

= Eddy Merckx =

Édouard Louis Joseph , Baron Merckx (Dutch pronunciation : [ˈmɛrks]) (born 17 June 1945) , better known as Eddy Merckx , is a Belgian former professional road and track bicycle racer . He was born in Meensel @-@ Kiezegem , Brabant , Belgium . He grew up in Woluwe @-@ Saint @-@ Pierre where his parents ran a grocery store . He played several sports , but found his true passion in cycling . Merckx got his first bicycle at the age of three or four and competed in his first race in 1961 . His first victory came at Petit @-@ Enghien in October 1961 .

After winning eighty races as an amateur racer , he turned professional on 29 April 1965 when he signed with Solo @-@ Superia . His first major victory came in the Milan ? San Remo a year later , after switching to Peugeot @-@ BP @-@ Michelin . After the 1967 season , Merckx moved to Faema , and won the Giro d 'Italia , his first of eleven Grand Tour victories ? a record that still stands today . Four times between 1970 and 1974 , Merckx completed a Grand Tour double . His final double also coincided with winning the men 's road race at the UCI Road World Championships to make him the first rider to accomplish cycling 's Triple Crown . Merckx broke the hour record in October 1972 , extending the record by almost 800 meters .

He acquired the nickname " The Cannibal " after a teammate told his daughter of how Merckx would not let anyone else win , and the daughter referred to him as a cannibal . Merckx achieved 525 victories over his eighteen @-@ year career . He is one of only three riders to have won all five ' Monuments of Cycling ' (Milan ? San Remo , Tour of Flanders , Paris ? Roubaix , Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège , and the Giro di Lombardia) . The other two are fellow Belgians Roger De Vlaeminck and Rik Van Looy . He won the Tour de France in 1969 , 1970 , 1971 , 1972 and 1974. The only major one @-@ day race he did not win was Paris ? Tours : his best performance was sixth in 1973 . Merckx was successful on the road and also on the track , as well as in the large stage races and one @-@ day races . He is widely thought to be the greatest and most successful rider in the history of cycling . However , Merckx was caught in three separate doping incidents during his career .

Since Merckx 's retirement from the sport on 18 May 1978 , he has remained active in the cycling world . He began his own bicycle chain , Eddy Merckx Cycles , in 1980 and its bicycles were used by several professional teams in the 1980s and 1990s . Merckx coached the Belgian national cycling team for eleven years , stopping in 1996 . In 2001 , he played a large role in getting the Tour of Qatar organized to start in 2002 . He co @-@ owns the tour and also the Tour of Oman , both of which he still organizes .

= = Early life and amateur career = =

Edouard Louis Joseph Merckx was born in Meensel @-@ Kiezegem , Brabant , Belgium on 17 June 1945 to Jules Merckx and Jenny Pittomvils . Merckx was the first @-@ born of the family . In September 1946 , the family moved to Sint @-@ Pieters @-@ Woluwe , in Brussels , Belgium in order to take over a grocery store that had been up for lease . In May 1948 , Jenny gave birth to twins : a boy , Michel , and a girl , Micheline . As a child Eddy was hyperactive and was always playing outside .

Eddy was a competitive child and played several sports , including basketball , boxing , football , and table tennis . He even played lawn tennis for the local junior team . However , Merckx claimed he knew he wanted to be a cyclist at the age of four and that his first memory was a crash on his bike when he was the same age . Merckx began riding a bike at the age of three or four and would ride to school every day , beginning at age eight . Merckx would imitate his cycling idol Stan Ockers with his friends when they rode bikes together .

In summer 1961 , Merckx bought his first racing license and competed in his first official race a month after he turned sixteen , coming in sixth place . He rode in twelve more races before winning his first , at Petit @-@ Enghien , on 1 October 1961 . In the winter following his first victory , he trained with former racer Félicien Vervaecke at the local velodrome . Merckx won his second victory on 11 March 1962 in a kermis race . Merckx competed in 55 races during the 1962 calendar year ; as he devoted more time to cycling , his grades at school began to decline . After winning the

Belgian amateur road race title , Merckx declined an offer from his school 's headmaster to have his exams postponed , and dropped out of school . He finished the season with 23 victories to his name .

Merckx was selected for the men 's road race at the 1964 Summer Olympics , where he finished in twelfth position . Later in the season , he won the amateur road race at the UCI Road World Championships in Sallanches , France . Merckx remained an amateur until April 1965 , and finished his amateur career with eighty wins to his credit .

= = Professional career = =

= = = 1965 ? 1967 : Solo @-@ Superia & Peugeot @-@ BP @-@ Michelin = = =

= = = 1965 : First professional season = = =

Merckx turned professional on 29 April 1965 when he signed with Rik van Looy 's Belgian team , Solo @-@ Superia . He won his first race in Vilvoorde , beating Emile Daems . On August 1 , Merckx finished second in the Belgian national championships , which qualified him for the men 's road race at the UCI Road World Championships . Raphaël Gémiani , the manager of the Bic cycling team , approached Merckx at the event and offered him 2 @, @ 500 francs a month to join the team the following season . Merckx chose to sign ; however , since he was a minor the contract was invalid .

After finishing the road race in 29th position , Merckx returned to Belgium and discussed his plans for the next season with his manager Jean Van Buggenhout . Van Buggenhout helped orchestrate a move that sent Merckx to the French @-@ based Peugeot @-@ BP @-@ Michelin for 20 @, @ 000 francs a month . Merckx elected to leave Solo @-@ Superia due to the way he was treated by his teammates , in particular Van Looy . Van Looy and other teammates mocked Merckx for his various habits such as his eating , or called him names . In addition , Merckx later stated that during his time with Van Looy 's team he had not been taught anything . While with Solo @-@ Superia , he won nine races out of the nearly 70 races he entered .

= = = 1966 : First Monument victory = = =

In March 1966 , Merckx entered his first major stage race as a professional rider , the Paris ? Nice . He took the race lead for a single stage before losing it to Jacques Anquetil and eventually coming in fourth overall . Milan ? San Remo , his first participation in one of cycling 's Monuments , was the next event on the calendar for Merckx . There , he succeeded in staying with the main field as the race entered the final climb of the Poggio . He attacked on the climb and reduced the field to a group of eleven , himself included . Merckx was advised by his manager to hold off on sprinting full @-@ out to the finish line until as late as possible . Three other riders reached the line with him ; Merckx , however , beat them in the sprint . In the following weeks , he raced the Tour of Flanders and Paris ? Roubaix , the most important cobbled classics ; in the former he crashed and in the latter he had a punctured tire . At the 1966 UCI Road World Championships he finished twelfth in the road race after suffering a cramp in the closing kilometers . He finished 1966 season with a total of 20 wins , including his first stage race win at the Tour of Morbihan .

= = = 1967 : Second straight Milan ? San Remo and world champion = = =

Merckx opened the 1967 campaign with two stage victories at the Tour of Sardinia . He followed these successes by entering Paris ? Nice where he won the second stage and took the race lead . Two stages later , a teammate , Tom Simpson , attacked with several other riders on a climb and was nearly 20 minutes ahead of Merckx , who remained in a group behind . Merckx attacked two

days later on a climb 70 km into the stage . He was able to establish a firm advantage , but obeyed orders from his manager to wait for the chasing Simpson . Merckx won the stage , while Simpson secured his overall victory .

On 18 March , Merckx started the Milan ? San Remo and was seen as a 120 ? 1 favorite to win the race . He attacked on the Capo Berta and again on the Poggio , leaving only Gianni Motta with him . The two slowed their pace and were joined by two more riders . Merckx won the four @-@ man sprint to the finish . His next victory came in La Flèche Wallonne after he missed out on an early break , caught up to it , and attacked from it to win the race . On 20 May , he started the Giro d 'Italia , his first Grand Tour . He won the twelfth and fourteenth stages en route to finishing ninth in the general classification .

He signed with Faema on 2 September for ten years worth 400 @,@ 000 Belgian francs . He chose to switch over in order to be in complete control over the team he was racing for . In addition , he would not have to pay for various expenses that came with racing such as wheels and tires . The next day , Merckx started the men 's road race at the 1967 UCI Road World Championships in Heerlen , Netherlands . The course consisted of ten laps of a circuit . Motta attacked on the first lap and was joined by Merckx and five other riders . The group thinned to five as they reached the finish line where Merckx was able to out @-@ sprint Jan Janssen for first place . In doing so , he became the third rider to win the world road race amateur and professional titles . By winning the race he earned the right to wear the rainbow jersey as world champion .

== = 1968 ? 1970 : Faema == =

== = = 1968 : First Grand Tour victory == = =

Merckx 's first victory with his new team came in a stage win at the Tour of Sardinia . At Paris ? Nice , he was forced to quit the race due to a knee injury he sustained during the event . He failed to win his third consecutive Milan ? San Remo and missed out at the Tour of Flanders the following weekend . His next victory came at Paris ? Roubaix when he bested Herman Van Springel in a race that was plagued by poor weather and several punctures to the competing riders .

At the behest of his team , Merckx raced the Giro d 'Italia instead of the Tour de France . He won the race 's second stage after he attacked with one kilometer to go . The twelfth stage was marred by rainy weather and featured the climbs of the Tre Cime di Lavaredo for the stage finish . By the time Merckx had reached the penultimate climb , there was a six @-@ man group at the front of the race with a nine @-@ minute advantage . Merckx attacked and was able to get a sizable distance between himself and the group he left before he stopped to change his wheel in order to slow down due to orders from his team manager . Merckx got back on his bike and caught the leading breakaway and rode past it to the finish , where he won the stage and took the race lead . Merckx went on to win the race , along with the points classification and mountains classification . In the Volta a Catalunya , Merckx took the race lead from Gimondi in the race 's time trial stage and won the event as a whole . He finished the season with 32 wins in the 129 races he entered .

== = = 1969 : A Victory in Paris and injury in Blois == = =

Merckx opened the 1969 season with victories at the Vuelta a Levante and the Paris ? Nice overall , as well as stages in each of the races . On 30 March 1969 Merckx earned his first major victory of the 1969 calendar with his win at the Tour of Flanders . On a rainy day that featured strong winds , he attacked first on the Oude Kwaremont , but a puncture nullified any gains he was able to establish . He made a move on the Kapelmuur and was followed by a few riders . As the wind shifted from a crosswind to a headwind with close to seventy kilometers left to go , Merckx increased the pace and rode solo to victory . The seventeen days after the Tour of Flanders saw Merckx win nine times . He won Milan @-@ San Remo by descending the Poggio at high speeds . Merckx saw victory again in mid @-@ April at the Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège when he attacked with seventy

kilometers remaining in the pouring rain .

He began the Giro d'Italia on 16 May , stating that he wished to ride less aggressively than the year before in order to save energy for the Tour de France . Merckx had won four of the race 's stages and held the race lead going into the sixteenth day of racing . However , before the start of the stage race director Vincenzo Torriani , along with a television camera and two writers , entered Merckx 's hotel room and informed him that he had failed a doping control and was disqualified from the race , in addition to being suspended for a month . On 14 June , the cycling governing body , the FICP , overturned the month long suspension and cleared him due to the " benefit of the doubt . "

Before starting the Tour , Merckx had spent a large amount of his time resting and training , racing only five times . Merckx won the race 's sixth stage through attacking before the leg 's final major climb , the Ballon d'Alsace , and then outlasting his competitors who were able to follow him initially . During the seventeenth stage , Merckx was riding at the head of the race with several general classification contenders on the Col du Tourmalet . Merckx shifted into a large gear , attacked , and went on to cross the summit with a 45 @-@ second advantage . Despite orders to wait for the chasing riders , Merckx increased his efforts . He rode over the Col du Soulor and Col d'Aubisque , increasing the gap to eight minutes . With close to fifty kilometers to go , Merckx began to suffer hypoglycemia and rode the rest of the stage in severe pain . At the end of the stage , Merckx told the journalists " I hope I have done enough now for you to consider me a worthy winner . " Merckx finished the race with six stage victories to his credit , along with the general , points , mountains , and combination classifications , and the award for most aggressive rider .

His next major race was the two @-@ day race , Paris @-@ Luxembourg . Merckx was down fifty @-@ four seconds going into the second day and attacked eight kilometers from the finish , on the slopes of the Bereldange . Merckx rode solo to catch the leading rider Jacques Anquetil , whom he dropped with a kilometer remaining . Merckx won the stage and gained enough time on the race leader Gimondi to win the race .

On 9 September , Merckx participated in a three @-@ round omnium event at the cement velodrome in Blois where each rider was to be paced by a derny . Fernand Wambst was Merckx 's pacer for the contest . After winning the first intermediate sprint of the first round , Wambst chose to slow their pace and move to the back of the race despite Merckx wanting to stay out in front for fear of an accident . Wambst wanted to pass everyone to provide a show for the crowd . The duo then increased their pace and began to pass each other contestant ; however , as they passed the riders in first position , the leading derny lost control and crashed into the wall . Wambst chose to avoid the derny by going below it , but the leader 's derny came back down and collided with Wambst , while Merckx 's pedal caught one of the dernies . The two riders landed head first onto the track .

Wambst died of a fractured skull as he was being transported to a hospital . Merckx remained unconscious for 45 minutes and awoke in the operating room . He sustained a concussion , whiplash , trapped nerves in his back , a displaced pelvis , and several other cuts and bruises . He remained at the hospital for a week before returning to Belgium . He spent six weeks in bed before beginning to race again in October . Merckx later stated that he " was never the same again " after the crash . He would constantly adjust his seat during races to help ease the pain . Merckx stopped racing on 26 October to recuperate .

== == 1970 : A Giro ? Tour double == == ==

Merckx entered the 1970 campaign nursing a case of mild tendonitis in his knee . His first major victory came in the Paris ? Nice where he won the general classification , along with three stages . On 1 April , Merckx won the Gent ? Wevelgem , followed by the Tour of Belgium ? where he braved a snowy stage and followed the day up with a victory in the final time trial to secure the title ? and the Paris ? Roubaix . In the Paris ? Roubaix , Merckx was battling a cold as the race began in heavy rain . He attacked thirty @-@ one kilometers from the finish and went on to win by five minutes and twenty @-@ one seconds , the largest margin of victory in the history of the race . The next weekend , Merckx attempted to race for teammate Joseph Bruyère in the La Flèche Wallonne ; however , Bruyère was unable to keep pace with the leading riders , leaving Merckx to take the

victory .

After the scandal at the previous year 's Giro d 'Italia , Merckx was unwilling to returning to the race in 1970 . His entry to the race was contingent upon all doping controls be sent to a lab in Rome to be tested , rather than being tested at the finish like the year before . He started the race and won the second leg , but four days later showed signs of weakness with his knee as he was dropped twice while in the mountains . However the next day , Merckx attacked on the final climb into the city of Brentonico to win the stage and take the lead . He won the stage nine individual time trial by almost two minutes over the second @-@ place finisher , expanding his lead significantly . Merckx didn 't win another stage , but managed to expand his lead a little more before the race 's conclusion .

Before beginning the Tour , Merckx won the men 's road race at the Belgian National Road Race Championships . Merckx won the Tour 's opening prologue to take the race 's first race leader 's yellow jersey . After losing the lead following the second stage , he won the sixth stage after forming a breakaway with Lucien Van Impe and regained the lead . After expanding his lead in the stage nine individual time trial , Merckx won the race 's first true mountain stage , stage 10 , and expanded his lead to five minutes in the general classification . Merckx won three of the five stages contested within the next four days , including a summit finish to Mont Ventoux , where upon finishing he was given oxygen . Merckx won two more stages , both individual time trials , and won the Tour by over twelve minutes . He finished the Tour with eight stage victories and won the mountains and combination classifications . The eight stage wins equaled the previous record for stage wins in a single Tour de France . Merckx also became the third to accomplish the feat of winning the Giro and Tour in the same calendar year .

= = = 1971 ? 1976 : Molteni = = =

= = = = 1971 : A Third Consecutive Tour and Second World Championship = = = =

Faema folded at the end of the 1970 season causing Merckx and several of his teammates to move to another Italian team , Molteni . The first major victory for Merckx came in the Giro di Sardegna , which he secured after attacking on his own and riding solo through the rain to win the race 's final stage . He followed that with his third consecutive Paris ? Nice victory , a race he led from start to finish . In the Milan @-@ San Remo , Merckx worked with his teammates in a seven @-@ man breakaway to set up a final attack on the Poggio . Merckx 's attack succeeded and he won his fourth edition of the race . Six days later , he won the Omloop Het Volk .

After winning the Tour of Belgium again , Merckx headed into the major spring classics . During the Tour of Flanders , Merckx 's rivals worked against him to prevent him from winning . A week later , he suffered five flat tires during the Paris ? Roubaix . The Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was held in cold and rain conditions . After attacking ninety kilometers from the finish , Merckx caught the leaders on the road and passed them . He rode solo until around three kilometers to go when Georges Pintens caught him . Merckx and Pintens rode to the finish together , where Merckx won the two @-@ man sprint . Instead of racing the Giro d 'Italia , Merckx elected to enter two shorter stages races in France , the Grand Prix du Midi Libre and the Critérium du Dauphiné , both of which he won .

The Tour de France began with a team time trial that Merckx 's team won , giving him the lead . The next day 's racing was split into three parts . Merckx lost the lead after stage 1b , but regained it after stage 1c due to a time bonus that he earned from winning an intermediate sprint . During the second stage , a major break with the major race contenders , including Merckx , formed with over a hundred kilometers to go . The group finished nine minutes ahead of the peloton as Merckx came around Roger De Vlaeminck during the sprint to win the day . After a week of racing , Merckx held a lead of around a minute over the main contenders . The eighth stage saw a mountain top finish to Puy de Dome . Bernard Thévenet attacked on the lower slopes and Merckx was unable to counter . Joop Zoetemelk and Luis Ocaña went with Thévenet and wound up gaining fifteen seconds on Merckx .

On the descent of the Col du Cucheron during the race 's ninth leg , Merckx 's tire punctured , prompting Ocaña to attack with Zoetemelk , Thévenet , and Gösta Pettersson . The group of four finished a minute and a half ahead of Merckx , giving Zoetemelk the lead . The following day Merckx lost eight minutes to Ocaña after a poor showing due to stomach pains and indigestion . At the start of the eleventh stage , Merckx , three teammates , and couple others formed a breakaway . Merckx 's group finished two minutes in front of the peloton that was led by Ocaña 's Bic team . After winning the ensuing time trial , Merckx took back eleven more seconds on Ocaña . The race entered the Pyrenees with the first stage , into Luchon , being plagued by heavy thunderstorms that severely handicapped vision . On the descent of the Col de Menté , Merckx crashed on a left bend . Ocaña , who was trailing , crashed into the same bend and Zoetemelk collided with him . Merckx fell again on the descent and took the race lead as Ocaña was forced to retire from the race due to injuries from the crash . Merckx declined to wear the yellow jersey the following day out of respect for Ocaña . He won two more stages and the general , points , and combination classifications when the race finished in Paris .

Seven weeks following the Tour , Merckx entered the men 's road race at the UCI Road World Championships that were held in Mendrisio , Switzerland . The route for the day was rather hilly and consisted of several circuits . Merckx managed to be a part of a five @-@ man breakaway as the race reached five laps to go . After attacking on the second to last stage , Merckx and Gimondi reached the finish , where Merckx managed to win the race by four bike lengths . This earned him his second rainbow jersey . He closed out the 1971 calendar with his first victory in the Giro di Lombardia . This victory meant that Merckx had won all of cycling 's Monuments . Merckx made the winning move when he attacked on the descent of the Intelvi Pass . During the off @-@ season , Merckx had his displaced pelvis tended to by a doctor .

= = = 1972 : Breaking the hour record alongside a Giro ? Tour double = = = =

Due to his non @-@ participation in track racing over the winter , Merckx entered the 1972 campaign in poorer form than in previous years . In the Paris ? Nice , Merckx broke a vertebra in a crash that occurred as the peloton was in the midst of a bunch sprint . Against the advice of a physician , he started the next day being barely able to ride out of the saddle , leading Ocaña to attack him several times throughout the stage . In the race 's fifth leg , Merckx sprinted away from Ocaña with 150 meters to go to win the day . Merckx lost the race lead in the final stage to Raymond Poulidor and finished in second place overall . Two days removed from Paris ? Nice , Merckx was victorious for the fifth time at the Milan ? San Remo after he managed to establish a gap on the descent of the Poggio .

In Paris ? Roubaix , he crashed again , further aggravating the injury he sustained from Paris ? Nice . He won Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège by making a solo move forty @-@ six kilometers from the finish . Three days later , in La Flèche Wallonne , Merckx was a part of a six @-@ man leading group as the race neared its conclusion . Merckx won the uphill sprint to the finish despite his derailleur shifting him to the wrong gear , forcing him to ride in a larger gear than anticipated . He became the third rider to win La Flèche Wallonne and Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège in the same weekend . Despite a monetary offer from race organizers for Merckx to participate in the Vuelta a España , he chose to take part in the Giro d'Italia .

Merckx lost four minutes over two and a half minutes to Spanish climber José Manuel Fuente after the Giro 's fourth stage that contained a summit finish to Blockhaus . In the seventh stage , Fuente had attacked on the first climb of the day , the Valico di Monte Scuro . However , Fuente cracked near the top of the climb , allowing for Merckx and Pettersson to catch and pass him . Merckx gained over four minutes on Fuente and became the new race leader . He expanded his lead by two minutes through the stage 12a and 12b time trials , winning the former . Fuente managed to get Merckx on his own as the two climbed together during the fourteenth stage . He and teammate Francisco Galdós attacked , leaving Merckx behind . Merckx eventually reconnected with the two on the stage 's final climb . He proceeded to attack and went on to win the stage by forty @-@ seven seconds . He lost two minutes to Fuente due to stomach trouble during the seventeenth leg that

finished atop the Passo dello Stelvio , but went on to win one more stage en route to his third victory at the Giro d'Italia .

Merckx entered the Tour de France in July where a battle between him and Ocaña was expected by many . He took the opening prologue and expanded his advantage over all the other general classification contenders , except Ocaña , by at least three minutes . Going into the Pyrenees , Merckx led Ocaña by fifty @-@ one seconds . The general classification favorites were riding together as the race hit the Col d'Aubisque in the seventh leg . Ocaña punctured on the climb , allowing for the other riders to attack . Ocaña chased after the group but crashed into a wall on the descent and went on to lose almost two minutes to Merckx . Merckx was criticized for attacking while Ocaña had a flat , but Merckx responded that the year before Ocaña had done the same thing while the race was in the Alps . Merckx won the following stage , regaining the lead which he had lost after the fourth leg . During the next two major mountain stages , one to Mont Ventoux and the other to Orcières , he merely followed Ocaña 's wheel . He won three more stages before crossing the finish line in Paris as the race 's winner , thus completing his second Giro @-@ Tour double in the process .

After initially planning to attempt to break the hour record in August , Merckx decided to make the attempt in October after taking a ten @-@ day hiatus from criterium racing to heal and prepare . The attempt took place on 25 October in Mexico City , Mexico at the outdoor track Agustin Melgar . Mexico was chosen due to the higher altitude as this led to less air resistance . He arrived in Mexico on the 21st to prepare for his attempt , but two days were lost due to rain . His attempt started at 8 : 46 am local time and saw him finish the first ten kilometers twenty @-@ eight seconds faster than the record pace . However , Merckx started off too fast and began to fade as the attempt wore on . He eventually was able to recover and managed to post a distance of 49 @.@ 431 km (31 mi) , breaking the world record . After finishing he was carried off and was quoted saying the pain was " very , very , very significant . "

== == 1973 : A Giro ? Vuelta double == ==

An illness prevented Merckx from taking part in the Milan ? San Remo at the start of the 1973 calendar . During a span of nineteen days , Merckx won four classics including Omloop Het Volk , Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège , and Paris ? Roubaix . He decided to race the Vuelta a España and the Giro d'Italia , instead of racing the Tour de France . He won the opening prologue of the Vuelta to take an early lead . Despite Ocaña 's best efforts , Merckx won a total of six stages on his way to his only Vuelta a España title . In addition to the general classification , Merckx won the race 's points classification and combination classifications .

Four days after the conclusion of the Vuelta , Merckx lined up to start the Giro d'Italia . He won the opening two @-@ man time trial with Roger Swerts and the next day 's leg as well . Merckx 's primary competitor , Fuente , lost a significant amount of time during the second stage . He won eighth stage that featured a summit finish to Monte Carpegna despite Fuente attacking several times on the ascent . Fuente tried attacking throughout the race of the race , but was only able to make time gains on the race 's penultimate stage . Merckx won the race after leading from start to finish , a feat only previously done by Alfredo Binda and Costante Girardengo . He also became the first rider to win the Giro and Vuelta in the same calendar year .

The UCI Road World Championships were held in Barcelona , Spain in 1973 and contested on the Montjuich circuit . During the road race , Merckx attacked with around one hundred kilometers left . His move was marked by Freddy Maertens , Gimondi , and Ocaña . Merckx attacked on the final lap , but was reeled in by the three riders . It came down to a sprint between the four , of which Merckx came in last and Gimondi in first . Following the road race , Merckx won his first Paris ? Brussels and Grand Prix des Nations . He won both legs of À travers Lausanne , as well as the Giro di Lombardia , but a doping positive disqualified him . He closed the season with over fifty victories to his credit .

== == 1974 : Completion of cycling 's Triple Crown == ==

The 1974 season saw Merckx fail to win a spring classic for the first time in his career , in part due to him suffering from various illnesses during the early months . Pneumonia forced him to quit racing for a month and forced him to enter the Giro d 'Italia in poor form . He lost time early in the race to Fuente , who managed to the race 's first mountainous stage . Merckx gained time on Fuente in the race 's only time trial . Merckx attacked from two hundred kilometers out two days later in a stage that was plagued by horrendous weather . Fuente lost ten minutes to Merckx , who became the race leader . The twentieth stage had a summit finish to Tre Cime di Lavaredo . Fuente and Gianbattista Baronchelli attacked on the climb , while Merckx was unable to match their accelerations . He managed to finish the stage only to see his lead shrink to twelve seconds over Baronchelli . He held on to that lead until the race 's conclusion , winning his fifth Giro d 'Italia .

Three days following his victory at the Giro , Merckx started the Tour de Suisse . He won the race 's prologue and rode conservatively for the rest of the race . He took the final leg , an individual time trial , to seal his overall victory . After finishing the race , Merckx had a sebaceous cyst removed on 22 June . Five days following the surgery , he was scheduled to begin the Tour de France . The wound was still slightly open when he began the Grand Tour and it bled throughout the race .

At the Tour , Merckx won the race 's prologue , giving him the first race leader 's maillot jaune (English : yellow jersey) , which he lost the next day to teammate Joseph Bruyère . He won the seventh stage of the race , and regained the lead , through attacking in the closing kilometers and holding off the chasing peloton . He put five minutes into Poulidor , his main rival , after dropping him on the Col du Galibier . The next day , on the slopes of Mont Ventoux , Merckx rode to limit his losses after suffering several attacks from other general classification riders , including Poulidor , Vicente López Carril and Gonzalo Aja . He managed to expand his lead through several stage victories afterwards , including one where he attacked with ten kilometers to go in a flat stage and held off the peloton to reach the finish in Orléans almost a minute and a half before the chasing group . Merckx finished the Tour with eight stage wins and his fifth Tour de France victory , equaling the record of Anquetil .

Going into the men 's road race at the UCI Road World Championships , Merckx anchored a squad that included Van Springel , Maertens , and De Vlaeminck . The route featured twenty @-@ one laps of a circuit that contained two climbs . Merckx and Poulidor attacked with around seven kilometers to go , after catching the leading breakaway . The two rode to the finish together where Merckx won the sprint to the line , establishing a two @-@ second gap between himself and Poulidor . By winning the road race , Merckx became the first rider to win the Triple Crown of Cycling , which consists of winning the Tour de France , Giro d 'Italia , and men 's road race at the World Championships in one calendar year . It was also his third world title , becoming the third rider to ever be world champion three times , after Binda and Rik Van Steenbergen .

= = = = 1975 : Second place at the Tour = = = =

With victories at Milan ? San Remo and Amstel Gold Race , Merckx opened the 1975 season in good form , also winning the Setmana Catalana de Ciclisme . In the Catalan Week , Merckx lost his super domestique Bruyère , who had helped Merckx to victory in years past many times , to a broken leg . Two days following the Catalan Week , Merckx participated in the Tour of Flanders . He launched an attacked with eighty kilometers to go , with only Frans Verbeeck being able to match his acceleration . Verbeeck was dropped as the race reached five kilometers remaining , allowing Merckx to take his third Tour of Flanders victory . In Paris ? Roubaix , Merckx suffered a flat tire with around eighty kilometers left when a part of a leading group of four . After chasing for three kilometers , he managed to catch the three other riders and the group rode into the finish together ; De Vlaeminck won the day . Merckx won his fifth Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège by attacking several times in the closing portions of the race .

Merckx 's attitude while racing had changed : riders expected him to chase down attacks , which angered him . Notably , in the Tour de Romandie he was riding with race leader Zoetemelk as an attack occurred . Merckx refused to chase the break down , and the two lost fourteen minutes .

Merckx contracted a cold and , later , tonsillitis while racing in the spring campaign . This caused him to be in poor form , forcing him to not participate in the Giro d 'Italia . He then rode in the Dauphiné Libéré and was not on par with Thevenet , who won the race . At the Tour de Suisse , De Vlaeminck won the race as a whole , while Merckx finished second .

He placed second in the Tour de France 's prologue . The following morning 's split stage saw Merckx put time on Thevenet by attacking with Francesco Moser , Van Impe , and Zoetemelk . In day 's second leg , Merckx managed to gain time on Zoetemelk . He won the stage six individual time trial and gaining more time on Thevenet and Zoetemelk . He won the next time trial into Auch as well . During the race 's eleventh stage , Merckx sent his team to set the pace early on in the stage . Reaching the final climb of the day , Merckx was on his own as his team had been used to set the pace throughout the day . On the day 's final climb to Pla d 'Adet , he matched an acceleration by Zoetemelk . Thevenet then launched an attack , to which Merckx could not follow and saw him lose over two minutes . After the stage Merckx switched decided to mark Thevenet for the rest of the race and make an attack on the Puy de Dome .

While climbing the Puy de Dome , Thevenet and Van Impe attacked . Merckx followed at his own pace and kept the two riders within a hundred meters . With about 150 m remaining , Merckx was prepared to sprint to the line , but was punched in the back by a spectator , Nello Breton . He crossed the line thirty @-@ four seconds behind Thevenet and proceeded to vomit after catching his breath . The punch left him with a large bruise . During the rest day he was found to have an inflamed liver for which he was prescribed blood thinners .

The stage following the rest day featured five climbs , Merckx felt a pain on the third climb in the area of the punch and had a teammate get him an analgesic . Thevenet attacked several times on the climb of the Col des Champs , all of which Merckx countered . Merckx retaliated by speeding away on the descent . On the start of the next climb , Merckx had his Molteni teammates set the pace and he distanced himself from his competitors before the start of the final climb . However , as Merckx began the final climb he cracked . Thevenet caught and passed him with four kilometers left . Gimondi , Van Impe , and Zoetemelk passed Merckx , who finished fifth and one minute and twenty @-@ six seconds down . The following day , Merckx caught up with the leading breakaway and wanted to push ahead , but the riders chose not to participate in the pace making , leading Merckx to sit up and get caught . He lost two more minutes to Thevenet , who attacked on the Col du Izoard . He crashed in the next leg , breaking a cheekbone , and managed to gain some time on Thevenet before the finish in Paris . He finished in second place , the first time he had lost a Tour in his six starts .

= = = = 1976 : A record seventh Milan ? San Remo = = = =

He opened his 1976 season with his record seventh victory in Milan ? San Remo . He followed with a victory in the Catalan Week , but suffered a crash in the final stage when a spectator 's bag caught his handlebars , injuring his elbow . This injury plagued his performance throughout the spring classic season . He entered the Giro d 'Italia but failed to win a stage for the first time in his career . He finished the race in eighth overall while battling a saddle boil throughout the race . Following the Giro 's conclusion Merckx announced that he and his team Molteni would not take part in the Tour de France . He took part in the men 's road race at the UCI Road World Championships and finished in fifth position . He ended his season in October after racing for most of August . He failed to win the Super Prestige Pernod International , a competition where riders were awarded points for their placements in certain professional races , for the first time since 1968 . In the first two months of his off @-@ season , Merckx spent the majority of his time lying down . Molteni ended their sponsorship at the end of the season .

= = = 1977 ? 1978 : FIAT & C & A = = =

FIAT became the new sponsor for Merckx 's team and Raphaël Géminiani the new manager . He got his season 's first victories in the Grand Prix d 'Aix and Tour Méditerranéen . Merckx agreed to

ride a light spring season in order to save himself for a chance at a sixth Tour victory . He took one stage at the Paris ? Nice but had to withdraw from the race 's final stage due to sinusitis . In the spring classics , Merckx did not win any races , with his best finish being a sixth place in the Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège . Before the Tour , Merckx raced both the Dauphiné Libéré and Tour de Suisse , winning one stage of the latter .

He admitted his poor form and anxiety about aggravating previous injuries going into the Tour de France . He managed to hold on to second place overall for two weeks . As the race entered the Alps , Merckx began to lose more time ; he lost thirteen minutes on the stage to Alpe d 'Huez alone . On the stage into Saint @-@ Étienne , Merckx attacked and managed to gain enough time to move into sixth overall ; he finished the Tour in same position . In the time following the Tour , Merckx raced twenty @-@ two races in a span of forty days before coming in thirty @-@ third at the UCI Road World Championships 's men 's road race . Merckx earned his final victory on the road on 17 September in a kermis race . In late December , FIAT chose to end their sponsorship of Merckx in favor of building a more French centered squad .

In January , the department store C & A announced that they would sponsor Merckx after their owner met Merckx at a football game . His plan for the season was to race one last Tour de France and then ride several smaller races for appearances . He raced a total of five races in the 1978 calendar . His last victory was in a track event , an omnium in Zürich , on 10 February 1978 with Patrick Sercu . His first road race came in the Grand Prix de Montauroux on 19 February . Merckx came to the front of the race and put in a large effort before swinging off and quitting the race . His best finish came in the Tour de Haut , where he managed fifth . He dropped out of Omloop Het Volt due to colitis and completed his final race on 19 March , a kermis in Kemzeke . Following the race , Merckx went on a vacation to go skiing . He returned from travel to train more , but by this point the team sponsor knew he was going to quit . Merckx announced his retirement from the sport on 18 May . He stated that the doctors advised him against racing .

= = Retirement = =

Following his exit from racing , Merckx opened up Eddy Merckx Cycles on 28 March 1980 in Brussels , Belgium . The initial workers that were hired for the factory were trained by Ugo De Rosa , a notable bike maker , before starting . The company almost went bankrupt at one point and was also caught up in a tax repayment controversy . Merckx would spend time giving input on the models as they were being produced . Despite the financial problems the brand became highly regarded and successful , being used by several top @-@ level cycling teams in the 1980s and 1990s . Merckx stepped down as CEO in 2008 and sold most of his shares , but still tests the bikes that are created and has some input . Cycling journalist Sam Dansie believed that the fact that Eddy Merckx Cycles has maintained a presence as an elite bicycle due to its adoption of new methods over time . As of January 2015 , the business is still based in Belgium and distributes to over twenty @-@ five countries .

Merckx managed the Belgian national team world championships for eleven years , between 1986 and 1996 . He acted as the race director for the Tour of Flanders for a brief period of time . He temporarily sponsored a youth developmental team with CGER Bank , a team that featured his son Axel . He helped organize the Grand Prix Eddy Merckx , which started out as an invitation only individual time trial event , later becoming a two @-@ man time trial event . The event folded after 2004 due to riders ' lack of interest .

He played a pivotal role in getting the Tour of Qatar started in 2002 . In 2001 Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani , the former Emir of Qatar , reached out to Merckx and told him of his interest in starting a bicycle race to show off his country . Merckx then contacted then Union Cycliste Internationale president Hein Verbruggen , who checked out Qatar 's roads . Following a successful inspection , Merckx contacted the Amaury Sport Organisation about working with him planning the race ; they agreed in 2001 . Merckx officially co @-@ owns the race with Dirk De Pauw and still helps to organize the race . In addition , Merckx also helped Qatar secure the right to host the 2016 UCI Road World Championships , as well as designing the race route for the road race . Merckx also co

@-@ owns and helps organize the Tour of Oman . In 2015 , Merckx said later that although he wasn 't racing , he knew would still be involved with the sport as " as a bike builder , first in the factory and now as an ambassador . "

= = Personal life = =

Merckx officially began dating Claudine Acou in April 1965 . Acou was a 21 @-@ year @-@ old teacher and daughter of the trainer of the national amateur team . Merckx asked her father for permission to marry her between track races . On December 5 , 1967 Merckx married Acou after four years of courtship . She would often handle the press over her husband , who was a shy person by nature . Claudine gave birth to their first child , Sabrina , on 14 February 1970 . Merckx skipped a team training camp to be with Claudine for Sabrina 's birth . Claudine later gave birth to a son , Axel , who also became a professional cyclist . Merckx was brought up speaking in Flemish , but was taught French in school .

In 1996 Albert II of Belgium King of the Belgians , gave him the title of baron . In Italy , Merckx was given the title of Cavaliere . In 2011 , he was named Commandeur de la Légion d 'honneur by then French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris . Merckx has become an ambassador for the Damien The Leper Society , a foundation named after a Catholic priest , which battles leprosy and other diseases in developing countries . He was blessed by Pope John Paul II in Brussels in the 1990s . Merckx is an art lover and stated that his favorite artist is Rene Magritte , a surrealist . Salvador Dali is another of his favorites .

Before starting the third stage of the 1968 Giro d 'Italia , Merckx was found to have a heart condition . A cardiologist , Giancarlo Lavezzaro , found that Merckx had non @-@ obstructive hypertrophic cardiomyopathy , a disease that has killed several young athletes . In 2013 , Merckx was given a pacemaker to help correct a heart rhythm issue . The surgery was performed in Genk on 21 March and done as a preventative procedure . Merckx stated that he never had any heart issues while racing , despite the fact that several males in his family died young of heart related problems . In May 2004 , he had an esophagus operation to cure stomach ache suffered since he was young . In August he reported that he lost nearly 30 kg after the procedure .

= = Legacy = =

Merckx has been regarded by many as the greatest and most successful cyclist of all @-@ time . He rode well in the Grand Tours and in the one @-@ day classics . He was a very good time trialist and climber . In addition , Merckx showed great ability to race on the track . He was known for racing style that consisted of attacking constantly , which came to be known as " la course en tête " . Attacking for Merckx was the best form of defence . He would spend a day in a breakaway and then make another significant attack the following day . Despite his constant attacking , he would occasionally ride in a defensive mindset , particularly when racing the Giro and facing Fuente . Merckx entered over 1 @, @ 800 races during his career and won a total of 525 . Due to his dominance in the sport some cycling historians refer to the period in which he raced as the " Merckx Era . " During his professional career , he won 445 of the 1585 races he entered . Between the years of 1967 and 1977 Merckx raced between 111 and 151 races each season . In 1971 he raced 120 times and won 54 of the events , the most races any cyclist has won in a season . Merckx admits that he was the best of his generation , but insists it 's not practical to compare across generations .

He is one of the three riders to win all five ' Monuments of Cycling ' (i.e. , Milan ? San Remo , Tour of Flanders , Paris ? Roubaix , Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège , and the Giro di Lombardia) , the other two being Rik Van Looy and Roger De Vlaeminck . He finished his career with nineteen victories across the monuments , more than any other rider and eight more than the rider with the second most . He won twenty @-@ eight classic races , with Paris ? Tours being the only race he did not win . The closest he came to victory in the race was sixth in the 1973 race . A lesser Belgian rider , Noël van Tyghem , won Paris ? Tours in 1972 and said : " Between us , I and Eddy Merckx have

won every classic that can be won . I won Paris ? Tours , Merckx won all the rest . "

While racing , he became the third rider to win all three Grand Tours in his career , a feat that has since been accomplished by more riders . He holds the record for most Grand Tour victories with 11 , along with the record for most stage wins across all three Grand Tours with 64 . He has completed the most Giro @-@ Tour doubles in history with three . He was the first rider to win cycling 's Triple Crown which has only been accomplished one other time , by Stephen Roche in 1987 . He was also the first rider to win all three major classifications ? the general , points , and mountains classifications ? in one Grand Tour at the 1968 Giro d 'Italia , and again at the 1969 Tour de France . This has only been done twice since by Tony Rominger and Laurent Jalabert . He shares the record for most victories at both the Giro d 'Italia and Tour de France , with five wins at each . In those races he also holds the records for days spent in the race leader 's jersey at 78 and 96 respectively . For his career successes in the Giro d 'Italia , Merckx became the first rider inducted into the race 's Hall of Fame in 2012 . When being inducted , Merckx was given the modern @-@ day trophy with the winners engraved until 1974 , the last year he won the race . At the Tour , he holds the record for most stage wins in its history , with thirty @-@ four .

He was given the nickname " The Cannibal " by the daughter of Christian Raymond , a teammate of Merckx 's . Raymond had commented on Merckx not allowing anyone else to win , to which his daughter referred to Merckx as a cannibal . Raymond liked the nickname and then mentioned it to the press . In Italy , he was known as " il mostro " (English : the monster) .

Dutch cycling great Joop Zoetemelk said " First there was Merckx , and then another classification began behind him . " Cycling journalist and commentator Phil Liggett wrote that if Merckx started a race , many riders acknowledged that they likely would be competing for second place . Ted Costantino wrote that Merckx was undoubtedly the number one cyclist of all time , whereas in other sports there are debates that go on about who is actually the greatest of all time . Gianni Motta told of how Merckx would ride without a racing cape when it was snowing or raining in order to go faster than other riders . Even after his retirement , many subsequent stars still feel overshadowed by his fame and race results . Merckx befriended Fiorenzo Magni when he began racing for an Italian team . He was criticized by opposing riders for his relentless pursuit of victory that prevented even lesser known riders from collecting a few victories . When told that he won too much , Merckx stated that " The day when I start a race without intending to win it , I won 't be able to look at myself in the mirror . "

= = Doping = =

Merckx was leading the 1969 Giro d 'Italia upon the conclusion of the sixteenth stage in Savona . After the stage , Merckx traveled to the mobile lab that traveled with the race and conducted the drug tests . Merckx 's first test came up positive for fencamfamine , an amphetamine . A second test was conducted and also came up positive . The word spread about Merckx 's positive test while Merckx himself was still asleep . The positive test meant Merckx was to be suspended for a month . Race director Vincenzo Torriani delayed the start of the seventeenth stage in an attempt to persuade the president of the Italian Cycling Federation to allow Merckx to begin the stage . However , the president was not in his office and Torriani was forced to start the stage , disqualifying Merckx in the process . In the succeeding days , the Union Cycliste Internationale removed the suspension put in place .

From the start , Merckx claimed his innocence saying that " I am a clean rider , I do not need to take anything to win . " He maintains that his samples were mishandled . After the incident , several conspiracy theories emerged including : the urine that tested positive wasn 't Merckx 's , a move to give Italian Felice Gimondi a better chance at victory , and Merckx had been given a water bottle with the stimulant in it .

On 8 November 1973 , it was announced that Merckx had tested positive for norephedrine after winning the Giro di Lombardia a month earlier . Upon learning of the first test being positive in later October , he had a counter @-@ analysis performed which also turned up positive . The drug was present in a cough medicine that the Molteni doctor , Dr. Cavalli , prescribed to him . Merckx was

disqualified from the race and the victory was awarded to second @-@ place finisher Gimondi . In addition , Merckx was given a month suspension and fined 150 @,@ 000 lira . Merckx admitted his fault in taking the medicine but said that the name norephedrine was not on the bottle of cough syrup he used .

On 8 May 1977 , Merckx , along with several other riders , tested positive for pemoline , a stimulant in Stimul , at La Flèche Wallonne . The group of riders was charged by the Belgian cycling federation , and the riders were each given a 24 @,@ 000 pestas fine and a one @-@ month suspension . Initially Merckx , announced his intention to appeal the penalty , saying he only took substances that were not on the banned list . Merckx 's eighth @-@ place finish in the race was voided . Years later , Merckx admitted he did take a banned substance , citing that he was wrong to have trusted a doctor .

Due to Merckx 's positive tests during his career , he was asked by the event organizers to stay away from the 2007 UCI Road World Championships in Stuttgart , Germany . The organizers stated that " [they] had to be role models " , while Merckx wrote them off claiming them to be crazy . Merckx was not alone , as several other riders were asked to keep their distance from the event .