

= 2015 Vuelta a España =

The 2015 Vuelta a España was a three @-@ week Grand Tour cycling race . The race was the 70th edition of the Vuelta a España and took place principally in Spain , although two stages took place partly or wholly in Andorra , and was the 22nd race in the 2015 UCI World Tour . The 3 @,@ 358 @.@ 1 @-@ kilometre (2 @,@ 086 @.@ 6 mi) race included 21 stages , beginning in Marbella on 22 August 2015 and finishing in Madrid on 13 September . It was won by Fabio Aru (Astana Pro Team) , with Joaquim Rodríguez (Team Katusha) second and Rafa? Majka (Tinkoff ? Saxo) third .

The early leaders of the race were Esteban Chaves (Orica ? GreenEDGE) and Tom Dumoulin (Giant ? Alpecin) , who exchanged the leader 's red jersey several times during the first ten days of racing , with both riders winning summit finishes in the first week . Aru took over the race lead following the mountainous Stage 11 , which took place entirely within Andorra . He kept his lead for five stages as the race entered the mountains of northern Spain , but lost it to Rodríguez on Stage 16 . Dumoulin took the lead back on Stage 17 ? the race 's only individual time trial ? with Aru three seconds behind in second place . Aru attacked throughout the final stages and , on the penultimate day , finally dropped Dumoulin , who fell to sixth place overall . Aru therefore took the first Grand Tour victory of his career .

The points classification was decided during the final stage and was won by Alejandro Valverde (Movistar Team) , while Rodríguez won the combination classification . The mountains classification was won by Omar Fraile (Caja Rural ? Seguros RGA) . Dumoulin won the combativity award , while Movistar won the team prize .

= = Teams = =

The seventeen UCI WorldTeams were automatically invited and obliged to attend the race . The organiser of the Vuelta , Unipublic , was also able to invite five UCI Professional Continental teams ? the second tier of professional cycling teams ? as wildcards . These were announced on 20 March 2015 . Caja Rural ? Seguros RGA , the only Spanish @-@ registered Professional Continental team , was one of those invited , along with two French teams , Cofidis and Team Europcar . MTN ? Qhubeka were invited for the second consecutive year after also securing their first ever entry into the Tour de France . The final team to be invited was Colombia . One prominent team to miss out on an entry was UnitedHealthcare .

The team presentation took place in Benahavís on the evening before the first stage . The number of riders allowed per squad was nine , therefore the start list contained a total of 198 riders . The riders represented 37 different countries , with the largest numbers coming from France (30) , Spain (27) and Italy (20) . The average age of riders in the Vuelta was 29 @.@ 13 years , ranging from the 20 @-@ year @-@ old Matej Mohori? (Cannondale ? Garmin) to the 38 @-@ year @-@ old Haimar Zubeldia (Trek Factory Racing) .

The teams entering the race were :

= = Pre @-@ race favorites = =

The top four riders from the 2015 Tour de France all chose to start the Vuelta . These were Chris Froome (Team Sky) , Nairo Quintana and Alejandro Valverde (both Movistar Team) and Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) , all of whom had previously won Grand Tours . The most notable absentee from among the general classification contenders was Alberto Contador (Tinkoff ? Saxo) , the winner of the 2014 Vuelta . Oleg Tinkov , the owner of the Tinkoff @-@ Saxo team , had challenged Contador , Froome , Nibali and Quintana to attempt to ride all three Grand Tours in 2015 ; none of the riders took up the challenge . Froome , Nibali and Quintana all declined to ride the Giro and , as Contador was attempting to win both the Giro d 'Italia and the Tour , he did not aim to ride the Vuelta . Valverde and Nibali were the only two previous winners of the race to start the 2015 edition .

Froome , who had been second in the 2011 and 2014 Vueltas , had had a strong season , with

victories in the Vuelta a Andalucía , the Critérium du Dauphiné and the Tour de France . He was attempting to become the first rider since Bernard Hinault in 1978 to win both the Tour and the Vuelta in the same season , though it was expected that he would be tired following his victory in the Tour . The individual time trial was expected to favour Froome , who is strong in the discipline . Before the race , however , Froome was uncertain about his form and his ability to win the race . Quintana 's only stage race victory of the season had come in the Tirreno - Adriatico , but he had performed strongly in the Alps in the Tour 's final stages and the mountainous route of the Vuelta was expected to suit him .

Vincenzo Nibali , who had won the Vuelta in 2010 , had struggled in the opening stages of the Tour , but had recovered to take a stage victory in the final week . The Astana team also included Fabio Aru and Mikel Landa , second and third respectively at the Giro d'Italia ; while this made a strong team it was unclear which rider would be favoured by the team and given the assistance of his teammates . There was a similar situation at Movistar , as Valverde , who had won the Vuelta in 2009 and had finished on the podium on four other occasions , was also in strong form and was well suited to the course . Also among the general classification contenders were Joaquim Rodríguez (Team Katusha) , Rafa Majka (Tinkoff - Saxo) and Tejay van Garderen (BMC Racing Team) .

Other notable riders to take part in the race included several sprinters . One of these was Peter Sagan (Tinkoff - Saxo) , four times the winner of the points classification in the Tour de France and winner of three stages in the 2011 Vuelta , who was preparing for the World Championships road race the following month . Sagan was considered particularly strong on the easier uphill finishes in the first week . John Degenkolb (Giant - Alpecin) had won four stages and the points classification in 2014 as well as five stages in 2012 . Nacer Bouhanni (Cofidis) , who had crashed out of the Tour , was expected to compete with Degenkolb in the flat sprints .

== Route and stages ==

The first announcement of the route for the 2015 Vuelta a España came in October 2014 , when Javier Guillén , the race director , announced that the first stage would take place in Puerto Banús near Marbella on 22 August . It had been decided that the stage would be either an individual time trial or a team time trial . More news came the following month , when Guillén revealed that he had been involved in conversations with Chris Froome and had promised him that the race would include a fairly flat individual time trial of around 40 kilometres (25 mi) . He also said that the race would feature " explosive finals and summit finishes " . The official route announcement came on 10 January 2015 in Torremolinos , along the coast from the start of the first stage in Puerto Banús .

The first five stages took place in and around Andalusia in southern Spain ; the 2014 Vuelta had also started there . The first stage was a team time trial along the coast from Puerto Banús to Marbella . The next four stages were fairly flat , although Stage 2 finished on a moderately difficult climb . The sixth stage started in Córdoba and finished in Sierra de Cazorla in Jaén on another moderately difficult climb . The seventh stage then returned to Andalusia for the first major difficulty of the race : the first 1.9 category summit finish at La Alpujarra . The route then continued along the eastern coast of Spain , with a medium 2.1 mountain seventh stage and another first 1.9 category summit finish at Benitachell on Stage 9 . There was one more medium 2.1 mountain stage on Stage 10 , taking the riders into the Province of Castellón . This was followed by a transfer that took the riders into Andorra for a three 2.1 day spell , beginning with the first rest day . The eleventh stage took place entirely in Andorra ; though it was only 138 kilometres (86 mi) in length , it included six categorised climbs , including a summit finish , and was described by Eusebio Unzué (the manager of the Movistar team) as " the toughest Vuelta stage that he has seen in more than 30 years " . Stage 12 took the riders back into Spain for a fairly flat stage , before three consecutive stages with summit finishes . These took place in the mountains of Cantabria and Asturias and were followed by the race 's second rest day . The final week of the race included no summit finishes : the first stage was a 38 2.1 7 2.1 kilometre (24 2.1 0 mi) individual time trial in Burgos and was then followed by three mixed stages that took the riders nearer to the final stage of the race , a sprint stage in Madrid . For the first time , the race organisers also held a women 's race on the

same day as the final stage , using the same circuit . This race ? called La Madrid Challenge by La Vuelta ? was won by Shelley Olds .

The 2015 Vuelta included nine summit finishes , none of which had previously been used in the race . Unusually , the principal difficulties of the race came in the first two weeks , including all nine summit finishes . It was therefore expected that the climbers would need to attack early in the race , in order to build up a significant lead ahead of the lengthy time trial on Stage 17 . The race organisers also hoped to encourage sprinters to take part by including seven fairly flat stages .

Each road stage (that is , all the stages except the team time trial and the individual time trial) included an intermediate sprint . This was a point where the leading riders in the stage were awarded points in the points classification and time bonuses in the general classification . Many of the stages also included climbs that were categorised by the race organisers according to their difficulty ; the leading riders over each of these climbs were awarded points in the mountains classification , with the most difficult climbs earning the most points .

In the days before the beginning of the race , there was controversy over the first stage . On arriving at the start , the teams discovered that the route used a variety of road surfaces , crossed sandy sections and included several ramps . As a result , the race organisers decided to neutralise the stage : the teams therefore competed only for the stage victory and for the team classification , not for the general classification .

= = Race overview = =

The team time trial was won by BMC Racing Team and Peter Velits took the red jersey as the first rider across the line . Since the stage had been neutralised for the general classification , all 198 riders began the second stage on the same time . The stage finished on a moderate climb , where Esteban Chaves (Orica ? GreenEDGE) attacked early and took both the stage victory and the lead of the race . A major crash in the final 30 kilometres (19 mi) brought down several riders and most riders in the peloton (the main group) were held up , including Fabio Aru and Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) . Aru quickly rejoined the peloton ; Nibali was forced to chase for a long time . After the stage , a video emerged of Nibali holding on to his team car as it accelerated him back to the peloton . Nibali was therefore fined and excluded from the race .

The next stage was a moderately difficult stage that ended in a bunch sprint . Peter Sagan won his first Grand Tour stage in over two years ahead of Nacer Bouhanni (Cofidis) and John Degenkolb (Giant @-@ Alpecin) . The fourth stage again included an uphill finish . This stage was also decided in a sprint finish , this time won by Alejandro Valverde . Sagan , who came second , took over the lead of the points classification . A third consecutive bunch sprint came on the fifth stage , which ended on a slight incline . The relatively straightforward stage was won by Caleb Ewan (Orica ? GreenEDGE) , who was riding his first Grand Tour , ahead of Degenkolb and Sagan . There were splits in the peloton at the finish ; Chaves lost six seconds to Tom Dumoulin (Giant ? Alpecin) , who therefore took over the red jersey of the race leader by one second . This lead did not last long . The sixth stage finished on another moderate climb . Chaves again attacked early in the climb and took his second stage victory , with Dan Martin (Cannondale ? Garmin) second and Dumoulin third . Chaves therefore took back the red jersey .

The seventh stage was the most significant uphill finish of the race so far , finishing on the climb of the Alto de Capileira . It was won by Bert @-@ Jan Lindeman (LottoNL ? Jumbo) from the breakaway . Most of the general classification favourites finished together , though Fabio Aru gained seven seconds in the final kilometre and Chris Froome lost nearly half a minute . The following stage was a moderately difficult stage : it was too difficult for the pure sprinters to reach the finish line with the main group of riders , but not difficult enough to create gaps between those riding for the overall victory . The most notable event was a large crash 50 kilometres (31 mi) from the finish . Four riders were immediately forced to withdraw from the race with injuries , including Dan Martin , who had been in the top ten . The stage was won in a reduced bunch sprint by Jasper Stuyven (Trek Factory Racing) , who had been among the riders injured in the earlier crash . He was forced to withdraw from the race after the stage with a broken scaphoid . Stage 9 ended with a difficult climb .

There was a series of attacks on the early part of the mountain , with many riders dropped from the lead group . Tom Dumoulin eventually took a solo win in the stage , two seconds ahead of Chris Froome , and took back the red jersey as Chaves lost significant time . Froome had originally been dropped , but rode at a steady tempo and came close to the stage victory . Stage 10 , the final stage before the first rest day , ended in another bunch sprint , which was won by Kristian Sbaragli (MTN ? Qhubeka) .

The eleventh stage , the first after the rest day , was the difficult stage in Andorra , with six difficult climbs and almost no flat roads . The stage was won from a breakaway by Mikel Landa (Astana) . Fabio Aru , Landa 's teammate , took second place and moved into the race lead . Chris Froome fell from his bike at the beginning of the stage and lost several minutes to Aru ; the following morning it was revealed that he had broken his foot in the fall and he withdrew from the race . Nairo Quintana also lost several minutes on the stage . The following stage , which took the riders from Andorra back into Spain , was won in a sprint by Danny van Poppel (Trek Factory Racing) after the day 's breakaway was caught in the final kilometre . Van Poppel won the stage despite puncturing his tyre with 10 kilometres (6 @. @ 2 mi) remaining . The thirteenth stage ? the last one before a series of three consecutive summit finishes ? was won from a breakaway by Nelson Oliveira (Lampre ? Merida) , with no impact on the general classification .

The first of the three summit finishes ? Stage 14 ? was won by Alessandro De Marchi (BMC Racing Team) , who had been in the day 's breakaway . Quintana gained several seconds back , while Aru , Rodríguez , Chaves and Majka all gained time on Dumoulin . Rodríguez attacked strongly on the final climb to win Stage 15 and gained time on all his rivals , putting himself just one second behind Aru . Dumoulin lost further time to Aru , Majka and Chaves . The final stage with a summit finish was Stage 16 : it was a difficult stage including seven climbs and was won by Fränk Schleck (Trek Factory Racing) . On the final climb , Rodríguez gained two seconds on Aru in the final metres to put himself into the race lead for the final rest day , while Dumoulin lost more time and was nearly two minutes back .

After the rest day came the race 's individual time trial . It was won by Dumoulin , who was more than a minute ahead of all the other riders in the race . His time was good enough to put him into the overall race lead . Aru rode strongly , and was only three seconds behind Dumoulin in the general classification after the stage . Rodríguez lost over three minutes to Dumoulin . Majka also lost significant time to Aru and Dumoulin and fell to fourth place .

Following the time trial , there were three mountainous stages , although none of them had a summit finish . All three were won by riders from breakaways . Nicolas Roche (Sky) won Stage 18 , beating Haimar Zubeldia (Trek Factory Racing) in a two @-@ man sprint . After his team had put pressure on the peloton through the whole stage , Aru attacked Dumoulin six times on the final climb , and Valverde put in three more attacks . Dumoulin , however , did not lose any time and retained his three @-@ second lead . Stage 19 ended with a short , cobbled climb into Ávila . It was won by Alexis Gougeard (AG2R La Mondiale) , who had escaped from the breakaway group on the previous climb . The day 's racing also produced another crash : this time Aru fell to the ground . Although he had to make several trips to the medical car , he did not seem seriously injured . At the end of the stage , Dumoulin used his team to put him in a strong position for the cobbled climb and he increased his lead over Aru to six seconds . Stage 20 was the final day of mountainous terrain , including four difficult climbs . It was won by Rubén Plaza (Lampre @-@ Merida) after a 117 @-@ kilometre (73 mi) solo breakaway that lasted over three hours . Aru 's Astana team rode hard in the second half of the stage and , with a strong team effort , they were eventually able to drop Dumoulin on the penultimate climb of the day ; he dropped further back on the final climb and lost nearly four minutes , dropping to sixth place overall . Quintana and Majka gained nearly a minute on the other general classification rivals . This meant that Aru took the race lead , with Rodríguez second and Majka third .

The final stage of the race was a flat stage that finished in Madrid . It was won in a sprint by Degenkolb . During the stage , Valverde took advantage of a puncture for Rodríguez and won the intermediate sprint to give him the points jersey . Although Aru lost a little time in a split in the peloton at the finish line , the rest of the standings were unchanged . Aru therefore won the race ,

his first Grand Tour victory .

= = Classification leadership = =

The 2015 Vuelta a España included four principal classifications . The first of these was the general classification , which was calculated by adding up each rider 's times on each stage and applying the relevant time bonuses . These were 10 seconds for the stage winner , 6 seconds for the rider in second , and 4 seconds for the rider in third , and 3 , 2 and 1 seconds for the first three riders at each intermediate sprint ; no bonuses were awarded on the time trial stages . The rider with the lowest cumulative time was the winner of the general classification and was considered the overall winner of the Vuelta . The rider leading the classification wore a red jersey .

The second classification was the points classification . Riders were awarded points for finishing in the top fifteen places on each stage and in the top three at each intermediate sprint . The first rider at each stage finish was awarded 25 points , the second 20 points , the third 16 points , the fourth 14 points , the fifth 12 points , the sixth 10 points , down to 1 point for the rider in fifteenth . At the intermediate sprints , the first three riders won 4 , 2 and 1 points respectively . The rider with the most points won the classification and wore a green jersey .

The third classification was the mountains classification . Most stages of the race included one or more categorised climbs . Stages were categorised as third- , second- , first- and special @-@ category , with the more difficult climbs rated higher . The most difficult climb of the race , the Alto Ermita de Alba on Stage 16 , was given its own category as the Cima Alberto Fernández . Points were awarded for the first riders across the summit of each climb ; the rider with the most accumulated points won the classification and wore a white jersey with blue polka dots .

The final individual classification was the combination classification . This was calculated by adding up each rider 's position on the other three individual classifications . The rider with the lowest cumulative score was the winner of the classification and wore a white jersey .

The final classification was a team classification . This was calculated by adding together the times of each team 's best three riders on each stage . The team with the lowest cumulative time was the winner of the classification . There was also a combativity prize awarded on each stage ; three riders were chosen on each stage by a race jury to recognise the rider " who displayed the most courageous effort " . There was then a public vote to decide which rider should be awarded the prize ; the rider wore a red dossard (race number) the following day . An identical procedure took place on the final stage to decide the most combative rider of the whole Vuelta .

= = Final standings = =

= = = General classification = = =