

## HIGH NOON

Some speak of Chiappucci's ride to Sestrieres in the Tour of 1993, or Roche's pursuit of Pedro Delgado to La Plagne; some remember Lemond's TT ride into Paris to take the jersey by 8 seconds from Fignon, or any one of Indurain's unbelievable time trials in the grand tours of the early 90s; others can see no further than the sprint victories of Super Mario, the 'Lion King' himself; the cognoscenti may nod knowingly in the direction of Mr V. Possee's long and growing list of track honours; but the fine detail of the greatest win of all time has been known, until today, only to the 7 men who took part in the battle itself. What momentous event was this, you may rightly ask? It must surely have been before the advent of camera-motorbikes and television, of lycra and indexed gears; a Paris-Roubaix perhaps, a Tour of Flanders, a Giro d'Italia? The truth, my friends, is more mundane and more recent; the Assel Valley race from the world-famous Blackie's Brae to Pinmore on Sunday 25 January 2004, an occasion worthy of ten thousand words (however editorial constraints have restricted the author to the following short paragraphs).

The usual thoughts flit through the author's mind as the dreaded left turn draws ever nearer; 'if only I hadn't opened a second bottle of wine last night'.... 'maybe nobody will go hard'.... 'my winter frame is so effing heavy'.... 'why can you never have just one helping of black forest gateau'.... 'it's bloody unsporting that some of the Ayrodynamic are still on their summer bikes'. A plan starts to form; need to get back early, domestic chores, would have to miss out the Assel today, such a pity when legs feeling good, etc, etc. These thoughts are organising themselves into a semblance of order when the bike turns left as if on autopilot. Where are we now? Oh for (expletive deleted – editor) sake, Blackie's!!!

Too late now, fumble with the lever and get into the little ring, shift the chain rapidly across the cassette, and spin as though your life depended on it. God, this is hard. Across the bridge, still spinning like a demented Catherine wheel, your author is starting to lose contact with the cream of Ayrshire cycling. Get out of the saddle and power through the bends; like Sinatra the black forest gateau threatens a comeback. A minor miracle; the top of Blackie's arrives and your author is still with the front group. Time to take stock; for the Ayrodynamic there is the sprinter Girvan, the lone break specialist Muir, the 'rouleurs' Connell, Wilson and McNulty. For Ayr Roads there is Paul Muir and Alex McAllister, two fine but ageing competitors. It looks bleak, only a madman would bet against another Ayrodynamic victory.

The break powers past the Barr road end, chains are ramped over to big rings, and the speed rises dramatically. The author hides at the back of the line, desperately attempting to recover, and politely declining all invitations to come through. The line of riders moves swiftly and inexorably towards the next bridge and the subsequent steepening in the road. All too soon the bridge flashes past; ten seconds later no more bets are being taken on an Ayr Roads win as McAllister's tactic of being first on to the bridge then sliding back down the line is completed, unfortunately with fully half of the climb still to be overcome. This is only achieved by a series of ugly out-of-the-saddle thrashings of rapidly tiring legs. The seven gladiators drive their machines onward, bound together as though with invisible thread, etc, etc.

The pace being set on the endless drags is incredible. Your author would love to be more informative but as he was utterly unable to focus on anything but the rear wheel in front of him at this time, the reader is required to exercise his or her own imagination. The Ayrodynamic domestiques

just never let up for an instant, and then it happens. McAllister has had enough. It is asking just too much at this time of year. He eases off on the pedals and inevitably drifts from the back of the line. Then, miracle of miracles, the pace of the break momentarily eases. The legs protest vociferously but are over-ruled by the idiot compartment of the brain, which instructs them to pedal hard again. The gap is bridged, the break once more complete. Several lifetimes pass; infants are born, grow into adults, age and die; and still the climb continues in a fuzz of pain and suffering. What's this? The stream on the left of the road is momentarily glimpsed. Yes, readers, you have realised the significance of that seemingly innocuous fragment of information; the last bridge, the col, blessed relief, are all within reach. Your author's final reserves are expended to ensure that contact is maintained with his lone ally and with the enemy.

The powers of darkness that the Ayrodynamics most certainly are, drive ever harder, like a marauding band of orcs on the hunt for stray hobbits. Only a naïve bookmaker (and how common are they?) would offer any wager worth a sane person's consideration. The pace is unrelenting, but your hearts will be gladdened to know that your representatives are hanging on gamely, and even allowing thoughts of tactics to come to the fore. Paul shows momentarily at the front, a ploy which only serves to goad the cursed ones into pedalling even more furiously.

About half a mile before Pinmore, it suddenly happens; Girvan powers away from the break. Nothing can be done; to chase him would only invite his domestiques to sit on and take an easy victory. All is not lost, however. Girvan must have neglected to explain his plan to his cohorts, who continue to drive on relentlessly like automatons. Perhaps they are so indoctrinated to his service that they have lost all power of rational thought? Round the last left hand bend, and the escapee is in sight. And he is being brought back! The

two men in blue and white confer urgently. The heavier of the two, realising that his legs have gone, directs his companion to stay on his wheel. The colossus is now on to the finishing slope, the rest of the break only some 25 metres from his rear wheel. It's now or never! Ayr Roads' finest jump as one from the back of the line, and power past their rivals as though they are static. On to the slope now, and the sprinter is overhauled. McAllister is out of the saddle and gives his all for the forces of light. Behind, wailing and cursing emanates from the darkness as the misformed ones have the error of their ways explained to them by their leader. McAllister's legs give up on him, the ultimate sacrifice made for the greater good. Muir is projected towards the line as though an arrow fired from an elven bow. In vain, the enemy heave and sweat in his pursuit as Muir romps over the railway bridge to Nirvana. Shafts of sunlight stream down from the skies, and your author can hear the strains of a heavenly choir as Paul floats up to the junction without the laying-on of a single opponent's glove. Victory was never sweeter!

#### POSTSCRIPT

The run re-assembled at the bus stop where the Ayr Roads riders munched their energy bars in smug silence while the Ayrodynamics animatedly 'debriefed' the sprint.

The pace down the Byne was fast and furious. Quarter was neither given nor asked. Big Kenny was flying towards the last road sign before the roundabout when Kenny Wilson came off the wheels and hit the front like a rocket. Try as he might, Kenny G could not get round the Ayr Roads man. Two out of two for the club!!!

Knowing what the chances were of hanging on up the coast and hitting the line first at Doonfoot, we left the Ayrodynamic to it, and headed to the café for a victory pot of tea and a bacon roll. As Dirty Harry said, 'a man's gotta know his limitations'.