

Escape Collective - Holly's Original Questions*

**In general these questions refer to both the men's and women's pelotons.*

Names of Teams and Marketing

- There are lots of product logos on the bikers' kits that aren't the same as their team name, so presumably these are also sponsors but aren't committing the majority of the funding. Is that right?
- Also, if a team has multiple main sponsors, does the one that contributes the most get first billing? For example, did Jumbo give more than Visma? Is Visma providing more than Lease-a-Bike? If not, who decides what comes first?
- How much input do the companies that sponsor the teams have in the life of the team? Like can the CEO of Lidl say "Fire that Guillio Ciccone. I don't like the cut of his jib."?
- How do teams maintain their "brand" when there is a major shift like Sky to Inneos?
- What is Grenadiers? Is that a beverage?
- Does all the advertising work? Does the stock value of Alpecin go up during the Tour? How do companies measure the impact of their sponsorship?
- What is the point of caffeinated shampoo? Does it make your scalp tingle with anticipation?
- What's the longest team name ever?
- Are team names misleading ever?
- Do cyclists ever refuse to consider riding for a team that is sponsored by a shady entity or do they just take the work they can get?
- Patrick Lefevre is French Oscar the Grouch. Not a question.
- How often do team names change and does it happen at a particular time of year? (How was I, a newb, supposed to make the shift from Jumbo Visma to Visma Lease-a-Bike? No one told me this was happening. I just woke up one June morning and bam! Also, can we agree that Lease-a-Bike seems like a kind of rinky dink name for a big team?)
- Do announcers have to use the full team name? Like can they just call the team "Lotto" instead of "Lotto Dstny"? As in "There's a Lotto rider moving up the front..." I suppose there's no way for anyone to penalize the announcers, but is the idea that they are supposed to use the whole name no matter what?
- Does it matter if they use the anglicized version (like AG2R vs Ah, Jzhe, Deux, Er)?
- I understand that it's a form of product advertising, but am I the only one who thinks it's bizarre to give a professional cyclist who has won a stage of a World Tour—essentially a modern-day gladiator—a stuffed animal? Imagine if an American football team won a major game on the way to the Super Bowl and afterward they all stood on the field and waved while officials came up and gave them a box of crayons.

Names of Cyclists and other Terminology

- Do the announcers get a pronunciation key for the cyclists' names? If so, where can the rest of us get one?

- Is there some rider whose name is getting repeatedly slaughtered and does he or she have any way to help the announcers get it right?
- Why is a water bottle called a bidon?
- When you are talking about the Tour de France and you are not from France is it better to call it France or Frahnce?
- I have heard some people (including commentators) refer to Tour de Frances instead of Tours de France. Even as a newbie I know better than that. Why are they doing that?
- There are misheard song lyrics and then there is misheard race jargon. What misunderstandings did the folks who are now seasoned fans have back when they were newbies like me? An example – and to be clear, I 100% knew it wasn't correct: "Trois, deux, un...SUPER FEEEEEET!" at the start of each stage.

All the Different Races

- A lot of newbies start by being aware of the men's Tour de France then find the Tour de Femme. As time goes by we hear about the Vuelta and Giro. But if you start listening to podcasts or even paying attention to what the announcers are saying about riders during race coverage, you soon start hearing of other races. Rider X was injured in Liege Bastogne? What is Liege? This other guy won the Tour of the Basque Country? Who knew that was a thing?
- Who sets up all these races?
- Which of these races are most popular?
- What is a "crit" race?
- European roads are narrow and twisty with lots of blind turns. How do riders train without getting killed?
- Gravel? Cobbles? Why?
- Cyclocross, BMX, road...Is an industry with so many offshoots financially viable? How? (By contrast, with tennis, you have men's and women's singles, doubles, and mixed doubles...that's it.)
- Sometimes cycling journalists talk about going out and riding part of a stage before the race starts. How does that work?

Kits, Numbers, and Fashion -

- Why do they have to change colors every year?
- Is it true you can't have a kit color that closely resembles one of the race sponsor's colors?
- Can you make an annual EC game where we vote kits up or down and see which are the big winners and losers?
- Why do the cyclists use safety pins to put their numbers on every day and doesn't that damage their tiny little suits?
- I heard that for each team the leader gets a number that ends in 1, so what happens if it's not clear who the leader is going to be, like when Jumbo Visma had both Jonas and Primoz?

- Also re the race numbers, I heard that the numbers are assigned by place from the previous year. What numbers are given to people who weren't in the previous year's race?
- When did EF choose pink as its signature color and why? Do the cyclists like standing out?
- Do cyclists care what their kits look like/what color they are?
- Who invented those cycling caps with the brims that flip up? Do they have any purpose?

Rider Safety and Health - Physical and Mental

- When a group of riders (especially in a sprint finish) comes across the line very fast and one throws up his arms in victory, how do the others avoid crashing into him/her? Has such a crash ever happened?
- The riders have to be skinny to be fast in the mountains, but if they don't eat enough they won't have energy to ride. Some look emaciated. It seems like it's taboo to discuss eating issues in the peloton, and I don't want to stir up controversy. But what I don't really understand is why they can't eat whatever they want in the evenings given how many calories they are burning every day?
- In some scenes in Unchained, directors sportif struggle to work with riders who are not delivering a good performance. For example, in the second season, we see Ben O'Connor falling behind in the GC, putting out average performances by his standards. He seems confused and scared by his inability to do his best. He yells into his radio, clearly trying to signal his fears and the DSe's response is just to be frustrated with him like he's a toddler. Jack Haig, in his podcast, talks about having had a long stretch of under-performance and how he had to work through it both physically and mentally. Why don't the teams utilize sports psychologists along side their doctors? Or do they? In many other sports we are seeing the taboo of mental health being addressed. Why isn't mental health care a priority in cycling? Or is it?
- Why don't the cyclists unionize so they can collectively bargain for some basic things like having racing suspended when it gets too hot? If they have a union, is there a way to make it stronger given how uneven the pay is from rider to rider?
- Obviously there is teamwork to be done throughout every stage of every race, but it looks like there is also a lot of time just pedaling. What do the riders think about during all those hours? Even the beautiful scenery can't possibly be so exciting day after day.
- Sometimes the cyclists hop up from a crash like a cartoon character springing back to life after falling off a cliff or being hit with an anvil. How are they able to do that? The two times I have crashed I was a mess. The adrenaline wore off after a few minutes and I was dizzy, sick, and hurting, not going anywhere.
- Is the feeling that a regular person gets from exerting maximum effort during sport training different from the feeling that a pro cyclist gets when they push their hardest? I.e. Is the feeling I get that I'm going to die if I go any harder different from how a pro cyclist feels when they hit their limit even though their overall physical output is monumentally higher than mine? Are we both having the same mental and physical sensation of our outer limits?

- Among the riders, if you did an anonymous survey, which DS's encouragement style is the one they like best? Do they want just a steady stream of "allez, allez, allez"? Do they want to be told they are a motorbike? What are the things the DSs say that actually motivate them?
- Do cyclists have to take out any kind of special medical insurance? Do the teams cover the cost of medical care after crashes in countries that don't have universal healthcare?
- Thibaut Pinot mentioned his balls aching in the second season of Unchained. Even on my long rides (which are microscopic by pro cyclists' standards), I use chamois cream to protect my bits. Are there creams or other protection that cyclists –in both the men's and women's pelotons—use to soothe their nether regions?
- Has injury to the privates ever caused someone to have to quit a race?
- Is it true that levels of testicular cancer are higher among men's pro cyclists?
- Sometimes cyclists take their sunglasses off while riding and some seem to prefer not to wear them at all. Are they not concerned with getting bugs or debris in their eyes? (I once biked through a swarm of gnats during a triathlon. I spent the next 15 miles weeping and trying to wipe gnats out of my eyes).
- How many bugs per day do cyclists swallow? Do they care?
- Has any cyclist ever choked from inhaling a bug?

Diversity and Lack Thereof

- Are there any women directors sportif for men's teams? What's life like for them?
- Are there any out LGBTQ+ riders in the men's or women's pelotons? What's life like for them? What's life like for the ones who *aren't* out?
- It seems like there is a lot of masculine anxiety in the peloton. Is that correct? Who is most comfortable with their masculinity?
- Does everyone in the cycling community tacitly understand that there are queer elements to that sport—that obviously don't mean most cyclists are gay—but which almost any queer person (or any person) would note?
- Why are there so few racial and ethnic minorities represented in the peloton?
- If there are Muslim women cyclists, is there a way for them to wear hijab and modest dress safely while riding?
- It seems like there is a pretty significant gender gap where cycling enthusiasm is concerned. Is that true, and if so why is that? Can you get a sense of how significant it is based on EC memberships?

Team Radios

- How do the radio earpieces work? Do the signals get weaker if the cyclists go over a mountain and the team car is still on the other side? How far out do they work?
- How clear are the radios? Especially when a DS is using a language that is not the primary one of the riders, wouldn't a fuzzy signal cause more confusion?
- Do all the riders hear what the DS is saying to another teammate? Can the riders on a team communicate directly to one another without everyone else having to hear?

- Can any team (or journalist) listen in to any other team's radio by just shifting channels like on a HAM radio? If so, can't DSe's just eavesdrop on any other team's plans? Do teams have to use codes the way pitchers and catchers use signals in baseball? If so, what are some of the codes?
- In this year's Tour de Femmes one of the riders left her teammate in a crash and won the stage because she didn't go back. She said her radio stopped working and she assumed her teammate already had support, but it seems like a lot of race insiders and journalists thought that was more of an excuse than a legit explanation for a self-serving move. From an outsider's perspective it seemed like a totally reasonable explanation, but that may be because we just don't get how the radios work. Is it unusual for them to stop working? Should she have been obliged to go back even if it wasn't working, because that's the job? Wasn't it worth it for the team's overall profile to get a stage win? Obviously, she couldn't have known that her teammate was going to lose the race by 4 seconds in the end. I imagine that made her feel bad.
- Sometimes riders take their earpiece out so they can concentrate and avoid distraction. Is that right? Do they mainly do it if they are near the end of a stage?
- Ronan said it is safer to have radios so the team cars can know where to go if someone has a crash, but from most of the history of bike racing they didn't exist. What was that like? How did it shift the nature of racing? When did it come about?
- I don't get how the team car caravan works. It's a long string of cars and there is a lot of honking but not a lot of room to pass if one team needs to get past another team's cars to a fallen rider. Can they use their radios to ask the other cars in front of them to make way?
- Can a rider draft behind the caravan to hop back into the peloton after a crash or mechanical? The rules seem inconsistent.
- Side note: Caley was right when he said in the Unchained Binge that a lot of people might not know what a "peloton" is which is why it made sense for Netflix not to use the direct translation ("Heart of the Peleton") for the show title. I knew, but my wife didn't. Also, "Unchained" sort of sounds like the term "off the chain" like when a party is really good. To an insider, it might sound like it's a broken bike. To an outsider, it may sound cool. Just a thought.

Race Logistics and Rules

- Who decides which stage is the "Queen's Stage"? Is it the amount of elevation + overall distance or is there an alternate calculation? Is it subjective?
- How do the commissaires have enough information to know who to give penalties to at the end of each day? How can they know every bit of debris that was thrown and every pee taken in the wrong place as there's no video camera on every cyclist all day long?
- Is there a team presentation at the start of every stage?
- How early do the teams start booking hotels for each stage race? Does it start right after the stages are announced? Do they hire someone specifically to handle these kinds of logistics? Do any hotels give certain teams first dibs?

- Does having a stage of the tour run through your town, or start/end in it, do more good than harm? i.e. The tourism dollars might be helpful, but having a massive circus pass through town could be destructive to roads and facilities.
- Do towns vie to have the Tour stop in them? What's the protocol for that?
- How do the World Tour race organizers (or any tour, really) get thousands of kilometers of roads shut down day after day? There are towns near me that used to host half marathons and have now canceled them because they can't afford to close down roads for so long and can't hire enough security to monitor the race. Do the race organizers put up detour signs every day? Is it just a cultural difference that Europeans don't mind having roads closed?
- Who decides what the wild card/invited teams will be for each of the World Tour races each year?
- When someone gets "bonus seconds" at the end of a stage does that mean that a certain number of seconds is subtracted from his or her overall time or that the seconds are added to everyone else's? The use of the word "bonus" in this context makes no sense to me.

Team Dynamics, Specific Cyclists, and EC Opinions

- Which team makes the most effort to develop team bonds? What do they do to facilitate it?
- What's it like to be one of the guys in the peloton who is an excellent domestique but no one has ever heard of? Does that kind of cyclist exist, or have all of them had to work so hard to get there that anyone who is a serious fan knows who they are?
- Do any of the teams or riders do charity work? Which things do they support?
- Who are the smartest riders in the peloton in terms of academic accolades?
- Who are the smartest/sneakiest in terms of race strategy? (Are they the same as the ones from the previous question?)
- Which cyclists are fluent in the most languages?
- Which is the most boring team in the peloton?
- Who is the nicest DS and does his/her team do very well, or do nice guys finish last?
- What is the average age of retirement for cyclists?
- What are the most common things that cyclists do after they retire (besides throw croissants in rivers like Thibaut Pinot)?
- Who is your favorite cyclist of all time and favorite current cyclist, and why?
- Have they ever made a "Sexiest Men of the Peloton" calendar, and who made/did not make the cut? That question comes from my neighbor, Aimee, who has put up with my cycling chatter for months even though she really doesn't care.
- If you could have one road racing skill at which you were one of the best in the world—climbing, sprinting, time trialing etc.--which would it be? Why?

Fans and Hooligans

- Some Tour fans seem to be completely nuts. Is the reason they can be so drunk and disorderly because it's just not possible to police every part of the course and getting drunk is a good way to pass the time?
- I heard the guy throwing Bugles at the cyclists was arrested at the 2024 Tour. What were the charges? What happens to people who harass or harm the riders? Are there different ordinances depending on the location?
- What's with the bananas?
- People ask me if I'd ever want to go see a stage of the Tour. I think the answer is yes, but I don't know. Unless you follow the Tour around in a camper van for days so you can see the peloton go by multiple times, I'm not sure it's worth it. I don't understand why anyone would hike to a remote location to stand there for hours so that they can see cyclists whoosh by at 45 kpm/ 28 mph for 20 minutes.
- Is it worth it? Why?
- Do people hike up to steep places because they know the cyclists won't go by as fast?
- Is there any way for racers to practice riding through crowds? Is there a simulation they can do, like a wind tunnel, to get used to the mayhem?
- Are there repercussions for motos that get in the way of the cyclists?
- Do the crowds force riders to take lines they wouldn't if they had more room on the road?
- Are the riders too out of breath to yell at the hooligans?
- Has a cyclist ever gotten off their bike and gotten in a fight with an unruly fan?
- Is it worth it for Haribo to have so many give-aways at the Tour?
- Do most people just watch the last 50k or so of each stage on TV or do die-hard fans somehow make enough time to watch the stages from start to finish? I think the vast majority of newbies just watch the ends of stages.
- How much do newbies annoy people who are long-term, die-hard cycling fans? Like, is a newbie pod bound to set off a firestorm of irritation?
- Have you ever watched a stage of the Tour while riding inside on a trainer? Is that a thing, or did I just make up a new cycling nerd pastime?
- If a cyclist prefers a type of bike that is not the one that the team uses, do they train on the team bike for consistency when they are home, or do they just use their own? (This may be my own tech question).

Commentators and Journalists

- How do the commentators think of things to say for hours and hours per day when a lot of the stages have some really slow segments?
- How do commentators avoid speaking over one another?
- In my Vuelta viewing the male commentator kept correcting the female commentator. His responses were given in a polite tone but it was awkward. It felt like she was set up to be the one asking questions and getting things wrong. Wouldn't they prefer to hire someone like me who literally has no clue rather than being insulting to a competent host? (I don't mean actual me—as I cannot keep up conversation for hours and hours for days on end—but someone new to the sport).

- Why don't they put a chyron on the bottom of the television screen that tells you who the commentators are and what their qualifications are? The qualifications don't have to be being pro cyclists. Being pro journalists would give them lots of credibility.
- Is there a way for the commentators to communicate with the camera operators on the motos to let them know that they're taking footage of people having nature breaks? (Spotted while perusing obscure race footage on Max. Tour of Elf-something?)
- Based on the EC TdF daily pod the journos are given space to work in sweaty gymnasiums. Sometimes viewers can hear other commentators talking in the background. How close together is everyone seated?
- In one of the Unchained Binge episodes Kit notes that Seb Piquet has the information about 30 seconds ahead of what the passengers in the team cars see on their screens. How does he get the info ahead of everyone? How does he spot who has been caught up in a crash? Does his car pause beside the carnage and check it out? Isn't that dangerous? Doesn't he need to keep going to know what's going on ahead?
- How fast is Piquet's car (or any team car) allowed to go?
- Are the answers to my questions buried on Discord and I'm just too lazy to track them all down? (Note: I don't think the newbies are delving into the Discord, we're either too old, too busy, too unaccustomed to the format, or too intimidated by everyone else being so knowledgeable).
- How do the announcers figure out which rider is which from a helicopter shot?
- Why are the American announcers so much more bombastic than the international feed? I got a VPN and cycling media subscription just so I could enjoy the company of less irritating hosts. Every time Roche and McCrossan describe a church or gorge or whatever, I feel like I can maybe survive another day of international political mayhem. Meantime over on Max, those guys are always yelling about how much pain the riders are in, which is okay once or twice, but over and over and over...Ugh.
- Can we get American announcers to stop calling the Dauphine the "Dolphinay"?
- Does anyone give the cyclists media training?
- If, as a journalist, you could give a rider a piece of advice for how to handle a press interview, what would it be?
- Why does the guy who does the first big post-race interview for the World Tour races always make a statement instead of asking a question? Is that a European interviewing strategy? E.g. "You have just won a stage of a World Tour after falling eleven times during previous races this year. You have had a difficult time."

Holly's Rider Survey

What Do Cyclists Experience and Think?

I mentioned this in some earlier questions about what goes through the minds of the riders during the boring pedaling hours, and what kind of encouragement they prefer from their DSES, but I have a zillion more questions about their experience. Has a broad peloton survey already been done? For the women's peloton, too? Could EC put together a survey to gather some data

about their experiences and get it out to as many cyclists as possible (we could make one for the DSes, too)?

Holly's Rider Survey

Here are some sample questions:

- If you could ride for any team right now, which would you most want to be on? (You can choose your own team) [give a drop down list of teams - select one only]
 - What team sponsor do you wish you could have so you could get free samples of their products? _____
 - What do you think about most while cycling, when not focused on fueling, strategy, or other team needs? (multiple select)
 - A. My family
 - B. Side projects I do besides cycling
 - C. My future after cycling
 - D. Mathematical calculations about watts, aerodynamics, other race related measurements
 - E. What I will eat later
 - F. Team dynamics
 - G. Gear and marginal gains
 - H. I sing songs, recite mantras, or do other repetitive thought patterns
 - I. Movies, books, games or other distractions
 - J. I think about the pain in my body
 - K. Other: _____
 - What type of encouragement do you most prefer to receive from your DS during a race?
 - Repeated phrases like "allez, allez, allez!"
 - Telling me I'm brave, tough, able to handle the pain
 - Comparing me to a motorbike or other machine
 - Reminding me that I am going to crush the competition
 - Nothing. Peace and quiet is best. I'm already motivated.
 - Other: _____
 - Other than having physical challenges during a race, what discourages you most?
 - An angry or demeaning DS
 - Disagreements and frustrations between teammates
 - Bad sleep
 - Bad food
 - Missing family
 - Other: _____
 - What is your strongest motivator to continue as a cyclist?
 - Family
 - Friendships

- Money
 - Love of the sport
 - Other: _____
- Do you feel like you have close bonds and good team spirit with your team?
 - Yes
 - Somewhat
 - Not really
 - No
- Do you wish you had closer bonds and team spirit?
 - Yes
 - Somewhat
 - No
 - Don't care
- Have you ever gotten into a significant fight or disagreement with a teammate?
What happened?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being terrified and 1 being not worried at all, how much do you worry about your job security?
- Do you think you are adequately paid? (1-5)
- If you can't choose your own current position, what role would you prefer to have in a stage race?
 - GC rider
 - Domestique
 - Time trial specialist
 - Sprinter
- How do you feel about doing post-race interviews?
 - I dread them in every way
 - I dread them because I'll have to speak in multiple languages
 - I don't mind them, but they take too long
 - I secretly enjoy the attention
 - I love doing them
- Is there a question you wish journalists would ask you after a stage? (Short answer question)
- Presumably, you share a hotel room with a teammate during stage races. Is this your preference?
 - Yes. I like having a roommate to chat with.
 - No. Roommates can have different routines, be messy etc.
 - I'd rather have my own room, but I don't really care.
 - I don't care at all. No preference.
 - Other: _____
- Which staffer has the hardest job?
 - Team chef
 - Mechanic
 - Souigneur
- If you could have any DS from any team as your own, who would you want:

- Name _____ Team_____
- Why did you pick that person: _____
- Would you ever want to be a race commentator?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Probably not
 - Maybe
- What is the worst part of a stage race? _____
- Which of the following components of a race stage do you dread most?
 - Super steep climbs
 - Super steep descents
 - Long drags up
 - Long flats
 - Technical sections
 - Sections with lots of hooligans
 - Sections with boring scenery
 - Small towns with a lot of road furniture
 - Long, exposed bridges
- How many times have you had an injury that took 2-3 months to recover from fully?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4+
- How many times have you had an injury that took 3-6 months to recover from fully?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4+
- How many times have you had an injury that took 6+ months to recover from fully?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4+
- How long have you been a pro-cyclist?
 - 1-3 years
 - 4-5 years
 - 6-9 years
 - 10-15 years

- 15+ years

- Assuming your body holds up, at what age would you want to retire from cycling:

- Which is worse, extreme heat or extreme cold?
- How much does the death or life-threatening/altering crash of another rider disturb you? (1 to 5)
- Are there factors that have caused you to want to quit cycling? If so, what: _____
- Would you consider joining if the pro cyclists banded together to form a more powerful union that could use collective bargaining to negotiate for better conditions/pay/benefits etc.?
- Who is your all-time cycling hero?
- Do you have a cycling mentor or role model? (Who?)
- What's the best advice you've received about being a pro cyclist?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being certain it's happening and 1 being certain it's not, how likely do you think it is that doping is happening in the peloton?
- How much do you worry about your weight as a cyclist? With 1 being not worrying about it at all and 5 being worrying about it all the time.
- Do you believe you or a teammate suffers or has suffered from an eating disorder?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Probably
 - Other: _____
- How much pressure is put on you about your weight? (5 constant pressure, 1 no pressure)
- What do you love most about being a cyclist?
- If you had to choose a different career what would be your dream job?
- What job would you most like to do after cycling? _____
- Do you have any other thoughts about your experience as a cyclist that you'd like to share? _____
- If you are open to talking more about your experiences, please provide your name and contact info: _____

Note: I can think of many others or other ways to phrase these questions. There are plenty that could be trimmed out. These are just thoughts.