

CHRIS FROOME

As surging crowds spilled onto the winding road up Mont Ventoux, hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous 'Maillot Jaune', spectators may have been surprised to see Tour leader Chris Froome run past on foot, determined to get to the top of the climb by any means possible after his bike was damaged in a crash.

This summer, British rider Froome won his third Tour de France title, a trio he completed in just 4 years and one which saw him join a very select list of multiple Tour winners.

But the 31-year-old's victory in the 2016 edition wasn't without its challenges – not least being forced to run up one of the most iconic climbs in cycling without his bike.

The Tour de France is won over 3 weeks of racing in July. The victory, though, was a result of season-long focus by the rider and his team, Team Sky.

We sat down with Chris Froome at the Vuelta a España to talk training, nutrition, and what went through his mind that day on Mont Ventoux.



2016
Runner-up in the Vuelta a España

2016
Olympic bronze in the Time Trial

2016
Won his third Tour de France

2016
First place in the Critérium du Dauphiné

2015
Won the Tour De France a second time

2015
First place in the Critérium du Dauphiné

2014
Won the Tour de Romandie

2013
Claimed his first Tour de France victory

2013
First place in the Critérium du Dauphiné

2013
Winner of the Tour de Romandie

2012
Won Olympic Bronze in the Time Trial

2012
Second place finish in the Tour de France

2011
Finished runner up in the Vuelta a España

2007
Turned professional, signing for South African team Konica Minolta

How much training do you do each year and how does this change in the lead up to major races like the Tour de France?

Our training programmes are structured around our specific races and goals for the year.

One of the big things that has changed in recent years is the idea of the off-season. The race calendar has expanded and riders have different goals spread across the year, so it's not a case of training and racing into form over the first few months of the year.

We work with Team Sky's Head of Athlete Performance, Tim Kerrison, to ensure we reach our performance peak at the right time, and everything is built around this.

So, this year, I started by riding the Herald Sun Tour in Australia and the Volta Catalunya but after those races my focus was on training in



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Tenerife with the main group of riders who would be riding the Tour de France. With the Tour as my primary target, I really began my race programme in April, riding the Liege-Bastogne-Liege one-day race, the Tour of Romandie and then winning the Criterium du Dauphine. These are important races in their own right, but my race schedule is designed so that I reach my peak for the Tour. The way I have prepared this year has been slightly different, though, as I have looked to peak slightly later – maintaining form through the Tour, then into the Olympics and onto the Vuelta a España.

In order to cope with high training loads it is necessary to pay close attention to recovery. Which recovery strategies do you rely on most?

Good nutrition forms a huge part of rider recovery



Image left: Chris Froome during stage 3 of the Tour of Oman in 2013.

Image right: Froome alongside race leader Nairo Quintana on stage 20 of the 2016 Vuelta a España.

Image right below: Chris Froome celebrates on the podium after winning the 2016 Tour de France.

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A good nutritional programme forms a huge part of rider recovery – so just making sure I eat in a way that supports my training and that I get the right balance of protein and carbs.

We have massages after rides and use compression garments immediately after big efforts, and make sure we have good quality sleep.

Sleep is another area where the team has paid a lot of attention and really led the way. Staying in different hotels on races every night obviously doesn't promote good sleep and recovery, so Team Sky were the first to take our own mattresses to each hotel during the race. It's a big effort but one that ensures that we have a more consistent environment every night. It's something that a lot of other teams do now. We also take our own air treatment units to each hotel, including mobile air conditioning units and humidifiers. A lot of our training takes place at our camps in Tenerife and that's a good place for rest and recovery. We stay in a small hotel near the top of a volcano, so there aren't too many distractions!

Getting ill when training or racing must be quite a worry for you. What steps do you take to reduce your chance of becoming ill?

It's something we pay a lot of attention to as a team. When we're in our own environment, such as a training camp, you can control more and try to do everything to avoid illness. At races, though, we really preach the importance of simple things like hand hygiene. If you're signing a lot of autographs and shaking hands all the time, you increase your risk of picking up an illness, so we take steps to avoid this, like using our own pens and making sure all staff use hand sanitizers.

Generally, though, it's just about common sense – making sure to avoid high risk situations, sleeping and eating well.

Do you use any particular nutritional strategies when you are training? What about when you are racing?

Good nutrition plays an increasingly important role in performance and it's something the team puts a huge amount of work into. We have our own chefs, who travel with us on races and prepare food for us in our mobile kitchen truck, as well as our Head Nutritionist James Morton, who helps devise specific nutrition strategies for each individual rider.

I sometimes train with low carb availability to promote training adaptations, but I need to make sure to maintain high protein intake. Obviously weight is a hugely important factor for pro cyclists, but you also need to make sure you fuel well for the high-intensity efforts.



Consistency really is key – from your environment through to your equipment



What would you usually eat during a hard mountain stage during the Tour de France?

Breakfast is a mix of carbohydrate options, including porridge, pasta, rice, quinoa, assorted breads, plus vegetable and fruit juices. We're encouraged to ensure high protein intake at breakfast through foods such as eggs, Greek yogurt and smoked salmon. We sometimes have some carbohydrate snacks while travelling, such as bananas or protein bars. During the race, we then refuel on a mix of homemade rice cakes and bespoke products including bars and gels. We have outstanding chefs who ensure that our evening meal tastes great, looks great and does what we need it to do – provide plenty of carbohydrates to replenish energy and plenty of protein for recovery.

Last year in the Vuelta a España, you sustained an injury to your foot – how did that happen? How long did it take to get back on the bike following this? Did you follow any particular rehabilitation programme?

It was one of those crashes where it didn't necessarily look very spectacular, but I knew immediately that it could end my race. The crash was in the first few kilometres and I managed to get to the end of the stage, but I was diagnosed with a fractured foot, so that was the end of my race and my season.

I was off the bike for 4 weeks. In terms of recovery, it was just avoiding weight bearing, using a walking boot and a bone stimulator to promote fracture healing. The injury meant that I missed the World Championships last year, but as the Vuelta a España falls towards the end of the season I didn't miss any of my other major targets and was able to turn my attention to getting ready for 2016.

During this year's Tour de France you were brought off your bike by a crash near the top of Mont Ventoux. What went through your mind at the time?

Mont Ventoux is one of the most iconic climbs in cycling and it always throws up surprises. Obviously this year was no different! The race finish had been moved further back down the mountain due to high winds and it was also a public holiday in France, so the crowds in the final few kilometres were enormous. Myself, Richie Porte and Bauke Mollema were riding behind a camera motorbike when it just came to a sudden halt in the middle of the road. The crowds were so big that it seems like the motorbikes just couldn't get through. We piled into the back of the motorbike and all three of us crashed.

My bike was broken by a following police motorbike but the crowds were so big that the team car, which had my spare, couldn't get near me. So my instinct was to just start running. I was looking back



for the team car but it was one of the race neutral service cars that reached me first. They gave me a bike, but it was the wrong size and the pedals weren't compatible with my cleats, so that was no good. The team car made its way through to me and gave me my spare bike, which I rode for the final kilometre to the finish.

Obviously there was a lot of activity at the finish line with the crowds and TV cameras, but as a team it was actually pretty incredible how focused we were. The first thing I did was to jump straight on to my turbo trainer, which was set up at the finish for me, and begin my warm down. The next day's stage was the first individual time trial, which we knew was going to be crucial to the outcome of the race. In those circumstances I think you can waste a lot of energy charging around looking for race officials, but I was confident that the race officials would see that it was an exceptional set of circumstances that were out of my control. Thankfully, they agreed! It was a long wait, but I was given the same time as those I had been with when I crashed, which meant I kept the Yellow Jersey.

It wasn't until I was in the team car on the way back down the mountain when I saw all of the photos of me running up the mountain that I think it sunk in what an incredible moment it had been. There have been lots of photos mocked up of me in my Yellow Jersey racing Usain Bolt, running away from lions – all sorts. The guys in the team have been pretty quick to give me a hard time about it!



Image above: Froome sets off up Mont Ventoux on foot after his bike was damaged in a crash during stage 12 of the Tour de France, 2016.

Image left: Chris Froome battles the cold and Spanish riders Joaquim Rodriguez and Alberto Contador on the ascent of Vallter 2000 during the 2014 Volta a Catalunya.





Image: Froome on the start line of the Men's Individual Time Trial at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

You have been a member of Team Sky during your most successful years. What makes them such a great team to ride for?

I've been with the team since it started in 2010 and Team Sky have been fundamental to my success so far. Everything the team does is focused on supporting the riders and giving us the best chance of winning. One of things that sets us apart is a commitment to continuous improvement – the team are always looking at where the next advantage can be found and where we can build on our success and that's huge in keeping everybody motivated.

I always say this when we announce the team line-ups for Grand Tour races, but it's genuinely an incredible feeling to go into races as the team leader knowing you're being supported by some of the best bike riders in the world.

I'm proud to ride for a team that has shown that you can win the biggest bike races in the world clean.

What is the ideal team doctor for you? What are the essential skills he would have?

There is a lot of crossover between sports medicine and sports science – especially in cycling – and so ideally a team doctor will have knowledge of both of those areas.

It's a unique job as when you're on a race it is so fast moving but, to be honest, a lot of it comes down to building personal relationships. Cycling teams spend a lot of time with each other on the road and in hotels and you need to be able to get on with each other. It's a balance of knowing when to help and when to leave a rider alone. We're lucky to have a great group of doctors at Team Sky – they all have very different personalities but ultimately they are all very easy to talk to and they work well as part of the group.

What do you see as the role of the physiotherapist within a professional cycling team?

There are the professional parts of their work, such as massage, helping to prevent injuries or discomfort when riding; and working closely with the medical team and carers. But you spend a lot of time with the physio and carers getting massages after stages and during training, so again it comes down to being able to understand individual riders, their personalities – when to keep quiet and play some music and when to try and cheer us up!

You spend a large amount of time away from your family when you are at races or training camps – how do you and your family cope with this? What do you like to do when you are away from cycling?

Thankfully in this day and age we have Skype and Facetime, so I speak to and see my family at least once a day.

I love watersports, fishing, scuba-diving and generally being in the outdoors.

The things you do immediately after the stage are just as important as what you do during it

Do you follow any injury prevention strategy?

Consistency really is key – from your environment through to your equipment. So, we make sure that the set-up is identical between the different bikes we use, no sudden changes in training load, and no big changes in riding position or equipment choice. I also follow a core and stretching program throughout the year.

You sometimes race in conditions that are deemed by the press as “dangerous for the athletes health”. Did you ever have the feeling at a race that if you continue that particular race under the given conditions, it would have impaired your health?

We do race in extreme conditions at both ends of the scale. That’s really the nature of a race programme that stretches pretty much across the whole year and is so geographically diverse. I raced the Liege-Bastogne-Liege one-day classic race in Belgium in pretty brutal conditions. It snowed throughout the day and in conditions like that, when you’re on the bike all day, you really do need the best clothing to keep warm.

At the other end of the scale, in races like the Tour de France and Vuelta a España, you can be racing in extremely hot temperatures and hydration is absolutely crucial. As a team we have our own protocols for days like that, where we will have staff go ahead of the race along the course, ready to hand out bottles to the riders. The

stage when I took Yellow at the Tour de France this year was a good example of a day like that.

In both hot and cold weather the things that you do immediately after the stage are just as important as what you do during it. Whether that’s hydrating properly immediately after the stage or getting into warm clothing, it’s crucial to avoiding illness.

I make no secret of the fact that I prefer riding in hot weather, but adapting to rain and the cold is part of bike racing. The UCI have their own Extreme Weather Protocol in place now so they can cancel or change the route of a race if the weather is too much of a risk to the riders. Rider safety has to come first so it’s right this is taken seriously.

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Image: Chris Froome celebrates with his Team Sky teammates after winning the 2015 Tour de France.