

= 2015 Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège =

The 2015 Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was a one @-@ day cycling classic that took place in the Belgian Ardennes on 26 April 2015 . It was the 101st edition of the Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège one @-@ day cycling race and was the fourth cycling monument of the 2015 season . It was part of the 2015 UCI World Tour and was organised by the Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) , who also organise the Tour de France .

200 riders raced over a 253 @-@ kilometre (157 mi) route that started in Liège , travelled south to Bastogne , then returned north by an indirect route to finish in Ans on the outskirts of Liège . The route included many hills , especially in the final 70 kilometres (43 mi) , which were the principal difficulty in the race .

There were many attacks in the final part of the race , with several groups breaking away from the peloton and subsequently being caught . A small group came together on the final ascent to the finish line , where the race was decided in a sprint . It was won by the pre @-@ race favourite , Alejandro Valverde (Movistar Team) , ahead of Julian Alaphilippe (Etixx ? Quick @-@ Step) and Joaquim Rodríguez (Team Katusha) . This was Valverde 's third victory in Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège and put him into the lead of the World Tour standings .

= = Background = =

Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was established in 1892 and is one of the oldest races on the cycling calendar . Milano ? Torino is the only current race to have begun earlier , although it did not exist as a regular event until the 1920s . Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was founded as a precursor to a planned Liège ? Paris ? Liège event , which never came about , but eventually became one of the most important races on the cycling calendar in its own right . The race has come to be seen as one of the cycling Monuments , alongside Milan ? San Remo , the Tour of Flanders , Paris ? Roubaix and the Giro di Lombardia . Because Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège is the oldest of the major races on the cycling calendar , it has been given the nickname La Doyenne (English : The Old Lady) . It is particularly known as a race where the best one @-@ day riders and the best Grand Tour riders can compete on relatively equal terms . In his book The Monuments , Peter Cossins wrote that Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège " is generally regarded as the toughest one @-@ day race on the calendar " . Eddy Merckx holds the record for the most victories : he won five times between 1969 and 1975 .

Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was the fourth of the Monuments to take place in the 2015 season . Milan ? San Remo and Paris ? Roubaix has been won by John Degenkolb (Giant ? Alpecin) , while the Tour of Flanders was won by Alexander Kristoff (Team Katusha) . Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège was the final event of the spring classics season and came as the conclusion to the Ardennes classics , following the Amstel Gold Race and La Flèche Wallonne . It was also part of the 2015 UCI World Tour , a season @-@ long competition that included both one @-@ day events and stage races .

= = Teams = =

As it is part of the UCI World Tour , the 17 UCI WorldTeams were automatically invited and obliged to send a team to Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège . The race organisers (ASO , which also organises the Tour de France) also made eight wildcard invitations to UCI Professional Continental teams . The peloton was therefore made up of 25 teams . Six of the teams were also invited to La Flèche Wallonne . These included two Belgian teams (Wanty ? Groupe Gobert and Topsport Vlaanderen ? Baloise) , two French teams (Cofidis and Team Europcar) , Team Roompot and MTN ? Qhubeka . The final two teams to be invited to Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège were Bora ? Argon 18 (whose invitation meant that they would participate in all five Monuments in 2015) and Cult Energy Pro Cycling . As each team was required to enter between five and eight riders , the maximum size of the peloton was 200 riders .

= = Route = =

The route for the 2015 race was announced on 15 April . The route was 10 kilometres (6 @. @ 2 mi) shorter than in 2014 ; it was therefore 253 kilometres (157 mi) in length . The changes came in the final section of the route , with the Côte de la Vecquée removed and the Col du Rosier and the Col du Maquisard added instead . The second change was a reduction in distance between the third @-@ last and second @-@ last climbs : the distance was cut from 25 kilometres (16 mi) to 16 kilometres (9 @. @ 9 mi) , with a small unclassified climb also added . Cyclingnews.com described the first change as a " much harder combination " suggested that the new route would make the race more interesting than the 2014 edition , which it described as " painfully dull " .

The race began in Liège , in Place Saint @-@ Lambert outside the Prince @-@ Bishops ' Palace , with a neutral zone that took the riders out of the town to the south . The first 75 kilometres (47 mi) of the race brought the peloton south , through Aywaille to La Roche @-@ en @-@ Ardenne ; although the roads were not flat there were no difficult or categorised climbs . Here the riders encountered the first classified climb of the day , the Côte de la Roche @-@ en @-@ Ardenne (2 @. @ 8 kilometres (1 @. @ 7 mi) at an average gradient of 6 @. @ 2 %) . After reaching the summit , the riders continued south for another 28 kilometres (17 mi) . This took them through Bertogne to Bastogne , which they reached after 107 kilometres (66 mi) of racing . This was the turning @-@ point : from here the route turned to the north to return towards Liège . The northern leg of the race was both longer ? 146 kilometres (91 mi) ? and more difficult ? it included nine categorised climbs .

After turning around at the Rond @-@ point La Doyenne (named after the race itself) , the peloton left Bastogne to the north @-@ east . The first 17 kilometres (11 mi) were fairly flat and took the riders to Houffalize . After a fast descent came the Côte de Saint @-@ Roch (1 kilometre (0 @. @ 62 mi) at 11 @. @ 2 %) . Another fairly flat section followed : the route continued north for approximately 30 kilometres (19 mi) on fairly major roads through Gouvy and Vielsalm . At this point , with 86 @. @ 5 kilometres (53 @. @ 7 mi) to the finish line , there were still eight categorised climbs remaining .

The first three of these climbs came in quick succession . These were the Côte de Wanne (2 @. @ 7 kilometres (1 @. @ 7 mi) at 7 @. @ 4 %) , the Côte de Stockeu (1 kilometre (0 @. @ 62 mi) at 12 @. @ 5 %) and the Côte de la Haute @-@ Levée (3 @. @ 6 kilometres (2 @. @ 2 mi) at 5 @. @ 6 %) . The Côte de Wanne was narrow and badly surfaced , with a dangerous descent following . The Côte de Stockeu was described by Cycling Weekly as a " killer climb " , because of its steep gradient , its narrowness and its poor road surface . The Côte de la Haute @-@ Levée was unique on the course because it included a 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) section of cobblestones .

These climbs brought the riders to Stavelot . Soon afterwards , there was a hairpin turn that took them towards the two climbs new to the 2015 edition . The first of these was the Col du Rosier (4 @. @ 4 kilometres (2 @. @ 7 mi) at 5 @. @ 9 %) , which was the longest climb of the day . The riders then descended through the town of Spa and turned west onto the Col du Maquisard (2 @. @ 5 kilometres (1 @. @ 6 mi) at 5 %) , which they crossed with 46 kilometres (29 mi) to the finish line . The route then crossed over the roads used for the southern leg as the riders entered the final section of the race .

The following climb was Côte de La Redoute (2 kilometres (1 @. @ 2 mi) at 8 @. @ 9 %) , with 34 @. @ 5 kilometres (21 @. @ 4 mi) from the summit to the finish line . Cyclingnews.com described La Redoute as " the most emblematic climb of the entire race " . It had an uneven gradient : the first 1 kilometre (0 @. @ 62 mi) was at about 8 % , before 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) at around 13 % and another 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) at 6 % . The riders descended down twisting roads , crossed over the uncategorised Côte de Sprimont , before coming to the penultimate climb , the Côte de la Roche @-@ aux @-@ Faucons (1 @. @ 5 kilometres (0 @. @ 93 mi) at 9 @. @ 4 %) with 19 kilometres (12 mi) to the finish line . This was one of the most difficult climbs of the race , with frequent changes of gradient and a poor road surface . There was then another uncategorised climb and a steep descent into the outskirts of Liège .

The final climb of the day came with 6 @. @ 2 kilometres (3 @. @ 9 mi) remaining . This was the Côte de Saint @-@ Nicolas (1 @. @ 2 kilometres (0 @. @ 75 mi) at 8 @. @ 6 %) . Cycling Weekly

described it as " a succession of steep corners with nothing between " . After the descent from the climb , the riders entered Ans , the finishing town . There was a long , straight road that started 2 kilometres (1 @. @ 2 mi) from the finish line . After 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) of flat , the road climbed towards the finish at around 5 % . With around 300 metres (980 ft) to go , there was a left @- @ hand turn that took the riders to the finish line .

= = Pre @- @ race favourites = =

Recent editions of Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège had been won in several different ways . Andy Schleck (then riding for Team Saxo Bank) had won a solo victory with a long @- @ distance attack in 2009 , while Dan Martin (Cannondale ? Garmin) had attacked late on to win in 2013 . The 2010 edition was won by a two @- @ man breakaway and the 2011 edition by a three @- @ man group . The defending champion , Simon Gerrans (Orica ? GreenEDGE) won the 2014 edition in a bunch sprint after a large group came to Ans together . The pattern of the 2015 edition was therefore hard to predict . One consistent pattern , however , was that recent editions of the race had been won by major names rather than by outsiders .

Alejandro Valverde (Movistar Team) had won La Flèche Wallonne during the week that preceded Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège and he was one of the major favourites to take the victory . Valverde had won the race on two previous occasions (in 2006 and 2008) and had also been on the podium on four other occasions . Valverde 's status as the major favourite had the potential to work against him , however , as other riders were expected to mark him closely and perhaps prevent him from winning . Philippe Gilbert (BMC Racing Team) had suffered from this problem in the Amstel Gold Race .

The other major favourite for the race was the reigning world champion , Micha? Kwiatkowski (Etixx ? Quick @- @ Step) . Kwiatkowski had finished third in the 2014 Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège and had already won the Amstel Gold Race in 2015 . Although he had not been as strong as had been expected in La Flèche Wallonne , the longer climbs of Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège were expected to suit him better .

Other favourites included Joaquim Rodríguez (Katusha) , Rui Costa (Lampre ? Merida) and Dan Martin , as well as Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) and Tim Wellens (Lotto ? Soudal) . Simon Gerrans had suffered an injury earlier in the season and had not fully recovered ; he was not expected to be able to defend his title . Similarly , Philippe Gilbert had suffered a fall in La Flèche Wallonne ; he was also not as well suited to the route of Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège as he was to the other Ardennes classics .

= = Race report = =

The race began with hard racing for the first hour until the day 's main breakaway was formed , with around 40 kilometres (25 mi) raced . The breakaway involved eight riders . These were Diego Ulissi (Lampre ? Merida) , Matteo Montaguti (AG2R La Mondiale) , Otto Vergaerde (Topsport Vlaanderen ? Baloise) , Clément Chevrier (IAM Cycling) , Marco Minnaard (Wanty ? Groupe Gobert) , Anthony Turgis (Cofidis) , Cesare Benedetti (Bora ? Argon 18) and Rasmus Quaade (Cult Energy Pro Cycling) . The group 's lead soon extended to nearly eight minutes , while the peloton was led by Team Europcar . Europcar 's work reduced the breakaway 's lead by around three minutes by the time of the Côte de La Roche @- @ en @- @ Ardenne , 79 kilometres (49 mi) into the race .

After the turn in Bastogne , the breakaway continued . It was , however , reduced in numbers , as Quaade , Chevrier and Vergaerde all fell back before the peloton reached the Côte de Wanne , four hours into the race . Katusha led the peloton as it approached the climb . On the climb itself , Astana came to the front of the peloton and led the chase , with the breakaway 's lead reduced to under a minute . On the Côte de Stockeu , Andriy Hrivko (Astana) , Gorka Izagirre (Movistar) and Simon Yates (Orica ? GreenEDGE) attacked and joined the lead group ; more riders then bridged across to form a 21 @- @ man group . This included five Astana riders , though not Nibali . On the Côte de

la Haute @-@ Levée , several riders attacked again to form a smaller breakaway ; these were Tanel Kangert and Michele Scarponi (both Astana) , Manuele Boaro (Tinkoff ? Saxo) , Esteban Chaves (Orica @-@ GreenEDGE) and Julián Arredondo (Trek Factory Racing) . They had a 25 @-@ second lead at the summit and , although Boaro and Arredondo were dropped on the Col du Rosier , this increased to more than a minute for a short while . It was reduced to 45 seconds on the Col du Maquisard , however , as Movistar worked hard in the peloton to bring them back .

As the peloton approached the Côte de la Redoute , there was a large crash . Among the riders to crash were two previous winners of the race , Dan Martin and Simon Gerrans , as well as Fränk Schleck (Trek Factory Racing) , Nicolas Roche (Sky) , Mathias Frank (IAM) and Yukiya Arashiro (Europcar) . Vincenzo Nibali was forced to unclip himself from his bike , but avoided crashing . The peloton was reduced to around 40 riders at the foot of the climb . Although there were no bad injuries in the crash , Roche and Arashiro took some time to stand up , with Roche looking particularly dazed . Many of the riders who crashed attempted to get back into the peloton , with Gerrans and Martin among them . Gerrans was forced to abandon the race shortly afterwards after he crashed for a second time .

On the Col de la Redoute itself , Kangert was dropped from the breakaway ; Scarponi and Chaves had a 35 @-@ second lead at the summit and were caught around 10 kilometres (6 mi) later . The riders then entered the Côte de la Roche @-@ aux @-@ Faucons , where Roman Kreuziger (Tinkoff @-@ Saxo) and Giampaolo Caruso (Katusha) attacked ; they were quickly joined by Jakob Fuglsang (Astana) and had an 18 @-@ second lead at the summit . Several riders attempted to form chase groups ; eventually a six @-@ man chase group was formed by Giovanni Visconti (Movistar) , Julian Alaphilippe (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) , Rui Costa (Lampre @-@ Merida) , Samuel Sánchez (BMC Racing Team) and Daniel Moreno (Katusha) . They stayed away for a short while and were then joined by around 20 other riders with 15 kilometres (9 mi) remaining as rain began to fall .

Zdeněk Štybar (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) took over the pace @-@ setting in the peloton as it approached the Côte de Saint @-@ Nicolas and he reduced the gap to Kreuziger , Caruso and Fuglsang . On the climb , Valverde came to the front of the group to control the pace . Nibali then attacked and , while he was not able to escape the group , several riders were dropped . These included Michał Kwiatkowski and Philippe Gilbert . Nibali 's attack also brought the chasing group back to the leaders . The next attack came from Romain Bardet (AG2R La Mondiale) on the descent from the Côte de Saint @-@ Nicolas . While he too was unable to break away from the group , his attack did cause Nibali to lose contact and reduced the group to ten riders .

Giampaolo Caruso led the group into Ans and towards the climb to the finish . At the foot of the climb , Daniel Moreno , Caruso 's teammate , attacked and built a small gap ahead of the group . The group did not initially chase him , as all the other riders looked for Valverde to do the work . Eventually Valverde did start to chase Moreno and caught him at the final bend . He opened his sprint from a long way out , with Joaquim Rodríguez (Katusha) right behind him . Rodríguez slowed as they approached the line , however , and Valverde took the victory . Julian Alaphilippe came around Rodríguez in the final metres to take second place .

= = Result = =

= = Post @-@ race analysis = =

= = Rider reactions = =

Valverde 's win was the third victory at Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège in his career . He became one of only six riders to have three or more victories in the race . Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège also concluded a very successful Ardennes week for him : he had two victories and one second @-@ place finish in the three races . Valverde was the first rider since Philippe Gilbert in 2011 to win both La Flèche

Wallonne and Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège in the same week and , although he was one place away from imitating Gilbert 's Ardennes triple , he described it as a " great week " .

Alaphilippe 's second @-@ place finish was the best for any French rider since Laurent Jalabert in 1998 . He had entered the race in support of Kwiatkowski . When Kwiatkowski was struggling on the Côte de Saint @-@ Nicolas , the Etixx @-@ Quick Step directeur sportif sent a radio message to Alaphilippe to ride for himself ; this was similar to the events in La Flèche Wallonne , where Alaphilippe also finished second to Valverde . He was frustrated on the finish line and waved his arm in the air ; he said after the race " today I really felt I could have done something more " . Cyclingnews.com suggested after the race that he had the potential to win a Monument in the future .

Several riders were injured in the crash 40 kilometres (25 mi) from the finish . The worst @-@ affected was Yukiya Arashiro , who suffered several broken bones . Gianluca Brambilla (Etixx @-@ Quick Step) broke his collarbone . LottoNL ? Jumbo had two riders with injuries : Paul Martens broke his hand and Bram Tankink suffered from concussion and bruises . Nicolas Roche and Simon Gerrans both suffered some discomfort after their crashes , but neither had significant injuries . Dan Martin rode the Tour de Romandie the following week . After he suffered with his breathing through the race , he discovered that he had broken two ribs in the crash in Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège .

= = = UCI World Tour rankings = = =

After his strong Ardennes week , Valverde moved into the lead of the UCI World Tour individual rankings , with Richie Porte (Team Sky) dropping to second place . Rui Costa also moved into the top ten . Spain moved ahead of Australia in the nations ' standings , while Etixx @-@ Quick Step retained their lead of the team rankings .