

= 2015 Tour of Flanders =

The 2015 Tour of Flanders (in Dutch , Ronde van Vlaanderen) was the 99th edition of the Tour of Flanders one @-@ day cycling race . It took place on 5 April and was the eighth race of the 2015 UCI World Tour . The race is one of the cobbled classics and is the second of the cycling monuments on the 2015 calendar . The 2014 champion was Fabian Cancellara ; he was not able to defend his title after breaking two vertebrae in a crash at E3 Harelbeke .

The race was initially dominated by a breakaway group of up to seven riders before the favourites in the chasing group started to attack on the climb of the Taaienberg , 36 km (22 mi) from the finish . Eventually , Alexander Kristoff and Niki Terpstra broke free and contested the victory in a two @-@ man sprint , won by Kristoff , who became the first Norwegian to win the race . Greg Van Avermaet finished third .

= = Route = =

The route of the 2015 edition of the race was only slightly adjusted from that of the 2014 edition , with two climbs added to the route in the first 100 km (62 mi) , the Tiegemberg and the Berendries . It was 264 @. @ 9 kilometres (164 @. @ 6 mi) in length , 5 @. @ 8 kilometres (3 @. @ 6 mi) longer than in the previous year and featured 19 small climbs , some of them cobbled . The race started in the Belgian city of Bruges , in the Grote Markt , with a 9 @. @ 2 kilometres (5 @. @ 7 mi) neutral zone . The racing began after the riders passed through Lopen , on the outskirts of Brugge . The first part of the route was a 43 @. @ 6 kilometres (27 @. @ 1 mi) route south to the city of Kortrijk , passing through Zwevezele , Ardooie and Izegem . This part of the route was almost entirely flat . After Kortrijk , the route turned east towards the region known as the Flemish Ardennes . The final 150 km (93 mi) were kept from the 2014 edition , with the toughest part of the race starting at the steep Koppenberg . In the last 45 km (28 mi) , five climbs were set to prove decisive : the Steenbeekdries (at 39 km (24 mi) remaining) , the Taaienberg (37 km (23 mi)) , the Kruisberg (28 km (17 mi)) , the Oude Kwaremont (17 km (11 mi)) and finally the Paterberg (13 km (8 @. @ 1 mi)) . Several climbs needed to be tackled more than once , as the route took two laps of a circuit . These included the Oude Kwaremont , which was ridden three times , first after 112 km (70 mi) as the second climb of the day and the Paterberg , which was featured twice .

= = Teams = =

As the Tour of Flanders 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 .

= = Pre @-@ race favourites = =

The field of the race was marked by the absence of defending champion Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) and former winner Tom Boonen (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) , both ruled out by crashes earlier in the season . Several riders were named as potential favourites for the victory , among them Geraint Thomas (Team Sky) , who came into the race after a victory at the E3 Harelbeke and a third @-@ place finish at Gent ? Wevelgem just a few days before . In the absence of Cancellara , Trek Factory Racing 's squad was led by Stijn Devolder , the only former winner in the peloton , although he was not considered to have the best chances . Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step 's squad featured Niki Terpstra , Zden?k ?tybar , and Stijn Vandenbergh , all of which were considered serious contenders . Team Katusha was led by Alexander Kristoff and Luca Paolini , the latter of which had proven his good form by winning Gent ? Wevelgem earlier in the week , but had declared to work for Kristoff for this race . Other possible contenders included Milan ? San Remo winner John Degenkolb (Giant ? Alpecin) and Peter Sagan (Tinkoff ? Saxo) , although the Slovaks form had been called into question prior to the race . In addition , commentators named Greg van Avermaet (

BMC Racing Team) , Sep Vanmarcke (LottoNL ? Jumbo) , Lars Boom (Astana) , Filippo Pozzato (Lampre ? Merida) , Jürgen Roelandts , Jens Debusschere (both Lotto ? Soudal) , and Sylvain Chavanel (IAM Cycling) among the high number of possible contenders . Barry Ryan on cyclingnews.com declared the race " wide open and [...] a nightmare to predict " .

= = Race report = =

The race started with a small delay caused by a farmers ' strike . When racing got under way , five riders broke free of the pack after 20 km (12 mi) : Jesse Sergent (Trek Factory Racing) , Damien Gaudin (AG2R La Mondiale) , Ralf Matzka (Bora ? Argon 18) , Matthew Brammeier (MTN ? Qhubeka) , and Dylan Groenewegen (Team Roompot) , while Clément Venturini (Cofidis) was briefly in the front group as well before dropping back . At Sint @-@ Elooïs @-@ Winkel , there was a bonus sprint , in which Brammeier won his body weight of 73 kg (161 lb) in local beer . Lars Bak (Lotto ? Soudal) and Marco Frapporti (Androni Giocattoli) were able to bridge the gap to the leaders , creating a group of seven at the front . After 60 km (37 mi) of racing , the leaders were about seven minutes clear of the peloton , but the gap started to come down once the riders reached the first climbs .

There were several attacks from the main group when it navigated the area around Oudenaarde , with André Greipel (Lotto ? Soudal) featuring in all of them , to no avail . Just before the cobble section of the Haaghoek , a neutral car by supplier Shimano tried to overtake the leading group and hit Sergent , who fell and had to retire with a broken collarbone , which later required surgery . With the lead group now down to six riders , they led the main field by three minutes , with Team Sky leading the chase , after their rider Bradley Wiggins had recovered from an earlier crash . Another incident involving a car by Shimano occurred a little later when it crashed into the back of a FDJ team car , which in turn brought down rider Sébastien Chavanel , forcing him to abandon as well .

On the Kaperij , the tenth climb , Bak and Gaudin were able to break free from their group . On the second ascent of the Oude Kwaremont , Greipel again unsuccessfully attacked , before the main field reached the breakaway at the top of the climb . On the Koppenberg , Greipel again attacked and an increase in tempo caused Bradley Wiggins and other riders to lose contact . At the front , Geraint Thomas and Stijn Devolder (Trek Factory Racing) led the chase to bring back Greipel . Once they reached him , Alexey Lutsenko (Astana) was on the attack after the climb , leading at a maximum of half a minute .

At the climb of the Taaiberg , 36 km (22 mi) from the finish , the favourites came into play . Niki Terpstra was the first to move , with Greg van Avermaet following after crossing the top , soon followed by a larger group . On the third and final lap of the course , Lutsenko attacked the 26 @-@ rider strong group again , joined by van Avermaet and Nelson Oliveira (Lampre ? Merida) . They were caught before the Kruisberg , soon followed by an attack by Terpstra and Kristoff . The two created a thirty @-@ second lead and held it to the finish , even with a counter @-@ attack from van Avermaet and Peter Sagan late on . Terpstra did not contribute to the pace making over the last kilometre , trying to use Kristoff 's slipstream to win a sprint . This proved unsuccessful however , as Kristoff took the second monuments victory of his career , outsprinting Terpstra to the line . He became the first Norwegian to win the race .

= = Post @-@ race = =

Kristoff was delighted with his win , saying : " I 'm really happy to win , it 's a really good feeling [...] My family is here today , and it was a big dream and my big goal this season and I managed to do it . " On his run @-@ in to the finish line with Terpstra , he commented : " At the end , I came with Niki , and he didn 't really want to work with me , but I understand that . In the end I could still beat him . " Geraint Thomas was disappointed with his performance , tweeting after the race that he " just lacked the legs of last weekend " , referring to his E3 Harelbeke victory .

The magazine Cycling Weekly commented on the race by criticising the route as " more attritional [...] than it is tactical " , citing the lack of attacks and the teams ' reluctance to send riders into break

@-@ always . Reporter Stephen Puddicombe also criticised Niki Terpstra for not attacking Kristoff before the finish , writing : " Did Terpstra really believe he had any hope of winning the two @-@ man sprint against one of the quickest finishers in the world ? "

= = Results = =