

= 2016 E3 Harelbeke =

The 2016 E3 Harelbeke ( officially the Record Bank E3 Harelbeke ) was a one @-@ day cycling classic that took place on Friday 25 March 2016 . It was the 59th edition of the E3 Harelbeke ; it was the second one @-@ day race of the 2016 UCI World Tour and the first of the cobbled classics .

The race started and finished in Harelbeke , covering a distance of 206 @.@ 4 kilometres ( 128 @.@ 3 mi ) . The principal difficulty in the race came from the fifteen climbs of hills in the Flemish Ardennes . These mainly came in the second half of the race . The principal favourites for victory were Peter Sagan ( Tinkoff ) and Fabian Cancellara ( Trek ? Segafredo ) .

The race was won by Micha? Kwiatkowski ( Team Sky ) . He formed a breakaway 30 kilometres ( 19 mi ) from the finish with Sagan and , despite hard work from the Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step team and from Cancellara , they came to the finish together . Kwiatkowski comfortably won the sprint and Sagan took second place . Kwiatkowski 's teammate Ian Stannard won the group sprint for third place , eleven seconds behind .

= = Route = =

The E3 Harelbeke starts and finishes in the city of Harelbeke in West Flanders . The principal difficulty in the race comes from the climbs ? many of them cobbled ? that appear in the 205 @-@ kilometre ( 127 mi ) route ; many of these climbs also appear in the Tour of Flanders , including the Oude Kwaremont and Paterberg . In 2016 , there were several changes to the route from previous years , with a shorter distance and fewer climbs ; Cycling Weekly suggested that these could make the race slightly easier than previous editions .

The route left Harelbeke to the southeast , crossing the Scheldt river at Kluisbergen and proceeding through the outskirts of Oudenaarde . The first climb was the Katteberg after 30 kilometres ( 19 mi ) ; there was then a flat section of cobbled road ? the Paddestraat ? before the roads turned to the east . The route passed to the north @-@ east of Zottegem , then further east as far as Ninove with 65 kilometres ( 40 mi ) completed . Here the roads turned back to the west into the Flemish Ardennes . The second climb of the day was La Houpe , which came after 115 kilometres ( 71 mi ) ; the riders then continued into Ronse , the half @-@ way point of the race , for the cobbled climb of the Oude Kruisberg . There were then seven climbs in the following 35 kilometres ( 22 mi ) : the Knokteberg , the Hotondberg , the Kortekeer , the Taaienberg ( cobbled ) , the Boigneberg , the Eikenberg ( cobbled ) and the Stationsberg ( cobbled ) . At this point there were 57 kilometres ( 35 mi ) and five classified climbs remaining .

The next climb , the Kapelberg came 10 kilometres ( 6 @.@ 2 mi ) later and was immediately followed by the Paterberg , the steepest climb of the day with 700 metres ( 770 yd ) of cobbled road at an average gradient of 12 % and sections of 20 % . This was then followed after 4 kilometres ( 2 @.@ 5 mi ) by the partially cobbled , 2 @.@ 2 @-@ kilometre ( 1 @.@ 4 mi ) climb of the Oude Kwaremont . The penultimate climb of the day was the Karnemelkbeekstraat , 30 kilometres ( 19 mi ) from the finish . At this point , the route crossed back over the Scheldt and returned north @-@ west towards Harelbeke . The final climb , the Tiegemberg , came with 18 kilometres ( 11 mi ) remaining . The last part of the race was flat , with the final 3 kilometres ( 1 @.@ 9 mi ) a final loop through Harelbeke to the finish line .

= = Participating teams = =

There were 25 teams selected to start the race . All 18 UCI WorldTeams were automatically invited ; the race organisers also gave wildcard invitations to seven UCI Professional Continental teams . These included two Belgian teams ( Wanty ? Groupe Gobert and Topsport Vlaanderen ? Baloise ) , two French teams ( Fortuneo ? Vital Concept and Direct Énergie ) , an Italian team ( Wilier Triestina ? Southeast ) , a Dutch team ( Roompot ? Oranje Peloton ) and a German team ( Bora ? Argon 18 ) . Each team was permitted to enter eight riders . Orica ? BikeExchange and Team Dimension Data each entered seven riders and BMC Racing Team 's Greg Van Avermaet withdrew through illness ,

so 197 riders started the race .

== Pre @-@ race favourites ==

The 2015 champion , Team Sky 's Geraint Thomas , was not present to defend his title ; he was riding the 2016 Volta a Catalunya instead . Peter Sagan ( Tinkoff ) , who won the 2014 race , did start , as did Fabian Cancellara ( Trek ? Segafredo ) , who had won the race on three occasions in the past , and Tom Boonen ( Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step ) , who held the record for the most victories with five . Cancellara was riding the race for the final time , having announced that the 2016 season would be his last as a professional , and was in strong form with victories in the Strade Bianche and a time @-@ trial stage of the 2016 Tirreno ? Adriatico . Sagan , the reigning world champion , had also been performing strongly , but did not have any victories so far in 2016 . Boonen had not demonstrated any strong form .

Although Boonen had not shown strong form , he came to the race with a strong team . His teammates included Niki Terpstra , Zdeněk Štybar , Stijn Vandenbergh and Matteo Trentin , all of whom were possible winners of the race . Despite Thomas 's absence , Sky also brought a strong team : they had Ian Stannard , Luke Rowe and the former world champion Michał Kwiatkowski . Other possible victors included Sep Vanmarcke ( LottoNL ? Jumbo ) , Alexander Kristoff ( Team Katusha ) , Edvald Boasson Hagen ( Dimension Data ) , Jürgen Roelandts ( Lotto ? Soudal ) and Lars Boom ( Astana ) . Greg Van Avermaet would also have been among the favourites , but he was ruled out of the race due to illness .

== Race summary ==

After 40 kilometres ( 25 mi ) of racing , an eight @-@ man breakaway formed . The riders involved were Bert De Backer ( Giant ? Alpecin ) , Antoine Demoiné ( Wanty ? Groupe Gobert ) , Nico Denz ( AG2R La Mondiale ) , Tony Hurel ( Direct Energie ) , Sjoerd van Ginneken ( Roompot ? Oranje Peloton ) , Reto Hollenstein ( IAM Cycling ) , Jay Thomson ( Dimension Data ) , and Wouter Wippert ( Cannondale ? Drapac ) . They extended their lead to five minutes with 55 kilometres ( 34 mi ) completed , but their advantage was reduced to less than four minutes by the efforts of Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step in the peloton . It was reduced to less than two minutes by the time the riders reached the Taaiberg with 73 kilometres ( 45 mi ) remaining , as Trek put an effort into bringing the lead group back .

On the Taaiberg , Tiesj Benoot ( Lotto ? Soudal ) led the peloton , with Boonen right behind him . A ten @-@ rider group broke away from the peloton over the climb , with Benoot and Boonen joined by Roelandts , Cancellara , Boom , Vanmarcke , Daniel Oss ( BMC ) and three other Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step riders ( Terpstra , Štybar and Trentin ) . On the next climb , the Boigneberg , Cancellara 's rear derailleur failed and it took more than a minute for his team to bring him a replacement bike , putting him a long way behind the other favourites . Shortly afterwards , the breakaway was caught by the chasing group ; the combined group was then caught by another group that contained Sagan and Kwiatkowski to create a 20 @-@ man lead group , although Štybar soon suffered a puncture and fell out of the group . Cancellara , meanwhile , was in a group led by his teammates Yaroslav Popovych and Markel Irizar around two minutes behind .

By the time the race reached the Paterberg , the gap was around half a minute . On the climb , Cancellara attacked from the chasing group , with Štybar on his wheel ; meanwhile , a ten @-@ man group broke away from the leaders . After the Paterberg and the subsequent Oude Kwaremont , Cancellara and Štybar eventually reached this group . On the next hill , the Karnemelkbeekstraat , Sagan and Kwiatkowski attacked ; over the next 5 kilometres ( 3 @.@ 1 mi ) they extended their lead to over 20 seconds . This extended to 30 seconds on the Tiegemberg and reached 36 seconds on the final stretch to Harelbeke . The Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step riders were forced to do all the work in the chasing group , as none of the other riders in the group would collaborate with them .

After a long effort from Terpstra , Boonen took up the effort on the front of the chasing group and the gap to Sagan and Kwiatkowski began to reduce . The gap fell to under 11 seconds with 1

kilometre ( 0 @.@ 62 mi ) remaining , but the leading pair were not caught . After going under the flamme rouge , Kwiatkowski manoeuvred Sagan to the front and surprised him by opening up his sprint with 300 metres ( 330 yd ) remaining . Sagan was unable to respond and Kwiatkowski took the race victory , with Sagan four seconds behind . The chasing group finished 11 seconds behind , with Stannard beating Cancellara in the sprint for third place .

= = Results = =

= = Post @-@ race analysis = =

= = = Reactions = = =

Kwiatkowski 's victory was his first since joining Team Sky at the beginning of 2016 . He said after the race that his main target was still the Ardennes classics rather than the remainder of the cobbled classics season , but that there was no reason why he could not succeed in both . He pointed out that he was glad to have escaped with Sagan as they worked well together ? they had arrived at the finish of the 2014 Strade Bianche in a similar situation , with Kwiatkowski the winner there as well . He said that he thought he had surprised Sagan by sprinting first , rather than waiting for Sagan 's sprint . He also acknowledged that he knew from his own experience a year before that it was " very difficult " to race with the pressure of the world champion 's rainbow jersey .

Sagan revealed that he had been told on the radio that he had to ride hard to stay away from the chasing group , but that he had no power left in the final part of the race as he had done the majority of the work in the breakaway . Nevertheless , he said that he was happy with the race . Cancellara , meanwhile , said that , although he was disappointed with the result in itself , he had pride in the way he had performed in coming back from his mechanical failure . After his long pursuit , with the help of several teammates in different groups , he had barely been able to follow the other riders in the group on the Tiegemberg .

= = = UCI World Tour standings = = =

In the season @-@ long UCI World Tour competition , Kwiatkowski moved into the top ten thanks to the points won in the race . Sagan , meanwhile , moved from seventh to third , just ten points behind the leader , BMC 's Richie Porte . Poland moved into the top ten of the nations ' rankings , while Sky remained top in the teams ' rankings .