

= 2015 E3 Harelbeke =

The 2015 E3 Harelbeke was the 58th edition of the E3 Harelbeke cycling race . It took place on 27 March and was the sixth race of the 2015 UCI World Tour . The defending champion was Peter Sagan (Tinkoff ? Saxo) , who won the 2014 edition in a four @-@ man sprint . The race , while important in its own right as part of the spring classics season , is seen as an important part of riders ' preparation for 2015 Tour of Flanders , one of the cycling monuments that takes place on many of the same roads the following week .

The E3 Harelbeke takes place on roads in Flanders , starting and ending in the town of Harelbeke . The primary difficulty in the race is the series of short climbs known as hellingen , some of which are cobbled ; most of these came in the middle part of the race , with a fairly flat final part .

The key move of the race was made on the Oude Kwaremont by Geraint Thomas (Team Sky) , Zdeněk Štybar (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) and Peter Sagan . The three riders rode together for over 30 kilometres (19 mi) , maintaining a gap to the chasing peloton . With approximately 4 kilometres (2 @. @ 5 mi) remaining , Thomas attacked and was able to take a solo victory . He became the first British rider to win the race . Štybar chased and was able to take second place , but Sagan was caught by the main peloton . Štybar 's teammate Matteo Trentin won the bunch sprint for third place .

The other major feature of the race was a succession of crashes . Sep Vanmarcke (LottoNL ? Jumbo) slipped on the Paterberg , though this resulted in nothing worse than a broken shoe ; however , a major crash early in the race caused significant problems for a number of riders . The worst affected was Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) , one of the major favourites for victory ; he broke two vertebrae , ruling him out of the remainder of the classics season .

= = Poster controversy = =

About a month before the race took place , in February 2015 , the race organisers published a publicity poster for the race . This poster showed a woman , with her dress raised and underwear with the race logo visible . A cyclist 's gloved hand was reaching out apparently to pinch the woman 's bottom . The poster bore the caption Wie knijpt ze in Harelbeke ? (" Who squeezes them in Harelbeke ? ") . This was a reference to Peter Sagan 's actions after the 2013 Tour of Flanders , when he pinched the bottom of Maja Leye during the podium ceremony after the race .

The poster caused significant controversy , especially as the 2011 race had also featured a poster viewed as sexist . The 2015 poster was described as " demeaning " and " misogynistic " . The poster was criticised by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) and by the Belgian Jury of Advertising Ethics . In March , a few weeks before the race was held , the poster was withdrawn and replaced .

= = Route = =

The 2015 edition of the E3 Harelbeke was 215 @. @ 3 kilometres (133 @. @ 8 mi) in length . It started in the Belgian municipality of Harelbeke , where there was a 2 @. @ 8 @-@ kilometre (1 @. @ 7 mi) neutral zone before the official start . Initially , the route headed north , but after a short distance it turned south @-@ east to reach the town of Avelgem after 12 @. @ 8 kilometres (8 @. @ 0 mi) . The route then turned north @-@ east through Oudenaarde and reached the first climb , the Katteberg , after 32 kilometres (20 mi) . The route briefly went south @-@ east again to reach the second climb , the Leberg , 10 kilometres (6 @. @ 2 mi) later . Between the Katteberg and the Leberg , there were two flat sections of cobbles , the Holleweg and the Haaghoek . The race then entered a long loop without any significant climbs , though it did include the Paddestraat , another flat section of cobbles . This loop first went north @-@ east , reaching Burst after 62 @. @ 5 kilometres (38 @. @ 8 mi) , then south to Appelterre @-@ Eichem . The loop turned west at this point , travelling through Geraardsbergen after 86 @. @ 0 kilometres (53 @. @ 4 mi) .

The third climb came after 99 @. @ 9 kilometres (62 @. @ 1 mi) at La Houppe . This was the

longest climb of the day at 3 @. @ 4 kilometres (2 @. @ 1 mi) . The course then turned north to reach the Berg Stene climb after 108 @. @ 5 kilometres (67 @. @ 4 mi) . The next four climbs came in quick succession over the next 18 kilometres (11 mi) : the Boigneberg , the Eikenberg (the first of the cobbled climbs) , the Stationberg and the Taaienberg . A 15 @- @ kilometre (9 @. @ 3 mi) flat section followed , as the course travelled south @- @ west through Ronse , before a turn to the north to tackle the next climb . This was the Knokteberg , which came after 142 @. @ 6 kilometres (88 @. @ 6 mi) , and it was followed by another turn to the east and the climb of the Hotondberg after 146 @. @ 6 kilometres (91 @. @ 1 mi) . The Rotelenberg (after 155 @. @ 0 kilometres (96 @. @ 3 mi)) and the Kortekeer (after 156 @. @ 6 kilometres (97 @. @ 3 mi)) were the next two climbs as the route again approached Oudenaarde .

After turning south at Leupegem , there were 53 @. @ 0 kilometres (32 @. @ 9 mi) remaining . With 46 @. @ 2 kilometres (28 @. @ 7 mi) remaining , the riders climbed the Kapelberg . The next section was expected to be the key part of the race : the climbs of the Paterberg and the Oude Kwaremont . The Oude Kwaremont was the final cobbled climb of the day ; at the top of the climb there were 37 @. @ 7 kilometres (23 @. @ 4 mi) left to the end of the race . In past editions of the race this was the section where a decisive breakaway was formed ; the combination of the two climbs is also a major feature of the Tour of Flanders .

The route continued south to the penultimate climb of the day , the Karnemelkbeekstraat , with 29 @. @ 7 kilometres (18 @. @ 5 mi) remaining , then turned north @- @ west for the final part of the race . This section was mostly flat ; the only climb was the Tiegemberg with 18 @. @ 7 kilometres (11 @. @ 6 mi) to the finish line . It was expected that riders dropped in the hilly section of the course would try to regain contact on this section . The route continued west and finished where it had started in Harelbeke .

= = Teams = =

As the E3 Harelbeke is a UCI World Tour event , all 17 UCI WorldTeams were invited automatically and were obliged to send a squad . Seven Professional Continental teams received wildcard invitations .

= = Pre @- @ race favourites = =

The E3 Harelbeke is part of the spring classics season . It is therefore suited to the riders who ride in the several other similar races through the early part of the season , such as the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad , the Tour of Flanders and the Dwars door Vlaanderen , which are often raced over the same roads .

The winner of the 2014 E3 Harelbeke , Peter Sagan (Tinkoff ? Saxo) was one of the major pre @- @ race favourites , although his early @- @ season form had been mixed and he had won just one race so far in the year . The team 's preparation for the race was also affected by the suspension of the team manager , Bjarne Riis , by the owner Oleg Tinkov , following the team 's poor results .

The other principal favourite was Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) , who won the race in 2013 , 2011 and 2010 . Although he too had had a relatively unsuccessful Milan ? San Remo , finishing seventh , he had shown good form in other races in the season . However , one of his most important teammates , Stijn Devolder , crashed in the Dwars door Vlaanderen earlier in the week , potentially affecting Cancellara 's chances .

The Etixx ? Quick @- @ Step team was also expected to feature in the race . Although Tom Boonen , the leader of the team and a five @- @ time winner of the race , had crashed at Paris ? Nice and was absent with injury , the team had several other riders who could compete for the win . These included Niki Terpstra , who was second in 2014 , Zden?k ?tybar and Stijn Vandenbergh .

Other favourites included Greg Van Avermaet (BMC Racing Team) , Sep Vanmarcke (LottoNL ? Jumbo) , Alexander Kristoff (Team Katusha) and Ian Stannard and Geraint Thomas (both Team Sky) . Nairo Quintana (Movistar Team) also entered the race as he had the Dwars door

Vlaanderen ; he was preparing for cobbled stages at the Tour de France rather than competing for the win .

= = Race report = =

= = = Early stages = = =

The race started without Filippo Pozzato (Lampre ? Merida) , the 2009 champion , who missed the race due to illness . Shortly after the start , a breakaway was formed by six riders . These were Sjoerd van Ginneken (Team Roompot) , Sean De Bie (Lotto ? Soudal) , Dries Devenyns (IAM Cycling) , Sébastien Turgot (AG2R La Mondiale) , Kristian Sbaragli (MTN ? Qhubeka) and Andrea Dal Col (Southeast Pro Cycling) . The first significant event took place on the Haaghoek cobbles after about 40 kilometres (25 mi) . A water bottle came loose and caused a large crash in the main peloton . A large number of riders crashed , including Fabian Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) , Sebastian Langeveld (Cannondale ? Garmin) , Robert Wagner (LottoNL ? Jumbo) , Lars Boom (Astana) and John Degenkolb (Giant ? Alpecin) . Most of the riders were able to continue , but Cancellara , one of the favourites to win the race , was forced to abandon it in significant pain . It was immediately clear that he would miss Gent ? Wevelgem ; soon afterwards it was announced that he had two broken vertebrae and would miss the rest of the spring classics season .

Over the next 70 kilometres (43 mi) , the breakaway continued to build their lead over the peloton ; with 100 kilometres (62 mi) to race , they had a lead of around six minutes , although Dal Col was dropped . Shortly afterwards , the peloton climbed the Taaiberg , where Daniel Oss (BMC Racing Team) , Matteo Trentin (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) and Matti Breschel (Tinkoff ? Saxo) attacked and were soon joined by Tiesj Benoot (Lotto ? Soudal) . This breakaway was soon brought back by Team Katusha . Nairo Quintana was dropped during this period of racing and abandoned the race . Tinkoff ? Saxo , along with Team Sky , took up the chase in earnest and reduced the breakaway 's lead to under two and a half minutes with 67 kilometres (42 mi) left . BMC Racing Team joined in the chase and halved the lead over the next 20 kilometres (12 mi) . Van Ginneken was dropped , leaving three riders in the leading group .

= = = Paterberg ? Oude Kwaremont = = =

The riders then entered the crucial section of the Paterberg and Oude Kwaremont . Devenyns attacked alone from the breakaway group , while Sep Vanmarcke (LottoNL ? Jumbo) attacked the peloton . Vanmarcke was riding the climb in the gutter to one side of the road . He slipped in the mud and had to put a foot down on the cobblestones ; this damaged his shoe and left him unable to clip into his pedal , reducing his ability to apply power on the climbs . He continued with the broken shoe over the Paterberg and Oude Kwaremont until he was able to change it on a flat section of road . Vanmarcke was in a small group of riders that earned a gap on the Paterberg , but they were caught soon afterwards . At this point there a chase group of around 30 riders , half a minute behind Devenyns as they entered the Oude Kwaremont .

Marcus Burghardt (BMC Racing Team) led the peloton on the first part of the climb , until he was attacked by Geraint Thomas (Team Sky) , who was followed by Zden?k ?tybar (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) . After a brief period , Peter Sagan (Tinkoff ? Saxo) bridged across to Thomas and ?tybar ; the three riders then caught and dropped Devenyns . The gap between the leading three and the peloton quickly reached 25 seconds , then was reduced to 15 seconds by BMC .

= = = Final stages = = =

The gap expanded again to 45 seconds at the foot of the final climb , the Tiegemberg ; on the climb , BMC 's pressure reduced the lead by 20 seconds and dropped several riders from the chasing

group . At the top , with 17 kilometres (11 mi) left , Oss was leading the group , while Greg Van Avermaet , BMC 's team leader , was a couple of places further back . Van Avermaet was riding on the wheel of Alexandr Kolobnev (Team Katusha) , who missed a corner and was forced to brake . Van Avermaet also braked ; this action caused him to somersault over his handlebars and crash , injuring him and taking him out of contention for the rest of the race .

With Van Avermaet injured , BMC were no longer riding at the front of the group and the breakaway 's lead quickly grew to 50 seconds , with only Team Katusha 's Luca Paolini leading the chase . The gap was reduced slightly to 40 seconds as the riders entered the last 5 kilometres (3 @. @ 1 mi) . With 4 kilometres (2 @. @ 5 mi) left , Thomas attacked the lead group and ?tybar waited for Sagan to respond . Sagan , however , was unable to chase Thomas , who built a gap ahead of the other two . ?tybar eventually gave chase , but he was unable to catch Thomas . After the race , he attributed his loss to two seconds ' hesitation . Thomas continued alone to win the race ahead of ?tybar by 25 seconds . Sagan , meanwhile , was both caught and left behind by the main chase group and finished 30th , over a minute behind Thomas . In the main peloton , Matteo Trentin was led out by his teammates Stijn Vandenbergh and Yves Lampaert . Another teammate , Niki Terpstra , was able to block Alexander Kristoff as he attempted the sprint and Trentin took the third podium place , 38 seconds behind Thomas and 13 behind ?tybar .

= = Result = =