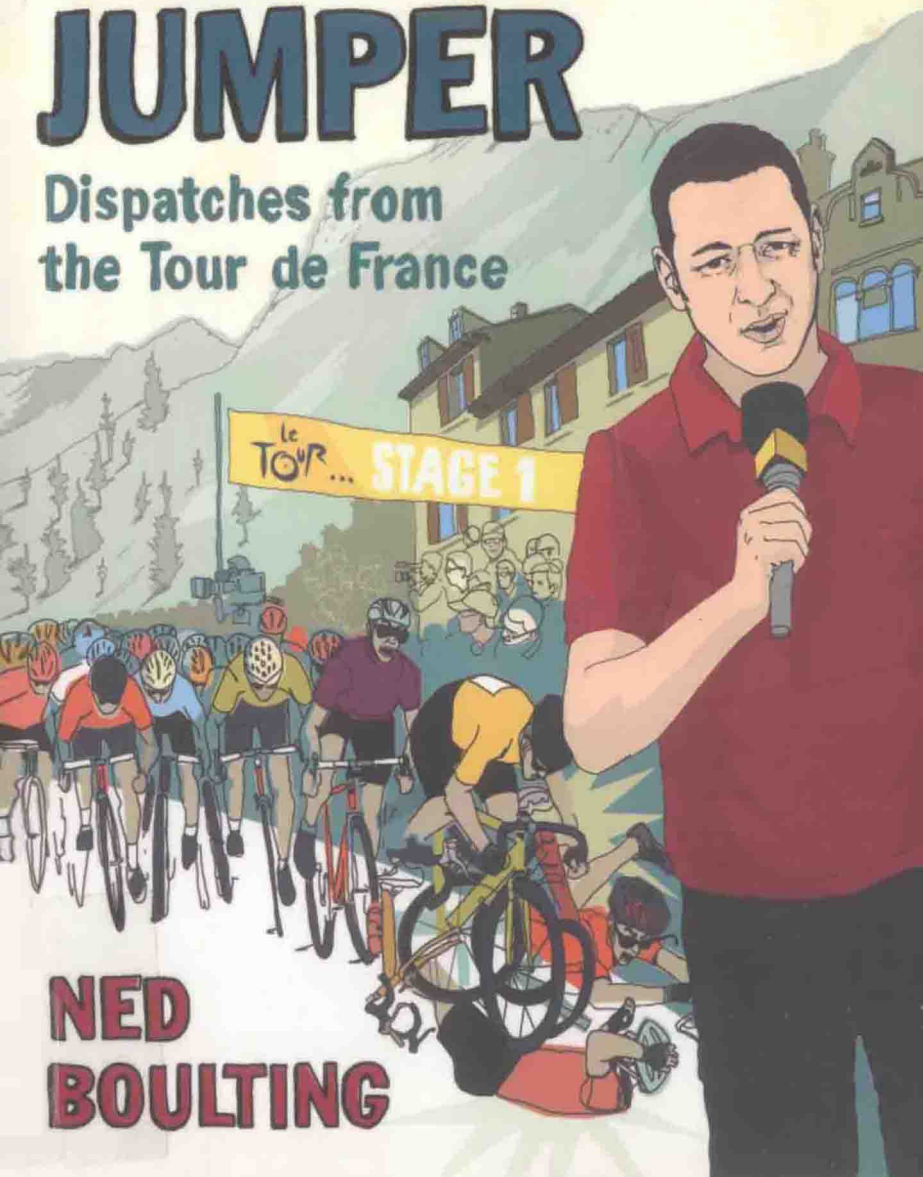


'QUIRKY, WARPED, ENTHUSIASTIC AND FUNNY' CHRIS BOARDMAN

# HOW I WON THE YELLOW JUMPER

Dispatches from  
the Tour de France



**NED  
BOULTING**

NED BOULTING

---

# HOW I WON THE YELLOW JUMPER

DISPATCHES  
FROM THE  
TOUR DE FRANCE



YELLOW JERSEY PRESS  
LONDON

Published by Yellow Jersey Press 2011

8 10 9

Copyright © Ned Boulting 2011

Ned Boulting has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by  
by Yellow Jersey Press  
Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,  
London SW1V 2SA

[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at:  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm)

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9780224083355

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®), the leading international forest certification organisation.

Our books carrying the FSC label are printed on FSC® certified paper.

FSC is the only forest certification scheme endorsed by the leading environmental organisations, including Greenpeace. Our paper procurement policy can be found at  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment)



Typeset in Fairfield Light by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,  
Falkirk, Stirlingshire  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

# HOW I WON THE YELLOW JUMPER

To Mum and Dad

## PROLOGUE

---

I'd love to say that cycling has always been my passion. It would be advantageous to claim that I had run away from home in the mid-seventies, stowed away on the Zeebrugge ferry, armed with only a Curly Wurly to sustain me and a Kodak Instamatic to record my adventure, in the hope of catching a glimpse of Joop Zoetemelk riding the Flèche Wallonne. But, to my great regret, that would be a lie.

Instead I have had to accrue history, to acquire heritage at double-quick pace.

I was a few days short of my thirty-fourth birthday when I first saw a bike race of any description. It wasn't any old bike race, mind you. It was the Tour de France. And I was there to report on it for television, which meant that I had to at least look and sound like I knew what I was talking about. That confidence trick wasn't always successful.

My first year covering the Tour passed in a haze of angst-ridden confusion and I vowed never to return. Yet, unconsciously, something of the Tour had wormed its way into my DNA. Before I knew what I had done, I agreed to work on the 2004 Tour. Then I ended up covering every Tour between 2005 and 2010, eight Tours in all. I have now spent a total of twenty-four weeks following the peloton round France, gradually growing ever more obsessed with the race.

After the best part of a decade, I might almost claim to understand it, or at least bits of it, from time to time.

I am not the only one to have made this progression. The chapters to come are for anyone who has made a similar journey in following this extraordinary sport. They reflect, to some extent, my transition from novice to devotee, taking in both scepticism and wonder. They also invite a minute

inspection of the nooks and crannies of life covering the Tour de France. They tell of champions and car parks, yellow jerseys and filthy socks. They celebrate the race, but they celebrate all the other stuff, too.

That 'stuff' is what makes this a unique event: the millions of fans lining the road, the thousands of Tour vehicles, the villains, the virtuous, the hungry and the hopeless. It's not just about the riders. For the rest of us, it's the mere act of crashing through France, chasing after an event that won't stand still: a series of lurches from incident to accident.

You will notice that, like the Tour itself, this book doesn't follow a straight line. It has a mind of its own, and tends to jump from superstar to supermarket, from the riders to the roadies, from an appraisal of the career of Lance Armstrong to a meditation on the workings of launderettes. My experiences over the eight Tours that make up the substance of this account are necessarily a little disorderly. The random nature of everyday life grinds away at your journalistic endeavour, and leaves it smoking like the red-hot clutch plate of an overheated Renault Espace, immobile and stranded up a mountain. In fact, there's a chapter about just that.

Like those mind-bendingly difficult pixellated designs that were all the rage in the eighties, my hope is that, if you stare at these chapters for long enough, suddenly a fully rounded 3-D picture of the Tour de France will emerge. Fleetinglly.

But what of the race itself?

The sport of cycling, not for the first time, faces extreme scrutiny. In fact, it exists in a permanent state of tension. A series of doping scandals involving some of its biggest names has taken cycling's credibility close to the brink. It feels as if the watershed moment, the point of no return, is now both increasingly imminent, and indefinitely delayed.

Ever since I have started to cover cycling, bad news has broken across its bows. But incessant attacks on its integrity,

the most damning from within cycling itself, have done little to dull the growing popularity of the sport, particularly in the UK. The unravelling of reputations at the very highest levels has coincided with the emergence of a generation of British cyclists able to compete with the very best in the world and, in the case of Mark Cavendish, thrash them. So even if the Tour has never had it so bad, we, in our British bubble, have never had it so good.

That's not the only ambiguity that has defined my evolving attitudes to covering the race. In fact, there's not much about the Tour that isn't ambiguous. Therein lies the fascination.

A colleague once told me that the only way to follow the Tour is to use the same technique that Inuit people use when faced with the blinding whiteness of the snow. They look at it 'with an off-centre gaze'.

Here are my off-centre thoughts.

Ned Boulting  
June 2011



# THE CAST

Since the Tour is as complex as a Tolstoy novel, it might help for me to effect a few introductions. Many of the characters in this book are well known. Others, less so. But all are vital to my story.

## LANCE ARMSTRONG



Lance – or Larry, as we have dubbed him – is the alpha and omega of the years I have covered on the Tour. Articulate, imperious, stubborn and subtle, he was the reason I became transfixed. Oh, and he won it seven times.

## CHRIS BOARDMAN



In his time, Chris Boardman won Olympic medals, yellow jerseys and world records. Track or road, it mattered little. These days he spends his Julys working for ITV. He sweeps up with the same proficiency he used to ride a bike.

## MARK CAVENDISH



Cavendish is the rider I have interviewed more than any other. Principally because his fifteen stage wins to date have coincided with my tenure as ITV's Tour de France reporter. For that reason alone, I feel a little possessive towards him. He may not share that feeling.

## STEVE DOHERTY



Steve has produced or directed almost every Tour for British TV coverage since 1903. Here he is, circa 2009, struggling with the concept of a computer. A punctilious man with an understated passion for the sport and an ability to multitask under pressure while wearing perfectly creased shirts.

## GARY IMLACH



Gary has covered every Tour de France for the last twenty years. He has presented the ITV coverage since 2002. He is universally accepted as one of sport's most admired and respected broadcasters. He does, however, eat tinned mackerel. And I have to share his lip-microphone sometimes.

## PHIL LIGGETT



The Grand Man of the Microphone of the Telly of the Tour. Phil's voice has rung through decades of bike races all over the world, but when July comes, it rings loudest. Silver-haired, silver-tongued, shaven-legged: that's what he is.

## LIAM MACLEOD



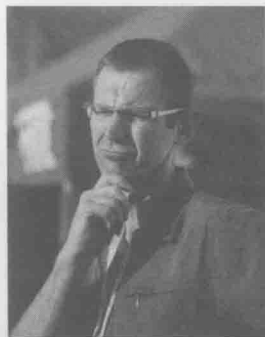
Liam is a fine cameraman and a splendid fellow. His work has brought to life everything I have done over the last four years of the Tour. An ardent Rangers fan with an Irish-sounding name, his confusion was only increased by his introduction to cycling. Like me, though, he's got the bug.

## DAVID MILLAR



David Millar has been my Tour guide. His roller-coaster career has heaped triumph upon failure, rebirth upon disgrace. Lately he has taught me not to believe all that you see. But, equally, that without belief, we might as well all go home.

## MATT RENDELL



Matt is one of cycling's great thinkers. Look at him, scratching his chin and musing. Among other books, he has written *The Death of Marco Pantani*, the definitive work on il Pirata's tragic life. On my first Tour, he nursed me through my initiation. Without his knowledge and passion, I would have given up long ago. He is also able to speak almost every language on earth, which in my eyes makes him extremely clever.

## PAUL SHERWEN



The other half of the Phil-and-Paul double act. Chipper, chirpy, cheeky and any number of other adjectives beginning with 'ch', Paul's unfailing good humour and faith in cycling makes him a force of nature. As is his ability to talk for hours at a time. Incidentally, he owns a substantial chunk of Africa.

## JOHN TINETTI



On my early Tours, I worked with John out on the road. He is a poker-faced, tough Australian, who has surprisingly strong opinions about cycling. He just tends to keep them to himself. He can also run fast. Backwards. With a camera. Filming.

## BRADLEY WIGGINS



Wiggins. Long, tall and with an ever-changing barnet. No one expected him to finish fourth in 2009, but he did. In the course of three weeks he made British cycling re-evaluate its ambitions. His achievements have changed the way we think about ourselves as a nation of riders.

## BEN WOODGATE (WOODY)



Woody is one of television's top sound recordists. Rich in charm, long on talent and bereft of most forms of seriousness, he strolls through July with a set of headphones clamped to his ears, pretending that he cares about cycling. He drives the car a lot, and secretly quite enjoys it.

## CONTENTS

---

|  |      |
|--|------|
| <i>Prologue</i>                          | ix   |
| <i>The Cast</i>                          | xiii |
| Lewisham Hospital: Part One, August 2003 | 1    |
| A Simple Mistake                         | 3    |
| Being on Air                             | 13   |
| The Yellow Book                          | 31   |
| Introducing Armstrong                    | 39   |
| En Route                                 | 54   |
| France. And the French                   | 76   |
| The Go-To Men                            | 94   |
| Glenn                                    | 106  |
| The Lingo                                | 115  |
| Floyd Landis                             | 127  |
| Lewisham Hospital: Part Two, August 2003 | 141  |
| Cavendish - Beginnings                   | 144  |
| Mange Tout                               | 160  |
| The Tour Eats Itself                     | 176  |
| The Mountains                            | 187  |
| Wiggins and the Tax-Haven Tour           | 208  |
| Rest Days                                | 227  |
| Concluding Armstrong                     | 240  |
| Blokes on Bikes                          | 251  |
| Above Us Only Sky                        | 263  |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Cavendish - The Finish Lines               | 273 |
| Oh, the Toilette                           | 288 |
| Contador - An Epilogue                     | 297 |
| Lewisham Hospital: Part Three, August 2003 | 305 |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>                    | 309 |
| <i>List of Illustrations</i>               | 311 |