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2003 Tour De France

By James Brown

If you ask most bicycle racing fans, they will tell you that the not one tour de France was more exciting than the one that occurred in 2003 starting with the 14th stage. Two hundred and fifty thousand fans crowded along the narrow paths, known as switch backs, that rises to the very top of the Luz-Ardiden. This is the peak that looms for about a mile above the Basque region of the French Pyrenees.

Along the cliffs, the crowd was jammed solid on the edge of each precipice. They were right on the slender blacktop that directed it to the finish of the 15th stage of the 2003 Tour de France. They were awaiting the arrival of the 162 bicycle riders who had started out the day's racing within the southwest France flatlands hours before. Being that the Tour de France doesn't take place in an arena or stadium, it extends to the same terrain and roads that a multitude of spectators travel daily to arrive at their houses and places of employment. Three weeks of the Tour de France becomes a lifetime the casual racing fan can hardly forget.

American superstar cyclist, Lance Armstrong, was expected to glide to his fifth consecutive win. However, he didn't complete without a bout with "the struggles". His rival, German cyclist Jan Ullrich had shocked the powerhouse from Texas several days earlier by defeating Armstrong in an unforgettable, against-the-watch time trial, tarnishing Armstrong's golden aura of undeniable invincibility. As the race reached the Pyrenees, Lance Armstrong was struggling to maintain the slim lead, a quick 15 seconds, after about two weeks and one thousand - miles of cycling.

Enduring most of the race shoulder to shoulder, Armstrong and Ullrich's rivalry had started earlier in the day through small villages, as they were zipping along past vineyards and farmsteads. Later during the 14th state, Armstrong caught his handlebar in the purse of a gung-ho spectator. He pivoted prior to his fall, but then rose quickly. He mounted on bicycle as he appeared uninjured, but he lost precious race time and psychological composure. Armstrong's chance of victory was in serious jeopardy.

Lance Armstrong started the 15th stage of centennial Tour de France displaying signs of weakness. His whole race was in question. However, being the true champion that he is, Armstrong was neither finished nor consumed against Ullrich and the other competitors. Armstrong preserved and found his

second wind reservoir in his soul.

Nearly a minute ahead of Ullrich, Armstrong crossed the finish line in the midst of thunderous applause on the mountaintop. Rarely smiling during the race's first two weeks, he finally had plenty to smile about. He still had five days to go, but Armstrong did end up the victor once again. Hardly an individual thought his win was surprising after he'd defeated the mountains, his rivals and the pain and mastered himself. Now, that's the Tour de France. To find out further information about the best deals on bicycles, log visit

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The Tour De France, The Worlds Biggest Road Bike Race.

By Alastair Hamilton

The Tour de France is the BIG one; it's the World cup and the Olympics all in one. It has it all, the high mountains, the wind swept northern planes and the heat of the south. It also has the world's media, all the top teams and riders and millions of cycling mad fans watching. The other "Grand Tours" of Italy and Spain are as exciting, sometimes more so, but they don't have the thing the Tour has, that unique Tour ness, that unique French ness.

How it started.

It all started in 1903, when the French daily paper, L'Auto wanted to sell more than its competitor, Le Vélo, who at that time was the only paper reporting on cycle racing. It was suggested to the papers director, Henri Desgrange that they should organise a bike race all round France. The first race was 2,428 kilometres split into six stages and was run off at 25.29 kilometres per hour and out of the 60 starters 21 finished and the race was lead from start to finish by Maurice Garin.

The Heroes.

Over the years there has been a lot of heroes in the Tour de France, you could say all the riders are heroes, to win the race once is hard, but to win it five times is phenomenal. Only five men have done

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this, and one of these has won it seven times. French rider Jacques Anquetil was the first to win the race five times, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and then Spaniard Miguel Indurain all equalled him. Then the American, Lance Armstrong started to win in 1999 and didn't stop until he had won it a record seven times in a row. This is all the more amazing as he is a cancer survivor and was given a 50/50 chance of life; he beat the cancer and went on to beat all comers in the Tour de France.

The course.

The race starts in a different town every year and every other year it starts outside France, the choice of stage towns is a combination of money and sporting considerations, the towns will pay for a start or a finish, but they need to be near a mountain or a cobbled road or be near other town who want to host the Tour. The Towns pay to be the centre of interest for a day, the Tour also brings in a lot of money in tourism and the Towns collect much more than they pay and the world will remember the name of the Town, for at least a day.

The riders.

All the best riders want to win the Tour de France, but they cant, from the 200 or so starters there is a possible five or six riders who can win, the rest are either helping their team leaders or sprint or mountain specialists who want to win stages or points or mountain jerseys, this keeps the race active and interesting from beginning to end.

The BIG Tour.

The Tour is the biggest, but that has its problems, some Towns are not big enough, hotels etc., the television needs more space, the journalists need more phone lines and computers, more and more

people are following the race and the riders can be forgotten about in all the razzmatazz, but its still the biggest sporting event in the world, long may it run!

Alastair Hamilton is a successful writer who offers a truly unique depth of experience in competitive cycling, he also contributes adding technical articles on road bikes (

<http://www.bike-cycling-reviews.com/road-bikes.html>

) to some cycling online magazines. Further

information on components and cycling news at

<http://www.bike-cycling-reviews.com>



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