



HENNIE CHAMPION WILLPOWER KUIPER

Joop Holthausen
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MONUMENT

3

Paris-Roubaix 1983

HENNIE'S RESULTS

1973	31 at 27:36
1974	42 at 23:46
1975	29 at 16:28
1976	4 in the same time as the winner
1977	10 at 1:39
1978	6 at 4:26
1979	3 at 0:40
1980	14 at 10:38
1981	6 in the same time as the winner
1982	15 at 2:38
1983	1
1984	9 at 6:16
1985	8 at 3:30
1987	11 at 3:12

Hennie Kuiper lined up for his eleventh Paris-Roubaix on 10 April 1983. Although victory had eluded him on his previous ten attempts, Kuiper still regarded the Queen of the Classics as 'his' race. Paris-Roubaix, or the Hell of the North as it is also known, featured all the competitive ingredients he loved: an ordeal that only a rider with unimaginable perseverance and equally unimaginable willpower could withstand. The distance alone – between 255 and 265 kilometres as a rule – is enough to separate the men from the boys before the starting gun has even sounded. And the course itself, around 60 kilometres of which runs over ruthless stretches of cobbles, wears the riders down. The ride from Paris to Roubaix is a journey into pain. Rattling over those bald lumps of stone is hell on the joints. Your wrists, backside, and of course your legs are tested to breaking point. The weather often plays a decisive role, especially when the heavens open and mud from the sodden fields seeps onto the road. Road spatters leave many a rider peering out from behind a clay mask, as they slip, slide, tumble, get back up again, and doggedly give chase. Over and over again. An endless battle.

And yet... There is a select band of riders who prize Paris-Roubaix above all other races. The 1967 winner Jan Janssen, for example, who took the title three years after Peter Post, the first Dutchman to emerge victorious: his average speed of 45.129 kilometres per hour was a long-standing record that once seemed impossible to break. Janssen, who finished eighth in that record-breaking race of 1964, knows all too well what drove that killer pace along. 'We had gale force 7, sometimes 8, blowing at our backs.'

'In 1967 it was a very different story,' Janssen recalls. "The weather was foul. The rain came pouring down. There were punctures and crashes galore. I was one of the last men standing. One rider after another gave up the ghost. There were ten of us in with a shout at the end. I won the sprint in Roubaix Velodrome, thanks partly to the track experience I had gained that winter.' For Jan Janssen, winning Paris-Roubaix remains one of the all-time highlights on his list of achievements.

Hennie Kuiper is one of that rare breed with a genuine love of the race, despite being denied victory until 10 April 1983. He still remembers his first Paris-Roubaix, in 1973 as a little-known rider for Ha-Ro, one of the lesser teams. 'It was as exciting as it was punishing. Sometimes I found myself riding alone, then suddenly I was back in a group of riders. I had no idea of my position, but the French kept urging me on. "Allez, mon petit!" I thought they were really getting behind me. It turned out that they were cheering anything that moved. The weather was filthy, but I didn't give up.'

He reached the Velodrome at Roubaix, trailing Luis Ocaña and a full half hour behind the winner Eddy Merckx, only to find the attendants getting ready to close the gate. But Hennie couldn't have cared less. He was bursting with pride at having made Roubaix in the wake of so many of his sporting heroes. At a respectful distance... but still.

A wing and a prayer

In Paris-Roubaix one year later, Kuiper and Belgian rider Staf Van Roosbroeck made their break and set off on a long hard run for home. 'Why? Because I loved it. I wasn't thinking about winning or running out of steam. No, I just got a massive kick out of leading a race like that for as long as I could. The spectators clapping and yelling, cheering you on. It gives you goose bumps. Is all that attention for me? I haven't always raced to win. There were times when I took crazy chances for the sheer enjoyment of it.' In 1975, it was the same story. He barrelled his way through that dreaded Hell, with no plan, no strategy to back up his attacks. 'I set off on a wing and a prayer. Just to see how far it would take me.'

In '76 things got serious, much more serious. Kuiper lined up as world champion in his rainbow jersey and felt he owed it to his newfound global status to ride in the vanguard, to show what he was made of. 'In Belgium, they still weren't convinced that I was a worthy world champion. Well, if you want to spur me on, that's exactly the kind of thing to say.' Kuiper is the quiet type. 'Standing in the baggage claim area after a flight, I was often the last to pick up my suitcase from the carousel. Once you got your case you often had to hang around anyway. So what was the point of muscling in to get it a few minutes earlier? But if you rile me, I let my legs do the talking. And that's just what I did in Paris-Roubaix 1976.' Kuiper rode in fifth position, alert to everything around him, and saw Walter Godefroot step up the pace. 'I thought to myself, this group is going to break. And sure enough... Five of us went clear. Then Godefroot got a flat tyre, so that left just four: Francesco Moser, Roger De Vlaeminck, Marc Demeyer and me.' Almost inevitably, he brought up the rear in that quartet, but he had staked his claim: it was clear that young Kuiper was ready and willing to take on a leading role in the Queen of the Classics. A role he would play again and again in the years that followed. With those devil-may-care first three years out of his system, there were only two occasions in the lead-up to 1983 when he failed to make the top ten: 1980 and 1982.

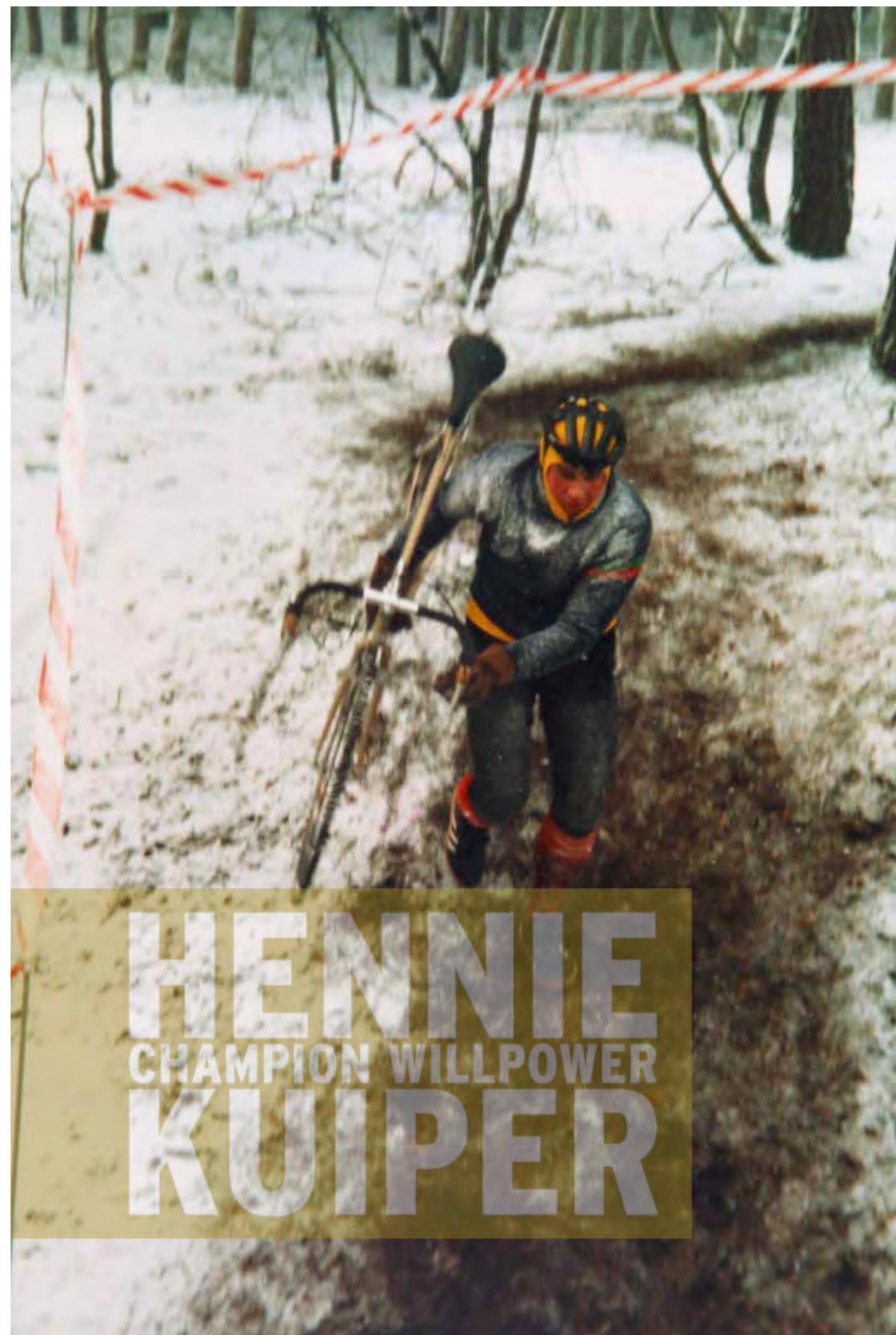
After 1983, the top ten placings kept coming: 9th in 1984 and 8th in 1985. In 1987, he missed out by a whisker, coming 11th. Injury threw a spanner in the works in 1986 and 1988, otherwise, Kuiper's run would have been even more impressive. In 1988 especially, his final year as a pro, he was showing excellent form in the spring classics. But a broken frame on the Paterberg in the Tour of Flanders saw him landed with an ill-fitting bike. Even so, he pushed himself to the limit and ended up injuring his backside, dashing his hopes of competing in Paris-Roubaix one week later.

Tensions running high

In 1979, Hennie Kuiper stood on the Paris-Roubaix podium for the first time: third in a race that made him realise that he needed to knuckle down to an even more Spartan training regime if he ever wanted to win Paris-Roubaix. In the closing stages, Kuiper had found himself in the same company as in 1976: De Vlaeminck, Moser and De Meyer. First De Vlaeminck got a puncture, then De Meyer. That left Moser and Kuiper fighting for victory, till Kuiper felt one of his tyres slowly deflate. Waiting for team leader Maurice De Muer to come to his aid, tensions were running so high that he picked up his bike and hurled it into a field. By the time he was back in the saddle, De Vlaeminck had caught up with him. 'That guy was riding so incredibly fast that I was only able to get ahead of him once. That's when it dawned on me: "I'm going to have to train even harder."'

Beroepsernst garandeert dat Hennie Kuiper zich al vroeg in het jaar 1983 klaarstoomt voor de belangrijke doelen, zoals hier tijdens de Interclubcross in Heerle (tussen Bergen op Zoom en Roosendaal). Wat hij in het veld opbouwt aan weerstand en stuurmanskunst zal hem in Parijs-Roubaix uitstekend van pas komen

>> En ze zijn los! Francesco Moser houdt een straf tempo aan. Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle volgt. Dan Hennie Kuiper. Dan Marc Madiot. Dan Stephen Roche. Dan Alain Bondue. Dan Ronan De Meyer



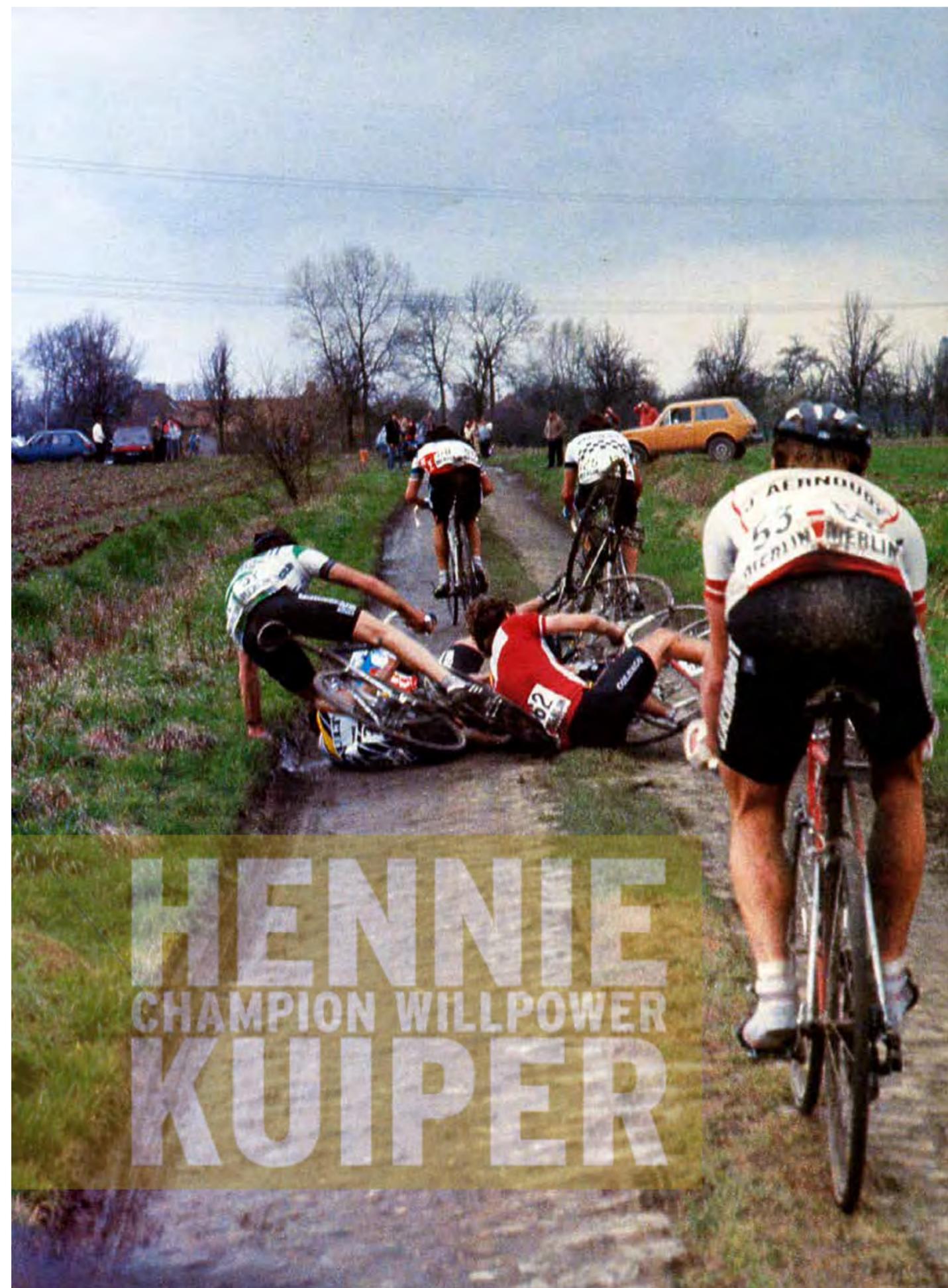


WENNIE
CHAMPION WILLPOWER
KUIPER



Modder. Smurrie. Bagger.
Derrie. Blubber. Moor.
Slijk en krot en prut en drek.
Het ligt er allemaal in
Parijs-Roubaix 1983...

Cruciaal breekpunt in de
wedstrijd. Francesco Moser
en Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle
trekken vol door wanneer
achter hen Alain Bondue,
Patrick Versluys, Ronan
De Meyer en Marc Madiot
de kasseien van dichtbij
gaan bekijken. Kuiper kan
een val vermijden, maar
moet met een voet aan de
grond wachten tot hij de
achtervolgving op Moser en
Duclos-Lassalle kan inzetten



Desire, belief, action: that sacred mantra was echoing through Hennie's head again. That's where the desire to finally win Paris-Roubaix was born. The belief that he could really achieve victory had grown since his third-place finish. As for action, it was a matter of waiting for the ideal opportunity.

Three years later, in 1982, he truly was ready for action. He had pushed his training to the absolute limit and from the very first kilometre he felt: this could be my day. 'My legs were good and I felt strong.' But brimming over with confidence, he made a huge blunder. At the feed zone, Kuiper passed up his musette with an arrogant air: 'I don't need that.' A little later he lost concentration for a second and steered straight over a sharp stone: flat tyre. No panic. New wheel. 'It was all so easy: I rode back up to the head of the pack whistling a merry tune. But then it hit me. I felt like someone was hanging on my saddle the whole time. Hunger knocked me sideways and I ended up finishing fifteenth.'

It was high time for action.

More driven than ever

The year 1983 dawned and from day one, Hennie had a single goal: Paris-Roubaix. He punished himself in endless training sessions. Kuiper had never been one to take the easy way, but now he was driven like never before. Then a threat to his ultimate preparation came from an unexpected source: sponsor Jacky Aernoudt.

It all had to do with Ghent-Wevelgem, a semi-classic which in those days was sandwiched between the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix. The first Sunday of April was the Tour of Flanders, the following Sunday was Paris-Roubaix and the Wednesday between the two was Ghent-Wevelgem, a race that was mostly the domain of the sprinters.

As luck would have it, the sponsor's palatial furniture store was located on the Ghent-Wevelgem route. For Jacky Aernoudt, the race was the perfect opportunity to show off both his business and his professional cycling team. He was determined to see every single one of his star riders racing past his furniture palace. And so he ordered the management to field the strongest possible team to line up in Ghent. This prompted a protest from José De Cauwer. 'Kuiper has to do the honours in Paris-Roubaix on Sunday. Ghent-Wevelgem will only mess up his preparations. He'd be a non-sprinter in a sprinters' race, where's the good in that?' But Aernoudt would not take no for an answer. 'I don't care, I want Kuiper on that team.' Once again José refused. The tug of war continued for a while, but De Cauwer stuck to his guns. 'I'll see you in my office on Monday,' was the sponsor's ominous parting shot. De Cauwer shrugged, knowing that for the time being he had won. Now it was up to Hennie to do the same. On the day of Ghent-Wevelgem, Kuiper put himself through the mill in a brutal seven-hour training session, storming through the countryside of Zeeland in high gear.

The next day, he subjected himself to the same inhuman ordeal. Returning home, he was so tired that he could barely open the front door. He showered, forced down a meal and collapsed into bed, utterly worn out. When José called to check on him, the reply was 'I'm completely shattered.' 'Great,' his team leader answered. 'That means you'll be raring to go on Sunday. You have two days to rest up. Get back to bed and it'll all be fine.'

THE COBBLES OF PARIS-RUBAIX 1983

81st edition
Start: Compiègne
Finish: vélodrome de Roubaix, 274 km
Number of cobbled stretches: 33 Total
length: 53,7 km

2900 meter	Neuvilly > Inchy
200 meter	Viesly
1800 meter	Viesly > Quiévy
3700 meter	Quiévy
1600 meter	Saint-Python
1300 meter	Saulzoir > Verchain Maugré
1700 meter	Verchain > Quéréniang
1300 meter	Quéréniang > Artres
2900 meter	Artres > Aulnoy les Valenciennes
2400 meter	Foret d'Arenberg
1700 meter	Wallers
2900 meter	Erre > Wandignies Hamage
2300 meter	Marchiennes > Brillon
2400 meter	Tilloy > Sars-et-Rosières
1100 meter	Orchies (Chemin des Prières)
600 meter	Orchies (Chemin des Abattoirs)
3100 meter	Auchy > Bersée
3000 meter	Bersée > Mons en Pévèle
200 meter	Phalempin
700 meter	Phalempin
1800 meter	Phalempin > Martinsart
1100 meter	Martinsart
400 meter	Avelin
1100 meter	Avellin > Antreilles
1400 meter	Le Pont-Thibaut > Ennevelin
500 meter	Le Pont-Thibaut > Ennevelin
1600 meter	Cysoing > Bourghelles
800 meter	Wannehain > Camphin en Pévèle
1900 meter	Ferme de Creplaine > Camphin
2300 meter	Carrefour de l'Arbre
1100 meter	Carrefour > Gruson
400 meter	Gruson
1500 meter	Chéreng > Hem

Forest of Arenberg

The weather did not bode well for this edition of Paris-Roubaix. From the cobbled stretches of Hell came reports of steady rain, water-logged fields, and roads slick with mud. The peloton was gearing up for a tough day ahead. The Aernoudt riders formed a protective shield around Hennie Kuiper. The idea was to allow him to conserve as much strength as possible, at least until the Forest of Arenberg, where traditionally the first moves would separate the men from the boys.

That impossible stretch of cobbles flanked by trees was introduced to the race by former cyclist Jean Stablinski, a Frenchman of Polish origin. Once upon a time, the Stablewski family – as his surname was originally spelled – had left Poland for the mines of northern France in search of a better life.

At the tender age of 14, young Jean was sent down the pit but later discovered cycling and worked his way up to become a pro. Not just any old pro, but the 1962 world champion, a stage winner in the Tour, the Vuelta and the Giro, a four-time French national road-cycling champion and a winner of the Amstel Gold Race. In short, a cyclist of standing.



As a rider he knew the region around Roubaix like the back of his hand. The devilish cobbles of Carrefour de l'Arbre, Cysoing and Mons-en-Pévèle had long been part of his life. He was racing on roads above the mines where he himself had worked. Not the most picturesque place to grow up, but one that will sure as hell make a rider of you.

When his cycling days were over, he had a golden tip for Albert Bouvet of l'Équipe, the man who shared responsibility for the design of the course. 'Go and have a look at La Drève des Boules d'Herin,' was his recommendation to the men behind the Hell of the North. The organisers feasted their eyes on those cobbles and it was love at first sight. Almost every year since 1968, the Forest of Arenberg – for that was Jean's secret – has been a highlight of the Paris-Roubaix route. La Drève des Boules d'Herin, to give this 2.4-kilometre cobbled road its official title, appears on the official route map as the Trouée d'Arenberg: the Trench of Arenberg. How the peloton fears those cobbles! Anyone not among the leading group as it enters the forest can forget about glory for the rest of the day. Especially when the weather turns nasty, it can turn into a purgatory of falling riders, broken frames, cursing, screaming and, above all, anguish. In 1998, for example, Belgium's Johan Museeuw shattered his kneecap and three years later Frenchman Philippe Gaumont broke his thigh.

In 1983, the peloton came charging onto those infamous cobbles as usual. Shortly beforehand, Kuiper's teammate Adrie van der Poel had asked if they were almost at the forest. 'It'll be a while yet,' was the answer, but barely a hundred metres on Kuiper saw that he had misjudged. A rusty level-crossing barrier came into view, suspended above the railway line used to transport coal back in the old days. That barrier more or less marked the entrance to the forest. Hennie surged forward to join the leading group of about twenty riders as they went juddering over the cobbles. Adrie was a fraction too late and watched in dismay as the leading pack sped away from him.

Masters of the cobbles

The nightmare came back to life for another year: shattered riders, twisted wheels and even the odd broken frame. Sixteen men survived the first hellish ordeal. Among them were renowned masters of the cobbles such as Francesco Moser, Marc Madiot, Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle, Stephen Roche, the local favourite Alain Bondue, Ronan De Meyer and yes, Hennie Kuiper was right there in the mix.

'Man after man fell by the wayside,' Hennie recalls. 'After the forest, it was every man for himself, and that suited me just fine. My cyclo-cross background means that I've always been able to handle the cobbles. Moser and Duclos kept sprinting to be the first to turn onto the next cobbled road. I let them get on with it. I was never going to win those sprints anyway. And I felt strong enough to think, "They won't get away."' The group turned onto a stretch of muddy cobbles. One rider went down, others tumbled over the top of him. Bondue, Patrick Versluys, De Meyer and Madiot were the fallers. Kuiper, riding a little off the pace, saw it happen and was able to stop in time. He put one foot on the ground and waited until the fallen riders scrambled to their feet, straightened up their bikes and set off again.

Hennie takes up the story: 'I cycled past and saw Moser and Duclos in the distance, racing off at full throttle. I bridged the gap at my own pace, and before long Ronan De Meyer and Madiot were back alongside us.'

Then it was Kuiper's turn to hit the deck. On a particularly slippery stretch, he felt the bike slip from under him. Right behind him, Madiot was just able to steer clear and missed him by a whisker. 'I didn't panic for a moment, just picked up the bike and started chasing down the leading group, with a car from French TV for company. Those journalists kept track of the time differences between me and the first group. I was closing down fast on the leaders.' Hennie's heart was in his throat. He made his way back to the leading group. Every fibre of his being was screaming 'go on, charge past them and don't look back'. 'But I said to myself: take it easy, Hennie. Keep your cool.'

Kuiper, Moser en
Duclos-Lassalle:
het is koers!

Hennie Kuiper alleen
en vastberaden. Zeer
vastberaden. Zeer,
zeer vastberaden



Carrefour de l'Arbre

He had vowed to save his attack for Carrefour de l'Arbre, that stretch of vicious cobbles described by Bernard Hinault as even tougher than the Forest of Arenberg. This wasn't going to be a replay of the year before when he forgot to eat, was felled by hunger and ended a lowly fifteenth. Everything in him was crying out for revenge, revenge on himself. And now the moment had come. 'This time around I hadn't explored the course. But I knew what to expect. In the days I spent resting up after those exhausting training sessions, I re-watched everything on video. I knew what I had to do.' Hennie joined the group of four and they all worked as a team to put themselves well out of reach of any potential chasers.

Then came Carrefour de l'Arbre, the place where it all had to happen.

He changed up to a bigger gear and stormed to the head of the group, with Duclos-Lassalle in his wheel. Hennie didn't try to make a clean break. Instead he upped the pace little by little, inching up the pressure. Achingly slowly but irresistibly, he began to ride away from his fellow breakers. Metre by metre he pulled away. The men behind him were left gasping for breath. But Kuiper the diesel rumbled on, grinding away at a steady pace. This was a demonstration of sheer power, racing on the courage of your convictions. The cobbles were slippery as ice, but Hennie set his own course, riding the ridge in the middle of the road, then switching to the tiny strip of asphalt that separates those clumps of raw stone from the water-logged fields. He whipped past a row of poplars, rode past a local bar, and left the cobbles behind for a while. All this time, his lead was growing. Was Hennie finally on the way to victory in his favourite classic? On the very last cobbled stretch near Hem, the road turned right. Kuiper steered to the other side, to the narrow asphalt strip alongside the cobblestones. In a flash, he caught sight of a kneeling figure clutching a camera. Hennie gambled on the man jumping aside, but he only had eyes for the photo of the century he was hoping to shoot. There was nothing else for it but to ride through a puddle on the road. He turned the handlebars and felt the bike lurch beneath him. The puddle was a pothole, filled with water. His rear wheel slammed through it. Five, six metres on, it jammed. With the title almost in his grasp, he ground to a halt. He could almost feel his chasing rivals breathing down his neck. The TV viewers – especially those in the Netherlands – let out a cry of anguish. Oooooohh... What a disaster! Hennie looked down at the bike, saw that his encounter with the hole had ripped the tyre from the wheel and left it jammed between brake and rim. He let his bike fall on the verge.

A new bike! He has to get a new bike!

That bike was on the car of team leader Fred De Bruyne. Three spares were mounted on the roof: Eric Vanderaerden's, in prime position on the right, Adrie van der Poel's on the left and Hennie Kuiper's stuck in the middle: the least favourable spot of all. It takes longer to grab the bike from the middle than from the outside, and so the bike of the rider least expected to do well is slotted into middle position on the car.

Cattoir saves the day

Gilbert Cattoir from Flanders was the mechanic on duty. In consultation with team leader Fred De Bruyne, he had determined the bikes' positions. 'Fred and I said: let's mount Kuiper's bike in the middle. He hasn't been performing all that well this season. Assistant De Cauwer knew that Kuiper was in great form, but we didn't.' The mechanic tried to salvage the situation during the race. 'As soon as Hennie made his move, I said "Damn it Fred, Kuiper's bike is in the worst position. Let's switch them round." But Fred dismissed the idea, saying, "Let's just leave it, it'll all be over soon."'

A few kilometres later, all hell broke loose. 'There was that man with his Kodak, for Christ's sake.'

Hennie Kuiper heeft afstand genomen van de concurrentie, maar in de achtergrond is mecanicien Gilbert Cattoir er nog niet gerust op. Hij hangt preventief buiten de wagen om te kunnen ingrijpen. Dat is lastig doordat de reservefiets van Kuiper in het midden van het dak staat. Cattoir wil de fietsen van plek verwisselen, maar ploegleider Fred De Bruyne sust: 'We zijn er zo...'

Hennie Kuiper in zijn karakteristieke stijl – scheef op de fiets – draait in de finale van Parijs-Roubaix 1983 de gashendel vol open





The car could not get to the scene right away. There were two other team cars between Kuiper and De Bruyne's car with the spare bike. Precious seconds ticked by. Hennie looked around impatiently to see where the car was. Buzzing with adrenaline, he clapped his hands furiously, an image etched in the memory of many a cycling fan. It was not a question of panic, but the need to act quickly. Panic, however, was exactly what team leader De Bruyne was feeling. Mechanic Cattoir first grabbed two wheels from the roof, only to see it wasn't wheels that Hennie needed, but a complete bike. De Bruyne tore the wheels out of the hands of his mechanic, ran towards the bike and started pulling frantically on the frame and the jammed tyre. Fortunately, Cattoir kept his cool and acted fast. 'I pulled that bike from between the others on the roof, and ran as fast as I could towards Hennie, who saw me coming. Quick... quick... quick...' These were breath-taking seconds: everyone involved, the spectators and the television viewers could feel their heart pounding. Each and every one of them was willing Hennie on. Faster, damn it! Faster! Moser and co. are right behind! Seconds felt like minutes. In reality, the whole operation – from the moment Hennie hit the pothole until he was up and riding again on the asphalt a good hundred metres further on – took exactly 49 seconds. The man who saved the day: Gilbert Cattoir!

A RECONSTRUCTION BASED ON THE TV IMAGES

00 seconds	Hennie hits the pothole.
05 seconds	Hennie gets off the bike. Sees that the tyre has come off the rim.
07 seconds	Hennie sees it's hopeless to go on and lets his bike fall on the verge.
08 seconds	Hennie claps his hands furiously. Where's the team car?
17 seconds	De Bruyne comes running over with wheels. Pulls on rear wheel and tyre.
27 seconds	Cattoir arrives with the new bike.
28 seconds	Hennie gets on the bike. Cattoir pushes him, keeps pushing as he runs. 'Push, push,' Kuiper urges him on.
33 seconds	Hennie and Cattoir, still pushing, have to skirt a motorcyclist parked on the narrow asphalt strip.
39 seconds	Cattoir keeps pushing with all his might. Hennie shifts to a higher gear and pulls on the strap of his right toe clip in one smooth movement.
42 seconds	Hennie leaves the cobbles and hits the asphalt road. Cattoir gives one last mighty push.
49 seconds	Hennie pulls the strap on his left toe clip and is back in cadence.

When Kuiper was up and cycling again, the chasing duo of Moser and Duclos-Lassalle were still 17 seconds behind. Which means that at the time of the incident, Kuiper must have had a lead of over one minute on his pursuers. There was still six kilometres to go.

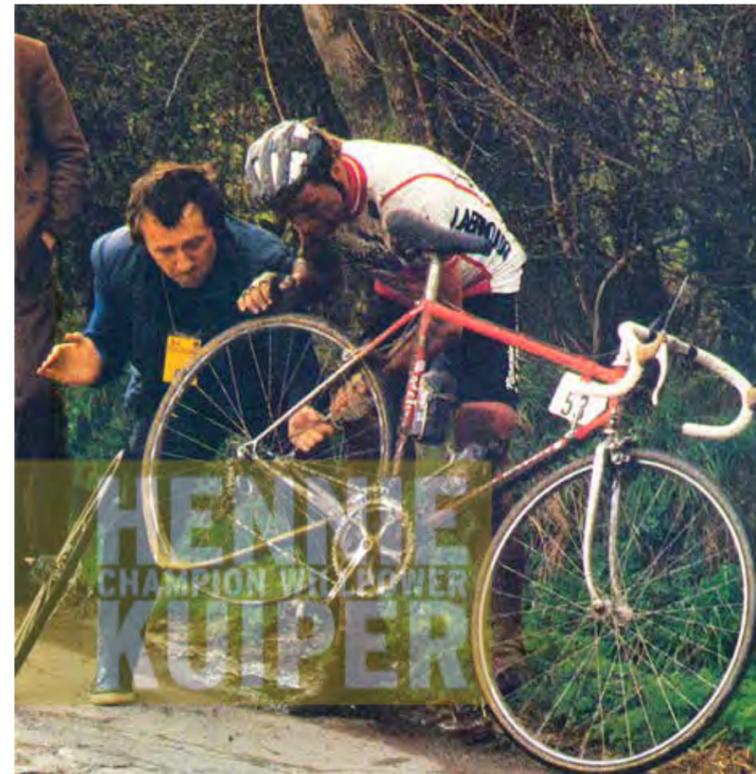
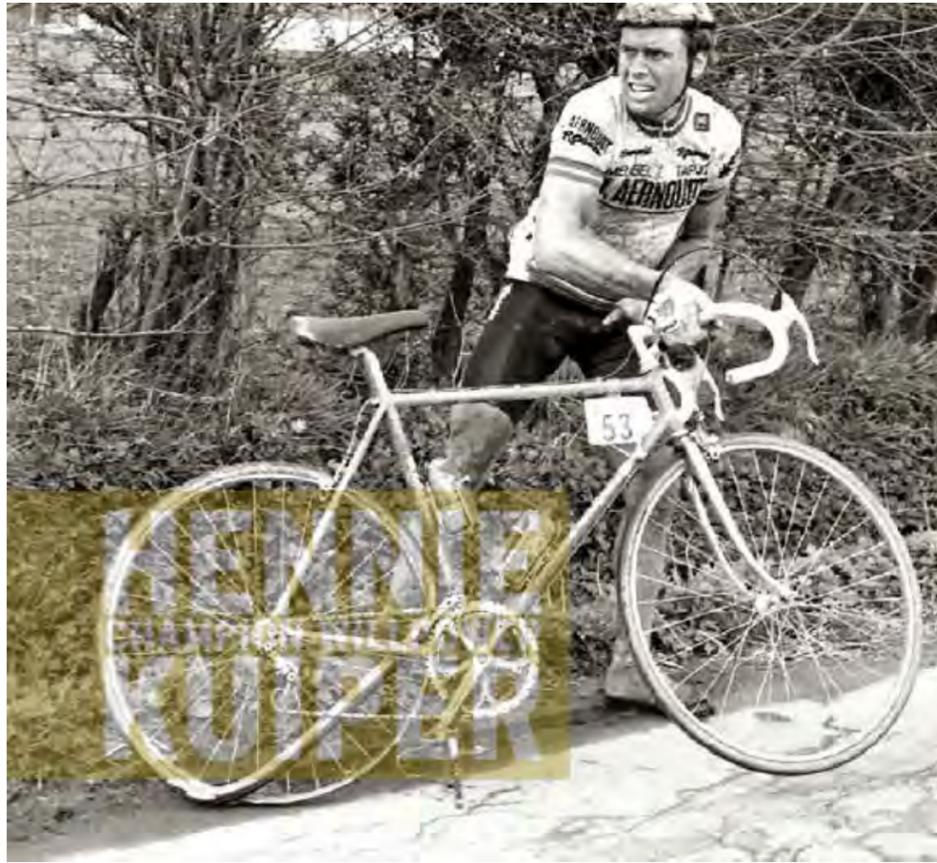
Thirty-four years after the Paris-Roubaix incident, Francesco Moser remembers very little of what happened. The Italian, who has since built up a considerable reputation as a winegrower, prefers to talk about the three consecutive years when he emerged victorious from the Hell of the North. In 1978 and 1979 he triumphed over Monsieur Paris-Roubaix himself, Roger De Vlaeminck; and in 1980 he consigned Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle to the runner-up position.

But Moser remembers one lesson very well: 'You can't give Kuiper any space at all.'

Of course, Moser knows Hennie Kuiper well, as a rider and a rival. 'He beat me in two races I was determined to win: at the 1972 Olympics, when I couldn't reel him in after he broke away, and at the 1975 World Championships, where his Dutch teammates covered all my attempts to break away and follow him.'

He knew that if you gave Hennie Kuiper an inch, he'd take a mile. 'Once he's up and gone, you won't see him again. And that's exactly what happened in 1983. I didn't even know he'd had an accident. Nobody told us he had lost so much time and we never really had him in our sights. No, he was gone and then you knew that getting back in touch would be a very big ask.'

De aanleiding voor het oponthoud in de finale van Parijs-Roubaix. Hennie Kuiper draait met de bocht naar rechts. Zoekt links van de weg een spoor naast het wegdek. En moet uitwijken voor een hurkende amateur-fotograaf. Zijn achterwiel krijgt een klap in een onzichtbaar diep gat, dat met water is gevuld. Band eraf! Kuiper gooit de fiets in de berm. En klap in de handen om zo snel mogelijk nieuw materiaal te krijgen



De mythe van de lekke band voor altijd weerlegd. Kuiper reed niet lek in de finale van Parijs-Roubaix. De band liep van de velg af

Hennie Kuiper pakt zijn fiets en probeert vast het achterwiel los te krijgen, omdat Fred De Bruyne met een nieuw wiel komt aanzetten

Fred De Bruyne slaat uit volle macht om het wiel los te krijgen, maar slaagt niet in zijn opzet

Gilbert Cattoir begrijpt wat onder de gegeven omstandigheden wel noodzakelijk is: een nieuwe fiets. Hij heeft de middelste fiets van het dak van de ploegleiderswagen gehaald en komt – los van het wegdek – met zevenmijlspassen aanzweven

And so it proved that fateful Sunday. Hennie was unstoppable. 'The moment I reached the asphalt, I nudged the chain up to 13 and then back down to 12 a little later.'

That gear was big enough to get him back up to top speed. 'I gave it all I had. At Hem, I flew up that last hill.' Normally that climb would be a molehill to any pro worth his salt, but as the final obstacle in a gruelling race of over 250 kilometres it can feel like an hors catégorie Alpine pass.

Hennie passed the red flag that marked the start of the final kilometre. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the red car of course director Félix Lévitan pulling alongside him. The small figure in his leather cap leans out and says a few unforgettable words to the speeding rider: 'Monsieur Kwiepèr. Mes félicitations. Vous êtes fantastique aujourd'hui.'

Hennie turns onto the driveway that leads to the Velodrome. He sees the supporters, seems to register every face in the crowd. 'When you're on top form, you see every last detail.' Then he reaches the cement of the Roubaix Velodrome and starts his jubilant last lap in front of the packed stands.

Kuiper praises the contribution of mechanic Gilbert Cattoir in his great victory. 'It was Gilbert who won Paris-Roubaix for me.' Cattoir was the man who kept his cool and saw what needed to be done at the critical moment. Unlike the perpetually jittery team leader De Bruyne, the mechanic knew better than to muck about with a bike that was beyond repair. He rushed a new bike straight to Kuiper and pushed with all his might, propelling him onto the tiny asphalt strip beside the cobbles.

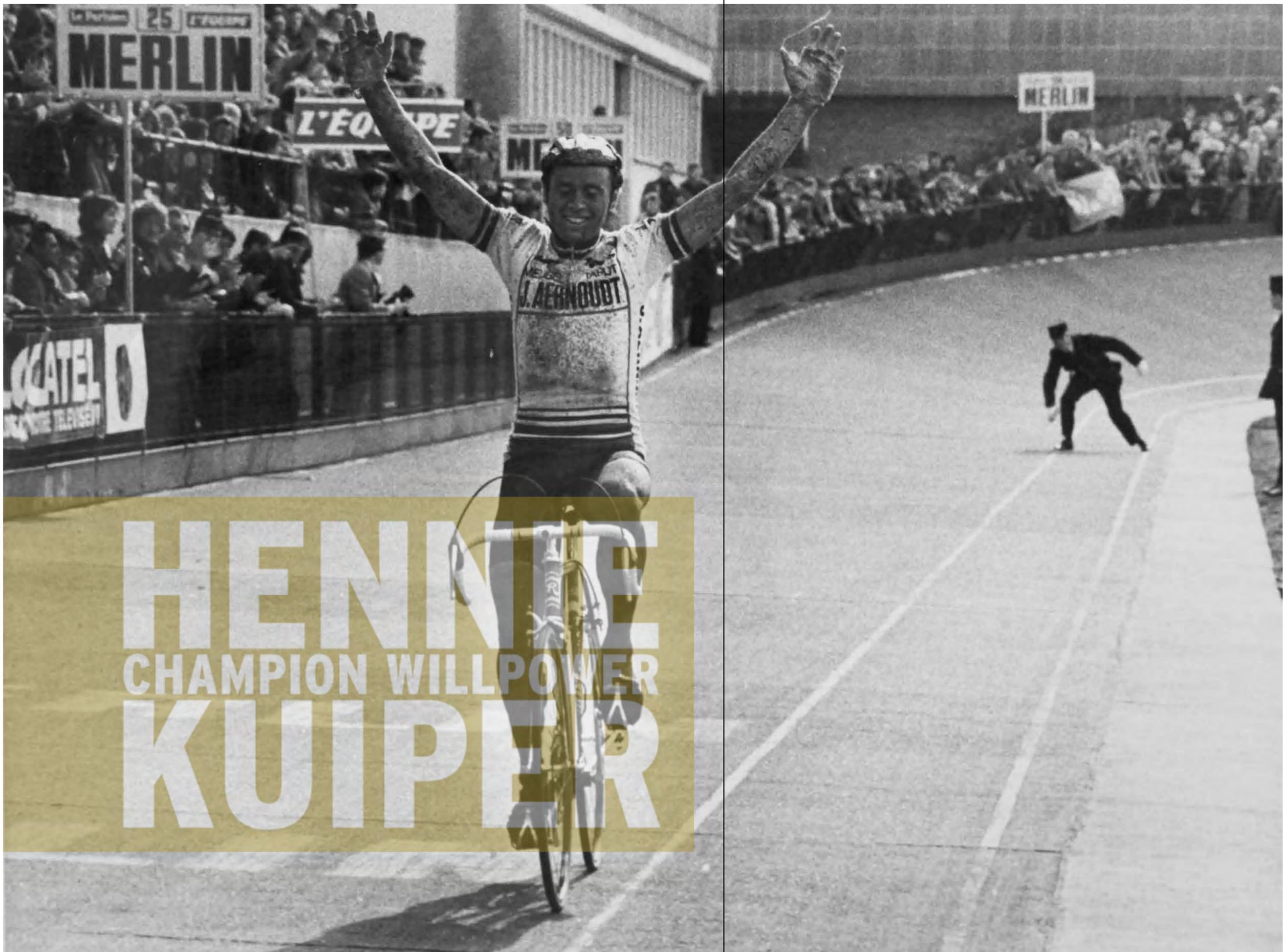
'I was only able to do it because I still had the physical fitness of a cyclo-cross rider,' Cattoir reveals. 'Right up to the previous winter, I had continued to race cyclo-cross. And in that sport, you have to train hard to stand any chance at all. That strength came in handy at Hennie's moment of need.'

For over a hundred metres, Cattoir pushed Kuiper as hard as he could. 'Boy, was I shattered! I ran back to the car and had only just got in when I saw the chasers, Moser and Duclos-Lassalle, bearing down on us. If it had taken us another ten seconds to get Hennie back on the road, they would almost have caught him. Looking back, it's a blessing that I was in such good shape.'

It's true: Cattoir played an undeniable part in Kuiper's victory. Without his contribution, the great man might have faltered within striking distance of victory. But none of this detracts from the fact that Hennie delivered a historic achievement on 10 April 1983, an achievement that he – above all – deserves to be proud of. With hindsight, perhaps he should be grateful to the amateur photographer who forced him to make that fateful manoeuvre and hit that pothole. It's an incident that gave his victory a heroic dimension. Without that bloody photographer, the viewers and spectators wouldn't have been treated to that nerve-racking bike change. What would have been a magnificent triumph became the victory of a hero.

Eeuwige roem voor
Hennie Kuiper. De zege
in Parijs-Roubaix 1983
zal voor een deel de rest
van zijn leven kleuren





HENNIE CHAMPION WILLPOWER KUIPER

De zege op de wielervedstrijd van Roubaix van Hennie Kuiper 1983 behoort tot het Nederlands sporterfgoed. Bij een verkiezing voor het Sportmoment van de Eeuw in december 1999 werd de zege van Kuiper onder andere met het Olympisch volleybalgoud van Atlanta 1996, met de Elfstedentochtzege van Reinier Paping, met de Wimbledonvictorie van Richard Krajicek en de vier gouden medailles in Londen 1948 van Fanny Blankers-Koen