

= 2011 Astana season =

The 2011 season for the Astana cycling team began in January at the Tour Down Under and ended in October at the Tour of Hainan . As a UCI ProTeam , they were automatically invited and obligated to send a squad to every event in the UCI World Tour . In a change from the 2010 season , the team 's manager was Giuseppe Martinelli , replacing Yvon Sanquer . There was also a major change in ridership , as three @-@ time Tour de France champion Alberto Contador departed for Saxo Bank ? SunGard , while his doping case remains unresolved . Three Spanish domestiques followed Contador to Saxo Bank ? SunGard , while two climbing talents who spent the previous season with Liquigas ? Doimo , Roman Kreuziger and Robert Ki?erlovski , were notable additions to the team for 2011 .

Alexander Vinokourov was the team 's leader alongside Kreuziger . Vinokourov stated before the season that 2011 would likely be his last year as a professional rider . He sustained a serious crash at the Tour de France . He broke his right femur and retired from the sport for a time , but he eventually went back on this decision and his decision from before the season , opting instead to return for the 2012 season .

True to their longtime identity as a stage racing team , all of Astana 's 2011 victories came in stage races . They had a much lesser presence at the Grand Tours than they did when Contador rode for them , achieving just one stage win and sixth overall as their best placing , both from the Giro d 'Italia . They also took stage wins at seven other races .

= = 2011 roster = =

Ages as of January 1 , 2011 .

= = One @-@ day races = =

= = = Spring classics = = =

The squad was not competitive at the first three monument races in the spring season , coming just 66th in Milan ? San Remo , 35th at the Tour of Flanders , and 18th at Paris ? Roubaix . Ki?erlovski and Clarke took seventh places at two early @-@ season classics , respectively the Classica Sarda and the Giro del Friuli , the latter a race run in such difficult conditions that only 25 riders finished .

The team 's two leaders Vinokourov and Kreuziger rode strongly at the Ardennes classics . Vinokourov took fourth in La Flèche Wallonne , six seconds back of winner Philippe Gilbert . Kreuziger was also fourth , at the fourth monument Liège ? Bastogne ? Liège , and also back of Gilbert as race winner . The team also sent squads to the E3 Prijs Vlaanderen ? Harelbeke , Gent @-@ Wevelgem , and the Amstel Gold Race , but finished distantly in each , 16th , 66th , and 17th respectively .

= = = Fall races = = =

Gasparotto turned in a fourth place ride at Tre Valli Varesine , which matched the team 's best single @-@ day result of the season , along with the performances of Kreuziger and Vinokourov from earlier in the season . Clarke provided two of the team 's highest finishes in the later @-@ season single day races , coming fifth at the Coppa Ugo Agostoni and seventh at Vattenfall Cyclassics . Clarke also turned in a good ride at the Grand Prix Cycliste de Québec , finishing tenth .

The team also sent squads to the Clásica de San Sebastián , the GP Ouest @-@ France , the Grand Prix Cycliste de Montréal , the Coppa Sabatini , the Giro dell 'Emilia , the GP Bruno Beghelli , the Giro di Lombardia , the Chrono des Nations , and the Japan Cup , but finished no higher than 17th in any of these races .

= = Stage races = =

Di Gregorio took the team 's first win of the season , at Paris ? Nice , winning a windy , rainy stage 7 into Sophia Antipolis . Vinokourov had targeted this stage , since it fell on the anniversary of the death of his friend Andrei Kivilev in the 2003 race . It was also during this stage that Kiserlovski slid and crashed on a slippery downhill , and skidded underneath a parked truck . It took several minutes to safely extricate him , and after needing eight stitches to sew up his wounds , he did not start the final stage . Vinokourov won stage 3 of the Tour of the Basque Country with a 4 km (2 @. @ 5 mi) long solo attack . Kreuziger took his first win of the season at the Giro del Trentino , winning the fourth and final stage . He also was first over the day 's last two climbs , which gave him enough points to win the mountains classification . The squad also won the teams classification .

Later in April , the team took two wins at two concurrent events . In stage 2 at the Presidential Cycling Tour of Turkey , Valentin took his first win of the season in a field sprint , besting Alessandro Petacchi at the finish . The victory made the younger Iglinsky the race leader for a day before he ceded it to Colnago ? CSF Inox 's Manuel Belletti , winner of stage 3 . Later in the race , Zeits made a fortunate breakaway which took nearly 12 minutes over the rest of the peloton . The result put him fourth in the overall standings , 20 seconds clear of the man in fifth , but 10 minutes ahead of the man in sixth . The next day , the Astana squad worked hard to get another breakaway containing Zeits to the finish line first , which resulted him in moving up to second overall . He retained this position to the conclusion of the race . At the Tour de Romandie , Vinokourov won stage 3 . He , Mickaël Cherel , and Tony Martin had slipped off the front of the field when the day 's principal breakaway was caught , and stayed away to allow a three @-@ up sprint decide the winner , though they had no appreciable time gap over the fast @-@ charging peloton at the finish . Cherel protested the results , feeling that Vinokourov 's sprint had illegally impeded him , but race officials upheld the order of finish on the road . Vinokourov felt after this result that he was a strong contender for the overall crown , sitting 32 seconds back with an individual time trial , where pending race leader Pavel Brutt struggles , still to race . He finished the race third , losing time to race champion Cadel Evans in that time trial . He later said he was satisfied with this performance . However , at this race , Kiserlovski was revealed to have worse injuries from his Paris ? Nice crash than first thought . An MRI taken after the Romandie prologue , due to the Croatian suffering from severe shoulder pain , revealed that he had a cracked vertebra . He abandoned the race with hopes of recovering in time for the Giro d 'Italia . Vinokourov had a successful Critérium du Dauphiné . He finished second in the prologue time trial and assumed the race lead the next day on the first road race stage . He held the jersey for a second day before losing it in the stage 3 time trial , a considerably longer course than the prologue . He finished a distant 14th , having difficulty on the technical descents on the course , and slipped to fourth overall . When Janez Brajkovi? faltered in stage 6 , Vinokourov re @-@ assumed a podium position , third , and kept it to the race 's conclusion the next day .

The team had a very successful Tour of Austria , a race concurrent to the Tour de France . Kessiakoff rode to a strong stage 2 win on a summit finish at Kitzbüheler Horn . On a day where the composition of the leading group changed several times over rolling terrain , Kessiakoff was the first rider to attack out of the main peloton and surpassed all riders ahead of him to finish alone atop the 1 @, @ 670 m (5 @, @ 480 ft) summit . A former mountain bike veteran , this solo ride was Kessiakoff 's first career road win in his third year in the discipline . The result gave him a lead of a minute and 18 seconds in the overall standings . After most of the riders finished together on the next four stages , Kessiakoff built his lead even higher in the stage 7 time trial . He was fifth , ceding time only to riders well behind him in the overall standings , extending his lead to two and a half minutes . He easily won the race overall the next day , finishing safely in the peloton in an uncomplicated sprinters ' stage . After Masciarelli won the youth award at the inaugural Giro di Padania , Valentin Iglinsky provided for the team 's final wins of 2011 at the Tour of Hainan . In a race that actually counted toward the 2012 Asia tour standings , Iglinsky , the race 's defending champion , won stage 8 and subsequently the overall crown the next day .

The team also sent squads to the Tour Down Under , the Tour of Qatar , the Tour of Oman , the Volta ao Algarve , the Giro di Sardegna , Tirreno ? Adriatico , the Volta a Catalunya , the Tour of Belgium , the Tour de Suisse , the Eneco Tour , and the Tour de l'Ain , but did not have a stage win , classification win , or podium finish in any of them .

= = Grand Tours = =

= = = Giro d'Italia = = =

Astana 's leader for the Giro was Kreuziger . Though he had ridden six previous Grand Tours and finished in the top ten at the Tour de France twice , this was his first time riding the Giro , as his former team Liquigas ? Doimo always inevitably had someone else in mind for leadership at the Italian tour . It was also the first time Kreuziger had ridden as the unquestioned leader in a Grand Tour . Both leadership and access to the Giro were central to Kreuziger 's signing with Astana in the offseason . A team of experienced domestiques , along with Kiserlovski , the tenth place finisher at the 2010 Giro d'Italia , were named to ride in support . Kreuziger 's goal was to finish on the podium .

The team began the Giro with a poor team time trial , finishing 17th of 23 teams , immediately putting Kreuziger 50 seconds off the race lead . Kreuziger made each of the day 's selections in stage 5 , a hilly stage with numerous sectors of unpaved or ' white ' roads , and finished with the race 's top riders eight seconds back of the day 's winner and new race leader Pieter Weening . This result moved Kreuziger up 42 places , from 70th to 18th , even though his time gap to the race leader remained close to the same . Kreuziger took one of the time bonuses two days later on Montevergine di Mercogliano , as the race 's top riders narrowly missed taking back the last breakaway rider Bart De Clercq on the Giro 's first summit finish . While the Belgian won the stage , Kreuziger 's third @-@ place ride moved him further up the classification , to 14th . Kreuziger , like the rest of the field , was greatly outclassed by Alberto Contador on Mount Etna in stage 9 , but despite finishing 50 seconds back he vaulted even higher in the standings , entering the top ten overall for the first time , at seventh . He also gained the white jersey for best young rider after this stage . He held that position in stage 11 , which unexpectedly became a stage for the overall classification riders despite Contador 's hints that he may cede his pink jersey on this day . With Michele Scarponi 's Lampre ? ISD leading a strong chase , Kreuziger finished sixth on the day , amongst the race 's top riders , to remain seventh overall .

Kreuziger , along with most of the race 's best riders , was again out @-@ distanced by Contador on the Grossglockner , the next summit finish . He finished sixth on the day , losing over a minute and a half . Attrition to other riders meant he actually moved up to fifth overall , though he was three and a half minutes down on Contador , a time gap unlikely to be recouped . Kreuziger faltered badly the next day on the stage ending at Monte Zoncolan . He was a distant 16th on the day , losing three and a half minutes to stage winner Igor Antón , but more importantly losing between two and three minutes to the race 's other top riders . He fell down to ninth overall as a result . He regained one position the next day with ninth place on Gardeccia , but again lost time to the race 's other leading riders . This was because Ag2r ? La Mondiale rider Hubert Dupont fell from his position above Kreuziger in the standings . Kreuziger finished sixth in the climbing time trial to the Nevegal , but since the climb was relatively short , time gaps among the top riders were small , and he remained eighth overall as a result .

The team took their one stage win in stage 19 . Tiralongo , perhaps Kreuziger 's top support rider , attacked out of the leading group 7 km (4 @. @ 3 mi) , all uphill , from the finish in Macugnaga . After other riders tried to bridge up to him but never made it all the way , Contador easily made his way to the front of the race and rode beside Tiralongo for several moments . They shared a few words , and Contador patted the veteran Italian on the back as he encouraged him to take the stage win himself . Tiralongo did so , the first race win of his 12 @-@ year career . Contador , who had ridden the last three seasons with Astana , remembered Tiralongo as a friend and a valued support

rider , and wanted to do something to thank him for all his hard work done on the Spaniard 's behalf . The day was also a good one for Kreuziger , as his eighth place on the day moved him up to seventh overall . Kreuziger was just 16th in the stage 21 time trial in Milan , a poor showing for him . But since José Rujano , the man who had been directly ahead of him in the overall standings , is a vastly inferior time trialist (46th on the day) , Kreuziger moved past him to finish the Giro in sixth place overall . While he did fall short of his goal to finish on the podium , Kreuziger nonetheless added another Grand Tour top ten and the best young rider jersey to his palmarès . The squad also finished as winners of the Trofeo Fast Team , the traditional team classification where the times for the team 's top three riders are added each day . They finished an even ten minutes the better of Movistar Team .

= = = Tour de France = = =

Vinokourov led the Astana squad at the Tour de France . Entering 2011 , he had thought it to be his final season as an active competitor , and his main goal for the year was to wear the yellow jersey at some time during the Tour . His pursuit of yellow was strengthened by the addition of Kreuziger to the squad , riding solely in support of the veteran Kazakh . Paris ? Nice stage winner Di Gregorio and Tiralongo were also named to the squad .

The squad turned in a decent ride in the stage 2 team time trial , finishing ninth of 22 teams . The result installed Vinokourov into 27th place , 32 seconds off the race lead . Vinokourov took third in stage 4 on the Mûr @-@ de @-@ Bretagne , one of only ten riders to finish together at the front of the race . He moved up six places to 18th with this result . In stage 8 on Super Besse , Vinokourov and Team Sky 's Juan Antonio Flecha put in an attack that constituted a clear bid to take the yellow jersey . Starting the day 32 seconds back of race leader Thor Hushovd , Vinokourov surged past Flecha and all remaining members of the morning breakaway other than eventual stage winner Rui Costa . He occupied second position on the road , holding a sufficient time gap that he could take the race leadership , until he was reabsorbed by the depleted front peloton and finished at the back of that group . The result did , however , move Vinokourov up to 11th .

The team 's fortunes took a dramatic turn the next day . On the same day that breakaway riders Flecha and Johnny Hoogerland were sideswiped by a car at the front of the race , Vinokourov crashed along with Jurgen Van den Broeck , Andreas Klöden , and David Zabriskie , all of whom eventually left the race due to their injuries . Vinokourov 's injuries were quite clearly serious immediately ? he could not walk back to the road from which he fell , needing to be held up by Di Gregorio and Grivko . He was revealed to have sustained a broken right femur . Fofonov also crashed , witnessing what took place from his position directly behind Vinokourov . He described that the race had been extremely fast , and the road wet , with Hushovd and a rider from Omega Pharma ? Lotto taking a line around a left @-@ hand curve that resulted in those behind taking it much too widely and falling off the road . Vinokourov was quoted as saying " I never expected such a dramatic end on the Tour de France " and said that he expected the team to fight on for a stage win . He had surgery in Aurillac the next day , with the scheduled recovery time for the injury ruling him out for the remainder of the season , also meaning that it would likely end his professional career . A week later , Vinokourov indeed announced his retirement from the sport , for a second time . After his first four weeks of rehabilitation went better than anticipated , Vinokourov announced that he would ride the Giro di Lombardia before retiring . Later this plan changed , to have him ride the Chrono des Nations instead , due to the lesser risk of crashing in an individual time trial than in a hilly classic . In September , Vinokourov came out of retirement altogether and announced that he would return as an active rider in 2012 .

Despite Vinokourov 's hopes upon crashing out of the race that the squad would continue to be combative , they did not attain any noteworthy results over the remainder of the Tour . Grivko and Fofonov took top @-@ ten stage placings from breakaways in stages 16 and 17 , but did not come close to winning either day , finishing tenth and sixth respectively and over a minute off the winner 's time both days . Vaitkus finished eighth on the Champs @-@ Élysées stage to close out the Tour . The squad 's best @-@ placed rider in the final overall standings was Di Gregorio in 39th place , an

hour and 22 minutes off Tour winner Cadel Evans ' time .

= = = Vuelta a España = = =

Kashechkin , who previously rode for Astana before being suspended following a positive doping test at the 2007 Tour de France , transferred to the team from Lampre ? ISD effective at the beginning of August . His first race back with the team was the Vuelta a España , where he was to ride as squad leader . He hoped to finish in the top five .

Astana turned in their strongest team time trial performance in the Vuelta , finishing fourth of the 22 teams . Kiserlovski commented after the ride that the team was well pleased with fourth place and the small time gap to the stage winners Leopard Trek . Gasparotto had high placings in stages 2 and 3 , but did not come especially close to winning either , taking seventh in a field sprint and then ninth over a minute down on the back @-@ to @-@ back days . In the Vuelta 's first summit finish the next day in the Sierra Nevada , Kessiakoff finished in the 29 @-@ rider leading peloton 11 seconds back of the stage winner , which moved him up to seventh overall . Kashechkin , on the other hand , finished in the second @-@ to @-@ last large group , losing 18 minutes and any chance at serious overall contention . Kessiakoff moved up to sixth the next day by finishing tenth on the Valdepeñas de Jaén climb . After two more tenth places on difficult stages , Kessiakoff 's position improved to fourth overall , gaining that position on stage 9 . He occupied fifth after stage 11 , having slipped a bit in the stage 10 individual time trial , still leaving him to be described as the " big surprise of the Vuelta a España . " After 11 stages , Kashechkin lay 107th , nearly an hour and a half behind the race leader . Team manager Martinelli stated that no pressure for a particular final placing would be put on Kessiakoff . Sporting director Aydar Mahmet expressed the team 's dissatisfaction with Kashechkin publicly suggesting the expectation of a high placing when he obviously did not have the form to attain it .

Kessiakoff moved into his highest overall position after stage 12 , occupying third overall just nine seconds behind the race leader . Kessiakoff at last cracked on stage 14 , finishing 21st two minutes off the pace on La Farrapona . He had such time in hand over the bulk of the field , however , that he slipped only to sixth overall . Kessiakoff badly cracked in the next stage , losing almost 22 minutes and falling to 26th overall . Kiserlovski then became the team 's top overall rider . He took ninth on stage 18 into Noja , part of a breakaway that took over seven minutes against the race 's top riders . The result installed him into 16th place overall . He ended the Vuelta in 18th , as Astana 's best @-@ placed rider . Kessiakoff 's final position was 34th , and Kashechkin was 89th .

= = Season victories = =