

La Marmotte



On behalf of *Frikransen* cycling club I participated in *La Marmotte* 5. July 2003, with my 89 kg and completed at 10:26:06. 340 in class M50-59 among 651 and 2926 total among 4533 completing participants. What is called the world's toughest cycle tourist race has everything that can be imagined of ingredients; 174 km road, 5,500 m altitude gain, 4 mountain passes, tunnels with and without light, good and bad roads, broken pavement and gravel. Punctures and also unfortunately some front collisions that supposedly took the lives of three cyclists according to a *Dutchman*. Fantastic weather with sunshine all day long and around 10 °C on the passes, 25 °C down in the valley so it led to some foolhardy and fast execution where *Bart Dekker*, the best man had 6:02:00 (29 km/h) which is on pro level.

The start in *Le Bourg d' Oisans* was a formidable experience and the bus from *l'Alpe Huez* hardly parked in time, but we got on the bikes and into a start field of several hundred metres with thousands of cyclists before I crossed the start mat about 7:30 am.

I took a long drag the first flat 10 km in a quarter of an hour and drove past hundreds of cyclists before the pond by *Verney*. Then in moderate speed up to *Col de la Croix de Fer* (37.5 km and 3210 m above sea level) that was passed in about 2 hours. The first downhill was nice and clear, cycled controlled, but down to *St. Jean de Maurienne* (67 km 546 metres above sea level) I saw much hazardous cycling, a bloody biker with shock in his eyes was wrapped in a gold folio in the ditch and a couple of motor bikers looked after him while the ambulance came screaming up a little further down the valley. The motor cyclists were excellent in their execution in the field and quick to assist or provide assistance for those who had problems with the body or the vehicle.



Then about 14 km pace driving again and some nice drags and overtaking up to *St. Michel de Maurienne* (81 km 712 m). The slopes up to *Col du Telegraphe D902* (57.5 km 1570 m above sea level) went relatively smoothly and *Valloire* (97.5 km 1430 m above sea level) was passed in about 5 hours (20 km/h) in accordance with the schedule. Then it really started to feel in the body up to *Col du Galibier* (114.5 km 2642 m above sea level) 17 km and an average gradient of 7% with a piece of 14% just before the top. It took a couple of hours and since I did not live in a Hill House in *Homansbyen* in *Oslo* (40 m above sea level) I took a little stop and some drinks and food on top to make sure that the body was in order before riding downhill that went smoothly. Here also some oncoming traffic and supposedly a biker who died later in the day in a rather stupid and daring right turn maneuver on the left side of a box car.

The journey went in strong head wind controlled down the valley *D1901* to the start point in *Le Bourg d' Oisans* (160 km 719 m above sea level) that was done away in an hour with some good drags. A lot of car traffic and cyclists who blocked the road, but better to survive than get a few minutes ahead. Then the famous ground-up to *l' Alpe Huez*, was relatively fast up the first bend, but then it went like with the environment only slower and slower. The farther up I came the more people sat in the bends and rested. Some puke was also in the road so it was obvious that somebody surpassed themselves. "*¿Buena con agua?*" like a pair of smiling *latino girls* asked encouraging, but 6 km before the finish I just had get off the bike and walk for a kilometer, eat and drink to get the strength to get around. Then a small threshold of a few meters, enough to get the wheels rolling again in *tempo piano* until it was a kilometer left and flat terrain into the alpine town. Suddenly went very fast and rode like a rocket into the finish (174 km 1880 m above sea level) while the church bells were ringing and the people applauding. A fantastic experience even though the last 14 km took almost 2 hours. *Marco Patani* has the record in 38 minutes...

Tour de France stage nr. 8 from 13. July 2003 went from *Sallanches* into the *La Marmotte* trail at *St. Jean* and over *Col du Telegraphe* and *Col du Galibier* to *l' Alpe Huez*. It was exciting to see how raw the pros are! A half old passionate recreational individual like me can only bow in reverence of what level the pros and the sport of cycling in *Europe* is, both when it comes to achievements and ability to carry out events where the local population is participating.

You will never really avoid accidents and only a *Tour de France* and other major pro rides get car traffic stopped for a few hours. The mountain walls and cliffs we can not do anything about until they erode or explode.



Studio in *Le Chavanu* in the heart of *l'Alpe Huez* can be recommended for reservation, so it is just to hang on. Any *Frikranser* and cyclists with respect for themselves and their surroundings should implement such a wonderful ride that is an experience for life.

Styrkeprøven (540 km) and *Jotunheimen rundt* (430 km) with a few hundred cyclists over some small *Norwegian* hilltops are just asocial Sunday trips in comparison!

A la prochaine! Vive la France!