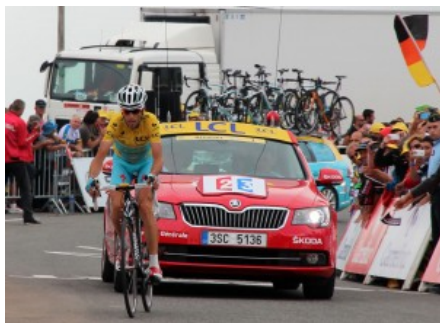


The Days Are Just Packed!



Kevin sporting his new shades at the 50 meters-to-go line on the Hautacam. We had some of the best seats in the house today!



Nibali winning the Hautacam stageKevin's having the time of his life here at the Tour de France; today we had an "easy" 42 mile day in which we rode up the HC (beyond category) Hautacam climb and found the perfect viewing spot right on the 50 meter line! Pretty amazing to pull that off. Best part about it is that we were surrounded by huge TV screens, so for once, we knew everything that was going on in the race, including Chris Horner briefly attacking the Yellow Jersey group... briefly because Nibali quickly bridged up to him and flew on past.



American TeeJay looking for every secondToo bad it was really gray up on top, so despite having a fantastic location for photos, things didn't turn out as planned. Since a good photographer never blames his equipment, I'll tell you that it would have helped to have a powerful flash, and let you conclude for yourself what my photographic skills are. :-)

There was a downside to having close to the best seats in the house. They held us up at the top for over an hour, while they emptied out all the press, all the team cars, even the caravan. Which of course meant that, when we finally did get to descend, we were fighting it out with a zillion cars all the way down.



Kevin flying the PMU flag on the way "home" to Lourdes after the stage. That was today, our final day in Lourdes, as tomorrow we head on the train to Bergerac for the time trial. Assuming of course that our train isn't one of the many being affected by a work slowdown.

Yesterday was a bit more... interesting. We had met up with a group of men & women from Bath (England) spending a couple weeks here for the Tour de France and cycling in general. We rode with them out to the Pla d'Adet stage, over the Col d'Aspin, that mountain with the insane descent that you really could go 60mph on, if you're crazy. One of the group from Bath was, perhaps, a bit crazy... I'm heading down the hill as fast as I feel comfortable, with Kevin a bend or two ahead of me, round a curve and see something I've seen before... cars suddenly stopped, cyclists at the side of the road, green jacket on the ground. My first thought is oh no, Kevin went boom. No, it was Kate, from Bath, who over-cooked a corner and went down hard, cracking her helmet, breaking her shoulder blade and dislocating her arm. Ouch. Thankfully someone from Thomson Tours was coming down in a van not far behind her, and took her into town to the doctor. She'll be fine, but a bit bruised and sore for awhile.

As for seeing the stage on the Pla d'Adet, the 60-minute diversion meant that we couldn't ride up the hill, so we hiked up a super-steep side path and then walked about 3k up. We actually found a really good spot for taking photos, which I'll get around to posting soon.

1:15am right now, so I'd better sign off, and maybe get through a bunch of photos and videos to post on the train to Bergerac.

But overall, this has been by-far the most-challenging set of rides we've done in France, and at the end of each day you're left wondering, do you really have anything left for the next? But as soon as you get on the bike and start riding, that feeling goes away completely and you realize you're just getting stronger every day. I could get used to this, but Tuesday I kinda need to be back at the shop and let Becky have a day off. --Mike--