

= 2011 Team Europcar season =

The 2011 season for the Team Europcar cycling team began in January with La Tropicale Amissa Bongo and ended in October with Yukiya Arashiro 's performance in the Japan Cup . It was the team 's twelfth season as a professional cycling team , although its second as a UCI Professional Continental team . Unlike fellow former UCI ProTeams Cofidis , FDJ , and Geox ? TMC , they did not seek the status for 2011 , thus in order to compete in any UCI World Tour event , the team had to be invited in advance , by race organizers .

The season was one of the best in the team 's history , with 20 victories and a Tour de France with multiple noteworthy performances . Team leader Thomas Voeckler wore the yellow jersey as race leader for ten days ; the second such occurrence of his career , after also leading for ten days in 2004 . Unlike that race , however , Voeckler poised himself as a serious overall contender and took fourth place overall ; the best result by a French rider since 2000 . While he spent most of the Tour riding in Voeckler 's service , Pierre Rolland won one of the marquee stages , up Alpe d 'Huez , eventually finishing 11th overall and winning the young rider classification .

Voeckler was one of the more prolific winners of the early season , tallying eight victories in 2011 , the last of them obtained on May 8 . The veteran Frenchman won five stages at four stage races , plus the overall crowns at the Tour du Haut Var and the Four Days of Dunkirk along with the single @-@ day Cholet @-@ Pays de Loire .

= = 2011 roster = =

Ages as of January 1 , 2011 .

= = One @-@ day races = =

= = = Spring classics = = =

The team had a solid showing at the traditional opener to the French cycling season , the Grand Prix d 'Ouverture La Marseillaise . While FDJ 's Jérémy Roy easily won the race with a solo breakaway , Gautier rode to sixth place by finishing near the front of the peloton two and a half minutes behind . At Kuurne ? Brussels ? Kuurne , one of the early @-@ season Belgian races , Chavanel also turned in a sixth place , in a large field sprint . That same day , Gautier secured a podium finish at Les Boucles du Sud Ardèche , coming third in a selective 12 @-@ rider sprint at the front of the race . Chavanel rode to eighth place at Le Samyn , coming across the line 11 seconds back of the winner Dominic Klemme in a race decided by a late breakaway .

On the same weekend as the more prestigious Milan ? San Remo , to which the team was not invited , they picked up two wins in single @-@ day races . Veilleux won La Roue Tourangelle beating Saur ? Sojasun 's Anthony Delaplace in a two @-@ up sprint five seconds ahead of the main field . Chavanel led the field across the line , giving Europcar two out of the three podium spots . That same day , team leader Voeckler won Cholet @-@ Pays de Loire by foiling a field sprint . With 3 km (1 @. @ 9 mi) left in the race , Voeckler went on the attack . He opened up a ten @-@ second time gap very quickly and just held on to win , having no appreciable gap over the peloton at the finish . Since Cholet @-@ Pays de Loire is a UCI Europe Tour race , Voeckler had to wear the all @-@ white jersey of Europe Tour leader and not the French national champion 's jersey , something which spectators expecting to see the tricolor jersey found absurd . While Voeckler was nonetheless happy to come away with a win , he stressed after the race that it was not Milan ? San Remo , and that the victory should be viewed with the proper perspective .

In April , Jérôme won Tro @-@ Bro Léon . He credited the win to advice from teammate Quemeneur , who hails from the area where the race was won , about the roads on which it was run . Also working in Jérôme 's favor was a timely puncture from teammate Hurel . After Hurel got a wheel change , Jérôme had bridged up to him , so Hurel went to work for Jérôme . Jérôme and Will

Routley then broke away from two FDJ riders for the final sprint , which Jérôme won with a time gap . Voeckler just missed out on the podium at the Tour du Finistère , finishing in second position of the peloton behind two late attackers for fourth place on the day . In late May , the team had a very strong showing at the Boucles de l'Aulne . While Vacansoleil ? DCM 's Martijn Keizer rode off with the victory , Team Europcar placed three riders in the top ten and four in the top twelve ? Charteau on the podium in third , Gautier in fifth , Gène in seventh , and Veilleux in twelfth .

The team also sent squads to Omloop Het Nieuwsblad , Dwars door Vlaanderen , E3 Prijs Vlaanderen ? Harelbeke , Gent ? Wevelgem , the Route Adélie de Vitre , the Tour of Flanders , the Flèche d'Emeraude , the Scheldeprijs , Paris ? Roubaix , Paris ? Camembert , the Brabantse Pijl , the Grand Prix de Denain , and the Grand Prix de Plumelec @-@ Morbihan , but finished no higher than 11th in any of these races .

= = = Fall races = = =

Cousin took ninth at the Polynormande , in fourth position from the peloton behind five breakaway riders . Haddou took fifth in a field sprint at the Châteauroux Classic , behind Ag2r ? La Mondiale 's Anthony Ravard . Voeckler took a podium finish at the GP Ouest @-@ France . Lampre ? ISD 's Grega Bole broke away in the final kilometer to win the race , and Simon Gerrans and Voeckler tried to bridge up to him . Though everyone in the peloton had the same time at the finish , Bole , Gerrans , and Voeckler finished just ahead of the main field , in that order to round out the podium . Voeckler also turned in the team 's best ride at the Tour de la Somme , finishing ninth in the field sprint . At the Tour de Vendée , which took place not far from the team 's headquarters , they had two riders take top @-@ ten placings , Charteau in sixth and Quemeneur in seventh .

The team also sent squads to the Tour du Doubs , the Grand Prix Cycliste de Québec , Paris ? Brussels , the Grand Prix Cycliste de Montréal , the Grand Prix de Wallonie , the Grand Prix d'Isbergues , Binche ? Tournai ? Binche , Paris ? Bourges , Paris ? Tours , the Giro del Piemonte , the Giro di Lombardia , and the Japan Cup , but finished no higher than 11th in any of these races .

= = Stage races = =

Just as they had been in 2010 under their former guise as Bbox Bouygues Telecom ? when the team won two stages and the overall classification with Charteau ? the team was very successful at La Tropicale Amissa Bongo in Africa . Gène took the team 's first win of the year (and accordingly , first under their new name) in stage 2 , the only stage that finished outside the race 's primary host nation of Gabon , winning a field sprint in Ebolowa in Cameroon . In stage 4 , the event 's defending champion Charteau figured into a winning breakaway . Though he finished 24 seconds back on stage winner Daniel Teklehaimanot , he assumed the race leadership . He had a lead of four seconds over the man in second place and seven seconds over the man in third , but a good two minutes over the man in fourth , meaning it was virtually certain that he would at the very least finish on the podium . The next day , Gène added a second sprint win , as most of the field finished together and Charteau retained his advantage in the overall . While the final stage had the potential to shake up the overall standings , with three large groups finishing four seconds after one another , Charteau held on to win the race overall for the second straight year by finishing in the first of these groups . In February , at the Étoile de Bessèges , Haddou won the sprint finish to the race 's titular stage finishing in Bessèges . Later in February , Voeckler won the first stage of the Tour Méditerranéen . He had instigated the morning breakaway with four others , and they stayed away by a margin of three seconds over the fast @-@ charging peloton . Voeckler won the two @-@ day Tour du Haut Var later in February . He finished one second down on Samuel Dumoulin in stage 1 , but in the hillier second stage , he finished 29 seconds clear of any other riders , along with breakaway companion Julien Antomarchi . He allowed Antomarchi to take the stage win , knowing that he had the race overall won . The team entered another African race in February , the Tour of South Africa . After winning La Tropicale Amissa Bongo , Charteau was expected to be a top contender for victory , but he broke his collarbone after a stage 1 crash and had to leave the race .

The squad did pick up a win , with Gène taking stage 3 from a breakaway sprint , but their best @-@ placed overall finisher was Quemeneur over two minutes down on race champion Kristian House .

Voeckler entered Paris ? Nice optimistic for results , but with the realization that the stage 6 individual time trial would limit any chances he had on the overall crown . After finishing in the peloton for the first three stages , Voeckler figured into a winning breakaway in stage 4 . He and recently ousted race leader Thomas De Gendt , with two others , broke away just 6 km (3 @. @ 7 mi) into the stage and stayed away by a margin of 13 seconds over the peloton at the finish . Voeckler won the four @-@ man sprint at the end and took the stage win , as De Gendt had spent all his energies drilling the group to the line in order to get the time gap he needed to retake the race leadership . It was Voeckler 's first career Paris ? Nice stage win , after having competed in the race since 2003 . Voeckler lost two minutes in the mountains the next day and any chance at the overall , but he rebounded to win stage 8 from another breakaway . Again joining the morning escape , Voeckler was one of relatively few riders who chose to complete the race by riding a slippery descent of the Col d 'Eze , and stayed out front by 23 seconds over Lampre ? ISD 's Diego Ulissi and one minute , 22 seconds over the peloton . He finished the race in 21st place overall . He added a sixth win on the season at the Giro del Trentino . Breaking away with Michele Scarponi on the climb to Ledro Bezzacca which closed out stage two , Voeckler defeated the Italian in the sprint 25 seconds ahead of the peloton . Upon seeing Scarponi make the juncture to him , he had been careful not to expend too much effort and leave himself fresh for the eventual sprint . Voeckler added further success at the Four Days of Dunkirk . While German sprinter Marcel Kittel won four of the race 's five stages , Voeckler took the one that mattered as far as the overall classification was concerned . He put in a winning attack 20 km (12 mi) from the end of the hilly fourth stage , as the chase group he had been in caught the day 's morning breakaway . He finished safely in the peloton in the final stage the next day , comfortably maintaining his minute @-@ plus lead to win the race overall .

The team was successful in stage @-@ hunting at events later in the season . Chavanel took his first win since rejoining the team , and first in three years , at the Circuit de Lorraine , winning a nearly full field sprint . Kern took a strong win at the Critérium du Dauphiné , finishing alone 9 seconds clear of the main field full of some of the best climbers in the world , atop the short , steep climb at Les Gets . The team had been very active in the finale , with Rolland and Voeckler launching attacks in the run into the finish before Kern got clear . The team 's performances on the race 's last day got them the victory in the race 's teams classification as well . Later in June , Turgot won the prologue time trial at the Boucles de la Mayenne , besting Endura Racing 's Alexander Wetterhall by less than a second . The squad won the team award at this race as well . Charteau showed his climbing prowess and cunning in stage 2 at the Route du Sud , outpacing Movistar Team 's Vasil Kiryienka to win alone on a Pyreneean hilltop in Cauterets . The team did not win any stage at the Tour du Poitou @-@ Charentes , but they did win two jersey classifications , with Pichot taking the mountains classification and Gaudin the sprints .

The team also sent squads to the Tour de Langkawi , the Driedaagse van West @-@ Vlaanderen , the Circuit de la Sarthe , the Tour de Romandie , the Rhône @-@ Alpes Isère Tour , Bayern @-@ Rundfahrt , the Tour de Luxembourg , Paris ? Corrèze , the Danmark Rundt , the Tour du Limousin , and the Tour of Britain , but did not achieve a stage win , classification win , or podium finish in any of them .

= = Grand Tours = =

As a Professional Continental team , Europcar needed to be selected by the organizers of any of the Grand Tours in order to participate . They were selected to ride the Tour de France , but not the Giro d 'Italia , nor the Vuelta a España .

= = = Tour de France = = =

The Amaury Sport Organisation announced the wildcard entries to the Tour de France in January , much earlier than in past years . Team Europcar had among their number French national champion Voeckler , though he lost that title shortly before the Tour , a de facto national hero after he wore the yellow jersey for ten days in the 2004 Tour de France . Confident of their inclusion , they were indeed among the four teams added to the 18 UCI ProTeams obligated to attend . Voeckler was named as the squad leader , with Charteau and Kern his top support riders . Gène was also named to the squad , the first black rider in the Tour 's history . The team started quietly , with no rider finishing near the front of the race on stage 1 at the Mont des Alouettes and 13th of 22 teams in the stage 2 team time trial . The team did not really figure into the sprint finishes that happened early in the Tour , having left their best sprinter Chavanel off the squad for the Tour . Turgot 's eighth place in stage 7 was their highest such finish .

Stage 9 was the Tour 's toughest stage to that point , with seven climbs during the 208 km (129 @. @ 2 mi) parcours . Voeckler , who entered the day in 19th place a minute and 29 seconds down in the overall classification , made a high @-@ powered breakaway with Luis León Sánchez , Sandy Casar , Juan Antonio Flecha (all of them stage winners in one or more previous Tours) and Johnny Hoogerland . Some 36 km (22 mi) from the finish line , a car from France Télévisions sideswiped Flecha and Hoogerland , the two front riders at the time , sending both off their bicycles and Hoogerland crashing into a barbed @-@ wire fence . After a few uncertain minutes while he appeared to want to wait for Flecha and Hoogerland to rejoin them , Voeckler then drove the breakaway hard . With prior race leader Thor Hushovd well back , the yellow jersey was bound to change hands , and Voeckler 's time gap over the main field at the time of Flecha and Hoogerland 's crash made him very likely to be the rider to take it . Voeckler 's efforts left him unable to sprint at the end of the stage , and Sánchez won , but his near four @-@ minute time gap over the peloton gave him the yellow jersey by a minute and 49 seconds over Sánchez and two minutes and 26 seconds against the best @-@ placed overall favorite , Cadel Evans in third place .

The overall standings did not change until stage 12 , on Bastille Day , which ended with the hors catégorie climb to Luz Ardiden . Voeckler finished ninth on the day , ceding 20 seconds to most of the race 's top overall riders , but still had sufficient time in hand to remain race leader by nearly two minutes . Rolland finished at his side for tenth on the day . Voeckler had said the night before that he expected to lose the jersey on this stage . After the peloton mostly stayed together in stage 13 , popular expectation for stage 14 , including two first @-@ category climbs on course and another hors catégorie climb at the finish (Plateau de Beille) , again was for Voeckler to lose the jersey . But he not only retained the jersey , he also finished with the main group of overall favorites , losing time to only three riders and actually putting time into other riders such as Damiano Cunego and Tom Danielson . Voeckler himself again expressed his surprise at his successes , saying " I was very surprised to be with the best riders up the Plateau de Beille climb . I don 't know how far I can go . " Stage 16 ended with a lengthy descent , from the second @-@ category Col de Manse . Voeckler lost time to nearly all the race 's top riders , and expressed after the stage his certainty that he could not win the Tour , but he remained race leader .

Stage 18 was undoubtedly the most difficult in the Tour , incorporating three hors catégorie climbs , including the Col du Galibier at the finish ; as such , race organisers defined the stage as the race 's queen stage . When Andy Schleck , who began the day two minutes and 36 seconds behind Voeckler , surged away from the race 's top riders 60 km (37 mi) from the finish and quickly made it to the morning breakaway , it seemed all but certain that he would become the new race leader . While Schleck easily won the stage , Voeckler followed Evans as the Australian made a strenuous pull at the end of the stage to limit his time losses . At the very end , Voeckler lost Evans ' wheel and fell to fifth on the day , two minutes and 21 seconds behind Schleck . Visibly so spent that he could not sit upright on his bicycle after crossing the finish line , Voeckler had retained the yellow jersey by a margin of 15 seconds . He said afterwards that while he had expected to lose the jersey earlier in the Tour , on this day all the team 's efforts were put into retaining it . Post @-@ race analyses called Voeckler a " survivor " and " astonishing . "

With Voeckler having visibly given it everything he had in stage 18 , and another hors catégorie finish looming (at Alpe d 'Huez) in stage 19 , he was no longer the favourite to keep the yellow

jersey to Paris , as Evans and the Schleck brothers held an advantage over him in the high mountain stages . Though stage 19 was also the Tour 's shortest , Voeckler was indeed dropped between the Col du Galibier (visited again in stage 19) and Alpe d 'Huez , finally ceding the jersey to Schleck . However , the day was still a very good one for the team . On the ascent of the Galibier , Voeckler told Rolland not to work for him any further and to ride his own race , and Rolland rode at or near the front of the race the rest of the day . Together with Spaniards Alberto Contador and Samuel Sánchez as the leading group on Alpe d 'Huez , Rolland rode away from them with 2 @. @ 5 km (1 @. @ 6 mi) to race and took the day 's honors , the first and only stage win for a French rider in this Tour . He also claimed the best young rider white jersey by finishing two minutes the better of Cofidis ' Rein Taaramäe , who had begun the day in the lead in that classification . Voeckler finished 20th on the stage , losing three minutes to most of the other top riders , but this dropped him only to fourth place overall .

The stage 20 individual time trial was to be the Tour 's final competitive stage , since its final stage is traditionally mostly ceremonial and only competitive at the sprint finish . Voeckler 's position was likely secure , being a minute and 13 seconds behind Evans and a minute and 21 seconds ahead of Damiano Cunego , both time gaps unlikely to be recouped due to Voeckler 's and Cunego 's limited time trial skills . However , Rolland 's position as best young rider remained in play due to his minute and 33 seconds advantage over Taaramäe , and Taaramäe 's time trial abilities well superior to Rolland 's . Rolland rode one of the best time trials of his career to finish 21st . Taaramäe finished tenth , and took back 47 seconds , but it was insufficient to take back the white jersey . Eight of the nine Team Europcar riders completed the Tour , with the lone exception being Kern who had crashed out of stage 5 . Voeckler finished fourth overall and Rolland tenth as the best young rider .

= = Season victories = =

= = Away from competition = =

= = = Change of title sponsor = = =

Midway through the 2010 season , Bouygues Telecom announced that they wished to reduce their involvement in financing the team , and were interested in continuing their partnership with the squad . This was on the proviso that team manager Jean @-@ René Bernaudeau could find a primary sponsor that would allow Bouygues Telecom to contribute ? 1 million to the team 's budget , but the rest of its finances would be covered by an incoming sponsor . At this point in time , the team had lodged an application to become a UCI ProTeam once again in 2011 . Following his victory in the inaugural Grand Prix Cycliste de Québec , Voeckler was complacent about his team 's future , believing his team manager Bernaudeau would eventually find a sponsor . Bernaudeau himself was still hopeful of acquiring a deal at that point , but that deadlines were working against him in order for the team to return as a professional team from the 2011 season onwards .

After talks with an organisation in Paris , which later turned out to be French multinational oil company Total , Bernaudeau set his sights on another company , a banking group , and at best , rated his team 's chances of survival as " 6 out of 10 " . Voeckler was equally pessimistic about the team 's chances of survival , having stated that the team could not have done any better , than they had in 2010 . Voeckler had also received offers from rival French squads Cofidis and Saur ? Sojasun about joining their respective teams , if in the worst @-@ case scenario that Bbox Bouygues Telecom folded . Bernaudeau obtained an extension from the Union Cycliste Internationale , in relation to the registration records for the team , which had to be submitted before 1 October .

Ultimately , Voeckler signed a contract with Cofidis on 1 October , which would have only become official if Bbox Bouygues Telecom folded . Voeckler announced a complete U @-@ turn on his move a day later , with preliminary reports from France stating that the team had indeed found a

sponsor ? on a three @-@ year deal from the 2011 season onwards ? and that it was car rental company Europcar that had joined the team as sponsor on the proviso that Voeckler , the French national champion , was part of the team 's roster . The deal was officially confirmed later that day , but the team were no longer eligible to apply for a ProTeam licence due to the delay in finding a sponsor . Bernaudeau sent the team 's dossier to the Union Cycliste Internationale on 4 October , requesting Professional Continental status for another year ; this status was granted in November .