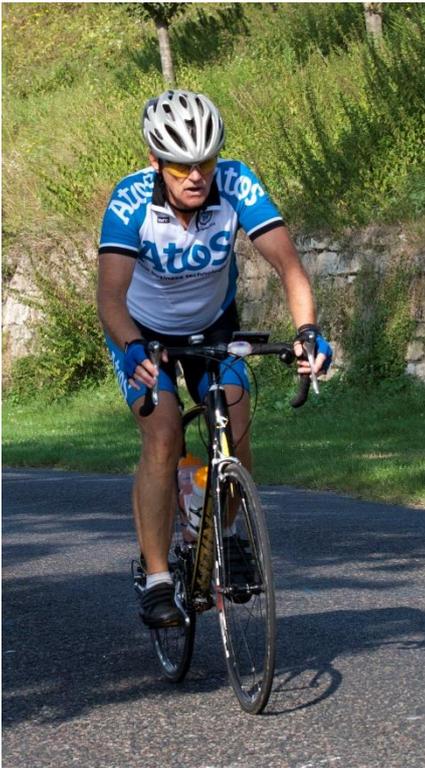


AtosTour Paris-Eindhoven 2013: Experiences of a participant.



In 2013 I participated for the 8th time in the AtosTour. Also for me it remains quite an adventure that needs a thorough preparation. Therefore it may be interesting, especially for the new participants, to list up a number of things.

Preparation:

The AtosTour Paris-Eindhoven (stage1: 250km, stage2: 220km, in total 470km in 2 days on a very hilly route) demands a thorough preparation. You must build up in advance the number of kilometers and the number of hours on the bike, surely during the last 2 months. A ride of 250km with an average speed of 25km/h means **10 hours on the bike**. So training is the word. You surely need a few rides of more than 200km before the AtosTour in September. Also **climbing is important**. The climbs are not very long, but it goes continuously up and downhill, and there are surely a number of really steep hills among them that finally are counting up (day 1 => 2600 altimeters, day 2 => 1900 altimeters). Climbing you best do on your own pace without forcing things. Further it is very important **to eat and drink regularly** during the ride (also in rainy

weather). Make **sure your bike is okay**: tires in good condition, accelerator device tuned, chain oiled, two inner tubes in your pocket, lighting on the bike (front and back), etc.

Departure from Eindhoven:

Thursday 5th of September we were expected to be present at 06:45h at the Evoluon in Eindhoven, where there was already a pleasant crowd going on. Loading bikes in the trailer, luggage in the bus, picking up plastic bags with the cycling clothing, drink bottles and a few “snelle Jelles” (a kind of energy bars). In between say hello to colleagues from The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, UK and Ireland, and get a cup of coffee. The 5 motorcycle riders check their communication boxes and the GPS-systems. The drivers of the tour-car, the broom wagon and the free car are briefed a last time. And in the meantime strong stories are told of previous editions, it finally is the 10th edition. And then at exactly 08.00h the convoy leaves on the way to Bussy-Saint-Georges, a suburb of Paris. After ca 300km there is a stop in Asservillers. Time to eat a sandwich or to have a quick lunch on your own expense. After 40 minutes sharp we depart again direction Paris.

Arrival at Bussy-Saint-Georges:

Around 14:00h we arrive at the B&B-Hotel in Bussy, where the French colleagues are awaiting us. Also here a hive of activity: unload the bikes and luggage, park the bikes in the garage, assign room-numbers (3 persons per room), change into Atos-cycle outfit, and at 15:00h again in the bus on the way to the Atos headquarters in Bezons.

Reception in the Atos headquarters in Bezons:

In Bezons there is first a photo-shoot where, with a lot of laughing, joking and a great interest, a number of pictures of the whole group are taken. After that the bar opens with soft drinks, beer, wine, etc. The management welcomes the group and praises the cyclists for their courage and determination. And then finally a nice extended buffet offered by Atos France is waiting to be consumed. With a satisfied feeling we return to Bussy. Before going asleep I put things ready for the morning and think of the long ride the next day. Probably the visit to the Atos headquarters will not take place any more in 2014.

Stage 1: Paris-Mons

At 05:00h we get up, a quick shower and then at breakfast eat as much as possible, not an easy thing to do so early in the morning. Then get the bike in the garage, mount drinking bottles and computer on the bike, check the tire pressure, put 2 inner tubes in the pocket, luggage in the trailer, lights on the bike, and go to the start, and all this in the darkness. The convoy is lined up and exactly at 06:30h Gerrit the tour-director whistles and the peloton starts to move for a ride of ca 250km over a very hilly landscape to Mons in Belgium. Cycling in the dark in a peloton of 65 riders is a risky thing that demands a lot of attention and concentration. During primarily the first 10 km there is a nervous and hectic ambience until we get out of the agglomeration and pass the first climb. Slowly the day eliminates the night and the rising sun is a really revelation. The ambience in the peloton is super and the outriders develop a steady speed of about 28-29km/h. The 5 motards rotate continuously from the back to the front and block almost all crossings, so that we can pass without stopping or even slowing down. The tour-car with yellow rotating beacon and orange flags and with the tour-director on board in front, behind that the motards, then the peloton of 65 riders, followed by the broom wagon with trailer for the luggage and mechanic on board. The free car with bike trailer closes the convoy. When, as a cyclist, you are feeling exhausted, you can take place (eventually for a short period) in the broom-wagon. However take into account that the number of places are limited. In the peloton there are 2 outriders with a white armband who ride in front all the way to the finish. Further there are 5 road-captains with yellow armband who keep the peloton in the ranks. Their instructions must be strictly followed. In the back there are 5 talented young riders in good shape who bring back the unlucky ones. In case of a flat tire or other evil, you stop, hand over an inner tube to the mechanic in the broom wagon, who takes the wheel out, puts another wheel in, and one of the riders in the back will bring you back in the peloton. In the meanwhile the peloton rides on with a slightly lower speed. Each day there are 3 stops of each 30 minutes. In the short time you have to fill up the drinking bottles, visit the toilet, consume sandwich and coffee, eventually own energy bars, get your own repaired wheel in the broom wagon and deliver the spare wheel back, etc. In the broom wagon you can deposit your own backpack with own drinks and energy-food. There is also a large stock of water that you can use to fill up your drinking bottles.

Arrival at the Youth Hostel in Mons

When entering Mons around 18:00h we are awaited by 2 police motor-riders who lead us through the narrow streets of Mons right to the youth hostel in the center of the city. Again unload the luggage, park the bikes in the garage, assign room-numbers, pick up sheets and pillowcases. Per room with shower and toilet there are 4 beds. Diner is at 20:00h. After that you can walk to the historical market place that is really nearby and has a number of very nice terraces.

Stage 2: Mons-Eindhoven

Get up at 05:30h, breakfast at 06:00h. Start in the dark at 07:00h for a ride of ca 220km with in the first half again also a number of steep slopes. After that it gradually flattens out slowly. Today again 3 stops of each 30 minutes. During the second stop we get the company of Jan Janssen in the peloton, world champion 1964 and winner of the Tour de France 1968. For the sake of safety it is very important to have in the peloton a number of rules to take into account: always ride 2 by 2, always stay behind the outriders in the front, stay on the right on steep slopes when it is getting a little difficult, when a motard puts the forefinger in the air get immediately on 1 line to let the traffic behind pass the peloton on very busy roads, pass the instructions of the outriders in front to the back, follow the instructions of the road-captains and always ride very attentive and concentrated, because a fall happens in seconds.

Finish in Eindhoven

After a very interesting and pleasant ride we finish around 17:15h in Eindhoven at the Evoluon, where we are welcomed with a big party. After the speeches and celebrations the bar opens and there is a buffet for which family and friends could have registered on beforehand. Each participant who sold winning lottery-tickets must collect the prizes and take care that they are delivered safely to the buyer of the winning tickets. In the pleasant crowd everybody tells about the successful AtosTour and the French riders are listening with open mouth to the stories of Jan Janssen about his years of glory with Jacques Anquetil, Raymond Poulidor and a lot of other champions of times long ago.

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January 10 , 2014 Clem Van Hees