

Notes from the frontline



Saturday, March 25

GP E3 at Harelbeke:

7am-7pm. Started the Classic season with 35 pairs of pavé wheels, which we have been preparing since January. A lot of the guys have new bikes: George Hincapie smashed his up and there was a lot of other good carnage. Scott (Parr) went in the car on the race; Sal (Lillienthal) and Geoff (Brown) arrived at the team HQ near Kortrijk from Catalan Week in the truck.

Sunday, March 26

Flèche Brabançonne:

6am-7pm. Scott went in the race, I spent three hours repairing Hincapie's bike and wheels.

While the Motorola team were fighting the cobbles of the North, their five mechanics were contending with long days and a shortage of wheels, as head spanner-man George Noyes, left, relates in his diary. All pictures by Graham Watson.

Monday, March 27

Spent the morning at the team HQ cleaning and checking wheels, gluing tyres from the weekend and unpacking the truck from Catalonia. After lunch, packed the truck for De Panne, went to the team hotel, cleaned and checked the race bikes and spares — outside in the snow and one degree temperature. We're already starting to run out of wheels, and have just enough to start De Panne.

Tuesday, March 28

Stage one of De Panne:

7am-8.30pm. With Scott, washed and loaded the three cars (right). He went in the race, I stayed in the hotel. Built four wheels and glued 10 tyres, and began preparing the wheels for the Tour of the Basque Country, which starts on April 3. After the race, we cleaned and checked the bikes, again in the snow, temperature one degree. A really destructive day for equipment.

Wednesday, March 29

Stage two of De Panne:

6.30am-8.30pm. Sal replaced Scott, in the morning we cleaned and loaded the three cars, and Sal went in the race. I stayed at the hotel, built more wheels, glued tyres, and began working on the time trial bikes. In the evening Sal and I cleaned and checked the race bikes, added 21-tooth sprockets to the cassettes — the first two days here are really hilly, so you need 23s, the last day is flat. A lot of messing around and hassle today, with the stage cancelled.

Thursday, March 30

Stages three and four of De Panne:

6am-8pm. Cleaned and loaded the three cars, early in the morning. Sal went in the race, I took the truck to the finish of the morning's stage to prepare the afternoon's time trial bikes. After lunch, while the riders time trialled, we cleaned the bikes and wheels from the morning, and put in the training wheels so that the riders could ride to the Holiday Inn in Ghent where they stay before Flanders. Then we re-loaded the truck and went back to the team HQ.

Friday, March 31

6.30am-7pm. A day of running around, counting tyres, wheels and pieces. Sal was leaving for the Basque Country the next day so he had the day off. Scott and Julien (De Oriese — Greg LeMond's mechanic at ADR, 2, and GAN, who works part-time at Motorola. — Ed) prepared the bikes and wheels and loaded the truck for the Tour of the Basque Country, built up three of the titanium bikes they will use for Flèche Wallonne and Liège-Bastogne-Liège, and Scott spent half the day working on Lance's special time trial bike, which he wanted to try out the day before Flanders. It tries to incorporate his new, bizarre, aerodynamic position and his climbing position for the time trial in the Du Pont which has both flat and climbs. We took the cars to the garage for a service, and took one which had been damaged to the decal shop.

Saturday, April 1

7am-8.30pm. Julien and Sal set off in the truck for the Tour of the Basque Country in the morning. Scott and I checked the De Panne wheels — all the stuff from De Panne was washed, but not sorted out, so we don't know what shape the wheels are — loaded the truck for Flanders, then went to the hotel in the afternoon, where we cleaned and checked the race bikes and spares, changed all the gears and chainrings, and did some more work on Lance's time trial bike.

Sunday, April 2

Tour of Flanders:

6.30am-7pm. Up early, washed, filled up and loaded the five cars. Scott went to the race, I washed the truck, went to the finish and built three wheels, glued five tyres, and built Peron's Paris-Roubaix bike, which was three hours wasted work as he went home with low morale after Ghent-Wevelgem. While the riders showered, we washed their bikes so they could take them home. Flanders wasn't as destructive as usual — we only ruined two tyres, and we had made so many wheels that we had enough left over for Ghent-Wevelgem.



Monday, April 3

9am-7pm. Scott had a day off, because he had spent the whole day in the car the day before, I checked wheels at the team HQ and began preparing the Paris-Roubaix bikes. Three or four of last year's were resprayed and built up in January, unlike last year, when we only got them just before the race. They take about three hours to build up — the position has to be exact, but in January it's not usually the same as in April. The RockShox take about half an hour to an hour to fit, because you change the position completely, and fit a new crown race.

Tuesday, April 4

8am-6pm. Scott and I did more Paris-Roubaix bike work in the morning, then loaded the truck for Ghent-Wevelgem and drove to the hotel. In the afternoon, prepared and cleaned the race bikes and spares.

Wednesday, April 5

Ghent-Wevelgem:

A nice 8am start, as the race starts late, in Ghent, but it ended up a very bad day with crashes and a lot of smashed up equipment, so we were in the pub at 7pm. In the morning we cleaned and loaded three cars, Geoff (Brown) arrived from vacation, so we did more Paris-Roubaix bike work. Scott drove to Valenciennes for more RockShox — we have a total of eight, one for each rider — then he did more fork installation at the team HQ and began working on the titanium bikes for Flèche Wallonne.

Geoff went to the race and picked up Steve Bauer off the tarmac after he hit a car. Bauer's frame stood up well but he caused \$2,000 worth of damage to the car. Sean's front wheel was almost destroyed, the rim was hitting the brake block and almost rubbing the fork blades, but that's no problem for Sean. By the time Geoff got to him after picking up Bauer he had already taken off. Peron wrecked both wheels, whined his way into the finish and onto a plane to Italy. While this was happening I was at the finish and glued on 20 Paris-Roubaix tyres, built two wheels. After the race, loaded the truck, and packed Peron's bike for him to take on the aeroplane to Italy.

Thursday, April 6

Scott, Geoff and I put on two more Paris-Roubaix forks, and set up the bikes for the riders' reconnaissance with the wheels prepared the day before. Scott took the bikes for training, Geoff and I cleaned and checked the wheels from Ghent-Wevelgem, and prepared the wheels for Roubaix, then I took the afternoon off, as the wife was about to kill me. Geoff cleaned and checked the bikes for the Grand Prix Pino Cerami, then he and Scott worked on the new Columbus/Max and Ti bikes for Liège and the Du Pont, preparing the threads, cutting the bearing surfaces, cleaning the tubes. Geoff also spent an hour or two repairing Steve Bauer's bike, checking it carefully to make sure it wasn't bent.

Friday, April 7

Grand Prix Pino Cerami:

Geoff and I washed the cars and loaded them, then we built wheels and glued on 30 Paris-Roubaix tyres, changed the blocks to 12-21s for Roubaix, then did more work on the Max bikes for the Du Pont. Scott took the day off, and I took another afternoon off as the wife was still about to kill me!

Saturday, April 8

Geoff and Glenn cleaned the Pino Cerami wheels, and put one more RockShox fork on Michel Dernies' bike — he only found out he was riding that day, but we figured he would after Ghent-Wevelgem, so we had already got his bike. I kept changing blocks and checked the glue bands on 50 wheels — you have to check the tyre is on securely and clean the braking surface. Scott did more work on the titanium bikes, then we packed the truck for Paris-Roubaix and drove to Compiègne.

Sunday, April 9

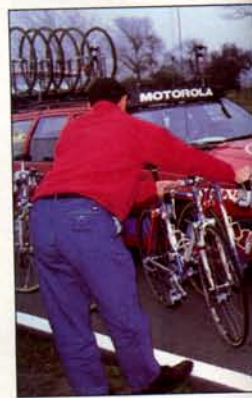
Paris-Roubaix:

Scott and I washed and loaded the four cars, Scott went in the race car, Geoff drove down from Belgium with 15 pairs of wheels and spare bikes and drove like a maniac from one cobbled section to another to stand there in case someone got a flat. We had a lot of people out there — there were six people in Walters with wheels, including Paul Sherwen and his guests, and Freddy Diane the soigneur.

It was all for nothing as we only had two flats. Scott changed one, and Steve got a change from Mavic when he punctured the second time, but their wheels weren't blocked for Rockshox, which need a wider spacing — funny, because most of the field in Roubaix use Rockshox now.

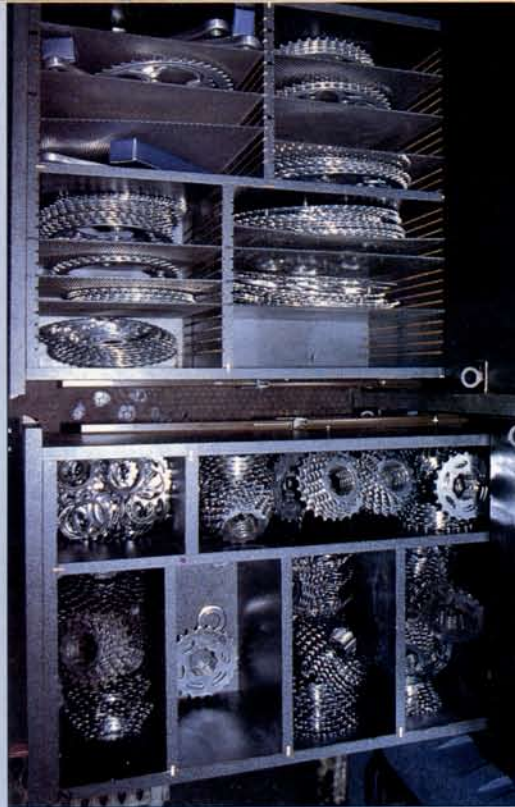
The mechanic spent an age messing about, couldn't get it in, then didn't put it in straight. Steve was going around corners with his wheel floating and almost crashed, and the tyre was touching the brake block and was ready to blow out. He was still 17th.

We had a good race — if you puncture seven or eight tyres, the car runs out, and has to take all the wheels from whoever is by the road. Afterwards we just put the stuff away so we could clean it at our leisure. You can put most of the Paris-Roubaix wheels aside, as the wheels for Flèche Wallonne and Liège are the same trick radials we use for Milan-San Remo. Home by 7pm, and straight down the pub.





Left: With two days to go to the 'Hell of the North,' Geoff Brown prepares some of the 50 wheels Motorola had available for Paris-Roubaix.



Right: Shimano sprockets and chainwheels sit ready for action in the Motorola team base in Belgium. Before Paris-Roubaix every block is changed.



'Sprockets changed?' 'Check.' 'RockShox fitted?' 'Check.' 'Position adjusted?' 'Check.' Scott Parr, left, and George Noyes, right, confirm that Gord Fraser's Roubaix machine is just right.



Above: Scott has one last tinker with Fraser's bike before the Canadian tests it on the cobbles.

Left: Only 49 to go: George checks the glue bands before Paris-Roubaix.

Below: 'Now do be careful and don't get it all grubby Sean...'



Damage report

Harelbeke: Three punctures, three dead wheels, three dead tyres. George Hincapie crashed his new bike, damaging forks, bars, derailleurs, wheels. Snow, rain, hail, dirt. A filthy, terrible day.

Flèche Brabançonne: Four punctures, one dead wheel. Axel Merckx broke his chain and crashed.

De Panne day one: Four punctures, seven tyres to be replaced, one wheel destroyed, lots damaged. One STI lever ground into the mud and ruined. All brake blocks ground away. Apart from Yates' and Bauer's bikes they had been on since December.

De Panne day two: Race shortened, so one puncture, three tyres

to be changed.

De Panne day three: No punctures, two tyres to be changed. One wheel destroyed, some damaged.

Tour of Flanders: Three punctures, six wheels heavily damaged — to be banded back for Paris-Roubaix training — two tyres ruined.

Ghent-Wevelgem: Three crashes — Steve Bauer, Andrea Peron, Sean Yates. Five wheels destroyed, lots of others dented. Bauer wrecked STI levers and both wheels, Yates wrecked a wheel, Peron wrecked two wheels.

Grand Prix Pino Cerami: one crash, not bad.

Paris-Roubaix: two punctures, six wheels wrecked but able to finish.

