

LANTERNE ROUGE

Some people get a little confused as to what my role as Lanterne Rouge actually is. My experience tells me that most see me as some kind of 'grim reaper' figure, clad in red, scythe in hand and cutting riders down at the back of the peloton who have slipped behind the cut off time. If I ride up to someone I am generally greeted with "am I at the back?" or "am I ok for time?" or other questions along these lines accompanied with a look of pure fear. Luckily, I've stopped taking it personally...

I'm going to clear up a few of these myths for you now with an overview of a normal day for the Haute Route Lanterne Rouge, who's not such a bad guy after all.

During the first few hours of a stage, I spend time riding in the bunch just chatting and meeting riders. If the terrain is more rolling, such as it can be for the Haute Route Ventoux stages or some of the Pyrenees stages, I will tow a group of riders towards the mountains. This will help to hold a nice even pace and save riders' legs for when they start to hit the mountains and the climbs ramp up.

Depending on the stage profile, at the top of certain climbs I'll check in with the Broom Wagon (even scarier than me) to see how things are going at the rear of the race. From then on, and until the finish line, my job is to do everything I can to keep folks moving in the right direction and within the time checks so that they make the finish line

within the time-cut for that day. It might sound simple, but it does take some skill...

As the owner of Alpcycles.com I have been guiding a whole spectrum of riders in the mountains for over 10 years. Over that time you really learn how to read people. Some want to chat in order to pass the time on the climbs. They will chat about anything and everything, so I now have a repertoire of stories and jokes to keep things going, and although I can't comment on the quality of either, they seem to keep riders distracted from the struggle at hand! Other folks just need to know you are nearby, but they don't want the chatter. Totally understandable. Or, you may be one of those people who have just given me 'the look' and I know exactly what that means... "I'm suffering, but I'm fine. Just leave me alone to suffer, and I'll thank you for that." I've seen it many times and I hear you, so I'll ride away for a while and come back later.

Then there are times when people are physically and mentally done. Exhausted. Spent. There is nothing left in them at all, to the point that it is unsafe for them to be on a bike on an open road. The time has come for them to stop. This is by far the toughest part of the job for me as I want nothing more than for every single rider that sets off that morning to cross the finish line and achieve their goals, I truly do. In the past we have had riders so blown that they are literally wobbling and weaving on the bike. I know they don't want to give up, but someone

needs to give them permission to stop. I do feel there is part of them that needs me there to do this, to take the responsibility away and say, "No more. You've done enough." It is truly a tough thing to do to someone but it's part of my job.

The safety of every rider taking part in the event is key for both the Haute Route team and me and that never stops. So let me take this opportunity to give a huge shout out to the team behind the scenes at the Haute Route events especially the men and women out on the road dealing with the race safety: the medical teams, motorbike outriders and the team in the Broom Wagon. They do their best to keep everyone safe and moving. They also do an amazing job of looking after little old me, so that I in turn can do my job! It's a team effort all the way.

So, if you see me coming at one of this year's events, don't be scared. Let me know if you need a joke or a chat, some quiet time or just say hi! I don't bite, honest.

Ade HILL

Ade
Lanterne Rouge,
road guide and all round
nice guy

