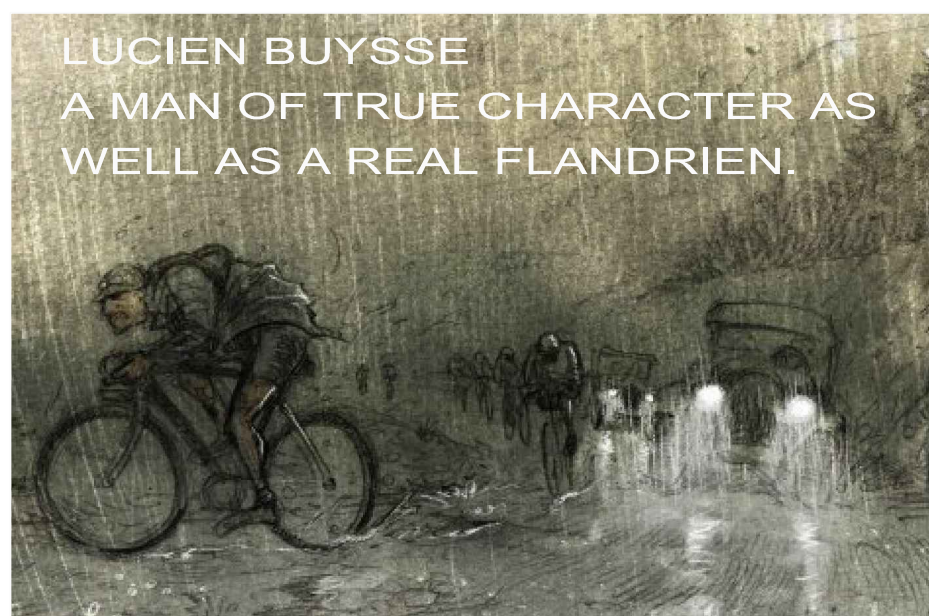


THE TOUR DE FRANCE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BICYCLE RACE IN EUROPE, AS WELL AS THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS ONE. THE FLEMISH PEOPLE COULD NOT BE MORE PROUD THAT THIS LONGEST AND MOST DIFFICULT TOUR IN HISTORY WAS WON BY:



In the years before 1926, several occasions of fraud had come to light in the Tour. The race director Desgrange had found a solution for this problem. "In 1926, I will make sure that the race in the Alps and the Pyrenees is so hard, that every trick or occasions of fraud won't be able to stand up against it, and that only the true and honest champion can win it!"

Tuesday 6th of July 1926. The church bells of Bayonne strike at two am. The riders leave for a legendary ride of 326 kilometers, to arrive in Luchon. They need to climb four mountains: Col d'Aubisque, the Tourmalet, the Aspin and the Peyresourde. After little over half an hour, the riders are met with the first raindrops of the day. No one knows yet that it won't stop raining anymore, not for the night and the day after either. For the entirety of the race, our riders will no longer see the sun. They are at the gates of hell. They are torn from all sides and are wet to the bone. The merciless battle of reckless man against all of nature's force is now to begin.

The climb of the Aubisque. The riders dismount their bikes, take out the rear wheel of the bike and turn it around. This way, the lower gear can be used in order to ease the climb up the mountain. The road has become a muddy path full of trenches. Rainwater gushes down the road, as if it has become a river/creek. Lucien Buysse attacks immediately. One after another, the others need to let him go. At the top of the Aubisque, Buysse already has a head start of 8'30" on Bottecchia, even though the riders can't see anything, and even though the rain has now turned into wet snow. This Italian rider wore the yellow jersey, and he had won the Tour in 1924 and 1925.

At the top of the Aubisque, Dejonghe throws himself down the mountain: "I will get Buysse, dead or alive," he roars. Not much later, he catches Buysse, but the hardest climb is yet to commence: the Tourmalet.

The road has now gotten even worse. It is hell. The mud has become deeper and the trenches have only gotten wider. The water is now not only coming from the sky, but from the rocks of the mountain as well. A little over halfway, Dejonghe can no longer follow, and he needs to stay behind. Buysse is now all alone. Rain has become snow. He does not expect to see anyone anymore today. Yet not much later, Lucien gets stuck in the mud. His fellow countryman, Odille Tailieu races right past him. Yet Tailieu gets a breakdown just before the foot of the Aspin, and despite Buysse's slip and fall, he manages to become once more head of the race.

Ottavia Bottecchia is at the end of his tether, and he gets off; this is the end of the Tour for him. At the foot of the Aspin, the myth really begins. Nobody knows where they are. Only at the end in Luchon, a balance can be made. At a quarter past seven, Lucien Buysse crosses the finish line first. It took him just over 17 hours to finish this 326 kilometre race. 25 minutes later, the Italian Aymo Bartolomeo arrives. Half an hour after Buysse's arrival, fellow countryman Leon De Vos crosses the finish line. Then follows the Belgian Theophile Beekman at 40 minutes and the Luxembourger Nicolas Frantz at 42 minutes. After them, it takes until half past ten for a group of ten riders to finally cross the finish line, almost simultaneously. At that moment, the tour director realises the scale of the disaster: the other riders are lost in the mountains, hiding in caves and caverns. He mobilises everyone who has a car and one by one, the other riders are found in the night. Not one of them will reach Luchon by bicycle. The tour director decides to intercalate a day of rest.

This was the most difficult Tour race in history, as well as the longest ever to exist, with a total of 5745 km, 17 races and a mean of 338 km per race. Some races were over 400 km and started only at 12 am. The tour director Desgrange would never again consider making a Tour this hard, but in the Tour of 1926, a true champion, a man of true character, a real Flandrien prevailed.

Those who follow Buysse's footsteps this day, albeit it on proper tarmac, will find his bust at the top of the Col d'Aubisque, put there by his proud fellow villagers from his hometown Wontergem (Deinze). At the church of this little hamlet, one can also find a large bronze statue which symbolises the force with which Lucien fought the power of nature in the mountains.

In order to never forget this story, the people have also inaugurated a street in the village, also thanks to Lucien Van Impe (the last Belgian to win the Tour in 1976). As a way to honour Lucien, each year a group of cycling tourists that go by the name of "Luciennekes" go to affront the same mountains that Lucien Buysse overcame. Two friends from Lucien's native village (Lieven Tack and Dirk Vermeirsch) have launched "Buysse Bierke". Now all the villagers, real Flandriens, Belgians and world citizens can enjoy "THE FLUID GOLD OF THE TOUR". It is beer with a strong character, made for men with character. You will taste the merciless battle of reckless man against all the forces of nature, in a pleasant way. All that remains to say is: "CHEERS, TO LUCIEN !!!".

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