

# THE GREATEST RACE ON EARTH

by Bronwen Wall



Ready  
to Read

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**Tour de France** (tour-duh-frons)

**Taupō** (toe-paw): town in central North Island

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Ministry of Education

## Three ... two ... one ...

They put on their helmets.  
They get on their bicycles.  
They roll up to the start line.  
Three ... two ... one ... go!  
Go! Go! Go!



It's the start of the greatest race on Earth.  
It's the **Tour de France** bicycle race.  
"Tour" is a French word. It means "course".  
The French word "de" means "of".  
Every summer, more than 150 cyclists  
from all over the world take part in the race.

## How did it start?

The first Tour de France was held more than a hundred years ago. A French newspaper company wanted more people to read their newspapers, so they decided to have a huge bicycle race that everyone would want to read about. The plan worked.



## Where do they ride?

Today, cyclists ride over 3500 kilometres in the Tour de France. That's like riding a bicycle from the top of New Zealand to the very bottom and then all the way back up to Taupō. Whew!



The course changes every year and goes through many parts of France. Sometimes, the course goes into other countries too. But it always finishes in **Paris**, the capital of France.



The Tour de France cyclists ride through Paris.



The cyclists race through towns, along flat country roads, and up mountains.

Lots of people stop what they are doing to watch the cyclists race past. They clap and cheer. Go! Go! Go!



### ***How long does it take?***

It takes more than twenty days to ride the course of the Tour de France. Each day of racing is called a **stage**.

Some of the stages take only a couple of hours. Some of the stages take most of the day.

The cyclist who is the first to finish a stage each day wins that stage – but it doesn't mean they will win the whole race.

A computer times how fast each cyclist rides each stage. At the end of each day, it adds up each cyclist's times for all the stages so far. Then the cyclist who has the fastest time over all the stages gets to wear a special yellow jersey the next day they race.



### **Why is the jersey yellow?**

The company that started the Tour de France had its newspapers printed on yellow paper. The company decided that the cyclist leading the Tour de France should wear a jersey the same colour as the newspaper. Everyone watching the race would see the yellow jersey and think about the yellow newspaper.



## How do the cyclists keep going?

To be able to race for more than twenty days, cyclists need lots of energy. The Tour de France cyclists eat big, healthy breakfasts before they race each day.

Eating while they race is difficult, so most cyclists carry energy drinks in water bottles on their bicycles. People hand them new water bottles full of fresh energy drink as the cyclists ride by. The cyclists also pick up little bags of snacks as they race along. In the bags, there are nuts, energy bars, and pieces of fruit.

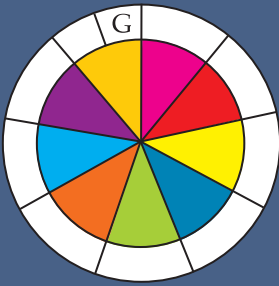


Thousands of people come to Paris to watch the race end. They cheer and clap as the cyclists sprint to the end of the greatest race on Earth – the Tour de France.

Go! Go! Go!







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