

Cycling 470km for charity – The journey of a first-time rider



In the early morning of Thursday 5th of September 2019, 70 cyclists gathered at the Evolution in the center of Eindhoven to onboard a bus that would take them to the start of the Atos tour 2019. The Atos tour is a ride for Charity, supporting different cancer organizations internationally, in which 70 riders from the IT company Atos, complete a 470Km journey from Paris to Eindhoven in 2 days.

How it all started

This journey started for me about 9 months ago. Me and my cycle buddy Tom, have only really started our cycle career 2 years ago. I picked up cycling after i snapped the cross ligament in my right knee. I could not do sports anymore, besides Cycling. I received a new ligament in November of 2018.

Although Tom and I are fanatic, we could be considered weekend warriors. Having been caught by the cycling virus, we wanted more and needed a goal to work towards. We subscribed for the Atostour in January after reading great reviews and hearing the feedback about how well it was organized and the charity it supports. This was the ideal goal for us.

Preparing for the Atos tour

First, we signed up for the Amstel gold race, which is 150Km with 3000 meters of elevation. This sportive is planned in April, so it would give us a good benchmark to see where we stand. Would we be able to complete the 150Km ride?

Amstel gold was tough, especially the climbing, but we made it, barely. There was some serious work to do, as the Atostour has 3 times the distance and twice the elevation.

In the months after we trained every week, as many times as we could. Mostly together, but also by ourselves. Each weekend we would set out to ride 80Km plus. This should become comfortable, as the Atostour has stops around these distances. We also spend time on indoor trainers in which we trained for elevation, using [Zwift](#).

A fellow tour cyclist and long distance hero, [Luc van Santen](#), gave us the advice to also learn how to cycle in a peloton. This turned out to be a very good advice. We always cycled with the two of use, never in a group. This turned out to have some up and downsides. The upsides where that we have trained to a point where we could cycle the 100Km distance with an average speed of about 30Km/h, on flat terrain. The downside is that we had no clue of peloton etiquette, or what I meant to cycle in a group as a whole. Based on Luc's advice, we

joined Onyva, a local cycling club, without being a formal club. They cycle twice a week, and anyone can join. You ride in group up to 14 people in a peloton.

Joining the group for the first time, was a real eye opener. We for the first time experienced “the draft effect”. Although we have read and heard about it, when feeling it it changed everything. In a peloton, you need 30% less energy to achieve the same. Before we knew it, we were cruising along at 34km/h, without even breaking a sweat. This gave us the confidence that we could do the 80Km stints in the tour, as we knew we could do the distance with the 2 of us, and now we also knew we could do it in a group with way less effort. Do not get me wrong, this does not make the tour easy, as in inclines you lose those benefits, but it will help in the flatter bits.

Now we got the stint distance, peloton riding and climbing training out of the way, there was one hurdle left to tackle. How do you survive such a long distance, with just 5 touch points (feet, hands and saddle) It means your bike needs to be adjusted to perfection, and your bib-short should be up for the job as well.

Getting the bike setup for endurance

Getting my bike right for 30–60km was easy, as normally when you have it sort of ballpark, pain will only kick in after 2 hours for me. So I knew my bike was setup ok, but I also noticed that after the 2 hour point, my behind would start hurting, my hands would go numb and my neck and lower back would act up. Something had to change.

I could have done a bike-fit but decided to do a bit of bike tuning myself. Youtube is a great resource for learning all about your bike setup. I started with my cleats, these were set all the way to the front. Not a big deal on short distances. But as your calves do all the work, and they are not meant for that, it's not best position for long distances. I moved my cleats all the way to the back. This would mean my upper leg muscles would do most of the work, which they can sustain the workload longer longer and my calves are only used for sprints and inclines. As I adjusted my cleats, my saddle was not right anymore. Using the [KOPS](#) method with my new cleat position, gave me a position that felt right. Finally, I moved my stem up as high as a could, as I did not need an aero position in the Tour, I needed comfort. After changing these things, I micro-adjusted each ride, until I found a sweat spot, which I used for the Tour. Proof would come after the tour, but I was confident with my starting points

The Atos Tour

So, there we were in the bus to Paris, for my first Atostour. I must admit I was quite nervous. Even with all the preparation, I have never cycled more than 150Km in one ride. The bus ride was fun, with a bus quiz, and veteran stories about the tour. Not sure if these helped in my confidence ;-). After arrival in the hotel in Bussy-St.George, we received instructions from the organization, pictures where taken in our Atos tour clothing and we had dinner with Tour the France winner [Joop Zoetemelk](#). And this was only day one!



After some sleep, as we slept with 3 people in one room, we went to our bikes and lined up two by two in one big line after which the tour formally started. The start was quite exciting, as we started in the dark, another first for me. In the beginning the peloton was chaotic. Riders trying to find their pace and place in this new group. We started in the back of the peloton. The position you should take in the peloton is depending on your fitness. The further back, the more difficult, as when the peloton slows or accelerates, the effect is emphasized in the back, which means that it's more stop and sprint as it would be in the front, where changes are more gradual.

The peloton settled quickly, and we were on our way. It was a very very cold morning, with 4 degrees Celsius, it was freezing cold. Especially in the descent the cold would bite your hands, feet and face. I underestimated that part and found myself underdressed in the first stint. We could keep a consistent pace thanks to the help of a group of motards, which joined us throughout the tour. They would block all traffic, which means we could just cycle.



The first stint was tough, riding in the back, cold, a lot of hills, we were happy to make it to the first stop. After some food and warmth, the second stint started. The sun was now helping us a bit and the conditions were much better. We now got used to the peloton and we got more into the flow. Focus would make room for conversations now. After 250Km we arrived in Mons in Belgium. The last stints were easier and we got the feeling we might even make it. Why not? The second day is only 220Km ;-).

After another broken night, day 2 started. Not as early as day 1, but still in the dark. Besides the cold, hills and distance we will get a new challenge today, cobblestones! This already started when we left the hotel. Hold on to your fillings and other bits as the vibration is amazing. Weather was much better this day. Although shorter and less elevation, the climbs were brutal. Some stretches getting as steep as 15%. After the first 100Km, the landscape eased out and it was more or less flat until the finish. Although nothing I expected hurt, unexpected things did. On both days, my neck cramped up and shoulders would hurt from being in the same position all the time. My thumb got numb, from holding the handlebars in a similar all the time. But that was about it. I suffered way less as expected.

Arriving in Eindhoven with Music, loved ones, medals and kind words, was awesome. As soon as you get off your bike you forget all the pain. We have made it and it feels great!

Tips and Tricks

If you are an Atos cyclist and you want to join the tour, here are my tips for getting it done

- Subscribe as early as possible. Only 70 can go and more people apply
- Make sure you can cycle at least 80Km in on go without an issue, try to do 230Km's a week

- Practice riding up hills. If you do not have those near your, find some or invest in an indoor trainer with support for Zwift and resistance
- Find a local cycling club and see if you can practice cycling in a peloton
- Train at least for 6 months before the tour
- Set your bike up for endurance not for speed
- Tour goes at speeds of 26.5km/h on average, which includes hills. On flat I would say 30–32Km/h
- Make sure you pack clothes for the cold. Leg warmers, arm warmers, gloves, overshoes, wind-stopper
- Check your bike before start on loose bits or the cobblestones will bite you.
- Don't worry about the Atos cycling clothing, shorts are fine and painless

Help is there when you need it

The Atos tour is well organized. All cyclist helps each other and if that is not enough, you can always spend some time in the bus that drives behind the peloton and recover, although I do not think you need this, if you follow the steps above. The Tour has its own medics, motards, mechanics, strong riders to support you in the front and the back (road captains) and timing under strict control of the tour manager, Gerrit. I really felt like a pro-cyclist for two days and only had the worry about cycling.

The dirty details



6:23 AM on Friday, September 6, 2019

Atos tour stage 1 PARIS - mons

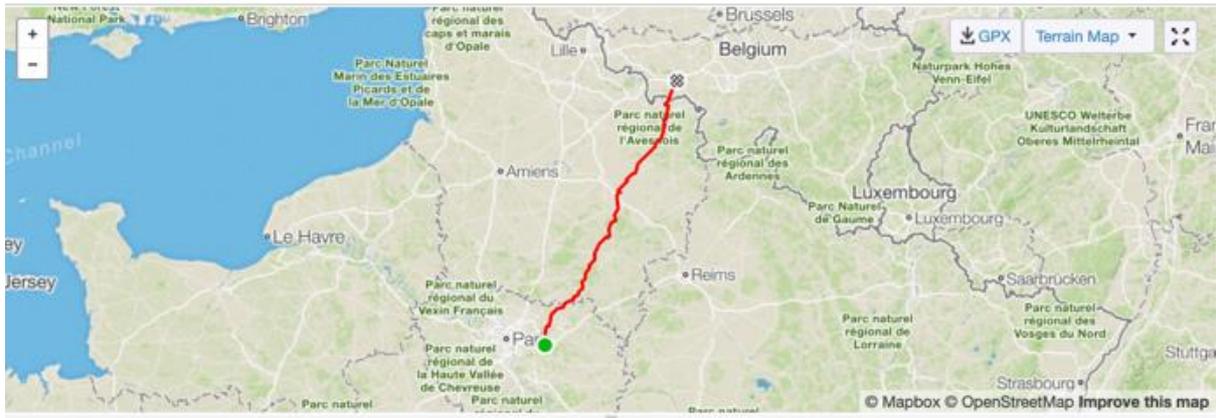
251.56 km **9:31:27** **2,493m** **307**
Distance (?) Moving Time Elevation (?) Historic Relative Effort

157w **5,378 kJ**
Estimated Avg Power Energy Output

	Avg	Max	Show Less
Speed	26.4km/h	58.3km/h	
Heart Rate	131bpm	171bpm	
Cadence	81	183	
Calories	5,507		
Temperature	15°C		
Elapsed Time	11:20:01		

Wahoo ELEMNT BOLT

Bike: Bianchi infinito CV





6:59 AM on Saturday, September 7, 2019

Mons - Eindhoven Atos tour 2019 stage 2

221.41km Distance (?) 8:19:38 Moving Time 1,178m Elevation (?) 168 Massive Relative Effort

144w Estimated Avg Power 4,311kJ Energy Output

	Avg	Max	Show Less
Speed	26.6km/h	51.1km/h	
Heart Rate	123bpm	168bpm	
Cadence	79	130	
Calories	3,071		
Temperature	17°C		
Elapsed Time	10:39:52		

Wahoo ELEMNT BOLT

Bike: Bianchi infinito CV



Why we ride

The Atos tour is unique, well organized and for a good cause. Each rider can collect money from friends, family and business partners. This year we collected a whopping 46.719 euro! All this money goes to charities that support the fight against cancer. And although we as cyclist suffer a bit for two days, people with cancer will have a much harder battle to fight, which is unfortunately not always won. The feeling that with this effort we can contribute a little to getting closer to a solution, makes it all worth it and I have been extremely proud to be part of it.

Concluding

I would do it again in a heartbeat and will subscribe again for next years tour. It was an experience I will never forget. A big thanks for the organization! If you like cycling, like a challenge and want to contribute to the fight against cancer, this is your change. Join the Atos tour and [follow us](#)

Together we will ride again!