

## Frank Kistler's Cycling Tour Followed The 2003 Tour de France



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### Day 1 – July 16

We arrived A.M. of July 16 in Toulouse. Luggage and bikes didn't. They're stuck in Paris until A.M. of July 17.

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### Day 2 – July 17

Assembled bikes, load into trailer attached to large bus. The TDF team bike buses and support cars for Jean Delatour





and Gerolsteiner roll into our hotel parking lot full of Scott and Wilier bikes, respectively.



They let us look inside but no touch.

Gorgeous cycling machinery! We loaded and drive to Carcassone for a 25 mi. shakedown ride.

**Day 3 – July 18** Leave hotel at 8:00 A.M., rode in bus to ride start point, rode 40 miles to [T.T. start in Gaillac – Stage 12](#). Our ride was hot, hilly, and a hammering by choice. The mild climbing is like an hors d'oeuvre before Col du Tourmalet. A little horn blowing – I was first to the town sign.

T.T. start was quite a sight. Lance stayed out of the saddle for a good half mile until out of sight. We're leaning over the course side barricade for close viewing. After all racers start, we went to a crowded bar in Gaillac jammed with French watching the big screen until Lance finished. He started last since he had the yellow jersey. Every French person I met was very friendly and helpful.



#### Day 4 – July 19

Rode from Carcassonne hotel onto TDF course of Stage 13 for 38 miles. Stopped for a TDF course-ride picnic and ride by viewing. The riders were preceded by a long parade of sponsor floats traveling at high speeds. The breakaway group of 8 was 6 minutes ahead of Lance and the peloton. All passed by as our cameras fired away. Lance was well protected by the Posties.

#### Day 5 – July 20

Stage 14 – We climb Col du Peyrsourdes on the TDF course. It's hot again and there's some apprehension in the group as this is our first of 4 major climbs. Most of us rode to the summit. The fans were clapping and cheering as we rode by. You'd think we were in the TDF race. It's very crowded and chaotic at the top. The pageantry and enthusiasm are like our Superbowl.



While descending down to our group viewing and lunch spot I greet Frank and Gail Booth on their tandem. It was great seeing other Toledoans.

This was an exciting day prior to the climb:

- 1) Our bike trailer detached from the bus as we are leaving the hotel in the A.M. It rammed the rear of the bus shattering the large rear window. Our guides remained cool, check for bike damage and patch the window opening with cardboard and duct tape. ½ hour delay. Bikes, OK!
- 2) Bike trailer blows a tire en route to ride beginning. We exit

the highway and it catches fire. It takes 3 fire extinguishers to kill the flames and our threatened bikes are still OK. We had to leave the trailer and put the bikes in the bus.

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## Day 6 – July 21

### Stage 15 – My Most Memorable Day

We rode from the hotel to [Col du Tourmalet](#). This was the most challenging TDF climb of the trip with some 10+% grades. I made it to the top and descended down to our lunch and viewing spot in the mountain village of La Mongie. Lance and the peloton pass by bunched tightly. Here we saw the TDF Devil and company. I took a nap in the La Mongie hotel but awoke in time to see [Lance crash](#) and recover to win the stage over J. Ulrich on the big screen.

### The Bandit Ride –

After descending Col du Tourmalet just past the base a group of locals flew by and I caught a wheel. Bye Bye tour group! We're going 35+ mph and taking turns at the front – no gray hairs in this group other than yours truly. They



accepted me and smile as I took my short turn at the front. I was very enthused at being able to stay with their pace line.

However, I managed to get separated from my tour group.

After asking for directions to our departure point from 5 people, I got there as the bus left. So I went into a cycling museum and ask the attendant to call a taxi. It was a neat museum, he got the taxi, and I thanked him profusely. 50 Euros and 40 minutes later I return to the hotel. The exhilaration and French social contact of that 4 mile “Bandit Ride” were worth the extra Euros and time. I'd do it again any day. It was even fun talking with the female taxi driver, stumbling over my French.

Sometimes one has to make his own fun.

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## Day 7 – July 22

### TDF rest day

We rode from the hotel to the base of Hautacam. The climb was equivalent to Tourmalet, but shorter. Foggy the whole ride, but fun.

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## Day 8 – July 23

### Stage 16

We had an option of riding from the hotel in Lourdes to Pau for the Stage start or climbing [Col de Soulor](#) and missing the start. I chose the climb thinking there aren't any like this at home. This was the most scenic of the major climbs. We stopped at the summit for espresso, water and sandwiches. The photo opps.

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Were many and we all shared some fun stories. The descent down was a bit scary as the road was narrow with gravel. I was holding it down under 35 when John the guide flew by saying "Relax".

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## Day 9 – July 24

### Stage 17

We rode from our hotel in St. Emilion to Bordeaux and watched the stage finish. The ride was mostly flat for the first time. One person flattened and the guide told us we could go on if we wanted as he stayed to help with the tire tube change. Two of us worked together at 22-25 for the rest of the way into Bordeaux. We had day maps and they helped. The occasional rain and headwind didn't.

I was able to locate 50 meters from the finish line, again found myself leaning over the raceside barrier. They really flew by while out of the saddle. There was an outside big screen located about 50 feet to my right. It showed the racers approaching Bordeaux.

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## Day 10 – July 25

### Stage 18

We had the option of viewing the start and then either riding to a feed zone or transferring to Paris via high speed train. I chose the Paris transfer.



Our guides found a strategically placed café where we watched all the team busses roll in for the start. We also saw [Frankie Andreu](#), 9 time TDF finisher from Detroit, and [Robin Williams](#). I got Eric Zabel's autograph by hopping over the barricade.

My wife, Carol, had been in Paris with Paul Kozy's wife Marcia since the previous Sunday. We arrived in Paris at 5 P.M. Dinner was fancy at the [Hotel Raphael](#). It features rooftop dining with opposite views of the Arc de Triomphe and the Tour Eiffel. Both were illuminated at night.

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## Day 11 – July 26

### Stage 19

We had option of viewing the TT finish or riding with the locals on a closed cycling circuit. The circuit is similar to N.Y.'s Central Park. I chose riding with locals. [Kevin Livingston](#) joined us for a few laps and photos. He's a very nice young man and an early retiree. I got his autograph and photo with him and two of our guides.



Dinner was at the [Petrossian](#), Carol and I with 3 guys on our

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tour from California. Good food, Good wine, Great company.

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## Day 12 – July 27

Stage 20

We're part of 10,000 riders wearing our special [La Randonnee du Centenaire](#) jerseys who rode through Paris along the Champ-Elysees TDF finish route. This was to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the TDF.

Race viewing was from second floor balcony of the [Hotel de Crillon](#). However, most of us left the hotel with cameras, Sharpie pen, magazine for autographs and went through the team bus area to be race course side. I located at 450m and 300m from the finish for some great photos. The breakaway group formed early. They were out of the saddle even at the 300m mark on the final sprint!

I got [Jan Ullrich's](#) autograph and photo this day. He was very nice to young kids.

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## Day 13 – July 28

Returned home

Summary –

I'm sure I forgot to include some stuff. Paul Kozy took over 5000 digital photos. Most of mine, 2 digits less than his, are on video tape. I'll try to attach some if I can.

[VeloSport Vacations](#) is a good tour company and I'd go again. Maybe I'll go next year for Lance's 6<sup>th</sup>!

This was my first visit to France and first cycling tour. It was great, especially the "Bandit Ride".

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