

press information exposition

Gentlemen, on your marks! Ahead of the race

Sint-Pietersabdij (St. Peter's Abbey) Ghent
29/02/2020 to 26/07/2020

Is Flanders the road race, and is the road race Flanders? Flemish people cannot imagine a spring without the protracted sprints on the Kwaremont, without the fans in the Veurnse Moeren, or the hard war of attrition on the Schavei in Overijse. It all starts at the end of February. The Omloop Het Nieuwsblad finally brings road racing back home after the usual winter stages in Australia, Oman and various other Emirates. The starting signal that is given between the Museum of Fine Arts and the Kuipke not only marks the start of a new cycling season this year, but also the start of the brand new exhibition *Gentlemen, on your marks! Ahead of the race* exhibition.

In recent years, books, television programs, magazines, cycling coffee bars and even, very recently, films have focused on the Flemish cycling culture. With the *Tour of Flanders Centre* in Oudenaarde and *RACE. Museum of Cycle Racing* in Roeselare, two high-quality, permanent exhibition spaces openly express their love for road racing all the year round.

The exhibition ***Gentlemen, on your marks! At the head of the race*** or translated in Dutch ***'Heeren, vertrekt! In de kop van de Koers'*** distinguishes itself from these museums by mainly focusing on **how the road race is experienced by the riders, their entourage and the fans**. More emotional than rational. As in all productions of Historische Huizen Gent, stories, rather than dry facts and objects, are central here. Road racing is above all emotions and the experience itself, which is why the exhibition focuses on what is going on 'in the head' of the fan, the enthusiast, the collector, the care provider, the team leader, the sponsor and, of course, also the rider himself. The uniquely human feelings, such as joy and sadness, fear and euphoria, strength and loneliness, pain and suffering, are thereby certainly not avoided.

In putting together the exhibition, journalist-photographer Jelle Vermeersch has focussed primarily on the **unique cycling DNA** for which Flanders is so envied abroad. But that doesn't mean that he has only considered local events. He has travelled far and wide, at home and abroad, in search of unique images and catchy stories of riders, team leaders, cycling doctors, carers, partners and fans. They offer you an intimate insight into the world of international cycling.

Audio

The audio guide is included in the entrance price, and plays an essential role in the visit. You will step into the head of our five main characters.

- the former cyclist and oldest surviving winner of the Tour of Flanders, **Roger Decock**
- the legendary Mapei/QuickStep/Deceuninck doctor **Yvan Vanmol**
- the grand lady of cycling, **Corinne Poulidor** (daughter of Raymond, wife of Adrie and mother of Mathieu and David van der Poel)
- the cycling couple **Louis Vervaeke & Astrid Collinge**.

Via listening points, they take you with them on their road race, indicated by a coloured line. Each person can be recognised by his/her own colour. At the end of the exhibition, the different colours of the heroes come together in the rainbow jersey. Roger Decock starts it off in yellow.

A SNEAK PREVIEW

The visitor enters **the café of Roger Decock**. The year is 1957. Roger has already had his café/fan club in the Kortrijkstraat in Tielt for 3 years. A jukebox with hits from that year, a billiards table, a cosy bar and pictures from races, the registration register, ... in short, pure nostalgia.

In order to become completely immersed in the road race atmosphere, the visitor is given a **back number, safety pins and a small thirst quencher**, before continuing to the start of the exhibition through the *Koer (courtyard)*. The visit with the audio guide starts there.

The visitor starts with the life story of Roger Decock. Life-size photos, a massage table, action photos of masseurs, embrocation ointment, beef steaks, eau de cologne, pickled herrings, amphetamines, syringes, an old heart rate monitor, images of town fair racers from the 80s, newspaper articles, radio and TV fragments, etc.

In the period between WWII and the end of the 1990s, Italy was much more the leading country in cycle racing than Belgium. Both Roger Decock and Yvan Vanmol took part in major changes in the cycling sport from the front row, inspired by Italian ingenuity in terms of material, team organisation, training methods and medical support.

With the story of Yvan Demol, interwoven with the story of Roger, the visitor experiences the huge difference between the cycle racing as it was in the past and now. The stories of the young rider Louis Vervaeke, and his wife Astrid Collinge, who lost her husband Antoine Demoitié (25) in the Gent-Wevelgem race, and the story and the worries of Corinne Poulidor, mother of Matthieu and David van der Poel, bring us back to contemporary cycle racing.

Road race attributes and paraphernalia, such as the bike with which Tom Boonen rode his last Paris-Roubaix, and the Pontiac watch with which Wim van Est crashed into the canyon in the 1951 Tour on the Col d'Aubisque – obtained through collaboration with KOERS and a number of private lenders - the Rodania tune, sound and film fragments, posters, etc., take the visitor on a **trip down Memory Lane**.

But that's not all.

Specially for this exhibition, photographer Jelle Vermeersch has taken gripping black-and-white images of 20 of the 27 Tour de France winners still alive: from 91-year-old Federico Bahamontes, through Eddy Merckx, to Egan Bernal, the winner in 2019.

But it's not only the Flandriens of today who are presented in a unique way for this occasion, but also the spectators, the signallers and the young up-and-coming talent are put in the spotlight with a special photo series. The tour bus zooms in on life along the way, and the exhibition organisers provide a selection of photos from Sigfrid Eggers that were taken with the Deceuninck-Quickstep team. The forest of Wallers, on the other hand, confronts the visitor with a beautiful series of Paris-Roubaix racers, taken by Jelle Vermeersch.



The exhibition is a collaboration of the Historic Houses Ghent with Jelle Vermeersch, photographer-journalist and co-founder of the cycling magazine Bahamontes and RACE. The Museum of Cycling (Roeselare), Flanders Classics and Sporza.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Sint-Pietersabdij Ghent (St. Peter's Abbey, the exhibition hall of the Historic Houses Gent)

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Image material

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/155713187@N08/albums/72157712857239948>

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PRICES

The audio guide is **included** in the admission ticket and is available in Dutch, French and English.

Tickets can be booked online on

<https://tickets1stpietersabdij.stad.gent/Exhibitions/Overview>

€ 12

Individual entry

€ 10

Groups of at least 15 persons (online reservation mandatory)

Teachers, on presentation of a teacher card

€ 7

Students from 19 up to and including 25 years of age, on presentation of a valid student card

Residents of Ghent

€ 2

Children from age of 13 up to and including 18

Ghent students from 19 up to and including 25 years of age, on presentation of a valid student card

Free

Youngsters up to and including 12 years of age

Youngsters from Ghent, up to and including 18 years of age

Residents of Ghent on Sunday mornings from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Ghent schools, primary and secondary *

Escort of persons with a disability

Leader of a group (of at least 15 persons)

Press, on presentation of a valid press card

ICOM

Holders of a Museum pass or City Card

* Free entry, but an online reservation is mandatory.