked happy to rely on the Jumbo train through the race, happy to finish second in his debut Tour at the age of 21. But looks, and timing splits in time trials, can be very deceptive. At the bottom of the climb, 30km into the final stage and only 6km from the finish, he was a second behind Tom Dumoulin and 36 ahead of Roglic. Dangerous, even an emergency, but the race was still alive. And at this point, Pogacar was doing a good, but not necessarily a great time trial. Usually the great time trials of the Tour are tracked in real time by the yawning gaps at each split – Pogacar wasn't even the fastest to the second checkpoint.

▼ A devastated Primož Roglič struggles to absorb his shock defeat on the stage 20 TT

But between the bottom of the climb and the finish, Pogacar rode six of the most devastating kilometres ever seen at the Tour. He put 82 seconds into Dumoulin and 80 into Roglic there.

At the finish, television cameras rushed in to bear witness to Roglic's raw, vacant pain. We all wanted and needed to see. But it was also a gross invasion of privacy. It immediately felt like we were seeing a little too deep into his soul as he sat, staring into space, just beyond the finish line. The normal procedure after a time trial for a professional cyclist is: sit down, recover, let the breathing return to normal. Roglic was going through the motions of the physical recovery; who knows how long the mental recovery will take? Tom Dumoulin put his arm around Roglic, but didn't say anything. What could he say?

They say that the truth hurts. The truth was that Pogacar was doing to Roglic what Jumbo had done to the rest of the Tour over the previous three weeks. The race of truth hurts.

Promptly, the inquest began. A lot was made of Pogacar winning the Tour without a strong team. But he had one of the strongest teams ever seen in the Tour de France

giving him what he most needed – a steady fast pace in the mountain stages, and protection all the way from the Pyrenees to the final time trial. It just happened that that team was not his. Pogacar's yellow jersey was built on the foundations of Jumbo's ambitions.

With the benefit of 2020 hindsight, maybe Roglic hadn't been so dominant after all. He'd won that early stage, and from Nice to the Vosges, the only rider to put more than a handful of seconds into him was Pogacar, and remember that the younger

Slovenian had ceded 1:21 in the crosswinds in stage 7 to Lavaur. But nor had Roglic put anything significant into his rivals – he was consistently jabbing, taking seconds here and there, but the knock-out punch never came. It almost seemed like Roglic had held back from killing his rivals, perhaps for fear of the last-week capitulation which saw the 2019 Giro d'Italia prised from his grasp. Roglic gave the impression that every day, he did everything he could not to lose the Tour de France, and he was successful for 19 days. But he put so much into not losing the Tour that he neglected to win it. Jumbo-Visma were like the football team who dominate the match with 75 per cent of the possession but don't score and then lose to a last-minute goal.

And there were signs, if we knew where to look, that this was not to be a Roglic procession to victory. On the eve of the final time trial of the 2018 Tour, the situation was this: Primož Roglic, third overall at 2:24; Chris Froome, fourth overall at 2:37. Froome rode out of his skin to come second to Dumoulin by a second; Roglic faltered and came eighth, 1:11 behind Froome, losing his place on the final podium one day before Paris. But Roglic, a rider who has won a silver medal in the time trial Worlds, has historically struggled to find his best in final-week TTs in grand tours. He has form in this area; or rather, he doesn't.

In the 2016 Giro, he was first in the mid-race TT, but 44th in the stage 15 race against the clock. In the 2017 Tour: 14th in the penultimate day's time trial. 2018 Tour: eighth. 2019 Giro: first on day one and day nine, but 10th on the final day's TT. The 2019 Vuelta, where he won a mid-race TT and the GC, didn't have a TT in the final week. The fifth place he achieved on the Planche des Belles Filles may have been the worst day of his life, but it was his best ever result in a final week grand tour time trial. He simply needed a bigger buffer.



Images: Christophe Petit / Tesson (Roglic), Marco Bertorello (Pogacar) / via Getty.



The time trial absolutely recast the entire narrative of the Tour. We'd spent two and a half weeks observing that the strongest rider on the strongest team was winning the race, and there was nothing to be done about it. Even Bahrain-McLaren asserting themselves in the two main Alpine stages had simply been interpreted as doing Jumbo's job for them.

(Little did everybody know, they were actually working for Pogacar.)

The philosopher Thomas Kuhn's most famous theory was that scientific knowledge evolves not along single narrative lines, through the accumulation of facts, but in revolutions, in which radical theories change the whole way we look at things: paradigmatic shifts.

The 2020 Tour's paradigmatic shift came on La Planche des Belles Filles, but in order to understand the scale of the revolution, we have to look at what came before.

▲ Pogacar was aggressive in the mountains, but his stage 20 TT effort was spectacular

The first real key moment in the GC came on stage 7 when Ineos split the race up in the crosswinds in the last 30km of the stage between Castres and Lavour. Pogacar and Richie Porte were the two biggest names to miss the split; Roglic, Bernal et al put 1:21 into them.

In the Pyrenees, a significant pattern emerged. As expected, Jumbo-Visma squeezed the life out of the race, but on the last climb of the stage to Loudenvielle, the Col de Peyresourde, they left Roglic more or less on his own. No single team had more than one rider in the final GC shakeout. Given Jumbo's much vaunted strength in depth, this had the effect of significantly narrowing their options, and it was clear that Roglic was their one and only leader. They'd anticipated starting the Tour with three potential options – Roglic, 2018 runner-up Tom Dumoulin and 2019 third-placer Steven Kruijswijk. But Kruijswijk crashed in the Dauphiné, while 🟡

Nobody knew exactly how the Tour was lost for Roglič, but we knew roughly when. The Slovenian rode down the starting ramp of the Planche TT as the yellow jersey and anointed champion; he struggled up the final ramps a broken man







REVIEW

Dumoulin effectively ruled himself out of the GC by committing to work for Roglic on the Peyresourde. Roglic with the entire weight of the strongest team in the race behind him still looked at that point like the most likely winner, but it was also true that Jumbo-Visma's tactic of riding hard on the front in all the mountain stages suited all the other contenders. Jumbo-Visma had decided that the Tour would come down to who the strongest climbers were, at the end of the stages. It showed confidence in Roglic, but what was the plan if Roglic was not the strongest? They didn't have one.

When the strongest rider is on the strongest team, the Tour is as close to straightforward as it can be, and the four victories of Chris Froome are evidence of that. But what if the strongest rider is not on the strongest team? Unpredictable things happen. You get 2020, for example. It's just that Jumbo-Visma and most Tour followers didn't know that was the case until it was too late to do anything about it. Jumbo team boss Richard Plugge

casually estimated Roglic's chances of winning the Tour coming out of the Alps at 90-95 per cent. It turned out that 5-10 per cent gave Pogacar a lot of room in which to operate.

In retrospect the decision of Dumoulin and the team to use the Dutchman as the last carriage in the mountain train, instead of keeping him safe as a wild card in the GC is one that Jumbo-Visma may reflect on at length, even if given the information they had at the time, it was understandable. Dumoulin is slowly building mental and physical form, and 2020 looked too early for him to assume the responsibility of leadership, even if he did rise to seventh overall by Paris.

This does give us the prospect in 2021, assuming Pogacar is in good shape, of teams having very good options to beat him - Jumbo and Ineos will both have multiple potential winners, who now know that they won't necessarily beat Pogacar in a head-to-head, controlled race, but in an aggressive, dynamic race, they could have a chance.

► The sprint stages were split two each for Ewan, Bennett and Van Aert (l-r)

▼ Jumbo-Visma's confidence through the race masked a fatal frailty in the TT

Despite the fact that no team was represented in the top 10 on GC with more than one rider through most of the Tour, the battle for yellow through to the Alps remained undynamic and closed. Pogacar's Peyresourde attack took 40 seconds back, but apart from that the favourites were evenly matched, and as the Tour progressed and Jumbo-Visma seemed to gain in strength and confidence, the mountain stages largely fell into the pattern of strict control, followed by a final flurry. Over the Marie-Blanque, Pogacar attacked and took Roglic, Bernal and Landa with him, gaining a handful of seconds on the next group. On the Pas de Peyrol, Pogacar's extended finishing sprint pulled him and Roglic another 13 seconds clear of their main rivals. On the Grand Colombier, the pair put five seconds into Porte in the finishing sprint. The Col de la Loze magnified the differences a little more, and for a change Bahrain-McLaren set the pace. Behind stage winner Miguel Ángel López, at home in the thin air at the top, Roglic put 15 seconds into Pogacar with Porte a further 46 seconds behind. In the final mountain stage, the truce called between the favourites after none could drop the others was extensive enough that Jumbo's Wout van Aert, normally the fourth-last rider in the team's mountain train, could win the sprint for third place.

Pogacar's revolution, when it came, was devastating for Jumbo, who might have drawn a straight line from Nice, all the way through Roglic's gains at Orcières-Merlette, Lavour, Laruns, Pas de Peyrol, the Grand Colombier and the Col de la Loze and projected that it would continue all the way to Paris. That's the thing about paradigm shifts - we can't know that they're going to happen until they do. ▶



Images: Stuart Franklin/Getty (Dumoulin), Gruber Images (right)





Image: Gruber Images

For a Slovenian to win the Tour de France, then, a Slovenian also had to lose it. A small country in central Europe had still provided the race's top two, symbolising a shift in eras.

Change was in the air through the Tour. The Ineos dominance was broken and 2019 winner Bernal looked fallible, before he cracked in the Jura and pulled out in the Alps. The green jersey, dominated for the same number of years by Peter Sagan as Sky/Ineos dominated the GC, saw a new winner. The seven-time winner of the classification turned up to the Tour out of sorts and out of form, but even then he pressed eventual winner Sam Bennett hard throughout the race, and the aftershocks of their attempts to break up the race before the bonus sprints hit the rest of the race hard.

▲ Sam Bennett struck his first blow in the green jersey competition by winning stage 10

The best tactical racing took place in the middle mountain stages, where Sunweb, Bora and EF picked up stage wins thanks to enterprising aggression and being able to put the right rider in the right place at the right time. Sunweb's model, in particular, was interesting in what it said about the way cycling teams are structured. They left proven winner (and former green jersey) Michael Matthews at home, even though he'd have likely thrived in this

Tour. But Matthews is a leader, while Sunweb's strength in 2020 was in a flat hierarchy where riders worked for each other as the race evolved, rather than keeping everything together for a single plan. The plan was that the plan changed every day, and sometimes even then in the course of the stage. Maybe they could have told Jumbo-Visma a thing or two about not going for a single leader. In the end, a lot of plans were ripped up at the Tour de France, none so much as Jumbo-Visma's which lasted 19 stages before its fatal flaw was revealed in a single, monstrous effort by Pogacar.

History, they say, is written by the victors. But it can also only be written with the benefit of hindsight. In the soft glow of a Paris evening, we could finally look back and understand that when the strongest rider is not on the strongest team, unpredictable things can happen. 📺

Between the bottom of the climb and the finish, Pogačar rode six of the most devastating kilometres ever seen at the Tour de France

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WINNER

BOY KING

Tadej Pogačar turned the cycling world on its head with his dramatic last-ditch victory in the 2020 Tour the day before his 22nd birthday. *Procycling* looks at the meteoric rise of Slovenia's new cycling hero

Writer Alasdair Fotheringham /// Image Chris Auld



UAE
TEAM
Emirates

UAE
TEAM
Emirates

UAE
TEAM
Emirates



WHOOSH

FABY



WINNER

P

“He was much keener on doing the Giro this year and then the Tour the next. But I told him the best idea would be to do the Tour now, where with [Fabio] Aru as leader, he’d be able to learn what it’s like without any pressure.”

Matxin’s argument about learning without pressure proved far more successful than the veteran Basque director could have imagined, even if Pogacar’s ability to grasp the essential notions of grand tour racing at a speed that other, far more battlescarred pros, have never managed to master was already blindingly obvious to the cycling world in the Vuelta last year.

But what the world now wants to know is how Pogacar, at 21, riding his first ever Tour de France and second grand tour, managed in a single, spellbinding hour to transform a runner’s up spot seemingly set in stone into a devastating last-minute triumph. In 36.2 kilometres, Pogacar claimed his third stage, recaptured the King of the Mountains (and if we all felt a bit sorry for Roglic, spare a thought for Ineos Grenadiers rider Richard Carapaz, whose own chances of a stage win were sacrificed for a two-day spell in the polka-dot jersey), confirmed his



▲ Not such slow Slovenians: the top two of the 2020 Tour congratulate each other

lead in the white jersey of best young rider and, of course, took yellow. When he said afterwards, “My head’s going to explode,” he wasn’t the only one feeling that way. Sporting heists on this scale are rare.

We can’t just say either from the moment the route was published, that we always knew the final time trial on La Planche des Belles Filles would be critical. As often as not in grand tours, all they do is shake up the lower end of the podium a bit (as indeed happened with Richie Porte and Miguel Ángel López). Nor could we credibly do some clever tea-leaf reading and say that Pogacar’s victory in the Slovenian National

rimož Roglic won’t want to hear it, but Tadej Pogacar didn’t initially want to take part in the Tour de France this year.

“I was talking to Tadej when the season was getting underway, and he wasn’t so interested in the Tour,” Joxean Fernández Matxin, UAE Emirates DS, tells *Procyling*.

GC RESULTS AS A WORLDTOUR PRO



2020
TOUR DE
FRANCE

4th Critérium du Dauphiné 2020



2020
VOLTA A LA
COMUNITAT
VALENCIANA



2019
TOUR OF
CALIFORNIA

4th Tour of Slovenia 2019



2019
VOLTA AO
ALGARVE

6th Itzulia Basque Country 2019



2020
UAE
TOUR

13th Tour Down Under 2019



2019
VUELTA
A ESPAÑA

Boxout: De Waele, Ramos, Graythen, Setterfield / all via Getty.



Championships time trial over Roglic in late June on a similar-ish course was an omen for two months later. Nor yet was this a case of Roglic losing a time trial, pure and simple – as happened in the third week of both the 2018 Tour and the 2019 Giro. A victory by 1:21 over as established a TT specialist as Tom Dumoulin, let alone Porte, Roglic and Wout van Aert, puts Pogacar in a league of his own.

So what happened? Probably, to go back to Matxin's initial explanation, a large part of his

success was due to there being no pre-race expectations. Speaking to *Proccycling* the day before the time trial, Matxin said, "We wanted him to learn in this Tour. And he has learned a lot. In one sense, everything he's managed to do beyond that is essentially icing on the cake – be it a second place, two stages, one or two classifications..."

That absence of pressure extended deep into the time trial. It wasn't just that nobody batted an eyelid when Pogacar rode without a power meter, or that he spent

▲ Pogacar cuts loose in the Planche des Belles Filles time trial, winning the Tour

Friday evening watching the mechanics build up a white bike for his parade into Paris. He already knew that even if he fell apart on the road to La Planche des Belles Filles, he had achieved enough.

"We'll see if I'm in yellow on Sunday, but even if it's this UAE shirt on the Champs-Élysées, it will have been a good Tour for us," he said on the second rest day.

Winning the Tour in a final time trial is not new – Cadel Evans did so against Andy Schleck in 2011. But Pogacar's Tour time trial was different because he treated it with all the insouciance of a 21-year-old with nothing to lose, happy to flog himself into the ground merely for the hell of it. His effort in the opening kilometres, already gaining ground on Roglic, wasn't a strategy – he couldn't hear the times on the race radio because of the crowds, he said, and probably he wouldn't have cared if he had. In a sense, the Planche des Belles

"He was much keener on doing the Giro this year. But I told him the best idea would be to do the Tour now, where with Aru as leader, he'd be able to learn what it's like without any pressure"

Joxean Fernández Matxin, UAE Team Emirates sports director

17

Wins since turning pro for UAE Emirates in 2019

Images: Tim de Vaele/Getty, Gruber Images (main).



Filles stage was his own personal celebration, 24 hours before Paris, of what he'd already achieved.

"I always go into TTs quite nervous because it's a good discipline, I like it, I fight with myself," he said afterwards. Here was a chance any time triallist would seize with both hands: an opportunity on a wonderfully varied course to pound themselves into the ground in the greatest bike race on earth, watched by millions, with no pressure on results. What was not to like?

As for the actual result, after two weeks of a largely straightforward GC battle, whenever the tension mounted it had been very hard to see past the lines of yellow-and-black jerseys of Roglič's killer wasps at the front of the pack. There had been a blaze of a white UAE jersey as Pogacar stomped off the front for a few kilometres in the Pyrenees, a flash of blue as López conquered the Col de la Loze for Astana, a mass

of navy jerseys when Ineos Grenadiers briefly rolled back the years in the echelons on stage 7. But suddenly on a single Saturday, Pogacar eclipsed them all.

"He's a nice young man off the bike," UAE's Andrej Hauptman, widely seen as the 'father' of modern Slovenian cycling, told *Cyclingnews.com* after the race. "But on the bike, he's a shark."

DATA FREAK

Despite the all-consuming nature of Pogacar's Tour challenge this September, his decision to opt for the Tour, rather than the Giro, was largely formed when there was no racing on the calendar at all.

Riding their home race of the UAE Tour, Pogacar and a large chunk of the team's stage racers were forced to spend two weeks in an Abu Dhabi hotel in quarantine. "We saw, first-hand and on the ground, what could happen. We

were already thinking that the Tour might not happen or what our options would be if it shifted," Matxin says. "Tadej up to then had been thinking more about the Giro; he wasn't so convinced the Tour was so good for him."

But that changed, there and then. And Matxin's reason for convincing Pogacar of the opposite was that the

▲ Pogacar tracks Roglič up the steep final slopes of the Col de la Loze on stage 17

▼ As if yellow and white weren't enough, Pogacar was also the King of the Mountains





WINNER

sooner he learned about the Tour for himself, the better.

“The Tour is like crashing on a bike. It doesn’t matter how often people will tell you it’ll hurt, you don’t understand the pain until you’ve actually fallen off. It’s the difference between words and reality,” he says.

“For example, the gap that opened when he lost time in the echelons on stage 7. In other races, he might have lost 10 seconds. But in the Tour, the slightest error or incident is magnified. And you can only learn that first-hand.”

The final decision could not be made until May, when the Tour’s dates were confirmed. But UAE’s main process of hammering out the pros and cons of whether Pogacar should head to Italy or France for his next grand tour was made in circumstances where every angle of the choice could be studied and debated with no time pressure or planes to be caught, not to mention a minimum of external distractions.

Two other key factors had already been covered: whether Pogacar could handle the pressure of taking part in events in theory way beyond his depth of experience, and whether he would be able to take full advantage of flying under the radar to learn as much as possible.

As first revealed in an interview with *Procyling* last year – and repeated ad infinitum this summer in different media – Hauptman had had no doubts about Pogacar’s ability to punch above his weight ever since he witnessed ‘Tamu Pogi’ – little Pogi, as he is known – as a junior, lapping a field of Slovenian senior racers.

Then in 2019 from the Volta ao Algarve to the Vuelta a España, neither event he was also initially supposed to take part in, Pogacar had made it clear no challenge was too big for him. “If Tadej wants to race in the Tour next year as

“He’s 21, he was riding at 2,000 metres. If that’s the first time that happened and all he lost was 15 seconds, that’s a result”

Joxean Fernández Matxin

co-leader, he’ll have a lot of reasons to justify that,” Matxin said at the Vuelta’s finish in Madrid.

“When we did our first ever training camp [in 2019, when Pogacar turned pro], we planned out the next five years for him and in theory he was going to do a grand tour after a year or so,” he tells *Procyling* now.

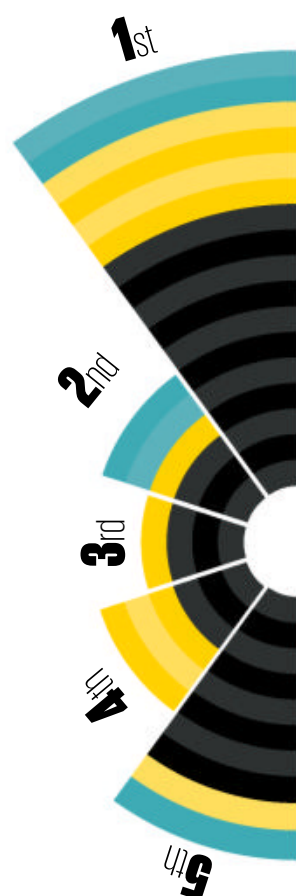
“But after working so well for Diego Ulissi in the Tour Down Under, we put him in the Algarve and then in California and I told him, rather than the 28 days of racing we’d got planned for you in multiple events, we may put you in the Vuelta. No pressure, with Aru as leader, but simply to see.”

At that point, although nobody knew it, the blueprint of using Aru as the main man and Pogacar as his foil that took him to the Tour in 2020 had already been created.

And once he got there? Another key, according to Matxin, is Pogacar’s ability to absorb data. “These days, almost all the races are available to watch, you have Strava and power meters, Training Peaks, wattage, calories, efforts and so on at everybody’s fingertips. That’s great, because if younger riders have a strong character, and they push themselves, then experience is no longer necessary.”

But if those resources are available across the board, Pogacar’s exceptional ability to master a steeper than usual learning curve is what enables him to stand out. “It’s one of those definitions that makes him a champion, being able to process that information fast enough to be able to convert the bad moments into normal ones and the normal moments into excellent ones.”

There was a moment in the Tour’s first week, on stage 7, when it ▶



MAJOR RESULTS

● GC ● Stage ● One day race

1st

Stage, Tour of Algarve 2019
Tour of Algarve 2019
Stage, Tour of California 2019
Tour of California 2019
National TT Champs 2019, 2020
Stage, Vuelta a España 2019 (3)
Stage, Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana 2020 (2)
Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana 2020
Stage, UAE Tour 2020
Stage, Tour de France 2020 (3)
Tour de France 2020

2nd

Stage, Itzulia Basque Country 2019
Stage, UAE Tour 2020
UAE Tour 2020
National RR Champs 2020
Stage, Tour de France 2020
National TT Champs 2018

3rd

Stage, Tour of Slovenia 2019
Vuelta a España 2019
Stage, Critérium du Dauphiné 2020
Stage, Tour de France 2020

4th

Stage, Tour of Slovenia 2018, 2019
Tour of Slovenia 2018, 2019
Stage, Tour of California 2019
Critérium du Dauphiné 2020

5th

National TT Champs 2017
Stage, Tour of Slovenia 2017, 2019
Tour of Slovenia 2017
Stage, Tour of Croatia 2018
Stage, Tour of Algarve 2019
Stage, Itzulia Basque Country 2019 (2)
Stage, Critérium du Dauphiné 2020
Stage, Tour de France 2020



seemed that Pogacar's inexperience had ended up with him being on the wrong side of a split, and which produced the biggest dent in his GC bid up to that point. With 30km to go, when Ineos powered up the echelons, Pogacar ended up caught behind. But although he was able to limit the gap with two teammates – Polanc and Marco Marcato – Matxin strongly denies that this represented some kind of wake-up call for the young Slovenian.

"You don't see what happens because of the TV images, but when he punctures, there are two Bahrain-McLaren riders who fall in front of him and Landa's also in difficulties. By the time Tadej gets back, the echelons were gone, there were roundabouts, crashes and the whole thing turns into a time loss. What happened, happened."

Time bonuses aside, the only other point Pogacar was gapped by Roglic was on the Col de la Loze.

"In 21 days there are always moments when you don't get it right or feel particularly special," Matxin says. "But then he's 21, he was riding at 2,000 metres. If that's

the first time that happened and all he lost was 15 seconds, that's a result that absolutely gets 12 out of 10 marks for me.

"More than the stage wins, I think third on that stage was, up to then, his best result of the Tour."

But in between, too, came a point where according to *L'Équipe's* interview with researcher Frédéric Portoleau, while agreeing that both Roglic and Pogacar were superior to the rest of the field on the climbs, that there was a remarkable degree of homogeneity. "One performance stands out: Pogacar on the Peyresourde, where I estimated his power output to be 467 Watts on a climb timed at 24:35," wrote Portoleau. Like on the Col de Marie-Blanque, Pas de Peyrol, Grand Colombier and La Planche des Belles Filles, Pogacar's ascent of the Peyresourde was a record.

"He's the strongest in the mountains," Roglic himself recognised, which renders it even more surprising that he failed to chase Pogacar in the Pyrenees.

"You would have thought he'd realised it was a great opportunity

▲ Pogacar outkicks Roglic on the Grand Colombier, stealing another four seconds

12

Number of yellow jerseys for Slovenian riders. 11 for Roglic, one for Pogacar

to get some time on Bernal, if nothing else," Sean Yates, the former Sky director, tells *Procyling*. "Not losing those 40 seconds might not have helped him in the final time trial, but it'd have reduced the pressure."

Another key part of the jigsaw, that it seemed like nobody saw Pogacar coming – as Eddy Merckx pointed out scornfully – could be true up to a point, given his team, while impressive enough on the flat stages, had lost its two key mountain workers. Aru and Davide Formolo abandoned and a third, David de la Cruz, raced the entire event with a broken sacrum after hitting the deck in Nice.

While they backed him as best they could, even if Matxin's claim that, "with our three top climbers in shape, they'd have been talking about the UAE train, not the Jumbo-Visma one" sounds somewhat exaggerated, the consequence was simple. Whenever the road steepened, the UAE team were no longer a factor. Except Pogacar.

But if Merckx's scathing analysis of Jumbo-Visma's failure to shake off Pogacar is partly justified, the other teams will have learned their lesson the hard way. With a rider that strong and that versatile – his three stage wins were all taken in different scenarios or stage formats – there will be no granting the young Slovenian a second's leeway in the future.

Can we compare him to another remarkably young Tour winner, Egan Bernal? "No, in my era we always compared them to Indurain and we've ended up screwing over an awful lot of good riders because they weren't Miguel," says Matxin.

"It's the same as saying one person's good looking or another is not: totally subjective. Tadej is Tadej, Egan is Egan. He's a different kind of champion." But he's one the cycling world will have to get used to now – and fast. **P**

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JOURNAL

ENTERING THE BUBBLE

Peter Cossins on the Tour's new normal in the covid-19 pandemic

One of the last things I do before setting off from home in the French Pyrenees for the grand départ in Nice is to give my forecast for the Tour de France to a website I work for. Top three? Dumoulin, Bernal, Roglic. Chances of the race reaching Paris? Eighty per cent. I check the predictions made by the other journalists. No one else thinks the Tour has better than a 50-50 chance of reaching its scheduled finale in the French capital.

I put my comparative optimism down to living in France and witnessing first-hand the government's very effective, if slightly late response to the threat of covid-19 by locking down the whole country for several weeks. However, when I stopped for a lunch break just to the east of Marseille, it struck me that it might have been the result of living in the Ariège, half the size of Yorkshire but with only three per cent of that county's population. In short, there aren't many people where I live and the virus had hardly made any inroads. Suddenly, I found myself in a situation where everyone was masked up and, for the first time, I felt quite vulnerable. This sense was heightened by the fact that Nice had been declared a red zone where cases of the virus were on the rise.

I felt reassured when I reached my hotel – gel at the door, staff in masks, although this second precaution did underline to me how much I depend on seeing a French-speaker's mouth when trying to decipher what they're saying. Out on the streets, I quickly became more nervous. A big sign on the edge of the autoroute coming into the city had stated: Masques Obligatoires. It appeared that only one person in two was heeding this regulation. The city's mayor Christian Estrosi had been talking up the fact that the police in Nice had handed out almost 10 per cent of the national total of fines given for not wearing a mask. Yet, as I walked the kilometre or so to the press room, I passed a police station where just a handful of the gendarmes outside were in masks.

Within the Tour bubble, the atmosphere was tense and implementation of the rules was rigorous. If you forgot to replace your mask having taken a drink or left it lying *sous le nez*, a reminder was usually swift in coming. We felt like naughty schoolchildren, but adhering to this rule was vital if the Tour was to continue. The French government body overseeing the response to the covid crisis had insisted on it, in the same way that it had insisted that any team with two positive tests for the virus would be removed from the race. They, and not ASO, were in control, and we, like the Tour, would have to go with the flow. **PG**





GRAND DÉPART

Words Edward Pickering /// Image Gruber Images

UNDER A CLOUD

The 2020 Tour de France held its grand départ in Nice, two months after initially planned. *Procycling* looks back at the uncertain atmosphere of the opening day of the race



GRAND DÉPART





GRAND DÉPART

R

ain in Nice is not quite as rare as an autumn Tour de France, but the deluge which soaked the riders of the Tour and lubricated the roads of the Côte d'Azur on the first stage of the 2020 race summed up the atmosphere of incongruity which surrounded the grand départ of the 107th edition. Fourteen months

previously, in a different era, the Brussels grand départ kicked off in a heatwave; for 2020, overcast skies washed the colour out of Nice and the Riviera.

It was miracle enough that the 2020 Tour, the covid Tour, was taking place at all. Plans of all sorts have been put indefinitely on hold through this year, so for the world's biggest bike race to be running a mere nine weeks late felt like a dodged bullet. The usual festival atmosphere of the grand départ was tinged with unease and trepidation, but while the organisers and French health officials quibbled about what would happen in the case of positive tests, the cycling world breathed a sigh of relief that the race was starting at all.

Nobody looked too far ahead. With Nice designated a covid 'red zone' and infection numbers rising fast around France, the aim for race followers was just to get the first two stages out of the way, then get out as fast as possible. Nice has long been renowned as a place of hedonism and escape; this found expression in the feeling that the Tour should live for the day and worry about the consequences later.

Nice has always been a place apart. Its golden sands and the neighbouring towns along the Riviera coast are separated from the rest of France by the rising uplands of the Alpes-Maritimes and it shares a climate, but little in the way of history and culture, with Provence. It has not even been part of France for that long. Historically, Nice was part of the Duchy of Savoy, then France for a brief period at the turn of the 19th century, then the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont. It was finally annexed again by France in 1860.

The Belle Epoque and then the Swinging Sixties were good to Nice. Its climate and sea views attracted a transient and eclectic mix of Brits, Americans and French. Ostentatious hotels were built on



the sea front, huge villas built in the hills; artists, actors, singers, composers, high flyers and arrivistes made it their temporary home: Matisse, Renoir, F Scott Fitzgerald and Stravinsky spent time there.

It's got a long association with cycling, also. Of course, Paris-Nice has finished here every edition since the first in 1933. Stars of the 1960s like Jacques Anquetil and Raphaël Géminiani raced and trained on the Riviera. The Tour itself used to be a regular visitor – every Tour between 1906 and 1937 stopped here, before the visits dried up – two stages in the 1970s, one in 1981, then nothing until this year's grand départ, save for a single team time trial stage in 2013.

The Tour is first and foremost a celebration and function of French geography – it could not exist without the topography, culture, towns and roads of its host nation. But it is also a travelling city – part of France and separate from it. The imposition of the race 'bubble' by ASO and the repeated attempts to bar fans from climbs and finishes, even as early as Nice, just added to that sense. The Tour was like a guest

◀ Masks and distanced media zones become the norm at the 2020 covid-19 Tour





who was not universally welcome, yet who was wholly reliant on the hospitality of its hosts.

So in every way, the Nice grand départ was a fractious, uneasy start to the Tour. Primož Roglic, Egan Bernal, Thibaut Pinot and Emanuel Buchmann all carried injuries, and the Tour’s entourage fretted about covid protocols. All the while, followers wondered if the very idea of a thousand or so people travelling around France for three weeks was even tenable during a pandemic.

IT DOESN'T RAIN, IT POURS

The locals call it ‘verglas d’été’ – summer ice. It doesn’t rain often at all in this part of the world, especially during the summer months, and 2020 was no different. Riders who live locally scratched their heads, tried to recall the last time they’d been out training in the wet and came up with estimates ranging between two and four months. During that time, cars deposited tiny drops of oil on the road, and every time they braked, a few micrograms of brake pad powder fell. The wind blew dust

▲ The riders tentatively take a corner on the slick Nice roads, under a deluge of rain



GRAND DÉPART

around, and the pine trees leaked sap to add to the invisible and gossamer-thin coating of sticky matter on the roads. To create summer ice, simply add water.

L’Équipe described the roads as an ice rink. The humidity which resulted in dots of rain spotting on the television cameras in the first 20 minutes of the stage turned to a full on downpour less than an hour later. A peloton can dodge or outrun localised rain, but not on a laps-based route – as they began the second lap, climbing away from Nice to the north, the roads were already soaked, and the rain set in.

The first crash picked up by the cameras occurred at just under 100km to go. A Bora-Hansgrohe rider’s front wheel slid out on a tight-ish 90-degree bend in the village of Aspremont, with paint on the road; Nairo Quintana of Arkéa-Samsic also got taken out. It was nothing. A non-consequential glissando at low speed which saw both riders quickly up and away. The problem was, it was contagious.

Shortly afterwards the cameras showed a bloodied Pavel Sivakov riding gingerly down a descent. Julian Alaphilippe went down, though his bike, with a jammed front wheel, suffered more damage than the Frenchman. Along the Promenade des Anglais at the end of the second lap, a more serious crash left a lot of riders on the ground. Less than five kilometres later, a big crash in the peloton. Sixty-five to go: another big crash.

Nice is densely populated – quite a lot of people and houses are squeezed into the relatively small area of land that can actually be built on. The roads are narrow and bend under the pressure of the hilly landscape. In the context of a bike race, it’s not the obvious sharp corners that do the damage – it’s the very small changes of direction forced by riders moving across the road, or width of the carriageway. It might have been fine, except that

STAGE 1

SATURDAY AUGUST 29
Nice Moyen Pays › Nice
156KM

It hadn’t rained in Nice for months. But as ironically as Alanis Morissette sang, the day the Tour de France peloton rolled into town for the first stage of the 2020 race, of course it poured. On a route that looped into and around the city, the heavens opened as the race ascended the Côte de Rimiez for the first time, turning the sky as grey and dark as the tarmac, and making the winding roads treacherous. Soon, riders were falling as quickly and as hard as the raindrops. **Pavel Sivakov**, on his Tour debut, was the first major casualty, falling twice before the finish and ceding chunks of time as well as a few layers of skin. Soon, it was easier to name those who hadn’t hit the deck.

On the second ascent, the riders had had enough. **Tony Martin** - the new patron of the peloton - sat up, spread his arms out wide across the front of the bunch and called a truce. If the organisers wouldn’t neutralise the race, the riders would.

By the finish, so many riders were desperate just to survive, they had little left for a chaotic sprint. Enter **Alexander Kristoff**. Not many had considered the Norwegian as a potential winner, but few sprinters thrive more in adverse conditions and gruelling race than he does, as he showed the same class that won him Flanders and Milan-San Remo, to win the sprint comfortably.



STAGE RESULT

1	Alexander Kristoff		UAE Emirates	3:46:23
2	Mads Pedersen		Trek-Segafredo	st
3	Cees Bol		Sunweb	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Alexander Kristoff		UAE Emirates	3:46:23
2	Mads Pedersen		Trek-Segafredo	+0:04
3	Cees Bol		Sunweb	+0:06



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Alexander Kristoff		UAE Emirates	59
2	Mads Pedersen		Trek-Segafredo	30
3	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	29

STAGE 2

SUNDAY AUGUST 30
Nice Haut Pays › Nice
186KM

The Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur, its domed pavilion designed in the 1870s by Gustave Eiffel, sits near the summit of the Col des Quatres Chemins, east of Nice. In its day, it had the world's largest refracting telescope. You didn't need the observatory's 'grande lunette' to see that **Julian Alaphilippe** was going to attack on the slopes of the col, just before the descent into Nice. After a fairly neutral day in the higher mountains to the north, the stage would be decided among the hilltop settlements - the *villages perchés* - linked by the corniche roads, climbs and descents. Alaphilippe territory, in other words. The Frenchman's team-mate **Bob Jungels** set the pace on the climb, then Alaphilippe attacked, just as he had on stage 3 last year. But while he'd won alone in Épernay in 2019, this year he was followed by **Marc Hirschi**, then **Adam Yates**. Alaphilippe won the sprint in Nice, well ahead of Yates but just a few millimetres ahead of the fast-closing Hirschi. The result put Alaphilippe into the yellow jersey, with pundits wondering whether he was going to reprise his two-week long run in the race lead last year. The Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur enabled the astronomers of the time to get a closer look at the stars, but the Tour was already celebrating one much closer to home.



STAGE RESULT

1	Julian Alaphilippe		Deceuninck-QS	4:55:27
2	Marc Hirschi		Team Sunweb	st
3	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:01



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Julian Alaphilippe		Deceuninck-QS	8:41:35
2	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:04
3	Marc Hirschi		Team Sunweb	+0:07



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Benoit Cosnefroy		Ag2r La Mondiale	18
2	Anthony Perez		Cofidis	18
3	Michael Gogl		NTT Pro Cycling	12



GRAND DÉPART

there was no grip on the roads in the rain. There were discussions at the front of the bunch, and a pissed-off-looking Tony Martin signalled for a neutralisation.

RIDE AS ONE

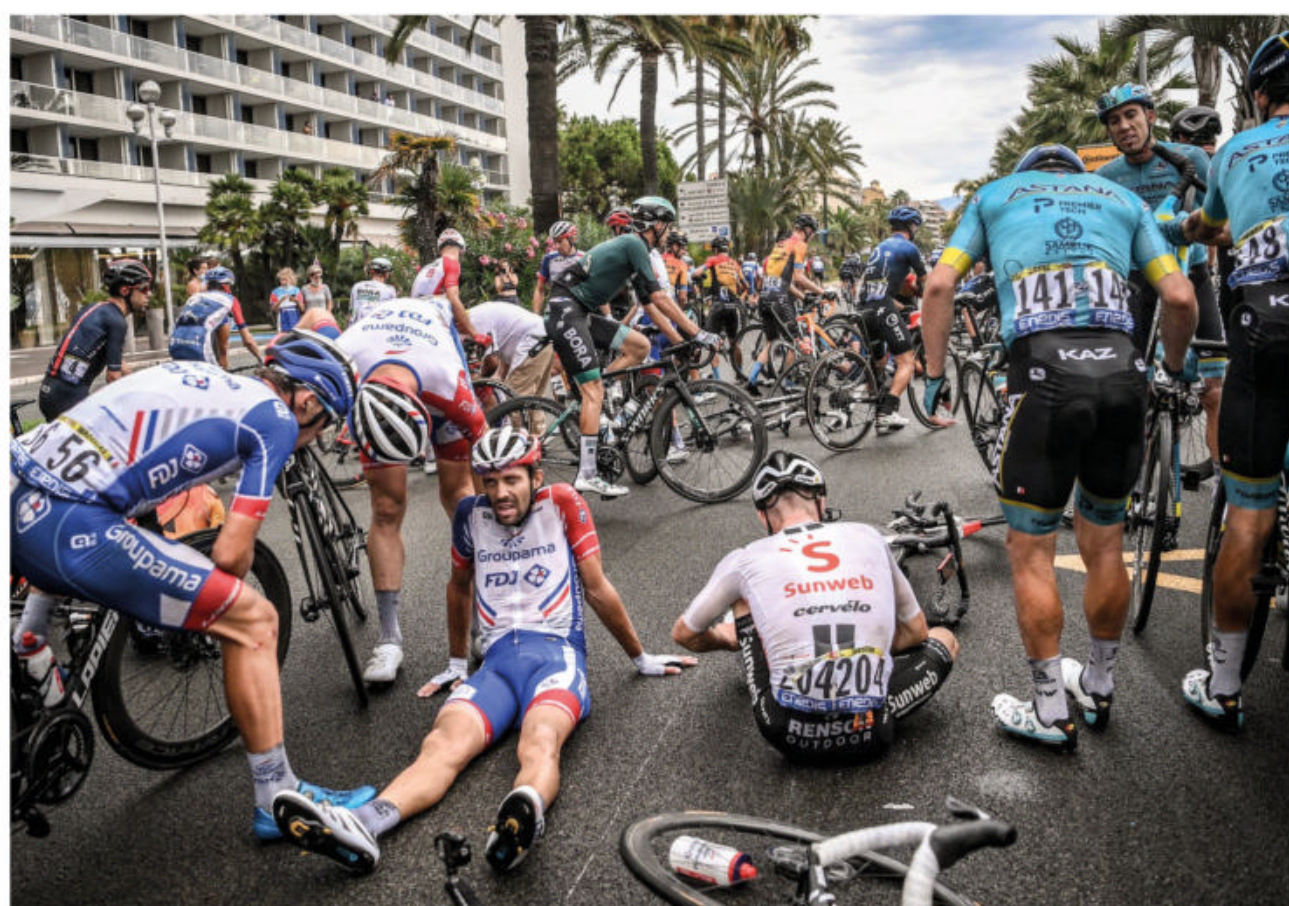
Later on, Alexander Kristoff would take the stage victory and first yellow jersey of the 2020 Tour. And there were still more crashes to come - the one that pitched Pinot on to an already sore back with 3km to go would have repercussions later in the race. However, there was also plenty of debate about fault and agendas. Sympathy largely sat with the riders, even when it became clear that not everybody had solidarity with Martin as he played the peloton shop steward. Astana tried to attack the descent in a manoeuvre they later described as simply keeping out of trouble, but their leader Miguel Ángel López lost his grip and went smashing into a street sign. But mostly, the riders and teams were united in their refusal to race until the finish. It

emerged that the teams had, in the spirit of the times, held an eve-of-Tour group Zoom chat in which they discussed safety.

ASO's instinct, that the race should go on, might have been understandable. After so much uncertainty, there's little doubt that they were keen for the first stage, of all stages, to happen. However, the fact that circumstances outside anybody's control had been the biggest factor in the unfolding of the race was a real-time demonstration of the balancing act that the 2020 Tour has had to be. It was a lesson that was probably not lost on the race as a whole.

But there were other lessons from stage 1 which became clear later. The team that took control, called the neutralisation and rode on the front was Jumbo-Visma. While the Tour had started under a literal and metaphorical cloud and would progress with constant uncertainty, the one predictable thing would become the sight of riders in yellow at the front. The 2020 Tour started as it would go on.

▼ A despondent Thibaut Pinot is among those who fall, just inside the 3km to go barrier



Images: Anne-Christine Poujoulat/AFP via Getty Images.

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KEY FEATURES



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TALES FROM **LA COURSE**

La Course by Le Tour de France in 2020 was the seventh edition of the race, this time on a hilly loop in Nice. *ProCycling* hears the stories of the day from inside the peloton

Interviews Sophie Hurcom // **Photography** Stuart Franklin/AFP via Getty Images



LA COURSE



6TH PLACE

ELISA LONGO BORGHINI

TREK-SEGAFREDO

ASO organised a chartered flight for the riders from the European Championships in Plouay, who were going to La Course. We landed in Nice around 9.30 in the evening of the day of the European Championships. We had one day of recovery, then we went to the race.

Our sport directors Giorgia Bronzini and Ina-Yoko Teutenberg explained the course to us; they went to recon it the day before. There was a chance the sprinters could make it over the climb, but we also knew that Annemiek van Vleuten was really keen to win the race.

We had some cards to play which were me and Lizzie, and we know that we work really well together. In the end, it was all about waiting for Annemiek's attack. We went with six riders that were the strongest up the climb. For me it was pretty clear as soon as we went back to the flat part into the valley, I had to work hard for Lizzie, because we didn't want any other sprinters to get into our group. Vos was really fast and was our biggest threat, and we had to beat her somehow. To me, it was pretty clear that my job was to protect 🏆

▲ Trek team-mates Deignan (r) and Longo Borghini celebrate Deignan's La Course victory

The coronavirus pandemic caused all kinds of havoc in the racing calendar in 2020, especially on the women's side of the sport and not least to La Course by Le Tour de France. Just seven weeks out from the day of the race the event was amended from a circuit on the Champs-Élysées – where the race has thrice been held before – to a lumpy loop around Nice, on the morning of and on the same roads as stage 1 of the men's Tour. On a sporting level, the change probably helped the event, though from a publicity viewpoint, an afternoon race in Paris beats a morning race around Nice.

It was the latest iteration of an event that in seven years has chopped and changed its identity. It has been a circuit race in central Paris with a sprint finish, an Alpine mountainous one-day race to Le Grand Bornand; a two-day race with one mountain-top finish on the Col d'Izoard, followed by a one-day 'chase' and a rolling course with hilltop sprint.

With so little time this year to pack in as much racing as possible, La Course 2020 also came off the back of an intense period for the riders, some of whom had contested the Dutch Nationals, Grand Prix Plouay and European Championships (also held in Plouay) all in the week before heading to the south of France.

It was perhaps no surprise that the riders who enjoyed the most success at La Course were those who had been particularly strong in the races building up to it. Annemiek van Vleuten – who won five races since the restart in July including the European title two days before La Course – was the instigator of the race-winning breakaway on the second ascent of the Côte de Rimiez. But the Dutchwoman wasn't the only rider who'd been showing signs of form. Lizzie Deignan won in Plouay, and she was able to follow Van Vleuten into the lead group, along with five other riders. In the end, Deignan won the sprint ahead of two-time La Course champion Marianne Vos.

"With Lizzie there is a very good connection and we can understand each other very well without talking too much"

Elisa Longo Borghini



LA COURSE

Lizzie and to bring her to the best position to sprint.

Normally, Annemiek goes from the bottom of the climbs because she's really, really powerful so we expected her attack. Lizzie was straight in her wheel; I was a little blocked in the peloton but then I managed to find my way. I went to her – I don't want to say it was easy because following Annemiek is not easy – but I could snake through the peloton and get into the first positions to follow her.

When the break went into the valley after the descent, we already had 1:40 over the peloton. When it was 10k to go we had 1:20. We'd lost only 20 seconds in 12k, so it was pretty clear that if we kept going like this they could not catch us. I had to put my head down and keep the speed high, to avoid attacks earlier than three kilometres to go for the sprint.

With Lizzie there is a very good connection and we can understand each other very well without talking too much. Also, the team car gave us some direction. That helps, because we have two of the best sprinters in the world in the team car. It was not easy to win, but it was really nice to have them because we knew what to do. We knew we had to anticipate Vos to make her start early. Actually, every time the sports director was telling me to attack I was already attacking. It was synchronicity. I had in my mind to attack, and the sport director would tell me to go, and that's amazing. It's because we've created a very good environment in the team and we can work, synchronized together. And sometimes things come out naturally.

It was a complete team victory for Trek, and I want to mention the other riders who were in the roster. Anna, Taylor, Ruth and Loretta, they did a perfect job for us, they protected us, they always put us in the best position, on to the climb and they were always around us. When I say it's a team victory, it really is.



▲ Deignan launches her sprint from the wheel of Marianne Vos (!)

3RD PLACE

DEMI VOLLERING

PARKHOTEL VALKENBURG

I've never been to Nice but I saw the route before the race. When I saw the route I first thought it was a little more a race for sprinters who could survive the climb, because there was such a long, flat part that was straight. I thought it would be really hard to get away on the climb, because the climb wasn't that hard, and then stay away in the part where it was so flat and so straight. I didn't expect so much from this race, and I thought it would be a big bunch sprint. But it all went differently.

The team tactic was to make a hard race so that we at least tried to make a hard race for sprinters,

and that's what I did on the first climb. I tried to stay at the front, and when the pace was a little bit lower I'd go to the front and set the pace a bit higher. My feeling was it was not going well enough, I still saw so many girls around me. But that was what we really wanted to do on the first climb. We would look and if no one was riding, we would ride. The second climb, it was the plan to jump, or jump with somebody else and if that didn't work then we wanted to sprint for me, but I hoped that we could go on the climb.

When Annemiek attacked, I immediately knew that I needed to go after her, because if you don't do it then you have a big problem. At first, I was a little bit stuck in the peloton. Hanna Nilsson, my team-mate, was riding in front of me and before Annemiek went I said to her, now is a good moment to go, go, but she was already in the red zone so couldn't. Then Annemiek went, so I was yelling to her, 'Get away, get away, so I can go.' It took a few seconds to get out

7

The 2020 edition of La Course was the seventh

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LA COURSE

of the peloton then I immediately started to ride and gave it all to make sure I was in the front group.

I knew that Lizzie wanted to sprint. That was also good for me because I couldn't get away anywhere. I immediately knew this would be a sprint, and I was sure it would be a third place for me – maybe I can win from Vos or Lizzie, but it would be really, really hard. The whole time I was keeping them in front of me and looking at them.

17TH PLACE

PAULIENA ROOIJAKKERS

CCC LIV

We had a busy week. We had the Dutch Nationals and Plouay so there was a lot of travelling in the car. I think we did 13 hours in two days to get to Nice, after 11 hours driving from the Netherlands to Plouay. I got to Nice two days before the race and could do the recon and relax.

I did the recon twice, and thought the course was quite hard, especially the first part from the start. It was quite steep, then the last five ks of the climb were less steep – it was a high speed climb. That was quite hard. Then you had a really tricky downhill, I didn't expect that. You had to pay attention and you had to be at the front on the downhill.

I didn't think it was going to end in a bunch sprint. I thought maybe it was possible that after the downhill, if there was a big headwind there could be a group of 30, but not more.

The plan was to be at the front on the climbs, and if there were attacks then we would look at who had attacked and not try to follow everything. My role was to

try to follow the first group with Soraya [Paladin] and Marianne, and the other girls had to watch out in the first lap if there were attacks. Marianne was really strong; she felt very good. It was nice that she could follow Annemiek and had a good race. Soraya and I were in the group behind, so we were in the perfect position if something happened.

The speed was a little too high for me on the climb so I could not really get in the wheels, and missed the move when Annemiek attacked. Afterwards on the climb I was like, 'Oh sh*t, I feel better now than when she went', but I knew Marianne was at the front so I could not work in my group.

I said to Marianne after the race, your group's speed was really high because our group was really riding. She said that Longo Borghini was doing really hard, long and fast pulls on the front. I couldn't do anything in my group, but I heard on the radio that the time gap was getting bigger, it was more than one minute, so I could just sit at the back and follow. A few teams were really riding to close the gap, but it didn't work out. FDJ, WNT and Paule Ka were doing a lot of work. I don't think they stopped chasing until the last few kilometres because you never know if the speed of the front group will fall, if they start attacking or if they are looking at each other. You have to keep going.

It was nice to see that Marianne took second, but I know she was not happy with that. But still she tried her best. 🍷

"I said to Marianne after the race, your group's speed was really high, because our group was really riding"

Pauliena Rooijackers

STAGE

3

MONDAY AUGUST 31

Nice › Sisteron

198KM

After the rain and crashes of day one and the mountains of day two, the Tour sprinters finally gave themselves a decent chance of a stage win in Sisteron on the first Monday of the 2020 Tour. **Cees Bol, Peter Sagan, Giacomo Nizzolo and Sam Bennett** all had as good a run into the finish as could be hoped for, unlike **Caleb Ewan**, who was far back and boxed in when the sprint started. However, Ewan, the most successful sprinter in the 2019 race, slalomed around his competitors and squeezed through narrow gaps in a way that looked impossible, even in slow-motion on the overhead television shots. And the delay, caused by initially holding back and having to shimmy his way through to the front, was to his advantage. A stiff headwind blew back at Bennett, who led through the final 100 metres, as Ewan's late run turned out to be perfectly timed. He filled the tiny gap between Sagan and the barrier for long enough to squeeze past, then sucked Bennett's wheel dry, before coming around him for a spectacular victory. The stage win was his fourth, at the age of 26. By comparison, **Mark Cavendish** had taken 20 at the same age, so Ewan has a way to go to catch up. But he's already showing signs of being able to win multiple stages every year.



STAGE RESULT

1	Caleb Ewan		Lotto Soudal	5:17:42
2	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	st
3	Giacomo Nizzolo		NTT Pro Cycling	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Julian Alaphilippe		Deceuninck-QS	13:59:17
2	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:04
3	Marc Hirschi		Team Sunweb	+0:07



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	79
2	Alexander Kristoff		UAE Emirates	77
3	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	74

STAGE



TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 1

Sisteron › Orcières-Merlette

160.5KM

A day after the sprint trains led the peloton into the finish in Sisteron, it was time for the GC teams to apply similar tactics in the first mountaintop finish of the 2020 Tour. The expectations before the Tour were that Jumbo-Visma would be the most likely team to control things, and they eagerly took that responsibility on the road to Orcières-Merlette, wielding sledgehammer strength. In a 6.7km-long lead-out worthy of any track team sprint, Jumbo's climbing domestiques were burned through before their leader **Primož Roglič** emerged at the front and duly sprinted to the stage win. Just as Sky and then Ineos have in the past, the Dutch team had what looks like the strongest team in the race, and apparently the strongest rider, in Roglič, too. **Wout van Aert** - Milan-San Remo winner turned mountain domestique - then **Sepp Kuss** turned themselves inside out in support of their Slovenian team-mate, in a manner reminiscent of Team Sky in Tours past. Cofidis's **Guillaume Martin** was the first to accelerate from the GC pack with 500m to go with Roglič in his wheel, before Roglič launched his sprint for the line. The time gaps at the top were fairly insignificant. The magnitude of the message sent out by Roglič, however, was anything but.



STAGE RESULT

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	4:07:47
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	st
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Julian Alaphilippe		Deceuninck-QS	18:07:04
2	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:04
3	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:07



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Benoît Cosnefroy		Ag2r La Mondiale	21
2	Michael Gogl		NTT Pro Cycling	12
3	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	10



LA COURSE

31ST PLACE

**CECILIE UTTRUP
LUDWIG**

FDJ NOUVELLE AQUITAINE

I was super happy to win the Giro dell'Emilia [11 days before La Course]. It's always nice to win and I think this one also felt quite special because it is one of the first races I've done for FDJ. The way we rode together was really good. Even though we are so new together, they all trusted me to make a full lead-out into the climb and give all their own opportunities away, and trust that I could finish it off, and give something back to the team. This season might be short, so you have to take every race as if it might be the last one. It felt really good to prove that I could be up there.

The week before La Course, with the GP Plouay and the European Championships too, I came for more. It's a bit frustrating but on the other hand, I know that my shape is good. The week was just super hard; travel, race, travel, race, travel, race.

▼ Uttrup Ludwig missed the move, but helped her team-mate Emilia Fahlin to seventh



This week was so hard, and I was always trying to catch up, catch up. I don't want to come with all these excuses, it was just a hard week. I know I can do more, I'm just hungry for more.

I was expecting a super hard race at La Course when I saw the course. It didn't necessarily look hard on paper but when I rode it on the Friday before, it did. It was just a pity that from the bottom of the climb there were 26 flat kilometres to the finish line. We were riding quite fast that bit, but still that could have been a possibility of things getting together. At the end we saw that the breakaway could hold, and what I think when I look back is, what a pity that we only got to race 100 kilometres. That was the same feeling I got with Plouay and the European Championships. The whole week consisted of 100k races. I feel like there should be some kind of minimum when you do a World Tour race. It should be a certain distance, at least.

I went in a breakaway that went on the first time up the climb. I think it was the right move to follow. But in the end, I was just too dead. I didn't have the legs to follow Annemiek.

That's the thing now with our races, we know that if Annemiek is there, she's going to try to split it on the climb. I think everybody is looking at her - now it's almost weird if she doesn't try to split it on the climb.

We were definitely trying to pull them back, but in our group it was only Valcar and FDJ who were actually doing the chase. Other teams had three riders, like Paule Ka, and other teams had multiple riders, but it was a bit like they gave up. You never know what will happen when there is such a long flat. In the end, Emilia [Fahlin] won the bunch sprint from the peloton, which was super nice. That also felt like nice teamwork. Evita [Muzic] and myself were really emptying ourselves for that.



LA COURSE



56TH PLACE

CHLOE HOSKING

RALLY CYCLING

I went home to Australia as soon as Strade Bianche got cancelled. I just hung out in Canberra from March until August; it's the longest I've been home since I was 18. That was really nice. But when the races started in July I was following from afar and you build up the what-ifs, or self-doubt. Am I going to be at the same level? Am I going to be able to compete with these women when I get back over to Europe? They're getting a head start. I think a lot of them were justified!

After starting La Course straight up a climb, it was a huge shock to the system, but I did go in with realistic expectations of first of all the type of rider I am, and what

type of courses suit me – I had ridden the course and I knew it was not going to be what everybody was saying it was. I actually think I did pretty okay for my first race back – even though I finished nine minutes down. People might look at the results and think, 'What is she talking about?' But I think you need to keep things in perspective, especially this year, it's not a normal year. I have been becoming increasingly frustrated with people who are trying to commentate on this season as if it's normal, because it's not. There needs to be a realisation and an acceptance that nothing about this year is normal, and everybody needs to have a bit more kindness and compassion around everything they're doing.

I didn't have a smooth return to Europe. Australia, at the time, did pretty well with managing coronavirus, but you still had to find a country you could come into that wasn't implementing a two-week quarantine. At the time, when I was booking my flights, France still had a voluntary two-

▲ Hosking is a former winner of La Course, but the 2020 course didn't suit her strengths

6

Six riders ended up contesting the win in Nice

week quarantine and it was really important to me that I did everything above board. So I did a bit of research and I discovered I could fly into Slovenia, go there for two weeks, do a nice block and then make my way to France. But when I rocked up in Ljubljana I was met with confusion by the customs people. They said, 'What are you doing here?' I said I'm here to ride my bike, to train, and they said you can't. As I was flying they had changed their travel advice, and re-implemented a two-week quarantine for Australians.

There were two flights, one to Frankfurt and one to Paris. While Slovenia had changed their travel advice, so had France – they'd reversed the two-week quarantine for Australians. So I said, okay, I'll come to France. It worked out pretty well, I ended up staying at a friends' place for a couple of days while I got my bearings. Then I went to altitude just outside of Nice. In the end it's such a perfect summary of this season; nothing goes to plan, you have to make plans on the fly.

I looked at my Training Peaks data file from the race, and I got a lot of trophies so it's kind of mentally hard when you look at your personal performance and you're hitting good numbers and personal bests, but you still get dropped. It's a great thing for women's cycling, it shows how the level each year is getting better and better. Even if there are complaints about La Course, and how short it is, people still want to show up and they want to have a great race, because it is such a huge platform for women's cycling. And I think the race this year was a fantastic display of that.

I thought it was a really fun course, I can still appreciate a course if I'm not going to win on it. It's a beautiful area here. I was a little bit apprehensive about racing in the time of corona but I thought that ASO did a fantastic job. I never at any point felt like I was put in a difficult position. **P**



Image: Stuart Franklin/Getty Images



JOURNAL

GAME THEORY AND A NICE SPRINT

Why a straight sprint is never a straight sprint in cycling

Cycling is often described as chess on wheels, and when Adam Yates, Julian Alaphilippe and Marc Hirschi descended headlong into Nice on stage 2, they faced a finely balanced endgame. The trio had conflicting aims. They needed to work together to hold off a fast-closing peloton. But they also needed to be ready to turn on each other in order to win the stage. If co-operation stopped too early, they'd be caught. If they co-operated too long, they'd do nothing more than help one of the other two win the stage.

Sprinting in cycling is not like sprinting in athletics. The point of a 100m race is to find the fastest athlete in the field. However, tautologically, the point of a bike race is to find out who wins the bike race. In athletics, each runner starts at the same time, the same distance from the finish, in the same conditions, so it's as close to an objective and fair measure of pure speed as you can get. As cyclists know, there's no such thing as objective and fair in a bike race. The greater a rider's ability to force, fool or coerce others to do the work, the greater the chance of winning.

Game theory studies the strategic interaction between participants in any situation, assuming a certain level of rationality. With 2km to go in stage 2, the gap was 18 seconds. The rational thing to do was to keep working, and they maintained this gap until 1km to go. But while Alaphilippe and Hirschi did short turns, Yates did two long ones, almost 300m each. They started slowing at a kilometre, and Alaphilippe was the reluctant inheritor of the lead. But his saviour came in the form of Yates, who moved to the front at 800m to go and led out the sprint. Yates knew he would be outgunned by the other two, yet he did the work that not only kept them away but also guaranteed his defeat, a decision that might have looked more rational as the Tour went on and he finished ninth overall, spending four days in yellow. Alaphilippe was desperate to win the stage, but his sprint against Yates at the bonus point on the Col des Quatres Chemins betrayed a hunt for seconds which would put him in yellow. Hirschi only wanted the stage win.

In the end, each riders' decisions maintained their chances of fulfilling their goals. Hirschi sat behind, only focusing on the sprint; Alaphilippe had a delicate balancing act of stage win and time gains and Yates kept the three ahead, cementing their time gains. The final result, a narrow Alaphilippe victory over Hirschi, just two seconds ahead of the peloton, showed how finely balanced the decisions had been. 🏆





CONNOR SWIFT

Words Adam Becket /// Image Chris Auld

SWIFT RISE

Connor Swift has gone from racing Tour Series crits to the Tour de France in just over a year, where he proved an unlikely to Nairo Quintana. He tells *Proccycling* about making his debut at the biggest race in the world



he big man-little man partnership is a classic trope of football. Think Kevin Phillips and Niall Quinn tearing it up for

Sunderland in the late 1990s, or John Toshack and Kevin Keegan scoring for fun at Liverpool in the 70s. The big target man would knock down long balls for the little man to nip in and score, a tactic that worked repeatedly. It's seen less in cycling, but big man-little man partnership is a good fit for what Connor Swift and Nairo Quintana have going on at Arkéa-Samsic.

Quintana stands at just 1.67m, while Swift towers over him at 1.9m. Arkéa posted a video of the duo embracing each other after stage 7 of the Tour de France, Swift a whole head taller than the diminutive Colombian who nestles under the Yorkshireman's chin. In the video they smile widely at each other and say, 'Oh my god' and 'Allez' - a few shared words they both understand. What makes the partnership all the more puzzling is that Quintana only speaks Spanish, and Swift only speaks English.

Quintana is from Cómbita, a town 2,825m above sea level in rural Colombia. Swift is from Thorne, just

outside of Doncaster, a town 5m above sea level in Yorkshire, in northwest England. Quintana is a lightweight, diesel climber, Swift is a powerful rouleur, who shows his strength on the flat. The pair couldn't have more different backgrounds, or look any more different, and yet their unlikely partnership combined well at the Tour, nowhere more so than stage 7 from Millau to Lavaur. While other GC riders such as Richie Porte, Mikel Landa, and Tadej Pogacar lost time in the crosswinds, Quintana finished safely in the lead group, with thanks to a big help from his big team-mate.

"I don't speak any Spanish, we just ride off of each other. If it's me and him in the bunch, he'll either point or say left or right, allez or tranquil and then I'll just kind of look behind me, make sure he's there," Swift tells *Proccycling*.

"Then there's always little bit of interaction between one another and it's just a case of moving him up. He was happy with the work for him I did the other day. It just seems to work well, with just minimalistic words that we can say to one another."

Quintana seemed like an odd fit at Arkéa when his signing was announced last year at the Breton-based team. The former Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a España champion was stepping out of the Spanish bubble at Movistar for a completely different experience. It has largely proven a successful move, though, with the Colombian winning at the Tour de La Provence, the Tour des Alpes Maritimes et du Var, and winning a stage at Paris-Nice before racing shut down. He may have failed to impress quite as much at the Tour de France, but 2020 was the year of a refreshed Quintana.

It is a change from the Quintana shown in *The Least Expected Day*, the Movistar documentary about





their 2019 season, where he looks lost and alone in the team he'd raced in since turning professional. In the last episode, Quintana says: "When you're not happy with life, you have to find another way and seek the things that make you happy and motivate you."

The Quintana of Arkéa seems more relaxed and more at ease with himself, and now has a team fully behind him. He certainly seems happier, despite running out of steam at the Tour. Being the only GC rider at Arkéa seems to suit him.

ONE TOUR TO ANOTHER

Swift is no less a surprising fit at the French squad than Quintana, moving from the world of British domestic racing to be with the team in May last year. Last year he could be found racing the Tour Series criteriums for Madison-Genesis, taking the win in the circuit race at Redditch. It's quite a switch from Redditch to riding through the Pyrenees and Alps at the Tour. At the Tour Series, you'd find a couple

▲ Rouleur Swift gets his first taste of the mountains in the Pyrenees on stage 9 of the Tour

of hundred people watching, compared to the millions watching the Tour de France around the world. Swift is only the third Tour Series winner to ride La Grand Boucle, after Mitchelton-Scott's Jack Bauer and EF Pro Cycling's Tom Scully. It is quite the meteoric rise.

Swift is under no illusions about it either, with the Tour being the first grand tour of his career and remarkably just the fifth WorldTour race he has ever started.

"This is the biggest race I've ever done. It's one of the massive sporting events. If I ever have a conversation with a family member that's not really into cycling or a friend or someone that's not into cycling, the first question you get asked is always, 'Oh, do you ride the Tour de France?' In the past it has always been no," he says.

"It's a massive race that so many people know about. Cycling and the Tour de France go together, and it's massive for me to be riding it now. I did two or three rounds of the Tour Series last year and I wouldn't have

"Cycling and the Tour de France go together, and it's massive for me to be riding it now. I did two or three rounds of the Tour Series last year and I wouldn't have thought I'd be racing the Tour de France the year after"



CONNOR SWIFT

thought I'd be racing the Tour de France the year after."

It seems a shame then that Swift has made his Tour debut in this odd year, with fewer spectators and all the covid protections. "After seeing the Tour on TV in previous years, and seeing other people's social media feeds from the team presentation, I can definitely feel that there's not the normal hype and the normal crowd et cetera that I would have expected there to be."

Swift is down-to-earth, and appears to be comfortably dealing with the pressure of his first Tour. His role is not a flashy one - to look after his team leader on flat stages, make sure he stays in a good position within the bunch and stick with the other leaders in sprint finishes. But one can see how Quintana finds his giant of a team-mate useful in the maelstrom of the peloton. "Obviously I've been helping out in a domestique role for Nairo, fetching bidons, helping out when he needs moving up in the bunch and things like that," he says. "I'm happy to make it to the first rest day and I had pretty decent legs on the ninth stage. So I was happy with that."

FROM BRITON TO BRETON

Before his Tour debut, the longest race that Swift had ever finished was the eight-stage Tour of Britain, which doesn't quite compare to the effort required to survive a three-week endurance test like a grand tour. Swift says that the leap in quality is evident in France, but it's not as large as one might think: "There definitely is a jump up in level at the Tour. Especially because you get to the final of the race, and you get guys on teams essentially doing, like, a death turn because they know they're not going to get to the finish line, so they go as hard as they can for as long as they can. When you're in the wheels, and

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

WINS

British National Championships Road Race, 2018

PLACINGS

Tour de France, stage, 18th, 2020
Tour du Limousin, stage, 7th, 2020
Tour du Limousin, 13th, 2020
Tour de Yorkshire, 9th, 2019
Tour de Yorkshire, stage 10th, 2019
Baloise Belgium Tour, 11th, 2019
Tour of Britain, stage 6th, 2018
La Poly Normande, 5th, 2018
Sparkassen Münsterland Giro, 15th, 2019
Velothon Wales, 7th, 2017

▼ Swift enjoys a moment with his cousin, Ineos rider, Ben Swift, before the 2019 Nationals

these guys are WorldTour, the finale of the races is super hard," he says.

"Climbing with these guys, it's not easy, but the level is not a million miles away. Everyone is pretty much at the same level, there are only a few that are above and beyond the rest."

Swift has shown plenty of promise before, not least in winning the British National Championships in 2018 at age 22. The surprise victory, ahead of half a dozen Team Sky and other WorldTour riders, was the first from a rider not at the top level of the sport since 2009.

Swift says the victory was the turning point in his career: "Winning the Nationals is something that put me out there, opened a few doors. It's still my biggest achievement to date, and I'd love to win it again in the future. It was a special day," he says.

Still, Swift's route to the Tour was a convoluted one. It's not often that riders jump from British Continental teams to ProTour or WorldTour teams, with the British scene quite insular, and squads rarely getting the opportunity to prove themselves internationally. Matt Holmes went straight from Madison-Genesis to Lotto Soudal, Harry Tanfield went from Canyon Eisberg to Katusha-Alpecin, and Jack Bauer went from Endura to



STAGE 5

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 2
Gap - Privas
183KM

As an exercise in cycling philosophy, consider: the break. **René Descartes** might have reflected, if he were to create a discourse on the method of road racing, *evadere ergo sum*. I escape, therefore I am. Perhaps **Plato** might have deduced that the perfect form of a bike race consists of a break, a chase, a catch and a sprint. **Jean-Paul Sartre** would surely have posited that bike racers are condemned to be free. The break is so fundamental a part of bike racing that we have taken it for granted. However, the 2020 Tour peloton collectively examined the nature of things and came to a decision that stage 5, from Gap to Privas, would proceed with no break. The long day of absolutely nothing happening gave us the time and mental space to consider profound questions, such as, 'If you have a bike race and nobody is racing, is it a race?' But the lack of action also revealed what we already knew - that breaks on flat days have no real impact on the result. When the peloton finally reached Privas, a sprint broke out, and **Wout van Aert** came off the back of **Cees Bol's** Sunweb train to win and finally give meaning to the day. And then Alaphilippe was penalised for an illegal feed and lost yellow. On the Tour, even when nothing is happening, everything is happening.



STAGE RESULT

1	Wout van Aert		Jumbo-Visma	4:21:22
2	Cees Bol		Sunweb	st
3	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	22:28:30
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:03
3	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:07



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	123
2	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	114
3	Alexander Kristoff		UAE Emirates	93

STAGE 6

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 3
Le Teil › Mont Aigoual
191KM

They call it an échappée royale: a break consisting only of big riders and hitters. No suicide break, this, and twenty-four hours after a rare breakaway-free stage, there was no shortage of riders who saw stage 6 as low-hanging fruit. **Nicolas Roche**, who deliberately lost time the day before - also keen to finally land a debut stage win after a string of top 10s in years gone by - got things going, and was followed by an A-list septet of **Rémi Cavagna, Greg Van Avermaet, Jesús Herrada, Alexey Lutsenko, Neilson Powless, Edvald Boasson Hagen** and **Daniel Oss**. The combination of wise veterans and eager rookies, desperate to win a stage and eager to prove their worth, mixing climbers and diesel rouleurs, blended exactly right. The route also played into their hands; a medium mountain stage with a summit finish too early, and too easy, to really trouble the GC contenders, meant that once the group got a gap it was clear they weren't coming back. On the Col de la Lusette to the finish, with the win from the eight assured, the group splintered. Lutsenko went clear with 17km to go and despite a valiant chase from Herrada, he comfortably won. "It was one of the strongest breakaways I've been in at the Tour de France," Van Avermaet later said.



STAGE RESULT

1	Alexey Lutsenko		Astana	4:32:34
2	Jesús Herrada		Cofidis	+0:55
3	Greg Van Avermaet		CCC Team	+2:15



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	27:03:57
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:03
3	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:07



YOUTH CLASSIFICATION

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	27:04:04
2	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:06
3	Enric Mas		Movistar	+0:15



CONNOR SWIFT

Garmin, but these are few and far between. Swift also had a stint as a stagiaire with Dimension Data in 2018, and raced the Arctic Race of Norway and Paris-Tours with the team, but returned to Madison for the start of 2019.

Swift was signed by Arkéa on the advice of André Greipel, who needed more support riders. But when the German left at the end of last year, Swift had impressed the management enough to keep him on - and send him to the biggest race. "Once they figured out my strengths and my weaknesses, and that I was pretty consistent as a rider, it has been great, and I've been given opportunities, and I've now signed a new two-year contract," he says.

One would imagine that switching from the very British world of Madison-Genesis for the very Breton world of Arkéa-Samsic would be alienating, but Swift says the team have helped him settle in. "My French is definitely improving, I can understand pretty much everything bike related and at the

dinner table. Anything I don't understand the team helps me out a little bit with the English side of things, because they speak English as well."

The Tour may not have gone as Arkéa-Samsic hoped but the plan remains centred around Quintana and Warren Barguil for the future, with the aim of eventually jumping up to the WorldTour. "We want to finish top of the ProTour ranks this season and we're on schedule for that. The team's evolved massively compared to two, three years ago."

Swift signed a two-year contract extension in July, and with his value to the team clear, one imagines that he will be a fixture at elite events in the coming years.

"I definitely wanted to be at the biggest races of the sport, at the highest level, so it's definitely something that I had set in sight. But obviously, maybe, not as fast."

As *ProCycling* went to press, a French doping investigation into Quintana and his team, launched post-Tour, was ongoing. Quintana has denied all wrongdoing. [P](#)

▼ Quintana shelters in the bunch behind his towering bodyguard Swift on stage 10



Images: Tim de Waele/ Getty Images, Christophe Eria - Pool/Getty(Lutsenko).



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BREAKAWAYS

GIVE THEM A BREAK

Long range breakaways succeeded on five stages of the Tour de France this year. Procycling speaks to some of the peloton's main players about the elements needed to make the perfect blend for an escape

Interviews Adam Becket & Sophie Hurcom
Photography Gruber Images

Tour de France
commune de
Saint Omer de la Tour
15 septembre 2020



BREAKAWAYS



NICOLAS ROCHE

Team Sunweb

STAGE 6 was a day that I picked with the team. We had a long discussion about me sitting up on the previous day, because I was quite up there on GC. Normally, I hang in and do my thing and when I start dropping time in the high mountains I naturally then go in the breakaway. But dropping 10 minutes without a reason, just thinking about potentially going in the breakaway the next day, that was quite new for me.

There was a little climb at the start which means the break could potentially go very quick if the speed was high, but there were rolling and very wide roads, so I was also ready for it to take an hour to go. Sometimes you don't really predict when or where the break is going to go, you just have to gamble on it.

You get the feeling on the road if it's going to work or not, depending on how strong the breakaway is. If it was four riders, maybe they had no chance because there was 150k of flat – where a group of eight, we had more chance than a group of

four or five, and a better chance than a group of, say, 15. A group of 15, you'll have guys who are not working so it becomes a lot more strategic. There was 35km of climbing, but the finish was not hard enough for the GC riders to take risks, to spend a lot of energy, to commit when the Pyrenees were coming. You have to look at where the stage is in the roadbook.

At the speed we went up the first climb, it was only workhorse riders who could be there – without being pretentious! If you look at the watts that I did on that six-minute effort, you weren't there by chance. That makes the first selection about who can make the breakaway. The guys who were going to come across were guys who were able to push that high, high power. There was no gamble – we were eight seconds for 15 or 20 kilometres, but there was no turning back, we really committed.

▼ The eight riders of the Tour's 'strongest break' on stage 6

I really enjoyed being in that breakaway.



TOMS SKUJINŠ

Trek-Segafredo

THERE have been quite a few times when I've managed to sneak into breaks, but on the other hand there have definitely been days when I don't make it, even though I want to. There's always a little bit of a balancing act. It's not just luck, or legs, it's a combination of those two things. It's luck, and timing, experience, and legs as well.

Stage 8 we started on pretty small roads, and that's something you've got to take into account, because the smaller the roads, the easier it is for other teams to block the road. It didn't take too long for the break to form, because after a few attacks we had a little group with a few riders, and a gap to the peloton. We all committed 100 per cent; straight away it was hard for the others to close it because we were going so fast. As soon as a few guys tried to close it but couldn't make it, the peloton just blocked the road, and we were gone. It was a fairly simple one, it didn't take too long.

On the next day, the next step was looking around and seeing who's [in the break], and seeing who is there for what goal. My first objective was to pass more climbs than I would have done in the peloton and be there for the leaders later in the race. For example, Michael Mørkøv was there, he didn't take a single pull because he wasn't there for the stage win; he was there to survive and eventually get dropped from the breakaway, in the hope that he could help his team later on. Depending on the parcours, you start to think, 'Who are going to be the main players in the final,' if the break ends up going for the win.





BREAKAWAYS



NEILSON POWLESS

EF Pro Cycling

IT depends on who is in a break and who's chasing. Pretty early on, I've known that the breaks that I've been in would make it to the line. As soon as they say the time gap, who's chasing and also who the riders are that are in the group I'm with, you can tell. As soon as you get five or more minutes, and there's only a team like Jumbo riding at the front, then there's a good chance that the break will make it. Every group is different.

On stage 13, we had to think on our feet a little bit, based on how guys recovered from the efforts they made from getting into the break. Just getting into that break was so hard, it was really difficult. The peloton was in pieces, there were groups all over the place. Eventually, two groups became one, and the peloton was still chasing, and then they finally let us go. We knew we had the strongest climber with Dani

[Martínez], and the goal was to get him across the line first. With three riders [in the break] it's not always an advantage, because they look at you to do all the work. We wanted to be on the front foot, never having to chase and in the end I opened the race up a bit early, and forced some riders to chase me instead, and let Dani and Hugh [Carthy] benefit from chasing me down. The hope was that by the time they got to the final climb they wouldn't have to do any work on the flat, and let their legs do the talking on the climb.

There were so many riders trying to get into that break, and a few times there were riders sneaking in who were within 15 minutes of the overall, and a team like Jumbo wouldn't want that to happen. It was pretty hectic, and Jumbo had a hard time sorting it. The roads were a bit wide too, so it was hard to block the road.

▲ EF packed the stage 13 break with numbers and it paid off as Martínez won

STAGE 7

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 4
Millau > Laval
168KM

The 'vent d'Autan', the seasonal wind which occasionally blows north across this part of France, sends a man mad, so the locals say. They never said anything about the hills doing it first. The crosswinds between Millau and Laval were only part of the stage 7 story. While the final 40km flattened making it look like a day for the sprinters, the parcours started with a cat-3 climb after 9km, and peppered even more uncategorised slopes into the first 100km. Add in a rampaging **Peter Sagan**, who started the stage without the green jersey for only the 26th time in the last eight years and the combination caused insanity in the peloton. Sagan's Bora team set a fearsome pace from the gun to distance green jersey **Sam Bennett**, dropping all the sprinters on the first climb and splitting the peloton to pieces. Sagan was then free to pick up intermediate sprint points to retake green from the Irishman. Importantly, the GC favourites all made it to the front, but then came the wind. As the peloton swung right out of Castres with 30km to go, the vent d'Autan struck from the left. **Tadej Pogačar**, **Mikel Landa** and **Richie Porte** were the biggest casualties - getting dropped and losing 81 seconds, before Wout Van Aert kept a cool head in the finale to take his second stage win of the 2020 Tour.



STAGE RESULT

1	Wout van Aert		Jumbo-Visma	3:32:03
2	Edvald B. Hagen		NTT Pro Cycling	st
3	Bryan Coquard		B&B Hotels-Vital C	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	30:36:00
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:03
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:09



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	138
2	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	129
3	Wout van Aert		Jumbo-Visma	106

STAGE



SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 5
Cazères › Loudenvielle
141KM

The winner of the first Pyrenean stage, **Nans Peters**, was named after a children's literature character, Nans the Shepherd. However, before the television cameras could focus on his win in Loudenvielle, they lingered for perhaps longer than was comfortable over another lover of even-toed ungulates, **Thibaut Pinot**, the most famous keeper of goats in the peloton, who was unable to keep pace on the Port de Balès. The saying goes that all publicity is good publicity, and the Groupama insurance company and the French national lottery certainly got a lot of television time as Pinot laboured up the climb, but the growing distance between the Frenchman and the front of the race indicated that the long wait for a home Tour de France winner would be extended for another year in 2020. While the break stretched ahead, Jumbo-Visma herded the peloton over the Balès, before **Tadej Pogačar** attacked on the Peyresourde. His compatriot **Primož Roglič** followed once, but relented, and settled into an uneasy truce with several of his rivals while the younger rider gained 40 seconds. Pogačar had conceded 1:21 the previous day in the crosswinds of Lavaur, but he'd taken back precisely half that deficit in one go. While the others dithered, Pogačar made hay while the sun shone.



STAGE RESULT

1	Nans Peters		Ag2r La Mondiale	4:02:12
2	Toms Skujins		Trek-Segafredo	+0:47
3	Carlos Verona		Movistar	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Adam Yates		Mitchelton-Scott	34:44:52
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:03
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:09



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Benoit Cosnefroy		Ag2r La Mondiale	35
2	Nans Peters		Ag2r La Mondiale	31
3	Ilnur Zakarin		CCC Team	25



BREAKAWAYS



MATT WHITE

Mitchelton-Scott, directeur sportif

THE break depends on what race it is and what your tactics are. Sometimes you're not looking to get in any breakaway, you're looking to shut them down or limit the size, for a tactic you want to play later in the day. We go into a race identifying stages that have potential for that, but that might change on the run, depending on what position you are on the GC, or whether you have a sprinter.

When Adam [Yates] was in yellow, there was a limit on which guys we'd let go. We encourage our guys to look at results, so they know the rider, the team that we're looking to block. In the pre-race meeting we present that to them and then our guys are very good at relaying race info back to the team car on the radios.

Due to Adam's yellow jersey and him staying in the top 10, he hasn't been able to move, so that ruined his chances of going in moves. Then Mikel Nieve was involved in two crashes in the first week, which gave him back issues, he

was at 60-70 per cent. We wanted to get Esteban Chaves in a couple of breaks, and whether it was because the roads didn't suit him, or because Jumbo shut it down because they saw him as a threat, it didn't work out. There haven't been that many breaks that have stuck at this year's Tour, because of the way that Jumbo has ridden. When we were in charge, we were happy to let breaks go, but they've had a different tactic, and it really has nullified a lot of chances to win stages.

Sometimes, at the start of these stages, when you're marking loads of people and you're not quite sure who you're marking, it can be pretty hectic. What we haven't seen in this year's Tour is the battle for the break going on for 75-80km. I've been at Tour stages when it has gone on for over 100km of the stage before the break has stuck. I think 50km has been the longest, and that's because of Jumbo and how the courses have been designed.

191

Kilometres, the longest break that survived to the line, on stage 6

MOST KILOMETRES IN THE BREAKAWAY

Top five riders who spent the most time in breakaways during the 2020 Tour



NEILSON POWLESS

EF PRO CYCLING, 482KM

Tour debutant Powless was one of the Tour's most aggressive riders. The American came close to a win on stage 6 (also his 24th birthday), finishing fourth on Mont Aigoual, and then fifth two days later in Loudenvielle.



RÉMI CAVAGNA

DECEUNINCK-QS, 432KM

It's no surprise the big engine-French national TT champ was a frequent presence at the front of the race. He spent 125k (mostly alone) in a breakaway on stage 19, but his best result was 36th on stage 13



RICHARD CARAPAZ

INEOS GRENADIERS, 390KM

The Ecuadorian went on a hat trick of long-range breaks in the Alps, hunting stage wins, coming second in Villard-de-Lans, 11th on the Grand Colombier, and another second helping Michał Kwiatkowski win on stage 18.



JULIAN ALAPHILIPPE

DECEUNINCK-QS, 355KM

2020 Alaphilippe took a similar approach to the Tour as 2019: attack, attack, attack. He won stage 2, but looked to be lacking his usual punch later in the race, and clocked up three more top 10s before Paris.



BENOÎT COSNEFROY

AG2R LA MONDIALE, 327KM

After picking up the polka dot jersey on stage 2, the Frenchman was repeatedly off the front up the road until the final week, in an attempt to cling on to it. He lost the KOM jersey, finally, on stage 17 in the Alps.

Boxout: Franklin (Cavagna), Steele (Carapaz), Powless), De Waele (Alaphilippe, Cosnefroy) / all via Getty.



MATT WINSTON

Sunweb, directeur sportif

THERE are a couple of things we look at really when assessing breakaways. Is it going to be a sprint day – if it's a sprint day on paper then normally the sprinters' teams will really control the race, so the chances of a big break being able to go and survive to the finish is limited. The second is if there are hectic moments in the stage; crosswinds, narrow cities or passages, then the peloton is going to speed up, to fight for position. That's not the best time for a break, as naturally it's going to come back. Thirdly, is if it's a mountain top finish – only a few

people can win then when it's a GC day; so how close is GC, how many teams are in contention on GC, who is going to control behind?

Normally, for a mountaintop finish in the first part of the Tour, the chances of a break surviving are low as the GC favourites will want to race it. As you go into the third week there's more of a chance, as maybe you only have three or four guys in contention for the Tour overall win, so there are 18 other teams motivated to be in the breakaway and maybe only two or three other teams chasing behind.

▲ Kragh Andersen won Sunweb's third stage from a late breakaway

The composition of breakaway riders is [important]. It depends also what you want to gain from the breakaway. For us, we want to win the stage, that's our goal. Others might be in the break to collect mountains jersey points, green jersey points, for television time – although that is getting a lot less now.

We don't really have the complete overview in the car when a breakaway is forming. Normally we have it on the TV if we get a good enough signal, but we're maybe 10 or 15 seconds behind. What we do in the car is bring facts to the riders; who's in the break, what might be coming up next, maybe a bit of motivation. The guys are focused and they are busy in that moment.

STAGE 9

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6
Pau - Laruns
153KM

It must be heartbreaking to get so close to a first stage win at the Tour, only to be pipped at the line. All the more heartbreaking when it is your second podium placing of the race so far, and you have been on your own at the front for 80km as **Marc Hirschi** had been. The exuberance of youth was the story of the day, as Hirschi attacked on his own from the early breakaway, holding off a charge from the GC leaders for most of the finale. When he crested the Col de Marie Blanque he had just 20 seconds on his chasers, and his descending skills kept him in the hunt, as he dived around corners, using every inch of road to keep his nose in front and extend his lead. With 1.6km to go, the quartet of **Primož Roglič**, **Tadej Pogačar**, **Mikel Landa** and **Egan Bernal** finally swamped Hirschi, but they could not shake the young Swiss. Hirschi latched onto the group and even launched the sprint at the death before Pogačar and Roglič came around him. Pogačar, a few weeks younger than Hirschi, took the honours and clawed back some of the time he lost in the stage to Lavaur with the bonus seconds on the line, Roglič, though, would not be budged from Pogačar's wheel, and took the race lead that seemed inevitable, after Adam Yates was distanced on the Marie Blanque. The yellow team finally had the yellow jersey.



STAGE RESULT

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	3:55:17
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	st
3	Marc Hirschi		Team Sunweb	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	38:40:01
2	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:21
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:28



TEAMS CLASSIFICATION

1	Movistar Team		116:06:55
2	EF Pro Cycling		+5:12
3	Trek-Segafredo		+5:27



BREAKAWAYS



GREG VAN AVERMAET

CCC Team

THERE are two kinds of breakaways. The one that goes from the beginning, they are quite easy most of the time to get into with no happy end. They come back and they are on stages that are meant to be bunch sprints or really controlled races. It's quite easy to get in them, you just have to start up at the front behind the car, and most of the time the first attack will go. The second one is the harder one. Most of the time it's probably a break that can stick to the end, has more chances to survive. More riders will be interested to get into it and then it's more about choosing the right moment. Being strong - of course, that's always necessary - and also small villages, climbs, these kind of things that can break the peloton easier and help you go faster. You have to be aware of this. Most of the time, it's also a bit about which teams are in the breakaway, and which teams aren't. It's all those things coming together. You find the right moments and you have to be aware that at some point it will happen.

The break on stage 6 was more about legs, so it was all strong guys



▲ Greg Van Avermaet's best chance of a Tour stage win came from a break

and an uphill start. Sometimes it's not about tricks, it's just about having the legs and if you have a good group that commits directly you'll get a gap and you'll ride really well together. I think that's a great combination to have. We had [Edvald] Boasson Hagen, Daniel Oss, [Rémi] Cavagna who are great riders on the flat and they have great power, and when you have those guys with you it helps to open up the gap.

You know the riders who are good at this, you see them, the form that they have and you see the stages that are coming. You anticipate which stages are good for breakaways, and which stages are not. It's not useful to go in the breakaway when it doesn't survive to the finish, especially in a grand tour, because you have to save your energy as much as possible.

Always, when I'm in the breakaway, I want to spend my energy but I also have to know that it will go to the finish because then you have a good chance for a good result. Those things are really important.

MOST BREAKAWAY ATTEMPTS

Top five riders who went in the most long-range breakaways during the 2020 Tour (attacks that went within the early kilometres of the stage).

RIDER	NO. OF BREAKS	STAGES	BEST RESULT
Neilson Powless	4	6, 8, 13, 16	4th
Simon Geschke	4	13, 15, 16, 18	7th
Benoit Cosnefroy	4	2, 3, 8, 16	24th
Nicolas Roche	3	6, 16, 18	8th
Richard Carapaz	3	16, 17, 18	2nd



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JOURNAL

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

Peter Sagan's grip on the green jersey competition finally unravels

Peter Sagan is usually the easiest rider to pick out of a bunch, because he always dresses differently. His rainbow stripes, or national champion's jersey, or the green jersey – one or other of which he has worn on 143 days in the Tour de France against eight in a regular team jersey before 2020 – stand out in a helicopter television shot of the peloton. And there he has always been, somewhere around 15th wheel in the bunch, a reference point by which the positioning of everybody can be judged.

However, you couldn't find a more apt metaphor for the Slovak's inability to find success in the 2020 Tour than the fact that he spent so much of it in a plain Bora jersey. An anonymous rider in the bunch, the biggest impact he made in a sprint was against Wout van Aert's right hip as he attempted to shoulder barge him out of the way on the finishing straight in Poitiers on stage 11. He was relegated from second place, and this was the killer blow in the green jersey competition he had made his own since his debut in the 2012 Tour. If he'd come second, he'd have closed to within 15 points of Sam Bennett. Instead, he ended up 68 points behind, and the Irishman had been regularly finishing ahead of him in head-to-head sprints. Before Poitiers the score was 8-3 to Bennett in bonus sprints and stage finishes. Furthermore, Bennett won two stages, whereas Sagan's best was third on stages 10 and 21.

Sagan's dominance in the points competition has been astonishing. He won it seven times in eight Tours up to 2019, his only black spot being the disqualification he suffered in 2017. Not only that, he regularly won it by hundreds of points – 470 points against runner-up Marcel Kittel's 228 in 2016. He achieved this by finishing in the top three in bunch sprints, winning a few along the way, but also by reaching the bonus sprints and finishes that other sprinters couldn't. He's accumulated 12 stage wins, but crucially, another 58 top-five finishes.

However, that ability deserted Sagan this year. Bora-Hansgrohe put Bennett to the sword on the climbs of stage 14 in Lyon, but he could only come third in the group sprint behind lone winner Søren Kragh Andersen. Luck has not been with him either. Bora did a similar job on Bennett in stage 7, but his chain slipped in the final and he only gained 21 points in total between the bonus sprint and finish.

A lot has been made of Sagan appearing jaded in interviews at the Tour in recent seasons. But 2020 is the first time this has spread into his racing. 🍷









MARC HIRSCHI

STAGE 10

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 8
Île d'Oléron > Île de Ré
168.5KM

STILLNESS & SPEED

Marc Hirschi was barely 22 when the 2020 Tour started, but he came away with a stage win, two more podiums and the overall combativity prize. *Procycling* spoke to the young Swiss about his spectacular debut in the race

Writer Edward Pickering /// Image Tim de Waele/Getty

The most transcendental hour of the 2020 Tour de France came in the final 26km of stage 9, between the base of the Col de Marie-Blanque and the finish in Laruns. At the bottom of the Marie-Blanque, Sunweb's Marc Hirschi was on his own, 3:30 ahead of the reduced peloton, led by a line of Jumbo-Visma riders.

The odds at this point in the race were against the Swiss. He'd been on his own since a short way into the Col de la Hourcère, 65km earlier, when he attacked a small group of riders who in turn were barely clear of the peloton, and he'd spent the interim time alone. The laws of physics do not favour lone riders against a peloton. The laws of physics furthermore do not favour lone riders against a peloton in a mountain stage, where the first 60km have been a series of almost non-stop attacks. When the attacks came from the GC group, it would be normal for Hirschi's lead to melt like cheese in a fondue.

Ahead of Hirschi: 7.7km of climbing, the last three very steep. Then about 7km of quite open

◀ A study in style: Hirschi drew admiration from Tour followers for his ease on the bike

▼ Hirschi won three daily combativity prizes plus the overall

descent and false flat down, and 5km of steeper, more technical descending. Finally, 7km of flat, including a nasty drag up at 3km.

The facts of the final hour were that Hirschi's lead went down to two minutes before Pogacar attacked on the steep section and took three more GC favourites – Roglic, Bernal and Landa – with him, closing the gap to just 11 seconds at the top. Hirschi's lead went back out to 28 seconds on the descent, before the GC quartet caught him with 1.6km to go. Game over.

But there was another equally tangible fact, though this one came down to more than the nuts and bolts of distance left and time gained and lost: that Marc Hirschi is in possession of an indefinable cycling attribute known as 'class'. ▶



Images: Stuart Franklin/Getty (right). Results bar: Kenzo Tribouillard/Getty

The bleak and imposing sea fortress of Fort Boyard, built as a naval defence in the 1800s, stands near the Île d'Oléron. Its impenetrable-looking walls were a reminder to the Tour peloton, if they looked out to sea, that today would be a day for defence. Unlike every other stage of the 2020 Tour, this one featured not a single climb. The obstacles were technical - narrow twisting roads and many roundabouts - and meteorological, with a stiff breeze blowing across the bunch as it approached the Île de Ré. The peloton's defences were strong - an early break of **Stefan Küng** and **Michael Schär** was brought back within an hour, by dint of teams riding hard to keep out of trouble. And there were attempts to split the bunch. But the main challenges came in the crashes that beset the unwary. In a bunch sprint, **Sam Bennett** won his first ever Tour stage. Afterwards, riders and teams complained about the dangerous route. But they might take note of the later history of Fort Boyard, which after almost falling into ruin, found use as the location for a reality TV show in the 1990s and beyond, a reminder that the currency of the 21st century is entertainment value. The TV show offers physical and endurance challenges for entertainment. Not much different, some riders might reflect, to the Tour itself.



STAGE RESULT

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	3:35:22
2	Caleb Ewan		Lotto Soudal	st
3	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	42:15:23
2	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:21
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:28



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	196
2	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	175
3	Bryan Coquard		B&B Hotels-Vital C	129

STAGE 11

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 9
Châtelailon-Plage › Poitiers
166.5KM

The calm usually comes before the storm, not after, but following a stage where wind and road furniture wreaked havoc on the flattest day of the Tour this year, stage 11 was clearly a chance for the peloton to reset the batteries, or at least not make anything more difficult than it needed to be. The 167.5km route inland east to Poitiers was as straightforward a stage as the Tour had this year - so much so, it wasn't until after the finish that the main drama kicked off. It featured a flat 90km to the one cat-4 climb slap-bang in the middle, before a flat run-in to the line. With this the last real flat stage before Paris, the sprinters' teams naturally took control of proceedings, although Groupama-FDJ's **Mathieu Ladagnous** was willing to test his mettle in a one-man breakaway. The Frenchman was never given more than five minutes though, and he was duly reeled in with 43km to go. Still, a short uphill to the line and a headwind didn't make it easy for the sprinters, even if for the second time, **Caleb Ewan** came out on top. The Australian zoomed from far back, through gaps that again seemed non-existent, to win on a bike throw in a narrow four-rider head-to-head with **Sam Bennett**, **Wout van Aert** and **Peter Sagan**. Sagan was later disqualified for barging Van Aert, proving that even on calm days, nothing is entirely easy.



STAGE RESULT

1	Caleb Ewan		Lotto Soudal	4:00:01
2	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	st
3	Wout van Aert		Jumbo-Visma	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	42:15:24
2	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:21
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:28



BEST YOUNG RIDER

1	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	46:15:45
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:23
3	Enric Mas		Movistar	+1:41



M A R C H I R S C H I

'Class', in cycling, is a combination of strength, riding style, tactical brain and je ne sais quoi. It's a slippery definition, not easily quantified, and because of that the best way to acknowledge it is simply to enjoy it, without asking too many questions. Hirschi rode up and over mountains and held a gap of four minutes for a long time. His pedalling style never changed, his upper body barely moving and his cadence ticking off the seconds, minutes and hours like a Swiss watch. It seemed that through the entire break, he was never over his limit, nor under it. On the descents, he was mesmerising - the 20 seconds he put into the Pogacar group down the Marie-Blanque were carved out in swooping corners, straight lines through curving roads and a motionless, silent aero tuck. His ride was physically impressive, of course, and the day had been entertaining on a sporting level in a way that many stages of the Tour are not. But there was something about Hirschi's riding style, self-belief and total physical and mental absorption in the task at hand that was almost meditative.

Back to the run-in. With 1.6km to go, the exhausted Hirschi went to the back of the group. With 1.1km to go, he tightened his shoes. With 250m to go he stood, wrenched his handlebars and sprinted.

220

The number of kms that Hirschi spent in breakaways during the Tour

▼ Hirschi finally got his stage win in Sarran, on stage 12, after escaping and going it alone



His defeat was neither here nor there. To paraphrase Mervyn Peake, to sprint at all is miracle enough.

LOCAL HERO

It hadn't been Hirschi's plan to go it alone. But when he pushed, on the Hourcère, his legs responded, and there was no reason to slow.

"In the beginning, I was not going for the win," Hirschi says to *Procycling*. "I knew how tough that would be, so I just focused on my plan - eating, drinking, focusing on the descent and on my rhythm. Focus on the basic things.

"Only on the last climb, I thought maybe I could make it. Then I switched to thinking about the victory. I felt quite good still, but I still dropped some watts, and I heard they were coming. It was quite hard mentally."

The harder switch came at about 3km to go, when it became clear he was going to get caught. He had to physically and mentally switch from resisting the pursuit to sitting



“I see his similarity to me, that he is a detail freak. He’s always looking at details, and equipment, so he is ahead. And he works on everything. He’s quiet, but that is his strength”

Fabian Cancellara

on the back of the group and having to battle against others.

“That was hard,” he continues. “More mentally. A sprint is always a gamble. But I had no choice. I switched my mind and focused on the moment.”

Hirschi comes from the same small Swiss village, Itegem, as Fabian Cancellara, who is now his manager. He is in his second year as a professional, and only turned 22 a week before the Tour. Yet in common with near-contemporaries like Remco Evenepoel, Pogacar and Bernal, the transition from U23 to professional has been seamless,

even invisible. Hirschi was a world U23 champion and top finisher in the U23 Flanders, Liège and Lombardia, before getting into the break in his debut E3 Harelbeke last year, then hanging on to the favourites when they came up and coming 10th. In Clásica San Sebastián the same year, his third place at the age of 20 was not given the credit it deserved because Evenepoel won it at 19. It was clear he would not be overawed by his first attempt at the Tour de France.

His near-miss on stage 9, where he was third, came on the back of an even closer miss on stage 2, where

▲ Hirschi’s solo break on stage 9 was one of the rides of the 2020 Tour de France

3

Team Sunweb stage wins at the 2020 Tour

he came within inches of beating Julian Alaphilippe after he’d matched the Frenchman’s explosive attack on the Col des Quatres Chemins, on the outskirts of Nice.

“I was not happy with that,” he says. “I f*cked it up. I wanted to go at 200m because I thought he would go at 180m because of the headwind. But then he already went at 200m, and the strength of Alaphilippe is his acceleration – it’s really strong. He opened the gap and I came too late.”

And then came the stage win. On stage 2, he’d left his move for the win too late; on stage 9, he’d gone too early. On stage 12 he went at the right time – off the back of a co-ordinated move by his Sunweb team-mates in the hilly finale of the stage, winning alone in Sarrau. He ended his Tour with a near-miss in the KoM classification, a crash on stage 18 costing him the chance to win it, and the overall combativity award to add to three daily awards.

The question is, why is he so good? The Swiss national coach Daniel Gisiger told *L’Équipe* that his primary assets are his intelligence and application. At 17, Gisiger said, Hirschi was meticulous in analysing his position on the bike, and tweaking, tweaking and tweaking until it was perfect. Cancellara tells *ProCycling* a similar story.

“I see his similarity to me, that he is a detail freak,” Cancellara says. “He’s always looking at details, and equipment, so he is ahead. And he works on everything. He’s quiet, but that is his strength – he doesn’t attack like Alaphilippe, and he looks so smooth when he attacks.”

Back when Hirschi was 10 years old and growing up in Itegem, he queued for an hour to get Cancellara’s autograph on the hometown hero’s return from winning a gold medal in the Beijing Olympics. Twelve years later, he still has the autograph, and now, like Cancellara, he has a Tour stage win. **P**



EF'S TOUR

EF - GEE!

EF Pro Cycling went to the Tour with multiple goals. Tom Southam, the team's sports director, took *Procycling* through the American team's highs and lows

Interview Jeremy Whittle



Dani Martínez wins on Puy Mary

I That was typical Dani. He pops up some days and does phenomenal rides. We didn't really expect it from him that day because he'd been a little bit down after his crash. That day, on the first climb coming out of Clermont Ferrand I saw Dani pop out of the bunch at the speed of a motorbike, going past big groups. Then he and Hugh Carthy

▲ Martínez outclimbed the Bora duo for his first Tour stage win

got into the move and we had the guys we knew could win the stage. When he was chasing Max Schachmann, at the base of the final climb, Lennard Kämna tried attacking, but Dani closed it so easily that, in the car, even then, we knew we'd won. We knew we were going to catch Schachmann on that finish. It was just a matter of time. Dani was so zippy, so fast, so ready. It was the calmest I'd

ever been in the car in that kind of situation. It was so hard that it didn't matter that it was two against one, because he was climbing better and jumping faster. After, it was oddly quiet. It was 12km to the buses down the other side of the mountain and there was nobody there – just me and the mechanic, for 20 minutes. We didn't see Dani until 10:30, when he got back to the hotel.

Rigoberto Urán fights for a top five finish

2

Rigo was on the right side of the splits in the crosswinds [stage 7], so that was what held him in such a good position for so long. He was riding consistently well, and better than we had expected. When I saw him on his bike last December, at training camp, on his way back from his crash at the Vuelta, I'd looked at Charly Wegelius and said, 'This guy has a long way to go.' You could see that from the muscle definition on his back, because it was completely lopsided. He benefited from the Tour being later in the year. He doesn't put on weight and even in December he was skinny.

He was better than our expectations, which was great, but I think that there were always



riders who weren't coming back from major injury who were going to be fitter. Mentally he was good, he was more like the Rigo of 2017 and he was a great leader. He stepped up after we lost Sergio and really pushed himself. It was a very impressive performance.

▲ Urán (second wheel) suffers over the Plateau des Glières gravel

He really struggled on stage 18, on Plateau des Glières. At that stage, like a lot of the other guys, it was the last thing he needed. Guys who were exhausted and just trying to get to the end, had to go over this two-kilometre gravel section. It was quite brutal.

Sergio Higuita crashes out after tangling with Jungels



3

It was a real negative for us because it took us out of the teams classification race. We weren't putting everything on it like Movistar, but you start to think a little bit about how you can do this and that to make a difference. Losing Sergio ended that. Also, for him personally, it was tough because he was on an upward trajectory.

Last year at the Vuelta he had a really bad first week but got better and I got the feeling that was the way his race was going to go. He had seemed quite stressed and worried during the first few

days and that morning, when he was trying to go for the break, the last thing that Charly had said on the radio was, 'This is great Sergio, keep going, keep looking for it,' and then it was BAM! It's over. He tried to come back for a long time in the cars but then he crashed again, because he couldn't brake properly.

That was the only real setback we had in the race. Nobody thought for one second that it was intentional. Quick Step came and apologised, Bob Jungels went to the bus looking for Sergio. There was no malice. It was clumsy, but that's all. Stuff happens out there, Sergio didn't blame him.

Images: Gruber Images (main), Steele (top), Bertorello (bottom)/ both via Getty

Neilson Powless rides four stages in breakaways



Neilson kept me busy! He was one of the last picks for the team. He was young and we knew that taking him,

we'd get motivation over experience. Some days we'd say, 'Neilson, you got to catch the break,' and he always did. His attitude was 'I'm not gonna miss this.' He generally follows instructions to a 'T,' but I think on the road to Mont Aigoual [stage 6] he was a little too enthusiastic. He attacked first, but then Alexey Lutesenko went over the top of him. At that point the car was telling him, 'Thin the group down and start to move a little bit,' but then he put in an enormous race-

winning attack and it was a bit too much. He cooked himself. That might work in another race, but it doesn't in the Tour.

We learned that we needed to detail that instruction a little bit more because that's where his experience is. But he did really

482

Roughly how many
kms Powless
spent in the break

well, and these things are just minor tweaks. Every day that we got on the bus and talked, he took it on board and didn't make the same mistake again. He was great to work with and it was impressive how well-known he was in France. Everybody knew him and his story.



The team's collective performance over three weeks



This year's Tour de France was really hard. Not just in the race but there was a lot of pressure on it, particularly before the grand départ in Nice. There was a lot of uncertainty and there was a lot for people to deal with. On top of that, logistically it was a tough race, almost like a Vuelta in that we were getting to the hotels pretty late at night. All of that adds up and you feel the weight of it. We did all of the transfers in the bus

but if they don't go back to flying, I'll be happy. You can shower, sleep, eat on the bus.

The days get long, but the team on and off the bike ran incredibly smoothly for us and we were on the right side of the splits and the crosswinds. Nothing went wrong for Rigo, he rode an accomplished race. You always worry somebody might lose time when they shouldn't, but that never happened. So, with all of that, with the logistics, the parcours, covid-19, lockdown, the change of dates, I think we should be immensely proud of it as a team.

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STAGE 12

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 10
Chauvigny › Sarrau
218KM

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again, only subtly differently. **Marc Hirschi** won his first Tour stage in Sarrau, following two podium places. He tried a late escape with a break on stage 2, and a long, lone break on stage 9. This time he combined the best points of these two methods - he joined a break, then attacked alone from it over the Suc au May, and rode hard over the rolling terrain of the Massif Central. The young Swiss rider is mentored and managed by Fabian Cancellara, who might have told him a thing or two about attacking and holding off a chase. However, this was no solo effort - it was built on teamwork. Sunweb came to the Tour without a sole leader, but lots of talented riders all willing to bounce off each other and go for stage wins. Stage 12 ended with three of their riders in the top 10. **Søren Kragh Andersen** finished third, with **Nicolas Roche** in 10th. Earlier in the day, **Tiesj Benoot** and Kragh Andersen helped set up the break from which the winning move eventually came, Benoot burning himself out for an opportunity that Hirschi took with both hands. Behind the sole leader, 14 riders would usually be able to catch one, but the lack of cohesion in the group played straight into Hirschi's hands, allowing him to descend flawlessly to the stage win.



STAGE RESULT

1	Marc Hirschi		Sunweb	5:08:49
2	Pierre Rolland		B&B hotels - Vital C	+0:47
3	Søren K. Andersen		Sunweb	+0:52



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	51:26:43
2	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:21
3	Guillaume Martin		Cofidis	+0:28



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Benoit Cosnefroy		Ag2r La Mondiale	36
2	Nans Peters		Ag2r La Mondiale	31
3	Marc Hirschi		Sunweb	31



RICHIE PORTE

A DREAM COME TRUE, FINALLY

Having been the Tour de France's nearly man for years, beset by crashes and bad luck, on his 10th start in the race **Richie Porte** finally made it onto the podium, finishing in third place. He spoke to *Procycling* as he made the journey to Paris

Interview Sophie Hurcom /// Image Anne-Christine Poujoulat/ Getty Images

How does it feel to finally get that place on the podium?

It's a huge relief. My story with the Tour has been pretty topsy turvy. To finally be going into Paris and going for the podium, is an absolute dream and a big relief. It's really the icing on the cake for me, for my career. I've won some pretty big bike races before but to come to the Tour to perform, and to be on the step in Paris, is a dream come true.

When we spoke in June you said that the Tour was the one thing that was missing. When you felt like you had the form in the years before, the crashes or bad luck got

► Fifteenth time lucky. At 35, Richie Porte finally stands on the podium of a grand tour

▼ Porte's bad luck still came, as he flatted on stage 18 on the Plateau de Glières gravel

in the way, and it felt like a missed opportunity. It sounded then like you felt that your time had come and gone. Did you think it was still possible to get to this position?

I didn't. I worked so hard before the race and I have a great team around me on and off the bike. I feel like I've matured as a person. Even this year in the Tour when we had disasters that could have ruined everything, I was able to salvage it. In past years I haven't been able to. It's a great feeling to be able to finally crack it. It's been a fantastic three weeks.

You said that this third place feels like a win. Does it feel like you've answered that question about the Tour or fulfilled that potential?

That's the thing. You can do whatever you want on the bike but there are always people who judge you, don't believe in you. To be able to prove some people wrong is great, but at the end of the day I did it for the team; I did it for myself. I missed the birth of my daughter. That's a huge sacrifice to make and it really weighed everything up for me. I don't think little Eloise will be too pissed off with me in the years to come! It's also about setting myself up for after my career. ➔



Images: Tim de Waele/Getty Results bar: Sebastien Nogier / Getty



You've not been shy about saying this is your last go at GC at the Tour. Did that give you freedom? Even during the lockdown there were times where my wife and I had that discussion, that this would be it, this would be my last year and I'd retire at the end of the year. I was that over it. Thankfully that's not the case. I've got a supportive wife. She's from Manchester; you know how Mancunians are – there's no beating around the bush. Our son's not far off school age, it kind of feels like with this career, we don't want to live in Monaco the rest of our lives, and putting life on hold. I've signed for two more years and I'll be happy to finish in two years' time.

You were training a lot with Nico Roche and Michael Matthews before the Tour. How were you feeling physically before the race? Physically, I was good. I'm not a massive Strava fan but it's a good yardstick because it's also what you've done. I was beating times that I'd done years before, so I knew I was in a good place. But then, to have guys like Nico Roche and Michael Matthews as your best mates, and they can see that I was struggling after the lockdown with motivation, they got me out every day. Also, my coach, Josu Larrazabal, he never put any pressure on me. He said, you're experienced, you know what to do, and he really let me do what I wanted to. Luca Guercilena, the boss of Trek-Segafredo, was fantastic to me, he said if you want to be there for the birth of your child, you go for it, family is the most important. When you have a team like that, who understand everything, I sort of felt a little bit of loyalty to them that I go and do my best. It's just nice to leave a team on a good note. I've really enjoyed my time within this Tour. It's been a great atmosphere.

Did the fact there was less racing this year play a part? Did it leave you feeling a bit fresher?



▲ The Planche des Belles Filles time trial saw Porte ride strongly into third place overall

My coach Dave Bailey from BMC said to me sometimes, maybe it's good for you to skip the Tour Down Under. For me it's one of the best races, I think everyone who does Down Under loves it because it's such a great event but this year it proved him right that maybe I was coming into the Tour sometimes on fumes. Whereas this year, come March, I then had two months of overeating and overindulging and hardly riding my bike. I came out of lockdown refreshed and ready to go. It was a bit of a blessing in disguise.

You were one of the strongest climbers in the mountains, not far behind Pogacar and Roglic on a number of the stages. As you crept up the GC did you feel you were growing in confidence and form as the race went on?

I've had the same soigneur the last four years and he was saying that to me, in the massage, he's never felt my legs were any better than what they were. I had Mads [Pedersen] who had more belief in me than

► Mads Pedersen (I) was key for Porte's challenge, protecting him on the flat stages

I have in myself, guys like that around. Then when the sh*t hit the fan, and I was able to ride my own tempo, which is how I did this race – I never really went into the red. It was on Puy Mary, those two went up the road and I was just behind with [Mikel] Landa and [Miguel] López – that was really when I thought to myself, I think I am the third strongest guy here. My confidence grew day by day after that. I didn't really expect to take that much time out of López, I was happy with the way that I finished the TT as well.

Did the TT go as you planned and did you feel good?

When I took the bike change, Kim Andersen my directeur said to me, 'Landa is just there.' He didn't change his bike and I could see him just in front. I thought, okay, I'm on a good one here because it's Landa and he's one of the best bike riders in the world. We didn't really have much information on López. It was after 14 kilometres that Kim said you've put 45 seconds into López



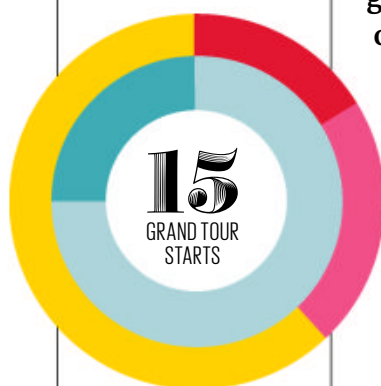
RICHIE PORTE

and then I was like, it's game on. I knew I had to take three seconds a kilometre. At three ks to go Kim on the radio said to me, 'Richie, you've achieved your dream, you're on the podium.' It was one of the sweetest moments of my career, but there were still three ks of absolute hell and suffering to go. The pain that I was in there, you feel like your stomach is about to rip in half, and that last 300 metres is absolute hell. I got a message off Pogacar last night and he said, 'If you'd have worn TT booties you'd have been second on the stage.' At the end of the day it doesn't matter - I'm happy to be third on the stage and third in the Tour. Unbelievable.

You still had bad luck. You crashed on stage 1, you lost 1:21 in the crosswinds on stage 7, you punctured on stages 14 and 18. In those moments did you think, 'It's happening again?'

Kim Andersen came to me and he said, this Tour is not over, it's not going to be decided by a minute 20. My daughter was born that night and it kind of made up for everything. I was able to take some time back from the guys on the Peyresourde and we started the fightback. In some ways it's easier to be fighting back than to be

PORTE'S GRAND TOURS



3x DNF
10x Tour de France
3x Giro d'Italia
2x Vuelta a España

2020 3rd in Tour
2019 11th in Tour
2018 DNF in Tour
84th in Vuelta
2017 DNF in Tour
2016 5th in Tour
2015 DNF in Giro
48th in Tour
2014 23rd in Tour
2013 19th in Tour
2012 34th in Tour
68th in Vuelta
2011 72nd in Tour
81st in Giro
2010 7th in Giro

leading, as Roglic had to. Wearing that jersey for two weeks is harder than having a chance to fight back.

You punctured on stage 18, on the gravel. That must go down as one of the best worst days you have had racing...

In Lyon I was a bit stressed about the final too. I took a puncture at a terrible time, took Kenny Elissonde's bike, then came back and didn't lose time. We did the recon and we had the Glières, it was super hard. I wouldn't call it a gravel road...it was ridiculous, it was just stones that were a disaster waiting to happen, and a pretty technical descent. People were quick to say I'm not a good descender after the crash I had in 2017 but I held those guys and I was able to come back. It was nice that Wout [van Aert] and Tom [Dumoulin] gave me a bit of a hand, but I also think it cracked [Enric] Mas and Landa.

How integral was having someone like Mads Pedersen around you?

As a person I don't like Mads very much, he's not really a nice guy... he's also sat right next to me! He's 25, he's the world champion. I can't say enough about him. He's got such a level head, he's one of the most fantastic team-mates and it's sad that we didn't get to race that much together...On and off the bike he's brilliant for morale and I think we haven't seen the end of him, it's a shame he didn't get to win Roubaix in the rainbow jersey but I'm sure in the future it could happen. He's such a huge talent.

Are you going to celebrate in Paris?

We've ordered burritos for the bus, but for me it'll be podium and luckily I've got a friend who's coming from Monaco on a private jet - Caleb Ewan's father-in-law. He's got a plane to get me back. He said to me, 'Let's get you back to meet your daughter.' That'll be my celebration. [P](#)



STAGE 13

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 11
Châtel-Guyon > Pas de Peyrol
191.5KM

The Monts du Cantal, of which the Puy Mary is one of the most prominent peaks, are what remains of a single huge volcano, which last erupted two million years ago. The Puy Mary and its surrounding peaks were carved out of the landscape by the inexorable crushing action of glaciers during the last Ice Age. The GC action up to and including stage 13 of the 2020 Tour, which finished on the Pas de Peyrol, just below the Puy Mary's peak, was more akin to the slow-moving glacial flow that formed this landscape than the Strombolian eruptions that characterised the volcano's initial formation. Before the stage, the top 10 were separated by 1:42; after the hard grind to the top, things were barely clearer, with nine riders still within 2:06 of **Primož Roglič**.

The Ineos Grenadiers set the pace in the favourites' group, far behind stage winner **Daniel Martinez**. But at the foot of the steep final climb, **Tadej Pogacar** attacked and only Roglič could go with him. They only put a handful of seconds into their rivals, but it was clear who the two strongest riders were. One more geographical feature of the Puy Mary is that it is reportedly one of the wettest places in mainland France. In retrospect, it was where Roglič and Pogacar really started to rain on everybody else's parade.



STAGE RESULT

1	Daniel Martinez		EF Pro Cycling	5:01:47
2	Lennard Kämna		Bora-Hansgrohe	+0:04
3	Max Schachmann		Bora-Hansgrohe	+0:51



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	56:34:35
2	Tadej Pogacar		UAE Emirates	+0:44
3	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:59



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	252
2	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	186
3	Bryan Coquard		B&B hotels - Vital C	162



JOURNAL

THE MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

On all terrain, across all stages, Wout van Aert was unshakeable for Jumbo

As Egan Bernal crossed the line on stage 15, having haemorrhaged over seven minutes to put the nail in the coffin of any hopes he had of retaining his Tour title, a yellow jersey hung behind his shoulder in the form of Wout van Aert. When Bernal finally cracked on the Grand Colombier, unable to keep up with the pace of the GC group, it was Van Aert on the front setting the devastating tempo and causing all the damage.

How do you describe a rider like Wout van Aert? Cyclo-cross world champion, classics specialist, time triallist, puncheur and sprinter were the well-known strings on the Belgian's bow, but super-mountain domestique and slayer of Bernal, perhaps not so much. Of course, Van Aert came into the Tour in blistering form, having won Strade Bianche, Milan-San Remo, a stage at the Critérium du Dauphiné and the Dutch National time trial title in a 29-day spree before the Tour began in Nice. Of the last 10 races he started before the Tour, stretching back to June 2019, he'd won at nine of them. Still, Van Aert's Tour evolution as all-round domestique-in-chief defies any myths that say riders have to specialise to find success in modern cycling. Throughout the Tour, he pulled on whatever jacket was needed for his team.

On stage 4 he helped set up Primož Roglic's stage win at Orcières-Merlette with a huge two-kilometre turn, up to 1.5km to go. Twenty four hours later he won in Privas, upsetting the pure sprinters by snatching the victory on one of the flatter stages of this year's race, using the Sunweb lead-out train as if it was his own on the undulating course. On stage 7 he was Roglic's bodyguard in the crosswinds, guiding him to the front as the peloton split and split again, before winding up the bunch sprint to take his second victory. On stage 11, he finished third in the lunge for the line alongside Caleb Ewan and Sam Bennett, even holding off a shoulder barge from Peter Sagan that saw the Slovak relegated in the sprint.

But it was on stage 15, on the HC-rated Grand Colombier, where Van Aert's most impressive achievement lay. At the foot of the 17km climb, Van Aert took over from Robert Gesink and began a 9km-long, 23-minute effort that shed the likes of Nairo Quintana and defending champion Bernal. To add insult to injury, he pulled over, sat up, and then tracked the dropped Bernal all the way to the line.

Jumbo started the Tour with a line up that was formidably strong for the mountains. Few expected they had a super domestique in Wout van Aert, too.







PRIMOŽ ROGLIČ

A BEATEN MAN

Slovenia's Primož Roglič looked every bit the Tour de France champion-elect for 19 days, until he was unceremoniously dethroned on the penultimate stage. *Procycling* examines how it all went so wrong, so quickly for the race favourite

Writer Barry Ryan // Image Marco Bertorello/Getty Images



Nothing transfigures a rider like defeat. For three weeks, Primož Roglič had looked a fitting winner of a socially-distanced Tour de France.

Cautious in his tactics, guarded in his comments and safely shielded by the strongest team in the race, he kept everybody at arm's length. Then, in the space of 36.2 kilometres of hard road in the Haute-Saône, all changed utterly. On the Tour's penultimate day, the detached impregnability of the champion suddenly gave way to the vulnerability of the human.

Nothing marked that transition quite like the new helmet that was perched atop Roglič's head during the fateful final time trial. As he readied himself on the start ramp in Lure, eyes hidden behind a tinted visor, the headwear seemed like the latest demonstration of his Jumbo-Visma team's commitment to eking out the most incremental of advantages.

By the time Roglič reached the upper slopes of La Planche des

▲ Roglič's smooth style deserted him when he needed it most in the final time trial

3rd

Roglič led the 2019 Giro d'Italia but faded to finish third

Belles Filles, the cutting-edge technology had transformed into a flimsy accoutrement, a symbol of futility. The seemingly undersized helmet appeared to be slipping backwards, while the discarded visor exposed an ashen face and a bewildered gaze. In a race that hitherto had been calculated to the second, Roglič was now in the process of conceding almost two minutes to his direct rival.

When Laurent Fignon lost the Tour to Greg LeMond on the Champs-Élysées in 1989, the

result was in doubt until the dying metres. Here, the balance tipped decisively in Tadej Pogacar's favour barely a third of the way up La Planche des Belles Filles. For Roglič, the final four kilometres must have felt like a nightmare from which he could not awake.

At the finish, his team-mates Tom Dumoulin and Wout van Aert watched events unfold on the big screen in quiet disbelief. The Tour was lost by the time Pogacar screeched to a halt past their vantage point, but the defeat was

“Primož did a good time trial. Not his best, but a good one - and we thought a good time trial would be enough, but apparently not”

Tom Dumoulin, following the stage 20 time trial



▼ Roglič made himself the race favourite by winning stage 4 at Orcières-Merlette



PRIMOŽ ROGLIČ

only confirmed mathematically a few minutes later, as Roglič entered the final 300 metres. Though beaten, he continued struggling against the gradient until he flopped across the finish line like a drowning man hauled gasping to the shore. That didn't bring an end to the suffering, of course. It merely changed its form, from physical to psychological.

Roglič dismounted and sat on the roadside, chest heaving, legs splayed. A soigneur discreetly snatched away the helmet, while Roglič wiped the saliva from his chin and stared into space, in confusion as much as in sadness. It was a place beyond words. Dumoulin, who knows what it is to lose a grand tour on the final weekend, crouched beside Roglič and draped an arm around his shoulder. "Primož did a good TT – not his best, but a good one – and we thought a good TT would be enough, but apparently not," Dumoulin would say afterwards, unable to mask his incredulity.

As soon as he could muster the strength, Roglič rose to his feet and staggered towards the television tent by the podium. He had given daily post-stage interviews in that very spot as the yellow jersey, saying as near to nothing as he could get away with. Now, as he interrupted Pogacar's first interview as the Tour winner

in waiting, one gesture seemed to reveal more than a fortnight of terse statements. Roglič hugged his fellow Slovenian, gently murmured his congratulations, exhaled, and then drew away. He shook his head and gave a thumbs up as he did so, a mesh of disappointment and dignity.

DESTINY CALLING

Since winning the Vuelta a España last year, Roglič had seemed the man most likely to challenge the Ineos Tour hegemony. They certainly thought so in Slovenia, as evidenced by the crowds that turned out to watch him at June's National Championships. "I never saw so many spectators there before. Maybe it was because of the pandemic, but people were hungry for sports," says Uroš Gramc of Slovenian newspaper *Vecer*. Roglič sent the masses home happy by powering to the road race title on the haul to Ambrož pod Krvavec, though his narrow defeat to Pogacar in the time trial sowed some doubts. "People started asking if Tadej was better than him," says Gramc.

Such thoughts were forgotten when Roglič dominated the Tour de l'Ain, where Jumbo-Visma squeezed the life out of the opposition. The template was reapplied at the Critérium du Dauphiné, where Roglič won on the Col de la Porte and led the race until forced to abandon after crashing heavily with a day to go.

Although Roglič arrived at the grand départ with his left arm wrapped in gauze, he showed no ill effects once the Tour got underway. The August races appeared to cause more lasting damage at Ineos, where Geraint Thomas and Chris Froome were omitted from the Tour line-up, while defending champion Egan Bernal reckoned with both a niggling back injury and the nagging sense that in Roglič, ●

STAGE 14

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 12
Clermont Ferrand • Lyon
194KM

Coming to the Tour de France with neither an established sprinter or an established GC rider can be a gamble. But it can also give a team space in which to operate. It was an especially big gamble in the case of Sunweb, who left home their most successful Tour rider in former green jersey winner Michael Matthews in favour of a youthful line up. The biggest wins often come through taking the biggest chances, however... With Bora-Hansgrohe having worked hard early in the stage to distance green jersey **Sam Bennett**, the team were desperate to set up **Peter Sagan** for the win to take maximum points but had burned a lot of their matches already. For Sunweb, not having one leader has advantages, and they had numbers. **Tiesj Benoot** was the first to try, attacking on the first of two cat-4 climbs in the last 11km on the rolling finish. When he got pulled back in, **Marc Hirschi** - not content with one stage win - had a go inside 4km to go. With few teams left with bodies to chase, it was down to the leaders themselves, like Sagan, to cover moves, and when Hirschi was reeled in **Søren Kragh Andersen** pounced with 3km to go. Everyone else could only look at each other, as the Dane soloed to his debut Tour win and his team's second in three days.



STAGE RESULT

1	Søren K Andersen		Team Sunweb	4:28:10
2	Luka Mezgec		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:15
3	Simone Consonni		Cofidis	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	61:03:00
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:44
3	Egan Bernal		Ineos Grenadiers	+0:59



TEAMS CLASSIFICATION

1	EF Pro Cycling		183:12:36
2	Movistar		+3:00
3	Jumbo-Visma		+23:02

STAGE 15

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 13
Lyon • Grand Colombier
174.5KM

Another Sunday, another win for **Tadej Pogačar**. On a day when attacks were largely kept in check due to the fearsome pace being set by Jumbo-Visma, the young Slovenian took his one opportunity to launch himself, outsprinting **Primož Roglič** to the line. There was no gap between the Slovenians, though, meaning that the only time gained back by Pogačar consisted of the bonus seconds on the line, but that put Roglič in sight at just 40 seconds ahead. Stage 15 was a tale of Jumbo-Visma controlling the day to perfection. **Adam Yates** attempted to attack and then straight away was reeled in by the yellow and black train, seconds after. The speed that **Wout van Aert**, **George Bennett**, **Tom Dumoulin** and **Sepp Kuss** set up the Grand Colombier prevented more attacks, and soon put other GC contenders in trouble. The most notable casualty was **Egan Bernal**, the defending champion, who slipped off the back of the leading group as Van Aert led. The 2019 Tour champion was unsettled by the pace set by Van Aert, the winner of two bunch sprints and Milan-San Remo. To top it off, the Belgian then sat in Bernal's mini chasing group that came in seven minutes down on Pogačar and Roglič, a reminder of how badly the day had gone wrong for Ineos.



STAGE RESULT

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	4:34:13
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	st
3	Richie Porte		Trek-Segafredo	+0:05



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	65:37:07
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:40
3	Rigoberto Urán		EF Pro Cycling	+1:34



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Benoit Cosnefroy		Ag2r La Mondiale	36
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	34
3	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	33



PRIMOŽ ROGLIČ

he was coming up against an opponent who had his number.

That impression only intensified in the opening phase of the Tour. At Orcières-Merlette, Van Aert and Sepp Kuss imposed Jumbo's order and Roglič sprinted to stage victory. He would assume yellow in the Pyrenees, press home his supremacy on Puy Mary and then distance Bernal definitively on the mammoth haul up the Grand Colombier on stage 15.

In the 21st century, the perceived probity of the maillot jaune and his team tends to double as a Rorschach test for the health of cycling at large, and Roglič might have felt he had been anointed the presumptive Tour winner at his press conference that evening, when he was asked if he was competing clean. "Yeah, I am. I have nothing to hide," said Roglič, who later confirmed his use of ketones.

Questions from his first seasons in the WorldTour re-emerged late in the third week, when Jumbo-Visma directeur sportif Merijn Zeeman was excluded from the Tour after insulting the commissaire who inspected Roglič's bike after the summit finish on the Col de la Loze on stage 17. Zeeman's outburst was all the more ill-judged given the insinuations that had been cast Roglič's way in 2016, though the rider himself handled the controversy with his usual aloof calm. "I was not present when it happened so it's really hard to comment on any of this," he said.

By then, Roglič had outlasted a determined Pogacar on the vicious final ramps of the Col de la Loze and he could perch a friendly arm across his compatriot's back after they had negotiated the gravel sector atop the Plateau de Glières the next day. He had maintained enough physical distancing across the Tour to enter the final weekend with a buffer of 57 seconds. The race seemed won.



▲ On the Grand Colombier, Pogačar outsprinted Roglič for the stage win

CALCULATIONS

The coronation was abruptly cancelled at La Planche des Belles Filles and replaced by an inquest, though in the pages of *L'Équipe*, Eddy Merckx saw little need to go rummaging through the wreckage in search of the black box when an obvious explanation lay in plain sight. "[Jumbo-Visma] raced stupidly. They dominated, controlled everything, except they forgot one guy, this little 21-year-old who was only 50 seconds down," Merckx said. "They got caught in their own trap, they were asking for it." Deceuninck-Quick Step manager Patrick Lefevere was of a similar mind, deeming their strategy to have been "almost arrogant".

In Mantes-la-Jolie ahead of the final stage, Jumbo-Visma manager Richard Plugge acknowledged that the small buffer over Pogacar was insufficient, but only because the youngster delivered an outsized performance in the time trial.

"We were stunned. We thought 57 seconds would be enough," he admitted. "It was a mistake to think that. That's clear. We were really surprised in what we saw, because it wasn't Roglič's best time trial, but it also wasn't his worst."

2nd

Roglič's best result at the Tour has come this year



PRIMOŽ ROGLIČ

Earlier in the race, when Jumbo-Visma were dictating the terms of engagement on all terrains, Plugge proudly accepted comparisons between his squad and the great Dutch football team of the 1970s. Van Aert, winner of two bunch sprints and often Roglic's most precious mountain domestique, seemed the personification of Plugge's vision of 'Total Cycling'. "The Dutch national team played collectively, with everybody at the highest level, and that's what we want to do too," he told *L'Équipe*.

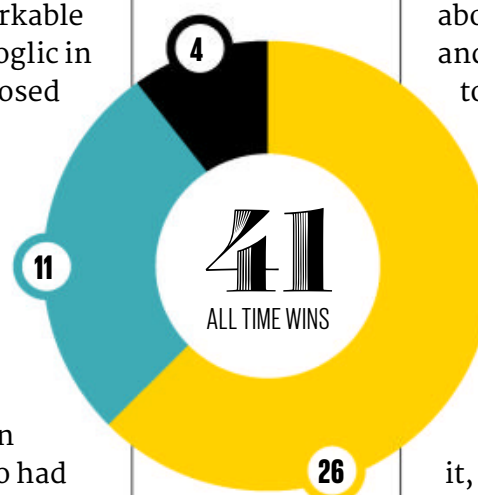
The problem was that, rather like Johan Cruyff et al in the 1974 World Cup final, Jumbo-Visma seemed so intent on humiliating their opponents that they neglected to win the match. The Netherlands went a goal up inside two minutes against West Germany, dominated possession and then contrived to lose 2-1. Jumbo-Visma put Roglic in the maillot jaune in the Pyrenees and regularly showcased their

collective might, but that superiority never translated into an unassailable advantage.

Given the magnitude of Bernal's eventual collapse, it is remarkable to think that his deficit to Roglic in the first 12 stages was composed entirely of time bonuses. Bernal was already visibly struggling when Jumbo-Visma blew the race apart on the Col de Peyresourde on stage 8, but Roglic was strangely hesitant to go on the offensive. Crucially, he also preferred not to track an acceleration by Pogacar, who had lost 1:21 in the crosswinds the previous day at Lavour.

It would be tempting to link Roglic's tactical conservatism to a key moment in his origin story, namely the ski-jumping crash in Planica in 2007 that signalled the beginning of the end of his first sporting career. "I didn't have the respect or the fear that I needed," Roglic once said of that incident.

ROGLIČ'S VICTORIES



Stages

Tour de France **2020, 2018, 2017**
 Critérium du Dauphiné **2020**
 Tour de l'Ain **2020 (2)**
 Vuelta a España **2019**
 Giro d'Italia **2019 (2), 2016**
 Tour de Romandie **2019 (3), 2017**
 UAE Tour **2019**
 Tour of Slovenia **2018 (2), 2015**
 Tirreno-Adriatico **2018**
 Itzulia Basque Country **2018, 2017 (2)**
 Ster ZLM **2017**
 Tour of Qinghai Lake **2015**
 Tour d'Azerbaïdjan **2015 (2)**

Stage race GC

Tour de l'Ain **2020**
 Vuelta a España **2019**
 Tour de Romandie **2019, 2018**
 Tirreno-Adriatico **2019**
 UAE Tour **2019**
 Tour of Slovenia **2018, 2015**
 Itzulia Basque Country **2018**
 Volta a Algarve **2017**
 Tour d'Azerbaïdjan **2015**

One-day races

National Championships road race **2020**
 Tre Valli Varesine **2019**
 Giro dell'Emilia **2019**
 National Championships time trial **2016**

◀ Roglic looked to have done enough as he dropped Pogacar on the Col de la Loze

In truth, at least as much of the caution at this Tour seemed to be emanating from his team car.

There was a sense of déjà vu about Jumbo's race management and, especially, their tendency to think days in advance rather than focus on the here and now. At the 2019 Giro, worried by their relative lack of climbing strength, Jumbo-Visma effectively engineered Richard Carapaz's passage into the pink jersey at Courmayeur.

He would never relinquish it, while Roglic never posed the same threat after frittering away a three-minute lead on the Ecuadorian rider.

Once Roglic took yellow on this Tour, he and his team seemed to prioritise saving energy over gaining time, preferring to increase the advantage in small increments rather than trying to deliver a knock-out blow before the time trial. The Slovenian emerged from the cover of teammates only fleetingly, notably at Puy Mary and the Col de la Loze. As Paris drew closer, Roglic looked destined to win his bout with Pogacar on points in the deft manner of Floyd Mayweather, but words attributed to another exponent of the sweet science, Mike Tyson, came to mind when the older man was dispatched to the canvas at La Planche des Belles Filles: everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face.

Cruelly for Roglic, the crucial hit came on the penultimate day. There was no time to lift himself and fight back, but this was no sucker punch. Pogacar had already served warning in the Pyrenees. Jumbo-Visma made tactical missteps, but maybe no strategy could have catered for Pogacar's startling power in the final reckoning. "We walked into the wall that's called Pogacar," Plugge said. "He was really strong, and we have to live with that." ▶





FINDING DISTANCE

The late Laurent Fignon recalled stumbling his way through a surreal press conference after losing yellow at the last 31 years ago. “I responded without responding,” he wrote in *We Were Young and Carefree*. The monosyllabic Roglic has been responding without responding since he joined the WorldTour.



By his standards, the press conference he held two hours after his time trial collapse was among the most revealing of his career.

“Sometimes he’s a little cold and distant, but in normal life, he’s different, more warm and nice,” his wife Lora Klinc insisted in a documentary produced by his team two years ago. There were signs of that here, but then defeat has always helped to soften perceptions of cycling’s more remote champions. “I feel sorry for the guys. I didn’t do this on purpose,” Roglic said, later admitting: “For the moment, I don’t have a really clear mind.” He even engaged in gallows humour when asked how his new helmet had worked out. “Obviously not so good, eh,” he smiled.

Fignon could at least go home the same night and start pretending it might be possible to

▲ Roglič slumps to the floor following his shock defeat at La Planche des Belles Filles

1st

Roglič’s career high point so far came at the 2019 Vuelta a España

forget the whole thing. Roglic had to repeat the anguish over again the next day. He was generous in his congratulations for Pogacar in the preamble and at the finish, but who knows what agonies he felt as he stood next to his young compatriot on the podium, the Slovenian anthem ringing round the Champs-Élysées.

The scene was being echoed at that very moment, 1,200 kilometres away in the village of Komenda. They had planned a celebratory party in Roglic’s hometown of Zagorje ob Savi for the final day of the Tour, but when he lost yellow, his fellow citizens felt it was only right to join the festivities in Pogacar’s village instead. As evening drew in, they could start to make light of being so abruptly superseded by their neighbour. The process will surely take longer for Roglic. **P**

BODY



SOLE

THE NEW SHOT 2

THE 5X GRAND TOUR WINNER RETURNS WITH A LIGHTER,
STIFFER SOLE AND MORE BREATHABLE UPPER.





RETRO
JEAN FORESTIER

THE SAGAN OF THE 50S

Jean Forestier was the 1957 Tour's green jersey, and also a Paris-Roubaix and Tour of Flanders champion. Procycling looks back at the career of a classics rider who also shone at the Tour

Writer Edward Pickering

Photography Pressesports/Offside Sports Photography



When the 2020 Tour came to Lyon, race historians noted that the visit, a rare one these days, was a nod to the Tour's first edition. The inaugural stage of the inaugural Tour ended in the city, and Søren Kragh Andersen's 15-second margin of victory in the 2020 iteration wasn't too different from Maurice Garin's 55-second gap ahead of Émile Pagie 117 years before. (With only one other rider within an hour of Garin, however, things were a little more spread out in 1903.)

The Tour wears its history self-consciously. Every edition is presented as a new chapter in the race's story, but at the same time the organisers are aware of the historical resonance of its people and its places. Until his death last year, 1960s Tour star Raymond Poulidor was a visible presence on the race, and when the Tour visits any region, its local riders of yesteryear are often presented to the crowds, new stars rubbing shoulders with their forebears.

Lyon has kept the Tour at arm's length in the modern era, and it is not a hotbed of the sport – French Wikipedia lists a small handful of pros from the city. The grand départ took place in Lyon in 1991, but that was 26 years after the last visit, and since then the Tour has visited twice, in 2003 and 2013. But the Tour still has a close link with the city in the form of Jean Forestier, a punchy French rider who won the green jersey in the 1957 race, to add to wins in Paris-Roubaix and the Tour of Flanders. His first Tour stage win, of four in total, came in Lyon in 1954, and in a further echo of the 2020 event, another came in Poitiers, which the Tour also visited this year.

Forestier was born in Lyon in 1930. His father worked in an abattoir, and his mother worked as a barmaid. According to Benoît Prieur, the author of *Jean Forestier: la Conquête de Paris-Roubaix*, the young Jean was largely ignored by his parents, and Forestier's main memory of growing up was of boredom and having little to do, with little support from his parents, who later divorced and paid him even less attention. However, he was looked after by his uncle Marius, who taught him

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RETRO

JEAN FORESTIER

to read and write. During World War 2 he was evacuated to Blany, in the countryside near Mâcon, and it was there that he discovered cycling. At first, it was a means of escape – he found that by being moved to Blany, he’d traded boredom in the city for boredom in the countryside. But he was interested in going faster, even if there was little sport to inspire him. There was a climb in a nearby village which he used to ride again and again until he was strong enough to go all the way to the top without having his hands on the handlebars.

His dream was to be a lorry driver, but he joined a club in Mâcon, then another in Lyon on his return to the city in 1947, and slowly and surely, he started getting stronger. He lived with his father in Lyon, and when he got up at 4am to go to work, the young Jean went out training until 7am, then carried on with working in a garage, studying to be a mechanic and getting his lorry driving licence. It was only after his military service that he started picking up results. His win in the 1951 GP de Reyrieux, which attracted the best riders from the Rhône, Loire and Lyon regions, enabled him to race as an independent in 1952 and then he turned professional for the Follis team in 1953.

SPRING DOUBLE

Jean Forestier remains, at the time of writing and going to press, the oldest living winner of the Tour of Flanders and Paris–Roubaix. He tells *Procycling* over the phone that some days are better than others, but that he’s looking forward to

◀ Forestier tackles the bergs of the Tour of Flanders, which he won in ‘56

his upcoming 90th birthday, and he has lucid recollection of his racing days and



▲ Forestier could climb well enough to reach a high of fourth in the Tour

get off his chest about the 2020s. “I follow bike racing still,” he says. “But it’s from a distance. I don’t follow too closely for the very good reason that I don’t like race radios and earpieces. The riders are robots now – the directeurs tell them, ‘Do this, do that’, and they don’t take responsibility.”

But even from a distance, he was happy to watch the modern Tour come to his home city.

“I saw the Danish guy who won in Lyon, he did a really good job there. I liked attacking in the last kilometre and I won some good races that way.” And he followed the 2020 Tour closely enough to know how the race had panned out.

“It went right to the penultimate stage in the time trial. The winner really did a fantastic thing that day. But until then, I can’t say that it was a terrific Tour.”

Forestier’s strengths as a cyclist were his resilience and his ability to sprint from a small group. He describes himself as a puncheur, though his biggest wins also came from an opportunist’s nose for his

greatest triumphs. But before he talks about the 1950s, he has a few things to

STAGE 16

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 15
La Tour-du-Pin > Villard-de-Lans
164KM

You only needed to look at the size of the break that went away early on stage 16 to see that the final week of the Tour had started. Week three is the last chance saloon, as alongside the battle for the yellow jersey is a battle of another kind among teams trying to salvage their Tour before it’s too late. With the 15 stage victories so far having been shared between just nine teams, and with the four jerseys sat within those same teams, too, that left 13 squads with little to show for their efforts. That would explain why it took 60km before the breakaway proper went free, and why it contained 23 riders, to make it the biggest in the Tour. Notably (and unusually), it was squads like Ineos Grenadiers and Arkéa-Samsic who threw their riders up the road – they contributed five of the 22 after their GC hopes evaporated on stage 15. And the gap ballooned to 10 minutes, as the GC-led peloton was content to take a quiet day where it could. On the cat-1 Montée de Saint-Nizier-du-Mouchrotte with 26km to go a five-rider selection formed, from which Bora’s **Lennard Kämna** went clear – dropping **Richard Carapaz** and **Julian Alaphilippe**, to solo to the line. Having been a runner-up on stage 13, this time around the German ensured he got his first stage win, and Tour redemption for his Bora team.



STAGE RESULT

1	Lennard Kämna		Bora-Hansgrohe	4:12:52
2	Richard Carapaz		Ineos Grenadiers	+1:27
3	Sébastien Reichenbach		Groupama-FDJ	+1:56



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	70:06:47
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:40
3	Rigoberto Urán		EF Pro Cycling	+1:34



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	269
2	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	224
3	Matteo Trentin		CCC Team	212

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STAGE 17

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 16
Grenoble • Méribel - Col de la Loze
170KM

Our memories of the 2020 Tour will be coloured in a different hue. The bright, washed-out sunlight of midsummer was swapped for the sharper distinctions of early autumn, with raking, horizontal light illuminating the race. Stage 17 also offered us a change in colour and mood, though not, in the end, of the race. The orange jerseys of Bahrain-McLaren silently and resolutely slid to the front of the peloton, over the Col de la Madeleine and thence to the Col de la Loze, and for once the front of the peloton was not coloured in yellow and black. The plan was to slingshot **Mikel Landa** into his favoured territory: high mountains in the third week of a grand tour. Pundits grumbled about the team doing Jumbo's dirty work for them. However, there was method in their madness. Jumbo might have been happier for a steadier tempo, and making it difficult should have suited the resilient Landa. And who knows if the hard pace they set didn't unsettle **Primož Roglič's** intended trajectory to Paris? As fate would have it, Landa faltered, while **Miguel Ángel López** soared to the win on the vertiginous Loze, ahead of Roglič and **Tadej Pogačar**. At this point, the Tour might have looked a little different, but it was still following the pattern that had been set since Nice.



STAGE RESULT

1	Miguel Á. López		Astana	4:49:08
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:15
3	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:30



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	74:56:04
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:57
3	Miguel Á. López		Astana	+1:26



BEST YOUNG RIDER

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	74:57:01
2	Enric Mas		Movistar	+3:21
3	Valentin Madouas		Groupama-FDJ	+1:24:17



RETRO

JEAN FORESTIER

rivals being more interested in each other than the Lyonnais who was disappearing up the road. In the 1954 Tour de Romandie, the big home favourites were the Tour de France champions of 1950 and 1951, Ferdi Kübler and Hugo Koblet. Kübler and Koblet watched each other so carefully in the opening stage that Forestier was given 17 minutes, dropped his breakaway companion on the final climb to Champéry and did enough to win the GC.

His Paris-Roubaix win in 1955 and Tour of Flanders win in 1956 came in similar ways, though the races were very different from each other. In Paris-Roubaix, he put himself out at the front of the race 50km from the finish on a small climb in Doullens, then attacked alone at Mons-en-Pévèle. Behind him, Fausto Coppi and Louison Bobet, two of the greatest cyclists of the 1950s, chased, but they also spent too long watching each other, leaving the exhausted Frenchman 15 seconds ahead on the line. At the Tour of Flanders the

following year, he gave himself little chance of success, and he was the only rider from his team to start, having

▼ Flanders champion Forestier won a similar spread of races to Peter Sagan

driven up to the start in Gent the day before with his wife. Before leaving on the morning of the race, he told his wife to expect him back early – without team support, a mishap or mistake would put him irrevocably out of the race. That day the Flemish classics specialist Fred De Bruyne took the initiative and attacked, but was brought back 3km before the finish. Rik Van Steenbergen tried his luck, but was brought back, and then, in the lull which hit the lead group with a kilometre to go, Forestier sensed his chance and attacked.

“Paris-Roubaix is the most beautiful classic,” Forestier tells *Pro Cycling*. “And in those days it was a true Paris-Roubaix – we started in Paris, whereas now they start in Compiègne. It was a very long race.

“The day I won it was Easter Day. It rained, the wind was blowing and it was really terrible weather. I took my chance at Mons-en-Pévèle. We were three, then two, and then I took my chance alone. Bobet and Coppi were watching each other a bit and were suspicious of each other, so I won. I wasn't afraid of them. I considered myself in the peloton as the smallest of the big riders, but I was never afraid of the



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RETRO

JEAN FORESTIER

bigger riders like Van Steenbergen, Coppi, Koblet or Kübler. It was an unforgettable day. When I got to the finish I was utterly spent. Dead. Exhausted, and soaked by cold rain. At the Tour of Flanders, on the other hand, I got to the finish line as fresh as a daisy.

"I was not the strongest that day," he continues. "Fred De Bruyne was going really well, and all the way through the race, I just stayed at the back of the peloton and saved energy. It's a hard race, with steep climbs – it's harder than Paris-Roubaix. But when the chance presented itself, a kilometre from the end on a small

► Forestier rode as a professional between 1953 and 1965

cobbled hill, I attacked, took 50m out of the others and won. I didn't see the front of the race until one kilometre from the finish. The Belgian sprinters – Van Steenbergen, [Raymond] Impanis and [Germain] Derycke – were all watching each other and I attacked from behind."

Forestier's Tour career saw him winning four stages, and he regularly rode the event as part of the French national team. His 1954 stage win in Lyon also came alongside his team leader Bobet winning the yellow jersey. The following year, Bobet won his third consecutive Tour with Forestier's support. And in 1956, he won the Tour stage he is most proud of, over three climbs to Gap, though the race was tinged with disappointment for the national selection as their leader Gilles Bauvin was beaten to the yellow jersey by Roger Walkowiak.

But 1957 was his most visible Tour. He rode again for the national selection in support of the eventual winner, Jacques Anquetil, but he also wore the yellow jersey for two days before Anquetil took over, and he won the green jersey, even though the stage win eluded him. Metronomic consistency saw him spend most of the race in the top five and he was fourth in Paris. He missed the podium by 42 seconds, but his consolation was the first ever win for a French rider in the green jersey classification.



Jean Forestier's career declined comparatively after 1957, though he took his fourth and final Tour stage win in 1961, and could still finish in the top 10 of Paris-Roubaix and Flèche Wallonne in 1962. He retired in 1965, and fulfilled his original childhood dream of becoming a lorry driver, spending Monday to Friday driving between Grenoble and Paris and delivering goods, then working on his lorry at the weekends.

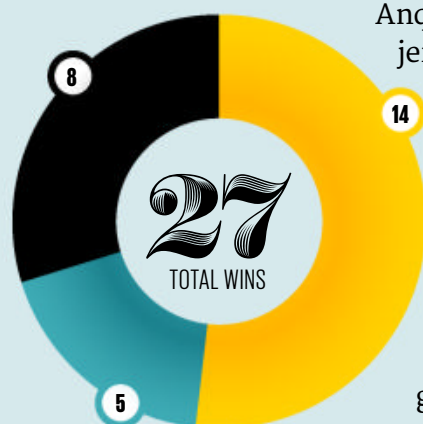
"I loved cycling, but I loved driving as well. I had already got my licence and I studied as a mechanic, so it was all planned," Forestier tells *ProCycling*.

"I still earned my living out on the road," he says. "But this time I had a different engine." **P**

JEAN FORESTIER CAREER WINS

Forestier's two biggest wins were the spring double of the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix between 1955 and 1956. But he picked up a lot of races, especially in individual stages

- Stages
- GC title
- One-day race



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G U Y N I V

GRAND AMBITIONS

Guy Niv made history as the first Israeli rider to race the Tour de France. The former mountain biker explains his path to the sport and why racing on the Grand Colombier at this year's Tour takes him full circle

Interview Sophie Hurcom
Photography Bettini Photo

I've found out, like everyone said, the Tour de France is nothing like any other race, you cannot compare it to anything done before. The peloton is really, really big, you can feel that it's the Tour de France and everyone wants to achieve something. Mostly, I'm having a lot of fun – it's my childhood dream to race this race and I'm really happy that I am doing it. I'm trying to pay attention to live in those moments, and I'm really having fun.

It's a huge honour to be the first Israeli rider in the Tour. I really like to represent my country and to show the world the other side of Israel, the side that normally doesn't get to be in the media. It's really a great honour for me to be in the biggest stage in the cycling world, to show the world Israel and to be part of an Israeli team – I'm really privileged.

I really see that it's made a big buzz in Israel, and I hope it will help promote cycling in Israel and more and more kids will dream of

becoming a pro cyclist. Cycling is growing a lot in Israel and now with the Tour de France, even more.

The biggest memory I have of the Tour is from my Bar Mitzvah trip to watch the Tour in 2007 when I was 13. I remember seeing the caravan going on the road and being on the top of the mountain, on the Col de la Colombière with my dad, waiting for the riders for so many hours and seeing them passing by, all the spectators going wild. It was really huge. This year we are going to be riding up the same climbs, but now I'm going to be there as a rider, not a fan, it's going to be really nice for me. Good closure.

I was attracted to cycling as a hobby. I wasn't thinking about becoming a pro cyclist. The racing scene in Israel is quite small, and not many people know about it. I was riding my bike for fun, with my dad, my friends. I joined a local club, I was a really competitive kid so I kind of immediately started racing. It was more about having

◀ Niv races up the Grand Colombier, 13 years after being a roadside fan

STAGE
18

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 17
Méribel › La Roche-sur-Foron
175KM

How do you salvage a grand tour? Get two riders up the road, win a stage with one, and move the other into the KoM jersey, obviously. **Michał Kwiatkowski** and **Richard Carapaz** of Ineos Grenadiers crossed the line arm in arm, and were so far ahead that they could enjoy a steady ride in and a chat, after having infiltrated the 19-rider break and then dispatched their rivals one by one. Kwiatkowski paid tribute to the team's late sports director, **Nicolas Portal**, and there was a sense that Ineos needed to put on a performance in his memory, but also to rescue a Tour that risked ending with nothing. With **Egan Bernal's** abandon, there was a sense that Ineos would look rudderless. Instead, Carapaz was in the break for the third day in a row, and the team sent three others with him, including Kwiatkowski. They rode away from **Nicolas Edet** and **Pello Bilbao**, then **Marc Hirschi** - the more dangerous in the group - pushed too hard on the Col des Saix descent and crashed. He never caught back up to the flying Ineos pair. It was a welcome win for Kwiatkowski, who had yet to add a grand tour stage to his decorated palmarès, and in all likelihood would never have had the opportunity were Bernal still to be in the race. A change of plan, but the plan worked.



STAGE RESULT

1	Michał Kwiatkowski		Ineos Grenadiers	4:47:33
2	Richard Carapaz		Ineos Grenadiers	st
3	Wout van Aert		Jumbo-Visma	+1:51



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	79:45:30
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:57
3	Miguel Á. López		Astana	+1:27



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Richard Carapaz		Ineos Grenadiers	74
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	72
3	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	67

STAGE 19

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 18
Bourg-en-Bresse › Champagne
166.5KM

Stage 19's lumpy route wasn't a classic sprinters' day. It featured 2,000 metres of climbing and mostly twisting, rolling roads. But with flat days few and far between in 2020 the sprinters put a tentative asterisk in the roadbook, if their post-Alps legs allowed it. Bora-Hansgrohe took control, trying one final time in vain to shake green jersey **Sam Bennett**, letting only his Deceuninck team-mate **Rémi Cavagna** go up the road and preventing a big break scuppering things. But with Bennett stuck to **Peter Sagan**'s wheel like glue, things came back together and a sprint finish looked likely. Except, this is 2020. With 30km to go **Oliver Naesen** attacked, Sagan followed and Bennett followed him, setting off a 12-rider group of hitters that also featured **Greg Van Avermaet**, **Jasper Stuyven**, **Luke Rowe** and **Matteo Trentin**. In the middle of the Tour, a classic seemed to have broken out. CCC had two riders present, but so did Sunweb in **Nikias Arndt** and **Søren Kragh Andersen** and with the latter team in imperious form, Sunweb capitalised. Kragh Andersen took off on a descent with 16km to go, and by the time the rest started to chase the Dane had an unclosable gap. He soloed to the win by almost a minute, taking his second stage victory of the Tour and Sunweb's third.



STAGE RESULT

1	Søren K Andersen		Team Sunweb	3:36:33
2	Luka Mezgec		Mitchelton-Scott	+0:53
3	Jasper Stuyven		Trek-Segafredo	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	83:29:41
2	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	+0:57
3	Miguel Á. López		Astana	+1:27



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1	Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	319
2	Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	264
3	Matteo Trentin		CCC Team	250



G U Y N I V

fun in nature, and riding my mountain bike. Only after seven or eight years of riding my bike did I understand I wanted to try and be a pro cyclist.

It was not normal for me to watch cycling. In Israel everyone is watching football and basketball – and so did I – they are the main sports I like to follow. But in recent years my family, my friends, have turned to pro cycling, and with the Giro d'Italia starting in Israel two years ago a lot of people started watching cycling. Now, when I am racing the Tour, a lot of people in Israel are watching.

The north of Israel, where I grew up, is heaven for mountain biking. We have really good courses there and huge forests. There is a big mountain bike stage race called the Epic Israel, like the Cape Epic. It's a really big and international race. For mountain biking, it's amazing. It's not desert like a lot of people imagine – we have the desert in the south but in the north we have lots of mountains and it's a really beautiful place. Where I live now, at the border with Syria and Lebanon, it's great for training for the road.

There are mountain bike races and also some crit races and once every month or two, a big road race. But definitely not enough. It's something that needs to grow in all disciplines... We need more clubs and we need more people to get into the racing scene.

I started to take mountain biking seriously when I was 16, 17, when I had the dream to go to the Europeans and the Worlds. I did it almost like a full-time job, when you consider I was also a student at school. I was training before and after. I really realised I could make a career out of it only four years ago when Israel Cycling Academy

“The north of Israel, where I grew up, is heaven for mountain biking. We have really good courses and huge forests... it's not desert”

stepped up from a Conti team to ProConti team, and I saw that this project was here to stay and reach the highest levels in the world. That was the moment I realised that if I wanted to make a career out of it, I needed to switch my focus from mountain bike to the road.

I jumped into deep water. I learned road racing through the process [of doing it]. I started in the summer of 2017 when I got the stagiaire contract. My first two races with the pro team were the Tour of Utah and the Tour of Colorado. Racing in the US is high level, but the roads are big, there's less stress in the peloton, the fight for position is not that big. It was an easier way to step into pro cycling.

▼ Having started the Giro twice, Niv makes his Tour debut this year





But in less than a year, I found myself in the Giro.

It was quite clear because of my size that I'm more suitable for climbing and I enjoy the big mountains more. I don't like the stress of the sprints, I'm also not that explosive and good at it. I find myself as a climber, but I'm not at the level of the big, big climbers, but I'm developing towards being a big climber. For the moment I can be a domestique in the climbs, to help our leader, and hopefully in the future I'll get the opportunities to be a leader if I can show I can be a leader.

It's a different engine in road racing to mountain biking. You need to work on different things. The duration you do during the week on the bike sometimes can be double when you're a road cyclist. When you're a mountain biker, you work a lot off the bike, but on the

road you work less. It's important, but not as much. Doing the long hours, day after day, is something that you are not used to. I really like this part of the training. When I was a mountain biker I had a big training [session] only once a week, but I always asked my coach to do more.

In 2018, I started the Giro and had to abandon after five days due to sickness, but in myself, I always believed I could do it. I was really looking forward to 2019 to show myself and show the team I am capable of handling the challenge of a grand tour. That was the first thing I learned after 2019, that I could do it. I also learned that on those long stage races you really need to pick your fights; you don't go all-in every day, you find the days that suit you, you find the days to go in the breakaway, then in the other days you do what you need to for the team, you finish it off and

▲ The ex-mountain biker has been learning through racing with the Israeli team

3
Grand tour starts for Niv; two at the Giro, and one at the Tour

roll to the finish with the grupetto, and save your legs.

I see myself as a progressing climber and I really want to win races in the future. If you have the ability to do it, you get to see it quite early in your career, but of course, I want to win races and the big dream is to win a stage in the Tour de France. And I can be a big and useful domestique for riders who are going to join this team – a small name like Chris Froome, who is joining the team next year.

As an Israeli this is the best team I can be in. The fact that this team keeps growing and bringing such big riders here is a huge sporting challenge for me, and I like those challenges. I'm really looking forward to working with Chris next season. I spoke with him at the Critérium du Dauphiné, he seems like a super nice guy and really motivated for next season. **P**



Image: Christophe Petit-Tesson/Getty Images.



JOURNAL

THE BACK OF THE PACK

One rider's job was to get his team-mate to the finish. It cost him his Tour

As the cameras focus on the front of the race – the leaders, the glamour of attacks – it is easy to forget about the battle at the back of the field to remain in contention. The Tour television production team love their ‘arrière-du-peloton’ camera shots, but what we never see is what happens to the riders after they have been dropped. While those in the hunt for the top of the general classification are looking to gain seconds, those who have slipped back on the stage are just hoping to finish inside the time limit.

The time cut is set each day based on the difficulty of the stage and the speed of the peloton on that day, and then a percentage is calculated, and from that, a time limit. For stage 17 of the Tour de France, which finished on the vertiginous Col de la Loze, that limit was set at 13 per cent of Miguel Ángel López's winning time, a cut of 37 minutes and 35 seconds. With two major climbs, the Madeleine and the Loze, the grupetto could lose a little under 19 minutes per climb. Which isn't much room for manoeuvre.

On what was billed as the queen stage of the Tour, it was a struggle for anyone who wasn't a pure climber. Even Richie Porte, who finished fifth, said he could barely pedal his bike with the gradient and the altitude. For the heavier riders in the bunch, or those looking after those less adapted to climbs, such as sprinters, it can be a matter of seconds between them making it to the finish in time or not.

Jens Debusschere became the third rider to finish OTL, outside the time limit, on the Tour, after he used all his energy attempting to save his team-mate Bryan Coquard's place in the race. Earlier in the stage, the Belgian was secure in the grupetto with Sam Bennett on the Col de Madeleine, but waited for Coquard on the valley road. After pacing him back to a place where he could stay in contention on the Col de la Loze, Debusschere slipped off the back, having done all he could to keep his sprinter in the race.

The pictures of the lead-out rider at the finish tell the story of a man putting his race on the line for a team-mate; in keeping Coquard's race alive he sacrificed himself. No different to a usual stage – the lead-out rider routinely sacrifices his or her chances of a high finish for a team-mate who can do so. All this for Coquard, who finished in the top five twice in sprints and was fourth in the points competition.

“It is a shame that I have to leave so close to Paris,” Debusschere said after the stage. “But it is no different. I came to the team to ride for Bryan and so you have to do everything for it.”





SAM BENNETT

IT'S NOT EASY WINNING GREEN

After years of waiting to get his chance at the Tour, **Sam Bennett** ended the 2020 race as the top sprinter, winning two stages - including on the Champs-Élysées - and the green jersey, becoming the first Irishman since Sean Kelly 31 years ago to do so

Even when Sam Bennett was interviewed after stage 10, it still hadn't sunk in that he had won his first Tour stage. "I forgot to throw the bike at the line and I thought he might have got me," the Irishman said, almost to himself, in a panic as if someone was going to come in and take it away.

He'd gone through the same routine with his team-mates a few minutes earlier. "Did I get it?" he asked. "Yeah, but did I really win it? It was so close I don't trust it," he repeated, in between hugs of congratulation.

As the realisation that he had won his first Tour stage became that bit little less of a dream and a little more reality, even the barrier of the face mask Bennett was obliged to wear couldn't hide the emotions. Relief, shock, happiness and everything in between: memories of the failures, the setbacks, the people he had to thank flashed through his mind, as he put his head in his hands and cried.

If the 2020 Tour had a feelgood victory, Bennett's was it. The kind no one in the peloton begrudged.

Writer Sophie Hurcom

Image Tribouillard/Getty

Look no further as to how well the Irishman is liked by his peers than the fact that even his biggest rival, Caleb Ewan, who he beat into second place, was among those to congratulate him on Twitter that night. When not sprinting head-to-head, the two are also friends and live near each other in Monaco.

Those who complete the Tour, even more those who find success at it, are often perceived as superhuman. But for a moment Bennett was not a professional cyclist, someone with almost 50 racing victories to his name. He was just a guy from Carrick-on-Suir in Ireland, reacting to something extraordinary in the most ordinary, relatable way. 🇮🇪





Twelve days later, Bennett crossed the line in first place on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Where others grew weary, Bennett visibly grew in confidence as the Tour went on, and by the time he got his second victory on the most famous boulevard in cycling, there were no tears. Decker head to toe in the green jersey atop a custom green Specialized bike, Bennett comprehensively won the Tour's final and most prestigious sprint in Paris by a bike length. There was no doubting this one. Over the course of three weeks, Bennett had cemented himself as the Tour's number one sprinter and perhaps found a bit of missing self belief.

"It's like I fully deserve my place within Deceuninck-Quick Step," Bennett explained from his home two days after the race ended, about how the Tour has changed him. "Sometimes you can have a bit of imposter syndrome, that you don't know are you actually good enough to be in this position, because of the riders who have come through in this position and they've always got results. I didn't want to be the first to not get a win in the Tour, in this

▲ The dream win: Bennett, wearing green, takes the 'sprinters' world championships' on the Champs

team, in this position with this support and the class of riders that are riding for you. Now I feel that is my position and I've earned it. I can relax knowing that I should be in the place that I am in."

A LONG WAIT

Seven years ago, almost exactly to the day of Paris, Bennett announced himself to the cycling world with a debut pro win on stage 5 of the Tour of Britain. After years of injuries and disappointments and a contract from FDJ that was later rescinded, Bennett was on the verge of quitting. Then on the toughest, longest stage of the race, straight through the hills of mid-Wales, 22-year-old Bennett, riding for An-Post Chain Reaction, emerged from the torrential downpour that soaked the first half of the day to win the sprint in Caerphilly, surviving where riders such as Mark Cavendish or Elia Viviani were dropped. It was the turning point.

"That was on top of three years of ups and downs," Kurt Boegarts, Bennett's team manager at An-Post told *ProCycling*. "We had a rider

who was injured, going to FDJ – there was a pro contract for him there, but he had a massive injury from a car crash [in 2011]. He came from the same town as Sean Kelly – in Ireland there's massive talent but they compare them to icons like [Stephen] Roche and Kelly which makes it very difficult. He was going through a rough patch. When you're out of the U23s it gets very difficult [to turn pro] and you need to do something outstanding, such as winning on the highest level."

A month later, Bennett signed with ProConti German squad NetApp-Endura, the team that would become Bora-Hansgrohe and where he stayed until joining Deceuninck-Quick Step this season. Still, success didn't come quickly, or easily. At NetApp, Bennett was given his Tour debut in 2015 but abandoned with illness on stage 17. A year later he returned but crashed on the opening stage and did little but suffer and survive to Paris. In the meantime he won at the Giro and then at the Vuelta. Of the 15 stage races Bennett has started since the 2018 Giro, up to this year's Tour, he's won at 12 of them. But



SAM BENNETT

with Sagan and Pascal Ackermann – the latter a German sprinter on a German team – Bennett was repeatedly overlooked for the Tour. And for a sprinter, to be considered among the top ranks, you’ve got to prove yourself at the Tour.

The move to DQS this year, while a sign of Bennett’s progression through the sprint ranks, was not without its pressures. Quick Step are *the* sprint force in the peloton, who have won Tour stages with the likes of Mark Cavendish, Marcel Kittel, Fernando Gaviria and Elia Viviani every year since 2013. Manager Patrick Lefevere is notoriously unforgiving; Bennett was signed to win Tour stages.

“The older you get and you don’t tick that box, the more doubt comes in, does he have that level to win at the Tour,” Boegarts said. “But I think the last few years, it’s been about getting the chance to do it.”

Bennett admitted that during the Tour’s first week, having finished fourth, second and third in the first three sprints, he was struggling to sleep until 2am as the pressure mounted. He was on the verge of turning 30 this October; maybe a Tour victory would never come.

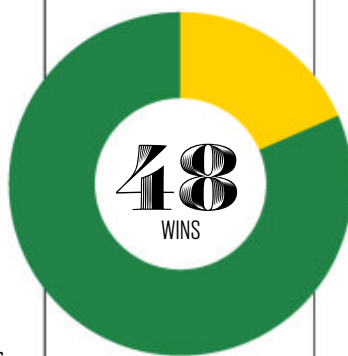
Michael Mørkøv, Bennett’s chief lead-out man, never doubted. “I never worried so much, as long as he was there, and I’m there. As long as we are playing for the victory, which we were in all the sprints we did, he was always second, fourth, third; that means that he was where he should be,” he told *ProCycling*.

When Bennett’s first win finally came in Île de Ré, it was as much down to clever tactics as speed.

“We noticed that many times Caleb marked Sam. I knew that on stage 10 coming into that sprint, I was trying to launch Sam as late as possible so that Caleb wouldn’t be able to come around,” Mørkøv continued. “I started my sprint as late as 250 before the line, and that showed that there was just not enough for Caleb to come around.”

CAREER VICTORIES

Bennett has won a total of 48 races ranked .1 and above. His most successful year so far has been 2019, with 13 victories



One day races
Stages

▼ Bennett had to work hard to avoid the time cut in the mountain stages of the 2020 Tour

GREEN GIANT

The victory on stage 10 also swung the green jersey back in Bennett’s favour. Sagan’s hold on green has been so tight since 2012 that most sprinters don’t even bother going for what traditionally is the ‘sprinters’ competition’. And when Bennett and Quick Step were dispatched by Bora on the hills of stage 7, history looked to be repeating itself.

Bennett was among those downplaying his designs towards green initially, seemingly happy to enjoy wearing the jersey and emulating his compatriot Kelly, even if just for a day or two. But he was unequivocally the faster of the two. And after his stage win, things went further in his favour. Sagan was relegated on stage 11 for barging Wout van Aert, and the points gap was now a chasm at 68.

However, Bennett’s win in green was far from being down to the luck of the Irish. The route didn’t play into Sagan’s hands as well as previous years have, with more early intermediate sprints with fewer climbs before them, but Bennett was unshakeable regardless. Bora took the race on almost every day to try and tire or distance him, but every move, every attack, Bennett was there, a shadow on Sagan’s shoulder. Of the 17 🏆



STAGE 20

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 19
Lure › La Planche des Belles Filles
36.2KM (ITT)

If **Primož Roglič** had been offered a deficit of 35 seconds on **Tom Dumoulin** in this time trial before the Tour, one would imagine that he’d have taken it. Roglič did come fifth, but what happened in front of him blew his yellow jersey hopes out of the water. **Tadej Pogačar**, nine years Roglič’s junior, in his first Tour de France, set a blistering time on La Planche des Belles Filles that could not be matched by anyone. So blistering a time, in fact, that Pogačar not only won the yellow and white jerseys, but the polka dot jersey, too.

Roglič is a man who has won four grand tour time trials, including two at the Giro last year. Before stage 20 of the 2020 Tour de France, the only elite time trial Pogačar had won was the Slovenian national time trial championships. Ominously, one of those victories was this year, where he beat Roglič on a hilly course. The manner in which he rode up to Planche des Belles Filles will live long in the memory, especially when compared to Roglič, who repeatedly climbed out of the saddle as it became all too clear that his lead was evaporating. He did not even have a bad day - fifth in a Tour de France time trial - but Pogačar was so much quicker than everyone else. A 57-second deficit to Roglič before the stage turned into a 59-second lead by the end.



STAGE RESULT

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	55:55
2	Tom Dumoulin		Jumbo-Visma	+1:21
3	Richie Porte		Trek-Segafredo	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	84:26:33
2	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:59
3	Richie Porte		Trek-Segafredo	+3:30



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1	Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	82
2	Richard Carapaz		Ineos Grenadiers	74
3	Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	67

STAGE 21

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 20
Mantes-la-Jolie › Paris
122KM

In the last 30 years only three riders have won on the Champs-Élysées wearing the green jersey: **Djamolidine Abdoujaparov** in 1993, **Robbie McEwen** in 2002 and **Mark Cavendish** in 2011. Not even **Sean Kelly**, the only other Irishman to ever win green at the Tour, had ever achieved the feat. Quick Step hadn't won in Paris since Gert Steegmans in 2008. The exclusive club expanded by one member in 2020 as **Sam Bennett** rode a wave of confidence and momentum to the victory on the Champs, ahead of **Mads Pedersen**, in the rainbow jersey, and **Peter Sagan**, for once divested of green.



STAGE RESULT

1 Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	2:53:32
2 Mads Pedersen		Trek-Segafredo	st
3 Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	st



GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1 Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	87:20:05
2 Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	+0:59
3 Richie Porte		Trek-Segafredo	+3:30



POINTS CLASSIFICATION

1 Sam Bennett		Deceuninck-QS	380
2 Peter Sagan		Bora-Hansgrohe	284
3 Matteo Trentin		CCC Team	260



KOM CLASSIFICATION

1 Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	82
2 Richard Carapaz		Ineos Grenadiers	74
3 Primož Roglič		Jumbo-Visma	67



YOUTH CLASSIFICATION

1 Tadej Pogačar		UAE Emirates	87:20:05
2 Enric Mas		Movistar	+6:07
3 Valentin Madouas		Groupama-FDJ	+1:42:43



TEAMS CLASSIFICATION

1 Movistar		262:14:58
2 Jumbo-Visma		+18:31
3 Bahrain-McLaren		+57:10



intermediate sprints contested by the duo, Bennett scored more points than Sagan in 11 of them, while in the six head-to-head finish line sprints where both riders finished in the top 10, Bennett beat Sagan in all. Sagan's relegation on stage 11 may have been the seismic shift, but Bennett's winning gap of 96 points was far more than the amount Sagan was docked that day.

"I never fully understand what goes into getting that green jersey. There's a lot of work, and it takes from trying to get stage wins," Bennett said. "When I started going for the green jersey, I started noticing, oh man, I have to race the first 20 minutes to one hour of this to make sure my competitors don't get into the break for the points. That was each stage, energy being taken away. Then I had to go for the intermediates, which is shorter at the time but more explosive, so that's more energy each day. Then I'm going against the points jersey riders and the supposedly fresher pure sprinters who are saving, when I'm racing. There was that aspect of it. I really didn't think I'd get the Champs-Élysées.

"As a kid, the Champs-Élysées is the one sprint I'd play over and over again, that side view of the sprinters coming around the corner and sprinting all the way to the line... to

▲ Even as late as the stage 19 bonus sprint, Sagan pushed Bennett all the way to the line

have footage now of me in the green jersey winning it, that's special."

Fourteen months after Sean Kelly won Ireland's last green jersey, the last of four he took during his career, Sam Bennett was born in Kelly's hometown, Carrick-on-Suir. He took his first steps into professional cycling as part of Kelly's An-Post team. While Carrick-on-Suir held a parade in Bennett's honour, Bennett enjoyed a low-key takeaway and Irish whiskey with his team-mates before returning home to Monaco. Quiet nights in are more his thing. His stage winners' medals were already on display on his sideboard and he'd been watching videos, reliving the last three weeks, but otherwise, nothing had changed. He celebrated an extraordinary achievement in the most ordinary way.

"I was going into the Tour like, if I get one here, I'll be happy. If you get one stage in the Tour it can make your whole career. Then I'll have one in each grand tour and it'll be fantastic, I'll be buzzing," he said.

"Three races I would love to win more than anything are Champs-Élysées, San Remo and the Worlds. Champs-Élysées was something I never thought I'd get. It's the sprinters' world champs, really, and then I did in the bloody green jersey. Holy crap."

5

The number of green jersey wins by Irish riders at the Tour

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INEOS

INEOS HORRIBILIS

Writer Richard Moore

Image Benoit Tessier/Getty Images

For the first time since 2014, Ineos did not win the Tour de France, and their best-placed rider this year was Richard Carapaz in 13th place. *Procyling* looks at where it all went wrong for the British team

On 20 December last year, Jumbo-Visma announced their eight-man team for the Tour de France, six months before the race was even due to start.

It was not until a week before the rescheduled start, at the end of August, that Ineos Grenadiers named their lineup. Jumbo-Visma's early announcement spoke of certainty and decisiveness, though in the event two changes were forced on them thanks to injuries.

In contrast, Ineos's late and surprise team confirmation – with Richard Carapaz parachuted in and

Chris Froome and Geraint Thomas left out – spoke of uncertainty, indecision and even panic.

The comparison with Jumbo-Visma may in the end be moot. They did not win the Tour, after all. But they did have the strongest team, if not the strongest rider. And for seven of the last eight Tours, Team Sky/Ineos had both: strongest team and rider.

This year they gambled, swapping the vast experience of Froome and Thomas for the energy and attacking flair of Tour debutant Carapaz, and it did not pay off.

But what went wrong? Was it just bad luck? Pavel Sivakov crashed twice on stage 1; Egan Bernal, the defending champion, was nursing a back injury from the Critérium du Dauphiné that contributed to his withdrawal; Carapaz was initially

below par after also crashing.

Or were the seeds for the Ineos horribilis, to use the phrase coined by one colleague in the Tour press pack, sown before the Tour even set off, beneath dark and ominously threatening skies, from Nice?

Three pre-Tour events are worth considering. First was Ineos's unusual announcement in early July that they would not be renewing Froome's contract in 2021. It was difficult to see the four-time Tour winner being part of the Tour team after this, though he was part of an altitude training camp for the intended Tour squad in mid-July.

What happened at this camp might also help explain the team's first failure at the Tour de France since 2014. Bernal was still in Colombia but about to return to Europe when most of the Tour ▶

10

Number of grand tour victories for Sky/Ineos: seven Tours, one Giro, two Vueltas





INEOS

lineup convened at the French resort of Isola 2000 in the Alps for altitude training, before racing resumed. Froome, Thomas, Michał Kwiatkowski, Dylan van Baarle and Sivakov were all there. But Sivakov, the young Russian who last year won the Tour of the Alps and Tour of Poland, was going so strongly that it apparently spooked some of the others. Thomas, in particular, is said to have gone deep in trying to match Sivakov, possibly disastrously, because he appeared fatigued and below his best at the Critérium du Dauphiné.

The third event worth looking at is the Dauphiné itself – specifically, the Col de Porte on stage 2. The Dauphiné is always a vital dress rehearsal, but its importance was amplified this year by its proximity to the Tour. There were only 11 days between it and the grand départ.

After Jumbo-Visma and Wout van Aert dominated stage 1 at the Dauphiné, Ineos tried to make a statement on the Col de Porte. But the team's famous mountain train malfunctioned with Froome posted missing, Thomas a shadow of his usual self, and Sepp Kuss, one of Primož Roglic's lieutenants,



▲ Carapaz almost rescued Ineos's Tour, but lost the KoM jersey with a day to go

coasting casually past Bernal after the Colombian attacked: a symbolic moment that seemed to catch even Kuss by surprise. The salt rubbed into the wound was that after Ineos's huge effort, the stage winner

was Roglic. Bernal pulled out a few days later with his back injury – a precaution ahead of the Tour, we were assured.

These three events, to varying degrees, may have had an influence on what happened at the Tour. There may also be other factors, in particular the death in March of Nicolas Portal, their energetic and popular sports director.

Dave Brailsford's verdict after the Dauphiné was that drastic action was needed. Carapaz, riding the Italian races in preparation for leading the team at the Giro d'Italia, which he won last year, was switched from the Italian 'bubble' to the Tour de France 'bubble.' Thomas was told to prepare for the Giro instead, with Froome given team leadership at the Vuelta.

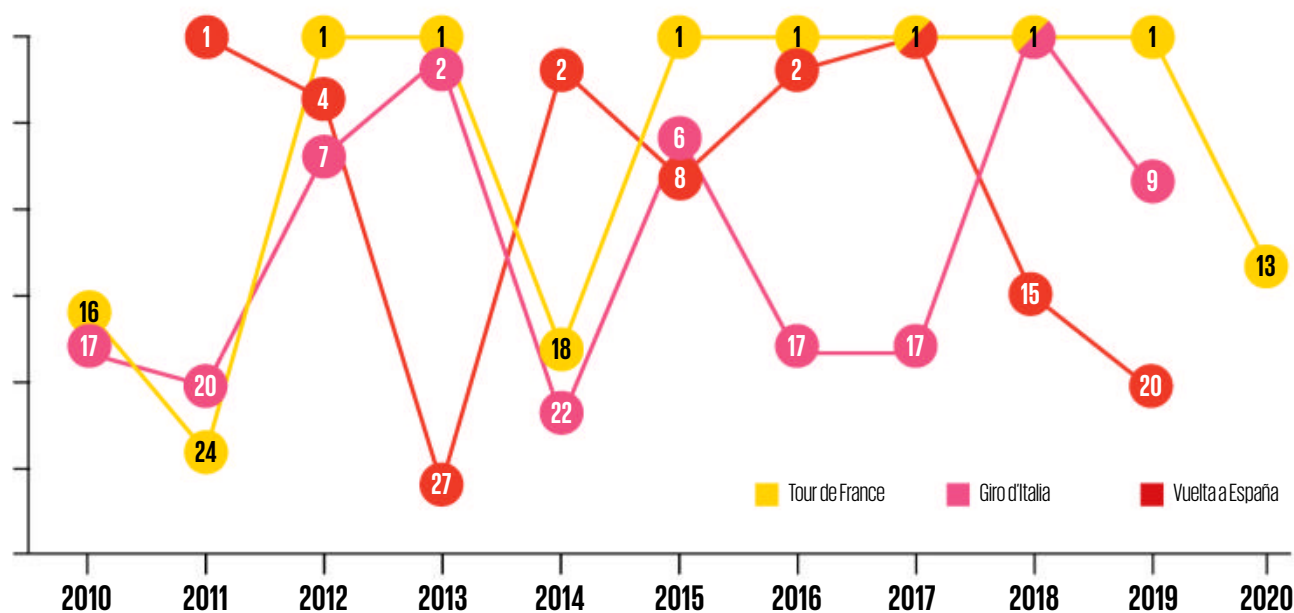


The Ineos team for the Tour looked dynamic but raw. There was plenty of experience in the support riders – Andrey Amador, Jonathan Castroviejo, Luke Rowe, Van Baarle and Kwiatkowski. But of the three potential leaders – Bernal, Carapaz and Sivakov – only Bernal had ridden the Tour before.

In a curious way, the hierarchy was established in Nice on day one. When the dark clouds opened and the rain fell, causing numerous crashes, it was Tony Martin, the Jumbo-Visma veteran whose face would be a common sight at the front of the peloton over the next three weeks, who called for a truce. That set the tone. If Martin was the patron, his team also took command at the front of the race long before Roglic took yellow.

Sivakov crashed twice on that first stage, injuring both hips and elbows. This was perhaps a bigger blow to Ineos than many realised at the time, since he may have been a better plan B than Carapaz, who was riding his first Tour and

THE INEOS GRAND TOUR RECORD





“I probably shouldn’t say this but it’s quite energising in many respects. Instead of going back to try and defend it, you’re going to try and win it and it’s a different thing”

—David Brailsford, Ineos team principle

apparently struggling to adapt to the rhythm in the early stages – though he had adapted by week three, when he came close to the King of the Mountains title, only to suffer the same fate as Roglic – being ousted on the penultimate day by Tadej Pogacar.

In the end, Pogacar’s astonishing success and Roglic’s defeat distracted from the fact that, regardless of the result in Paris, the strongest team was not Ineos, but Jumbo–Visma. Brailsford seemed happy to acknowledge this.

“They’ve been on a mission, they really have,” said the Ineos

principal. “And I admire that. I appreciate when sports teams set a goal, set a target, and they get absolutely obsessive about it, and piece it all together.

“It’s what we have to try and emulate. Go back to the drawing board and start over, and recognise that you’ve got to be that obsessive, you’ve got to be that hungry.

“We’ve got to dust ourselves down and ask: right, how much do we really want this? How much are we willing to commit, are we willing to put in the time and effort? Do we have the hunger and desire to try and win the yellow jersey next year?

▲ Kwiatkowski and Carapaz escaped together on stage 18, where the Pole was given the win

3

Former GT winners with Ineos in 2021 – Bernal, Carapaz and Thomas

I probably shouldn’t say this but it’s quite energising in many respects. Instead of going back to try and defend it, you’re going to try and win it and it’s a different thing.”

Brailsford’s words were fascinating for what they implied. Was that obsessiveness, that hunger and desire that he so admired in the Dutch team, now missing from his squad?

Rumours swirled around Ineos in the final week of the Tour, after Bernal had been forced to retire before stage 17. Carapaz’s attacking display, and the team’s emotional one–two in La Roche–sur–Foron on stage 18, with Kwiatkowski and Carapaz crossing the line arm–in–arm to take a one–two, papered over some cracks, but there was talk of a shake–up of the coaching team, and whispers of new riders coming in, including another 2020 Tour stage winner, Dani Martínez of EF Pro Cycling.

On the final weekend, Brailsford seemed energised by Carapaz, who by the end of the Tour was convinced he had figured it out and that he can return and win. Perhaps he can, and perhaps Bernal can, too.

But there are no guarantees, as Bernal knows, and as Roglic and Jumbo–Visma now also know. The strongest team, if they don’t also have the strongest rider, will not necessarily win the Tour. Jumbo–Visma largely followed the Sky/Ineos blueprint only to be tripped up within sight of the finish line.

“I think it’s good for the sport, because Jumbo were riding like Ineos before, smashing everybody with a really strong team,” said Pogacar’s team–mate, Alexander Kristoff, in Paris. “Tadej showed it’s possible to beat strong teams.”

Brailsford knows that ideally you need both the strongest team and the strongest rider. But with Pogacar, Remco Evenepoel and others emerging, the puzzle of assembling the pieces to win, and laying them out properly on the board, has got very complicated. **P**

Images: Kenzo Tribouillard (Carapaz), Marco Bertorello (main) / both Getty.



Image: Marco Bertorello / Getty Images



JOURNAL

HOMEcoming HERO

Kévin Réza was the local rider in Paris.
Procycling asked him about his Tour

How was riding on to the Champs-Élysées?
It's quite a fun sensation. We know it's the last stage. We know that it will be over soon and the tiredness will stop. Also, it's special for me because I'm riding near my parents, my friends and family. It was my third Tour, but I'd practically forgotten the pleasure you can have by racing on the Champs. It's a pleasure at that speed, on the Champs, in the most beautiful background. The feeling is always the same. The pavé are the same, other than that they're a little more worn and damaged. But the speed is high and the atmosphere for the last stage is unique.

What are your post-Tour plans?

To see my family and friends. Then rest a few days in Paris and go visit everybody who I've not been able to see for a while. It's a chance to catch up and realise the Tour is over. And to take a bit of time for myself.

How was the Tour for you?

It was a difficult Tour, and complicated for me at points during the three weeks. But mentally I got through, and you learn something every day. I've been a pro for 10 years but am still learning. I have my role as road captain. Some stages are harder than others to help on because of my profile but off the bike we talk before and after the stages. If I can give advice that helps, that's a satisfaction.

You were the only black rider in the Tour. You were the centre of attention for that reason. What is your perspective on it?

This was the common thread of my Tour. I've been happy to be able to tell my story and tell other riders about the situation. That's positive and I'm happy with how I've communicated it to others. But this is a small stage, and this story doesn't end with the Tour. The Tour is over but the work is not.

On the last stage there was a gesture by the riders for Black Lives Matter. Was it enough?

No. It was a start. It wasn't a big step. But it was still a step. We can be satisfied that it was taken, but it's not going to resolve our problems.

What can we do to help, as followers of cycling?

Simply follow the news and keep up to date and educate yourselves. Form your ideas. See what you can do. We've made a start, and I hope things will improve. 🗣️

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Procycling

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Printed by William Gibbons & Son

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London,
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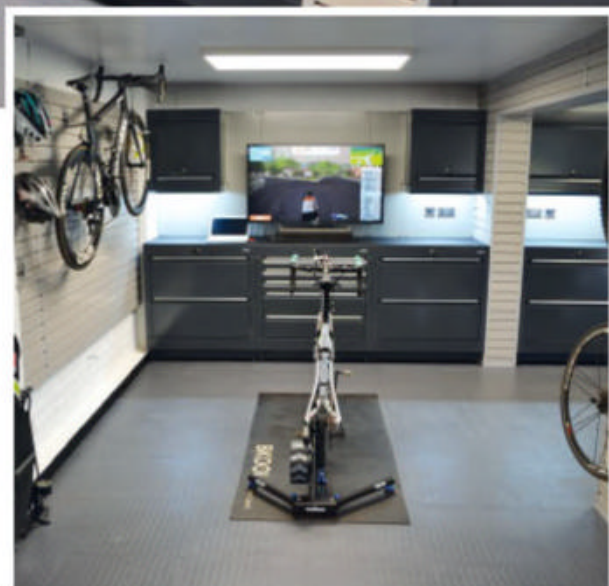


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THE LAST WORD

LAURENS TEN DAM

Where did it go wrong for Jumbo? Laurens thinks Primož Roglič peaked too soon

Oh man, what a change in momentum we saw in this year's Tour de France. While I was watching the time trial on La Planche des Belles Filles I got more and more excited. I could not believe what I saw and my thoughts went back all the way to 1989, when fan favourite Greg LeMond beat ponytailed Laurent Fignon by eight seconds. I was nine years old then but I still remember my dad screaming in front of our television. Now I was doing the same. History has been written by our two Slovenians.

From what I understand in the Dutch media, Jumbo-Visma were very confident of the victory. The general manager said after the last mountain stage, where Primož Roglič put 15 seconds into Tadej Pogacar, that it was 90 per cent sure that they would win the 2020 Tour – the 57 seconds now separating the two would be enough. Those 57 seconds, and the fact that Roglič showed his strength in the last two mountain stages. They had the right to be confident. In fact, the whole bunch gambled on Roglič being the yellow jersey in Paris. The whole bunch except for one man: Allan Peiper, team director of UAE Emirates. He prepared that final TT in every detail and was a big factor in one of the most unexpected turnovers in the recent history of sport.

With the innocence and bravery of a young guy, Tadej could race free of negative thoughts and approach the race day by day. That attitude helped him to ride the race of his life on La Planche des Belles Filles. In my opinion, he and his team rode the perfect Tour de France. When he lost time in a flat stage with echelons it was because of a flat tyre, not because of a mistake in positioning. Props to Allan Peiper for his smart thinking and tactics with clearly not the strongest team.

So where did it go wrong for Roglič and Jumbo-Visma? Although his helmet in the last TT looked ridiculous, I wouldn't blame it on a lack of aerodynamics like Fignon did with his floppy ponytail. In my opinion it was something else. I looked carefully at the races leading up to the Tour. There I saw a superior Roglič. He was so explosive to the finish line in the mountain stages in those races that he cracked



▲ Dumoulin offers consolation to team-mate Roglič as he absorbs his defeat in the stage 20 TT

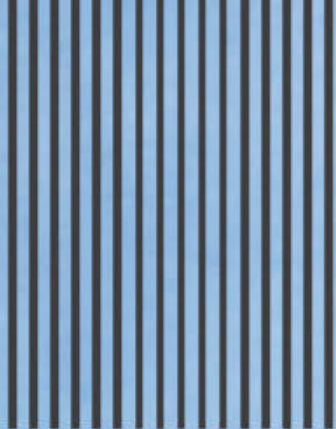
Egan Bernal's morale one month before showtime. I never saw that same outstanding Roglič in this Tour. He showed good form, but was not as dominant as he was in this year's Dauphiné.

A big factor in Roglič being off his Dauphiné form is the crash he endured in the second-last stage in that race. From my sources in his team, I understood he could not even think of riding his bike for the week after that crash. The first few days, the focus was more on nursing his huge road rash. He was still wearing bandages on his arm in the first week of the Tour, two and a half weeks after his big crash. From what I remember from my years being a pro, big wounds means your peak form is gone.

But there is more. Primož faded away in last year's Giro in week three, after winning every single race before. His peak was just too long. He learned from his mistakes and took the Vuelta victory later that year without a significant race in the months before. He just trained on altitude. This year, Roglič was in top shape in the Dauphiné when he came right from the mountains. This super talent destroyed the field there. But the Tour was again one day too long. My advice to Roglič: forget those risky preparation races, and race your biggest goal of the year right from your altitude training camp.

Laurens ten Dam is an ex pro cyclist. He lives by his motto, 'live slow, ride fast', while doing podcasts, organising gravel events and running a coffee brand and clothing label.

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