



During the Tour de France, 9,500 riders get to test their mettle on one of the official stages – Pau to Tourmalet – 181km (112 miles). Welcome to L'Etape du Tour 2010.

## TIME MAY WAIT FOR NO MAN, WOMAN, OR CYCLIST BUT ONE CONSTANT IS THAT L'ETAPE DU TOUR, now in its 18<sup>th</sup> edition,

remains 'the big one' on the European amateur cycling calendar. The appeal of riding an official stage of the Tour de France never ceases to lose its magic for the 9,500-strong *peloton* (pack) lucky enough to become kings or queens of the road for the day.

### THE EVENT

L'Etape du Tour (French for 'stage of the Tour') is classified as a 'Cyclo sportive' – an event open for everyone who feels fit and brave enough to endure the pain of cycling the same distance usually reserved for the pros. However, if you skim across the line-up at the start, you'll be surprised to see a wide selection of abilities. The field is divided into several categories. In pole position are 100–200 riders made up of aspiring amateurs, cycling ex-professionals, and VIP riders such as retired Formula One star Alain Prost and other bike-loving celebrities. The following sections are divided into holding zones of 500–2,000 riders. The better your time in a previous L'Etape, the farther forward you are placed. If you are a L'Etape 'virgin' and your tour organiser hasn't negotiated preferred start numbers, expect to have at least 5,000 cyclists in front of you.

### THE PREPARATION

The day before L'Etape is best spent picking up your start number and goody bag from the Village Depart, doing one last bike/gear check, and relaxing at your hotel. The Village Depart is a cycling exhibition, organised with the help of the local tourism board and usually located at or very near the site of the actual start. It features the sponsors as well as music and food. Your goody bag generally includes a T-shirt, other cycling-related items, your timing chip and race number, and coupons to attend the pre- and post-ride pasta party. Although classified as a 'party' don't be fooled into believing there's a lot of partying going on. The pre-event vibe is one of sombre excitement. You don't have to look far to see worried faces

discussing the task at hand in the morning. You'll be well advised to make it an early night – it's going to be a short one.

### THE RIDE

As the carbohydrate- and adrenalin-fuelled *peloton* rolls away from Pau – hopefully under clear skies and fresh 7am summer's air – it's here that the focus turns solely to the road ahead. In keeping with the start of any mass participation *sportive*, you can certainly expect a fair amount of nervousness within the pack as riders try to find their position and settle into a rhythm.

There's adequate time to get warmed up before the first 'obstacle' of the day, the Col de Marie Blanque at 47.5km (30 miles), but in reality the lead-up to this is unlikely to spread the *peloton* out enough to avoid bottlenecks. For those not close to the front at this point there's a fair chance you could

be off the bike involuntarily and walking uphill for a short time – a sight that's not at all uncommon for L'Etape.

With a long way still to go it's best not to get over-excited too early; try to relax and find the climbing pace you are comfortable with. Also, make use of the first feed stop that is rumoured to be at the top. Not fuelling up early on could come back to haunt you on the final ascent up the steep slopes of the Tourmalet.

It's now time for gravity to come to the fore as you plunge down between the ribbon of tarmac that unfolds before you. With early parts of the descent sheltered by trees, caution should be taken on road conditions that can change from dry to damp in less than a pedal stroke. Also be aware of the riders around you, and use your group riding skills to avoid trouble.

100  
YEARS

L'Etape du Tour 2010 will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tour de France first going to the formidable Pyrénées.



100 years ago, Frenchman **Octave Lapize** (who also won the 1910 Tour de France) was the first cyclist to climb the Col du Tourmalet, on a 12kg, single-speed bicycle. At the time the Tourmalet (which means 'bad short-cut') was a mere path, and many riders spent as much time walking up as they did riding. Lapize later told the organisers of the Tour that they were murderers.



**L'ETAPE  
DO'S & DON'TS**

**DO**

- ☑ Book early with an approved travel company.
- ☑ Start your training at least six months before the event.
- ☑ Get a professional bike-fitting to avoid strain injuries.
- ☑ Complete at least one or two organised mass-participation rides of 100 miles or more.

**DON'T**

- ✘ Buy the most expensive bike/gear; buy the bike/gear that fits you.
- ✘ Test out new energy drinks and food on the day.
- ✘ Get carried away with the early pace. Find your rhythm.
- ✘ Stress out. It's a challenge, but it should still be fun.



© Markus Neuert/Cyclefilm

It's on those narrow, steep descents that nasty accidents tend to happen.

As you enter the valley section in the approach to the next climb, it's worth trying to seek shelter from the wind by slipstreaming. Cycling two or three riders back in a small group saves you up to 40% in energy. As any professional rider will tell you, energy conservation in a race over four hours is as, or even more, important than energy output.

The second climb is the picturesque Col du Soulor. It's an ascent with a rhythmic gradient and smile-inducing views, including the neighbouring Col d'Aubisque, not to mention the reward of a second feed stop by the top. At this point the 9,500 riders will have truly spread out over a distance of several miles. No doubt, the elite riders will crest the Soulor while most of the weekend warrior crowd will not even have reached the foot of the climb.

Pure exhilaration hangs in the clear mountain air for the descent towards Argelès-Gazost. Fast, free-flowing turns carve their way off the mountain in quick succession before the fun ends all too early, and the road begins to climb again through another valley section. It's time for your final challenge to start.

The Tourmalet is an icon, a jewel in the Pyrenean crown some might say, initially starting off at a gentle 5% gradient, but its unrelenting straights can make progress seem slower than reality. With just about half of the 19km (12 miles) covered, the road pitches up to a serious 9% and then stays at a constant 8%, which, although mentally and physically tough, is kind enough to allow some sort of rhythm to be established. With 5km (3 miles) to go, you get a first glimpse of the summit, fully exposed to the natural beauty of mountain scenery in all directions. Emotions will be running wild as your pain threshold meets raw Pyrenean mountain

bliss. One final, lung-searing, muscle-burning dig will have you crest the Tourmalet summit and cross the finish line with a tear in your eye – your challenge completed.

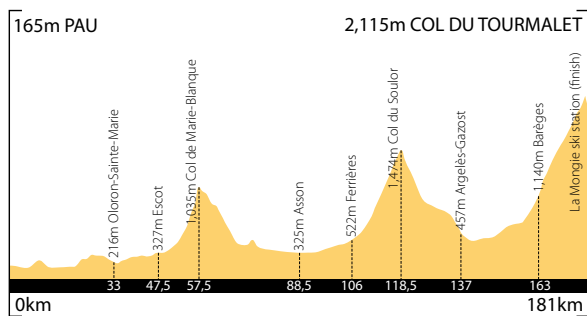
**THE AFTERMATH**

The organisers have learnt a trick or two with their mountain-top logistics, this time having you crest the summit and descend 4km (2.5 miles) to the event village at La Mongie, where you can pick up your finisher's medal, relax with a coke and bowl of pasta, and exchange stories from the road with your 'battle-hardened' comrades.

**PREVIEW**

If you are still eager to find out more, a detailed 90-minute reconnaissance DVD, covering every kilometre of the route, tips and tricks on climbing/descending techniques, adequate clothing, and nutrition, is available from **Cyclefilm**. Visit [cyclefilm.com](http://cyclefilm.com) for details. 📺

**PAU - TOURMALET: THE STATS**



Distance	174km
Total climbing	4,100m
Estimated time @ 28kph	6 hours, 13 minutes
Estimated time @ 24kph	7 hours, 15 minutes
Estimated time @ 20kph	8 hours, 42 minutes

Col	Distance/Gradient	Est. Time
Col de Marie-Blanche	9.5km @ 7.5%	1 hour
Col du Soulor	22km @ 4.9%	2 hours
Col du Tourmalet	19km @ 7.4%	2 hours, 15 minutes





Built for speed, the **FELT AR1 Di2** is engineered with an exceptionally aerodynamic and stiff UHC-Nano carbon-fibre frame, outfitted with Shimano Dura-Ace 7970 Di2 electronic shifting. Around US\$9,999. [www.feltbicycles.com](http://www.feltbicycles.com)



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**CYFAC ABSOLU** Nestled in France's picturesque Loire Valley, Cyfac has been expertly crafting bicycle frames for more than 25 years. Drawing inspiration from the world-famous vineyards and epic cycling lanes of the territory, each frame focuses on each customer's unique needs and specific geometries. Frames are finished using eco-friendly paints from more than 30,000 stock colours and custom tints.

Absolu frame in full T800H IM carbon fibre, with integrated seat mast, full carbon rear dropouts; custom-made US\$6,889. [www.cyfac.fr](http://www.cyfac.fr)



**FACTOR 001**

Crafted by BERU F1 systems, the Factor 001's defining feature is its unique 'twin-vein' design of the down tube and seat tube, said to substantially improve lateral stiffness. Hydraulic disc brakes, and full Di2 groupset. Limited to just 100 bicycles. US\$33,000. [www.factor001.com](http://www.factor001.com)

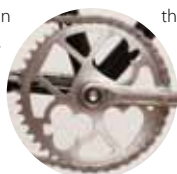


**BESPOKE: THE HANDBUILT BICYCLE**

**NEW YORK'S MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN (MAD)**

is running the exhibition **Bespoke: The Handbuilt Bicycle** until August 15. On display are 21 handbuilt bicycles from six internationally renowned builders, including master builder **Sacha White** of **Vanilla Bicycles** in Portland, Oregon, who is also guest curator. The 21 finely

crafted machines are works of art; not just in the precise bending, welding, carving, and wrapping of steel, titanium, aluminium, and carbon; but the attention to detail also rests in graphics and accessories, such as **Mike Flanagan's Cruiser**, which sports a front chain ring with the four deck of cards suit symbols (shown). As well as the fixed-wheel **Vanilla Bicycles** track



bicycle (main image), the exhibition also features fixed-gear, cyclocross, mountain, the stripped-down *radonneur* – designed exclusively for long-distance racing – and even a child's tricycle. 🚲

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