

Dave Sims' Chopper

Last year, Dave rode the *Étape du Tour* on a Raleigh Chopper. This year he attempted all 21 stages on one. **Dan Joyce** spoke to him



On 2 July, two days before the Tour de France professionals rolled down the start ramp in Utrecht, Dave Sims was riding his own time trial around the Dutch city. He had a skinsuit, an aero helmet... and a Raleigh Chopper. Three weeks later, he and his Chopper were on the Champs Élysées, having ridden 18 of the Tour's 21 stages.

Why? For charity. He was raising money for Help for Heroes. 'I met a Paralympian on Sa Calobra in Majorca,' he said. 'She had handcycled up it on this amazing piece of kit. She mentioned that her bike was partly funded by Help the Heroes. I thought: wow!'

He had the Chopper from the year before, when he'd done the *Étape du Tour* (see *Cycle Dec-Jan*). 'No one thought I would even finish the *Étape*. But I did it. I thought: next year I'm going to do the whole thing.'

Dave is a fit cyclist. He's a qualified mountain bike coach who does century rides on road on a 29er. 'As well as raising money for charity, my Tour de France ride

was an attempt to show cyclists that it's not all about the bike, but the engine that powers it.'

His three-week Tour began well. The Raleigh Redline tyres might have been 'like treacle' at times, but were fine hammering over the pavé in Belgium. He completed a 138-mile stage at an average of 15mph. Later, his luck changed.

'I had to abandon on stage 14 after damaging my Achilles. It was either go home or get it fixed. I rang Fran Millar, Dave Brailsford's PA. Team Sky knew about the project as they were following me on Twitter! Fran sorted out some physio and I met the squad. Sir Dave went round the car park on my Chopper bike. He loved it.'

Descending mountain passes was the most difficult part of Dave's Tour. 'On the Chopper, anything above 30mph is hard with hairpin bends. You've got to get the line in spot on and get the braking done before the corner. If you brake with that tiny front wheel, you get really bad understeer.'

Despite this, Dave cited the handling as his favourite thing about the bike. 'It's terrible but it's what makes the Chopper what it is.'

"You've got to get the line into bends spot on and get the braking done before the corner"

I've learned how to ride that bike – descending, climbing, cornering. I never fell off during my Tour, unlike the professionals.'

Dave made a few changes to the Chopper for practical reasons. He fitted his own saddle. 'I changed the seatpost as well, because it's a kid's bike and I'm 5ft 11in. A mate who's an engineer made me a solid steel seatpost. It weighs a lot but it was the only post long enough that didn't flex.'

He fitted an 8-speed hub instead of the 3-speed, a bigger crankset, and better brake pads. He also took a back-up bike, a red Chopper that became his mountain stage bike. 'The red one was less twitchy on descents. Its headset was less worn.'

For more, visit teamchop.co.uk.



Tech spec: Dave Sims' TdF Chopper(s)

MODEL: Mk3 Raleigh Chopper **PRICE:** £100 secondhand, plus upgrades **WEIGHT:** 15.9kg **FRAME AND FORK:** aluminium frame, steel fork **WHEELS:** 16in front, 20in rear, with original Raleigh Redline tyres at 3.5bar **TRANSMISSION:** 170mm 46T chainset (instead of 152mm 44T), Sturmey-Archer 8-speed hub gear with twistgrip shifter **BRAKING:** V-brakes front and rear **STEERING & SEATING:** Steel Apehanger handlebar (670mm wide, 330mm rise), steel 25.4mm stem, own saddle, solid steel seatpost **EQUIPMENT:** mudguards, bottle cage, rusty horn, spokey-dokeys

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