

Can a 42 year old effectively compete in the Tour de France?



Proof of a doping connection
for Chris Horner in 2007?



July 25, 2007. On the left we have one of the most-notorious dopers in the history of sport, Richard Virenque, meeting with someone some of us just might know. On the right, just minutes later, that same person is now seen with Chris Horner. Coincidence?

The 2014 Tour de France is nearly upon us and, as a Trek dealer, we should be getting excited about who's going to be racing for the Trek team, what chance Trek has in the GC (overall leadership), or the Green Jersey (sprinters), White Jersey (best young rider) or Polka Dot (best climber). The reality is that Trek really doesn't have a strong contender in any of those areas this year. [Andy Schleck](#), who once showed great promise as a fantastic climber, no longer climbs well and never could time trial (and you can't win the Tour de France without doing each quite well). His brother [Frank](#) looks to be in much better shape, quite possibly good enough to end up in the top-10, although in years past he's virtually refused to ride if his brother wasn't there, and vice versa. I suspect that ship has sailed and Frank recognizes the need to optimize for himself and let younger brother Andy do whatever he can on his own. [Fabian Cancellara](#), if he rides the 'Tour, could be a factor in the first week, likely to capture the leader's (Yellow Jersey) for a few days, but won't survive the first big test in the mountains (stages 8 & 9). Sprinters? [Nizzolo](#) shows promise for the future, but he's not quite there yet.

Actually there are a few bright lights, primarily for the future, including [Julian Arredondo](#) (who climbs very well but is likely worn out from the Giro) and the previously-mentioned Nizzolo. But in all likelihood, it will be a team designed to allow Jens Voigt a final shot at a stage win or two in his last year as a pro. Because he is, after all, just a few months away from being 43. Trek could do worse than to field a team around one of the peloton's most-popular riders, but it would certainly be an unusual affair.

Which brings us to... Chris Horner. The guy who, at 42, won a Grand Tour last year (The Tour of Spain, aka "Vuelta"). Is that really possible? Can a guy that old compete against those in their prime, and win? I want to believe. I really do. It's actually more important to me that Chris could be clean (isn't it terrible that I have to say "could be" instead of "is" clean?) than it ever was for Lance, because after a few years, we knew most of the peloton was doped, and it seemed tough to believe that Lance wasn't. But 2013 is supposed to be post-doping, or at least post heavy doping. Chris passed all the tests, but then, so did Lance. What Chris doesn't have at his disposal is an elaborate doping infrastructure, making it likely that, if he did dope, he did it on his own. But we really, really hope he didn't, because unlike Lance, Chris is a great guy. Rarely does anyone have a bad word for him, and every interaction I've had with him has been disarmingly pleasant.



Chris Horner at the 2006 Tour de France. And now, he and Rui Costa (recent winner of the Tour de Suisse) become the two "protected" riders on the Lampre team, "protected" meaning they're the guys everyone else has to work for, because they're expected to do well in the final GC. Rui Costa is a given; he's a great cyclist from Portugal who happens to be cycling's present World Champion. But to put Chris Horner on equal footing, given Chris's poor time trialing skills and tendency to crash? It's a bizarre scenario and, unfortunately, a scenario in which his success would bring outrageous scrutiny, so much that you'd wonder if winning meant you really lost.

It doesn't matter. At this year's Tour de France, Kevin and I will be yelling for Americans Chris Horner and Garmin's Andrew Talansky, old & young. And BMC's Tejay van Garderen, whom I suspect will make a bit less of a splash. We'll be on the mountaintops in the Pyrenees, and the Sunflower fields near Bergerac, for the time trial. It will be the final week so I suspect much will have been sorted out by then, most likely with Chris put into a position to help Rui Costa secure a possible place on the podium than going for it himself. Talansky? We'll see if he can stay strong for three weeks; if he can, he could be a contender for the podium (probably 3rd place). And the Trek guys? Tough to say. Maybe they'll surprise me at their Tour team announcement and I'll see something that says yes, they could pull something off! But I think they threw a lot of talent at the Giro and don't have much left.

In the meantime, Go Chris!