

| talkingpoint

Mountains of

Former Tasmanian Liberal senator Guy Barnett packed the lycra and the bike and travelled to France last month to follow the legends of the Tour de France. He writes . . .

CADEL Evans cycled the time trial of his life to gain the yellow jersey and move into first place on the last day of the Tour de France before Paris. The one-hour warm-up was amazing to watch as sweat was streaming down Cadel's face as he cycled hard and strong on his stationary bike.

I would be zonked after that effort I said to myself. Cadel was so focused he hardly noticed the dozens of supporters staring at him encouragingly. With exactly 20 minutes to go to the start of his time trial he wiped his face with a towel, got off his bike and returned to the inner sanctum of his BMC sponsored bus, but with a two-fingered victory sign over his left shoulder. Then with 15 minutes to go he exited the bus and cycled slowly to the start line accompanied by his coach and screams of "Go Cadel". Discipline and determination is everything in this game — one of the world's most gruelling iconic sporting events. Cadel Evans was not just Australia's first winner of the Tour de France, and the oldest victor since 1923 at 34 years, but the way he won the race demonstrated he has the heart of a giant and more guts than the world's greatest gladiator, Maximus Decimus Meridius.

Both Richie Porte and Matt Goss in the same pre-race training areas and following a similar routine seemed pleased to be extended a good luck message from a fellow

Launcestonian. Richie appeared relaxed and looking forward to the challenge ahead which augured well for his outstanding 5th place in the 42.5km time trial beating many of the world's great cyclists.

People were cheering the cycling warriors along the 150 to 200km of road each of the 21 days of this event. Much of the route, especially the uphill sections, was lined with campervans from all over Europe

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flying their home country flag.

Tim Piper and I cycled four days before, and four days during the tour itself.

After departing on Bastille Day and 30 hours flying from Launceston to London to Geneva we hired our station wagon, with our own bikes in the back, and drove two to three hours to Lyon in the south of France. Arriving late at night exhausted, we plonked into bed and

slept soundly. This part of France is renowned for its gastronomic pleasures which, of course, were a top priority with cycling each day. Breakfast was a French pastry or croissant and coffee, lunch a baguette, Tim's favourite cheese munster, saucisson, a type of well matured salami, and occasionally foie gras, with the evenings allowing us time for a more extensive tasting of the local fine cuisine and a local wine.

We travelled north to Beaune, a 2000-year-old Roman built town of 20,000 people protected by a moat and high walls. We were in the heart of the Burgundy region. Each day we cycled through vineyards, several small historic villages and passed the odd chateau. We cycled into a valley surrounded by a forest and up and up. We reached the top by which time I had suffered my first hypo (low blood sugar) of this adventure and required most of my jelly beans and a good 20-minute break rebuilding my strength while kicking myself for miscalculating my food and insulin intake.

On the next day we followed a similar route but found a good hill of some 12 per cent incline which removed any vestiges of jetlag and prepared our legs for the Alps in the days ahead.

We then began our six-day official tour which included four more serious days of cycling. During the tour we breakfasted at 7am and were on the bikes at 8am to ensure we

memories and pride

could conclude cycling by around 2pm. We would cycle the same but a shorter route as the pros with, of course, the all-important coffee breaks at scenic locations. The pros started each day at 12 and finished around 5pm, so we had time to shower, and then watch and cheer unlike our fellow Australians who were staying up late to do so in front of their TVs.

Day one we cycled 100 kilometres from Serre Chevalier in the heart of the French Alps to Pinerolo in Italy. We climbed three mountains at 6 per cent or more incline and enjoyed a 45km downhill amid some of the tallest mountains in France. For the first time since 1996 these were snow-capped during the tour. The roads were lined thick with people in campervans, dogs, flags and police. Police, ambulance and fire trucks would be racing one way then the other with sirens blazing. Organised and disorganised chaos in a friendly, excited and welcoming atmosphere seemed all around. This was France at its best and we were loving it. And later, being literally metres from Cadel Evans, as he put on his yellow jersey in Grenoble after his time trial success was a memory to cherish. He had tears in his eyes and so did we. We were very proud to be Australians and so were many others which is why Tim and I led the cry "Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi Oi Oi!!!" Australian flags were flying with boxing kangaroos bouncing up and down in the crowd.

Our final day in Paris would see Cadel Evans officially bestowed as the winner of the 3400km Tour de France 2011 in 86 hours 12 minutes and 22 seconds after finishing second in 2007 and 2008.



UPLIFTING: Guy Barnett with the Eiffel Tower as a backdrop and with Tim Piper at the Arc de Triomphe