

## ORIGINS

# Eddy and the Hour

In his first year as a professional, 1965, Eddy Merckx was asked the not unusual question for a neo-pro, "What are your principal ambitions?" His answer was immediate: "To win the Tour de France and set a new hour record."

Americans with any interest in cycling will recognize the Tour de France, but to mention the hour record in the same breath with the Tour may seem odd. How could an event lasting just sixty minutes possibly compare with one spanning three weeks and thousands of miles?

Think of the question another way. What is a rider's worth in terms of pure power? Strip away the guile required of a Tour winner, that wily knack of knowing

when to attack, when to call upon one's team, when to sprint for a finish and when to hold back, and what is left?

One way to force an answer is in a time trial, the "race of truth." Yet even here weaknesses can be masked. Jacques Anquetil, his era's master against the watch, was beaten in a 1960 Tour of Italy time trial by his opponent's suicidal descending skills. Lucien Van Impe, who won the Tour in 1986, did very well in time trials with a hill, but faded on the flats. Time trials on the road will always be bound to their time and place.

What is needed is a purely neutral territory, one that leaves the rider naked, with no place to hide behind peculiar attri-

**On October 25, 1972, Eddy Merckx set a record that still stands as the apotheosis of human effort.**  
*Owen Mulholland*



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