

June 18

Hello everyone,

I'll start by apologizing for my delay in this race report. I should have written it on the plane back from Europe.

After our great win in Vinkt, Belgium by Lawson, we had three short days to get our ducks in a row for the biggest race we were doing as a team.

The race is in North Western France in Brittany in a town called Locmine'. This was my eighth year doing this race and I think I have it dialed in. It always starts with a hard road race on the first day with a big loop of about 70km and five or six finishing circuits of about 10km. The second day has a time trial in the morning of 7.5 km, the same course every year, and an afternoon road race with another long loop and finishing circuits in the host town.

We stay in the same small, kind of cool hotel every year called Hotel la Britannia. The hotel is small and outdated by American standards but it has it's advantages. With no TV or internet the guys are required to do things most modern kids have forgotten like having conversations in person and reading. Most of the guys have school work to do too along with their training so the time does seem to fly by.

Stage one, we had previewed the day before. We rode the last two KOM's and the finishing circuits so we knew what to expect.

The strategy for the first stage was simple, wait, wait, wait. Often, when you know you are good, you try to do too much too soon, you try to force it. The problem with that is that all these guys are good and if you mess it up, get caught with your pants down, they will make you pay.

Stuart and Anders were to look for an early move to get into. That would take the pressure off us to chase. Austin was instructed to survive. Since he's so new to racing and international racing is so hard, I wanted him to stay out of trouble and learn. Yannick is a natural. He's so fast and instinctive but he's young and needs more muscle depth to win these stage races. He is capable of winning a stage for sure and soon, I think, he can win the overall. Lawson is Lawson. Everyone knows who he is and what he can do so there was no hiding him in the bunch.

I knew we would be good in the time trial and maybe get ourselves into a position to win but that required us to not lose time on the first stage. We don't need to win the stage, but we have to pay attention.

We arrived early for the first stage and we seemed ready. All of the guys were relaxed, including Austin. I expected him to be anxious but he's not. He is so easy going, it seems nothing rattles him. One thing I notice about these races that is very different from racing in the US. These races go off on time, every time, to the minute.

Bang, the gun goes off and we are racing again. The early parts of stages are sometimes more dangerous than the end of the stages. Everyone is still in the race in the beginning and everyone wants to be at the front, us included. The problem for us, this day, was that we were one of the last teams called up so we were at the back. In the later stages, riders are called up based on GC with the jersey holders called up first followed by the leaders in team GC.

Two kilometers into the stage and I hear "shoot, shoot!" which, in French means crash, crash! Then I hear "Hot Tubes" which is not what I wanted to hear. There are piles of riders down and it takes us a while to get there. By the time we arrive, there are still lots of riders on the ground but none of us. We get in the line of cars blasting back to the bunch, passing the one's and two's of riders chasing back then we see Anders.

We pull up to Anders and he calls for a rear wheel. Jimmy, our Belgian mechanic gets up to him quickly and I wait. It's hard for me as a bike builder and a good race mechanic to sit and let someone else do what I know I can do too. I watched as Jimmy took longer than I thought was needed to do a simple rear wheel change. I decided to get out and see what the problem was. In Jimmy's limited English, he explained that the seat stay was broken. I found out after the fact that during the crash, Anders got out without a scratch and was getting ready to rejoin the race when some big goon plowed into him from behind and that's how the stay got broken. There

was neutral support with bikes but they passed by without offering service and we didn't have a spare bike so Anders chased on what he had. He was going fast and I knew that the Cervelo chain stays are so stiff that he could ride with minimal problems. After the stage we could get a spare bike from Neutral support.

We paced Anders back, which is legal, passing one guy after another and came up to Austin. It seems that Austin was involved in the crash as well. Well, less involved than held up by it. He, also, waited for Anders knowing that this race was more important to Anders than it was for him. He was there to learn and Anders was there to earn a spot on the worlds team.

We paced for ten minutes, hard and nothing, no field, no caravan, nothing. Anders was experiencing some brake rub and was clearly struggling so he came up to the window and said, "go on, the others need you guys, leave us." I knew he was right but, man, we were only a few kilometers into the first stage and I'd lost forty percent of my team. I still had three guys in the field, three good guys, so I thought we would be all right.

Jimmy and I blasted off for the race and left the guys. I was surprised how long it took us to get to the field. We drove fast for a solid ten minutes before we saw the caravan. We would never have caught them if we stayed with Anders and Austin. I'm glad we have such an unselfish team. It would have taken me longer to decide to leave them had Anders not made the call.

When we got to the bunch we found out that all was okay for us. A group had gotten off the front, but was only a minute up and not gaining time. Lawson, Yannick and Stuee were all in the field, at the front but not the ones chasing so we were fine. The KOM's came and went and the break took all the points, no problem, that's not why we are here.

We made it to the circuits with little changing. Singles were dropped out of the break and it was looking less and less like a factor overall. On circuits like this, the race can change fast. Guys get off and guys come back quickly so you need to pay attention. I hear on the radio that Lawson was making a move with one or two guys. I can tell by how fast we are going that they are flying up front. After a few minutes I hear that their group was caught.

With a lap to go there is a group of maybe ten riders forty-five seconds up with a second group of three gapping the front of the field. Lawson had just been brought back so I know it was likely that he would not be covering this one. The race radio reads off the numbers and Yannick is in it. I'm feeling very good about this. Yannick may be the fastest finisher we have on the team and

this is a good finish profile for him. That and he was as fresh as he could be after such a hard stage since he had waited until the circuits to try anything.

As we come to the line the race radio keeps spitting out the gaps between the groups and they are all coming down. Yannick's group got to within thirteen seconds of the stage winner catching a few that got dropped out of the break at the end. Yannick finished seventh on the stage with the field hitting the line thirty seconds behind the winner. Finishing safely in the field were Lawson and Stuart.

This stage had it's highs and lows for us but in the end, nobody was hurt so we were ok. We met up with Austin and Anders at the finish so we had all the chicks in the nest and it was back to the hotel.

There was very little strategy talks at the dinner table since the next stage was a time trial. We were happy that Yannick was sitting second in the young rider competition, ten seconds out of the lead in that. They were all looking forward to an early bedtime and a good nights sleep, as was I. I forget the saying about all good plans, something or other but a knock on my door at 3 AM meant my sleeping was done for the night. More on that in the next report.

Thanks for reading,

Toby