

Velo Teifi Cycling Club

Tour of France 2009

The Chairman's Diary (Le journal intime du Chairman)

Saturday 25th July 2009

Day 9. Le Geant de Provence. Punctures *cinq, six, sept et oh*, I give up.

Weather: Scorchio.

7a.m. What do you mean they're asleep?

7.05a.m. Cynan and the Baron stagger out of their room. Cynan slightly more alert than his wild-haired roommate. We bundle them into the buses and make tracks. For five minutes. The motorway is three lanes of bumper to bumper traffic all heading the direction of Ventoux. We're pretty sure a heated argument broke out between Andrew and Mdm Tom Tom, but this remains unconfirmed at the time of writing.

After a while of stop-start, inter-lane gesticulations and general musings on how Howard, Barrie and Lynn resemble a gay couple and their adopted 12 year old son, we break off the autoroute and dash through the back roads to Modele where we abandon the buses and saddle up to tackle *le Geant de Provence*.

What a hill. What a crowd. French radio estimates one million people on Mont Ventoux today. We're having to ride around most of them. The going is tough, zig-zaggy and sweaty. The group gets broken up. I think I'm delirious – I see smurfs, I see Elvis, I'm blessed by a road side priest. All the time we're serenaded by groovy Europop. Bless them funky Dutch boys. God help them lunatic Norwegian boys – what do you mean "Cavendish is a fish"? It doesn't make any sense. I think something's getting lost in translation. We push on.

Chalet Reynard is reached with the aid of two bottles of drink and fizzy pop. Jeepers it's hot. Then the road closes. We stumble around, unsure what to do. Mad dogs in the midday sun. Is this a football match or a bike race? It's hard to tell...







A decision is made. Drop back down below the tree line and set up VT's base camp; road side and cosy like.

Part way down we bump into some of the team and, together, we search for a good spot. Here's one. Oh hello Lucky How didn't see you there. Psssssssst! comes the now standard response as puncture number five strikes.

"F*****g hell", exclaims a nearby big German sat on a stack of beer watching Howard's front tyre deflate gracefully again. Exactly my friend, exactly. We leave Lucky How/Howard to fix it. Cynan offers to help (more heroics from Captain Marvel), however he soon regrets this as his beautiful bike slips off the road and drops down the steep hillside. Arse!

The big German slips also. Backwards off his stack, positively wetting at this point.

We find a spot and settle down.

Howard and his mobile pit crew arrive. Psssssssst! You've got to be freakin' kidding me, man! Lucky How inflicts puncture number six on our now sobbing compadre... His pit crew get straight to work. Howard, you've got to do something about a) your alter ego, or b) your front wheel. Seriously.

Punctures fixed (I suffer a thorn-inflicted wound also), we settle in for an afternoon of beer from plastic cups, power bars, Silver Ladies and top viewing of the race.



Waiting.



Hungrily we stared at Barrie. Patiently, Howard waits for Lucky How to p**s off.



A familiar sight this week.



Team Puncturefix go to it.



Ventoux Death Grip.



Yea! Super! Let's all dance like Bonnie Langford.



Yeah. You can see what's coming.



Ready...



I said Oops upside yer head...



...oops upside your head.



Obvious David Soul songs abounded...



Cyclist disturbs Frenchman mid-dump.



He's actually moving rather quickly.



Alberto and Andy duke it out.



Lance and Brad's Group. GO BRAD!



Oh, the pain.



Big George!





Chairman's favourite. In a manly way...



Le Dandy slogs his way up.



Race blur 1.

	
Race blur 2.	The leaders on the Ventoux.

And that's that. Game over. The race has passed. Somewhere at the top Contador is confirming himself as the 2009 Tour de France winner. *Chapeau, Alberto, chapeau!*

Hopefully Brad has clung on to fourth. Hopefully Lance has secured third. And thank goodness for them Schlek boys making the race really interesting. Bless 'em. The skinny budinks.

We cautiously make our way off Ventoux, along with the rest of Northern Europe it seems. Slowed to crawling pace by the Gendarmes, stops are needed every couple of Kms to straighten our claw-like hands; cramped up into hideous witch-like appendages due to continuous breaking to maintain ridiculously low speed. This must be killing Dylan the Loon.

Oh, there's Howard... Hi Howard! Psssssst! My mistake. Hi Lucky How. We leave him seeing to puncture number 7. Barri reports a rather tetchy conversation that went something like:

Sulky Howard: "That's it! I'll f*****g walk back down this hill".

Too-caring Barrie: "Howard, you can't. It's twelve miles".

Poody Howard: "I don't care. You can come and pick me up."

Losing-patience Barri: "Howard, there's half a million people, Elvis, a priest and five Smurfs trying to get off of this mountain, you'll have a long wait!"

Common sense prevails and Barrie escorts the over-cautious, extremely fed-up and the not-a-little-bit grumpy Howard safely off Mont Ventoux.

We find Janice and Jason in Bedoin. The Baron has plied her with lager-beer it would seem. The ride back to the buses should be swift at any rate.

Our final evening in Valence and we treat ourselves to proper, fine French fare. What do you mean Morocco's not in France?



A warm Moroccan welcome...



...even for Welsh convicts.