

= 2015 Gent ? Wevelgem =

The 2015 Gent ? Wevelgem was a one @-@ day cycling classic that took place in Belgium and France on 29 March 2015 . It was the 77th edition of the Gent ? Wevelgem race ; it took place on 29 March and was the seventh race of the 2015 UCI World Tour . The defending champion was John Degenkolb (Giant ? Alpecin) , who had won the 2014 edition in a bunch sprint .

Gent ? Wevelgem is part of the spring classics season and is known as the " sprinter 's classic " , because its terrain is less challenging than most of the other classics . The 2015 edition followed a 239 @.@ 1 @-@ kilometre (148 @.@ 6 mi) route that started in Deinze and ended in Wevelgem . The race took place in difficult weather conditions with heavy wind and rain ; as a result , only 39 riders finished the race of the 200 who had started . The race was won by Luca Paolini (Team Katusha) , who attacked a small group in the final 6 kilometres (3 @.@ 7 mi) and took a solo victory . Niki Terpstra (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) sprinted to second place , ahead of Geraint Thomas (Team Sky) .

= = Route = =

The 2015 Gent ? Wevelgem was 239 @.@ 1 kilometres (148 @.@ 6 mi) in length , starting in the Belgian city of Deinze , west of the city of Gent , and finishing in Wevelgem . Most of the spring classics centre around Oudenaarde and the many small hills in the nearby region . Gent ? Wevelgem , however , travels west into West Flanders and France and has fewer hills , making it more suitable for sprinters .

After the race began in the Grote Markt in Deinze , the route took the riders west towards the coast ; after 73 kilometres (45 mi) of flat roads , they reached Adinkerke , southwest of Nieuwpoort , where the route turned south . They travelled another 23 kilometres (14 mi) before reaching Roesbrugge and , after 97 @.@ 8 kilometres (60 @.@ 8 mi) , entered the Nord department of France . The first 12 kilometres (7 mi) of French roads took them west , before they turned south at Wormhout . The first climb of the day came another 10 kilometres (6 mi) later , as the riders climbed the Casselberg . A 6 kilometres (4 mi) loop brought them round to climb the Casselberg a second time , though from a different direction .

The route then turned east . The final French climb was the Catsberg , which came after 143 kilometres (89 mi) . The riders continued east after this and , after 148 @.@ 2 kilometres (92 @.@ 1 mi) , re @-@ entered Belgium at Westouter , on the outskirts of Heuvelland , to enter the key section of the race . This began with the climb of the Baneberg , 152 kilometres (94 mi) from the start . 8 kilometres (5 mi) later , they climbed the Kemmelberg in the town of Kemmel . 4 kilometres (2 mi) after that , they climbed the Monteberg . This succession of climbs was interspersed with steep descents , including the difficult descent of the Kemmelberg . A flat , 29 kilometres (18 mi) section of road followed , as the route went east towards Mesen , then gradually looped back west through Nieuwkerke . After this flat section , the riders returned to the same roads that they had ridden previously and repeated the Baneberg ? Kemmelberg ? Monteberg sequence of climbs .

At the top of the second climb of the Monteberg , there were 34 @.@ 6 kilometres (21 @.@ 5 mi) remaining , mostly on flat roads . The route turned north @-@ east out of Kemmel to Ypres , where several cobbled roads were used . After Ypres , the route turned east through Menen and into Wevelgem .

= = Teams = =

As Gent ? Wevelgem is a UCI World Tour event , all 17 UCI WorldTeams were invited automatically and were obliged to send a squad . Eight Professional Continental teams received wildcard invitations . With eight riders on each team , the peloton at the beginning of the race was made up of 200 riders .

= = Pre @-@ race favourites = =

The 2015 Gent ? Wevelgem was without two of the main classics riders , Tom Boonen (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) and Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) , both of whom had been injured in races earlier in the spring . However , their absence was not expected to affect the race as much as it would other races in the classics season , such as the Tour of Flanders the following weekend , as Gent @-@ Wevelgem is particularly suited to sprinters . This is because it has fewer climbs than the other spring classics ; difficulty often comes from crosswinds on the exposed parts of West Flanders .

The defending champion , John Degenkolb (Giant ? Alpecin) , was the principal favourite for victory before the race . He had won Milan ? San Remo the week before and was in good form . Degenkolb is seen as a sprinter , but has good ability at getting over short climbs , having had no difficulty on the Kemmelberg in the 2014 Gent ? Wevelgem .

Alexander Kristoff (Team Katusha) , who was second in Milan ? San Remo and fourth a few days earlier at E3 Harelbeke , was also among the favourites , especially in the bad weather expected for Gent ? Wevelgem . Peter Sagan (Tinkoff ? Saxo) , the 2013 champion , was also in form following E3 Harelbeke , and was expected to be able to win either from a bunch sprint or from an attack .

The Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step team was also expected to feature strongly in the race , even in Boonen 's absence . They were led by Mark Cavendish , one of the strongest sprinters , who had already won Kuurne ? Brussels ? Kuurne , which is similar to Gent ? Wevelgem . Other options for the team included Zdenek ?tybar , second in E3 Harelbeke . Team Sky also brought a strong squad . Their team included Geraint Thomas , the winner of E3 Harelbeke , Ian Stannard , the winner of the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad , and Bradley Wiggins , but they were expected to support sprinter Elia Viviani .

There were many other riders considered to have a chance of victory in the race . These included classics riders such as Sep Vanmarcke (LottoNL ? Jumbo) , Daniel Oss and Greg Van Avermaet (both BMC Racing Team) and sprinters such as André Greipel (Lotto ? Soudal) , Arnaud Démare (FDJ) , Nacer Bouhanni (Cofidis) , Sam Bennett (Bora ? Argon 18) , Heinrich Haussler (IAM Cycling) , Sacha Modolo (Lampre ? Merida) , Adam Blythe (Orica ? GreenEDGE) , Tyler Farrar and Edvald Boasson Hagen (both MTN ? Qhubeka) . Moreno Hofland (LottoNL ? Jumbo) was also expected to be among the favourites , but he withdrew the day before the race with an illness .

= = Race report = =

The race took place in very wet and windy conditions . This included a headwind in the early stages of the race , which delayed the formation of a breakaway . When the breakaway did form , it included seven riders , who built up a nine @-@ minute lead within the first hour of racing . These riders were Tim Kerkhof (Team Roompot) , Alexis Gougeard (AG2R La Mondiale) , Albert Timmer (Giant ? Alpecin) , Alex Dowsett (Movistar Team) , Pavel Brutt (Tinkoff @-@ Saxo) , Jesse Sergent (Trek Factory Racing) and Mirko Tedeschi (Southeast Pro Cycling) . Soon afterwards the peloton was split into groups as riders began to withdraw from the race . The principal difficulty throughout the race was the wind : Cyclingnews.com described the riders as " constantly balancing on their bike , leaning into the wind , trying not to be blown off the road " .

As the riders entered the flat lands near the Belgian coast , the winds became more problematic . Around three @-@ quarters of the peloton had been dropped or had withdrawn from the race by the time the riders turned back inland . Gert Steegmans (Trek Factory Racing) was blown sideways into a ditch ; the wind knocked several other riders over and caused Martin Velits (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) and Lars Bak (Lotto @-@ Soudal) to withdraw from the race . Mark Cavendish crashed and was forced to chase to attempt to rejoin the leading riders . The conditions were so severe that some team officials called for the race to be neutralised to ensure the riders ' safety . Shortly afterwards , two large groups came back together . The main peloton was therefore made up of around 100 riders and was approximately two minutes behind the breakaway . The breakaway was caught soon afterwards .

Around Cassel , the peloton was again split into small groups by the strong winds . The front group

was reduced to 25 riders . Bradley Wiggins was left behind and withdrew from the race , along with Edvald Boasson Hagen (MTN @-@ Qhubeka) , who had hit a pole by the side of the road and had broken his clavicle . The front group included Vanmarcke , Thomas , Kristoff and Sagan , with Démare , Greipel , Matti Breschel and Van Avermaet joining soon afterwards . On the Catsberg , Maarten Tjallingii (LottoNL ? Jumbo) attacked alone and gained a one @-@ minute lead over the main group . Several riders attacked the group but no one was able to get away and they came to the Kemmelberg together .

Jürgen Roelandts (Lotto @-@ Soudal) attacked after the summit of the Kemmelberg . He initially built a small lead over the chasing group , which was led by riders from Etixx @-@ Quick Step . They stopped chasing , however , after Zdeněk Štybar suffered a puncture . This allowed riders to attack the group . Stijn Vandenbergh (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) was the first to attack ; he was then joined first by Daniel Oss (BMC) and Thomas , and then also by Jens Debusschere (Lotto @-@ Soudal) and Vanmarcke . Despite their superior numbers , Roelandts was able to maintain his lead ; the peloton , meanwhile , quickly fell a long way behind . Riders continued to crash during this period , including Sylvain Chavanel (IAM Cycling) and Mat Hayman (Orica ? GreenEDGE) . Jack Bauer (Cannondale @-@ Garmin) suffered a crash when another rider 's rain jacket got caught in the spokes of his wheels ; he picked up his bike and threw it into a ditch . With many of the team cars full , some riders asked for directions so that they could ride directly to their team hotels rather than completing the race .

Luca Paolini (Katusha) attacked from the main group and caught the five chasers , with Niki Terpstra (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) doing the same shortly afterwards . While Paolini and Terpstra were chasing , Geraint Thomas was blown violently from his bike , landing on his left shoulder . He landed on the grass and was able to rejoin the group , although he appeared to be shaken by the crash . As the riders approached the Kemmelberg for the final time , Roelandts had a lead of around two minutes . Vandenbergh led up the climb , with Thomas following closely and the other riders struggling . Vanmarcke and Terpstra soon caught up , with Debusschere quickly following . Paolini eventually returned to the group , but Oss was unable to do so . As they crossed the final climb of the day with 30 kilometres (19 mi) remaining , Roelandts had a one @-@ minute lead ahead of the six @-@ man group .

By this point , Roelandts had led solo for around 50 kilometres (31 mi) and was beginning to struggle . He was caught with around 20 kilometres (12 mi) remaining . As he was caught , Terpstra suffered a puncture . He quickly returned to the group and immediately attacked , with Paolini joining him . Thomas led the chase , with Vanmarcke and Debusschere looking tired . The six riders therefore came into the final 10 kilometres (6 @.@ 2 mi) together . With around 6 kilometres (3 @.@ 7 mi) remaining , Paolini attacked and was chased down by the other riders ; he then attacked again and built a gap , which he was able to maintain to the finish . Terpstra beat Thomas to second place , followed by Vandenbergh , Debusschere , and Vanmarcke within a minute and Roelandts and Oss further behind . The main peloton came in more than five minutes behind Paolini , with Kristoff winning the sprint for ninth place ahead of Sagan . Only 39 riders finished the race .

= = Results = =

= = Post @-@ race analysis = =

There was widespread comment in the media after the race about the weather conditions . Cyclingnews.com described it as " mayhem " and " one of the wildest [races] in recent years " . Paolini said that he had crashed twice on the way to victory and had used a total of three bikes , but also that he had been lucky later in the race . He said " we 're up in the north and this is real cycling " . Paolini pointed at his head and heart as he crossed the finish line ? the same gesture that he had performed when winning a stage in the 2013 Giro d 'Italia ? and explained the gesture as indicating that such wins required " head and heart as much as legs " .

Patrick Lefevere , the Etixx @-@ Quick Step team manager , afterwards described the team 's " bad luck " throughout the race , which included crashes for Cavendish and Martin Velits and punctures for Terpstra and ?tybar . Lefevere pointed to the absence of Tom Boonen as a reason for his riders ' nervousness . Geraint Thomas felt that the other riders had been looking at him in particular to chase Paolini because of his win in the E3 Harelbeke ; he said that he " didn 't have much left " in the sprint at the end of the race .

VeloNews wrote that the riders had come close to calling for the neutralisation of the race because of the extreme weather conditions . The winds reached approximately 70 to 80 km / h (40 ? 50 mph) and were so strong that the riders were even unable to form into echelons . However the website also quoted Brian Cookson , the president of the UCI , who described the conditions as " very difficult , but not impossible " and the race as " a real classic " .