

When we had the team briefing prior to any cycling taking place I was told that this is harder than the Alpine stage of the Tour de France, as they have thrown in as many climbs as possible GULP !

### **Day 1                    Thonon Les Bains to Praz sur Arly (114km, 2743 metres of ascent)**

We left the hotel at 8:30 in the morning and made it to the next hotel at 7 pm in the evening. Feeling quite smug as we made it back before lunch and managed to sneak in a couple of pints along the way. However I think we peaked too soon, after we had had the 2 pints and had just started the final climb of the day (which was fairly close to the hotel), we passed a very old nun who was walking almost backwards in terms of her speed. Around 30 mins later we stopped for no more than 20 secs when the nun overtook us. Lightning strikes twice ... and no more than a few minutes later a chap with a synthetic leg cycled past us – just goes to show how quick we were going !

### **Day 2                    Praz sur Arly to La Reculaz (105km, 3079 meters of ascent)**

My mate's bike was bugged before we set off which put around 45 mins onto our time. It was a really hard day with a mighty steep climb up Col De Pre and in places had an 11% gradient. On the second to last climb of the day, I ended up being stranded on my own in torrential rain, and on the final climb towards Val D'Sere it was like cycling up roads which looked like waterfalls. Now with the mixture of heat and rain, my glasses steamed up to such an extent that I had to take them off. I'm short sighted, so with the combination of the rain, short-sightedness and the daylight diminishing fast I couldn't see a thing and to make matters worse I had to cycle through a few pitch black tunnels for around 5 mins at a time, and all you can see is the white light at the end of the tunnel. At one point I thought I had died!

I arrived back at the hotel around 8 pm, 30 mins after tea had started. One guy returned after me about ½ hour later and another had to retire 3 km from the end as he was so tired he started hallucinating and driving into the wrong side of the road.

### **Day 3                    La Reculaz to Cesena Torinese (127km, 2620 metres of ascent)**

Today started with a 17km climb to the top of Col De L'Iseran, with sheer drops on either side and at points we were cycling in slush and all the way up the mountain was snow. Breathtaking views but extremely scary.

Again I got separated from the group and was on my own once more. I also made a huge mistake by not grabbing lunch when I had the chance and it was like peddling in treacle. Thankfully the support vehicle drove past me and I waved it down and had 5 slices of cake, a mouth full of peanut M&M's, Haribo's and a banana - that just about got me to the next hotel.

### *Col De L'Iseran*



#### **Day 4**

#### **Cesena Torinese to Vars (105.5 km, 3004 metres ascent)**

The chap who looked after the slow support vehicle, Nathan, came into his own. He was fantastic all the way in and really helped myself and Tony get to the end.

By now the chaffing and pure exhaustion is setting in. The mornings seem to be ok but the afternoons are hellish. We had 19 kms of climbing up Col d'Izoard, during the climb Nathan was a bit bored waiting for us to get to the top so he set off down the mountain on his mountain bike to see where we were at. And whilst he was riding alongside Tony, he was very impressed, he said "I don't know how you guys manage to balance your bike at such slow speeds" – we had no energy left to respond.

We left at around 8:30 that morning and arrived at the hotel at 8pm, so it was a really long day.

*Myself and Tony at the top of Col d'Izoard*



## **Day 5**

### **Vars to Beuil (127 km, 3142 metres of ascent)**

This was by far the hardest day - even the elite cyclists suffered. We had 3 climbs in the day. The first one 7 ½ km at the very start, just when we left the hotel, followed by a 23km climb up Col de la Bonette which is the highest colony in Europe and we climbed this in 30 degrees heat. This was followed by a 16km climb towards the hotel at the very end of the day. On the final climb I hit a brick wall with 4 km to go and for every kilometre I had to stop, slump over the handle bars to recover enough for the next kilometre. Prior to starting this climb my ipod decided to pack up, I dropped my energy sweets, and my mobile phone alarm decided to go off - I didn't have the energy to stop and turn it off.

I finally arrived last at the hotel at 8.45pm, where everyone was standing outside clapping me in. The day started at 8:15 am so it was 12 ½ hours on the road and it was always going to be the hardest day.

### ***At the top of Col de la Bonette***



### **Day 6 Beuil to St Vallier de Thieu (110 km, 1796 meters of ascent)**

This was an easier day today. Left at 9 am and got to the hotel for 6 pm. The day started with a lovely 22km descent through some amazing scenery but wasn't without incident. I underestimated a corner and entered it a little too quickly, my back wheel slid out so it was parallel with the front and ended up on the wrong side of the road. Thankfully there was nothing coming the other way otherwise I would have been toast! I proceeded for the rest of the descent sat upright with the brakes on (rattled). Around 3 o'clock on this day we had the final big climb of the trip and once we got to the top Nathan put on some uplifting tunes. There were 4 guys in lycra dancing in the middle of the road – we have a separate video on this if anyone wants to see it!!

### **Day 7 St Vallier De Thieu to Antibes (45km, 255 meters of ascent)**

Probably my favourite ride and it was always going to be. It was pretty much downhill all the way and straight down to the Med. Started about 9 am in the morning and arrived around 12 noon to a champagne reception with lots of beer and a dip in the Med with all our kit on - slightly regretted wearing the white lycra though!

On arrival at the finish, we were greeted by Nathan on the top of the van – naked, apart from some big green hands covering his modesty.

At the finish everybody was very quiet, obviously very pleased that we'd finished but I think the realisation had set in that that was it now, we were done and what we were going to do next.



All in all it was the most physically and mentally demanding and hardest week of my life, but I thoroughly enjoyed it and I am already thinking of what I can do next! Anyone got any ideas ????