

FRENCH CYCLING

A SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL HISTORY



HUGH DAUNCEY

French Cycling

A Social and Cultural History

Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures

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HUGH DAUNCEY

French Cycling
A Social and Cultural History

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French Cycling: Issues and Themes

French Cycling: A Social and Cultural History aims to provide a balanced and detailed analytical survey of the complex leisure activity, sport and industry that is cycling in France. Identifying key events, practices, stakeholders and institutions in the history of French cycling, the volume presents an interdisciplinary analysis of how cycling has been significant in French society and culture since the late nineteenth century.

Structuring and writing this book has been rather challenging, principally because of the potentially vast scope of material and debate, given the multi-faceted nature of ‘cycling’, and indeed, the chronological range of the period during which cycling has been significant, in whatever ways and in whatever forms to individuals or groups of any kind, in France. It could be argued that providing a fully comprehensive and fully balanced treatment of cycling in France since, say, the 1870s would require a team of researchers, a multi-volume series and the best part of an academic lifetime! Based on the view that few publishers would accept such a project, the approach in this treatment has thus been necessarily selective. In the paragraphs that follow we explain the approach of the book, starting with the question: ‘What to do with the Tour de France?’

The Tour is cycling, but cycling is not just the Tour

A significant and recurring problem in planning and writing this book has been a cycling-related phenomenon that most people – if asked to say one thing they knew about cycling in France – would readily suggest as the obvious topic: the Tour de France. Everyone, in France and outside, knows about the Tour de France. This simple fact reflects its dominant centrality to, arguably, almost all French understandings of what cycling is, and is not. There is perhaps a tendency among some British and American experts on the sociology and socioeconomics of cycling to consider the Tour de France as – just – a race, and as one example among many of the specialized activity of cycling as competition, and professional, elite, commercialized competition at that. To the Anglo-American

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observer, it is perhaps too easy to see only the garish lycra clothing and the shameless cheating of a hundred or so professional riders advertising credit companies, flooring surfaces or hearing aids, and to miss, given that the UK and US have never had their own national tour, the wider sociocultural significance of the phenomenon not just as a race but as a shared experience for most French citizens that signifies much more than just spectatorship. Indeed, the Tour is sometimes seen as one of the keys to understanding French identity.

In a previous volume, co-edited with Geoff Hare in 2003 in celebration of the Tour's centenary, we attempted to provide a balanced overview of the history and meanings of the Tour de France, illustrating how this event is every year, and has been through the decades, much more than just a race (Dauncey and Hare, 2003). The Tour has provided a space and forum for the working out of debates over the nature of sport and competition; of professionalism and amateurism; of the nature of 'work' and relations between employers and employees; of the use and abuse by individuals of their own bodies; of the nature of business and organizations; of the creation of French and foreign heroes, champions and stars; and of the definition of the physical boundaries of France and the exploration of wider European relations. Overall, as the celebrated French cultural historian Georges Vigarello has so definitively demonstrated, it has become a 'national institution'. To quote just two excerpts from Vigarello in further support of the importance of the Tour de France to French society and culture and, by extension, to any study of cycling and society in France: in the introduction to his essay, 'Le Tour de France', Vigarello suggests that:

le Tour de France s'est enraciné dans les rituels nationaux. Une institution devenue si légitime, même, qu'elle semble être sans âge: un spectacle aux origines oubliées. C'est que l'épreuve est peut-être plus qu'une course, elle s'adresse à la conscience collective, aux références communautaires, autant qu'à la curiosité sportive. Elle joue avec la géographie, les provinces, les frontières. Elle met en scène un espace-nation, un décor fait du territoire lui-même. (1997: 3801)

And in his concluding flourish, he reminds the reader that:

Le Tour de France illustre, au fil des décennies, le passage d'une France des terroirs à une France du tourisme, le passage des pédagogies volontaristes aux pédagogies consummatoires, jusqu'au déplacement du sentiment national lui-même, et, sans doute aussi, sa décrispation. Le sport reste ici le produit d'une société autant qu'il en est, bien sûr, le fidèle reflet. (1997: 3828).

This excerpt only refers to the geographical symbolism and what might be termed the 'performativity' of the Tour in terms of 'beating the

bounds' (Campos, 2003) of the French national territory. The rest of Vigarello's analysis (first published in French in 1986) considers how the Tour has reflected and accompanied developments of all kinds in French society, culture and politics. Vigarello's treatment has seemed so comprehensive that it has arguably discouraged others from producing further analyses of the Tour.

The Tour, as an un-missable feature of contemporary French life, has also been used by French intellectuals not as a site of memory and thus as an instrument for understanding France, but as a prism for thinking about culture and society overall, generally through literature (and we shall touch on some of these interpretations in the following chapters). Most specifically, Roland Barthes' short study 'Le Tour de France comme épopée', in his celebrated *Mythologies* (1957), in which he deconstructs the semiotics of the Tour in the 1950s, can usefully be read alongside the more prosaic treatment of the post-war Tour given in this volume, or, indeed, the account of the love-hate relationship that has obtained between France and Lance Armstrong in the 2000s.¹ Whereas Vigarello deconstructs the meaning of the Tour for French society and culture, Barthes' perspective is focused more on revealing the intrinsic structures of thinking about the Tour itself:

Ce qui sauve le Tour du malaise de la liberté, c'est qu'il est par définition, *le monde des essences caractérielles*. [...] *Le Tour est un conflit incertain d'essences certaines*; la nature, les moeurs, la littérature et les règlements mettent successivement ces essences en rapport les unes avec les autres [...] le Tour est le meilleur exemple que nous ayons jamais rencontré d'un mythe total, donc ambigu; le Tour est à la fois un mythe d'expression et un mythe de projection, réaliste et utopique tout en même temps. [...] Ce qui est vicié dans le Tour, c'est la base, les mobiles économiques, le profit ultime de l'épreuve, générateur d'alibis idéologiques. Ceci n'empêche pas le Tour d'être un fait national fascinant, dans la mesure où l'épopée exprime ce moment fragile de l'Histoire où l'homme, même maladroit, dupé, à travers des fables impures, prévoit tout de même à sa façon une adéquation parfaite entre lui, la communauté et l'univers. (1957: 118–19)

As 'explanation' of the internal logics of competition and their discourses, Barthes provides another key to understanding the event; as a case-study of a 'mere' sporting event, it demonstrates the prominence of the Tour in French thought.

The Tour de France is thus essentially unavoidable in any study of cycling in France, but discussion of it has been kept to what is hoped will be an acceptable minimum, as the analysis overall examines all the meanings of cycling through the decades. Thus, for example, the Tour is considered in terms of what its creation in 1903 reveals about the role of cycling as a driver of professional sport and about the importance of

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cycle sport in developing the French media of the period. Considering the inter-war period, discussion of the Tour will analyse how ongoing debates about the Tour's conception of labour relations – the infamous treatment of riders as *forçats de la route* – reflected and informed wider ideological issues in French society.² The furore around the role of *L'Auto* during the Occupation and the celebratory nature of the first post-war Tour run in 1947 by *L'Equipe* as the purged replacement of *L'Auto* necessitates study of the Tour in the 1940s and 1950s, as the 'national institution' helped define the new France. As another new France was created by Gaullism in the 1960s after the change of Republic in 1958, Tour champions such as Jacques Anquetil reflected predominating social and cultural values and their roles will thus also be discussed, as will the Tour and France's troubled and ambivalent relationship with the American rider Lance Armstrong in the 2000s, which took on dimensions wider, again, than just sport.

Having, we hope, adequately defended the discussion of the Tour that follows in subsequent chapters, it is also sensible to explain what else will be considered in this analysis of cycling in France, because unlike other sports, such as football or rugby, there are more things that people do with bicycles than they do with balls of whatever shape or size. Cycling is arguably a more complex activity than other sporting and recreational practices that are, in essence, just games or sports. To take rugby, for example: although, as Dine has clearly and elegantly shown (Dine, 2001) that the story of rugby in France is a complex mix of issues involving national and regional identities, class, politics and culture, it remains 'just' a sport, played in identifiable locations according to a set of internationally agreed rules. Rugby cannot really be conjugated as a ludo-sporting-utility practice with the same variability as cycling, and it is the continuum or spectrum of all the activities that are intrinsically cycling, undertaken by individuals with very differing interpretations of what they are doing and why, that makes the subject so complex.³

The complexity of cycling

Recent academic studies of cycling in its social and cultural dimensions have drawn attention both to the complex and intriguing nature of the activity of cycling and to the surprising lack of detailed academic analysis of what cycling is and is about. To take just one example:

We are surrounded by cycling, and people seem to like talking about it, often from their own direct experiences. Many people have cycling anecdotes,

stories, fears and theories. But cycling's universality is also one reason for its very complexity, diversity, and therefore, mystery. We live in societies where bicycles and cycling are ubiquitous, yet – from social science perspectives – remarkably un-thought. (Horton, Rosen and Cox, 2007: 1)

Cycling in France, in the richness and complexity all its variants and dimensions – arguably even more than its equivalents in the Anglophone world – remains a phenomenon that has escaped systematic academic scrutiny. It is now a commonplace to point out that it was American and British researchers such as Eugen Weber in the 1970s and Richard Holt in the 1980s (Weber, 1970; Holt, 1981) who first began to draw proper attention to French sport and leisure (including, notably, cycling), thus encouraging French academia to consider topics hitherto deemed too 'popular' and lacking in intellectual seriousness. The subsequent rise in French sports studies has not really yet provided any comprehensive investigation of cycling's universality, complexity, diversity and mystery. Part of the problem here may be, quite simply, cycling's diversity and the historical range that requires to be studied, and, related to this, the difficulty for French researchers often trapped within relatively rigid disciplinary boundaries to produce analyses of cycling as an overall phenomenon. Another explanation of the lack of an overall perspective is, as we have suggested above, that the Tour de France – through its dominant position in cycle sport and in the popular imagination of cycling – has dominated what academic analyses there have been. But even academic analyses of the Tour have been relatively few, leaving room as late as the mid-2000s for wider-ranging interdisciplinary studies of France's pre-eminent sporting event led by British and American researchers such as Dauncey and Hare or, notably, Christopher Thompson (Dauncey and Hare, 2003; Thompson, 2006), which complemented a surprisingly small number of analyses brought out by French academics around the centenary of the Tour, such as Lagrue (2004) and Boeuf and Léonard (2003). French sports historians and sociologists are now increasingly producing social and cultural histories of individual sports and leisure activities, as are British academics located within the more contemporary areas of French studies research, such as Philip Dine's history of French rugby (Dine, 2001) and Geoff Hare's study of French football (Hare, 2003). However, cycling remains a subject that seems to have so far eluded its synthetic critical biographer, either in French or English.

This volume aims to reflect the universality, complexity and diversity – to borrow the terminology of Horton, Rosen and Cox – of cycling in France since the late nineteenth century, and to help, in some small

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way, to dispel its ‘mystery’ through the analysis of a carefully chosen selection of topics representative of the principal social, cultural, economic, sporting and political dimensions of the activity. Because the study is intended as a history, rather than an exploration of separate themes with their own complex chronologies, the topics are grouped chronologically in chapters that bring together different themes in an overview of the significant meanings of cycling at different periods in France’s sociocultural and socioeconomic development. Different themes therefore recur in differing time periods: consideration of women, emancipation and femininity arises both in the study of the adoption of cycling by women as leisure in the later decades of the nineteenth century and in consideration of France’s greatest female sporting icon of the 1980s and 1990s, Jeannie Longo, or the creation of the women’s Tour de France in the mid-1980s. Other themes such as technology/innovation/industry or sport/media/spectacle are evoked in diachronic contrast in a similar fashion, allowing maximum coverage of the major events and debates of French cycling and the most extensive possible discussion of their significance.

There are no competing or similar overall studies of French cycling in English. Even in French (because of the neglect of serious study of sport by French academics until relatively recently) the only studies of cycling that do exist are generally sensationalist, hagiographical, competition/race-centred accounts rather than balanced analyses of the sporting/leisure practice as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon. In fact, the tradition of professional cycle racing in France has been so strong and popular – fuelled from the outset by a specialized press in the form of *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto* for example, and other significant but less well-known journals – that it has spawned a whole genre of journalistically inspired sporting literature devoted to cycling stars. For those interested in more serious analysis of the nature of sporting heroism, celebrity or stardom, these essentially hagiographical blow-by-blow accounts of races won and lost and mountains climbed are tantalizingly formulaic, but nevertheless provide some details of greater significance.⁴ Another form of literature on cycling is, of course, Literature with a capital ‘L’, and cycling in France has always been a subject of interest for novelists and other writers. The relationship between French literary art and cycling over the past 150 years or so would deserve an entire volume to itself, and Edward Nye’s delicious compendium (2000) is an excellent introduction to the range of writing inspired by the love of cycling in all its forms. Later discussions in this volume will touch on the meanings of cycling evoked by Bernard, Blondin, Bott, Colette, Barthes, Jarry,

Laborde, Londres and other literary figures.

The ethos/rationale of this book is similar to that of Horton, Rosen and Cox in their excellent edited collection of essays *Cycling and Society* (2007), which provides an interdisciplinary and wide-ranging (but ultimately somewhat unavoidably sporadic) sampling of the meanings, debates and themes connected with cycling in a wide variety of periods and national contexts. This present volume on French cycling has at least the advantage of concentrating on a unity of space (metropolitan France), even if it suffers the necessary difficulty of covering a wide time period, and it endeavours to pull together a number of the threads that characterize cycling in French society and culture. In an attempt to address in a structured manner what Horton, Rosen and Cox describe as cycling's (rich but frustrating) 'complexity, diversity and mystery', we concentrate in this volume on five broad and basic themes. These are leisure, recreation and sociability; utility; industry, commerce and technology; sport, competition and media; and 'identity'. It is very difficult to treat any of these themes and topics in a hermetically self-contained fashion, such is the constant overlap between, say, cycle sport and the development of a specialized sports/cycling media, or cycle sport and its links with the cycle industry. To take another example, cycling as leisure/recreation in the form of mountain-biking – or *le VTT* as it is known in French – is simultaneously leisure/recreation (with a mirror image in *competitive* cycling), industry and technology (in terms of French manufacturers' attempts in the 1980s to produce French-built MTBs), media and culture (in terms of the burgeoning specialized press that developed, mediating notions of 'Americanization' or freedom), and a variety of other crossovers.

Five major themes: leisure, sport, industry, utility, identity

As Horton, Rosen and Cox remind us: 'Pleasure appears to be one of the principal motivations for cycling, and one which remains remarkably durable across time and space' (2007: 6). It is not surprising therefore that cycling as leisure in France is a theme that is considered in almost all of the chapters of this study. Leisure is, of course, often conjoined with recreation and sociability, so our discussions of the leisure practice of cycling often cross with analysis of modes and meanings of sociability (in clubs and associations, for example, in the late nineteenth century), but leisure is also considered through reference to the adoption of the bicycle as an instrument of tourism, and for the emancipation of women – banned from clubs by the gender relations of the period – in the 1880s,

for example, or by study of the developing vogue in the 1990s and 2000s for long-distance tourist cycle routes. Perhaps the most obvious example of a leisure cycling practice is cycle touring, which in France has had a proud history of independence from more competitive forms of cycling and whose philosophy and rationale was principally theorized by the journalist, bicycle-designer and long-distance tourist Paul de Vivie at the turn of the twentieth century in Saint-Etienne. The term *loisirs* (leisure) in the French context naturally also evokes the celebrated ‘experiment’ of the left-wing Popular Front government elected in 1936, which advanced the cause of citizens’ access to free time both practically, through a legal right to *congés payés* (paid holidays), and by introducing the concept into public policy and state structures. The iconic image of the Popular Front’s invention of *congés payés* was the tandem, symbol of the recreational emancipation of the working class, and so we will consider these topics in discussing cycling in the inter-war years. During the 1950s an early version of mountain-biking was invented in the suburbs of Paris, and although – as so often – there were close links between this pastime and competition, it serves as an interesting example of ‘everyday’ innovation in cycling design and use, in apparent resistance to the impending decline of more usual forms of cycling. VTT and mountain-biking in the 1980s are considered more fully in Chapter 8, and the most recent trends in leisure riding are detailed in Chapter 9.

Cycling as sport and its attendant dimensions of amateurism versus professionalism, national identity, the body and doping, and other issues are investigated through study of the history of the Tour de France, the track racing organized at the Vélodrome d’hiver in Paris in the inter-war decades, and other emblematic events in racing and competition. As we have suggested above in discussion of the significance and meaning of the Tour de France, our approach to cycle sport is not merely to describe the events, but to relate them – as specific variants of cycling – to the social, cultural and political context in which they occur. This naturally means adopting an interdisciplinary approach, which aims to read events such as the spectacle of the *Six Jours* track festivals organized during the hey-day of the Vélodrome d’hiver in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s in their full interrelatedness as sport, spectacle, media, recreation and commerce. Similarly, the discussion of the iconic early races such as Bordeaux–Paris (raced annually between 1891 and 1988) and Paris–Brest–Paris (staged every ten years from 1891 to 1951) organized by major cycling clubs, sports newspapers and supported by the cycle industry hopes to unpack their full meaning as harbingers of France’s sporting and professional modernity. The staging during the late 1930s of the Paris–Roubaix

travailliste by left-wing sports organizations (what was known as a *course alternative*) in contradistinction to the ‘normal’ commercial race run by *L’Auto-Vélo* newspaper is another example of how cycle sport can reveal much about the development of French politics, culture and society.

Cycling as industry and economic activity is considered through an assessment of how cycling firms have contributed to technological innovation at various junctures in France’s economic development. The first discussion of this comes in Chapter 4 with an analysis of the cycle industry during the 1890s and early 1900s and its relationships with dynamic sectors of the economy such as automobile manufacture. In effect, the modernity of bicycle technology and manufacture in the late nineteenth century contributed as much to the modernization of the French economy as the modernity of cycling itself contributed to social change. Industry, technology and the retailing of cycles and cycle components are considered also in the late twentieth century, for the ways in which changes in patterns of bicycle purchase accompanied and reflected changes in society in terms of bicycle use, but also wider trends in the development of the French economy. By looking in detail at the high-tech successes of medium-sized French manufacturers such as Look and Time, for instance, we can better understand how cycling in the 1990s, say, contributed again to a modernization of some areas of France’s industrial production.

Cycling as utility is another theme that recurs throughout the book, often in partnership with other related issues, but it is true that our consideration of the most heavily practical and utilitarian dimensions of cycling are relatively restricted. One of the reasons for this is simply the difficulty of accessing reliable data, both for the contemporary period (when sociologists and transport experts have been actually measuring people’s uptake of cycling for commuting, for instance) and, *a fortiori*, for periods in the past in which a history of cycling would wish to take a comparative interest. Even where sensible information is available, it has to be said that, in discussing utility cycling, there is a tendency for the material to amount (as one specialized sociological researcher on cycling has recently said on a blog he runs about his own – exceedingly interesting – academic research on cycle-commuting) to little more than ‘statin’ the bleedin’ obvious’, along the lines of ‘people would commute on bikes more if they lived closer to work, the weather were better and cycle-paths were nicer...’ (thinkingaboutcycling, n.d.). Nevertheless, by interpreting practical cycling to mean such things as the use of cycling by the French army in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and

the links between this and, say, long-distance touring and sports federations' attempts to codify racing distances and speeds, we are able to say interesting things about this kind of cycling. Similarly, in considering how everyday, practical cycling was jeopardized in the 1940s and 1950s by the inexpensive availability of motorized bicycles such as the iconic *Vélo-Solex*, and by unpacking the cultural significance of this particular *véломoteur*, we can shed some light on the meaning of this kind of cycling. Chapter 9 discusses the well-known self-service cycle-hire schemes set up in France (in Strasbourg, Lyon and Paris, in particular) as an example of the adoption of urban cycling as twenty-first-century commuter transport.

Cycling and identity is a theme that is often strongly present in the field of cycle sport, which is why Chapter 9 also includes an iteration, through cycling, of the traditional ambivalence felt by France towards the US. Similar issues are touched on in earlier sections, where we consider how the earliest races often pitted French riders against foreign competitors, thereby allowing French society to compare itself uncertainly with 'English superiority' or 'American efficiency'. Personal rather than national identity is frequently negotiated through sport and leisure choices, of course, and this is another recurrent topic, whether it be the social emancipation of women in the nineteenth century, the masculine sociability of early cycling clubs, the philosophy of life and behaviour propounded by the guru of cycle touring, Paul de Vivie, at the turn of the century, or class and political identities obtaining in professional and amateur sport during the troubled inter-war years.

It will be seen that frequently these major themes of inquiry and analysis coalesce in any given topic, so the choices made in terms of case-studies for the discussion have been difficult. It is hoped that they nevertheless communicate some sensible sense of what cycling in all its multi-dimensional complexity has meant in French society and culture. A final note on the rationale of the analysis here explains how the chronology of the study has been conceived.

The chronology of cycling in France

The period considered by this study is essentially 1870 until 2010, and the discussion thus covers cycling and society in France during four political regimes, two world wars, industrialization and modernity, socioeconomic modernization during the post-war period, de-industrialization, and the ongoing socioeconomic crisis and questioning of

sociocultural values that has existed since the 1980s. Faced with such a range the best chronological structuring of the discussion was not immediately obvious, given the complexity and interrelatedness of the issues, events and concepts under analysis. Although tempting – as so often concerning France – a breakdown of the period into political regimes seemed ultimately unsuitable. Although by the convenience of its durability the Third Republic covers much of cycling's relationship with industrialization, the business of sport as media and technology, and the modes of sociability contained within cycling as leisure (for instance), seventy years seemed too great a span. The Vichy regime and the Liberation, although significant as a period during which thinking about sport evolved considerably and cycling participated in developing patterns of public policy and social demand for sport, likewise seemed to make better sense in terms of overall analysis if coupled with the Fourth Republic and its aspirations for a new France born out of the troubles of the Occupation. The Fifth Republic, even more so than the previous regimes, can offer itself as an appropriate chronological framework for the analysis of sport and leisure in society, again by virtue of its duration, but also because of its explicit interest in sport and leisure as a strategic concern of the state and public policy.

The compromise solution has been to merge the 'institutional/Constitutional' breaks of France's political regimes with the other natural demarcators of sociocultural and socioeconomic change constituted by the world wars. And overlapping with these divisions, a number of iconic events in cycling itself can also help to define a chronological structure that makes sense of the changes occurring in cycling in all its complex relationship to French society, politics and culture. The eight chapters therefore consider the 'founding' period of cycling (1869–1891); a period of initial maturity (1891–1902); a period marked by the rise of the Tour de France and the First World War (1903–1918); the inter-war years, when sport and leisure became increasingly subject to competing political ideologies (1919–1939); the period of the Vichy regime, Liberation and the Fourth Republic, when new policies towards sport and leisure developed, and cycling began to suffer from France's modernization (1940–1959); the early Fifth Republic, when the nature of cycling reflected the new technocratic organization of society (1960–1980); the later Fifth Republic, when the cycle industry modernized under pressure from international competitors and cycle sport began to give a fuller place to female racing (1980–2000); and, finally, the early 2000s, during which environmental awareness and government initiatives caused a renewal of interest in cycling overall.

A final point that needs to be made concerning our chronology of cycling in France is that the starting point we have chosen – the very late 1860s – is an essentially pragmatic one. More specialist treatments of cycling that focus more specifically on its development as a technology are often interested in the minutiae of technical changes to bicycle design during the nineteenth century, many of which, admittedly, had significant consequences on the uptake of the practice. Here, however, rather than placing too much stress on changes such as the introduction of chain drive, the move from solid to inflated tyres (adopted in the late 1880s), the invention of the ‘safety bicycle’ (1880s) or the use of gearing, we take cycling to mean, essentially, the use of whatever kind of machine was prevalent at the time.⁵ In general terms, it is probably fair to say that with the introduction of the ‘safety’ (two equal-sized wheels with rear-wheel pedal-and-chain drive) and Dunlop’s pneumatic tyres in the 1880s, the modern bicycle was born. It was the facility of use of the ‘safety’ by casual riders, women and the less athletic that encouraged the cycling boom of the 1890s, but cycling started in essence in the late 1860s with the appearance of the *vélocipède* and the races that were quickly staged to publicize its practicality and excitement. It is generally agreed that, although French industry led bicycle design in the 1860s, the French advantage was lost during the Franco-Prussian war and the 1870s, with British engineering taking pride of place in innovations. The leading historian of bicycle racing in the nineteenth century, Andrew Ritchie, provides a clear summary of early commercial bicycle production and *vélocipède* developments in his evocatively titled *Quest for Speed* (2011), usefully elucidating the contributions of French manufacturers and French cycling in general, and Althuser (1986) provides a brief treatment of the contribution of the Michaux family to the development of the cycle industry in France.

The structure of the chapters

Within each chapter, there are essentially five sections. An introductory page or two presents the principal issues in French politics, society and culture relating to sport and leisure in general and cycling in particular during the period in question. Following this, four further sections discuss issues or topics that can be deemed to usefully exemplify the significance and evolution of cycling – of all kinds – during the time-frame in question. Depending on the period, these passages of analysis may deal with differing topics and major themes (although as we have

explained above, crossovers are almost ever-present). To take the example of Chapter 4 (roughly 1903–1918) as an illustration of this approach: the introductory discussion presents the state of society, culture and politics in the *Belle Époque* as they related to sport and leisure/recreation, leading secondly to an analysis of how the French cycle industry had developed and was providing the context in which cycling technologies and practices and other related industries such as motor manufacture could flourish. Thirdly, since the Tour de France was launched as part of a circulation war between two newspapers that related differently to the industrial–media–sport complex of the period, we consider how the Tour reflected these issues in sport and the sports media and industry. Fourthly, because cycling at this time was also increasingly being considered as a practical means of utility transport (as well as its early primary uses as an instrument of speed and competition, or slow leisure for the rich) discussion centres on what was termed *la vélocipédie utilitaire*. Fifthly, since the Tour de France already had its opponents even in the early decades of its development because of the way in which it monopolized interpretations and representations of cycling, we discuss the alternative views on cycling and society in the early years of the twentieth century proposed by the famous practical proponent and philosopher of cycle touring, Vélocio.

We begin with a discussion of the early years of cycling in France, when the activity itself and its practitioners were in search of an identity, and when many of the founding and central elements of this complex ludo-sporting and utility practice were set in place.

Notes

- 1 We are currently preparing an analysis of Lance Armstrong read using Barthes' approach, to be published in Y. Gastaut, Ph. Tétart and O. Zanna (eds), *Au Miroir du sport* (Le Mans: Presses Université du Maine, 2013).
- 2 As we shall later discuss, the term *forçats de la route* comes from Albert Londres and is a key concept linking the significance of the Tour to wider developments in French society, then and now.
- 3 What might be simply termed the 'industrial-commercial' dimension of cycling, in other words the production of varied and technologically developing equipment for cycling practised as a range of linked but separate sports (MTB, road, track, BMX) or as utility/leisure, is surely another clear difference between cycling and other sport/leisure activities.
- 4 It sometimes seems as though the monopoly of journalistic hagiography over cycle racing has prevented any development of more considered academic analysis. A major figure, worthy of appraisal for his contemporary definition of the field of such journalistic writing on cycling, is Jean-Paul Ollivier, frequent

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contributor to the long-running series *[name of rider]: la véridique histoire*, published by Editions Glénart. See the Bibliography for some of his publications.

- 5 Accounts of the genesis of the modern bicycle naturally vary, but there is general agreement that bicycle design was advanced significantly with the invention in the 1860s by the Frenchmen Pierre Michaux and Pierre Lallemand of a front-wheel-driven machine with a large crank-driven front wheel. This was the classical *vélocipède*, which developed, in France and in the UK, as elsewhere, into the penny-farthing/Ordinary bicycle known in France as a *grand-bi*. For conveniently accessible further details, see Ritchie (2011).

The Early Years: Cycling in Search of an Identity, 1869–1891

France during the 1870s and 1880s was a country undergoing social, political and economic transformation. The end of the Second Empire (1848–70) in ignominious defeat at the hands of Germany in the Franco-Prussian war led to a change of political regime with the institution of the Third Republic in 1871, after the bloody and divisive interlude of the Paris Commune (1870–71). After what Roger Magraw has described as the ‘modernizing dictatorship’ of the Second Empire (1983: 149), the Third Republic continued France’s measured move towards modernity, as the economy industrialized and society became increasingly stratified into an industrial working class as well as the traditional rural peasantry, dominated by an increasingly well-educated and prosperous bourgeoisie (Charle, 1991). Between the workers and the upper classes lay a swelling social grouping of clerical and administrative workers, essential for the changing nature of the economy, whose support was courted by the Republic as it gradually established its legitimacy during the 1870s and then flourished in the later decades of the century, and whose growing affluence and cultural assertiveness partly found expression in leisure and sport (Zeldin, 1980: 331–48).

During this period of change and transition for France, sporting activities were in many ways a marker and indicator of the transformations occurring in society, culture and the economy, as well as in politics (Holt, 1981). Traditionally associated with the aristocracy, the concept of sport and the practice of sports of varying and novel natures became increasingly widespread among other classes in society from the 1860s onwards, and sport grew in its social and cultural significance, as well as in terms of its commercial and industrial importance for France. The social and cultural significance of the adoption of so-called ‘English’ or ‘athletic’ sports such as running or football by the French upper classes in the later nineteenth century has been much documented, stressing how these new sports – added to the traditional elite sporting activities of riding, horse racing, hunting, and so on – accorded distinction to those who practised

them. Initially the preserve of social elites, English sports gradually became popularized (the French term closest to this is the rather slippery *démocratisé*), reaching a wider range of social classes and eventually becoming – in the case of football especially – a clearly ‘mass’ pastime.

Cycling, like other sports during the period, both accompanied and facilitated the modernization of society and politics and of the economy and technology. By virtue of its nature as technology – the bicycle itself, whose cost initially set it beyond the reach of anyone outside the social elite – and also because of its novelty, cycling was originally the preserve of France’s moneyed and therefore leisured classes (Gaboriau, 1991). But, as the importance of professional racing grew and as bicycles gradually became more affordable, cycling became increasingly, towards the end of the century, an activity of the lower-middle and working classes: Fourastié (1963: 199) has shown how the price of (new) bicycles progressively declined in relation to hourly wage-rates, and second-hand bicycles were proportionately even more affordable. Technologically and industrially, the bicycle and its manufacture represented an opportunity for the modernization of the French economy through new processes and techniques (Hubscher, 1997).

In this chapter, we shall consider a selected range of features of cycling during this early period, and discuss what cycling in these decades reveals about French society, culture, economics and politics. Firstly, we will examine the ways in which the institutionalization of cycling as a sporting pastime through the setting up of clubs and associations devoted to the activity reflected current political and social values, and typified developing models of sociability. Secondly, we will consider just what cycling was during this period, discussing how different kinds of cycling – leisure, touring, racing and so on – were practised and by whom. Thirdly, because one of the most significant dimensions of cycling in this period – and arguably throughout the whole subsequent history of cycling in France – was sport, we shall analyse how sport and racing, and the champions and media coverage they stimulated, reflected developing values. And fourthly, we consider how cycling was experienced by women, looking at the social, cultural and medical controversies that surrounded the female use of bicycles.

Cycling clubs and associations: institutions and sociability

Cycling clubs were a key driver of the rise of sports in late nineteenth-century France: as cycling developed initially as a leisure and sporting

activity that interested the leisured and moneyed classes, aristocratic and bourgeois clubs were set up, which helped to anchor the pastime socially, as well as contributing to the development of rules and regulations. Alongside other sporting clubs concerned with rowing or swimming, the developing passion for cycling – frequently referred to at the time as *vélo-manie* – and the requirement for sports clubs to be legally set up and approved by the authorities meant that cycling clubs led the way in developing models of organizing such associations. Progressively, the direct regulatory function of clubs over their members and sporting activities was taken over by regional and national federations, and as cycling democratized, clubs became progressively less socially restrictive (with some notable exceptions, such as the Parisian Omnium club) and more numerous.

Creating structures for sport and sociability: when and where?

The years from 1867 until the end of the 1880s essentially represent a period during which cycling as a social sporting activity undertaken in company with others was invented. Following the detailed work of the French sports historian Alex Poyer (2003a), three phases can be identified within this twenty-year span: an initial phase of enthusiasm (1868–70), a phase of neglect (1871–79) and a renewal of interest (the 1880s). The first French cycling clubs were set up in 1868, when a total of five *clubs vélocipédiques* were created. The oldest club is deemed to be the *Véloce-club de Valence*, which sought official approval for its activities in March 1868, closely followed by the *Véloce-club de Paris* (May), the *Société des vélocipèdes du Tarn* (September), the Parisian *Société pratique du vélocipède* (November) and the *Cercle des vélocipédistes de Carpentras* (November). These five pioneer clubs were followed in 1869 by another 13 whose founding can be dated with reasonable certainty, such as the *Véloce-club rouennais* and the *Véloce-club rennais*, but in the early months of 1870, before the disruption to society caused by the Franco-Prussian war, only three clubs seem to have been set up (Poyer, 2003a: 21). The war and defeat, the Commune and the change of regime dealt a severe blow to the development of cycling clubs during the 1870s, so much so that although 1868–70 had seen the creation of about 40 clubs overall (those whose official approval is still to be found in the municipal, departmental and other archives where such material is preserved, plus other clubs whose existence is confirmed by other sources), in the period 1871–79 only six clubs were founded. New clubs began to flourish again during the early 1880s (16 clubs created in 1880–82) when some 52 clubs appear to have been in operational exis-

tence, and enthusiasm for club cycling continued to grow in the later part of the decade, allowing the first *Union Vélocipédique de France* (UVF) register of clubs to record 70 adherents. Including with the UVF statistics all the other clubs that must have existed, by the late 1880s France could boast at least a hundred cycling clubs (Poyer, 2003a: 22).¹

Geographically, cycling clubs in this early period were to be found in a wide range of departments, but by no means was the whole of France covered by the phenomenon. No more than a third of departments possessed a *véloce-club* in 1870, and no more than half by the end of the 1880s. As the number of clubs grew, so generally did the overall coverage of the country, but the absence of clubs in many departments meant that some clubs were isolated from others, and many individual cyclists found themselves far from a local, departmental or even regional club. The spatial irregularity of the distribution of clubs was compounded by the clustering of many principal early clubs in three main concentrations: Paris and its eastern and western approaches; the Atlantic coastline and hinterland from Bordeaux in the south-west to Vannes on the border of Brittany; and the Rhône valley from Lyon to the south coast. Over the years, other geographical groupings of clubs formed bridges between these main areas of cycling strength, themselves developing into recognized centres, and so by the late 1880s the cycling map of France was marked by a range of club concentrations: Paris–Amiens–Reims–Rouen; Angers–Vannes–Bordeaux; Bordeaux–Agen–Pau–Biarritz–Toulouse; Toulouse–Castres–Carcassonne; Lyon–Saint-Etienne–Grenoble–Nice. What is interesting is that, unlike in so many fields, Paris does not dominate the space of French club cycling. The reasons behind the springing up of clubs in particular locations are many and varied but, in essence, they concern such factors as the availability of cycles themselves (the sales network of the famous Michaux firm influenced regional interest in cycling, and the presence of local independent frame or cycle manufacturers gave a great boost to clubs in towns such as Angers); proximity to an existing cycling centre; a cosmopolitan and modern-minded outlook (cities such as Bordeaux with a tradition of trade and openness to new ideas seem to have embraced new sporting ideas more quickly than others); and, finally, linked to cosmopolitanism, the influence of British inhabitants keen on sport. In summary, the most favourable location, theoretically, for the early founding of a *véloce-club* would be a major urban centre possessing cycle shops, not distant from other towns or cities interested in cycling, open to new ideas by virtue of history or trade, and possessing a British expatriate community. Bordeaux, as we will see below, offers an interesting case-study.

The nature of clubs and associations: sociability and democracy

The *cercle* or club in nineteenth-century France was an interesting intermediary body between the state and the individual citizen. By bringing together individuals of like passions – political, cultural, or indeed sporting – in associations regulated both by the municipal authorities, the Interior Ministry and their own statutes and regulations, circles and clubs were deemed by the Republican state to exercise a role of democratic education through the creation of social networks based on shared communities of interest and shared rights and responsibilities. Much of the analysis of sporting associations in France in the nineteenth century (Callède, 2000: 421, 431; Arnaud, 1988) is arguably based on the pioneering work of the political and cultural historian Maurice Agulhon, specifically his analyses of political and cultural *cercles* in the early and mid-1800s (Agulhon, 1977; Agulhon and Bodiguel, 1981): studies of sporting organizations often explore how the mania for associations during the period 1870–1914 linked sport, sociability, democracy and republicanism in search of what the sports historians Hubscher and Durry have neatly described as the *dream* of ‘une sociabilité sportive une, fraternelle et égalitaire’ (Hubscher and Durry, 1992: 109).

As Agulhon (1977) and others have described, in nineteenth-century France the setting up of clubs or associations was tightly controlled by the authorities within the framework of the *Code Pénal*. Intended by various regimes and governments since the early 1800s to be a means of stifling political opposition and social dissension, article 291 of the 1810 Penal Code required any grouping or association of more than twenty members to request approval for its formation from the state (Grange, 1993: 11). The terms of the law itself referred to associations interested in ‘religion, literature, politics or other subjects’, and sporting clubs fell neatly into the catch-all category, having to submit lists of their members, their professions and addresses, as well as their statutes to the municipal and prefectural authorities. Based on reports prepared by the local police on the character and reliability of the members of the proposed clubs and on the aims and organization of the association as set out in the club statutes, prefectural, Interior Ministry and municipal approval was usually a formality. Clubs and associations were seen by government as useful in the civic and communal education of citizens: the young Third Republic was keen to encourage interactions between individuals that created bonds and that, moreover, through the working through of club meetings, rules, procedures, elections, admissions and exclusions, provided a school for understanding Republican democracy. Approval of sporting clubs was thus always considered a positive decision, as they

combined the civic and democratic education of citizens – Grange uses the term ‘*démocraties expérimentales*’ (1993: 106) – with another pressing concern of government in the years following France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war: the need for healthy, athletic *citoyens-soldats* capable of helping French armies eventually reconquer the lost territories of Alsace and Lorraine. The climate of political tolerance towards clubs and societies that culminated in 1901 in a famous law on the founding of associations still valid today (Nourrisson, 1920; Bardout, 2001) meant that approvals were often delivered readily; but putative sporting clubs were aware that success would be favoured by the inclusion of notable local personalities on the list of those founding the club, and that the more the statutes mentioned the moral, social, charitable and military value of, say, cycling, the greater the chances would be of seeing a positive response from the authorities. Statutes that had proved their acceptability were often simply copied by other sporting clubs hopeful of similar approval.

Sports ‘associationnisme’: the example of Véloce-club bordelais

Applying the notion of *l’associationnisme* to early *véloce-clubs*, Hubscher and Durry implicitly summarize the issues it raises (1992: 80–91). How did the statutes of cycling clubs and their organization represent the *apprentissage démocratique* so desired by the Republican state? How did cycling intersect with the notion of the patriotic *citoyen-soldat*? How did cycling associations create and maintain their identities as groups of like-minded citizens? How did the activities organized by cycling clubs interact with existing patterns of traditional festivities and commemoration? An interesting example of the creation and running of an early cycling club is the *Véloce-club bordelais* (VCB), founded in Bordeaux in 1878, which we can consider in the light of the questions posed by Hubscher and Durry. Although the lifetime of the club was short (1878–92), in its 1880s hey-day it contributed much to the definition of French cycling overall, and notwithstanding its relative – indeed almost complete – neglect by historians, a result of the lack of primary archives and materials, careful reading of secondary sources allows us to consider it here in some detail, in advance of a more complete study (Dauncey, 2014).² The club was officially authorized by *arrêté préfectoral* on 13 December 1878, and – among other achievements – its crowning glory was the creation of the Bordeaux–Paris race (discussed in the following chapter), first organized in 1891 and widely recognized today as marking the invention of modern cycle competition.³

Bordeaux in the latter part of the nineteenth century was a typically

‘open’ port city in terms of cultural influences and the national and social make-up of its population. The long-standing British interest and presence in the city and region based on the wine trade (Dupeux, 1974) created a strong British influence in (high) society and in the leisure tastes of the bourgeoisie, and the *vie sociétair*e in general was very active, with over 500 associations (ten gymnastics societies, five of *colombophilie*, one fencing club and one for *sport pédestre*, three *sociétés nautiques*, three *sociétés hippiques* and six or seven cycling clubs extant in the early 1890s) (Jullian, 1895: 747). Agulhon (1977: 88) suggests that it was just such cities, with their ‘élite de la bourgeoisie commerçante, le négoce des grands ports’, that were the home of new practices and trends in *la vie mondaine*. Jacques Thibault (1981a: 139) stresses how the sports clubs set up in Bordeaux in the period 1880–1900 reflected the questions inherent in a society that was changing rapidly at a key moment in its development. Desgraves and Dupeux (1969: 444–52) stress how it was originally ‘une minorité d’oisifs fortunés’ in Bordeaux who were interested in the development of sport, but note that the creation of over 80 sports clubs in the city between 1880 and 1914 demonstrated the beginnings of democratization.

The notion of *apprentissage démocratique* is broadly supported by the VCB. The VCB statutes, as those of a relatively early club, served as a source for other clubs, and clearly set out club organization and administration. The initial statutes of 1878 provided for very highly structured meetings and voting. Minutes and press reports illustrate that discussions were lengthy and formal. But equally, meetings were not always quorate, and members serving on committees – which were often held weekly – frequently resigned because pressure of work made it impossible for them to undertake their club duties.⁴ In 1888 the statutes of the new VCB as a limited company added greater complexity, representing arguably the possibility of an introduction to *capitalism* as much as an apprenticeship to *democracy*.

The link between sport and the *citoyen-soldat* in the VCB is less clear. The Bordeaux-based *Véloc*-*Sport* newspaper, closely linked with the VCB, was a keen advocate of *vélocipédie militaire*, and club and newspaper organized conferences on the topic. But as Poyer has demonstrated, cycling clubs’ enthusiasm for *vélocipédie militaire* was more often than not mere lip-service to the Republican ideal of the *citoyen-soldat* (Poyer, 2005). In Bordeaux, *vélocipédie militaire* was enthused about by the VCB because of the credit this brought the club in negotiations with the town hall and because of the VCB’s reliance on the military authorities in Bordeaux, who provided security stewards and military band music at

the club's race meetings.

The creation of club 'identity' is also illustrated by the VCB. In theory, shared identity was provided 'ready-made' by a passion for cycling, but in practice, different degrees of interest in different kinds of cycling led to fragmented solidarity. The VCB used the standard instruments of place, behaviour and process to foster the identity of the club and to strengthen the sociability of the association and of its members: there were well-appointed club premises in central Bordeaux, there were strong expectations of good conduct by members and there were careful procedures for the admission of prospective members. Club premises in various cafés in central Bordeaux hosted social functions, such as (from 1889) monthly dinners, which in addition to the annual dinners – high points of 'sporting sociability' – gave a regular rhythm to the life of the association. But frequent changes of locale and, arguably, competition for members' social time from the club's training track, lowered attendance at the 'clubhouse'. Another – patently non-sporting – locale that competed for the attention of club members was the club's box at the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux. The club's 'social reproduction' was protected by careful vetting of prospective members, but there appear to have been problems in ensuring the recruitment of responsible elements and maintaining proper behaviour. In 1886 and 1887 there were laments over bad behaviour, couched in terms that suggested that some members were concerned that a 'lower-class' element had entered the club. A letter to the *Vélocé-Sport* newspaper complained: 'Je ne dis pas que tous les vélocemen en France sont de la basse classe, mais la majeure partie; et cela vient de ce que nous payons trop en argent les professionnels qui courent pour les fabricants, au lieu de laisser à leurs maîtres le soin de les payer' (*Le Vélocé-Sport*, 1 November 1888, 730). One difficulty in building shared identity and sociability was the variety of different memberships: an individual's place within the VCB was defined in part by his status as either a committee member and club officer, a statutory founder-member shareholder (post-1888), a simple sporting member, a 'social' member, or some other (non-official) kind of member. In addition, when the issue of amateurism and professionalism became more and more important towards the end of the 1880s, the admission or rejection of professional riders or the acceptance of riders racing professionally under the colours of the VCB created tensions: in April 1890 the VCB rejected the application of the famous professional racer Henri Loste to become a *membre-coureur*.

Hubscher and Durry suggest that novel activities organized by cycling clubs tended to interact with traditional festivities and commemorations

in a way that simultaneously reflected the importance of tradition while hinting at its replacement by modern forms of popular entertainment: ‘Rien d’étonnant alors, que les nouvelles activités sportives trouvent leur place dans l’expression festive et commémorative d’une culture locale et nationale [...] les nouvelles structures n’éliminent pas l’ordre ancien, mais en se juxtaposant à lui, semblent en accompagner le déclin’ (1992: 107). This seems indeed to have been the case for the VCB. The revised statutes of the club in 1888 suggested that it saw its role in organizing race-days as a partnership with more traditional events run by the town hall. Approval for major race meetings was always sought, and the calendar of competitions was always designed to complement rather than replace existing events. However successful cycle racing was becoming as a spectacle in its own right, it was not sufficiently popular to compete with traditional festivities such as the Bordeaux Fair for the participation of the average Bordeaux citizen, nor sufficiently distinguished a passion to draw the bourgeois elite from their devotion to the customary leisured distractions of horse racing or yachting regattas. Indeed, Hubscher and Durry (1992: 109) establish a contrast between cycling clubs, which worked with traditional calendars of festivity, and sports associations of ‘social distinction’ such as yachting, golf and tennis, whose organization of events paid less heed to communal calendars of celebration and commemoration.

Cycling and society: who and what?

Cycling, as we have suggested above, is a multiple and multi-faceted activity. Here we attempt to provide some pointers as to what ‘cycling’ represented in French society and culture during the late nineteenth century.

Clubs and class

The founding of a large number of cycling clubs in the 1870s and 1880s has already been touched upon, as have the relationships between cycling clubs and civil society. But who actually were cyclists in the 1870s and 1880s, when cycling was a new, dangerous and exciting activity? Looking at the cycling population through the prism of clubs means necessarily that numbers of cyclists (however defined) whose enthusiasm fell short of joining a sporting association are excluded. Particularly in this early period, however, it is perhaps fair to say that those who chose to ride bicycles were by definition passionate about the new sport and

technology and were therefore more likely than not to be members of a *véloce-club*. Some categories of cyclist were also, of course, generally excluded from joining clubs, such as those below the age of 18 or women, so reliance on the – in themselves incomplete – archival records of *véloce-clubs* produces a number of distortions.

The point at issue in all discussions of almost any sport and class, and particularly cycling, during the late nineteenth century is always whether the new activity was adopted primarily by the upper groupings of the social hierarchy or whether its uptake was more democratic than elitist. Studies tend to differentiate between indigenous French sports such as gymnastics that tended, generally, to be patronized by the lower classes, and imported British sports such as rugby and football that were monopolized by the bourgeoisie and elite in search of social distinction. As a *sport mécanique* like motorcycling, motor racing and flying, which followed in its wake, cycling in the early decades is generally implicitly understood as an elite pursuit, because only the rich could afford to indulge in it. As well as being considered as a sport of the social elite, cycling is also often apparently considered as essentially a British import, another factor that suggests that it was or should have been a pastime of the upper classes. But analyses of the cost of cycling tend to disagree (Fourastié, 1963; Fourastié and Fourastié, 1977): yes, the prices of good early bicycles made by the main manufacturers were unaffordably high for those without money to burn, yet there was relatively quickly a flourishing second-hand market for machines, local frame-builders could produce less sophisticated mounts for reasonable sums, workers in the cycle industry could build their own machines, and so on. And cycling was absolutely not a British sport imported by the upper classes to mark their difference from the workers: although the majority of bicycles in the 1870s and 1880s were imported from the UK because of the collapse of the French industry during the Franco-Prussian war and its aftermath, the initial French tradition of cycling from 1867 was strong and Gallic.

Part of the difficulty in deciding to what extent cycling was an elite pastime is caused by the very definition of ‘the elite’. Discussions of French sport in the late nineteenth century tend often to refer to the model of sporting behaviour provided for emerging sports by horse racing, a sport dominated by the richest and most aristocratic elements of French society. This, however, is not an elite that jumped on the bicycle as a mark of technological modernity and social distinction. The elite public from which cycling was ‘democratized’ – along with other sports – in the 1890s and 1900s was essentially that of the *couches nouvelles*, or the new socioeconomic groups born of France’s industrial and commercial

transformation. The most detailed study of the membership of cycling clubs suggests that in 1868–70, 35 per cent of club cyclists were *notables*, 36 per cent *bourgeoisie populaire* and 28 per cent *employés*, and that during the 1880s there was little real change in the social make-up of the cycling population (Poyer, 2003a: 120–44).

Different kinds of cycling: leisure, pleasure, touring (and sport)

Cycling in the early decades of its development covered a variety of activities. As far as committed cyclists – members of *véloce-clubs*, for example – were concerned, there were two kinds of cycling: on the one hand, there was the highly visible and spectacular racing and, on the other, there was the quieter and less mediatized activity of touring and general pleasure riding. To these two kinds of cycling must arguably also be added the cycling undertaken by individuals who were not interested in racing or touring, and who were not sufficiently enthusiastic to belong to a cycling club, but who still indulged in cycling as pure recreation or as gentle exercise. In this last category should perhaps be included women, who, although sometimes interested in racing and touring, were generally excluded from cycling clubs and therefore practised the activity on a more personal and individual level.⁵

The racing of the period, as will be demonstrated in detail in the following section, was a sport that was trying to find its feet. It was only in the 1890s that cycling as a sport became a proper commercial spectacle, with road and track races attracting huge audiences and involving considerable financial stakes for riders, managers, trainers, promoters, manufacturers and newspapers. Although cycle races of the 1870s and 1880s were reported in the general press as well as in the nascent specialized cycling press (see Seidler, 1964), public interest in what was generally held to be a pastime for the privileged few was far from what it would become in the hey-day of racing during the 1890s, and from the creation of the Tour de France in 1903. Even if some racers in the 1880s – such as Charles Terront – were of a modest background and tempted into professional riding by the rewards on offer, for the general population cycling still seemed an activity reserved for the well-off, and despite the interest of its speed and mechanical modernity, something of only tangential interest to the masses.

Touring was a form of cycling that interested many members of the early *véloce-clubs*, but it was not an activity that raised passions in the same way as racing. Although touring did not elicit quite the same fanatical attachment to the bicycle as an instrument of speed, efficiency and progress, nevertheless divisions arose in cycling clubs between members

expecting the club's efforts to be principally directed towards the staging of race meetings, training and racing, and those members who saw cycling less as competition and more as leisurely enjoyment of physical activity and the discovery of nature. Richard Holt (1985; 1988) has detailed how the use of the bicycle in cycle touring helped the urban bourgeoisie 'discover' the countryside in an invention of almost contemporary modes of consuming leisure and nature, but the slow enjoyment of fresh air was very different to racing and records.

The *Véloce-club bordelais*, with its strong interest in cycle sport, was a prime example of this tension between two interpretations of cycling, as the club also contained an influential tourist element grouped around the journalist Maurice Martin. Martin was the author of a celebrated touring guide for the coast around Bordeaux (Martin, 1905) and (in an interesting crossover between touring and racing) an account of the ride from Bordeaux to Paris that he undertook in 1890 (Martin, 1890). The balance of forces between the two factions varied during the 1880s, and although in 1888 it seemed agreed that touring was the 'plat de résistance' of cycling and racing (merely) the 'hors d'oeuvre' (Martin, 1888), the VCB's considerable investment in race organization was arguably a main factor in its demise in 1892, when the touring element went on to help found other clubs. As with racing, and cycling in general during this period, the numbers involved in touring were small in comparison with what was to come as the bicycle became more affordable, but the 1880s laid the bases of cycling's contribution to the (re-)discovery of the countryside and to the (re-)definition of the relationship between 'the rural' and 'the urban' (Holt, 1985; 1988). The foundation of the *Touring Club de France* (TCF) in January 1890 reflected the existing interest in this aspect of cycling and anticipated its future development in the years before the First World War.

Cycling and competition

The 1890s and 1900s were to see the thorough professionalization of cycle sport, despite the best efforts of those who, like de Coubertin, wished to save French sport in general from the shame of commercial influence, as well as those whose 'Anglomania' aligned them with French perceptions of British 'Corinthian values'. The ways in which thinking on sport and cycling itself evolved during the 1870s and 1880s shed some light on why cycling became an exception to the general trends towards the 'Coubertinization' of French sport.

What was considered as a 'sport' in mid-to-late nineteenth-century France was a matter of some ambiguity; almost anything, from fencing

and horse racing to whist and chess, could be called a sport. Despite this ambient uncertainty over precisely what was, or should be, defined as a sport, from the late 1880s sport was gradually defined more as something that required elements such as effort, discipline, training, competition and performance, and cycling, therefore, became – inherently – a sporting activity. However, it could be argued that cycling would only become a proper sport, rather than a healthy distraction for the moneyed classes, when entrepreneurs such as Henri Desgrange melded the definitions of philosophers with the popular press's understanding of society's interest in spectacular sport. In the 1880s cycling was neither really an aristocratic sport nor really a popular one, and it was this intermediate social status that arguably helped it through the grasp of de Coubertin.

It is often suggested that the French upper classes were avid consumers of British sports and sporting values. While maintaining their interests in hunting, horse riding, horse racing and other traditionally prestigious athletic pursuits such as fencing, the old and new aristocracy enthusiastically adopted new sports, particularly those imported from Britain, in an effort to maintain their social difference from the newly influential classes of the French industrial revolution. Despite occasional attempts from its promoters to present cycling as a pastime of the elite and notwithstanding the notion that as a new activity it would automatically interest the upper classes, it seems more likely that cycling was adopted only very transiently as a sport of *distinction sociale*. Studies of the membership of cycling clubs have demonstrated how it was the 'new' socioeconomic groupings that predominated, using what 'noble' members there were as a guarantee for the authorities of the good morals and society of their associations (Poyer, 2003a: 125). Cycling differed in many ways from the typical 'Anglo-Saxon' sports that were adopted with real enthusiasm, such as rugby and football: it was not a team sport, with rules and codes and an ethos of solidarity as well as competition; it was not a sport taught in schools or played at university; it was not a sport that could be played as a dilettante (except in the form of touring). Cycling as a sport requiring training, effort, discipline, competition and performance was an activity that demanded concessions from those who practised it that were intrinsically 'professional' and very different from the adolescent, amateur or dilettante enjoyment of games such as football. Moreover, cycling was a *sport mécanique*, and as such was of interest through its modernity to the upper classes in search of *distinction sociale* through early adoption of (expensive) technologies in a display of Veblen-esque conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1912); but

the (noble) distinction of purchasing an expensive bicycle in the 1880s was arguably in a natural tension with the (vulgar) application required to race it. Examples abound of well-off individuals who passed from an enthusiasm for cycling, to motorcycling, to cars and then even to flying: G.P. Mills in Britain and Jiel-Laval in France, both participants and finishers (respectively first and fifth) in the 1891 Bordeaux–Paris race, had such evolving interests. It may be unfair to impute such fickleness of passion to the snobbishness of leaving a sport as it becomes more democratic – perhaps the motivation was simply a love of speed, or advancing age – but it seems the case that, in France at least, the more a sport required training, specialization and professionalism and the more it became the focus of commercial interests, the less it was likely to interest the upper classes, simply because professional sport and commerce were antithetical to bourgeois conceptions of the purity of amateurism.

One other consideration serves to underline the peculiar status of cycling in the 1880s as neither aristocratic nor popular. A common conception in Third Republic France was that sport embodied one of the founding tenets of Republicanism, namely the meritocratic selection of the fittest through competition. Such Republican social Darwinism usually applied through education and competitive exams to the civil service, but the parallels with sport seemed clear. However, although such a theory might hold for a sport such as running or rugby, it could be argued that *sports mécaniques*, in which costly technological innovations are an inherent part of competition, make sports such as cycling, at least in the rapidly evolving technical context of the 1880s, something less than a level playing field.

Sport and racing in the early years

As well as the novelty of a technology of personal mobility and transport, and as an instrument of leisure for the upper classes, cycling was popularized in the early decades through its adoption by individuals and newspapers as a form of competition. Cycle races were the principal means by which the technology and the activity of cycling in general were publicized, and in France in particular, a professionalized racing community was soon established.

Early races and racing

As Jean Durry (1973: 19–25), among others, has recounted, the first properly documented races took place in 1868, when now-famous

competitions were staged in Paris at the Parc de Saint-Cloud (31 May 1868), in Toulouse (27 July 1868) and in Bordeaux (2 November 1868). Many other races were organized during 1868 in the Paris region (either at the Paris hippodrome or at La Varenne, Charenton, Pantin, Le Raincy or Enghien) and also in small towns as far removed from the modernity and cosmopolitanism of Paris as Cognac, in the sleepy department of Charente-inférieure. The Saint-Cloud race – run over a distance of 1,200 metres or 2,400 metres (accounts differ) between the fountain and entrance gate of the park – was won by James Moore. The acute nationalism of the period led to some debate over the nationality of the winner, who had beaten the Frenchman Drouet into second place. Although some newspapers laid claim to Moore as a French citizen, he was obliged to declare that he was in fact British, although living and working in Maisons-Laffitte. Setting an example of (unavoidable) crossover between racing and the cycle industry that was to become a pattern (with many variations), the Saint-Cloud race was organized by the cycling business of *La Compagnie parisienne de bicycles*, run by the Olivier brothers.

Between these first beginnings of cycling competition and the Franco-Prussian war, racing flourished in both Paris and the provinces in 1869 and early 1870, as the *Véloce-club de Paris* staged frequent races in Paris (including a ‘Tour de Paris’) and other clubs organized competitions in towns such as Angers, Besançon, Carpentras, Chartres, Lille, Lyon and Marseille. An early point-to-point race was organized in January 1870 from Toulouse–Villefranche–Toulouse (63 km), but the most important race of the period was undoubtedly the Paris–Rouen of 7 November 1869, again won by Moore, who had been dominant since his victory at Saint-Cloud, in a time of some ten-and-a-half hours for an overall distance of 123 km. Marking another structural feature of the future organization of cycle sport, Paris–Rouen was sponsored by the recently founded sporting newspaper *Le Vélocipède illustré*, which was exploiting the popularity of cycling as pastime and spectacular sport. The enthusiasm for racing was reflected in the 300 entries to compete in the race, including some from women, although only 100 competitors actually set off. Paris–Rouen was intended by its originator, the celebrated journalist Richard Lesclide, to demonstrate the practical usefulness of the bicycle as a means of travel between two important cities, and Moore’s demonstration that this was indeed feasible earned him 1,000 francs.

After the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune, cycling took some years to regain its popularity, and it was only by the mid-1870s that racing recaptured its former momentum. By December 1876 the frequency of race meetings in Paris led to the creation of an early cycling

'federation' – the *Union vélocipédique parisienne* – intended to instil some order into the planning of races. Four years later the desire for a centralizing influence saw the birth of the *Union Vélocipédique de France* in February 1881, and the first races of the French national championships, held over the distance of 10 km at the Place du Carrousel, Paris. Although the UVF had something of a chequered history during the 1880s and 1890s because of competition for its role as cycling's federal body from other organizations, the annually organized national championships provided usually stable points of reference in the racing calendar. Racing in the 1880s continued to develop, but seemed to lack the excitement of its founding years in the late 1860s. It appeared that cycle sport was finding athletic, commercial, industrial and media maturity difficult to reach. Commenting on this period, Durry notes:

Cependant, à part les spécialistes, le cyclisme intéresse-t-il le grand public? Rien n'est moins sûr. D'autre part, les victoires changeantes et diverses des uns et des autres en vitesse comme en fond le prouvent, ce sport n'a pas atteint la maturité, sinon la perfection, où chacun se consacre à la forme d'épreuve pour laquelle il présente le plus d'aptitude. (1973: 25)

The first phase of maturity, at least, was to be gained only in the 1890s, as seminal races such as Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Brest–Paris rewrote the rules of road racing, and the rise of *vélodromes* fuelled public enthusiasm for track races.

Early cycling champions and heroes

Although the races that mainly caught the attention of the media for the heroism of their exploits in this period were held on the road, such as Paris–Rouen, the blossoming of road racing was properly to come only in the 1890s; most of the racing in the 1870s and 1880s happened on the track, and the heroes of cycling in this period were thus preponderantly track riders rather than road racers. The tracks of these early decades were often not dedicated tracks, but merely public spaces borrowed from town authorities for the staging of races, such as the Place des Quinconces in Bordeaux, whose surface had to be levelled and where ropes were laid out to trace the bends; le Mail in Angers; or simply boulevards of towns where riders rode out and back along a road, turning tightly at halfway. Interestingly, although there was an obvious crossover between the two disciplines of track and road, and some riders were able to excel at both, there seems to have been a difference in social class between those who specialized in track races and those who rode the road. Track champions were middle-class bourgeois, and road racers, such as Terront, often came from less privileged backgrounds. Track racing, on the circuits

described as *vélodromes*, despite their temporary and unsatisfactory nature, was more easily made spectacular for an urban viewing public (which had ready access to the race) than a long road race where riders might pass a spectator's vantage point only once. And the viewing public at a *vélodrome* was more easily controlled and even selected (by price of entry ticket) than on the road. Track racing often initially followed the model provided by horse racing, and attracted a bourgeois following as well as a more 'popular' element, as has been suggested by Ehrenberg (1980: 37), who emphasizes that the rising number of *vélodromes* reflected and accompanied a change in the nature of racing: 'la compétition change de fonction: de simple moyen d'organiser l'affrontement entre les pratiquants, elle devient un spectacle de masse, destiné essentiellement aux couches ouvrières urbaines'. The Englishman James Moore was arguably the first 'French' hero of cycling. It was Moore's success in the inaugural races of cycle sport such as Saint-Cloud (1868) and Paris–Rouen (1869) that began to catch the public imagination, and his dominance of racing in France until 1877 kept him firmly in the forefront of media coverage. Moore was a veterinarian, and presumably rode at least as much for pleasure as for any financial gain he might accrue.

The first true French rider to earn the reputation of a popular champion was Charles Terront, whose star began to wax as that of Moore was waning in the mid-to-late 1870s. Terront came to attention at the age of 19 in 1876, when he won Paris–Pontoise and came seventh in Angers–Tours. One of Terront's early major races was organized by the *Véloce-club de Toulouse* in April 1877 and pitted him against the declining Moore; although Moore just won the race at Toulouse, Terront was henceforward to be France's leading rider. He shared many honours at all distances during the 1880s and 1890s with riders such as de Civry, Duncan, Gros, Keen, Joguet, Médinger, Rousseau and Viennet (Breyer and Coquelle, 1898).⁶ Terront had been a delivery boy in Paris before realizing his potential as a cycling athlete as well as the financial rewards to be won in prizes, and his biography by Baudry de Saunier, an iconic journalist and popularizer of cycling in the *Belle Époque*, gives a clear view of the professionalism and hardships of his new trade as a professional athlete (Baudry de Saunier, 1893).

Although Terront's background was typical of many professional riders in the 1880s and 1890s (for example, Constant Huret and Edmond Jacquelin, both apprentice bakers; the butcher's boy Louis Pothier, later to gain glory in the Tour de France; or the famous Maurice Garin, destined to win the first Tour in 1903), other riders such as Moore were often of a different social standing. This was a period in which, in general,

cycling was 'la lenteur des riches, et la vitesse des pauvres' in the formulation coined by sports sociologist and historian Philippe Gaboriau (1991), as the moneyed classes mostly adopted the bicycle for recreation and leisure (with some exceptions who chose to race) while, as bikes became more affordable during the 1890s, the working classes saw it as either a means of transport or as a sporting career offering escape from the drudgery of manual labour. Even by the early 1880s the number of races organized on a regular basis and the prize money on offer was sufficient to encourage some lower-class riders with talent and ambition to attempt a professional career.

Riders such as Terront and Garin contrasted in social origin with two other emblematic racers of the 1880s: the 'aristocratic' Frédéric de Civry, whose eight-year career in the 1880s deluged him in victories and honours, and the English gentleman-rider Herbert Oswald (H.O.) Duncan. Duncan was British, but lived and raced in France, and de Civry was much influenced (through a stay in England during his adolescence) by British sporting values and methods. In 1883 de Civry won the British 50-mile time-trial championship at Leicester, and in 1886 Duncan was the French UVF sprint champion. Although both Duncan and de Civry seemed to originate from privileged classes and were therefore, theoretically, not in need of professional cycling success or involvement in the cycle trade to earn a living, the very closeness of their involvement in the developing cycle-sport industry seems to suggest that they too, almost as much as Terront and Garin, were linked to the sport by financial need. On de Civry's early death from tuberculosis at the age of 32 in 1893, the cycling press emphasized his sporting success (211 victories from 331 races), his rudimentary education (in England), his cunning business acumen (as a cycle salesman for Clément) and the torture of a tantalizing legal battle over his possible entitlement to part of the fortune of his aristocratic relations (*Le Vélo*, 1893). And although Duncan's ideal gentleman-rider was 'a young man of good family in possession of a sizeable income who enjoys participating in racing in several countries' (Holt, 1981: 83), his own involvement in the cycling press (he founded *Le Véloceman* in Montpellier in 1885) and in the training and managing of various professional racers suggests almost as much a 'professional' as a 'gentleman-amateur' relationship to sport, as his writings on cycling tend to suggest.⁷

Tradition, technology and modernity

Racing during the 1870s and 1880s was a testing ground for the nature of competition: cycling as a competitive and professional sport was

seeking its maturity. Similarly, racing in this early period was – more so than in others, arguably – closely imbricated with the testing of new technologies and designs of bicycle. Overall, the new mechanized sport of cycling was negotiating its place in the rapidly evolving modern world of late nineteenth-century France. In the 1890s the French model of competitive cycling came into bloom, as technology ('safety' bicycles and pneumatic tyres), media coverage (the competition between sporting newspapers such as *Le Vélo* and *L'Auto-Vélo*), industry and commerce (an increasingly mass market for bicycles) and social mores combined to create an environment in which the sport could flourish durably.⁸

Technology was tested in the races of the early period both in terms of the styles of bicycles used and the components. Compared with the 1890s and afterwards, such testing was perhaps less mediatized, and competition between frame-makers and component manufacturers was less intense, because the sport had not yet reached the paroxysm of public interest and commercial significance that it did in later years. Racing helped the search for the most efficient design of bicycle and the most reliable and lightweight equipment by affording direct comparisons over measured distances and between competitors of similar talent, and thus facilitated the gradual evolution from *vélocipède* to *grand-bi* (penny-farthing) to *bicyclette* ('safety' bicycle). The competition between frame-makers and providers of components during this period was firmly located within the context of a rivalry between French and British technology in which France looked despairingly at British supremacy. Whereas before the Franco-Prussian war French cycling technology had been at least the equal of what was produced in Britain, during the 1870s and 1880s British machines and equipment were deemed far superior, and French admiration of British sporting values and training methods compounded Gallic competitors' sense of inferiority. In 1868–70 races in France were mostly undertaken on French machines: Moore won the inaugural Paris–Rouen on a machine built by Tribout at the *Etablissements Suriray* in Melun. But from the mid- and late 1870s (the 'safety' was patented in Britain in 1878), riders, commerce and industry were generally convinced of the inferiority of French products.⁹ By 1889–91, however, a turning point was beginning to appear, as the *grand-bi* was consigned to racing history and French manufacturers asserted the worth of their technologies and products: the September 1889 100 km national championships at Longchamp saw the defeat of talented riders on penny-farthings by a victorious 'safety'; and in June 1891 the brothers Michelin took out a patent for their improved clincher tyre. The bases for ever-more intense sporting competition (the maturity

of the technology in the form of the ‘safety’) and for increasing industrial competition between the UK and France (the rise of manufacturers such as Michelin, Clément and others) had thus been laid.

The simple progress of technology was, however, not the only way in which cycle sport was a marker of modernity. Cycling as an innovative *sport mécanique* was conceived to be about speed and the practicality of the bicycle as a means of transport and communication, and these were intimately linked to its inherent technology; but there were other more subtle ways in which the development of cycle competition helped define a passage from ‘old’ to ‘new’ in French society.¹⁰ In this early period, cycle races were often initially organized along the lines of traditional sporting competitions, and received the imprint of other sports. Cycling’s gradual emancipation from the influence of horse racing, for instance – early races were often arranged by horse-racing clubs, on hippodromes, and riders wore jockey-like attire – demonstrated both the new sport’s debt to the past and its own identity. As grand ‘festive’ sporting events (along the same lines as major horse-racing festivals), cycling competitions negotiated a space in the festive and commemorative calendars of cities and regions, and as we have seen from the example of the *Véloclub bordelais*, these new sporting events both accompanied and replaced existing traditions of memory and entertainment. Cycle sport was also obliged to negotiate the use of public space, long before the great days of major road races in the 1890s and the launch of the Tour in 1903, and so early races were forced to ‘borrow’ public facilities – such as la Place des Quinconces in Bordeaux, le Mail in Angers, or the Parc de Saint-Cloud – whose traditional use was clearly not professional sport.

Women and cycling, 1870s–1890s

The first recorded women’s cycle race took place in Bordeaux in 1869, and during the 1870s and 1880s women were to be seen participating in racing of various kinds, perhaps more as a spectacle than as a sporting activity considered in its own right. Less energetically, female middle- and upper-class elites gradually adopted cycling as a leisure activity during these early decades of the rise of cycling. Controversies over women’s rights to cycle at all and what kinds of riding they should attempt, and the behaviour and apparel that they should adopt when riding, were, in France, very similar to the debates that arose in Britain, the US and other European countries. What seems clear is that, far from there being a consistent and clear-cut rejection of women’s desires to

participate in the new craze for mobility, exercise and freedom afforded by the bicycle, the terms of the debate were often confused and contradictory, as male and female commentators negotiated discourses that gradually facilitated the acceptability of women's cycling of all kinds. In comparison with the avowed amateur ethos of most of British cycling during this period, the intrinsic professionalism of much of French cycle sport facilitated the appearance of female 'racers' (essentially on the track) who attracted considerable followings for their glamour as much as for their athletic abilities; but female cycling's major contribution to French society in this period was possibly the facilitating of a range of new sociabilities. The bicycle during the late nineteenth century became in essence 'the technological partner of the *femme nouvelle*' (Silverman, 1992: 67).

Medical, social and cultural prejudices

It has been suggested that cycling was an activity that neatly encapsulated the contradictions in the development of female sports in the way that moral and scientific arguments could be adduced both for and against its growth (Hargreaves, 1994: 94). In a paper presented to the recently founded *Touring Club de France* in 1895, Dr Léon-Petit summarized how cycling had affected women's place in society, underlining how theories and public opinion had advanced since the earliest days of pioneering female cyclists: 'Si la bicyclette est en train d'opérer l'affranchissement social de la femme, plus sûrement et plus vite que les revendications les plus bruyantes, il n'en faut pas moins se rappeler que son entrée dans les moeurs ne s'est pas faite sans une résistance acharnée' (Léon-Petit, 1904). He summarized opposition to female cycling under two headings, either medical (dangers to women's health) or 'patriotic' (dangers to French birth rates). As he points out, for opponents of female cycling, these fears led to the simplistic slogan 'Vive la France! A bas la bicyclette!' Other objections might now be seen – hidden behind medical and moral panics – to be more social and cultural, as we shall discuss later.

In 1869, less than a year after the groundbreaking race in Bordeaux, a founding text of medicine applied to cycling appeared. Perhaps surprisingly, this analysis was relatively favourable to reasonable use of bicycles by women: 'La plupart des villes de France possédant des gymnases à l'usage des deux sexes, on se demande si le vélocipède doit être défendu aux femmes? Je réponds non, en principe, mais j'admets des restrictions' (Bellencontre, 1869: 30). The author of these relatively liberal interpretations of female cycling was Dr Bellencontre, respected as the *médecin*

inspecteur de la société protectrice de l'enfance de Paris, and the medical expert (*professeur d'hygiène*) commissioned by the prestigious *Véloclub rouennais* as its advisor. Bellencontre appeared somewhat of a convert to the craze for cycling, stressing in his preface that the bicycle should no longer be considered as a toy but as an object of utility and a means of locomotion that would have positive moral effects on the masses: 'J'ai voulu démontrer combien, appliqué à l'hygiène et à la gymnastique, il peut être utile à la santé, quel plaisir il procure et à quel but il conduit en concourant même au progrès de haute moralisation des masses, vers lequel les esprits tendent sans cesse' (1869: v). Perhaps thus 'captured' by the activity he was supposed to regulate, Bellencontre was an early favourable voice, but other experts were both less positive and less consistent in their views.

A major contributor to the ongoing medical, cultural and social debate over women and cycling in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s was the renowned French theorist of medicine and athletic activities, Dr Philippe Tissié.¹¹ In two volumes devoted specifically to cycling (Tissié, 1888; 1893) Tissié gave detailed consideration of the use of bicycles by women, changing his views radically from the earlier treatise to considerably more favourable opinions in 1893. In *L'Hygiène du vélocipédiste* (1888) he was disapproving of women's cycling, mainly since the design of the machines (hard saddles, solid tyres, frames ill-adapted to female anatomy) would prove injurious to women's health through the strains they placed on reproductive organs. But in a rather abrupt apparent *volte-face*, in 1893 he suggested:

En résumé, j'estime que l'usage du vélocipède peut être conseillé à la femme. La nouvelle fabrication des vélocipèdes a rendu ces machines plus maniables, plus sûres, d'un roulement plus facile et moins pénible; l'adaptation des caoutchoucs pneumatiques aux roues, l'élasticité des selles, d'une construction spéciale pour la femme, ont supprimé les trépidations et les causes de choc violent ou de frottement trop durs sur certaines parties du corps. (1893: 130)

However, Tissié's conversion to female cycling frequently seems confused and contradictory: a few lines after the endorsement above, he reminds readers that medical opinion should be sought by aspiring female cyclists, given that a woman's abdomen is made for carrying the fruit of conception and that women are 'wombs with other organs surrounding them'. Moreover:

Si donc, avec ces nouvelles machines, la femme peut se livrer à l'exercice du vélocipède, elle sera néanmoins considérée comme un objet d'art délicat et précieux que le moindre choc peut briser, auprès duquel devra toujours veiller un gardien prudent et attentionné. En somme, le tandem est l'image

de la vie conjugale. Un voyage à deux par ce moyen de locomotion n'est vraiment délicieux et poétique que par l'union de la force qui actionne et la grâce qui sourit en dirigeant. (1893: 131)

Tackling the vexed issue of the leg movement required in cycling, and whether this action is sufficiently comparable to the dangerous muscular contractions of the uterus believed by various moral and medical panics of the nineteenth century to be produced by the use of sewing machines, Tissié declines to conclude, suggesting only that cycling in moderation, especially by virtue of its practice in the open air, is beneficial to women. By 1897 a certain Dr Fauquez was prepared to reject comparisons between cycling and the deleterious effects of sewing machines, and although still holding reservations about the corset, suggested that 'A moins de contre-indications très limitées [...] on peut donc affirmer que l'exercice de la bicyclette est excellent pour la femme et que, dans de nombreux cas, les organes génitaux s'en trouvent très bien' (1897: 6–8).

Women, cycle sport/entertainment, leisure/utility cycling

On 1 November 1868 Bordeaux hosted the first officially organized race between women on bicycles. Over a distance of 500 metres, 'Mademoiselle Julie' took first place and a gold watch, beating her competitors Louise, Louisa and Amélie. On frequent subsequent occasions, *Les Dames bordelaises* would race in carefully staged events combining sport and the emancipation of women, sexual titillation and the objectification of femininity. Female cycle racing was an activity that – even more than leisure cycling – inflamed the passions of moralists and medical experts, but in some ways, because the protagonists were more often than not either foreign or working-class girls making a living through the 'spectacle' of women's racing in the regular velodrome meetings that sprang up all around France in the 1880s and 1890s, the 'problem' was circumscribed to the domain of entertainment and commercial sport.

In a famous guide to *vélocipédie* published in 1869 by the sporting journalist Richard Lesclide under the pseudonym of 'Le Grand Jacques' can be found a passage typical of the titillation of female cycle racing:

Si l'on organise des courses de femmes, c'est probablement à cause de l'attrait particulier qu'elles présentent. Que les dames s'habillent en voyous, le but est manqué. Ces courses doivent présenter un caractère de grâce et d'élégance qui dépend surtout du costume féminin, de la souplesse des écuyères, et de leur façon de gouverner leurs montures... (1869: 94)

And in a characteristic flourish of sexist voyeurism, the writer goes on to suggest that whereas pretty women with nice legs should show them off,

others should refrain from doing so! The more serious Tissié, even in his more enlightened phase (1893), was disapproving of female racing. Although – with various caveats and contradictions – he essentially maintained that gentle cycling was acceptable, the crucial aspect of any female cycling activity was precisely ‘moderation’:

l’usage du vélocipède est bon pour la femme. Il va sans dire qu’il sera modéré, en effet, je n’admets pas que la femme fasse des courses de vitesse. Qu’elles se livrent au tourisme en marchant à l’allure de 12 à 15 kilomètres à l’heure; très bien! Mais de la course à 20, 25 kilomètres à l’heure, non! (1893: 124)

The distinction has to be made, of course, between riding/racing by the wives/daughters/sisters of the middle-class males who expressed these restrictive views on how their female companions or relations should behave, and the riding and racing of the *demi-mondaines* such as the celebrated courtesans *la Belle Otero* and Emilienne d’Alençon in the Bois de Boulogne discussed by Pasteur (1986) or Mlle Julie and *les Dames bordelaises*, ‘Miss America’, and the numbers of other women who made a living from cycling either in road races or on velodromes as part of the developing sports-entertainment industry. ‘Miss America’ (in reality a Mrs Turner) took part in the famous Paris–Rouen race of 7 November 1869, taking 29th place in a mixed field of 33 finishers. Pseudonyms were often adopted by female riders either to protect a family identity considered sufficiently bourgeois to be worth concealing (a trend already set by male riders involved in races where money was involved) or in reflection of the novelty/entertainment status of their activities. As the business of racing-entertainment matured and as female emancipation in society and sport progressed, some women began to race under their real identities. One such pioneer was the Belgian racer Hélène Dutrieu (1877–1961) who was a successful track racer and record-holder in France for the Simpson Lever Chain team in the 1890s, as well as a performer of cycling stunt acts in variety shows, before a further career as a celebrated aviator (see Retail, 1911).

The reverse perspective on women and cycle sport should also be considered, namely the concern, prevalent among certain commentators, that bourgeois and upper-class women might effectively be corrupted by exposure as spectators to male cycling champions. Although such champions were often considered to be prime specimens of the virility of the French ‘race’, capable of producing strong new generations for any *Revanche* on Germany, as menial working-class cogs in the developing *sport-spectacle* industry of the velodromes they were a threat to bourgeois masculinities. In the 1899 novel *Alphonse Marcaux* by the future inventor of the Tour de France, Henri Desgrange, the *ordre social* of the

Third Republic is effectively portrayed as threatened by the sexual attraction felt by female *bourgeoises* for the muscular and sexually potent racing champions.

With regard to women and leisure/utility cycling during this early period, described by historian and sociologist of nineteenth-century cycling Philippe Gaboriau as 'la vitesse bourgeoise', it should be noted that cycle *racing* was essentially the preserve – with some exceptions – of male cyclists (Gaboriau, 1991). Too expensive for the masses, unless they were working-class racers making a living from competition, *la vitesse* was masculine and middle class. Male cycling could also be *slow*, of course, in contradistinction to the sweating proletarianism of paid racing stars, but women's bourgeois cycling was almost obligatorily *leisurely*. Where medical experts authorized female cycling – and we have seen above that this was more often the case than one might expect – it was with the condition that activity should be undertaken in moderation. In practice, this meant that rides should generally be short, should avoid undue exertion (for medical or social/cultural reasons) and should be accompanied by male guardians. Thus, women's cycling was essentially slow, short-range and social or leisure-orientated. Given the price of machines, only women of means sufficient to obviate the necessity of working could afford bicycles, and true 'utility' cycling was therefore rare.

Theories and practice of female cycling were, however, varying and variable, reflecting the difficulties inherent during this period of social, cultural and technological change: although in general, short rides were advised for women, as bicycle equipment improved and women's claims to independence gained credence, longer rides and even touring became possible. Theoretical advice remained contradictory even during the 1890s, oscillating between encouragement of healthy open-air exercise as a tonic for anaemic, neurotic women, recurrent concerns over the detrimental effects of pedalling on the womb, the advantages of mixed sociability or the dangers of coquetry, and inappropriate dress and ill-advised mixing of social classes. Thus, in 1893, Tissié quoted enthusiastically from a statement by the husband of a woman who had undertaken a lengthy cycling tour carrying heavy photographic equipment:

'Nous avons voyagé sur de très mauvaises routes, sans abri contre le vent, le soleil, la pluie, et jamais ma femme ne s'est sentie plus forte. Nous traînions un poids épouvantable [...]. Quand elle pense à ce temps de labeurs elle le considère comme le plus beau de sa vie et elle a pourtant été élevée au sein de la richesse et du luxe.' (1893: 121)

But on a following page he suggests that ‘une femme ne doit faire que des promenades qui lui permettent de rentrer tous les soirs chez elle’ (Tissié, 1893: 25). The advent of the *Touring Club de France* in the early 1890s strengthened the position of members (men and women) of cycling clubs more interested in leisure riding of all kinds, and gradually helped to make female cycling more acceptable.

Although ‘sociability’ will be discussed in more detail below, it should also be mentioned here. Women’s leisure cycling was generally a collective, group activity, rather than the often individual training/racing efforts of men. And since women’s leisure riding was invariably in mixed company, it was also invariably a practical test-case of developing gender relations. Dr Galtier-Boissière, writing in 1901 but analysing the experience of previous decades, suggested that:

l’association des deux sexes empêche généralement les excès, en obligeant l’homme à ménager galamment les forces de sa compagne. Enfin, l’action sur les moeurs est indéniable: la camaraderie réelle qui s’établit entre les jeunes filles et jeunes gens à la suite de longues courses de cyclisme a sur tous un effet bienfaisant. (1901: 54)

Moreover: ‘La sobriété de mise qu’impose le cyclisme supprime la coquetterie ou du moins n’en laisse subsister que ce grain imperceptible qui fait le charme de la femme’ (1901: 57). The series of short stories and plays entitled ‘Contes modernes, de selle ou de la pédale’, which appeared in the magazine *La Bicyclette* during 1893–95, set out many of these male–female gender issues in literary form.

Women and sociability

‘Sociability’ has been a key theme in the academic study of French cycling during the late Second Empire and the Third Republic, particularly in terms of the growth of cycling clubs and how these structures that organized sport and leisure activities also served to bring individuals together in ways that fostered shared social, political or cultural values. As the sports historian Ronald Hubscher points out, however, it is important to realize that this new sociability was, in essence, ‘une sociabilité au masculin’ (Hubscher and Durry, 1992: 96). The legal status of sports clubs as associations whose activities and organization were closely overseen by the authorities made them as much political groupings as mere comings-together of individuals inspired by a new sport/leisure activity. Within the particular political and social context of the Third Republic, characterized by concerns over possible atomization and fragmentation of society in conditions of free-market economic and social liberalism, sports clubs as associations could be seen as useful *corps intermédiaires*,

fostering models of *vie collective librement consentie* either to provide resistance to a dominant state or to palliate excessive individualism.

But as is clear from the history of cycling clubs themselves during this period, the place of women within this system of sociability and citizenship through sport and leisure was far from strong. Not only were women excluded from full citizenship until female suffrage in 1944, but membership of cycling clubs was often denied to them. As the historian of the early French cycling clubs Alex Poyer suggests (2003a: 36–39), during 1867–87 women were almost totally absent – at least as ‘full’ members – from cycling clubs, with the exception of the rather aristocratic *Véloce-club béarnais* in Pau,¹² which accepted women on condition that they avoid involvement in the running of the club and any other non-sporting activities. After the late 1880s evolving social and cultural thinking on the place of women in society, accompanied by technical developments in bicycle design that led experts such as Tissié to revise their objections to female cycling, meant that clubs and their sociability through cycling became slightly more open to women. However, female memberships generally remained inferior in rights and obligations compared with the standard involvement of men or even junior *sociétaires* (in order to preserve ‘respectability’, women were usually required to be introduced to clubs by husbands, brothers or fathers, and were debarred from taking on administrative roles); and, as Poyer points out, very few cycling clubs created competitions for female members (2003a: 142–44).

However, despite the sociability of cycling during this period being fundamentally male, Hubscher also suggests that cycling functioned for women (and for men) as what he terms ‘sport-prétexte’, in other words as a new practice ostentatiously adopted and allowing new forms of mixing between men and women in a social context facilitated by sport/leisure (Hubscher and Durry, 1992: 93–109). As we have seen above, one of the staple tropes of popular cycling culture was the illustrated short story or sketch on the ‘boy-meets-pretty-attired-girl-cyclist’ theme, and such representations of sociability – despite the ‘structural’ restrictions placed upon female emancipation by the cycling clubs themselves – faithfully portrayed the realities of how cycling could facilitate women’s independence. Indeed, the fact that Albertine is pushing a bicycle when she first appears in *A la Recherche du temps perdu* has allowed literary critic Françoise Gaillard (1998) to imagine that Proust’s *jeunes filles en fleurs* were all similarly equipped, the mobility and freedom of cycling helping not only the emancipation of young women, but also consolidating the creation of the concept of *la jeunesse*. Gaillard’s interpretation stresses how cycling positively influenced female

sociability (mixed in gender and class): ‘La jeune fille à la bicyclette est une force qui va, et qui ne bouscule pas seulement des estivals en promenade, mais des barrières sociales, des codes mondains, des rapports générationnels’ (1998: 87).

In this brief consideration of women and cycling during France’s *Belle Époque* we have not considered in detail either the complexities of medical science’s approaches to cycling, both male and female (Thompson, 1999), or, indeed, the voluminous debate on clothing and apparel (the ‘bloomers or not?’ issue) that forms part of the overall analysis of women’s freedom and mobility in the late nineteenth century. We hope, however, to have given a strong indication of how female cycling was seen as both threatening to established social and cultural values and encouraging to feminine emancipation. If further proof were needed, we should consider that in 1898 the novel *Voici des ailes!* by Maurice Leblanc (1898) concludes with the two couples who have shared a cycling tour of Normandy swapping their partners, and the women riding topless. Such could be the perceived revolutionary impact of female cycling!

* * *

Cycling during the early decades of its development in France was structured by pre-existing patterns of sociability, current interpretations of sport and leisure, and the prevailing understanding of gender relations. As we have seen, cycling was a varied and fluid activity, but one that captured the attention and the enthusiasm of significant numbers of French citizens, who saw it as a means of transport, entertainment, sport or emancipation. What seems clear in this early period of what might be termed pre-maturity is that both cycling and French culture and society were attempting to negotiate evolving identities: in the case of cycling as leisure, utility and sport, this identity was its initial cultural signification, as its varied forms were adopted, explored and adapted by different groupings. In the case of society overall, the socioeconomic modernization of France and the sociopolitical changes that accompanied the growing assurance of Republicanism were reflected in the ways in which citizens espoused and then developed in their own ways the activities of their new – socially, culturally and technically innovative – pastime.

Notes

- 1 The *Union Vélocipédique de France* will be considered in more detail in the following chapter, as an example of how cycling – and its ‘federational institutionalization’ – pioneered the creation of governing bodies for sport on both the national and international levels.
- 2 There are no remaining archives of the club itself, which dissolved in acrimonious circumstances in the early 1890s, and little administrative documentation survives in the departmental (Gironde) and municipal archives in Bordeaux. The details of the club on which this study is based have been gleaned from close reading of contemporary newspapers and sports journals, and on the scant material available in the city and departmental archives.
- 3 For the creation of the club, see *Archives départementales de la Gironde*, IR 112, on whose primary material some of this section is based. Another major cycling club during this period, also located in south-west France, where cycling was developing strongly, was the *Véloce-club béarnais* in Pau, which, although in many ways a highly significant early example of sporting *associationnisme* and longer-lived than the VCB, was less typical of the issues attached to the rise of sports clubs and of democracy during the early Third Republic (Dauncey, 2010a).
- 4 E.g. *Le Véloce-Sport*, 23 January 1890, p. 60, for a note on the resignation of committee members.
- 5 In Bordeaux in November 1868 women had taken part in the cycle races staged in the Parc bordelais, but the major club in Bordeaux, the *Véloce-club bordelais*, never agreed on allowing female members.
- 6 (H.O.) Duncan and (John) Keen were British. The internationalization of cycling sport was yet to be fully developed, but by the 1890s it was commonplace to see American riders racing in Paris and attracting huge followings as international sports stars. A case in point is the multi-champion and record-holder Augustus Zimmerman (1869–1936), who was a sporting icon in both the US and in France.
- 7 Duncan authored a well-known training manual (Duncan and Superbie, 1890), a ‘history’ of cycling (Duncan, 1898), and an autobiography (Duncan, 1926).
- 8 We shall discuss in a following chapter how the intense commercial and ideological rivalry between the newspapers *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo* led directly to the invention of the Tour de France in 1903.
- 9 There were obviously debates and exceptions. For example, in the mid-1880s, according to Pierre Naudin (1967: 1486): ‘Tous croyaient à la primauté des engins fabriqués outre-Manche, sauf le bordelais Georges Juzan, qui construisait un safety [...] les essais en furent d’ailleurs si concluants, que profitant de l’organisation du Championnat des 100km le 15 novembre 1885, Juzan voulut tenter un essai sur cette distance. Il la couvrit en 4” 40”, soit douze minutes de moins que le vainqueur Louis Loste.’
- 10 The vogue for using the term *véloce* in the names of clubs is a clear indicator of the enthusiasm for speed, as is the mania for average speeds and records. The practicality of the bicycle as transport and communication was demonstrated by Lesclide’s first Paris–Rouen race in 1869, and then by the first attested use of *vélocipédie militaire* in 1870, when a cyclist apparently brought dispatches to General Faidherbe, who was isolated from all other contact.
- 11 For discussion of his wider significance, see Thibault (1981b).
- 12 For a detailed study of the *Véloce-club béarnais*, see Dauncey (2010a).

Towards Sporting Modernity: Sport as the Driver of Cycling, 1891–1902

France in the 1890s was politically relatively stable, even though the new Third Republic – in the form of the ‘conservative Republic’ defined by Thiers as the form of regime least likely to divide the French people – was still challenged by threats from the extreme right, and was shaken to the core by the national drama of the Dreyfus Affair (1894–99). But the threat of a *coup d’état* from General Boulanger had been avoided in the late 1880s; parliamentary democracy seemed established, if occasionally questioned. Economically and socially, although France was still concerned at its weakness and slowness of development compared with Britain and particularly Germany, the country was beginning, in the mid-1890s at least, to recover from the economic depression suffered in the 1880s (Démier, 2000: 409). Structures, thinking and technologies in industry were modernizing and facilitating France’s economic and social transformation, even though the real explosion in the growth of the economy would not occur until the early years of the twentieth century or even the post-1945 period. Rather than being found in the motors of development of previous years, such as the building of the railways, or the urban building sector, or state investment in general, the drivers of growth during the 1890s were to be found in the renewal of industrial infrastructures and in household consumption. A particular success of French industry during the 1890s was its ability to adapt and adopt the products of the ‘industrial avant garde’ (Démier, 2000: 411–13) at this time, of which one of the most important was the automobile. Building on the vibrancy of the bicycle industry in the 1880s, as French production regained the early dynamism of the late 1860s that had been swept away by the disruptions of the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune, the industrial manufacturing base responded to ongoing demand for bicycles as well as moving into the production of motorcycles and motor cars during the 1890s. With increasing prosperity, increasing literacy, the developing strength of the bourgeoisie and the arriving significance of the industrial working classes in terms of the consumption of products and services of all kinds, sports in general – and cycling in particular –

found an environment propitious for their growth.

French sport in the 1890s was – as the historian of the early cycling clubs Alex Poyer has suggested – at a point where, structurally and institutionally, it could build upon the solid bases constructed by cycling, which in the 1870s and 1880s had pioneered the model of clubs and associations. The famous amateur multi-sports federation *Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques* (USFSA) was set up in 1889, leading the way for other national federations. Cycling clubs, whose socially more inclusive membership was stimulated by the increasing availability of affordable machines (a result of the second-hand market, greater production and rising living standards) and by the greater facility of riding of the ‘safety bicycle’, flourished strongly: from a mere 300 in 1891, the number of clubs had reached 1,400 in 1895 and 1,700 in 1899 (Poyer, 2007: 37). As cycling became increasingly democratized, the audience for cycle racing became much more significant, and the media, in the form of both specialized and non-specialized press, began to stage increasingly high-profile and spectacular competitions.

In order to give a discussion of the representative themes of cycling overall during this period of developing maturity for sport and its institutions and economy, this chapter will firstly consider the activities of the French national cycling federation – the *Union Vélocipédique de France* – which was challenged in the 1890s by other bodies with ambitions to lead cycling in France. Secondly, we will discuss a number of the immensely spectacular – and now considered iconic – races of this period, organized by the press and setting the principles of much subsequent cycle sport. Thirdly, we will examine the principal newspapers of the time that made cycling and sport their business, developing the nexus of relations between sport, media and industry that would characterize not only the birth of the Tour de France in 1903, but much of the subsequent history of cycling in France during the twentieth century. The term we shall use to describe this nexus is the ‘sports–media–industrial complex’.¹ Finally, analysis will focus on the way in which it was French, rather than British or American, cycling that led the way towards the creation of one of the earliest of international governing bodies for sport, the *Union cycliste internationale*, set up in Paris in 1900.

Federations and organizations: towards unity

During the 1890s the need arose for purposeful governance of cycling organizations and activities. As early as 1881 the first and most impor-

tant of national cycling federations, the *Union Vélocipédique de France* (UVF), had been set up in an attempt to coordinate the actions and interpretations of cycling as a developing leisure and sporting pursuit (Poyer, 2003a: 58–62), but it struggled initially to impose its authority on the disparate and growing ecology of clubs, races and practices. The increasing internationalism of cycle sport in particular meant that France was also in need of an organization capable of speaking with a clear voice on French positions regarding vexed issues such as amateurism and professionalism, the timing and distances of national and international records, and a host of other matters. During the 1880s the UVF eventually managed to master the competing claims – for instance from regional federations of cycling clubs, or lobbies in favour of amateurism or professionalism – to control French cycling on the national level. The principal institution that challenged the UVF in the mid-1880s was the short-lived *Alliance Vélocipédique de France* during 1884–86, which essentially had little to propose in terms of an alternative vision. But the flourishing of competition of all kinds, the development of the commercial importance of professional racing, the increasing stake held by industry in cycling in the form of the growing market for bicycles of all kinds, and the often frenzied interest of the sporting press in cycling as sport and leisure meant that challenges to the authority of the still young national federation were many and varied.

The Union Vélocipédique de France

As early as 1869–70 there had been some feeling that a national federation of clubs providing a unified governance of the development of cycling would be useful, but France's first sports federation was that for gymnastics, the *Union des sociétés de gymnastique de France*, created in 1873, followed eight years later by that of cycling. As Ritchie (2011: 89–97, 102–04, 141–50) has conveniently and expertly described, in the United Kingdom and in America, France's reference points for all things cycling-related, the Bicycle Union (later to become the National Cyclists' Union or NCU) had been set up in February 1878, closely followed by the Bicycle (later the Cyclists') Touring Club (August 1878), while the League of American Wheelmen saw the light of day in May 1880.

During the early and mid-1880s the *Union Vélocipédique de France* struggled somewhat to assert its independence from influential individuals, newspapers, clubs and regional federations, and because of the multiplicity of views on the vexed questions of the decade, particularly that of amateurism and professionalism, it found it difficult to impose a clear and undeviating line. Nevertheless, the UVF in the early 1880s was

sufficiently firm – at least initially – on amateurism to be seen as another example of France adopting *le modèle anglais* of sport, both in terms of its structure and its support of Corinthian values (Poyer, 2003a: 58). The founding congress in 1881 had been dominated by northern clubs imbued with British values (because of the presence of expatriate English members working in northern *départements*), and the definition of ‘French amateurism’ adopted had made only small concessions to the significant numbers of French professional riders, against whom (because they were classified as professional by the UVF) British amateurs (as defined by the NCU) would never be allowed to compete.² Successive congresses of the UVF made the status of amateur and professional riders more flexible, and more reflective of what southern clubs described as France’s more egalitarian and republican sporting values, rather than what were perceived as rigidly British (foreign) imported principles of Corinthianism and an insistence on rules of amateurism that stifled competition (and thus progress). As Ritchie has briefly described (2011: 177–78), what we might term the French compromise brokered by the UVF eventually led cycle racing towards open competition.

Although internal divisions in the UVF caused the failure of the Union’s contribution to the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, by the late 1880s the UVF had weathered the storms of the early years and was ready, during what is often described as the ‘Golden Age’ (e.g. Poyer, 2003a: 103) of French cycling, to guide the development of the sport as it became ever more important commercially, and as pressure gradually built for the creation of an international governing body. The UVF was instrumental in the birth of the *Union Cycliste Internationale*, created in 1900, thus guaranteeing a French influence on the development of cycling worldwide, but before this could happen, the French national federation still had to deal with a number of challenges to its role during the 1890s.³

Rival federations: the Touring Club de France, the Fédération

Vélocipédique du Nord, the Association Vélocipédique d’Amateurs

Three federations whose existence could threaten the centralizing and unifying role of the UVF came into being between January 1890 and January 1891. The *raisons d’être* of these three competing bodies reflected the three main causes of tension within the UVF during the previous decade, namely dissension over what kind of cycling should be primarily promoted (touring vs. racing), regional federations and conflict with the Paris-based Union, and the ever-present issue of amateurism vs. professionalism. The new organizations were the *Touring Club de France*

(TCF, January 1890), the *Fédération Vélocipédique du Nord* (FVDN, March 1890) and the *Association Vélocipédique d'Amateurs* (AVA, July 1890). The AVA was accepted into the *Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques* in January 1891. The most interesting of these three breaks in the merely apparent unity of French cycling are that of touring and the TCF, and amateurism and the AVA.

The *Touring Club de France* was created essentially as an echo of the British Cyclists' Touring Club, in order to fill the void left by the UVF in the area of touring as the national body concentrated on competition. Cycling clubs since the beginning of the sport had been obliged to balance the passions of members principally interested in racing and members more attached to the gentler pleasures of touring, and debate on this had raged (e.g. Martin, 1888). Racing, doubtless because it was easier to manage, organize, codify and structure, generally became the more visible focus of clubs, and the UVF's responsibilities to steward French cycling emphasized competition much more than leisure riding. Touring members of cycling clubs that affiliated to the UVF felt their interests were ignored, as did individual cyclists who took out personal membership of the national organization. The TCF thus answered a long-felt need and took over a number of the touring-related functions that the UVF had nevertheless developed, such as signposting of dangerous inclines and the publication of route guides and handbooks listing accommodation and facilities for the repair of cycles. Relatively rapidly – in fact by 1895 – the TCF expanded its brief from simply cycle touring to include touring by other means, such as cars (Poyer, 2003a: 196). The UVF, in reaction, continued to devote some time to cycle touring, in defence of its theoretical role as a federation for all kinds of cycling.

The challenge to the UVF from the *Fédération Vélocipédique du Nord* reflected the enduring spatial split in French cycling between clubs and groupings of clubs in the southern and western regions of the country and similar networks of relations and collaboration in the northern regions. Whereas by the early 1890s the *Fédération du Sud-Ouest* had lost its influence, cyclists and clubs in northern France could affiliate to the FVDN rather than the UVF and those in the Haut-Rhône could similarly choose allegiance to the *Fédération du Haut-Rhône* regional structure. Whereas the TCF's challenge to the UVF concerned principally the promotion and regulation of touring, and the AVA/USFSA disagreed with the UVF in terms of the ethics of sport (amateur values or commerce and professionalism), the rivalry of the FVDN was less ideological: the FVDN competed with the UVF in its governance of cycling by proposing its own competitions, its own rules, producing maps and organizing

campaigns against government initiatives such as the tax on bicycles.

The *Association Vélocipédique d'Amateurs* represented a return to the purest of amateur principles for cycling, in a reaction against what was seen as the tawdry commercialism and professionalism into which the UVF had allowed French racing to fall. Only those who could meet the most searching criteria could compete as amateurs in the calendar of competitions arranged by the AVA, and races were mostly track-based, all the better to control the quality of the viewing public they attracted.⁴ Cycling's entry into the amateur bastion of the USFSA created what was known as a *bataillon sacré* of cyclists carrying the amateur faith in the heathen land of French professionalism. The AVA/USFSA was mocked mercilessly by the (commercial) cycling press for what were seen as its outdated 'English' aristocratic ideals and social snobbery, but in 1892 it had the success of being the only federation whose riders were allowed to compete as amateurs in the UK. And in 1893, when the International Cyclists' Association (ICA) was founded in London, British influence ensured that the anglophile AVA/USFSA was accepted as a founding federation. Concretely, the AVA/USFSA had about half as many adherents as the UVF, who were concentrated mainly in the capital and the Paris region.

The Union cycliste de France

In November 1895 the partisans of professionalism and professional sport launched a new national federation uniquely concerned with professional competition. The *Union cycliste de France* (UCF) was designed to represent the interests of clubs and velodromes involved in professional racing, and was therefore uninterested in the perpetual discussions over the status of amateurs and professionals, and how French amateurism met or failed to meet the requirements of the UK and US governing bodies (Poyer, 2003a: 200). The UCF was thus the result of a schism in the UVF between those who wished to continue to manage French cycling as a whole – clubs, federations, amateurs, professionals, touring, racing – and those who saw the guaranteed future of cycling reflected in the professional, commercial, industrial and mediatized racing of the velodromes. The *Manifeste de l'UCF* was published on the front page of *Le Vélo* (1895), which was as usual fostering a continuing debate on the pro/am issue, proposals for trades unions for professional riders, the legal status of velodromes, and so on, and was backing the new federation against the UVF.

Since its foundation in 1881 the UVF had continually reviewed its definitions of amateurism and professionalism in response to pressures

from abroad and from within the UVF itself, where different factions defended different interpretations of what cycling was about (Poyer, 2003a: 198–200). In the early 1890s the organizational structure of the UVF was modified to make its work more effective, and in so doing more power was given to those within the Union whose principal interests lay in professional racing. The role of the national annual conference was reduced, giving more executive authority to the *Comité directeur*, and the powers of the *Commission sportive* were augmented to allow it – rather than the annual conference – to nominate the velodromes that would host UVF championships. Increasingly, during the early 1890s, the UVF was realizing and reflecting the growing links between itself as cycling’s governing body and the rapidly developing industrial-journalistic complex of manufacturers, velodromes and the sporting press. From 1892 members of the *Comité directeur* were allowed overt ties with press and industry, and the remit of the *Commission sportive* to choose velodromes to stage lucrative championships created an obvious link, beneficial financially to the federation, between the Union and the cycle-racing industry.

It was the faction embodied in the UVF’s *Commission sportive* that was at the root of the birth of the UCF. The reformers of the *Commission sportive* – led by the influential sports journalist Paul Rousseau – wished for a closer relationship between the UVF and the press, manufacturers and velodromes, whereas the *Comité directeur* under president Louis d’Iriart d’Etchepare – despite its loss-making stewardship of the Union – defended a more traditional approach. The schism finally occurred in late 1895 when, although disavowed by the annual conference, the *Comité directeur* refused to step down, thus forcing the supporters of the *Commission sportive* to secede. To the irritation of the UVF, the UCF was approved by the Interior Ministry in February 1896, and briefly provided a parallel governing body for French cycling, before its members rejoined the UVF in 1898, already planning another take-over of the organization from which they had seceded only three years before. Although a significant and interesting example of how ‘professional’ French cycling was even in the early years, and how significant and important professional racing and its stars were and would remain throughout the development of cycling in France, the UCF was short-lived because its national overall appeal was too limited: its membership was mainly Parisian and composed principally of velodrome managers and owners, sporting publicists and cycle manufacturers; it found difficulties in attracting the support of ordinary clubs; and its championships met with little success. Moreover, the UCF came perhaps too near the

end of the 1890s boom in professional track racing to base a secure future on a trend in cycle sport that was in relative decline.

UVF renewal and moves towards internationalism

Although the UVF had been weakened by competition from the UCF, it had managed to survive, despite losing members to the TCF and making an unhappy alliance – as an essentially *petite-bourgeoise* organization – with the aristocratic Omnium club in Paris, as well as dealing with anti-centralizing challenges from the *Fédération cycliste lyonnaise* (1896). Also in 1896 an ephemeral *Fédération cycliste des amateurs français* (FCAF) turned another page in the ongoing debate over amateurism and sporting ethics, but by threatening the USFSA and making it readier to compromise with the UVF, it enabled these two major federations to reach an agreement. The USFSA had profited slightly from the troubles of the UVF, gaining members and influence, but in October 1896 it saw fit to accept that professional races should be the exclusive domain of the UVF, while the UVF allowed amateur competition to be the preserve of the USFSA. But once the threats from the UCF to the UVF and from the FCAF to the USFSA had declined, the USFSA gradually weakened, eventually passing all responsibility for amateur racing back to the UVF in 1900 (Hubscher and Durry, 1992).

As we shall discuss in a following section, during the final years of the nineteenth century, secure in its now unrivalled position as the national federation, the UVF engaged with the process of creating a French-inspired international regulatory body for cycling. Here, however, we consider some of the principal races and forms of competitive cycling that characterized cycling as competition during this period, before the invention of the Tour de France in 1903 revolutionized racing in France, and arguably worldwide.

Sport: the maturity of competition

Competition during the 1870s and 1880s had been moving slowly towards the organization of a mature system of racing, with established regulations, a fixed calendar of events, an understanding of the amateur or professional statuses of riders, media coverage and a faithful public. It was very definitely in the 1890s that professional cycle sport properly took off in France, as the sporting principles established mainly in the 1880s melded with the rapidly growing sporting press and cycle industry to create a context in which racing would be promoted and reported by

an influential journalistic–industrial complex. Under pressure to produce more and more exciting racing and ever greater feats of physical prowess, riders began to specialize in the disciplines in which they were most gifted, rather than competing in all kinds of races as had sometimes been the case in the early years, and so cycle competition became a true *sport-spectacle*.

Competition for readership between the sports paper *Le Véloce-Sport* and the generalist *Le Petit Journal* and differences of opinion over the state and future of French cycling in general meant that the newspapers were actively seeking ways of attracting public attention. The race between Bordeaux and Paris in May 1891 was the gimmick hit upon by Paul Rousseau and Maurice Martin for *Le Véloce-Sport*, and Paris–Brest–Paris, run by *Le Petit Journal* and its editor Pierre Giffard in September 1891, followed closely, helping to launch a new mode of cycle competition. The year 1891 – twenty-two years after the famous Paris–Rouen race of 1869, which itself blended sport and media – is widely recognized as marking the start of a new era of professional racing that was to reach its culmination in 1903 with the creation of the Tour de France itself. Jean Durry (1973) coined the term *le Grand départ* to describe the way in which 1891 launched contemporary cycle competition. Racing on the road was to grow in popularity and strength during the 1890s – the celebrated Paris–Roubaix was first run in 1896 – but competition on the track was also to undergo a great boom, as the ownership of velodromes passed from cycle clubs to private entrepreneurs and, with the help of the cycling press, races and racers were transformed into objects of huge public enthusiasm.

The Bordeaux–Paris race

The inaugural Bordeaux–Paris race was staged on 23 May 1891 and was devised jointly by *Le Véloce-Sport* newspaper and the *Véloce-Club bordelais*, two institutions that had a number of influential individuals in common. Twenty-eight riders signed up for the 577 km race. Relying heavily on *Le Véloce-Sport* for publicity and on the VCB for the practical organization of the route, over the following decades the race was to become the doyenne of long-distance road racing in France. Much of the impetus behind its creation came from the rivalry between *Le Véloce-Sport* and other newspapers that were beginning to take sports journalism seriously, in particular the Paris-based *Le Petit Journal* whose cycling columns hosted articles by Pierre Giffard, writing under the pseudonym of ‘Jean-sans-Terre’.

Whatever the subsequent transformations of Bordeaux–Paris – and

the history of the race in the 1890s at least is a palimpsest of evolving thinking on cycle racing in France – the race as it was devised in 1891 was born of competition within France for leadership of *la vélocipédie*, and comparison with Britain. Piqued by the idea that cycling clubs in Lyon and Grenoble had been talking in 1890 with the London Stanley Cycling Club about the running of 12- and 24-hour time trials in the Haut-Rhône region, road racers in Bordeaux apparently brought forward their ambition of doing the same, but rejected as too logistically complicated the British model of time trials based on time limits (Lombard, 1891). This meant that the race would be a place-to-place ride, not conceived, however, as an individual record attempt (along the lines of, say, the End-to-End or Liverpool–London in the UK) but as a mass-start road race.

In 1891 the VCB and *Le Véloce-Sport* were keen to attract crack British riders to compete in Bordeaux–Paris, but the NCU refused to authorize British amateurs to compete in France in an open race where they might in fact be riding against professionals. Despite French indignation at the alleged bad faith of the British governing body – which in the view of the French was turning a blind eye to the ‘sham-amateurism’ of riders who were retained by manufacturers – in order to attract the best international field, the organizers of Bordeaux–Paris allowed only French *amateurs* to take part, thereby opening the door for UK participation. This effectively meant that British professionals such as G.P. Mills (riding for Humber as well as for his Anfield Bicycle Club) were racing against ‘true’ French amateurs, the best of whom was (Pierre-Joseph) Jiel-Laval (always known as ‘Jiel-Laval’) of the VCB. A further irony was that, since the organizers allowed pacing from companion riders, the victorious Mills was helped to Paris by many kilometres of shelter behind France’s premier professional rider, Charles Terront, who was not, of course, allowed to compete himself.

The race itself was an epic of courage and endurance, as it had been intended to be. Holbein was generally expected to win, but Mills’s dominance was such that it soon became obvious that he would be victorious, and he was welcomed to Paris by a crowd of some 10,000 spectators. The winning time was 26 hrs 34 mins 57 secs, giving an overall average speed of 21.82 kph. The Britons Holbein, Edge and Bates arrived next, with Jiel-Laval only losing fourth place by two minutes to Bates. The second French rider home was Coulliboef, placed sixth, three minutes behind Jiel-Laval (Spectator, 1891).

The race made a small profit: 510 francs of income from entry fees and donations against 423 francs of expenditure on programmes,

posters, checkpoints, prizes and so on produced a net gain of 87 francs (Jiel-Laval, 1891). But the main impact of Bordeaux–Paris was the publicity it had always been intended to give to cycling and, accessorially, the stimulation the result gave to debates in France over amateurism, professionalism and the presumed superiority of the ‘English model’ of training and racing. Mills’ performance was acclaimed as one of the greatest ever long-distance rides, ‘morally superior’, said *Le Véloce-Sport*, to all other distance records because of the atrocious conditions of rain and wind he had faced (Spectator, 1891). In the weeks that intervened between Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Brest–Paris in September 1891, discussion raged over whether French races should be organized specially to allow the participation of fake British amateurs, whether British training and racing was technically more advanced and whether British riders should be banned from Paris–Brest–Paris. Bordeaux–Paris had raised the profile of cycle racing with a single spectacular event, as the general public and the general press alike had taken notice of the race, but the specialist press, keen to retain its own niche, was unhappy with the reporting of other newspapers (Hamellet, 1891).

During the rest of the 1890s – as close reading of a near-contemporary view of developments in cycle racing allows us to suggest (Coquelle and Breyer, 1899) – Bordeaux–Paris served as a kind of test-bed for the development of professional road racing: in 1892 it was organized wholly by *Le Véloce-Sport*, and English riders did not participate because of disagreements over amateurism and professionalism; in 1893 the race was run by *Le Véloce-Sport* and the growing *Le Vélo*, which in the later 1890s was to take over the event completely; during the rest of the decade arguments raged over amateurism and professionalism and British participation, the use of pacing riders, the use of motorcycle or car pacing and other issues and, in 1902, the press war between sports newspapers led to Bordeaux–Paris races being staged by both *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo*.

The Paris–Brest–Paris race

The 572 km of Bordeaux–Paris had been planned as a spectacular demonstration of what men and bicycles could do, but just three months later another race was organized whose scale and drama eclipsed that of its earlier rival and, in many ways, caused cycle sport to claim its proper place in the popular imagination. As Durry (1973: 30, 33) explains the relationship between the two races: ‘cet évènement [Bordeaux–Paris] marqua les esprits, mais une aventure encore plus fabuleuse se préparait, qui allait avoir un retentissement non seulement national mais mondial’. He goes on to suggest that, after Terront’s incredible September 1891

ride, 'la cause du cyclisme était définitivement gagnée'. The non-stop ride from Paris to the far-flung Breton port of Brest and back, a distance of 1,196 km, was run over the days following 6 September 1891. The victor was the French professional Charles Terront, who completed the distance in 72 hours and beat the national hero of Bordeaux-Paris, the French amateur Jiel-Laval, into second place.⁵

The race was the brainchild of Pierre Giffard and *Le Petit Journal* newspaper. It came to be known as 'la grande course du *Petit Journal*', as the friendly rivalry between *Le Véloce-Sport* and the Parisian generalist paper that was one of the first properly to report sports developed. Paris-Brest-Paris was conceived as a response to the VCB and *Le Véloce-Sport*'s organization of Bordeaux-Paris as a race to attract British riders, which had effectively prohibited the participation of French professionals. Paris-Brest-Paris was thus devised as a *course nationale*, reserved for French riders of any category. Whereas Bordeaux-Paris was 'amateur', and G.P. Mills had won a cup and a gold medal from the organizers, prizes in Paris-Brest-Paris were either cash (for the professionals) or 'un objet d'art' (for the amateurs). Terront's winning efforts were to earn him 2,000 francs.

Giffard's aim was to devise a race that would best 'mettre en relief l'intelligence de l'homme en même temps que sa force physique et les qualités de sa machine'. Such a definition may seem surprising: why stress the 'intelligence' of a rider in a long-distance road race? Why be concerned with the characteristics of the bicycle used by the rider? In contrast with the simplistic approach of considering cycle racing as simply a question of physical ability, Giffard's understanding of the relationship between cycle sport and cycling in general was arguably more subtle. Although Giffard's summary of the qualities that riders would need (Jean-sans-Terre, 1891a) anticipates the view later popularized by Henri Desgrange that racing was as much about 'la tête' as it was about 'les jambes', it is in his famous declaration that 'la vélocipédie n'est pas seulement un sport, mais un bienfait social' that the origins of the ethos of Paris-Brest-Paris are to be found. A good-tempered exchange of views between *Le Véloce-Sport* and *Le Petit Journal* discussed whether Paris-Bordeaux was a real test of riders ('une course d'hommes'), whereas Paris-Brest-Paris would be a test of bicycles ('une course de machines'); this arose from the ruling that in Paris-Brest-Paris riders would only be able to use a single machine, rather than changing bikes after accidents or on different terrains, as had been allowed in Bordeaux-Paris. For Giffard (Jean-sans-Terre, 1891b), using a single machine would oblige riders to pay more attention in escaping accidents

(‘intelligence’ needed to avoid potholes or crashes), and manufacturers would be forced to provide reliable technologies (the ‘qualités de la machine’ that contributed to everyday cycling being a ‘bienfait social’).

So the inaugural Paris–Brest–Paris was designed as a national, open (professional/amateur) *course de machines*. It was a phenomenal success: 400 riders enrolled (several registrations from women were refused), 205 actually departed from Paris and 100 made it back to the capital. Thousands of spectators watched the start, the turn at Brest, or the arrival of the leading riders in Paris. Newspapers not usually interested in sport took up the race and commented, mainly favourably, on the extraordinary exploits of the competitors. In the absence of British riders, amateur or professional, French national pride could have full rein, and the performances of Terront, Jiel-Laval and the third-placed Coulliboeuf were lauded in eulogistic terms. *Le Petit Journal* took pleasure in quoting an article from the *London Evening News and Post* warning British riders of the new supremacy of the French (*Le Petit Journal*, 27 September 1891). The race did encourage manufacturers to develop and improve technology: the huge advertising campaign undertaken by Humber on the strength of Mills’ victory in Bordeaux–Paris had shown how sales could be influenced by racing success, and Michelin claimed to have developed a new clincher tyre specifically for the race. More generally, manufacturers were brought closer to the organization of cycle sport by a donation of 1,500 francs from the *Chambre syndicale des fabricants français de vélocipèdes*; but they were doubtless chastened by the calculations of *Le Petit Journal* that over 50 cycles broke during the race, thereby preventing their riders from completing the course.

Whereas Bordeaux–Paris became an annual event, the greater scale perhaps of Paris–Brest–Paris caused it to be neglected during the rest of the 1890s, the race only being resurrected in 1901 by *L’Auto-Vélo* of Desgrange, engaged in its bitter circulation war with *Le Vélo* of Giffard. But as a ‘one-off’ event, ‘Paris–Brest et retour’ had immeasurably advanced both racing and public perceptions of cycle sport.

Velodrome racing

The phenomenon of velodrome racing, which developed in the 1880s and rapidly reached its zenith in the 1890s (Holt, 1981: 82), is a complex case-study of the influences and trends at work in the evolution of cycling as sport and leisure. The brief period during which the velodromes flourished was marked by the rise of professionalism, the decline in the role of clubs in the organization of races, the rise in the importance of the sporting press, the strengthening of links between racers and manufac-

turers, and overall, a democratization of cycling.

Cycle racing in the early decades of the sport had been organized – mainly by clubs but also increasingly, as we have seen, by the press – on public roads or in public spaces such as parks or urban boulevards, but the need had soon developed for permanent facilities for racing that were not subject to the vagaries of town councils or conflict with other uses of public space. It was thus that early influential clubs built their own race tracks, to be used both for races and training. The south-west region was an enthusiastic early promoter of velodromes, with permanent facilities being built in the mid-1880s, such as that at Dax (1885), the Saint-Augustin track in Bordeaux (1886) and the Parc Beaumont track in Pau (1886). The Saint-Augustin track of the *Véloc-Club bordelais* allowed the club to transfer racing from the Place des Quinconces, but eventually represented a heavy financial drain on the club, whose demise in 1892 opened the way for fully commercial private-sector exploitation of velodrome racing in Bordeaux in the later 1890s.

The 1880s were the decade of gentlemanly competition on the track between riders of social distinction, participating in races organized by the still socially elitist cycling clubs, as cycling had not yet become a mass entertainment. Track racers in the 1880s were generally predominantly middle and upper class, whereas on the road, racers had already become predominantly lower class. However, by the 1890s and the full flush of early professionalism, track and road racing came to be dominated by riders from humble social origins who aspired to sporting glory and its attendant rewards. Eugen Weber suggests that although track racing was initially merely an ‘upper-class fad’ (both in terms of competitors and spectators), in the 1890s at least it was very rapidly taken up by the masses: ‘Cycle races were the first popular sporting entertainment of modern times, and the first to offer numerous professionals an avenue of economic, hence social promotion’ (1986a: 195). Weber makes the point that the famous *Vélodrome d’hiver* track founded in 1893 in the select Champ de Mars quarter in Paris was soon swamped with lower-class spectators, as track racing developed rapidly into commercial spectacle (1986a: 198). The *Vél’ d’hiv’* track was not the first to be set up in Paris: it succeeded the Palais des Arts libéraux (1890, in the Salle des arts libéraux built for the 1889 exhibition), which had soon been followed by the famous *Vélodrome de Buffalo* and the *Vélodrome de la Seine* in 1892 and in 1895 by a track at the Bois de Vincennes, and yet another at the Parc des Princes.

Under the combined influence of burgeoning professionalism, entrepreneurial innovation and a vigorous sporting press, velodrome racing

in the 1890s became something of a mania, but the popularity of the sport was always dependent on the fickleness of the public. Attracting a paying crowd to watch cycling in a stadium was more manageable than trying to make any money from the spectators of a road race such as Bordeaux–Paris, but once the first flush of enthusiasm for mere novelty (of the machines and the event) or for speed (and danger) had been exhausted, those who organized the track competitions had to find ways of maintaining interest. The life of a velodrome was often short, as backers became disillusioned with the uncertainties of the gate receipts. In the provinces, three or four velodromes in Bordeaux competed for the favours of the cycling public in the 1890s, but all eventually failed. *Le Vélo* was sufficiently concerned in 1897 to lead a survey of France's tracks, concluding that most were in a bad state. Publicity for the events was guaranteed by the sporting press – avid relayers of anything that could increase their circulation – and as Holt has described, 'Ballyhoo and hyperbole became the stock-in-trade of the sports journalist, who carved out a distinctive and specialized niche in the journalistic world' (1981: 90). 'Heroes' were fashioned by the sporting press whose careers and lives became sporting soap operas, reported on daily by the newspapers. Although some managers and owners of velodromes were former riders, such as Henri Desgrange (who admittedly was also a gifted journalist and publicist), Weber (1986a) and Holt (1981: 81–103) both rightly emphasize the links between cycling as 'spectacle' created in track racing and other more traditional domains of popular entertainment that were forged by the 'sporting impresarios' who often ran the tracks. The clearest examples of the crossover between sport and popular entertainment in the arts were Clovis Clerc of the Folies Bergères, manager of a track at Charenton in Paris, and literary man-about-town Tristan Bernard, owner of the Buffalo velodrome. It was perhaps their influence that helped develop races involving animals, revealingly dressed actresses, cycling acrobats and other gimmicks.⁶ In anticipation of the 'hook' to be found by Desgrange in 1903 for the Tour de France, however, velodromes seized on the notion of what could be called 'extreme racing', with non-stop duels between riders over distances of 1,000 km or more, or 24 hours. Such ordeals attracted crowds, but the public tired even of these spectacles of endurance and suffering, and the 'star system' of riders created by the press produced tensions between the velodromes and the most popular and successful racers. Difficulties such as these led to the creation of a riders' union and further complications for an unstable entertainment industry.

The sporting press: reporting spectacle

The relationships between sport and the press in France were first examined in a pioneering volume by Edouard Seidler, published in 1964, which presented the history of this symbiotic existence from the earliest days of the journal *Le Sport* (first published 1854, in Paris, for the ‘gens du monde’) through the creation of *Le Vélocipède illustré* (1869) by Richard Lesclide, and beyond to the launching of *Le Vélo* in 1892 and then *L’Auto-Vélo* in 1900 (Seidler, 1964). Although, as their names indicate, *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo* were very closely reliant upon the burgeoning sport of cycle racing in the 1890s, they were essentially examples of the ‘multi-sports’ newspaper, whose daily publication in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France was made possible by the huge range of sporting competitions and by the, carefully managed, public interest in the events and the personalities involved. Since cycling competition was to launch the mutually profitable relationship between sport and the press, by virtue of its early appearance in the 1860s and 1870s, there were naturally a number of cycling-specific newspapers that set the tone for much of what followed. One of the more significant of these was the influential *Le Véloce-Sport*, which as we have seen was central to the establishment of one of the most famous and significant of late nineteenth-century cycle races, Bordeaux–Paris. Newspapers, often involved in circulation wars with their competitors, were during this period keen on inventing, staging and sponsoring races of all kinds, and especially cycle races, which were particularly popular with the reading public, and *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo* followed this model enthusiastically. We shall initially consider the example of *Le Véloce-Sport*, and then discuss *Le Vélo* of Pierre Giffard and its avowed enemy, *L’Auto-Vélo* of Henri Desgrange.

Le Véloce-Sport and Le Véloceman

As Pierre Chany, among others, has chronicled (1995: 40–41) *Le Véloceman* and *Le Véloce-Sport* were founded independently in Montpellier and Bordeaux in 1885. They were early examples of successful weekly sporting newspapers devoted exclusively to cycling, and they demonstrate how provincial journalism managed to provide comprehensive media coverage of the developing sport. *Le Véloce-Sport* was closely linked with the famous *Véloce-Club bordelais*, though the club collapsed in 1892. It was founded in March 1885 by Pierre Rousset (president of the VCB), Fernand Ladevèze and Maurice Lanneluc-Sanson (a leading member of the VCB), and in 1886 absorbed its Montpellier-

based competitor *Le Véloceman*, a Franco-British publication run by the famous French-based British rider and trainer H.O. Duncan. In 1889 it was bought by three members of the VCB – Paul Rousseau, Maurice Martin and Emile Jegher – taking over another (French) cycling journal entitled *The French Cyclist* in 1893, after which date it was published in Paris. It soon merged with *La Bicyclette*, becoming *Le Véloce-Sport–La Bicyclette*, and came under the control of A. Lucenski and Louis Minart.⁷ Many of the personnel of *Le Véloce-Sport* were important members of the VCB, to the point where the newspaper was often at pains to reject accusations from other, mainly Parisian, journals that it was merely the club newsletter. Like the *Véloce-Club bordelais* itself, *Le Véloce-Sport* had ambitions to represent the Bordeaux ‘model’ of cycling at the national level, and to engage in debate over issues crucial to the development of *le sport vélocipédique* on an equal footing with the Parisian sporting press.

Rivalry with the developing sporting press in Paris arguably first impinged on *Le Véloce-Sport* when it started to publicize the inaugural Bordeaux–Paris race. Pierre Giffard’s intention to stage a spectacular race for the (daily) *Le Petit Journal* from Paris to Brest and back had thus been anticipated, and the columns of the papers aired a courteous debate over the merits and ethics of the respective races (*Le Véloce-Sport*, 2 July 1891, 30 July 1891, 6 August 1891; Jean-sans-Terre, 1891a; 1891b). However, from 1888 *Le Véloce-Sport* had been adopted as the official journal of the UVF, meaning that it was in its columns that the UVF published its decisions, rulings and other information, thereby according the newspaper something of a protected status. From its origins as – almost – the newsletter of an admittedly prestigious and influential club in Bordeaux and the voice of the views of the south-western clubs and regional federations, *Le Véloce-Sport* thus became an important national arbiter of cycling debate and fashions. It provided a forum for two major journalists of the sporting press, as well as launching a number of others into the profession. The famous sports journalist, newspaper owner and influential figure in the politics of French sport in the 1880s and 1890s, Paul Rousseau, was employed as the sub-editor in 1888, before leading the buy-out of 1889 that relaunched the paper, and the long-time columnist Maurice Martin was an active member of the VCB and an enthusiastic tourist, using his articles in *Le Véloce-Sport* and later newspapers to help ‘invent’ the concept of cycle touring.

Le Vélo

Between its launch in December 1892 and its disappearance in November

1904, the history of *Le Vélo* encapsulates much of the heady events of sport and the media in *fin-de-siècle* France. The last four years of its life were marred – terminally so – by vicious competition with the new sports newspaper of Henri Desgrange and the Tour de France, *L'Auto-Vélo*, but in its hey-day *Le Vélo* was a highly successful example of what the new industry of sports journalism could be. In effect, it was *Le Vélo*, printed on green paper and known affectionately as ‘le petit Vert’, that introduced the idea of a daily rather than weekly or fortnightly sports newspaper.

Just as the later *L'Auto-Vélo* was to be irrevocably marked by the personality and sporting ideology of its editor, Henri Desgrange, *Le Vélo* was very much the creation of its inventor and editor, Pierre Giffard. As editor for general news, Giffard had been responsible for introducing sports reporting to the pages of the mass-circulation daily *Le Petit Journal*, and had managed to boost sales of the paper through promotions such as the Paris–Brest–Paris race of September 1891 (Marchand, 1999: 58–59). By 1892 Giffard had realized that there was a growing market for sports reporting, and Hippolyte Marinoni, the owner of *Le Petit Journal*, was beginning to tire of the demands to include more and more sport in his mainstream newspaper. *Le Vélo* was born with the help of *Le Petit Journal*, as it was initially printed on *Le Petit Journal*'s presses, and it only became fully independent from Giffard's former employer in the mid-1890s, when sales had risen so much that Giffard parted company with Marinoni. *Le Vélo* in its early days also benefited from the input of young and progressive staff such as Paul Rousseau, poached from *Le Véloce-Sport*, Victor Breyer, Robert Coquelle, the brothers Hamelle, and the almost father-figure of the popularization of cycling and cycling history, Baudry de Saunier. Maurice Martin of *Le Véloce-Sport* also contributed occasionally in the early years, before joining the staff for good later in the decade. Although *Le Vélo* was much less closely linked with industry than its later rival *L'Auto-Vélo*, important financial support came initially from the tyre and cycle manufacturer Adolphe Clément.

Le Vélo needed a sound journalistic footing in the form of experienced and talented reporters, and the support of *Le Petit Journal* and of industry, because the market for sports newspapers, although expanding, was not without competitive pressures. The birth of ‘le petit Vert’ had to be brought forward by some days to 1 December 1892 in order to steal the thunder from the weekly *La Revue des sports*, which was relaunched on 3 December as a daily (Marchand, 1999: 75). As well as *La Revue des sports* (originally established as far back as 1876), *Le Vélo* was

fighting for readers with *Le Véloce-Sport* (1885), *La Bicyclette* (1892), *La Revue du sport vélocipédique* (1886), *Le Vélocipède illustré* (1890) and increasing columns devoted to sport in the generalist dailies such as *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Figaro*. Even before the particularly targeted threat from *L'Auto-Vélo* in 1900, the burgeoning success of Giffard's new paper had to weather turbulence created by the merger of *Le Véloce-Sport* and *La Bicyclette* in the mid-1890s and by the creation in 1898 of what was to become arguably the greatest of all sporting newspapers, *La Vie au grand air*.

The prosperity of *Le Vélo* – sales increased from 20,000 in 1892 to over 80,000 by 1894 – can be explained by the journalistic talents of the reporting team and by Giffard's charismatic – if on occasions irascible – leadership. Beyond the mere organization and running of the newspaper, however, *Le Vélo* managed to capture the loyalty of its readership because of its role as a promoter of cycling, and also, arguably, because of Giffard's interpretation of what 'sport' should mean in 1890s France. These two things were interlinked, and it is possible that, although *Le Vélo*'s position on cycling and sport was attractive during the 1890s, by the turn of the century it was the different sporting ideology of Henri Desgrange that was more in tune with the wants of the readers of sports dailies.

One key to an understanding of Giffard's philosophy of sport is his famous slogan: 'le vélo est plus qu'un sport; c'est un bienfait social', which was to be found on the masthead of *Le Vélo*. While obviously believing that cycle sport was an important aspect of cycling, Giffard agreed that the new means of personal transport was something that needed encouragement, and the columns of *Le Vélo* hosted debates on the need to fight against government taxation of cycles, as well as demands for responsible cycling, for appropriate signing of roads and hills, for garages for cycles and a host of other 'practical' measures that would allow cycling to play its full role in improving society. Another key was Giffard's belief that sport was a means for saving the lower classes from 'le péché de paresse, d'indolence, et de séjours interminables au café' (*Le Vélo*, 1901). Although Giffard was first and foremost a 'modern' newspaperman highly aware of the interlinkings of sport, media and industry in the new genre of sports journalism (after all, it was he who had launched the first truly modern major race in 1891 with Paris–Brest–Paris), he was also attached to an arguably less commercial–industrial vision of sport closer to the French ideal of *sports anglais* practised for their physical and moral benefits.⁸ It is this moral and social dimension to Giffard's thinking on sport that leads some commentators

such as the sports journalist and historian Jacques Marchand to stress the links between his philosophy of sport and that of Pierre de Coubertin, implicitly distinguishing the Giffardian view from that of Desgrange, the ‘fixer’ of the journalistic–industrial complex of turn-of-the-century French cycling (Marchand, 1999). Marchand goes so far as to suggest an ‘objective affinity’ between the views of Giffard and Coubertin (1999: 95–96). A more detailed examination of Giffard’s career and philosophy of sport and the press can be found in Dauncey (2008), which similarly suggests that, compared with Desgrange and his rich backers from the Omnium club or the industry supporters of the – avowedly non-political – *L’Auto-Vélo*, Giffard appeared as a progressive and politicized commentator on society whose personal interest in politics contributed to his professional downfall and that of *Le Vélo*.

Le Vélo eventually folded in November 1904, killed off by the success of the Tour de France organized by Desgrange and *L’Auto-Vélo*, but weakened already from 1899 by a political feud between the progressive Giffard and the powerful right-winger, the Comte de Dion. The main lines of the rivalry between *Le Vélo* and de Dion’s *L’Auto-Vélo* are usually summarized in terms of opposing positions on the judicial–political scandal that structured French society in the 1890s, the Dreyfus Affair, but the tensions between Giffard and de Dion were arguably as much to do with sport and industry as with Dreyfus. The divisions in French society caused by the Dreyfus Affair were often of a kind that encompassed entire world- and life-views, as the guilt or innocence of Dreyfus and the government’s manipulation of his trials forced people into opposing positions on the nature of civil and political society, on the state, the army, the Church, patriotism and nationalism. It was therefore relatively easy for a progressive such as Giffard to become totally opposed to a right-wing, aristocratic, industrial magnate, establishment figure such as de Dion.

L’Auto-Vélo and L’Auto

In January 1903 Giffard won a pyrrhic victory over de Dion, Desgrange and *L’Auto-Vélo* with the legal decision that *L’Auto-Vélo* had to drop the ‘Vélo’ from its title, but less than two years later *Le Vélo* itself had closed, beaten into submission by the dynamism and implacability of its young competitor. *L’Auto* would prosper until the Occupation, eventually to be reborn – in troubled circumstances – after the Second World War as the no less famous *L’Equipe*. *L’Auto-Vélo* was founded by the Comte de Dion in October 1900 as a result of his quarrels with Giffard. The precise details of the feud between the two men remain somewhat

unclear but, in general terms, it seems that, although they were both united by a love of sport, and particularly the new vogue for automobiles, de Dion felt personally and politically slighted by *Le Vélo*, and believed that the car industry and his company in particular were ill-served by Giffard's approach to running France's dominant sports newspaper.⁹

Although *Le Vélo* carried much advertising for de Dion's cars and the products of many of his manufacturing friends, Giffard's readiness to support Dreyfus in the newspaper infuriated many of his indirect backers. After a fracas at the Auteuil racecourse during a protest against the election of Loubet as president of France in 1899, after which de Dion spent time in prison for affray, their agreement to remain friends in support of the cause of the automobile while being political enemies put the count and the editor in a fraught situation. Relations deteriorated in a tit-for-tat downwards spiral: Giffard's attempt to be elected as a deputy in Normandy was partially sabotaged by de Dion; de Dion's adverts were no longer published in *Le Vélo*; Giffard criticized the *Automobile Club de France* for being nothing more than a society club for the elite such as de Dion and launched a rival *Moto-Club de France*. Finally, de Dion realized that the best way to deal with Giffard was by crushing *Le Vélo* and set out to do so with *L'Auto-Vélo*, backed by the industrialists Clément and Michelin and fronted by Henri Desgrange, former lawyers' clerk, cycle-racer, velodrome owner and manager and advertising director of Clément. Desgrange was seconded by Victor Goddet, another velodrome manager, in a team that reflected strongly the belief that the reporting of sport was to be free of politics *à la* Giffard, but closely linked with industry and commerce.

Although *L'Auto-Vélo* was initially dwarfed by the sales of its well-established rival, an active and vicious campaign of commercial undercutting and sporting piracy weakened Giffard's position: *Le Vélo* had lost some advertising through offence given to de Dion, Michelin and Clément, but even manufacturers who remained faithful, such as Darracq, were persuaded to change allegiance. In 1901 Desgrange wrestled sponsorship of the Paris–Roubaix race from *Le Vélo*; also in 1901 Desgrange 'stole' the first re-run of Paris–Brest–Paris from Giffard by persuading the owner of *Le Petit Journal*, Marinoni, to cede ownership to *L'Auto-Vélo* rather than to *Le Vélo*; Bordeaux–Paris 1901 was undermined by Desgrange's influence over riders as manager of the Parc des Princes velodrome, and Bordeaux–Paris in 1902 was run twice, first by *Le Vélo*, and then soon after by *L'Auto-Vélo*, but with better riders and faster times.

While awaiting the *coup de grâce* of the Tour de France in 1903, the sales war between ‘le petit Vert’ and ‘le petit Jaune’ (*L’Auto-Vélo* was printed on yellow paper) catalysed competitive sport and accelerated the development of sports reporting. As well as reviving races such as Paris–Brest–Paris and rejuvenating classics such as Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Roubaix, *L’Auto-Vélo* used the latest telegraphic technology to get instant reports on races, and introduced a real system of special correspondents sent specially to cover events worldwide.¹⁰ In 1903 Giffard left the sinking *Le Vélo*, as did Paul Rousseau and Frantz Reichel, who founded the short-lived *Le Monde sportif*, one of a small number of new papers such as *Les Sports* (1904–10) that attempted to occupy the space between the conquering *L’Auto* and the faltering *Le Vélo*. It was to check these inchoate rivals that *L’Auto* started looking for the ‘killer’ event that would definitively convert Giffard’s cycling readers to the cause of *L’Auto*.

The claimed intention of *L’Auto* was to report sport without politics: ‘il ne sera jamais, à *L’Auto-Vélo*, question de politique, soyez donc, ô lecteurs, ou pour ou contre [...] soyez ce que vous serez, mais ne comptez jamais sur *L’Auto* pour vous en parler’ (Desgrange, 1900). So Desgrange’s paper was not political in the narrow sense of party-politics, but it was ‘le journal des industriels’, creating events and news as much as it reported them and pushing cycling and sport forwards as free-market products. *L’Auto*’s awareness of the ‘loop’ of sport–media–industry is neatly demonstrated by its generous hiring of Giffard in 1904, and by the quiet purchase of *Le Vélo*, whose editor Gaston de Pawlowski was then paid to produce copy critical of *L’Auto* in a measure planned to maintain interest in both newspapers simultaneously!

The creation of the UCI: the internationalization of cycle sport

In a period of imperial expansion and nationalistic rivalries, sport was also becoming increasingly internationalized, as interest in confrontations between nations or their representative champions, such as Augustus Zimmerman in cycling (see Ritchie, 2011: 303–14), fascinated the sporting public and whetted the appetite of the sporting media, and as ever-improving travel and communications facilitated the staging of contests and reporting on them. As sport internationalized, the need for common rules and regulations became increasingly pressing, to allow national records and competitions to be sensibly comparable and so that international competitions could be staged fairly. Not counting the IRB,

which was set up in 1886 essentially as a 'home-nations' organization to govern rugby in the UK, the creation of the current international cycling body in 1900 preceded that of most other major sports: FIFA was formed in 1904, and many others followed in the years before the First World War: ISAF (sailing, 1907), FINA (swimming, 1908), IAAF (athletics, 1912), FIE (fencing, 1913) and ITF (tennis, 1913). French influence was strong in the inception of many of these governing bodies.

The *Union cycliste internationale* (UCI) was formed on 14 April 1900, in Paris. The UCI – known almost without exception through its French acronym, rather like FIFA – has had a chequered history, with its role being constantly challenged and debated. Most recently, in the 1990s and the 2000s, the UCI has been accused of incompetence and inefficiency in investigating and eradicating doping in professional cycling and has generally been challenged (e.g. Fotheringham, 2005; 2007), and these failings can be seen as a natural consequence of many of the circumstances that accompanied the birth of the organization in 1900.

For a long time, the UCI struggled to assert any kind of authority over the world of professional and amateur cycling, faced with the entrenched commercial, industrial and media interests of the traditional stakeholders in the sport. In addition to the difficulties of imposing any kind of order on the disparate activities of cycle manufacturers, sports newspapers, race organizers and cycling clubs, the UCI also found itself in an unenviable position of weakness vis-à-vis the long-established national cycling federations. Countries such as Belgium, Spain, Italy and France, which had considerable experience of professional racing extending back to the 1870s and beyond, had evolved (often at the cost of much conflict and argument) strong national organizing bodies that were loath to make compromises at the international level (some of the vicissitudes of the French experience of settling on a national governing body in this early period have already been touched on in this chapter). Additionally, the UCI had to cater for the interests of national cycling federations from countries where the sport was dominated not by professionalism but by amateurism, and the conflicts between these two interpretations of the sport has made the running of the UCI all the more problematic.

Early attempts to regulate international cycling: the ICA

As Ritchie (2011: 295–302) has described, the International Cycling Association (ICA) was born in November 1892 as the result of British-led moves to create a structure to govern the burgeoning activity of cycle racing on an international level. Despite the dynamism of cycle racing in

France and in continental Europe in general (and also, of course, in the United States), and the strength of the French national association the *Union Vélocipédique de France*, British cycling was the de facto leader of cycle racing worldwide, and it was the British annual cycling championships organized by the National Cyclists' Union that came to serve as the generally acknowledged 'world' championships, in the absence of any competitions actually staged by an international body independent of national associations.

While French cycling stakeholders – regional and national federations, industrialists, newspapers and indeed racers themselves – were keen to see the structure of the sport defined at an international level, the ICA was intrinsically problematic for the French sports–media–industry complex both in terms of its fundamentally Anglo-American genesis and organization, and also because, as a body born out of British cycling (and British 'Corinthian' attitudes towards sport in general), its principal preoccupation was to develop international competition in cycling along amateur lines. For the French and for many other countries (including the USA) where professionalism in sport was more culturally, socially and athletically acceptable, British control of the inchoate international body for cycling was troubling. Although the NCU had carefully and cleverly obtained support for the ICA from the French amateur sports and cycling federation, the *Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques*, it had broken off relations with the UVF precisely over the issue of the French national body's toleration of professionalism. Pierre Giffard's *Le Vélo*, which regularly commented negatively on the activities and ethos of the ICA, was representative of the simmering dissatisfaction within French cycle sport (outside the USFSA) with the new world regulatory authority, also exemplified by – among many others – *Le Véloce-Sport* in January 1893, commenting negatively on the birth of the ICA and its focus on amateurism: 'Cette ridicule et absurde manie de conserver [...] cette barrière entre professionnels et amateurs semble être un retour à l'ancienne loi des castes [...] Le professionnel est-il donc si bas, si ignoble que l'on se trouve offensé par son contact?' (F.-M.B., 1893). And in September 1893 *Le Véloce-Sport* made an editorial appeal, signed by Paul Hamelle, for a 'Union Latine' where ('continental') professionalism would have its rightful place alongside ('Anglo-Saxon') amateurism in competition of all kinds (Hamelle, 1893).

The ICA organized world championships in 1893 in Chicago (perhaps in an attempt to distance the event as much as possible, physically and conceptually, from France) where US riders dominated, and every following year until 1900 in Antwerp (1894), Cologne (1895),

Copenhagen (1896), Glasgow (1897), Vienna (1898) and Montreal (1899). The 1893 event coincided with the Chicago World Trade Fair and the star rider was the American Augustus Zimmerman, who embodied the contradictions and tensions intrinsic to the ICA as a rider deemed ‘professional’ by the ICA itself, but considered ‘amateur’ by the US national body, the League of American Wheelmen. But in 1900 the annual meeting of the ICA and the venue for the championships were finally scheduled to be organized by France, providing a golden opportunity for the UVF and other supporters of a less restrictively amateur code for competition to stage a coup and transform the ICA into a world governing body that would also fully embrace professionalism.

The UCI replaces the ICA: Anglo-French rivalry

On 25 February 1900 the annual congress of the International Cycling Association was held in Paris and ended in some confusion, according to the possibly not totally objective report and comment on the proceedings published in *Le Vélo* (Breyer, 1900a), as its British chairman Henry Sturmeay struggled to impose his wishes in the various issues that were threatening to cause the ICA’s demise. Against the backdrop of the long campaign of *Le Vélo* against the ICA, member countries were lobbying for a reform of the voting rules and for the encouragement of membership from other cycling nations. The February 1900 meeting of the ICA was unable to resolve or advance either of these issues, as Dutch and German representations for membership were deferred or rejected, the American National Cyclists Association accepted in a confusing replacement of the League of American Wheelmen, and discussion of voting reform postponed until an extraordinary meeting scheduled for April. One item that was agreed was the Italian request that – as arranged for in the ICA statutes – official documentation was to be provided in both English and French. Such a concession was, however, symbolic of the nature of many of the arguments that were rendering the work of the ICA so problematic: French cycling (and beyond France, cycling in other ‘Latin’ countries) had become increasingly resentful of what it saw as British domination of the international regulation of cycle sport. Writing in *Le Vélo* a week or so after the unsatisfactory congress of February 1900, the senior sports journalist Paul Hamelle explained this conflict of positions in florid terms that are nevertheless not untypical of the ‘literary’ style of much sports journalism of the period:

En résumé, il est apparu clairement, au cours de ces tumultueux débats, que deux esprits étaient aux prises, figurés par l’Angleterre et la France: l’un, esprit ancien, voué aux fictions fanées, hypnotisé par les souvenirs d’un passé

qui eut son charme, fidèle à un idéal que dénie la réalité, à cet amateurisme suranné qui eut son heure de vie mais qui n'est plus qu'une momie enveloppée de bandelettes, et que ses prêtres adorent les yeux baissés en des chapelles bien closes, de peur qu'un courant d'air ne la fasse tomber, ou qu'un cynique rayon de soleil ne la révèle telle qu'elle est: une chose morte. (Hamellet, 1900a)

And the second spirit was, naturally, that of France: 'l'autre, l'esprit nouveau, qui accepte l'évolution et ses changements; oh! bien souvent sans enthousiasme, mais sans dépit puéril non plus, et se résigne à légiférer pour les hommes tels qu'ils sont, et non tels qu'ils devraient être!' (Hamellet, 1900a).

For all his sympathy with the French position, Hamelle was by no means the most fervent of the detractors of the ICA: that honour should be awarded to the young Victor Breyer, who as an accomplished competitive cyclist, journalist and agent in the organization of cycle sport was rapidly creating a significant place for himself in the development of French cycling. Sturmev, who was seriously aggrieved by what he saw as French attempts to sabotage his control of what he considered to be 'his' organization of international cycling, singled out Breyer as one of the main protagonists in what he described as the French campaign, led by the UVF and *Le Vélo*, to assume leadership of the ICA, which led to Breyer's sardonic response in *Le Vélo* (Breyer, 1900b). Certainly, by 1900, the UVF was becoming more comfortably established than it had previously been during most of the 1880s and 1890s as the lead organization of French cycling: even if there were still remaining disagreements over amateur and professional cycling in France, at least its national role was no longer challenged, as was indeed confirmed in April 1900 with the disappearance of the one subsisting regional cycling association, the *Fédération vélocipédique du Nord* (founded in 1890), whose demise was welcomed by the influential journalist Maurice Martin (Martin, 1900a). French sensitivity over perceived Anglo-Saxon domination of international sport was partly a reflection of Gallic resentment of the way in which 'modern' sports appeared to have been mostly imported from Britain – football, rugby, athletics – and of real or imagined French sporting inferiority vis-à-vis British or American athletes. But a concern with the balance of (sporting) power between the 'Latin' and the 'Anglo-Saxon' worlds also mirrored greater national insecurity over France's place in the world (after defeat by the Prussians, Alsace-Lorraine, the Grab for Africa, late industrialization and other perceived failings) and the widely prevailing 'racialist' interpretation of national characters. One

example (among many) of this *Weltanschauung* occurred precisely in June 1900, between the final failed congress of the ICA and the first meeting of the UCI: the races of cycling's *Grand Prix de Paris* had been dominated by French and Italian riders – the great French champion Jacquelin had won the premier race – and according to Maurice Martin, writing in *Le Vélo*, this was proof enough of differing athletic abilities between nations of the North and the South: 'In summary, except for rare exceptions, the races of the North seem better suited to sports of power and slow energy, and those of the South more fitted for cerebro-physical sports less demanding in their athletic aspects, such as cycling' (Martin, 1900b).

The UCI is founded: French dominance

The business of the ICA deferred from its meeting of February 1900 was discussed at an extraordinary meeting, again held in Paris at the luxurious Hôtel de Russie, on 15 April 1900. It was at this meeting that the first nail was hammered into the coffin of the ICA, as the faction opposed to Sturmeý and his Anglo-Saxon domination of rulings on international cycling managed to force a change in the representation of member nations, thereby transforming the balance of power within the association. *Le Vélo*'s Paul Hamelle gave a useful summary of Latin complaints about the ICA and what the French saw as Sturmeý's autocratic and idiosyncratic running of the organization, likening the situation's chaos to the Tower of Babel (Hamelle, 1900b). Despite some apparent sharp practice from Sturmeý himself, who was involved in the discussions as a representative of the Cape Cyclists' Union and was supported by a specially appointed friend acting for the New Zealand Cycling Union, the meeting eventually obliged Great Britain to accept a dilution of its influence: two categories of membership in the ICA were decided, major countries having three votes, and lesser cycling nations having no actual vote but keeping the right to express their views. This new arithmetic of voting placed Britain on an equal footing with France and Italy, which now had a voting weight equal to that previously enjoyed by Britain – and resented by France – with its triple representation of the English National Cyclists' Union, the Irish Cyclists' Union, and the Scottish Cyclists' Union. What must have been a rather bad-tempered meeting ended with a failed attempt by the UVF to remove Sturmeý as head of the ICA, and the delegates went their separate ways. However, later in the evening of 14 April, the French, Belgian, Italian, Swiss and American delegates issued a communiqué announcing their withdrawal from the ICA and the simultaneous founding of a new international cycling organ-

ization in the form of the UCI, under whose rules the world championships planned for Paris in mid-late August 1900 were to run, and whose first official congress was to be held, also in Paris, in summer 1900. As the historian of early French cycling Alex Poyer points out (2003a: 247), four of the six original signatories of the UCI's founding were French: Alfred Riguelle (UVF), Count de Villers (USFSA), Victor Breyer (representing the American National Cycling Association) and Paul Rousseau, (deputizing for the representative of the Swiss national federation). And, as Victor Breyer polemically and triumphantly reported (Breyer, 1900c), the new body's first president was the Belgian Emile de Beukelaer, further cementing the 'Latin' control of business and concepts.

When the UCI met on 11 August 1900 in Paris, the locale was no longer the sumptuous refinement of the Hôtel de Russie, but the rather more utilitarian setting of the headquarters of the UVF, at 21 rue des Bons-Enfants. This was certainly practical, but it also underlined the strong French influence on the new body governing international cycling. Present at the meeting were the *Unione velocipedistica italiana*, the UVF and the USFSA representing France, the *Union cycliste suisse*, the National Cyclists' Association (USA), the *Ligue vélocipédique belge*, the *Verband der Deutscher Rad Rennbahnen*, the Canadian Cyclists' Association and the League of New Zealand Wheelmen. France's place at the top table of world cycling was ensured by the six votes agreed for her by the congress (along with Germany, Italy and the USA); the prizes for all future world championships were fixed in French francs, and France's new sway over international cycling was underlined when the world championships held in Paris at the end of August resulted in a clean sweep of victories for French riders.¹¹

The UCI develops: quarrels between the UVF and the USFSA

After a second congress held in December 1900, the UCI met again, in Alexandria, on 6 April 1901. Henri Desgrange, writing in his newly launched daily sports paper *L'Auto-Vélo*, was characteristically sardonic about what the international organization of cycling could achieve: given that riders were everywhere behaving properly (the term he used was *soumis*, or 'obedient') and that everyone knew that the next world championships were to be held in Berlin in June and organized by the major German velodrome consortium, all that would be achieved in Alexandria would be 'se raconter des inutilités dans toutes les langues' (Desgrange, 1901b). Despite Desgrange's cynicism, the third UCI congress further strengthened the UVF's influence over the new body, as voting rights were rearranged to give it four votes to the two of the USFSA (previously the

two national associations had shared France's six votes equally), and the absence of the USA (the League of American Wheelmen and the National Cycling Association were in some disarray) allowed European views to be heard more strongly. Although relatively little of real substance was decided in Alexandria, one decision of the nascent UCI – the apparently anodyne recognition of the UVF's category of 'amateur' riders – did have a significant impact on cycling within France.

Even by 1901 the long debate in France over amateurism and professionalism had still not reached a satisfactory conclusion. In cycling, the UVF and the USFSA both held to essentially similar but competing definitions of what, precisely, the nature of amateurism should be, and constantly quarrelled over whether 'their' riders (amateur cyclists could take out either a UVF or a USFSA licence) should be allowed to race together, where, and how.¹² Because of the focus of world sporting and cultural attention on France during 1900, the warring associations had reached a temporary truce to cover the various championships of 1900 and the cycling competitions of the *Exposition Universelle*, but traditional disagreements nevertheless remained. The truce expired at the end of the year, opening the way for old disputes to re-emerge against the background of struggles for influence within the UCI. The ICA had always recognized the USFSA as the French representative for amateur cycling, with the UVF naturally taking responsibility for professional matters; when the UCI replaced the ICA, the UVF requested recognition for its own amateurs in international competition, and when the UCI agreed, this placed the USFSA in the disagreeable position of being forced to allow French amateurs with either licence to compete together, both abroad and in France itself. The sympathizers of the UVF at *Le Vélo* – such as Frantz Reichel and Paul Rousseau – took a certain wry pleasure in pointing out this discomfiture of the USFSA and in inviting the rival, minor association to 'put up or shut up', particularly since, in their view, the USFSA had recently been guilty of sharp practice in persuading the Paris council to accept it as organizer of the amateur part of the prestigious *Grand Prix de Paris du Conseil municipal* planned for late June 1901, on the grounds that they alone were officially recognized as France's amateur ruling body (Reichel, 1901a; Rousseau, 1901). The USFSA decided that it would rather withdraw from the UCI than have to accept any part of UVF amateurism, and aimed to continue its responsibility for the *Grand Prix de Paris* (Reichel, 1901b). The immediate quarrel over the *Grand Prix de Paris* opened the way for renewed arguments over amateurism, as relations between the two associations worsened (Reichel, 1901c, d, e, f). Ongoing arguments between the

USFSA and the UVF eventually led to the *Grand Prix de Paris* being replaced by a UVF-organized *Grand Prix de la République* in late June, followed by a modified *Grand Prix de Paris* later in the autumn. Hence the UVF's dominant role in the UCI was strengthened almost immediately by the withdrawal of its national rival, and the UVF was confirmed in its view that it could influence the international regulation of cycling in ways that would further its interests in France.

* * *

During the 1890s French cycling moved towards the maturity of institutions, structures and principles that would govern competitive and leisure use of the bicycle until essentially after the Second World War. Although the four years of traumatic conflict of the First World War would interrupt the development of cycling early in the following century – not least by the death of many champions of professional cycling in the trenches – during the 1920s and the 1930s it would be the Tour de France that would drive professional riding, as well as velodrome racing in the form of ‘Six-Days’ competitions such as that of the *Vélodrome d’hiver* in Paris. The national federations created during this period would continue until after the Second World War, when the UVF, for example, was replaced by the *Fédération française de cyclisme*. What is perhaps most significant about this period is the way in which it was cycling *qua* sport, rather than as either utility or leisure, that seemed to be the driving impetus within the complex nexus of activities that made up the developing ‘culture’ of cycling. Cycle sport thus reflected and accompanied developing themes in French culture, politics and society. These themes and their workings out were marked by an international climate within which nationalism found natural expression in competition through sport, and by a context of domestic society and politics within which the institutions of sport on a national level were gaining in influence over individual clubs, and playing out issues such as amateurism/professionalism and popular media reporting that encapsulated the socioeconomic and sociopolitical tensions of a country in full economic transformation.

Notes

- 1 The term ‘military–industrial complex’ was famously introduced to general use by President Eisenhower, in his Farewell Address of January 1961, warning of the dangers of the imbrication of defence companies and the armed forces (and politics).

- 2 The columns of the sporting/cycling newspapers of the period were filled with debates on amateurism/professionalism, for example the series of articles by ‘Glofranc’ and others in *Le Véloce-Sport* during November 1888, e.g. ‘Glofranc’ (1888) and Nandy (1888).
- 3 A particularly detailed treatment of the UVF is given by Poyer (1999), for the minutiae of institutional changes.
- 4 An amateur was defined in the *Statuts et règlements de l’USFSA* as ‘Toute personne qui n’a jamais pris part à une course publique, à un concours ou à une réunion ouverte à tous venants, ni concouru pour un prix en espèces – ou pour de l’argent provenant des admission sur le terrain – ou avec des professionnels – ou qui n’a jamais été, à aucune période de sa vie, professeur ou moniteur salarié d’exercices physiques’. Quoted in Poyer (2000: 52).
- 5 A first-hand account of the race is provided by Jiel-Laval (1892).
- 6 Just as the structure and form of cycle racing was influenced in the early days by horse racing, the cross-fertilization with the world of the arts and popular entertainment in dance, music and theatre also influenced the developing status of professional sportsmen ‘managed’ by artistic or sporting impresarios such as Clerc, Bernard, or the director of Buffalo and the Vélodrome de la Seine, William Baduel.
- 7 With Pierre Giffard, Paul Rousseau later went on to found *Le Vélo*.
- 8 The columns of *Le Vélo* hosted many views, of course, and some of its journalists, such as Paul Rousseau, were strong supporters of ‘modern’ links between press and industry, as evidenced by *Le Vélo*’s support for the UFC rival to the UVF in the mid-late 1890s. More generally, the criticism reserved by *Le Vélo* for the UVF, variably described as ‘la vieille Bique’ (the old Hag), or more acronymically, ‘un vrai Four’ (‘a real flop’) or ‘une vaste Fumisterie’ (‘a huge joke’), reflected the Union’s perceived ineffectiveness in advancing the cause of cycling, as well as what were seen by some as its old-fashioned views on sport and industry.
- 9 The discussion that follows is based on the admirably clear exposition of the facts made by Marchand (1999: 113–23).
- 10 Giffard had assumed that he and *Le Vélo* would be the natural organizers of a revived Paris–Brest–Paris, but Desgrange realized that real ownership of the race resided with *Le Petit Journal*, and it was thus that the second running on 23 November 1901 became ‘La course Paris–Brest et retour du *Petit Journal*, organisée par *L’Auto-Vélo*’.
- 11 Didier-Nauts (amateur sprint), Jacquelin (professional sprint), Bastien (demi-fond amateur), Huret (100 km pro).
- 12 In 1900 the UVF could claim that the majority of riders taking out amateur licences were doing so with them (1,200) rather than with the USFSA (700).

The *Belle Epoque* and the First World War: Industry, Sport, Utility and Leisure, 1903–1918

Before France was torn apart by the First World War it experienced the golden age of the *Belle Epoque*. Following the political and social upheavals of the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s, which had for a time seemed almost to threaten the safety of the Republican regime, destabilized by attacks from the extreme right and doubting the validity of its own political, moral and social principles, France entered a period of relative calm and prosperity. As well as the success of the movement of ‘Republican defence’ in favour of the Republic that strengthened the regime around the turn of the century, a pause in the long-standing *guerre franco-française* between left and right over clericalism and anticlericalism seemed to have been reached with the separation of Church and state in 1905. However, it was also a period of change socially, economically, culturally and politically, and in geo-political terms, the years before 1914 were marked by growing concerns over France’s place in the world and over its relationship with the old enemy, Germany.

As well as a *Belle Epoque* in art and culture – the period saw a flowering of creativity in music, painting, literature and the decorative arts – the early twentieth century was marked by rapid economic development in terms of accelerating industrialization and the social changes concomitant with the growth of industry such as the rise of a significant working class and a growing urbanization of society. The historian Francis Démier describes France as having experienced a ‘belle époque de l’économie’ as well as the better-known era of prosperity and creativity that the term generally references (Démier, 2000). And Démier also reminds us that France during this period was the crucible of a new culture brought by technology, industry and the modernization of society towards ‘une culture de masse’.

The confidence of France during the early years of the *Belle Epoque* was symbolized most strongly by its hosting of the *Exposition Universelle* in 1900. As one of the first truly global ‘mega-events’, the *Exposition Universelle* showcased France’s genius to the world. It was hosted by the *ville lumière*, Paris, and housed in the novel and avant-garde surround-

ings of the Grand and Petit palais just off the Champs-Élysées. Following the similar Exhibition of 1889, which had startled the world with the Eiffel Tower as well as with examples of France's growing industrial and technological accomplishment (including the advances made in bicycle manufacture, of course), the Exhibition of 1900 presented a *bilan* of the previous century's developments, while looking forward to a glorious future. Included in the programme of the exhibition were *Concours internationaux d'exercices physiques et de sports*, reflecting the serious status of sport and health in the minds of the French elite.

In this chapter, we shall consider how the *Belle Époque* of industry and technology was reflected in the cycle manufacturing sector, as developments in the production of bicycles fed into the success of the French economy, and as evolving trends in transport towards motorized cycles allowed the technologies of two-wheeled vehicles to continue their contribution to the modernization of French industrial processes. More specifically, we shall discuss the performance of the famous *Manufacture française des armes et cycles* based in the heavily cycle-oriented industrial hinterland of Saint-Etienne, and then look at another emblematic French company born out of the boom in cycling in the late nineteenth century, Michelin. Following this brief exposition of how cycling had become substantially significant within industry, we shall discuss the founding of the Tour de France and the running of the race in the years preceding the First World War. As has been hinted at in the preceding chapter, the Tour de France was born out of a commercial and journalistic conflict between two competing sports newspapers around the turn of the century, one of which – *L'Auto-Vélo* of Henri Desgrange – represented the interests of the industrialists of the cycle sector. The creation of the Tour de France in 1903 and the ways in which it developed during its formative years 1904–14 shed light on the imbrications between cycle sport, the sports media, technology and industry. Thirdly, we shall discuss the ways in which other forms of cycling, radically different from the professional racing of the Tour, also reflected the contribution of the bicycle to the modernization of French society. Rather than racing, utility cycling was seen by the army as an innovation that could improve efficiency and help prepare France for eventual conflict with Germany. And touring cycling, although somewhat in the shade of *sport-spectacle*, nevertheless continued its development, both within the evolving federal structures of the UVF and the *Touring Club de France*, but also, as we shall discuss in the final section of the chapter in consideration of the tireless promotion of cycle touring undertaken by Paul de Vivie, as a philosophy both of cycling and of life.

The cycle industry: a mature productive system

Although the early hey-day of *vélocipédie* among fashionable Parisian society had seen the workshops of the *Compagnie parisienne des vélocipèdes* producing up to 200 machines a month in 1869–70, in the mid-1880s proper French cycle manufacturers were still rare and the numbers of cycles produced were low, as the sport retained its restricted social recruitment. Individual frame- and cycle-makers had always existed in isolation in the provinces in towns and areas where cycling had taken an early hold, such as Angers and Bordeaux, but around 1885 the notable (small-scale) manufacturers were firms such as Meyer (Paris), Lagrange (Autun), Tinfranet (Tours) and the Gauthier brothers in Saint-Etienne. After the showcasing of cycling at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, companies such as Clément, Peugeot-frères, Michelin and Rochet began to develop strategies to reduce the British domination of the cycle industry. By 1895, however, the new forms of motorized transport, the motorcycle and the automobile, were beginning to make their appearance and some manufacturers transferred their attentions to these much more expensive products. By 1905 the aeroplane had taken on the role of symbol of modernity for leisure, sport, transport and war, and once again the focus of industry shifted to reflect new fads among the rich and new imperatives of technology. A minor slump in 1907 encouraged manufacturers of bicycles, motorcycles and automobiles to consider the long-term viability of their work in the transport sector, producing a rationalization of the plethora of firms that had grown up during the different phases of growth for the various products, and by the end of the decade the main lines of the sector were established. The war economy of 1914–18 disrupted production and altered priorities, but also forced the introduction of new approaches and management.

The economic and industrial background

Eugen Weber was one of the first to comment on the way in which cycling and all its connected activities – technical, industrial, commercial, media, advertising – seem to have encouraged not only the sports-mania of the late nineteenth century, but also the economic prosperity that created the true *Belle Epoque*. The conceptualization of ties between sport and business were even suggested by Henri Desgrange, as Weber points out, as the physical regeneration of French society was linked to the recovery of the economy. Weber also considers the parallels between the organization of professional cycle sport into a star-system with an underlying drive for performance, records, speeds and distances, and the positivism,

productivism and Taylorism that underlay French economic development (Weber, 1987).

The traditional view of French industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is that it was backward and archaic, suffering from a *retard technologique* and a lack of business dynamism, hindered by demographic stagnation and the dominance of agriculture and rural society. Although reassessments of this view (e.g. Magraw, 1999) are now more frequent, and tend to suggest that not everything was quite so bad, pointing in particular to the new industries that arose from cycling, it is certainly the case that the bicycle business, then that of motorcycles and cars, and finally that of aviation appeared as dynamic, modern, innovative industries in the humdrum French economy of the 1890s and 1900s. Despite France's wealth in the *Belle Époque*, and its technological strengths, Michel Winock, for example, underlines that it should still be considered as a 'pre-industrial' society because of the meagre opportunities for profit afforded by stagnant demography, and points out that the economic development of the late 1890s and 1900s was heavily dependent on exports (2002: 54). Contemporary analysts of the French cycle industry still bemoaned the blow dealt to French companies by the Franco-Prussian war:

Pendant que nous luttions contre les Allemands, les Anglais, calmes dans leur île, se saisissaient du vélocipède parisien et le perfectionnaient avec le soin jaloux qui les caractérise [...] si bien qu'en 1872, quand nous pûmes enfin respirer, on vit revenir de Londres l'instrument en France, avec des modifications peu importantes toutefois, mais très utiles. (Giffard, 1891: 13)

In something of a minor revisionist vein, the economic historian François Caron has suggested that the French economy, at least from the mid-1900s to 1914, enjoyed a boom that was facilitated by the attainment of a critical level of urbanization and industrialization and by a culture of 'industrial creativity' exemplified and driven by the bicycle, car and aviation industries (Caron, 1992). For Caron, the phenomenal success of these industries in the 1890s and 1900s demonstrated no French conservatism or archaism, but rather an 'innovative society' receptive to change and capable of rewarding risk. The bicycle, car and aeroplane were thus typical examples of a French industrial creativity whose signal strength was the capacity to invent new products and, crucially, in dialogue with new consumers, to progressively improve their quality. Caron thus sees the social, commercial and industrial/technological success of cycling as an example of receptive pioneer consumers working with innovative entrepreneurs, skilled managers and workers and a sporting-media-advertising-industrial complex to maintain a virtuous circle of creative

supply. Much – but not all – of Caron’s analysis fits with the history of the *Manufacture française des armes et cycles* and Michelin presented below: new-entry entrepreneurs with high technical expertise; severe competition and high failure rates; sound management necessary for success; strength in numbers through risks shared with other businesses; full use of workers’ specialist expertise; importance of a reputation for quality products; and the primacy of sport, press and advertising in promoting business. Whatever the weaknesses of the French economy in the 1890s and 1900s, the cycle industry at least was a success story.

La Manufacture française des armes et cycles

One of the earliest large-scale cycle manufacturers in France was the *Manufacture française des armes et cycles* (MFAC) based in Saint-Etienne, a town and region that, as André Vant (1993) has described, was a key centre of the French cycle industry. The links between the production of light weaponry and bicycle components are well known: not only can the machine-tools required be shared between the two ranges of products, but, in times of peace at least, the seasonal demands for guns and bicycles are complementary (in France in the 1880s guns sold best between June and October, whereas the season for bicycles was February to August). MFAC was originally founded in 1885 and was initially only concerned with the sale and repair of imported British bicycles, but in 1888 its famous Hironnelle subsidiary was created, charged with producing French-made cycles for the growing market. It was apparently a visit to Saint-Etienne by the famous Humber sales representative H.O. Duncan in 1885 that stimulated the birth of the industry in the region. Duncan demonstrated the great superiority of the new Humber ‘safety’ by riding up and down the hills around the town with considerably more ease than his French hosts, still accustomed to penny-farthings. During the 1890s, bicycle ownership rose rapidly as machines became more affordable and as the mania for *vélocipédie* continued. The government tax of 12 francs instituted as an annual licence fee from June 1893 reflected the bicycle’s new status as a consumer item and confirmed the development of a proper industrial market in which French firms could try to reverse the domination of British manufacturers that they had suffered since the 1870s. Although French workshops had arguably been in advance of those in Britain during the 1860s, with forerunners such as the Michaux family (father and brothers) producing early machines, many early racing successes had been won on British bicycles, and the Franco-Prussian war damaged both the development of cycling and that of a French cycle industry. By the late 1870s and 1880s, when cycling in

France was regaining popularity, it was imported British machines and components that dominated.

From the late 1890s to the mid-1920s, Saint-Etienne and its network of cycle manufacturers and component makers was known as 'le Coventry français', such was the concentration of industrial and technological expertise around MFAC and other companies. The famous cycling journalist Maurice Martin first made the comparison between Saint-Etienne and Coventry (Martin, 1898), but subsequent commentators have suggested Birmingham as a more accurate analogy, given the relatively small number of large firms and the myriad workshops providing subcontracted components and services.¹ The cycle industry of Saint-Etienne was very wary of foreign competition and particularly distrustful of imported components that it felt could best be supplied by the *stéphanois* workshops. In the late 1890s tensions arose between cycle manufacturers based in Paris and those in Saint-Etienne, leading to schism at the 1897 *Salon du Cycle*: Parisian manufacturers saw no problem with using imported British components for bicycles assembled in state-of-the-art factories such as that of Clément at Levallois; but provincial companies from Saint-Etienne were more in favour of protectionism and the defence of France's home-grown components industry.²

Compared with other major companies in the cycle industry such as Clément or Michelin, MFAC was by no means backwards in its management. Indeed, the success of MFAC during the 1890s and the early decades of the next century was due in large part to innovative and modern policies in manufacturing, marketing and after-sales service. The success of the large range of Hironnelle bikes between the 1890s and 1920s reflected construction work inspired by the ideas of the rationalizer of industrial processes Henri Fayol (Fayol, 1916) and other modern thinkers on factory management, and although MFAC protected turnover by diversifying into fishing tackle, sewing machines, typewriters and a host of other products, it was unique in French cycling in being component maker, manufacturer, wholesale and retail seller of its bicycles.³ From 1897 everything could be ordered from the legendary MFAC mail-order catalogue (1,200 pages from 1907) or from the hundreds of agents spread across the country offering repairs and maintenance as well as sales.⁴ Under the energetic guidance of Etienne Mimard, MFAC acquired a model factory in 1902, which was expanded in 1910 to increase production of a large number of different models of bicycle. In 1908 the model ranges were rationalized in an effort to simplify marketing, production and servicing: individual model characteristics were kept, but wherever possible shared components and tools simpli-

fied manufacturing and after-sales. Although the bicycles were designed principally by the factory's rationalistic design team, the model ranges also took into account feedback from the riding public and MFAC's network of dealers and agents.

Michelin: cycle technology as the trigger of industrial success

By the firm's 50th anniversary in 1939, Michelin (by then Michelin-Citroën) had become a strong symbol of success in French industry. Founded in Clermont-Ferrand in May 1889 when the Michelin brothers took over the running of an existing rubber company, its early expansion was driven by the vogue for cycling and then driving (Gueslin, 1993). Its idiosyncratic organization exemplified the paternalistic management style of the 'captains of industry' who arose during the *Belle Epoque* and the early boom years of the twentieth century. Michelin's early success in the 1890s and early 1900s was based on the demand for tyres and inner tubes for bicycles and subsequently, when the market for car tyres became significant around 1906, on the rise of the automobile industry. Whereas the story of MFAC revealed the link between the manufacture of small arms and cycles, as all the studies of Michelin stress (e.g., Bletterie, 1981; Moulin-Bourret, 1997) the story of that company is of the link between the rubber industry and the new forms of personal transport – the bicycle, the motorcycle and the car. Much more so than MFAC, however, the development of Michelin in the *Belle Epoque* and early 1900s is linked with cycle (and motor) sport and the sporting media, as the company's advertising campaigns – for example the Michelin-man *Bibendum* – were as innovative as its products. During the 1880s the rubber industry was in stasis, suffering from the general slump in the economy; the Michelin brothers took charge of the company in a context of mediocrity and underemployment, and surfing on the vogue for *vélocipédie* and their own genius for innovation, management and self-promotion created a boom industry. Not only did Michelin's success contribute substantially to transforming the provincial industrial town of Clermont-Ferrand, it arguably provided a model for French capitalism in the twentieth century.

Some doubt is now cast (Moulin-Bourret, 1997: 18) on the 'founding myth' of Michelin's involvement in the cycle tyre industry that portrays brother Edouard's epiphanic moment while helping his workers laboriously mend the punctures of a chance passing cyclist in spring 1891 (Lottman, 2003: 11), but the story is part of the folklore of cycling and French industry. Apparently, Edouard realized, firstly, that convenient pneumatic tyres were the future of transport and, secondly, that existing

tyres were highly impractical. His conclusion was that Michelin should supply the world's cyclists with rubber tyres and tubes, and by June–August 1891, patents had been registered and the factory was preparing to produce what the public would surely want, in volume. The company had already established its clever use of publicity and marketing by presenting 'The Silent' brake-block at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* in 1889. 'The Silent' was technologically innovative, named in English to benefit from French velo-anglomania, and sold very well, so the Michelins were keen to repeat the good impression made on the cycling public. The ploy they found was to use *Le Petit Journal's* race from Paris to Brest and back in September 1891 as an advertising stunt for their new tyre. Coming late to the organizing of the race, they found riders already committed to other frame-makers and component suppliers, and failed to convince Jiel-Laval (the first Frenchman home in Bordeaux–Paris in May) to change allegiance. But Charles Terront, unhappy with his tyres, agreed to use those of Michelin, and duly won. All that then remained was to actually produce the tyres (4,000 were ordered by October), and by the end of 1892 an estimated 10,000 French cyclists were riding on Michelins.

The subsequent expansion of Michelin during the 1890s – turnover increased twelve-fold between 1891 and 1899 to six million francs – was based on research, innovation and quality products, dynamic advertising, marketing and customer service, and clever organization of processes and the growth of the company (Gueslin, 1993: 98). The Michelin brothers were not afraid of the politics of business either, and notably conducted a lengthy legal battle with the British Dunlop company over the rights to the clincher tyre and tube. British patents to rubber tyres fell into the public domain in 1904, but before then Michelin had already beaten Dunlop's claim to sole rights. The 'nationalism' of Michelin's battle with Dunlop was typical of the period, and surfaced again in the 1900s: in 1900 the Minister for Posts, Commerce and Industry foolishly attracted the wrath of Michelin by equipping post-bikes with German Continental tyres, provoking a quarrel in which claims and counter-claims concerning the real place of manufacture (Paris or Hanover?) were swapped (Moulin-Bourret, 1997: 94–95); and in 1909 Michelin attributed the crash of the French army airship *Le République* to inferior-quality Continental rubberized fabric.

As Moulin-Bourret (1997: 88) points out, the official company history of the early years of Michelin provides nothing for the period 1889–1914 except a list of cycle and automobile races. From 1891 Michelin was an important element of cycling's journalistic–industrial

complex, either sponsoring races and riders or simply organizing ‘Michelin races’ in which all competitors used Michelin tyres. From 1900 Michelin was a supporter of *L’Auto*, in which a regular chronicle entitled ‘Les Lundi de Michelin’ publicized what the Clermont-Ferrand factory was doing for cycle and motor sport. The Michelin brothers’ first foray into motor sport was Paris–Bordeaux–Paris in June 1895, and they sold their first car tyres in February 1896, but despite promotions such as buying six months’ production of De Dion-Bollée cars in 1897 and selling them on equipped with Michelin tyres, car tyre sales were unimportant until about 1906. By contrast, between 1899 and 1906 bike tyre sales increased nearly eight-fold. Starting from almost zero, Michelin car tyre production rose rapidly and achieved market domination in France, with 90 per cent of Renault cars being shod with Michelins in 1907. The mini-slump of 1907 ended Michelin’s period of growth during the early 1900s based on the continuing popularity of cycling and the growing vogue for cars; the workforce had risen from 62 in 1889 to 3,400 in 1906, agencies had been opened throughout Europe and subsidiaries set up even in the UK and US, but in the years before the First World War, the company retired from motor racing (1912), consolidated its activities in France (no new exploits abroad) and moved to diversify production (tyres for lorries and aeroplanes). The economic mobilization of 1914–18 distracted the company from its traditional activities, but the fabrication of some 1900 Bréguet-Michel planes allowed the testing of ‘Taylorized’ production methods.

The history of Michelin demonstrates how closely intertwined were the technological, industrial and indeed sporting development of cycling, motorcycling and the automobile. It was very often the same companies that produced bicycles during the early years (after having previously been small arms manufacturers), moving seamlessly on to develop motorcycles, tricycles and other motorized vehicles, before eventually producing France’s first cars. The pneumatic tyre was a prime example of the continuity of entrepreneurship that obtained during this period, and of the links between the original innovation of the bicycle and the ongoing development of the instruments of technological modernity and personal mobility.

The Tour de France: the most important race in cycle history

In 2003 the Tour de France celebrated its centenary. In 2013 it will have been run 100 times, its continuity as a sporting event that defines the

nature of competition, tests technology and builds national identity only having been interrupted by the world wars.

The creation of the Tour: a 'killer-event'

The Tour de France was the *coup de grâce* for *Le Vélo* in the circulation war that had been raging between Giffard's 'petit Vert' and Desgrange's 'petit Jaune' since the launch of *L'Auto-Vélo* in October 1900. *L'Auto-Vélo* (simply *L'Auto* from January 1903) had harassed Giffard mercilessly by taking races, financial backers, readers and advertisers, and by 1903 Giffard and other key staff had left the newspaper. Paradoxically, what seemed to be the terminal decline of *Le Vélo* also represented a new threat to *L'Auto*, as Paul Rousseau and Frantz Reichel, on leaving *Le Vélo*, were soon to set up *Le Monde sportif*, and other papers were also set to appear as ambitious journalists hoped to take over the cycling readership of *Le Vélo*.⁵ Hence de Dion and Desgrange of *L'Auto* ('le journal des industriels') needed something that would both attract any existing or new 'floating' readers and also legitimize *L'Auto*'s right to be considered a true sportspaper of *la vélocipédie*. In addition, the rising popularity of automobile sport was beginning to undermine the selling power of cycle racing for the sporting press, and something was needed to rejuvenate cycle competition and renew the public's thirst for reporting on incredible feats of human, rather than mechanical, endurance.

The story goes (Seidler, 1964: 27–28) that it was the young Georges Lefèvre (a former employee of Giffard, and later known to the wider sporting world as Géo) who was particularly responsible during 1902 for finding an idea for an event convincing enough to satisfy Desgrange. On 20 November 1902 Lefèvre suggested an event that would take racers around France in the longest cycling competition yet staged.⁶ Even Desgrange, who was no novice in conceiving and running spectacular sporting events, seemed initially sceptical, although seeing the possibilities of the idea. By mid-January 1903, however, after some serious thinking, Desgrange was sufficiently sold on the idea to announce the race in *L'Auto*, and all that then remained was to invent and organize it in practical, rather than theoretical, terms.

The Tours of 1903 and 1904: the first and almost the last

The Tour de France was a media event of the first importance. Some specialists of the period and its sporting life suggest (Gaboriau, 2003a) that the Tour was in fact overshadowed in 1903 by the Paris–Madrid motor race, run in May, whose bloody list of accidents during only its

first stage caused it to be cancelled (Durlier, 1966). But the Tour and Paris–Madrid were linked in a variety of ways, most importantly by the fact that bicycles and cars had shared in a modernist sporting adventure involving science, industry, sporting heroes and the media in the search for speed and technical progress. In simple organizational terms, the Tour borrowed the idea of racing in stages from motor sport, which had been developing the idea for a number of years, and devised its six long stages in echo of what had been tried by cars and motorcycles.

Although by 1903 the idea of a bicycle race – even of gigantic proportions – was less startling to the masses than a motorized race of the nature of Paris–Madrid, the formula invented by Desgrange and Lefèvre was sufficiently innovative to differentiate the Tour from previous racing. Firstly, it was a stage race and, secondly, it was to be run without the riders having recourse to pacemakers. The 2,428 km of the 1903 race doubtless required that it be divided into segments in an attempt to spare the riders' health, but Bordeaux–Paris (nearly 600 km) and Paris–Brest–Paris (1,200 km) had always been undertaken without breaks, so why the change of approach? The answer lies both in the race's nature as an invention of the sporting press and in evolving ideas about the nature of sport, sporting champions and sporting performance. A race divided into stages facilitated reporting, and allowed a style of journalism that maximized anecdote and reaction and fostered a sense of the evolving drama of the competition. *L'Auto* made the most it possibly could of commentary before, during and after the long stages, and the fact that stages were separated by periods of rest allowed further opportunities to sell copy on the strength of material not directly related to racing. Furthermore, by the judicious arrangement of start times and distances, stages could be organized in order both to facilitate printing deadlines and to maximize crowds at the finish lines.⁷

By banning the use of pacing, the Tour marked a shift away from the older interpretation of what cycle sport was about. Initially, road cycle races in particular had been seen as demonstrations of the practicality (speed and reliability as a means of transport) of the bicycle, and arguably more than the identity of the victor and his rivals, it had been the time and speed of the winning ride that had counted the most. Although the media reporting of rides did create sporting heroes such as Terront, and although track racing was also instrumental in inventing rivalries between individuals, much of the emphasis was on distance and speed, and all kinds of pacing – human and motorized – was allowed.⁸ And so if a rider won, it could be said that his performance was as much dependent on his pacing as upon his own abilities. In his Tour de France,

Henri Desgrange allowed competitors to fully demonstrate their own strengths and weaknesses within a sporting context that mirrored his own 'theory' of racing, as set out, particularly, in his volume *La Tête et les jambes*: 'le sport cycliste exige de la part de celui qui veut s'y adonner deux genres de qualité, d'ordre bien différent, qui se complètent l'un et l'autre: la tête et les jambes' (Desgrange, 1894). By pitting riders one against the other without pacing paid for by competitors or by the firms whose bicycles they rode, the Tour became a true test of 'la tête et les jambes', participating in a trend towards the democratization and popularization of sporting values. Unfortunately for the Tour in 1903 and particularly in 1904, the 'sporting values' of some of the competitors and many of the spectators fell somewhat short of what might have been hoped for in a contest of equals striving for honest victory. Perhaps because of the professional rather than 'Corinthian' traditions of French cycle racing, riders were often less than scrupulously fair in their riding, and the passions of the watching crowds were so inflamed by attachment to local heroes that racing conditions were on many occasions less than fair or safe for some competitors, as Jacques Seray has chronicled (Seray, 1994).

Staged from 1–19 July, the inaugural Tour of 1903 was a great popular success, winning the interest of the roadside watchers in rural regions and of the inhabitants of the major cities – Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes and Paris – through which it ran. Sales of *L'Auto* rose sharply, as new readers followed the progress of Maurice Garin and his rivals, and by the time the victorious Garin reached Paris, circulation had more than doubled to some 65,000 copies. Garin's winning time was 94 hours 33 minutes, giving an average speed of 26.45 kph. Of the 76 riders who had registered, only 20 actually finished the race, with the *lanterne rouge* Millocheau a staggering 49 hours 42 minutes down on Garin, whose winnings were 6,125 francs and a work of art donated by *La Vie au grand air*. In 1904 the race kept almost the same route and organization (2–24 July, 2,500 km, six stages, six days of rest at Lyon after stage 1 but single rest days between other stages); however, measures were introduced to restrict the opportunities for cheating. Eighty-eight riders left Paris, and Garin was again victorious, but in circumstances of suspicion about the regularity of racing and about the violent incidents that had marked the race. Indeed, the problems of 1904 led Desgrange for a time to declare the Tour dead and never to be repeated (Seray, 1994). The Tour's rulings on what was and was not allowed were numerous and complicated, amounting essentially to requiring competitors to ride alone and unassisted, except for feeding at

agreed checkpoints; however, the increased popularity of the race had made manufacturers much more keen to ensure that racers on their brand of bicycles were successful, and this led to various infringements, ranging from unauthorized technical assistance to the strewing of nails in front of rivals. Some riders succumbed to the temptation of taking trains, or sheltering behind cars or other cyclists, and accusations of irregularities were so strong in 1904 that the sport's governing body – the *Union Vélocipédique de France* – was asked by the Tour's own principal marshals to rule on the race results. After four months of enquiries, the first four riders were disqualified, making Henri Cornet the winner of this second Tour. Other sanctions were severe: Pothier, Chevalier and Chaput received life-bans and Garin was suspended from competition for two years. Desgrange was infuriated by the severe reactions of the UVF, which added to the punishments and exclusions he had himself imposed during the race. Not for the last time the Tour, as the major cycling competition, was feeling constrained by the intervention of a ruling body. The second Tour also brought tension between Desgrange and a manufacturer, the La Française company, whose team was made up of the Garin brothers and Pothier; the Tour was accused by some of being in the pocket of La Française. In addition to the cheating, however, the 1904 Tour had been marred by violent incidents in which spectators had attempted to brutalize riders who threatened the chances of their favourites, and on a number of occasions riders had been injured, forced to withdraw or hindered. Race officials had been obliged to use firearms to enforce their passage, particularly during the infamous attack on riders at the Col de la République near Saint-Etienne, where hooligans attempted to assist their regional favourite, Faure.

Building a legend: the Tour before the First World War

The development of the Tour in the years between 1905 and 1914 has been described as a 'patriotic rebirth' (Gaboriau, 2003a: 67). These ten years also served to create the original model for the world's greatest cycle race, as Desgrange and his team introduced ever greater physical challenges and attempted to define the interactions between the media, manufacturers and champions. The Tour in the *Belle Epoque* also set much of the style of future reporting, as well as pushing innovation in sports journalism.

Although the first Tour had been a success, the difficulties of the second year meant that the race was in need of a second chance, and one of the trends in its development was that of a 'patriotic' renewal. Many of the changes in the organization of the race tended towards ever-closer

association between the route in particular and the notion of 'France'. In terms of the nationality of competitors also, the initial involvement of Italians and Belgians led to something of a focus on the race as a contest in which France defended its territory against foreigners, 'losing' to Belgium in 1912, 1913 and 1914.⁹ The race increased in scale and gained even greater public support as a summer spectacle to be shared by the whole country. As the prospect of war loomed larger and patriotism swelled, the vocabulary of cycling – as of sport in general – became increasingly militaristic, culminating in a jingoistic and sanguinary diatribe by Desgrange in the columns of *L'Auto* on the eve of conflict in 1914 which it is worth quoting extensively:

Mes p'tits gars! Mes p'tits chéris! Mes p'tits gars français! Ecoutez-moi! Depuis 14 ans que *L'Auto* paraît tous les jours il ne vous a jamais donné de mauvais conseils hein? Alors écoutez-moi! Les Prussiens sont des salauds! J'emploie ce terme non pour parler « poissard » mais parce qu'il dit exactement ce que je veux dire... Il faut que vous les ayez, ces salauds-là, il faut que vous les ayez! D'abord parce que si vous ne les aurez pas, ils vous auront. Et quand ils vous auront, vous ne serez plus que des machines à obéir: vous serez obligés de faire le salut militaire à tous les uniformes... Stupide et fourbe en 1806, fourbe et lâche en 1870, pourquoi voulez-vous qu'il soit devenu intelligent en 1914? C'est un grand match que vous avez à disputer: faites usage de tout votre répertoire français. La tactique – n'est-ce pas – n'est pas pour vous effrayer. Une feinte, et l'on rentre. Vous savez tout cela mes p'tits gars, mieux que moi qui vous l'enseigne depuis bientôt trois lustres. Mais méfiez-vous! Quand votre crosse sera sur leurs poitrines, ils vous demanderont pardon. Ne vous laissez pas faire. Enfoncez sans pitié. Il faut en finir avec ces imbéciles malfaisants qui depuis quarante-quatre ans, nous empêchent de vivre, d'aimer, de respirer et d'être heureux... Ils comprendront que l'Alsace et la Lorraine sont des terres françaises. (Desgrange, 1914)

This editorial and its mixing of sporting and military metaphors – looking on the war as a 'grand match' that would allow plucky little Frenchmen to take revenge for 1870 through clever ruthlessness – was of a piece with much other media and political rhetoric of the period, but it pursued and built on a growing definition by the Tour itself of elements of French identity. The developing patriotism of the Tour is illustrated by the way in which it began to 'beat the bounds' of France as the length of the race increased: more and more important towns and cities were included in the itinerary as stage-halts (Grenoble and Rennes were added in 1905; Lille, Nancy and Brest in 1906; Metz and Belfort in 1908). The route was redefining France either in sporting terms by simply allowing far-flung regions to embrace the modernity of the Tour, or, more politically in 1906, by visiting the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine, under German control since France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Since

France's political boundaries were mainly traced through physical geography, visits to the mountains in search of physical trials also served to emphasize France's unity as described by the Tour (Vigarello, 1997; Campos, 2003).

One of Desgrange's concerns during this period was to maintain the Tour's reputation for excessive physical demands. Since the demands of the first two Tours had led to cheating, measures to increase the immensity of the sporting tasks set for the riders were accompanied by more and more draconian rules. Whereas long night stages were abandoned because they could not be properly monitored (1905), the number of stages was gradually increased, as was the overall distance (1905: 11 stages and 2,938 km; 1906: 13 stages and 4,443 km). As early as 1905 a mountain stage was introduced – *le Ballon d'Alsace* – in order to challenge riders even more, and in 1910 the race organizers forced the riders to climb the Pyrenean passes of Peyresourde, Aspin, Tourmalet and Aubisque in a single stage of 326 km from Luchon to Bayonne. In 1911 Alpine stages were included of such severity that riders accused the Tour of trying to murder them. The increasing length of the race and the mountains allowed Desgrange to maintain the 'spectacular' nature of the Tour, and constant modifications to the way in which the overall classification of race positions was calculated aimed to perfect a system in which suspense among *L'Auto's* reading public was maintained for as long as possible during July. Although at this stage in the development of the Tour 'rider power' was as yet weak, Desgrange was at pains to assert the Tour's independence from cycle manufacturers, and efforts were made to prevent manufacturers and their teams from fixing the results of star riders, or simply withdrawing from the race if their placings were not satisfactory. As the race grew in prestige and importance, and as prize monies increased, the Tour defended itself against riders' gamesmanship and manufacturers' pressures, as well as trying to retain its independence from French cycling's governing bodies.¹⁰

The reporting of the Tour became a burgeoning seasonal activity for journalists, and the style of copy, borrowing from previous eulogies of physical endeavour and accomplishment in cycling sport, set the tone for much following journalism. Typically, Desgrange had tried to keep the reporting of the Tour as exclusive to *L'Auto* as possible by such ruses as being secretive about the exact details of the route until the last minute, but the national interest in the race soon meant that generalist newspapers, as well as the sporting press, began to closely follow the competition. Predictably, it was the scale of the challenges and the heroism of the riders that attracted the interest of reporters, and

the ascents of the mountains were recounted by Desgrange and his colleagues, as by others, in a eulogistic literary vein.

La Vélocipédie utilitaire: clubs, the army and touring

From about the middle of the 1890s until the beginning of war in 1914, the world of cycling in general was subject to a number of pressures that helped to transform the nature of France's experience of *vélocipédie*. Cycling clubs saw much of their socially elite membership tempted by the new attractions of motorized speed, as motorcycles and cars replaced bicycles as the fetish-objects of modernity. And as the higher social categories tended to desert cycling clubs, the falling prices of bicycles made cycling affordable for greater and greater numbers of people of humbler origins. The bicycle as *la petite Reine*, symbol both of modernity, of social distinction and of ladies' leisure or gentlemen's sport, became increasingly a work- or play-thing of the working classes. Club cycling saw a redefinition of its social composition in the years before 1914.

Club cycling: democratization

Cycling clubs in the early 1900s were suffering from a stagnation in new foundations that had begun around 1895 and, moreover, were increasingly having to defend themselves against competition for membership from new ('English') athletic sports such as running, tennis, rugby and football. In addition, as the bicycle itself became progressively more affordable and less an object of social distinction, some better-off members and clubs were tempted to convert their loyalties to the car, or even to the aeroplane. During the 1900s overall numbers of cycling clubs remained relatively stable, but old and new clubs tended to share cycling with other sports, in what became known as 'omnisports' clubs. This reflected the fact that cycling was no longer the driving force of sport in general, as it had been in the 1880s and 1890s, and also the fact that ownership of a bicycle no longer meant that someone would be a member of a *véloce-club*: cycling was no longer the elitist, modernist fad it had been originally, and riding a bike was now as much a normal everyday activity as a practice of social or athletic distinction.

Membership of cycling clubs reflected the democratization of ownership of bikes, much to the chagrin of some. Writing just before the Popular Front victory in 1936, a certain Dr Ruffier lamented the declining social level of cyclists, complaining that in 1900 one was a world away from the days of the Prince de Sagan and elegant ladies cycling in the Bois

de Boulogne, and that *la petite Reine* had been democratized and taken over by the workers, and was therefore scorned by people of quality (Ruffier, 1936). Prices of bikes, new and old, were falling and wages were rising. In 1906 a statutory day of rest for the working classes was introduced, and this, along with the examples set by Garin and his colleagues in the Tour de France, stimulated popular interest in cycling and in membership of clubs. Frequently, cycling clubs were composed of homogeneous social groupings, as old-established clubs defended their select origins (for example the *Véloce-club havrais* and the *Véloce-club béarnais*), new clubs were created along corporatist lines (various clubs of postal workers, barbers or other trades), firms and industries formed sports clubs for their employees (for example the *Association sportive Michelin*, 1911) or as clubs were set up claiming working-class identities (for example the *Rally-cycle rennais*, 1904).

La Vélocipédie militaire: the bicycle and military efficiency

The use of cycling for military purposes was much discussed from the earliest days of *la vélocipédie*. Much was made of the success of a cyclist during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 in bringing messages to an otherwise isolated military contingent. During the 1880s and 1890s debate raged over the usefulness of the bicycle in warfare, and how best France could prepare itself to benefit from its strength in *vélocipédie*. Frequently, the encouragement of *la vélocipédie militaire* was mentioned in the founding statutes of cycling clubs, and the larger clubs, such as the *Véloce-club bordelais*, organized conferences and liaised with the military authorities. Much of this apparent enthusiasm was, however, more lip-service than real passion for cycling on the battlefield. Firstly, the general social context in the last decades of the century and during the *Belle Epoque* was one of nationalism and *revanchisme* against Germany, and hence much public discourse on any matter was coloured by reference to war and France's preparedness for conflict. As far as sport was concerned, the *sociétés de gymnastique* that had often pre-dated cycling associations and clubs were more or less expressly devoted to the physical preparation of French youth for military service. Secondly, the approval required from the authorities for the creation of a cycling club encouraged the inclusion in the statutes of objectives that were likely to produce assent, and a claimed desire to contribute to France's military effectiveness was something that was guaranteed to elicit a favourable decision. So in practice, clubs were often less committed to *vélocipédie militaire* than they were in theory (Poyer, 2005). During the early years of the new century, however, the UVF renewed its long-standing support

for military cycling and created a number of initiatives intended to prepare youngsters for military service, as Alex Poyer has described (Poyer, 2003a: 262–64). As early as 1889 the UVF had instituted a *Brevet* (certificate) *routier* of 100 km, holders of which could claim to have demonstrated a useful ability in covering alone, on a bicycle, a significant distance. In 1900 two more tests of proficiency were added: the *petit Brevet routier* (50 km) and a *Brevet routier* for the longer distance of 150 km. In recognition of the varied terrain over which a military cyclist might have to travel, 1908 saw the inclusion of a *Brevet de cross-country cyclo-pédestre*. These tests were usually conducted by clubs affiliated to the UVF, with supervision from officials, and 1908 saw over 1,000 undertaken. The ability to cover distance was not the only skill that the UVF wished to inculcate in cyclists: between 1905 and 1914 a number of *Brevets* covering more specifically military skills were introduced. The most militarily accomplished cyclists could aspire (from 1905) to the *Brevet d'estafette cycliste* ('dispatch rider' or cycling, shooting, map-reading and topography, cycle-repair skills and general physical fitness) or (1914) the *Brevet d'éclaireur cycliste* ('scout rider' or cycling ability on varied terrains, shooting, map-reading and topography). Lesser paragons of cycling's military dimensions could obtain (from 1912) the *Brevet de cycliste combattant* ('active service'), which required the ability simply to cycle and use a rifle. The Defence Ministry was keen to support the federation's efforts, providing funding that rose from a mere 500 francs in 1906 to 5,550 francs in 1911, and as the political situation in Europe worsened, from 1909 to 1914, the annual UVF congresses were increasingly devoted to *vélocipédie militaire* (Poyer, 2003a: 262–64).

Sport and touring

Apart from the Tour de France, cycle sport continued to be organized by clubs and federations and other stakeholders, but changing circumstances changed the nature of racing. Whereas the 1890s had arguably been the hey-day of track racing, the 1900s saw the supremacy of road racing, best exemplified perhaps by the Tour, but also by a range of other races organized and sponsored by the sporting press or by cycle manufacturers, or indeed, in a more classic mode, by enthusiastic and still vigorous *véloce-clubs*. Although the UVF became increasingly influential in regulating the competitions organized by clubs, newspapers or industry, the growing commercialism of cycle sport and its concomitant professionalization weakened any remaining attachments to amateurism. The UVF and professional racing coexisted in an uneasy but essentially profitable symbiosis, as the cycle industry and press contributed to the

funds of the UVF and the sport's governing body ruled indulgently on the activities of its benefactors.

In the 1890s Bordeaux–Paris (1891), Paris–Brest–Paris (1891) and Paris–Roubaix (1896) had been invented by what we can term cycling's 'media–industrial complex', but whereas these classics were aimed at *elite* professional riders (or amateur riders, in open competition), many races created in the 1900s by newspapers and manufacturers targeted the *mass* of competitive cyclists. Thus, in 1906, the *Grand Prix Peugeot* (later the *Trophée de France*) introduced club racers to the world of commercial competitive cycling. Although these races and others organized by manufacturers such as Alcyon, Clément or Gladiator relied on the assistance of *véloce-clubs* for marshalling and other tasks, they were instrumental in accelerating the breakdown of amateur values in cycling clubs, where riders had hitherto perhaps still been accustomed to competing for *objets d'art* rather than money. By 1908, when the UVF authorized amateurs to accept loans of bikes and travel allowances from manufacturers, the old ideals of 1890s amateurism seemed long-forgotten, and in 1911 the UVF went a step further by replacing its old division between amateurs and professionals with a tripartite system of amateurs, *indépendants* (allowed to accept prizes in cash and payments from manufacturers) and professionals.

In contrast to cycle sport, touring during this period seems to have been somewhat in the doldrums. Whereas racing was an object of interest to the media, industry and federations, touring had no such commercial or competitive attraction and, perhaps because of the rise of the automobile and the new possibilities for discovery that it offered to the moneyed classes, saw its function as an instrument of leisure seriously challenged among the bourgeoisie. Institutionally, the UVF was not really interested in touring, and reduced the funding allocated to tourism during the 1900s. The TCF had, of course, become a body dedicated to general touring with all kinds of transport, not just cycling, and although membership rose – after a slump at the turn of the century – from about 1904, reaching 136,000 in 1914, cycling seemed to be neglected as car ownership rose. The individual nature of membership of the TCF (rather than club affiliation) meant that it could only with difficulty lead any kind of campaign involving the actual practice of cycling, but it was active in pressing manufacturers to develop a perfected touring bicycle. In the absence of a touring federation purely dedicated to long-distance touring – the original definition of touring – non-racing activities in clubs became reduced to group rides over short distances often of only 50 km with frequent pauses for refreshment. Within this kind of *tourisme de prox-*

imité some more dynamic clubs tended to organize excursions involving the use of trains (amusingly known as *le grand frère*) or even cars to give access to farther-flung areas.

Despite these institutional weaknesses, and the temptations of café stops on too short rides, cycle touring in the *Belle Époque* saw a number of initiatives that helped prepare it for more successful years after the First World War. For example, in Saint-Etienne, the famous cycle-tourist Paul de Vivie, editor of the newspaper *Le Cycliste* since 1887, was instrumental in encouraging extremely long-distance touring in the region and beyond: the classic annual ride of de Vivie and his companions of the *Ecole stéphanoise* was a 40-hour Easter trip from Saint-Etienne to the Mediterranean (500 km). De Vivie's oft-repeated general aim was to ever improve the usability of the bicycle in order to obtain the maximum length of stages of riding, and the maximum speed with the least fatigue and expense. During the 1900s the *Ecole stéphanoise* regularly undertook rides of between 200 and 300 km, but it was in Paris that Henri Desgrange took up the idea of rides over set distances (initially 200 km) within defined time-limits (initially 16 hours), monitored and certificated and giving rise to different *Brevets*. These 'audax' rides were launched in April 1904, and by September their popularity had already given rise to an *Audax club parisien* (ACP), authorized by *L'Auto* to organize reliability rides of *hypertourisme* (after 1909) over 300 and 400 km as well as the original 200 km. In order to help train riders to achieve the longer distances, the ACP also organized shorter rides of 60–150 km, bridging the gap between the short slow rides of club tourists and the spirit of the audax in an attempt to stimulate cycling in general.

Paul de Vivie: an alternative view of cycling

Writing in 1903 Paul de Vivie expressed the view that: 'La bicyclette n'est pas seulement un outil de locomotion; elle devient encore un moyen d'émancipation, une arme de délivrance. Elle libère l'esprit et le corps des inquiétudes morales, des infirmités physiques que l'existence moderne, toute d'ostentation, de convention, d'hypocrisie – où paraître est tout, être n'étant rien – suscite, développe, entretient au grand détriment de la santé' (Henry, 2005: 98). De Vivie (1853–1930), better known by his nickname 'Vélocio', was a major figure of French cycling during the 1880s and 1890s, and continued to strongly influence thinking on how the activity should develop during the early decades of the twentieth century. In particular, his way of seeing cycling was something of a coun-

terweight to the overly mediatised exploits proposed by Pierre Giffard, or the equally highly mediatised and even more commercial sports events promoted by Henri Desgrange. Vélocio's varied and interrelated interests spanned cycle technology and the design and sale of bicycles from his Saint-Etienne workshop, the sporting press to which he contributed with his monthly review *Le Cycliste*, the encouragement of cycle touring, and a strong commitment to a healthy lifestyle centred around exercise and vegetarianism.

Le Cycliste: Vélocio's newspaper

Vélocio first launched his monthly review in 1887, published initially under the title of *Le Cycliste forézien*. The newspaper was originally conceived as little more than an advertising leaflet for his shop/workshop *L'Agence générale vélocipédique*, but it rapidly became a means for Vélocio to disseminate his many and varied views. What characterized *Le Cycliste* from the outset, differentiating it from the vast majority of other newspapers of the cycling press, was the fact that there was very little reference to sport. Whereas similar reviews – such as *Le Véloce-Sport* published in Bordeaux from 1885 – capitalized on the vogue for cycling competition, whether professional or amateur, on the road or on the track, *Le Cycliste* focused on practical aspects of cycle riding, excursions, touring and general *cyclisme de loisir*. In reflection of its editor's personality and convictions, *Le Cycliste* was always independent in ownership, finance, tone and content, and during the 1890s was thus a critical friend (and sometimes enemy) of more commercially minded ventures such as *Le Vélo*; after the demise of *Le Vélo*, and the stranglehold of *L'Auto* on most journalism concerning cycling that developed after 1903, *Le Cycliste* was increasingly a dissident voice.

In contrast to its larger, more commercial rivals, *Le Cycliste* was essentially amateur in its production values and – although Vélocio's own editorial line was always clear – open to allowing debate within its columns. It was printed on low-quality paper, had no or very few illustrations and contained little advertising; it was frequently late in being published and was often lost in the unreliable postal system. Nevertheless, each monthly issue reached twenty or thirty pages of practical discussion, disseminated in 1914 to 1,200 subscribers. The (small-scale) success of *Le Cycliste* was badly disrupted by the First World War, as publication was interrupted between 1914 and 1916, resuming briefly in 1916 before another break until 1919. In the difficult social and economic context of the early 1920s the relaunch of the paper was difficult, and Vélocio was forced to increase its price and

reduce its frequency to two-monthly, seeing subscriptions only slowly rise from about 750 to near pre-war figures of 1,000 in the mid-1920s. It would be false to say that *Le Cycliste* ignored racing completely – there were occasional reports on individual races and an annual commentary on the Tour de France – but the content was very predominantly practical, aiming to foster links between cyclists and provide them with advice on a wide range of issues that arose in the practice of everyday cycling.

Much of the debate in the columns of the paper was on technology or technical aspects of bicycle design, but apart from the more polemical items on developments such as the derailleur gear so hated by Desgrange, numerous exchanges between Vélocio and cycle manufacturers such as Hironnelle in *Le Cycliste* fostered improvements in cycle construction. The rest of the copy was made up of a varied diet of material reporting on touring rides, matching riders who were seeking riding companions with other cyclists, basic tourist guides to an increasing number of areas, various self-promotional competitions offering readers the chance to win pistols, knuckle-dusters, alarm clocks, telescopes, clothing and bicycles to help them in their cycling, and a range of contributions from readers.

When copy on cycling-related issues was short, Vélocio sometimes resorted to publishing poetry, but another crucial function of *Le Cycliste* was to organize the communal rides, meetings and reunions centring around the person of Vélocio that contributed to the emergence of what became known as the *Ecole stéphanoise* of cycling. Most of Vélocio's famous long-distance touring rides were seasonal or annual events, when he undertook phenomenally long rides in the company of small groups of companions (one could almost say 'acolytes'), which contributed through the epic and occasional nature of the exploits to the myth and publicity of the *Ecole stéphanoise*, but *Le Cycliste* also administered more regular local events that fostered cycling conviviality, technical testing and debate, and 'lifestyle'. An example of such an event were the *matinées du Cycliste* run twice-weekly in August and September in the mid-1900s, when twenty or so riders would accompany Vélocio in an early morning hill-climb (13 km and 600 m) and take a café breakfast on top of the Col des Grands-Bois above La Dignonnière near Saint-Etienne.

Cycle touring, vegetarianism and mode de vie

One of Vélocio's most strongly held principles was that cycling was a social and moral phenomenon whose promotion – in the right directions – could contribute to the improvement of society. Launched in the late 1880s, this idea was characterized as the *voie sociale* whereby, for instance, the use of the bicycle as a cheap means of transport could allow

industrial workers in polluted Saint-Etienne to move their families to cheaper and healthier housing in rural areas away from the factories. In its most extreme formulation, this principle was expressed in Vélocio's claim in 1901 that 'Cycling and vegetarianism can together completely change the economic conditions of existence' (*Le Cycliste*, 1901a).

In the *Ecole stéphanoise* that coalesced around Vélocio during the early decades of the new century, all of his concerns seemed to merge in a somewhat confused whole. In his later years, Vélocio became more and more 'philosophical' in his approach to cycling, essentially seeing the physical activity as a way of achieving a healthy body in a healthy mind as much as a means of efficient and economical transport. Whereas in the earlier years the long-distance rides had been intended mainly to demonstrate 'les possibilités de la bicyclette' and to test the machines and equipment proposed by manufacturers in 'le laboratoire de la route', it seems that increasingly cycling became a example of the possibilities of the human body and mind. The best way to ride was described by Vélocio in his oft-adumbrated 'sept commandements':

- i) Haltes rares et courtes, afin de ne pas laisser tomber la pression.
- ii) Repas légers et fréquents: manger avant d'avoir faim, boire avant d'avoir soif.
- iii) Ne jamais aller jusqu'à la fatigue anormale qui se traduit par le manque d'appétit et de sommeil.
- iv) Se couvrir avant d'avoir froid, se découvrir avant d'avoir chaud et ne pas craindre d'exposer l'épiderme au soleil, à l'air, à l'eau.
- v) Rayer de l'alimentation, au moins en cours de route, le vin, la viande et le tabac.
- vi) Ne jamais forcer, rester en dedans de ses moyens, surtout pendant les premières heures où l'on est tenté de se dépenser trop parce qu'on se sent plein de forces.
- vii) Ne jamais pédaler par amour-propre.

This philosophy of cycle touring based on self-knowledge and a simple, almost ascetic approach to the physical dimensions of life – eating, drinking, clothing, sleeping – linked vegetarianism and Vélocio's championing of the derailleur gear system in the *Ecole stéphanoise*, whose principles were set out in *Le Cycliste* and in *La Revue du Touring Club de France* in 1901 (*Le Cycliste*, 1901b). Essentially, the *Ecole stéphanoise* was about long-distance touring using the technology of multiple gears and the diet of vegetarianism, in order to travel far at small cost, thus demonstrating how citizens of modest means could discover the beauties of the countryside. In 1905 *Le Cycliste* defined the *Ecole stéphanoise* as

‘une école d’énergie physique et morale’ concerned with ‘l’hygiène et le culte de la santé physique et morale’, concluding that ‘A l’Ecole stéphanoise, nous avons tous soif de mouvement et de grand air’ (*Le Cycliste*, 1905: 148). Vélocio’s vegetarianism seems to have been rooted in moral and dietary convictions as well as being recommended for financial reasons: one of the aims of his style of touring was to travel as far as possible for the smallest cost. Such a requirement presumed an efficient machine (the multi-gear bicycle) and an efficient rider (eating frugally and cheaply and pedalling economically), lightly clothed (allowing perspiration and healthy exposure to the elements) and prepared to sleep in the open. Compared with the rigid discipline and regimentedly simple efficiency of the *L’Auto*’s audax rides (described derisively by Vélocio as ‘le cyclotourisme à la Desgrange’), the ideological foundations of cycling as interpreted by the *Ecole stéphanoise* were rich and liberal.

Technology, touring and the Tour de France

Vélocio was not in general well-disposed towards Pierre Giffard and Henri Desgrange and their different styles of promotion of cycling. Although there may have been greater shared ground with Giffard’s notion of the bicycle as ‘bienfait social’ than with Desgrange’s focus on competitive professional cycle sport, Vélocio nevertheless styled his fellow apostle of *vélocipédie* as ‘Giffardus pontifex’ and deplored his ‘suffisance vaniteuse’ (Henry, 2005: 48). With Desgrange, Vélocio’s conflict was focused around the centrality of touring to his own vision of cycling, and the obstacles that he saw Desgrange placing in the way of the development of touring and cycling technology.

Desgrange had tried to impose *L’Auto*’s authority on long-distance cycle touring in the audaxes he had helped organize in 1904 and subsequent years, but these rides, effected under strict conditions at fixed speeds and over specified distances, were a much more institutionalized version of Vélocio’s free-style long-range tours or convivial morning rides, meetings and reunions. Moreover, Desgrange appeared obsessed by the fixed-gear technology, which he stipulated – with varying degrees of integrity – for almost all the races and audaxes organized under the auspices of *L’Auto*. Influenced by Vélocio, the *Touring Club de France* staged a competition in 1902 to find the best multiple-gearing system for practical long-range riding over varied terrain, as the old-fashioned traditional fixed gear (or even the single-speed freewheel system) imposed unnecessary demands on riders. But for a variety of reasons that are not entirely clear, Desgrange was violently opposed to what was known as ‘polymultiplication’, describing it as cheating and fit only for old men

and women. When the inaugural Tour de France was run in 1903 on fixed-gear machines, many in the camp of the *cyclotouristes* suspected Desgrange of trying to rejuvenate the market for older styles of bikes in order to placate his industrial backers, and Vélocio, as a lucid observer of what really happened as riders tackled different conditions, pointed out that leading riders often changed bikes in order to benefit from different sizes of fixed gear, thus making nonsense of the very idea of a single- rather than a 'poly'-geared machine (*Le Cycliste*, 1903). Between 1904 and 1912 there was a war of words between the two schools of thought, with Desgrange holding hard to the view that athletic prowess – and therefore commercial sporting spectacle – was best demonstrated by fixed gears. Vélocio, on the other hand, pointed out that the flatness of early Tours reflected the deficiencies of the technology authorized by their organizers, and suggested, moreover, that Desgrange was not only retarding the evolution of the bicycle but also, through augmenting the physical demands of the race, putting riders ever more at risk of exhaustion and at the mercy of unscrupulous organizers, managers and dopers (Henry, 2005: 246). In 1913 two riders started the Tour on derailleur-equipped machines, but were disqualified on stage 4.

In 1903 Vélocio summarized his views on life and society in the following statement: 'Envers et contre toutes les apparences, je persiste à croire que l'homme est originellement bon et plus disposé à rendre service à son semblable qu'à le dépouiller' (Henry, 2005: 114). When contrasted with the ideological and political values of Desgrange and, indeed, of France in general at the turn of the century – when social and political thought was dominated by neo-Darwinist theories of competition, survival of the fittest and neo-liberal economic theories extolling the free market – such an optimistic perspective on human nature is perhaps surprising. But Vélocio's outlook on life and view of the world was based on traditions of humanism inherited from Antiquity and repeatedly incorporated into French culture before and after the Enlightenment. What might have been seen as Vélocio's naivety by hard-nosed entrepreneurs such as Desgrange and the rest of the sports-media-industry complex during the early years of the twentieth century can also be interpreted as a Rousseau-esque romanticism typical of a traditional divide in French culture and society between those who feel that humanity is perfectible and those who conclude that nature and society are red in tooth and claw. Above and beyond the technical and technological disagreements between Vélocio and Desgrange, their philosophical and ideological divergences anticipated the kinds of antagonism that would colour debates between Left and Right about the nature of sport and leisure in the 1920s and

1930s. The approach to life described by Vélocio in 1898 – ‘Je suis un primitif m’efforçant d’élaguer de l’existence toutes les complications de l’extérieur, recherchant les plaisirs qui naissent de nous-mêmes’ (Henry, 2005: 124) – was an aspiration that would perhaps only find full resonance in the France of the 1970s, when the desires of the generation of May ’68 fed into culture and politics. In the intervening years, however, the memory of Vélocio was kept alive by devotees and cyclotourists in France and worldwide, and, annually since 1922, by the commemorative ride known as *la montée du Col des Grands Bois* near Saint-Etienne. Attended by thousands of participants in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, *la Vélocio* now attracts many fewer riders, but still enough to demonstrate the continuing attractiveness of Vélocio’s ideas. We shall discuss in a later chapter how the vogue for mass-participation *cyclo sportive* rides is a contemporary development of concepts such as *la Vélocio* originated by de Vivie.

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The inauguration in 1903 of the Tour de France was possibly the single most important event in the history of competitive cycling worldwide. Desgrange’s invention of this particular model for national tours in particular and for cycle sport in general set the mould for professional cycling throughout the twentieth century, and the company that runs the Tour de France has ever since been the prime mover in world professional cycling. Based on patterns of industrial relations, class antagonisms and sport–media relations that originated in the French *Belle Époque* of the late nineteenth century, *L’Auto* (until 1944) and then *L’Équipe* dominated pro-cycling, even as late as the 2000s struggling with that other centenarian French-born organization the UCI for control of racing, riders and teams. During this same founding period of modern cycling, the bases were also laid in France of other, gentler and more recreational, kinds of cycling, in the form of the philosophy of cycle touring and leisure riding developed and demonstrated by Vélocio and the *Ecole stéphanoise*. As we shall see in later chapters, the encouragement of cycle tourism – in different forms, admittedly – has become in the 2000s something of a priority for the French state in its desire to foster sustainable and environmentally friendly leisure activities as well as to stimulate tourism and encourage healthy lifestyles. Similarly, the trials and tribulations, as well as the successes, of the French cycle industry in the twentieth century have echoed the issues evoked here in the founding years of the sector: technological modernity and the need to renew techniques and production,

and the links between innovation in the cycle industry and the wider economy. Overall, with the development of the Tour de France, the growth of a mature cycling-related industry and the ongoing rise of a media devoted to sport and competing interpretations of sport in general and cycling in particular, it can be said that France in the first two decades of the twentieth century was demonstrating a recognizably modern system of commercialized sports–media–industrial relationships.

Notes

- 1 Martin was one of the owners of *Le Véloce-Sport* in the late 1880s and early 1890s, but later wrote for Giffard's *Le Vélo*. One of his specialities was the survey, or *enquête*, dealing with, say, the state of French velodromes or cycling clubs, and in 1897 he was commissioned by *Le Vélo* to report on France's cycle industry (Martin, 1898).
- 2 The *Salon du Cycle* or cycling Trade Fair had long been campaigned for by the sporting press in the 1890s, which saw the British London Stanley Show as one of the ways in which the UK maintained its commercial superiority. The French salon was, however, often riven by disagreements.
- 3 Fayol was a kind of French precursor of Taylor. His most famous maxim was 'diriger c'est prévoir, organiser, commander, coordonner, contrôler', and the thrust of his ideas was that an appropriate organizational structure and an administratively competent leader are necessary for the successful functioning of a business.
- 4 The catalogue, which usually had to be bought, was occasionally used as a secret weapon for advertising, as on the occasion when a huge number of free catalogues were sent out to agents and shops, resulting in an abrupt rise in business. Because of the elegance of its design, the catalogue itself has recently become something of a style icon, and a version of it was republished in 2003.
- 5 *Le Monde sportif* lasted for less than a year, but *Les Sports*, introduced in December 1904, survived until June 1910.
- 6 Géo Lefèvre was a significant but minor figure in French sports journalism and entrepreneurialism. Lefèvre's autobiography (1964) provides a roll-call of his encounters with sportspeople.
- 7 The long wait in Nantes before the final stage to Paris in 1903 was caused by Desgrange's desire to have the riders arrive in the Parc des Princes on a Sunday.
- 8 Paris–Rouen in 1869 had been intended as a practical demonstration of the uses of *vélocipédie*, and the famous 'matches' on the track between crack riders were as much about records of time and distance as about rivalries between champions. Bordeaux–Paris in 1891 was won by a very strong rider, G.P. Mills, who also benefited from the strongest pacing (by Charles Terront), and subsequent pacing in Bordeaux–Paris was human-, tandem-, motorcycle- and car-based.
- 9 The foreign winners were Odile Defraye and Philippe Thys.
- 10 The Tour's ongoing attempts to retain as much independence as possible were manifested in the late 1990s and 2000s by its struggle with the UCI and the UCI Pro Tour. This initiative is an attempt by the world cycling body to more closely control professional racing, and is intended to reduce the influence of the traditional major tours (*Giro d'Italia*, *Vuelta a Espana* etc.) and their organizers over world cycling competition.

Cycling between the Wars: Sport, Recreation, Ideology, 1919–1939

The destruction and disruption of the First World War naturally impeded the development of cycling overall – in terms of competition, industry, media and everyday use – in France, although the links between light arms manufacture and the cycle industry that were discussed in the previous chapter meant that newly expanded factories, for example, were in a position to produce more bicycles than before, if the demand was there. In fact, in 1920 there were 4.3 million bicycles in France recorded by the authorities. By 1923 this figure had risen to 5.8 million, and by 1926 there were 7.1 million bicycles declared. But between 1926 and 1936 (when 7.5 million bicycles were recorded), this growth in ownership slowed and stagnated under the triple influence of a saturation of the market, public interest in watching rather than doing sport for leisure, and economic recession (Gerbod, 1986: 69–79). The cultural, social and philosophical reaction to the horrors of the war that gave the name *les années folles* to the 1920s, in recognition of a general interest in finding distraction rather than serious activities, evidenced itself in a popular enthusiasm for professional sports, fed and encouraged by the sporting media and late professionalizing sporting disciplines such as football. During the 1930s, a period in France as elsewhere in Europe marked by economic depression, social hardship and the rise of political extremism, although household incomes suffered, affecting the purchase of cycles, the impetus given by the Popular Front to sport and leisure in 1936 – as France began to recover from slump – encouraged bicycle ownership, which reached 8.8 million in 1939, despite the more than doubling of the bicycle tax in 1938 from 12 francs to 25 francs (Gerbod, 1986: 69–79).

During the 1920s and 1930s French society and politics became progressively polarized between the traditional visions for France proposed by Left and Right that had marked the French polity since the Revolution: Agulhon (1993: 178–213), for example, describes the period as one of ‘disillusion and dissent’. After the apparent ‘victory’ of the Republic in the 1890s and early 1900s, when republicanism and the

prevailing economic liberalism of the late nineteenth century had seemed to have imposed themselves over other projects (monarchy, imperialism, socialism), the *Union sacrée* uniting Left and Right in defence of France that obtained during most of the First World War had also encouraged the idea that *la guerre franco-française* was a thing of the past. In the inter-war period, however, with the continuing industrialization and urbanization of France and the concomitant rise in support for left-wing politics, and an international context in which communism was looming large as a project for society, economic and social hardship fostered the rise of both French socialism and communism and of disruptive right-wing protest movements against the Republic. Sport in general, and cycling in particular – because of its early professionalization in France – became a field in which the ideological oppositions of Left and Right were worked out, as well as representing the social and cultural aspirations of a population keen to amuse itself.

In this chapter, we consider firstly how leisure and sporting activities in general, and cycling especially, were influenced by the consequences of the war on thinking about sport and leisure, including a necessarily brief discussion of the impact made by the Popular Front government in the mid-1930s on public policies in favour of sport and leisure. Secondly, we look at the ways in which (professional) cycle racing, and particularly the Tour de France, was subject to the ideologies of class and social relations, economics and business, and human effort that were current during this period of political extremisms. Thirdly, developing the theme of professional sporting activity and the desire of the population to seek distraction in popular culture, we examine the prime example of *sport-spectacle* in the 1920s and 1930s that was provided by the six-day track racing at the famous Vélodrome d'hiver in central Paris. And finally, in a study of a phenomenon that is often neglected in studies of sport in France, we consider the short but instructive history of the 'alternative' Paris–Roubaix cycle race, run by left-wing sports federations in the mid- and late 1930s as a counter-example to the commercialized, professionalized and *sport-spectacle* Paris–Roubaix of Desgrange and his *L'Auto* newspaper.

Cycling and leisure: *années folles* to *congés payés*

The First World War had a number of effects on sport and on government thinking on the role of sport in society, which have usefully been recently summarized by Paul Dietschy (2007a; 2007b). Grassroots

participation in sport was arguably encouraged in the post-war years, and official policies on sport evolved a more sophisticated understanding of its usefulness. Although the rise of commercial sport during the 1920s and 1930 – with new sports stars and new role models in the form of *géants de la route*, or heroes of six-day racing, or footballers, boxers, or rugby players – demonstrated the need during *les années folles* for sporting entertainment, the practice of sport was also encouraged by changing mindsets and changes in society. Just as conscription had forced Frenchmen of all classes and all regions to serve together in the trenches and – literally – learn a common language, the mixing of different populations had facilitated an exchange of ideas and passions, including interests in sport.¹ Moreover, the physicality of life in the army, including in many cases organized or ad hoc sporting events, had helped to spread awareness of sport as a personal pleasure and discipline, and when soldiers returned home in 1918 they often brought with them a new interest in sport. Team sports, perhaps encouraged by the camaraderie of life in uniform, flourished, and were stimulated further by the development of professional leagues and their highly mediatized competitions. The extent to which cycling as a professional sport was already highly developed by this period is perhaps indicated by the fact that the French professional football league was only formed in 1932. Individual sports such as cycling were perhaps less directly influenced by the war, but the increasing prosperity of the working classes during the 1920s and the falling price of bicycles paved the way for the explosion of recreational cycling that occurred in the mid- and late 1930s.

With regard to official thinking on sport, the population losses in terms both of men and lowered birth rates during and after the conflict massively disrupted French society for years to come by weakening an already fragile demographic structure, and focused the attention of government even more closely on the quality and quantity of France's human capital. If before the war much of official and other discourses on sport had centred on the need for sport as direct *préparation militaire* – the *sociétés de gymnastique* set up after the defeat of 1870 were a prime example – during the 1920s and the 1930s there arose a new tension in government thinking between this traditional conception and a belief that sport had a wider role and importance in society. In the 1920s it was Henry Paté, who ended up as Under-secretary of State at the Ministry of Education and Arts in 1928–32, who defended the value of *éducation physique* in general as more than a simple adjunct of national defence, as part of the French state's as yet inchoate thinking on 'sports policy', whose overall historical development has been chronicled by, among

others, Jean-Paul Callède (2000). In anticipation of the work of the left-wing politicians Jean Zay and Léo Lagrange during the Popular Front, sport could now be thought of as contributing to the general well-being of individuals and society as well as, naturally, helping the health of France's *citoyens-soldats*.

Cycle touring in the 1920s and 1930s

According to one historian of cycling in this period, Paul Gerbod, cycle touring in the 1920s suffered in popularity, losing out to the more spectacular distractions – suited to the *années folles* – of six-day racing in velodromes and the Tour de France (Gerbod, 1986). As a spectator sport rather than an active leisure practice, cycling was also rivalled by the development of professional team sports such as rugby and football, in such a way that the *géants de la route* had to compete with a new category of sports stars: the *dieux du stade*.²

The French tradition of audax rides was first properly institutionalized by Desgrange and *L'Auto* in 1903 and 1904, when in order to match the exploits of a group of Italian riders who planned to ride from Italy to Paris, the newspaper lobbied for and created a monitored 200 km ride, successful finishers of which were awarded certificates and medals. The new enthusiasm for audax rides was carried forward by *L'Audax club parisien* (ACP) (launched in 1904 by Desgrange and other founder members such as Gaston Clément), but the concept remained the property of *L'Auto*. After the war the ACP expanded its range of audax distances, creating in 1921 free-paced events at the distances of 200, 300, 400, 600 and 1,000 km, and by the end of 1921 audax certificates – *Brevets de randonneurs français* – had been awarded to 4,500 cyclists. The success of the idea, which combined healthy exercise in the open air with a collaborative and essentially non-competitive ideology of sport, was such that, in 1921, *L'Auto*'s competitor newspaper *L'Echo des Sports* (under its editor Victor Breyer) approached the ACP for help in staging another long-distance cycle touring event, the *Polymultipliée*, which had previously been run in 1913 and 1914 (Poyer, 2003a: 294–96). Desgrange naturally reacted badly, and withdrew his permission for the ACP to certify audax *Brevets*, causing a split in the club between those faithful to Desgrange and *L'Auto*, who seceded to create the *Union des Audax Cyclistes Parisiens* (UACP), and the ACP itself.³ The ACP responded by inventing its own *Brevets de randonneurs français* over distances between 200 and 600 km, which were ridden at paces chosen by each ride participant rather than at the strictly fixed speeds of the original audaxes. The first 300 km event was held on 11 June 1922;

the first 400 km ride on 22 July 1923; and the first 600 km ride on 30 June and 1 July 1928. By 1930 these hard-riding touring clubs were realizing that longer and longer distances were of increasing interest to French cyclists, and although the introduction of a 1,000 km audax event organized by the ACP had to wait until August 1934, the anniversary of Paris–Brest–Paris in 1931 provided an opportunity for the two clubs to produce their competing versions of the famous audax Paris–Brest–Paris that still runs today.⁴ From 1930 Henri Griffé of the UACP, which was loyal to Desgrange, had been floating the idea of audax *Brevets* along the course, an innovation approved by *L'Auto* as it allowed the abolition of the less prestigious *touristes-routiers* category in the race itself. The president of the ACP, Camille Durand, understandably then proposed its own 1,200 km audax – a Paris–Brest–Paris *Randonneur* at free speed – to be run along the N12, passing 17 checkpoints and to be completed in under 96 hours.⁵ As shall be discussed in a later chapter, in the 2000s organized rides along stage-routes of the Tour de France became a significant dimension of leisure/sports cycling, and in these early Paris–Brest–Paris rides we can perhaps see a precursor of this link between professional sport and individual practice.⁶

Institutionally, the 1920s and 1930s saw developments in *cyclo-tourisme*. The *Touring Club de France* founded in 1890 was increasingly focusing on tourism and general, and particularly automobile, touring, and as cycling clubs were set up after the war with an interest in touring the need began to be felt for a coordinating body that could provide the liaison and unity not afforded by the TCF. It was thus that, in December 1923, Gaston Clément, who had been a founding member of the ACP, launched the *Fédération française des sociétés de cyclo-tourisme* (FFSC), which until 1945 was to be the sport's managing institution.⁷ In an effort to maintain at least a façade of unity in cycling, the long-standing *Union Vélocipédique de France* attempted unsuccessfully in 1926 to take control of cycle touring away from the clubs and the newly formed FFSC. Despite the support of the TCF for the UVF, interest in cycle touring as an activity distinct from the professional racing with which the UVF was associated allowed the FFSC to survive the take-over, and by 1939 the new federation could boast over 9,000 members.

The Popular Front: sports policies and structures

Such was the fervour and hope during the Popular Front that sport could become more fraternal and egalitarian that the *Fédération sportive et gymnique du travail* (FSGT) even suggested that the Tour de France should be taken into common ownership, and as a nationalized sporting

event should henceforward be organized by the Sports Ministry. In this view, articulated also in an article in *Sport* in midsummer 1936 (Ory, 1994: 730), the commercialism and competition of the event would be moderated and attenuated by the creation of two categories of riders (100 internationals and 100 youth and veteran participants), by a route that would give a more balanced coverage of France overall, and by a festive and educational dimension (bicycle rallies, processions, parties and cinema 'explanations' of each day's racing).

A succinct (and moving) definition of the philosophy behind the Left's leisure and sports policies was given later by the former Popular Front prime minister, Léon Blum, when he was put on trial in March 1942 by the collaborationist Vichy government: 'On s'est rendu compte que le loisir n'était pas la paresse, que le loisir et le repos après le travail sont aussi comme un réconciliation avec la vie naturelle dont le travailleur est trop souvent séparé et frustré' (quoted by Cacères, 1981: 34). A comment by Blum's minister Léo Lagrange adds to our understanding of the political and ideological underpinnings of their policies: Lagrange refused what he described as a 'caporalisation' of leisure in which sport and relaxation would somehow be 'imposed' on people; his ambition was to offer the masses the possibility of 'loisirs sportifs', 'loisirs touristiques' and 'loisirs culturels' (discussed by Ory, 1994: 713–88).

Lagrange's thinking on sport and leisure was informed by a number of factors. Firstly, he was influenced by the European context, in which the Olympic Games of 1936 in Berlin demonstrated the fascist Italian and Nazi German approaches to sport. Secondly, he was aware of the apparent deficiencies in health of the French population, undermined, it was claimed, by vicious alcoholism and tuberculosis. Thirdly, he was unhappy with the excesses of *sport-spectacle* in the 1920s and 1930s, which seemed to have encouraged the watching of sports often conducted in ethically dubious circumstances (cheating, match-fixing, doping) rather than the practice of healthy exercise. One of his calls to action encapsulated the 'political' and 'practical' aspects of his endeavours: 'J'ai trop souvent entendu dire qu'un pays démocratique était par essence incapable de créer une organisation des sports et loisirs. Notre ambition est de démontrer l'erreur fondamentale de cette conception. Son principe d'action est simple. Là où il y a une école doit exister un terrain de jeux' (radio broadcast 10 June 1936, quoted by Cacères, 1981: 34). As well as working to break old mindsets (leisure equating to laziness, for example) and to transform the legal entitlements of workers to free time, the Popular Front concentrated on developing infrastructures, often in sports from which the working classes had been excluded because of lack

of means. Canoeing, climbing, rowing and skiing were examples of these, but flying – *l'aviation populaire* – was perhaps the most surprising addition to the list of activities encouraged by the government.

Les années folles and the early 1930s had witnessed a growth in *sport-spectacle* and *sport-commerce*, as society had sought distraction and enjoyment, and as the sports media and sports industries had developed more sophisticated ways of catering for and stimulating public demand. For some, scandals in professional football and dubious practices in other sports smacked of an inherent ethical deficit in the *sport-spectacle* of sports governed by the national sports federations.⁸ The Popular Front's policies in favour of a *sport d'assainissement* ('purifying sports') – activities that would contribute to France's *redressement moral et physique* ('ethical and physical renewal') – aimed to encourage people to 'do' rather than simply watch sport, and, in parallel, requests were made to the federations to restrict the frequency of their competitions. Left-wing sport had also moved to counter the drift towards exploitation and unethical behaviour that it identified in *sport-spectacle*. Since *les forçats de la route* (see below) the Tour had been a prime example of the excesses of commercial sport, and its proposed nationalization in 1936 would only have taken a step further the tradition of *compétitions autonomes* organized by the Left in parallel to existing events. The 'Cross de L'Humanité' (1933) was a copy of the cross-country running race of *L'Auto*, and the 'Grand prix cycliste de L'Humanité' (1937) was presented as an alternative to the *Grand Prix de Paris*. Most notably however, the Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* of 1935, sponsored mainly by the newspaper *Le Populaire*, was a successful reaction against what was seen as the excessive commercialism of Desgrange's Paris–Roubaix, whose finish was then taking place in a closed stadium requiring payment for entry from spectators.

Cycling and the congés payés

Writing about the troubled Tour de France of 1937, which was won against expectations by the French rider Roger Lapébie against a background of national rivalries reflecting the tensions of the European context, historian Pierre Miquel evokes the constant presence of the bicycle among the Tour's working-class followers: the factory hands of France's growing industrialization were all 'des cyclistes permanents, qui constituent, dès l'aube, le long cortège serré, aux sonnettes cristallines, des travailleurs pédalant vers l'usine ou l'atelier, qui réveillent aux carrefours le bourgeois moins matinal' (Miquel, 1997: 20–21). The bicycle as a symbol of working-class freedom – even if it was often only the freedom

to commute more comfortably or more cheaply to and from work – was frequently to be found in the films and other iconography of the 1920s and 1930s. Cacérés, in his analysis of the ‘invention’ of leisure by the Popular Front, discusses Renoir’s film *Le Jour se lève* (1939), in which Jean Gabin’s elegant and charismatic but troubled proletarian hero is inseparable from a lightweight racing bike, symbol of his freedom; in the tragic finale of the film, a crowd of his workmates, who plead with him to surrender to the police, all hold their own bikes in their hands (Cacérés, 1981: 31). After 1936 and the introduction of *congés payés*, the bicycle and especially the tandem became even more the iconic objects of working-class leisure. As Cacérés suggests: ‘le tandem est resté l’image de 1936. Il a valeur de symbole. Il incarne le passage à la civilisation de loisirs’ (1981: 33). Ever since the bicycle had become affordable to workers it had been a means of transport for work and pleasure, but the restricted possibilities for times of pleasure afforded by long working hours and low pay had limited the use of the bike for escape and relaxation. By limiting working hours and by creating real holidays, the Popular Front produced the time to allow workers to go further afield on two wheels: occasional short excursions to the suburbs by Parisian workers could now be extended to longer trips into the countryside, and the combination of *congés payés* and higher wages made tandems and vacations on them properly affordable. Even now, the mental picture of young couples on tandems, either picnicking, returning home from a day out with bunches of flowers picked from the fields, or heavily laden with camping gear, endures as a powerful evocation of happiness and freedom.

Racing and the Tour de France: *les forçats de la route*

By 1930 *L’Auto*’s Tour de France could describe itself as a ‘Fête Nationale de la bicyclette [...], grande compétition internationale et pacifique où les nations cyclistes viendront chaque année prendre la mesure de la valeur de leurs champions’ (*L’Auto*, July 1930). This year marked the change of rulings that created national teams rather than teams of riders in the pay of cycle manufacturers and a swarm of independent competitors, and it was arguably the high point of Henri Desgrange’s stewardship of the race. The years from 1903 to 1939, when the race’s founder finally abandoned it, have come to be known as ‘les années Desgrange’, as his influence was ever-present in modifying the rules of racing to ensure the maximum control of *L’Auto* over its own race and maximum returns from his concept (Poyer, 2003b: 191). Desgrange as

‘patron’ of *L’Auto* and the Tour had essentially two opponents in the struggle to impose mastery on the lucrative spectacle of cycle racing that the Tour had rapidly become: the riders themselves and the manufacturers. The growing commercial significance of the Tour in the 1920s and 1930s had increased the responsibilities of riders and race managers alike, and while Desgrange attempted to impose his own ideology of sporting effort on the professional riders, some competitors began to react against the excessive demands forced on them. The purity of competition was spoiled by the interference of manufacturers in the unfolding of the race, as not only were dirty tricks frequently employed – such as the classic scattering of nails in front of rival riders – but team orders favouring some star performers could ruin the Tour as a spectacle by deciding the final result far in advance of Paris. ‘Les années Desgrange’ were also those of the first full internationalization of the race, and the hopes of France for a renewal and rebirth of society and sport marked by French victories in its national race were first dashed, then played out in the troubled context of growing European crisis.

Business and manufacturers

From 1903 to 1929 the Tour as a business was based on its initial founding commercial premise: the race was a means of selling newspapers (*L’Auto*) to the public and advertising space to the cycle industry, both in the pages of *L’Auto* and on the backs and bikes of riders. Such an ecosystem of interactions between the sports media and the cycle industry dated to the early days of cycle sport in France in the 1880s and even before, but Desgrange’s invention of the Tour ‘caravan’ in 1930 caused, as Eric Reed has discussed in a thorough and accessible treatment (2001; 2003), a fundamental evolution of the Tour’s nature as an advertising vehicle.

The manufacturers’ teams exploited the paradox fundamental to cycle racing, namely that it is an individual sport in which riders depend on the support of others to have a chance of overall victory. Desgrange’s view was always that the race was a competition between individuals, and the domination of the Tour by the Alcyon (Faber, Lapize, Garrigou, Defraye) and Peugeot (Thys) teams before the First World War had frustrated his desire for racing to be as exciting and unpredictable as possible. The participation of the major manufacturers also, of course, helped raise the profile of the race, so *L’Auto* did derive some benefit, but during the period 1919–29, the racing and winners reflected as much the fluctuating fortunes of French industry and cycle sales as they did the inherent strength of individual riders. By 1929 the stranglehold of Alcyon was

such that the severely suffering Maurice Dewaele – a ‘cadaver’ in the typically unsympathetic view of Desgrange – was guaranteed victory by his team, even against strong riders such as Antonin Magne.

From 1919 to 1921 sluggish demand for bicycles made manufacturers combine in the La Sportive consortium, with a (well-disciplined) team managed by Alphonse Baugé, which propelled its star members to victory. When the consortium dissolved in 1922, as trade picked up, Baugé continued to dictate the result of the Tour with his Peugeot team; then it was Automoto that dominated events, before Alcyon returned to winning ways in 1927. Not only were the major teams strong enough to dictate events, but other teams engaged in the race were unlikely to make difficulties, as they were often subsidiaries of the likes of Alcyon (Armor, Labor, Thomann) and Peugeot. Not only was racing stifled by team orders, but the commercial stakes involved in highly visible success in the Tour led to all kinds of gamesmanship, contrary to sportsmanlike behaviour.

The close symbiosis between industry and *L'Auto* in the Tour during the years 1903–14 and 1919–29, although irritating to Desgrange in the way it took some control over the race and racing from his hands, also facilitated some aspects of organizing an increasingly onerous event. The ‘interference’ of cycle manufacturers and other sponsors of the race was allowed at the price of material help in the form of machines for the riders and cars for *L'Auto*'s following journalists and organizers. Moreover, Desgrange also had the power, as owner of the race, to modify the rules as and when he liked in order to optimize both his own control over the event and competitiveness, spectator satisfaction, sponsor exposure and media coverage. It was thus that the famous yellow jersey was introduced in 1919, time-trial racing (in teams) against the clock in 1922, points bonuses for stage-winners in 1924, and radio reporting in 1929.

Sporting ideology: les forçats de la route

The famous reporter Albert Londres launched the scandal of *les forçats* (forced labourers) *de la route* in *Le Petit Parisien* on 27 June 1924. The popular rider Henri Pélissier, who had won the event in 1923, explained to the press why he, his brother and their protégé Vrille had abandoned the race: ‘Vous n’avez pas idée de ce qu’est le Tour de France [...] c’est un calvaire. Et encore, le chemin de Croix n’avait que quatorze stations, tandis que le nôtre en compte quinze. Nous souffrons du départ à l’arrivée. Voulez-vous voir comment nous marchons? Tenez...’ (Londres, 1996b: 22). What the riders revealed to Londres and other journalists was the chemist’s shop of drugs they took on a daily basis to help them

through stages, and the publicity that this gave to the more negative aspects of how Desgrange treated riders in the Tour created for the first time a questioning of the giant scale and inhuman demands of the race.

As Christopher Thompson has pointed out, there was a strong strand of thinking on cycling (often to be found in the columns of *L'Auto*) that presented the human body – that of Tour racers – as a machine whose performance could be described in terms of output and input, stress, power, productivity and effort (Thompson, 2001; 2003). This philosophy of man as machine in sporting competitions reflected deeper-rooted theories of man as motor in the context of work and industrial production and the ways in which the productivity of French workers could be maximized. Desgrange's own ideology of sport, which informed his organization of the Tour, combined a Taylorist concern to obtain maximum effort from the competitors and an apparent desire to instill bourgeois values in the racers. The ever-increasing feats of physical endurance demanded of the riders as *L'Auto* added successive difficulties to the race (more mountain stages, time trials, greater distances) served both to test the performance of machines (human and metal) and to create the drama necessary to sell papers and advertising. The glory of success was also proof of the developing limits of man/machine and bicycle technology, and what – post-Pélissier particularly – came to be seen as the 'mistreatment' of riders was the quasi-scientific testing of human productivity.

Before the Pélissier affair, left-wing politics and newspapers had generally been relatively indulgent towards the Tour, perhaps choosing to celebrate the glory and bravery of working-class riders rather than to investigate the conditions of their employment. But even in the 1920s the concerns about the commercialized excesses of *le sport-spectacle* that were to burgeon later in the inter-war period focused attention on some of Desgrange's more unpleasant practices, such as his ruling in 1903 (rapidly abandoned, but still revealing) that riders failing to maintain an average of 20 kph on any stage would forfeit the day's payment from *L'Auto*. Prizes and bonus payments were occasionally withdrawn when the Tour managers felt that riders had not tried hard enough. Both riders and Desgrange agreed that riding the Tour was 'work' – after all, the racers were professionals – but from 1924 the revolt of the Pélissier brothers showed that ideas diverged on how the work was managed, and on the symbolic value of riders' suffering. Londres' depiction of the Tour as a 'tour de souffrance' in which racers were brutalized by pain and effort, and badly treated by a draconian management that prevented them from wearing multiple jerseys to keep warm because discarding

them during the stage represented an abuse of team property, went against the image of heroic warriors stoically completing a job of work well done.

National teams, caravane, slump, radio

In 1930 and 1931 Desgrange introduced two major innovations in the organization of the Tour that, although shifting the balance of power from manufacturers back to *L'Auto*, nevertheless accentuated the rampant commercialism of the competition. In addition to (or because of) the problems with the manufacturers' teams, sales of *L'Auto* were stagnating, and the peak circulation of 500,000 during the Tour of 1924 needed to be regained. Another, more implicit, objective of the modifications was to facilitate the success of French riders, as the French public had been unable to celebrate a Gallic victory in what had become the 'Fête nationale de la bicyclette' since Henri Pélissier in 1923. The first change was the introduction of national teams in 1930, and the second, a year later, the invention of 'la caravane publicitaire' (Reed, 2003: 104–07). The new ecosystem of relations between the Tour, press and industry was evolved from the version that had governed the race in the 1920s, redistributing the financial burden of organizing the event, relocating the contractual loyalties of riders, redefining the rules of competitiveness, renewing the visibility of existing sponsors and creating new kinds of sponsors.

The change to national teams was intended to increase the competitiveness of the racing, as manufacturers and their subsidiaries could no longer 'fix' the results, and, if each national team had strong riders, then patriotic pride should give true racing all the way to Paris. Another accessory benefit would be that the star French riders such as Magne and Leducq, who usually rode for opposing commercial teams (and thus tended to nullify each other's chances) could both be supported by a single squad. The countries taking part in 1930 were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and it was André Leducq (a French Alcyon rider, outside the Tour) who was first back to Paris. This result was highly satisfactory to Desgrange, who had summarized the rationale of the new rules by claiming that nothing henceforward prevented the best rider from winning. Leducq was to win again in 1932, and France celebrated home victories during the rest of the 1930s with Magne (1931, 1934), Speicher (1933) and Lapébie (1937), with the Belgian Romain Maes winning in 1935 and 1936. Riders were no longer controlled by the manufacturers, but they were now contracted to *L'Auto* for the duration of the race, and thus under the management of Desgrange (*L'Auto*, 20

May 1930). Jean Durry discusses the contracts between riders and Desgrange and comments on how this changed the dynamics of the race (1981: 85–87).⁹ Because the Tour was now paying the wages of riders and other organizational costs previously the responsibility of the commercial teams, greater independence in running the Tour came at a price for Desgrange. Outside of the Tour, riders were still attached to manufacturers, and thus much advertising could be made from success in the Tour, although the bikes actually ridden during July were provided by *L'Auto* (painted yellow, they were the same for all professional riders in the national teams).

The advertising caravan was one of the solutions to the increased costs of running the race. By opening the Tour to general corporate sponsorship whose cars and vans would follow the route of the race, dispensing free gifts and jollity along the roadside and in the stage-towns, Desgrange allowed businesses outside cycling to profit from the fame of the Tour. A place in the caravan of publicity floats was obviously given in exchange for a fee, and although only ten companies participated in 1930, by 1935 there were 46. Sometimes companies sponsored individual stages, and the prizes were also linked to businesses, so the finances of the Tour were revolutionized. The greater affluence of the Tour made Desgrange more independent, and he was able to increase the sums demanded of the stage-towns for the privilege of hosting the race. The caravan commercialized and spectacularized the race in new ways by attracting extra-sporting sponsors, adding a dimension of entertainment and festivity that was non-sporting in nature. This trend reflected both the development of French business in the 1930s and the French population's desire for distraction.

Le Sport-spectacle: the Six Jours du Vél' d'hiv'

During the 1880s and especially the 1890s, velodrome cycle racing had been a popular spectator sport. Track racing dominated cycle sport, and the heroes and champions of track competition were media stars, lauded by the specialist press, which followed their every race and every move. Media coverage fed the appetite for news of both those who were able to spectate in person at the numerous velodromes and those who followed their heroes' exploits only in the newspapers, but actual attendance was strong during the hey-day of velodrome racing. Track racing was one of the first sports to create such a popular following that it could be properly termed *sport-spectacle*, and it was the *Vélodrome d'hiver* in

Paris in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s that confirmed cycle racing in France as a mass spectator sport. The Vélodrome d'hiver was built in 1903, when Henri Desgrange caused a cycle track to be installed in the Galerie des Machines, a huge building near the Eiffel Tower left behind by the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*.¹⁰ Between 20 December 1903 and 1909, this initial velodrome in the Galerie des Machines rapidly became one of the foremost sites of mass sports spectatorship, as the Parisian urban working classes (and other less proletarian groups) flocked to attend races. In 1909 the Galerie des Machines was demolished, and Desgrange commissioned a new 17,000 capacity cycling stadium (with standing room for the lower classes and seats for their social betters) close to the original site, on the corner of the boulevard de Grenelle and the rue Nélaton. In the half-century before its demolition in 1959, the new *Vél' d'hiv'* hosted an incalculable number of sporting (and non-sporting) events, becoming a near mythical space of popular sports spectatorship. Today, the Vélodrome d'hiver is principally known, outside sporting circles, for the role it played in 1942 in the shameful internment and deportation of French Jews (Rasjfus, 2002; Lévy and Tillard, 1967; Marrus and Paxton, 1981). But in the 1920s and 1930s it was a site of festivity, sociability, competition and sporting achievement.

As well as staging major boxing matches, horse riding, fashion shows and other important sporting competitions, the celebrity of the Vélodrome d'hiver was built principally upon the *Six Jours* non-stop cycle races, which had originated in the US but which Desgrange introduced to the *Vél' d'hiv'* in 1913. The First World War interrupted the full development of the six-day races, with the event only being resurrected in 1921, and it was during the 1920s and 1930s that cycle racing at the *Vél' d'hiv'* helped develop sport in France as mass culture. The inter-war period was one in which sport in France underwent significant changes, pushed to evolve by the interacting forces of democratization, politicization, commodification and mediatization, and the *Six Jours de Paris* from 1921 to 1939 mirrored and helped shape these changes. From 1946 to 1958, the year before the *Vél' d'hiv'* was knocked down, racing continued, but track cycling was less the passion that it had been when it became, in the US at least, 'the Jazz-age sport', and when, in France, the *Vél' d'hiv'* and the excitement of its *Six Jours* exemplified the sport and popular culture of the inter-war years (Nye, Groman and Tyson, 2005).

Commodification and mediatization of cycling

The spectating that went on at the Vélodrome d'hiver was a prime

example of the commodification and mediatization of cycling in the late Third Republic. These processes continued the trends initiated in sport in general by cycling in the 1880s and 1890s, when the emergence of highly popular professional racing on roads and on the track had provided a model for other sports. The Tour de France had also demonstrated the ways in which sport could be packaged as a product to be consumed directly and indirectly through spectating at the roadside or through the pages of newspapers. But Desgrange's *Vél' d'hiv'* could take commodification even further than the Tour, as the classical three unities of place, time and action could combine to provide a spectacle over which almost total control could be exercised, and whose representations could be carefully shaped by *L'Auto* newspaper. The disadvantage of road racing compared with track racing was that the spectating public was essentially elusive and transient, since the crowds who watched the Tour pass by were local, consuming the race itself directly only for a few minutes. The invention of the advertising caravan in the 1930s was one way in which the Tour worked to extend the time spectators were exposed to the product, but in essence, the Tour was always a race in search of its own fans. In track racing, on the contrary, as the velodrome craze of the 1880s and 1890s had demonstrated, crowds flocked to the stadiums to see races and record attempts that could last up to 24 hours or longer. The faithful fans who patronized the *Vél' d'hiv'* constituted a captive public for commodified and mediatized sport and for all the ancillary phenomena of popular culture that developed around the racing.

The *Vél' d'hiv'* was part of Desgrange's sporting and media empire, and the *Six Jours de Paris* held during the off-season for road racing was an important event in the professional calendar, as riders needed to ride to maintain income and *L'Auto* needed competition to report and discuss in order to fill its columns. Desgrange also owned the Parc des Princes track and so had a stranglehold on track racing as commercial spectacle in Paris. The financial importance of an off-season contract to ride at the *Vél' d'hiv'* was such that Desgrange could use the threat of exclusion from the *Six Jours* to influence riders in the Tour de France. In 1938 the promising young French rider Victor Cosson finished third in the Tour, but was accused by Desgrange of not having tried hard enough to attack the winner Gino Bartali. Desgrange famously threatened Cosson: 'Méfiez-vous jeune homme, je vous briserai, rappelez-vous que je peux faire d'un toquard un champion mais aussi d'un champion un toquard!' and he excluded him from the *Vél' d'hiv'* (quoted in Serres, 2003). This influence exercised over sportsmen by the sports media and by the sporting industry was precisely what worried those who were more

attached to the amateur, Corinthian, Olympic ideals of sport in which competition was intended to be pure, noble, honest and transparent. Much of the Popular Front's later concern with 'sport for all' and sport as a healthy leisure practice was a reaction against the 'passive consumption' of spectacularized sport exemplified by track racing.

The public that attended the *Vél' d'hiv'* was essentially of two kinds: the Parisian working classes who often came with their families, bringing food and drink to consume during the long hours of racing; and the bourgeois sporting enthusiasts and high-livers of various social origins who patronized the expensive restaurants and bars that welcomed customers in the centre of the track. As Brasseur describes the scene: 'Des ouvriers encore en bleu de travail, des familles entières avec des paniers pour le pique-nique dans les gradins et des élégantes en robe du soir au bras de messieurs en smoking. Bref, le tout Grenelle et le tout Paris réunis dans une même passion frénétique du Vélodrome d'hiver' (1997: 39). In some ways, these two groups were segregated by the spatial arrangements of the velodrome: the restaurants were situated on the central lawn area whereas the cheaper locations for watching the racing were in the banked rows of seats around the track. However, in between the working classes and the bourgeoisie – in social if not strictly physical terms – was another group of patrons of the *Vél' d'hiv'*. In common with much competitive spectacular sport, professional cycling attracted the attention of criminal groups who attended track events in the same way they followed boxing and other high-profile sports that were the subject of betting: underworld bosses, hangers-on and prostitutes were often to be found at important races and other events.

The *Vél' d'hiv'* in the 1920s mirrored the social and cultural development of France after the First World War. It is too simplistic to believe that the whole of France was overtaken by the desire to celebrate life and living that gave rise to the term *années folles*, but as Becker and Berstein point out in their history of France (2005), subtitled 'victory and frustrations', this idea is at least partially true, in the sense that some groups of people and some locations did indeed participate in a cathartic self-indulgence of pleasure and entertainment.

The Vélodrome d'hiver as 'stadium space'

A strong recent trend in the study of sport has been the analysis of stadiums, exemplified by the work of sports historians, geographers, urban planners, economists and public policy experts such as John Bale (Bale, 1993; Bale and Moen, 1995; Vertinsky and Bale, 2004). For obvious cultural reasons, the main focus of attention has been football

and baseball stadiums in North America (for example, Ford, 2009; Abrams, 2009) and soccer grounds in the UK and Europe. Velodromes in general, and the *Vél' d'hiv'* in particular, can be examined fruitfully using some of the concepts developed to explain what is at work in sports stadiums; as Maguire (1995: 45) concisely asserts in a formulation that can help guide our 'reading' of the *Vél' d'hiv'*: 'Sports stadiums are sociological entities which are formed spatially.' One building-block in the analysis of stadiums is simply their location and the ways in which they are perceived as and represent space and place. Definitions of space and place are multiple and varied, but following the dictum that 'spaces where life occurs are places' helps us to understand that 'place' is linked to community, identity, emotion and ultimately the idea of *topophilia*. Space, on the contrary – though inextricably tied to place in a dialogue of meaning – is concerned with capital, the distribution and 'disciplining' of bodies, the design of stadiums as retail/leisure complexes and, finally a sense of 'placeless-ness'.

Looking at the *Vél' d'hiv'* as space located within the urban environment of central Paris reveals that the velodrome possessed, from the outset, a geographical and thus cultural and social identity that set it apart from other sports venues. A tendency in the location of postmodern stadiums is to site them in the faceless suburbs or on the peripheries of cities (see Dauncey, 1997, for a study of the French national stadium), but the *Vél' d'hiv'* occupied a prime piece of real estate right from 1903. Although the move from the site of the *Exposition Universelle* in 1909 reflected the fact that the business of sport had to give way to urban heritage aesthetics – the original building was spoiling the view of the Champ de Mars – the new location below the Eiffel Tower still occupied a place of significance. Compared with the Stade de France built for the 1998 World Cup in the poor northern suburbs of Saint-Denis, the Palais Omnisports de Paris at Bercy built in the 1980s in a run-down area in the east of the city, or even the Parc des Princes at the old city boundary of the Porte Maillot, the *Vél' d'hiv'* was central to Paris and to Parisians' self-representations of their city and its life. Over a period of fifty years, Desgrange's covered velodrome formed part of the historic memory landscape of Parisian popular culture. Juxtaposed with the monuments and buildings of greater official status as *lieux de mémoire* (or 'places of commemoration') such as the Eiffel Tower or Les Invalides, the *Vél' d'hiv'* became an object of *topophilia* for the hundreds of thousands of Parisians who flocked to its cycling competitions and many other varied events.

Considering the *Vél' d'hiv'* as a stadium in abstraction from its privileged location within the heart of Paris also reveals interesting

considerations of its singularity. In essence, stadiums exist for the playing and watching of sport: they are, in their simplest expression, and to adapt Le Corbusier's term, 'machines for watching sport'. The traditional approach to the modernist design of stadiums was to define a 'landscape of spectacle' that rationally optimized both the game and spectatorship by providing the best-possible normalized playing surface and clear lines of sight for all watchers of the competition. This trend in design created the anonymous concrete behemoths of stadiums that have spurred analysts, following John Bale (1993) and his interpretation of Foucauldian perspectives on panopticism, to liken them to prisons for the disciplining of spectating and sporting bodies, sanitized soulless spaces for the rationalized and commercialized production and viewing of performance. More recently, stadium design has attempted to inject a wider range of functions, making sports grounds more flexible (multi-use) and better placed to integrate into their locality. Although the *Vél' d'hiv'* could not avoid its use by the authorities as a holding camp for Jewish detainees in 1942, it was not actually designed along lines that anticipated the stadium as machine. The 1909 design of the *Vél' d'hiv'* looked backwards to the velodromes of the 1880s and 1890s and the hippodromes upon which the latter were modelled as much as it looked forward in some ways to the later stadiums of the 1920s and 1930s such as those of Colombes (1907, enlarged in 1924 for the Olympic Games) and Charléty (1939).

Partly because of its location, partly because of its nature as a covered space and partly because of the simple duration of the sporting events – the six-day races – that it hosted, the *Vél' d'hiv'* was never simply a 'non-place' of sport and spectating, but through the provision of food, music, light and entertainment was always something more social, cultural and emotional. The notion of a 'non-place' has been considered particularly by the anthropologist Marc Augé (1992), in reference to places of transit and travel, using the term to describe places that are only remembered in generic terms rather than as individual sites with specific identities. To the extent that many sports stadiums and football grounds are nowadays generic in design and location, it seems possible to extend the use of the term to them. But the *Vél' d'hiv'*, as we argue here, retains an individual meaning in memory. The velodromes of the track-racing craze of the late nineteenth century had evolved in response to the need for normalized distances and conditions for competition, organized in private space rather than the public sphere of parks and city streets and had attracted aficionados and casual spectators with military bands, food, drink, electric light and other distractions. The 'total' experience offered by the *Vél'*

d'hiv' prefigured postmodern stadiums that, by integrating shopping malls, restaurants and cinema complexes, offer much more than mere sanitized concrete space for competition and spectatorship. Chris Gaffney and John Bale (2004: 25) have suggested that modern (stadium) sport is threatened with becoming a 'landscape of anaesthesia', but the *Vél' d'hiv'* – despite the totally normalized space of competition provided by the minutely measured and carefully prepared track – was, in the dazzle, colour, noise, stink and taste of its total experience, very far from the antiseptic panopticons of sporting non-space of modernist stadium design. The interesting analysis by Gaffney and Bale of the experiential dimensions of stadiums stresses how 'the feeling of place' associated with stadiums by those who frequent them derives from sensory perceptions of sight, gaze, sound, touch, smell, taste and 'sixth-sense' ideas of togetherness that make 'the stadium experience [...] a vital element of both constructions of reality and constructions of identity' (Gaffney and Bale, 2004: 25–38).

The Vélodrome d'hiver and spectacle

Another strand in recent academic analysis of sporting activities has been that of investigating sport as spectacle. The French sociologist Philippe Gaboriau has recently summarized a number of 'readings' of sporting spectacles, some of which can help unpack the cultural significance of the *Vél' d'hiv'* in the inter-war years. Gaboriau suggests that the sporting spectacles of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are peculiar to their time:

En ce début de XXI^e siècle, le sport est devenu une sorte de morale emblématique, la morale du capitalisme. "Le culte de la performance" et le besoin d'affirmation de soi par voie compétitive sont perçues comme des valeurs positives et dominantes. Le plus fort gagne, les autres perdent. (2003b: 113)

Gaboriau's readings are that sporting spectacles can be understood as 'carnival', as 'heroic epics', as total institutions *à la* Erving Goffmann, as entertaining conflict, as contemporary art, as the 'opium of the people' and as religious ritual. Arguably, an understanding of the *Vél' d'hiv'* can benefit from all of these perspectives. To take just one example of how the *Vél' d'hiv'* was carnival as well as competition, one can consider the tradition of annually electing the *Reine des Six Jours*, whose responsibility it was to officially start the race, which was considered the high point of the track season. Sport as spectacle and the popular cultural spectacle of the music hall and of popular music met in the figure of artistes such as Edith Piaf, Annie Cordy and Yvette Horner, all of whom at one stage were the *Reine des Six Jours*.

The Paris–Roubaix *travailliste*

In 1935 there were two versions of the famous race from Paris to Roubaix. One was run by the traditional organizer of this classic of the professional cycling season, *L'Auto*, and the other, an amateur race, was sponsored by the socialist daily newspaper, *Le Populaire*. The 36th Paris–Roubaix organized by *L'Auto* was won by Rebry of Belgium at an average speed of just over 39 kph, riding an Alcyon bike with Dunlop tyres and taking home a first prize of 3,000 francs; the Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* was won by Decru from Lens at an average speed of 30 kph, on an unrecorded bicycle and tyres, the winner being awarded 700 francs. Through its Paris–Roubaix *travailliste*, in which only members of the left-wing amateur sports organization the *Fédération sportive et gymnique du travail* were allowed to compete, *Le Populaire* was making a stand against what it saw as the rampant commercial exploitation both of a race that was part of cycling history in France and of proletarian muscles.

Founded in 1896, the professional Paris–Roubaix, alongside the Tour de France and the *Six Jours de Paris*, had become one of the key events in *L'Auto*'s domination of cycling competition.¹¹ The autocratic and domineering approach of Desgrange towards 'his' races and the riders who took part in them had always brought him into conflict with those who felt that sport (even races such as Paris–Roubaix that had always been commercial operations) somehow also had a public significance to the national or local community, and that professional racers should be treated with the respect that was due to their status as true *ouvriers de la pédale*. Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* and other cycling competitions organized by left-wing sports movements and newspapers were an attempt to propose an alternative model of sport, diametrically opposed to *le sport-spectacle* of the press–industry–federation complex.

Commercial and socialist sport

Ever since the precocious professionalization of French cycling in the 1880s and 1890s there had arisen critiques of the way in which the commercial imperatives of *sport-spectacle* both denatured athletic contests themselves and could potentially lead to the exploitation of competitors. This strand of thinking reached its clearest expression in the furore that erupted in the mid-1920s over the Tour de France and Desgrange's alleged inhumanity to the riders, who were described as

forçats de la route. This scandal continued to taint the image of the Tour throughout the remaining years of the inter-war period, and it was against this background in particular that the 1935 Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* was organized. As we have discussed above, the term *forçat* was first coined by the journalist Albert Londres, in a celebrated series of reports on the 1923 and 1924 Tours that he wrote for the newspaper *Le Petit Parisien*.¹² Londres' view of the 1924 race as a kind of cycling Calvary was informed by interviews with the Pélissier brothers, famous and popular riders who were vociferous in their complaints against the draconian and often petty rules imposed on competitors in the Tour by Desgrange.

These rules were intended, in Desgrange's ideology of sport, to help make the Tour a civilizing process in which proletarian racers could be moulded into properly trained and respectable *ouvriers de la pédale*, as Thompson (2001) has masterfully described. Successful and independently minded racers such as Henri Pélissier were prepared to accept that road racing was work that was exhausting and excruciatingly painful, but rejected the need for trivial rules; implicitly, for them, the labour of cycle racing was honest and honourable enough. Unfortunately for Desgrange, the communist daily *L'Humanité* took up the Pélissier affair and used it to transform its hitherto relatively neutral coverage of the race – emphasizing the strength and skill of the riders rather than criticizing their exploitation – into a systematic critique of the Tour as the epitome of capitalist, bourgeois, profit-driven, commercial *sport-spectacle*, itself emblematic of contemporary French industrial capitalism. The communist view of professional cycling was thus simple and clear, but the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* was less forthright, preferring to continue celebrating the riders' skill and courage and denouncing the extremism of *L'Humanité*'s approach.

As Ory (1994) has summarized and as Fontaine (2004) also touches on, for a decade after 1924 it suited the two strands of the Left to display differing attitudes towards the Tour and professional sport, as the two parties vied for electoral support and leadership of progressive France, but in the run-up to the election of the Popular Front in 1936, a consensus view was developed. In the fraught political and social context of the mid-1930s, debates over the commercial exploitation of athletes for the benefit of *sport-spectacle* became more heated, as French society increasingly polarized between Left and Right. Moreover, as the splintered Left moved towards greater cooperation in the hope of presenting a united front to the forces of reaction in France and fascism in Europe, the left-wing critique of *sport-spectacle* found new consistency and strength. The

socialists adopted the more radical approach of the communists, choosing now to emphasize the suffering of riders caught in capitalist exploitation and being more ready to accept the image of *forçats de la route*.

In the increasing union of the Left that would deliver the electoral success of the Popular Front in 1936, communist and socialist sports movements began to work together, pooling their strengths in organization and membership. It was this collaboration that created the *Fédération sportive et gymnique du travail* (FSGT), born on 24 December 1934 of the merger between the communist *Fédération sportive du travail* and the socialist *Union des sociétés sportives et gymniques du travail*. These two sports movements had been set up in the early 1920s, as French socialism and communism developed on separate paths after their split at the Tours Congress in 1921, and were themselves based on various organizations of *le sport travailliste* that had arisen during the early decades of the century.

The FSGT and 'participation for all' in sport

The historian of French culture and society in the inter-war period Pascal Ory has described Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* – even though it preceded the election of the coalition government of socialists and communists by over a year – as an event typical of the Popular Front's ambitions in cultural policy:

Le Front populaire souhaite ardemment faciliter l'accès de tous, et donc d'abord des plus démunis, à la culture universelle. C'est cet objectif qui justifie l'action de toutes ses associations culturelles, c'est lui qui préside obstinément au grand dessein éducatif de Jean Zay. De l'opéra populaire de Gennevilliers au Paris–Roubaix travailliste, une même préoccupation: abattre les obstacles à une participation de tous à l'expression, obstacles qui ont nom – sous de multiples masques – argent et préjugé de classe. (Ory, 1994)

In a simple physical sense, Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* knocked down the barriers for those who wished to watch their sport of cycling without having to pay. The trigger for creating Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* was *L'Auto*'s decision to conclude its race in the hippodrome Croisé-Laroche at Marcq-en-Baroeul in Roubaix, where spectators could more easily be made to pay for entry than on the Avenue Gustave-Delory, where the finishing line had previously been located. The left-wing council of Roubaix saw this as an insult to the working people of Roubaix, who would thus be deprived of 'their' race by Desgrange's appetite for financial gain.

However, the objectives of the newly unified left-wing sports movement were obviously wider reaching. The principles of the FSGT were

expounded in the sports columns of *Le Populaire* during January 1935 by the journalist Pierre Marie. More than just creating a unified sports movement, the ambition was to: ‘grouper des centaines de milliers de jeunes prolétaires, à qui l’exercice physique sagement dispensé apportera le complément de santé indispensable à une époque où tout concourt – rationalisation, civilisation mal-dirigée, chômage, sous-alimentation etc – à entamer la valeur et la résistance physiques des travailleurs’. The founding of the FSGT ‘a sonné le glas du sport frelaté, des marchands du temple sportif, des mercantils des muscles des autres. Plus d’un parmi ces mauvais bergers peut s’apprêter à faire ses paquets, à disparaître de la scène de l’exercice physique. La vérité sportive est en marche, rien ne l’arrêtera’ (Marie, 1935a).

Writing on the day of the race itself, Marie explained the links between socialism and sport and how Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* was different to Desgrange’s *sport-spectacle*:

la course Paris–Roubaix sera bien autre chose qu’une manifestation publicitaire au profit d’une société, d’un journal ou d’un homme. Elle prendra vraiment le caractère d’une vaste manifestation socialiste tout le long de la route, du départ à l’arrivée [...] J’ai bien souvent soutenu que le sport s’inspirait, à bien des égards, des mêmes principes que le socialisme, que la pratique sportive contenait, pour une part, comme une anticipation du régime socialiste. Le sport se fonde sur l’égalité, au sens véritable du terme. Le sport implique la recherche, la culture, et l’emploi exact des tempéraments individuels. Le sport comporte l’émulation désintéressée. Le sport tend à créer du bien-être, de la santé, l’usage heureux de la force et du loisir. (Marie, 1935b)

This approach was even symbolized by the day chosen by *Le Populaire* and the FSGT for the race: Sunday 14 April 1935. This was also the date of the *Journée nationale de la bicyclette* organized by the (bosses’) cycle trade confederation, Desgrange’s *L’Auto* and the *Union Vélocipédique de France*, and so the Left were aiming neatly to hijack an event symbolic of the more purely commercial interpretations of cycling. For many on the Left, it seemed that sport itself had been hijacked by business, in the form of *L’Auto* and its backers in the cycle industry, and that the UVF, instead of protecting the interests of sport against capitalist exploitation, was in fact conniving with the press and business by delegating to them the responsibility for organizing major races and championships.

Preparation and the race itself

Following Desgrange’s decision to conclude his Paris–Roubaix in a private velodrome, Jean Lebas, mayor of Roubaix, and Raymond Boucherie, who was in charge of the cycling branch of the FSGT, decided

to run their own race, announcing the date and the prizes in *Le Populaire* of 2 January 1935 in order to steal Easter Sunday from *L'Auto*. Desgrange's race would henceforth use the racecourse of Croisé-Laroche or the Stade Amédée-Prouvost, though he was eventually reconciled with the council of Roubaix and used the velodrome of the *Parc municipal des sports* built by Lebas's administration as part of the Popular Front's encouragement of sports infrastructure. No opportunity was missed by *Le Populaire* in the run-up to the race to poke fun at Desgrange for having lost the moral copyright to 'his' race, and *L'Auto* responded with a peeved but dignified silence, while awaiting the running of its own Paris-Roubaix the following Sunday. *L'Auto* of Monday 15 April reported on the running of the 21st Paris-Caen (organized by *L'Auto* and *Le Journal de Caen*), the festivities of the *Journée nationale de la bicyclette* and track racing at the Buffalo velodrome, but gave only the briefest of passing mentions to Paris-Roubaix *travailliste*.

The race was planned to coincide also with the 50th anniversary of the Roubaix workers' cooperative *La Paix*, in a neat reversal of *L'Auto*'s plan to use the competition as publicity for the *Journée nationale de la bicyclette*. As well as support from *Le Populaire*, the finances and prize lists were swollen by contributions from favourably inclined newspapers in the north of France such as *La Croix du Nord* (and even *Le Peuple de Bruxelles*), and the left-wing *Le Sport*. Commemorative cups were donated by *Le Populaire*, *Le Peuple de Bruxelles* and *Le Sport*, and a total of 5,100 francs of prize money was offered, comparing not unfavourably with the rewards of the professional Paris-Roubaix of *L'Auto*. However, the prizes for Paris-Roubaix *travailliste* were arguably more equitably distributed than those of its capitalist model (*Le Populaire*, 1935), as some 60 competitors would be recompensed in one way or another, either as top finishers in the general classification (40 prizes with a gentle taper) or in the 3rd category classification (20 prizes in all). The principles of *sport travailliste* were further evident in the organizers' concern that competitors should not be prevented from taking part because of expenses, and there was some correspondence in *Le Populaire* over what costs should necessarily be borne by riders and what subsidies could be made to allow as many as possible to participate. Although personal insurance was compulsory, helmets were deemed to be a necessary private accessory and accommodation at Saint-Denis before the start was at the expense of individuals, it was decided that riders who won no prizes would be given a travel subsidy and that everyone would benefit from a food allowance (*Le Populaire*, 1935).

The race itself was conducted as a kind of festivity, despite atrocious

weather. On the Saturday evening before the start in Saint-Denis, the council held a gala reception for the French, Belgian and Polish competitors, and the race itself was watched by tens of thousands of spectators, who were encouraged to shout 'Vive le Socialisme, vive le journal du Parti, vive le Sport ouvrier' as the riders and *caravane rouge* of some fifty cars passed by.¹³ Given the bad conditions, quite a few of the 185 riders who had originally signed up decided not to start, including the 63-year-old veteran Bouhours, who had won *L'Auto's* Paris–Roubaix in 1905. Decru was the winner of the final sprint in Roubaix, narrowly beating the local rider Wybon to take the 700-franc first prize as well as the special prize – a racing bike – donated by *L'Humanité*. It was the communist daily that summarized most neatly the impact of this *course rouge* and of these *sportifs rouges*: it was through competitions like Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* and the *Grand Prix cycliste de l'Humanité* that 'les sportifs prolétaires arracheront à l'influence néfaste du sport bourgeois, à son chauvinisme détestable, les nombreux travailleurs qu'il inféode encore' (*L'Humanité*, 1935a; 1935b).

The second Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* was run on 4 April 1936, in the full swing of campaigning for the general election that would produce the government of the Popular Front. The race was run again in 1937 and 1938, but as France prepared for war interest declined and the race was forgotten.

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Sport and leisure in France during the 1920s and 1930s were highly charged as vehicles for ideological competition, and cycling, in the form of the Tour de France and its ongoing negotiation of its own ideology of sporting endeavour and physical work, was at the forefront of this process. Sport and leisure during the inter-war period were also, increasingly, the object of growing mediatization as the written press and, from the mid-1920s onwards, new media such as the wireless began to contribute not only their coverage of events to the avid sporting public, but also to create innovations in the form of contests themselves. The growing media interest in sport facilitated the development of *le sport-spectacle*, exemplified by the races staged by the velodromes, most extravagantly by the Vélodrome d'hiver in its popular-cultural mixing of showbiz, social classes, sports competition and amusement. More soberly, and more seriously, left-wing ideology was reacting against the exploitation of workers and the duping of the viewing public represented by *sport-spectacle* organized by the bosses in the form of media entre-

preneurs such as Desgrange and *L'Auto*, and, when in government, the Left was instrumental in laying the bases of what would become – during the 1940s and the Fourth Republic (1946–58) but also most significantly under the Fifth Republic (1958–) – public policies in favour of sport and healthy lifestyles. Here the iconic image of the Popular Front's innovations is the tandem, emblematic of the working classes' newfound right to paid holidays and of the Left's belief in a better and healthier life for all. Alongside the Tour de France (the icon of free-market sporting spectacle reliant on the labour of *ouvriers de la pédale*), an image of equal strength of the exploitative demands of professional cycling had always been the Paris–Roubaix race (known as 'the Hell of the North' for the suffering it demanded of riders), but in the 1930s the *compétition alternative* offered by the FSGT and *Le Populaire* gave another interpretation of how sport could be organized.

Notes

- 1 'Standard' French had only been relatively slowly adopted in the provinces, even since the implementation in the 1880s of a nationalized, standardized primary education system using French as the language of instruction. In the First World War, soldiers whose mother tongues were Breton, Flemish, Basque, Catalan, Provençal, Alsatian and other regional languages were forced to communicate in French, thus favouring the post-war improvements in French's position as the national language and the common language of a national press.
- 2 *Les Dieux du stade* was the French title of Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* about the 1936 Berlin Olympics, but the term was used already during the 1930s in France for the new stars of 'spectacularized' sport created by the rise of professional competition and stadium sports.
- 3 The UACP was later to become *L'Union des Audax Françaises*, which nowadays certifies *Brevets* ridden at a constant speed of 22.5 kph under the direction of ride captains, whom riders may not overtake. These rides are known as *Brevets audax*.
- 4 The professional race Paris–Brest–Paris had been run in 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921, with an amateur category of *touristes-routiers* from 1901.
- 5 The start of the first Paris–Brest–Paris *Randonneur* was given on 2 September 1931. A peloton of 45 men, two women, five tandems (four of which were mixed teams) and one *triplette* set off at 10 p.m. from 'la Porte Maillot' in front of the Le Mauco café. The entire ride was made in rain and strong westerly winds, making progress rather demanding, but despite the conditions, 34 single bicycles and all five tandems finished within the time limit.
- 6 The rides along Tour stages in the 2000s, of which the best-known is called the *Etape du Tour*, attract riders in tens of thousands.
- 7 The FFSC was transformed into the *Fédération française de cyclotourisme* on 7 May 1945.
- 8 Dine (2001), for example, comments on the 'illicit' professionalization of French rugby in the 1930s.
- 9 Desgrange was happy that riders were 'in the hands of the organizers'.

- 10 The architect was Gaston Lambert.
- 11 The race had been invented by two Roubaix industrialists, Théodore Vienne and Mauric Perez, who had wanted to find a way of publicizing the vélodrome du Nord built in 1895 and who had hit on the idea of a cycle race for Easter Sunday that would interest both Paris and the north and Belgium. Their idea was soon taken over by *L'Auto*.
- 12 See *Le Petit Parisien*, 23, 27, 29 June 1924, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 19, 20 July 1924, later reproduced in two slim volumes (Londres, 1996a; 1996b).
- 13 Rather surprisingly, the caravan of cars from the newspapers (three cars for *L'Humanité*; eight cars for *Le Populaire*) also included a representative of the well-known apéritif 'Midy', a *vin tonique*, samples of which were distributed free-of-charge to the waiting crowds.

From Defeat to the New France:
Sport and Society, Cycling and Everyday Life,
1940–1959

The period of the Occupation and of government by the *Etat français*, based in the town of Vichy, from 1940 to 1944 still provokes strong emotions among French people. The political and social divisions between French citizens that were exposed so cruelly by the choices they were confronted with after the rapid defeat of France in 1939–40 often reflected ideological stances that had developed during the politically charged 1930s, and once France had been liberated, politics and society negotiated a difficult pathway through what the cultural historian Henry Rousso has described as a ‘Vichy syndrome’ (Rousso, 1987). Occupied by an invading army, torn between resistance and collaboration of all kinds, divided into two geographical regions by a demarcation line, France was indeed during these Vichy years in torment, and ‘torment’ is the word chosen by the historians of sport and public policy Marianne Amar and Jean-Louis Lescot to describe the situation of sport under the Occupation and at the Liberation (Amar and Lescot, 2007). During the war years there was significant disruption to the normal workings of the system of sporting activity in France, caused either simply by the absence of able-bodied men (serving in the Free French forces, or in POW camps, or undertaking compulsory labour service in Germany) or by difficulties of logistics (transport, fuel, electricity or other requirements for hosting sporting events), but the German and Vichy authorities were at pains to encourage sport as a means of suggesting a certain ‘normality’ in everyday life (Arnaud, 2002). Major sports such as football, rugby and cycling thus continued to function as best they could during the troubled period of the Occupation and during the generally joyous but sometimes traumatic months of the Liberation, which were perhaps even more disruptive of events than the war years themselves (Dine, 2001: 99–114; Hare, 2003: 22–25). Some iconic sporting competitions either occurred in truncated form or, in the case of the Tour de France, simply ceased altogether, their reappearance in the years following Liberation, the end of the war

and the foundation of France's new regime of the Fourth Republic being noted by all as proof of France's return to its own traditions and to a true normality.

But the influence of the Vichy regime on sport was not an entirely negative disruption of the practicalities of competition and a distortion of the ideals and philosophy of sport itself in the service of an ideology that emphasized order, responsibility and discipline in society and politics, and that saw sport as a means of exemplifying such 'positive' values in support of France's new national motto, *Travail, Famille, Patrie*. Precisely because the Vichy regime was interventionist in society and economics, in furtherance of its 'conservative revolution' and goal of French 'national renaissance', it developed the trend set in the 1930s by the Popular Front of setting up public policies and public institutions to foster sport and leisure. The French state's interest in and involvement in sport and leisure was to reach its fullest intensity during the Fifth Republic (1958–), as we shall discuss in the following chapter, but during the Fourth Republic (1946–58) which replaced the Vichy regime, even relatively un-interventionist governments became increasingly aware of the need for the encouragement of sport and healthy living.

In terms of practical, everyday cycling the years of the war and of the Fourth Republic were – although in many ways the hey-day of utility cycling – a period of challenge for *la petite Reine*: during the austerity of the Occupation and of the late 1940s, the bicycle flourished as a mode of personal transport, but as the French economy gradually regained pre-war levels of production and unheard-of rates of growth in the 1950s, rising prosperity allowed households to experiment with other forms of mobility. Rising ownership of motorcycles, cars and the motorized bicycle know as the *Vélo-Solex*, for example, increasingly distracted French citizens from cycling as a practice of everyday life, even if the Tour de France and other professional racing remained as significant – if not more so – than ever.

In this chapter we shall, inescapably, discuss the history of the relations between the Tour de France and its owner, *L'Auto* newspaper, and the authorities of Vichy and subsequently of the new Fourth Republic, considering why the Tour did not run during the war and reappeared only in 1947. Secondly, we shall consider how Vichy and the Fourth Republic attempted to manage sport and cycling in general through ideologies, institutions and policies. Thirdly, the huge popularity of the Tour as it redefined France's identity in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the attachment of millions of French citizens to the French heroes of the Tour during the Fourth Republic, merits some discussion of quite what

champions such as Jean Robic and Louison Bobet represented culturally and socially in a country questioning its own worth and modernity. Fourthly, we shall discuss how popular culture – in film, in the form of the *Vélo-Solex* and in the form of invented cycle leisure/sport practices involving (sub-)urban space – was beginning to reflect the difficulties now being experienced by cycling, threatened by the car and prosperity, by its old-fashioned image, and sometimes symbolic more of France's past than of its future.

The Tour and *L'Auto* during the Second World War

Although the running of the Tour de France was suspended from 1940 until 1947, the newspaper that had conceived the event and that organized it each year continued to function during the Occupation, and at the Liberation was transformed into *L'Equipe*. In the difficult times of both the Occupation and of the return to government by the French themselves during the Liberation and the purges that accompanied it, the behaviour and activities of *L'Auto* and then *L'Equipe*, as 'guardians' of France's national sport and emblematic annual cycle race, were under close scrutiny.

L'Auto becomes L'Auto-Soldat

On 16 September 1939, some two weeks after the declaration of war, *L'Auto* changed its name to *L'Auto-Soldat*, promising to place the newspaper's priority on 'the struggle for human independence' and the 'crusade of free men' that had recently been joined against Nazi Germany (Lagrue, 2004: 85). The rhetoric of *L'Auto-Soldat* echoed that of *L'Auto* in 1914, when Desgrange had famously exhorted Frenchmen to throw themselves into the fight against the 'bastard Prussians' (Desgrange, 1914), but neither the newspaper nor France were in the same situation of national unity and enthusiasm for revenge on Germany as had reigned at the start of the First World War. The management of *L'Auto* was now under the care of Jacques Goddet, the son of Desgrange's initial business partner Victor Goddet, and Desgrange himself was seriously ill. France's armed and political resistance to Germany was short-lived, with capitulation coming on 16 June 1940, accompanied by the creation of the Vichy state, which replaced the Third Republic and was led by the octogenarian Marshal Philippe Pétain, hero of Verdun in the First World War, but now inclined towards cooperation with the victorious Germans. Desgrange died on 16 August 1940, being spared the difficulty of seeing his news-

paper become increasingly mired in the compromises and collaborationist arrangements required of the press during the Occupation, but not before *L'Auto* had published an 'Appel aux sportifs' in which it called for realistic and disciplined acceptance of France's predicament. This was the first overt example of what was to become *L'Auto*'s much-debated and much-criticized 'collaborationist' stance during the *années noires* of the Occupation, discussed accessibly by Lagrue (2004: 85–92) and Bœuf and Léonard (2003: 117–32). Even after more than sixty years of discussion and research, and a useful recent volume by the sports journalism historian Jacques Seray (2011), it is hard to judge just how collaborationist *L'Auto* was during the period 1940–44. The ambiguity of the newspaper's actions and declarations is all of a piece with the ambivalence, confusion and changeability of French politics, society and culture as a whole under the much-denigrated *Etat français*, and the journalists themselves, masters of rhetorical ambiguity, often couched their texts in a style that offers varying readings.

The 'Appel aux sportifs' of 17 June 1940 is a case in point: it is not signed and in many ways does little more than echo a predominant theme – *le maréchalisme* – in French political and popular opinion of the day, which was support for the sacrifice of Marshal Pétain in offering his services to protect France from further conflict. The 'Appel aux sportifs' suggests, for example, that sportsmen and women understand better than others the need to bow to 'unjust adversity' because: 'La rude école du sport leur a appris à apprécier à sa juste valeur la force qu'il faut pour regarder la vérité en face, quelle qu'elle soit et pour se soumettre à ses conséquences.'¹ Such phraseology admits of both collaborationist and more positive readings, as France's situation is presented as unjust at the same time as readers are apparently enjoined to accept its defeat. Goddet was serving in the army when the 'Appel' was published, and Desgrange was too ill to contribute to *L'Auto*, so it is generally assumed that the piece was written by the Germanophile Charles Faroux. *L'Auto* had been founded by Desgrange as a – purportedly – apolitical newspaper, but during the Occupation its path veered uncomfortably towards political engagement, as Goddet's *maréchalisme* became obvious in its columns, and as, perhaps more damningly, it published announcements imposed by the Germans.² Goddet himself vigorously defended himself against accusations of collaborationism, presenting a version of events – notably in his autobiography *L'Equipée belle* – that acknowledged his support for Pétain but stressed his responsibility to maintain the business of *L'Auto* in order to keep his workers in employment during a difficult time (Goddet, 1991). Goddet was also able to justify his actions by

emphasizing the difficulties he faced after the sale of a controlling share of *L'Auto*'s capital to German financial interests: not only was he under pressure from the German authorities in Paris, but his business was owned by the Germans!

The Circuit de France of La France socialiste

One of the principal non-collaborationist achievements of *L'Auto* during the Occupation was – perversely, given the race's importance to the finances of the group – not to run the Tour de France. Goddet had been organizing the Tour since he replaced Desgrange as 'patron' of the event in 1936, and as late as August 1939 had outlined plans for the race of 1940, but from the summer of the phoney war until 1947 the Tour was put into hibernation, despite considerable pressure from the Germans and from the Vichy state. The popular success of the Tour during the 1930s had transformed it into a symbol of national identity and normality, and thus it was in the interests of the occupying forces in northern France and of the collaborationist government of the south that the Tour should be organized to give the appearance of a country accepting its new condition. When the Tour was finally run in the austerity of 1947, it was hailed as proof of France's return to being herself, marking, if need there was, how the race's absence in the intervening years had demonstrated the nation's estrangement from its traditional values. In the spirit of the times, Goddet was initially in two minds over the running of the Tour under the Occupation, tempted to believe that the race might be able to stimulate the French cycle industry and thus improve the difficult living conditions of many workers, at the same time as providing its traditional examples of effort, discipline and courage (Marchand, 2002: 49–51). He was also aware of the propaganda that could be made by the Germans if the Tour were to be held and was mindful of the further tarnishing of the reputation of *L'Auto* that would ensue.

Serge Laget has briefly summarized the 'ersatz' Tours that were run during the Occupation (Laget, 2003), and it is clear how they combined complex conflicting motivations of differing interpretations of duty, patriotism, honour and self- and national interest, played out in cycling, France's national sport. Piecing together the treatments of Lagrue (2004: 90–92), Thompson (2006: 78–81) and Bœuf and Léonard (2003: 126–32) allows us to provide a summary of the events. In 1941 Goddet resisted pressures from the occupier-run *Paris-Soir* newspaper to stage the Tour jointly, and then in 1942 similarly rejected a proposal from the collaborationist newspaper *La France socialiste*. The principal sports

correspondent of *La France socialiste*, Jean Leulliot, then undertook alone the organization of a six-stage race christened *le Circuit de France*, which ran from 28 September until 4 October 1942, visiting Paris, Poitiers, Le Mans, Limoges, Clermont-Ferrand, Saint-Etienne, Lyon and Dijon. Sixty-nine riders started the 1,650 km race, which was run over both the occupied and unoccupied zones of France, and which earned the approval of the collaborationist prime minister, Pierre Laval, who was keen to stress the ‘national’ dimensions of the competition. The journalists of *La France socialiste* were at great pains to emphasize the differences – as well as the flattering similarities – between their race and the Tour, as the *Circuit* was designed to reflect the sporting and social agendas of the Vichy government. The *Circuit*’s major obstacles were thus presented not as the distances and mountains of the route, but more as the challenges of a simple non-commercialized race run under spartan conditions of rationing (riders were accommodated in dormitories rather than hotels, food was not to be wasted, fancy componentry such as lightweight inner tubes was not to be used). The *Circuit* involved multi-national teams, whose varied members were to work together to achieve glory in their common profession. Ironically, the *Circuit* was organized at a time when the *Etat français* was increasingly losing the support of ordinary French citizens, who had been shocked by the recent introduction of compulsory labour periods in Germany for French workers (the STO system). The *Circuit*’s stress on effort and austerity, and on Vichy values such as ‘national revival’ and ‘corporatist pride’, served more to remind the French of their difficulties than to inspire them to greater loyalty to the *Etat français*. The *Circuit* was essentially a failure, as it struggled to overcome the material difficulties it publicized as the challenges the riders were supposed to master in their racing. Despite political attempts to present it as a success and to encourage the organization of a second competition in 1943, the changing tide of the war and of politics and society within France meant that the *Circuit* of *La France socialiste* was the only ‘national’ race run during the period of the Occupation.

L’Auto during the Liberation

Jean Leulliot of *La France socialiste*, organizer of the *Circuit de France*, was executed for collaboration during the *épuration* period that accompanied and followed France’s liberation in 1944–45. The *épuration* (purge) was a confused mixture of official and unofficial justice and reprisals meted out to people of all walks of life who were deemed to have overly sympathized with, or assisted, the German occupiers. Goddet

was unsympathetic, suggesting that Leulliot had committed ‘high treason’ and deserved his fate.³ Goddet himself escaped the *épuration*, despite considerable dissatisfaction among some who thought that he had not done enough to distance himself from the Germans and Vichy. The fact that he had refused to run the Tour was Goddet’s major saving grace, as well as his toleration of the use of some of *L’Auto*’s facilities – the printing presses for example – for resistance activities. In general Goddet was deemed to have done his best in difficult circumstances, particularly the German ownership of *L’Auto* created by Raymond Patenôtre’s sale of his shares in the newspaper to a German consortium in early 1941 (Lagrue, 2004: 91–92). In August 1944, however, *L’Auto* fell victim to a purge of newspapers rather than individuals, implemented by the Provisional French government as part of its attempt to punish press groups that had profited from the Occupation and to remove the influence of collaborationist media. *L’Auto* was initially banned on 17 August 1944 and saw its premises and equipment confiscated, and then on 30 September 1944 a new law was implemented that prohibited newspapers that had continued publication during the Occupation from ever being authorized to reappear. This effectively sealed the fate of *L’Auto*, but Goddet was eventually able to create a new sports newspaper from the ruins of Desgrange’s pre-war commercial empire in the form of *L’Equipe*.

Government restrictions on the press and shortages of paper and newsprint prevented the publication of newspapers dealing with sport or other non-essential matters until February 1946, when a number of new titles tried to win the attentions of the sporting public. *Sports* was a communist-inspired sports paper, closely linked to the communist resistance forces of 1940–45, which survived until the early 1950s; *Elans* was a short-lived (just 77 numbers) paper with socialist sympathies that quickly became absorbed by the much more successful *L’Equipe*, whose first number was published on 28 February 1946, and which continues today as France’s only sports newspaper. *L’Equipe* was staffed by a variety of journalists of most political persuasions, but the general tenor of the newspaper was discreetly right-of-centre.⁴ Initially Goddet had to take something of a back-room role, as legislation prohibited over-direct links between the new press of the Liberation and France’s reconstruction, and that of the Occupation. Just as in the 1890s, the sporting press became an arena of rivalry between Left and Right, a rivalry that expressed itself in the classic form of competing ‘national’ cycle races staged in spring and summer 1946.⁵ The ultimate goal of both *Sports* and *L’Equipe* was, of course, the organization of the first post-war Tour de France, and the more successful Paris–Monaco, sub-titled ‘Le petit Tour

de France', managed by *L'Equipe* in July 1946 outshone the 'Ronde de France' (essentially Bordeaux–Grenoble) organized by *Sports* (Bœuf and Léonard, 2003: 138–40). In June 1947 the government finally awarded the rights to the post-war Tour to the company that managed the velodrome of the Parc des Princes, which was backed by the newspaper *Le Parisien-Libéré* and *L'Equipe*. This was the result of complicated financial and political machinations on the part of Goddet and the owner of the *Parisien-Libéré*, Emilien Amaury, who was also co-owner with Goddet of the *Société du Parc des Princes*. Amaury was a highly influential figure in the Liberation period, transforming his past as a member of the Resistance and his participation in governing bodies of the press into real commercial opportunities that would cement the future success of both himself and Goddet. By offering his support – in return for 50 per cent of the action – to Goddet's claim to run the Tour in 1947, Amaury assuaged the concerns of the left-wing president of the *Fédération nationale de la presse*, Albert Bayet, about the suitability of *L'Equipe* to be in charge of France's national race. The Tour of 1947 was a surprising success, even in the highly charged atmosphere of a year during which France was suffering ever more from the political and social tensions created by the looming Cold War. Christopher Thompson points out how the race was marked by a 'hopeful consensus' that it could somehow mark French recovery, and details how the symbolism of the Tour's visit to the ruined Normandy city of Caen demonstrated both France's suffering and its resilience (Thompson, 2006: 83–85).

Sport and cycling under Vichy and the Fourth Republic

Vichy's approach to sport and leisure was a serious one. The development of the sports–media–industry complex since the 1890s and before was seen as having produced an essentially frivolous association between (healthy) physical activity and popular entertainment, and the *Etat français* was keen to take matters in hand, channelling the energies of French citizens into more wholesome and more purposeful avenues of sport and leisure. Jean-Louis Gay-Lescot (1991: 83) has described Vichy sports policy as 'une nationalisation coûteuse dont la finalité profonde déborde largement de la seule générosité sociale ou l'hygiénisme', and stresses how Vichy's ambition was not simply to take over the measures of the Popular Front (themselves an adaptation of existing structures – see Lassus, 2000) but to introduce a new understanding of sport in education and society.

Vichy: institutions and sport

Under Vichy, there was an attempt to create public policies and effective state institutions governing sporting activities. We have seen how the left-wing Popular Front in 1936–38 began to structure the state's involvement in sport and leisure in favour of healthy lifestyles and non-spectacularized commercialized sport, but Vichy's objectives were slightly different in their motivations. Robert O. Paxton has summarized Vichy's approach to sport as centring on the need not to effect a revolution, but to change the course of a revolution in sport badly managed by the Third Republic (2002: 20). For Paxton, Vichy recognized the 'sportification' of society that had occurred between 1870 and 1940, but considered that the parliamentary regime – despite the interventionism of the Popular Front – had allowed sport to develop in ways that vitiated its positive influence on society; simplified to the extreme, this view is expressed by the remark that the 'la France de l'apéro et des congrès' had lost the war by neglecting the proper development of sport.⁶ For Paxton, the gravamen of Vichy's complaint was that sport had evolved during the Third Republic to privilege public enjoyment rather than the higher interest of society (2002: 20). This focus on sport as spectacle and spectator sport had created too many spectators and too few participants, too much individualism and too little social discipline, too much brain and too little brawn, too many championships and too little gymnastics. Paxton points out that, although the Popular Front had indeed taken an interest in sport and society from 1936, the emphasis had been on sport as a right, whereas under Vichy sport was seen more as a duty. Seen in such terms, it is perhaps unsurprising that Vichy's attempts to reform French society's relationship ended essentially in failure; not only did the reforming zeal of the *Etat français* not sweep away the established bodies and practices of the management of sport in France, but the public's enthusiasm for passively consuming sport resisted the idea of getting out and getting fit. As Paxton concludes: 'As far as sport was concerned, popular culture was stronger than Vichy' (2002: 21). The principal structure governing sports policy during the Vichy period was the *Commissariat général à l'éducation générale et aux sports* (CGEGS), headed from July 1940 until April 1942 by the famous pre-war tennis star Jean Borotra and from May 1942 until the Liberation in 1944 by Colonel Joseph Pascot.

Vichy and cycling

The CGEGS had a three-fold objective of restructuring, rendering more ethical and stimulating sporting activities. In cycling this meant

attempting to create some order in an activity divided between sport of various kinds and levels, and touring and leisure; addressing the excesses of professional racing; and encouraging the various cycling bodies and federations to develop new initiatives. Structurally, the CGEGS addressed itself to the issue of the various federative organizations claiming to represent different strands of cycling. The ambition of having a single federation for any single sport immediately foundered against the multifarious nature of cycling, as the governing bodies for racing, cycle touring and touring in general all had authority over different kinds of cycling. The UVF and the FSGT represented racing, and the FFSC and the TCF represented touring. As Poyer (2002) has outlined, the plan to encourage the co-existence of these different organizations within a single *Fédération française de cyclisme* (FFC) was inherently problematic from the start, and the FFSC in particular, founded in 1923 with values strongly opposed to commercialized cycling, dragged its feet in joining the FFC so effectively that by April 1942, when Pascot took charge at the CGEGS, Vichy's revolution of sport was forced to recognize that *activités de plein air* such as cycle touring could never cohabit institutionally with professional cycle racing and would therefore need their own federation in the guise of the *Fédération française de cyclotourisme* (FFCT).

In terms of the ethical dimensions of French cycling, what Vichy was concerned about was the morality of professionalism. Despite his own distaste for professional sport, Borotra and the CGEGS were obliged to agree short-term exceptions to the objective of amateurism in French sport for football, boxing, *pelota* and cycling (Poyer, 2002: 296). Over a period of three years, the ranks of the some 700 French professional riders were supposed to be reduced to 326, selected by the federation, but the UVF's strategies of resistance – for example, creating a category of 'trainee' pro-riders in order to circumvent the *numerus clausus* imposed by the CGEGS – protected the professional domain. By 1942 Pascot was ready to accept the argument that a branch of professional racing was necessary in France in order to represent the country abroad, and furthermore, in a tacit acceptance of France's long tradition of overlap between amateurism and professionalism, fudged the issue of amateurs being awarded prizes of cycling componentry directly convertible to cash. As well as professionalism, another 'moral' issue of interest to the CGEGS was the participation of women in touring and racing, and various measures were taken to actually discourage female cycling.

Overall, the efforts of Vichy in the field of French cycling were ineffectual, as the wave of reforming zeal broke firstly on the rocks of

cycling's fragmented disciplines and, secondly, on the inertias and resistances of governing bodies loath to see long-held prerogatives and traditional policies confiscated by the state. Even in the last months of the Occupation during 1944, when the *Etat français* radicalized its policies, cycling resisted pressures to change. In terms of the actual practice of cycling during the period, it seems that the years of Occupation led to a decline in the numbers of clubs and active cyclists: on the eve of war in 1939, the UVF boasted some 1,500 clubs and 25,000 *licenciés* (registered riding members), but by 1943 the FFC registered a mere 650 clubs and 900 *licenciés* and in touring, between 1939 and 1944, the number of clubs fell from 240 to 160 and of *licenciés* from 9,000 to 5,000. Structurally, Vichy's ambition of having a single federation for each sport and a single club in each town failed in cycling, as governing bodies argued special cases and as individual clubs refused to merge. Ethically and philosophically, Vichy failed to impose its ideas on amateurism, but the single innovation that it did manage to introduce was a conceptual one: an 'architecture' of governing bodies in sport – in cycling the FFC and the FFCT – that reflected a categorization devised by the state rather than by essentially private interests such as the UVF or the TCF/FFSC (Paxton, 2002: 23; Poyer, 2002: 299). Jean-Pierre Rioux has suggested how Marshal Pétain's reported pleasure in watching children undertake *plein air* exercise was an 'hommage sénile à une jeunesse bucolique', symbolic in its pointlessness of the 'grand silence d'indifférence puis l'hostilité des Français' which marked the ultimate failure of Vichy's voluntarist approach to sport (Rioux, 1991: 3); in cycling as in sport and exercise overall, Vichy brought some changes of note, but little real lasting impact.

The Fourth Republic: institutions and sport

In the realm of sport, the Liberation and the post-war era opened in France with a symbolic event: the condemnation of the sports newspaper *L'Auto* and a ban on its publication. The Provisional government was punishing *L'Auto*'s continued appearance during the Occupation and its apparent compliance with and support for collaboration. As in so many areas of culture, politics and society, the France of the Liberation hoped to create a new, positive role for sport, abandoning the interference of the Vichy state in favour of a definition of sport as *service public*, providing some subsidies to the private sector sports associations, clubs and federations in return for oversight of their activities.

As we saw, *L'Auto* was soon reborn as *L'Equipe*, the Tour de France was relaunched in 1947, and the sport–press complex of the inter-war

years continued to foster *sport-spectacle*. Elections to the governing bodies of sports federations in 1945 tended to reappoint those who had served during Vichy and before, and although leisure and sport were encouraged in the 1946 Constitution, it was *sport libre* rather than *sport dirigé* that seemed likely to prevail. The rest of the Fourth Republic followed this pattern of contradictions, as governments hesitated between a more interventionist approach to sport and a return to the freedoms sport had enjoyed before Vichy. Where attempts were made to guide the development of sport, they usually failed, thwarted by inertia, confusion and lack of funds, and the continued strength of commercial sporting ventures such as the Tour, the *Six Jours de Paris* and other popular professional sports.

As the historian of sport in the Fourth Republic Marianne Amar has noted, in November 1947 an opinion poll revealed that 31 per cent of French people felt themselves to be *sportif* (1987: 60). On closer inspection, however, this quite positive figure was revealed to reflect an interest in sport as entertainment, rather than a commitment to the actual practice of sport. Another survey revealed that, in 1950, only 5 per cent of French citizens were signed-up members of the major sports federations – and therefore practising a sport – and by 1958 this had only increased to 5.8 per cent. Such stagnation of real involvement in the major Olympic sports of interest to the state reflected the feeling of governments that encouraging sporting activity in the general population was a fruitless endeavour during the 1940s and 1950s: what the French people were interested in was casual leisure sport or *sport-loisir* (membership of non-Olympic sports federations rose by 50 per cent between 1950–58), and *sport-spectacle*.

However, the Fourth Republic started with a real interest in the potential benefits of participatory sport. Amar has shown that as early as 1944 sport was seen as a remedy for the privations of the Occupation exemplified by rationing and illnesses such as tuberculosis that had reappeared as a result of wartime hardships. In the early post-war years a kind of consensus seemed to reign within government and among those who thought about sport in the new Republic that sport was something that could serve France favourably in ‘improving’ its population. Amar describes this belief as a kind of ‘union sacrée’ around ‘sport éducatif’, sport mobilized as a means of strengthening the bodies of the workers needed to rebuild the nation, or of inculcating the moral values that would reduce perceived increases in juvenile delinquency (1987: 8–16). Such views on the usefulness of sport in educating society and serving the common good arose most noticeably in the early years of reconstruction

when the mobilization of sport was just one element in a ‘productivist euphoria’. As the economy, society and politics returned to some normality in the early 1950s the notion of sport as part of a productivist vision for France declined somewhat, although implicitly the failure of the progressive Langevin–Wallon plan for reforming education in 1947 pushed much of the burden of improving the country’s common values, hygiene, moral values and health on to sport (Amar, 1987: 21). Government discourses on the importance of sport – athletes were to be ‘ambassadors of renewal’ – were not backed by clear policies or significant funding: during the late 1940s and early 1950s some sports attempted to create more reliable sources of finance from forms of betting, flouting official policies of the state’s tutelage of the *secteur associatif privé*.

The practice of cycling in the Fourth Republic

Cycling was not immune to these difficulties and contradictions, although all forms of cycling continued to flourish as best they could in the fraught circumstances of economic, social and political reconstruction, and, in the case of ‘utility’ cycling, in the face of growing competition from affordable motorized transport such as *vélocoteurs* and small cars. In the late 1940s cycling as transport was obviously of continued importance, as disruption to public transport and shortages of cars and petrol made ordinary citizens even more reliant on *la petite Reine*. Leisure cycling, likewise, was encouraged, as people in the major cities fell back on their bicycles as a means of escape during days off and rare holidays. But from about 1950 sales of bicycles began to decline, as increasing prosperity and France’s rapid modernization led cyclists of all classes to abandon regular cycling as transport, leisure or vacation for mopeds, motorcycles and the gradually more affordable motor car.

Cycle sport in its many and varied forms was also able quickly to adapt to the new Republic. In essence, cycling continued as before the war, having been relatively little affected by Vichy, and managed to steer its own course through the late 1940s and 1950s without paying much heed to the confusion of government approaches to sport. The venerable *Union Vélocipédique de France*, founded in 1881, was reformed in 1946 as the *Fédération française de cyclisme* and reassumed its stewardship of amateur and professional cycling, but it was principally private-sector commercial sport – mainly in the form of *L’Equipe* and its control over many important races and competitions – that drove developments in cycling during the period.

Racing at the Vélodrome d’hiver, which was owned by *L’Equipe*,

resumed quickly, with the first post-war *Six Jours de Paris* being staged in 1946. The *Six Jours* continued with success until 1958, a year before the demolition of the velodrome, and other classic events organized by *L'Équipe* such as Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Roubaix renewed their popularity with the sporting public. 1946 also saw the staging of a race around France – the ‘Ronde de France’ – that was intended to replace the Tour de France, in abeyance because of the sanctions taken against *L'Auto* for its ambivalent behaviour during the Occupation, but this event met with little popular approval. The reintroduction of the Tour de France itself in 1947 marked the resumption of ‘service as usual’ in professional cycling and, indeed, introduced a period in which cycling as *sport-spectacle*, fuelled by French successes in the Tour and the population’s desire for distractions from the parlous state of politics, boomed to such an extent that ideas voiced at the Liberation of sport as *service public* seemed startlingly anachronistic.

For all its popularity, professional cycling in the late 1940s and 1950s underwent a number of changes to its economic organization: riders increasingly demanded better wages and conditions of employment and the declining vitality of the domestic bicycle industry led cycle teams and organizers of races to consider sponsorship from outside the world of cycling. Traditional organizers of competitions such as newspapers welcomed investment in the sport from businesses that hitherto would have left cycle sport to be sponsored by bike and component manufacturers, and even *L'Équipe-Parisien libéré* and the Tour – Goddet nurtured a complex mix of commercialism and sporting mystique in the Tour – were happy to develop a publicity caravan from 1947, increasing subsidies from *villes-étape* and other forms of sponsorship. The essential problem for the Tour, as Goddet had recreated it in 1947 in an attempt to protect its ‘symbolic’ importance to France, was that the teams were national rather than corporate, thereby separating the sporting and financial logics of the event. Hence, even though riders were employed by teams sponsored by cycle-industry companies and, latterly, *extra-sportif* partners such as Nivea or BP, Jacques Anquetil, say, would ride the Tour simply as a Frenchman (though in the *Giro d'Italia*, for example, he would represent his corporate sponsor). The corporate team system was eventually reintroduced in 1962, as the Tour had been weakened in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the absence of champions such as Van Looy, Anquetil and Poulidor, who chose not to participate in favour of other competitions of more importance to the *extra-sportif* sponsors of their teams. Champions had been stars in previous decades, but it was only really in the 1950s that riders began to gain some real influence over

their conditions of employment as their importance to *extra-sportif* sponsors began to counterbalance the controlling influence of the Tour management. The creation of the *Union des cyclistes professionnels français* in 1957 with the French champion Louison Bobet as its head reflected the modernization of the sport, itself a reflection of the rapidly changing society of France in the late Fourth Republic.

Cycling champions of the 'New France': Vietto, Robic, Bobet

French society by the middle of the 1950s was beginning to move forwards again after the destructions and disruptions of war and occupation. In 1947 the first post-war Tour was won by the French rider Jean Robic, who gained a somewhat unexpected victory through a surprise – and rather irregular, in terms of the riders' code – attack on the final day's stage. Robic's win at the expense of the Italian rider Pierre Brambilla was greeted with relief by the public that the pre-war run of wins by Belgians and Italians had been broken (even if through the use of a slightly questionable tactic).⁷ Given the enormous difficulties experienced by France in the immediate post-war years – economic reconstruction and the re-founding of normal politics in the form of the Fourth Republic established only in late 1946 – Robic's snatched victory can be interpreted as another iteration of what was later called the 'Astérix complex', in which the combative French rider (in this case, very appropriately, a Breton) employs a ruse to undo the technical superiority of the Italian (who had taken the yellow jersey after the 'technical' stage of an individual time trial). Robic continued to participate in the Tour throughout the Fourth Republic, retiring eventually in 1959, but never repeated his success.

As the Tour restarted, 1947 in particular had been a year of great social, political and economic unrest, and although by the mid-1950s politics and the economy had reached a new equilibrium, French society overall was still both coming to terms with the aftermath of occupation and collaboration and, increasingly, being challenged by the socio-economic modernization demanded by the post-war world. In politics, international relations, economics and sport/culture, the French were looking for signs that France could be successful again, and could put behind it the perceived causes of its shameful collapse in 1940 (technological backwardness, social divisions and political incompetence). Hence, sporting victories were welcomed with great appreciation, and the run of wins by Louison Bobet in 1953, 1954 and 1955 seemed to

demonstrate a return to the good times through a renewal of France's national sport.

René Vietto: nostalgia for the 'Old France' in 1947?

The French rider René Vietto (1914–88) had been a favourite star for the home audience during pre-war Tours (his selflessness in favour of his team leader, Antonin Magne, in 1934 had become part of Tour and national sporting folklore). In 1938 and 1939 he came close to winning the Tour himself, wearing the yellow jersey for many stages, but ultimately losing his overall leadership. Vietto's participation in the 1947 Tour marked both the continuity of the competition – in a sense starting again as it had left off – and also a kind of nostalgia for the pre-war years of innocence. Despite holding the lead for 14 stages during the 1947 race (his record was 15 in 1938), Vietto eventually finished fifth and never took part in the Tour again. Although Vietto was only 34 in 1947, and continued racing until the late 1940s, the symbolism of his failure to progress beyond his pre-war achievements in the Tour was clear enough; while his popularity had endured among a nostalgic cycling audience, they and France in general were waiting for new champions representative of France's renewal and rebirth after the Occupation (during which Vietto had, incidentally, continued to compete). Jacques Lecarme has suggested that Vietto can be considered as an emblematic hero of the Popular Front, and reminds us that, in 1947, he was the subject of a eulogistic article by the communist *Miroir-Sprint* magazine, extolling his (left-wing) virtues (Lecarme, 1998: 150). The younger French winner Jean Robic defined himself in contradistinction to Vietto's easy-going good nature and the inter-war failures characteristic of 'la France de l'apéro' with aggressive tactics and ambition (Robic got married just before the Tour and famously promised his bride that, although he had no money for her, she would soon have his rewards as winner of the Tour de France).

Jean Robic: the Astérix complex – resourceful France

During the course of his long professional career, Jean Robic (1921–80) sustained eleven major injuries, including a fractured skull in 1944 and a broken femur in 1956.⁸ According to the former champion and then team manager, Antonin Magne, he was 'the prototype of the kind of rider who never admits defeat'; Magne elaborated: 'It isn't weight or size that determines the worth of an athlete, but valour and class' (Le Boterf, 1981: 16). At 1.61 m and weighing only 60 kg, with an unprepossessing appearance and demeanour, Robic apparently deserved his nickname in the

peloton of '(Ro)biquet' ('the Goat'). But in many ways he was a real popular hero of the late 1940s and 1950s, whose origins, style and image contrasted with those of the two French champions – René Vietto and Louison Bobet – against whom he defined his career. The crowds who lined the roads of France to shout 'Robic-où-qu'il-est' ('Robic, where is he?') when he won the first post-war Tour in 1947 saw something of their sufferings during the Occupation in his determination to keep fighting, and preferred to call him 'Robic Cœur de Lion' and 'Jean de Gaule' rather than 'the Goat'.

The whole of Robic's career and life appears to have been overshadowed by a persecution complex from which he drew motivation to compete. For Robic, the slights and unfairness against which he had to fight were all too real; as he claimed 'Je ne suis pas un tourmenté. Je dis seulement la vérité', and it seems that on many occasions when he complained about preferential treatment accorded to other racers, he was right (Le Boterf, 1981: 2). But his provincial outlook on modern life and hypersensitivity to criticism or opposition also reflected the troubled times of the mid- and late 1940s, and France's difficult transition from the Third Republic and Vichy to the optimism of the Fourth Republic. During Monaco–Paris – the race staged in the absence of the Tour in 1946, and known as 'le petit Tour de France' – Robic's anger at favours accorded to René Vietto were expressed in terms that seem to crystallize the forced pragmatism of the new France ('making-do' and 'getting-by'), compared with the self-indulgent style of 'la France de l'apéro' of the 1930s, represented by 'le Roi René', who won the race: 'It should have been me in the Yellow Jersey, but Robic wasn't good enough or pretty enough to be the winner.' Robic's Breton and proletarian roots, and the work ethic that accompanied them, were in a complicated relation with the imperatives of professional racing in the immediate post-war period and with the modernizing society of the new Republic.

Robic was proud of his Breton roots in the village of Radenac (Morbihan) and of his trade there as a carpenter:

C'est là où je me sens chez moi, où j'ai travaillé. C'est le seul endroit sur la terre où les gens qui m'entourent me connaissent bien et m'apprécient. Là-bas je suis devenu un ouvrier de renommée dans ma profession, et même de renommée départementale, et je crois que c'est une des choses dont je reste le plus fier. Aujourd'hui encore, quand je vais à la Bottine, je suis content de voir circuler des brouettes, des charrettes, et de me dire que c'est moi qui les ai fabriquées il y a de nombreuses années, et qu'elles sont toujours aptes à servir. (Ollivier, 1992a: 20)⁹

Such pride in one's work and in the honesty of work done properly was at odds with many of the arrangements required in racing, especially

during a period when an old and popular champion such as Vietto was attempting to mark the renewal of the Tour at the same time as younger riders such as Robic and his later rival Bobet. Robic's thirst for victory clashed with the desire of organizers and the public to see Vietto claim his rightful place in a celebration of France's return to normality, but his energy and desire to win through against all obstacles also touched a chord with a population suffering rationing and reconstruction. The Tour of 1947 was the only victory for Robic in 'la grande Boucle', as he defeated Vietto and the Italian rider Brambilla. His disrespect for the etiquette of riding led him to declare that during the arduous stage from Luchon to Pau 'je pars dès le début, et j'arrive seul...' (Ollivier, 1992a: 46). During the last stage he contemptuously accepted the deal proposed by a rider in the French national team to help him win yellow, arguing that the offer was made by someone who accepted his own defeat and that of his team leader, Vietto, and that the 100,000 francs requested could soon be recouped in after-Tour engagements (Ollivier, 1992a: 47).

Robic's hopes of winning the Tour again were reduced by the victorious return of Gino Bartali in 1948, and then by the rise of Fausto Coppi, who won in 1949 and 1952. The Swiss victories for Ferdi Kubler in 1950 and Hugo Koblet in 1951 completed the foreign domination of the Tour between Robic's win in 1947 and Bobet's trio of victories in 1953–55. Robic claimed that on several occasions during the 1950s when they were team-mates in the French national squad, he suggested to Bobet that they ride tactically together to block the foreign champions, but he found Bobet 'too egotistical' to agree (Le Boterf, 1981: 103). Vietto and Bartali were ghosts from the past, as champions of the 1930s, but Coppi and Bobet were racers whose approach to competition took the sport forwards into a more technical future. Robic is an appropriate link between the two periods. Compared with the scientific training of Coppi and the media-friendliness of Bobet, the Goat's recourse to faith healers during the 1950s and his natural irascibility, distrust of journalists and of race organizers seemed an example of France's introspection and stagnation during the war, rather than of the spirit of rebirth and modernity of the brave new 1950s. Cycling journalist and historian Pierre Chany has suggested that Robic's role – willingly adopted – in the Tour de France during the 1950s was that of the evil counterpart of Louison Bobet, and that it was the desire of press and public to see such a manichean rivalry that led him, as a good professional, to fulfil their expectations (Ollivier, 1992a: 193). Certainly, Robic had a highly developed sense of his responsibilities as a professional rider, declaring on his retirement: 'Moi, je ne peux oublier ce que je dois malgré tout au cyclisme.

Il a fait de moi un homme public, à défaut d'un homme riche, et un homme public se doit de faire face à ses responsabilités, même si son entourage se lasse de la méchanceté de ses détracteurs' (Ollivier, 1992a: 190).

Louison Bobet: rebuilding French confidence

Louison Bobet's wins in 1953, 1954 and 1955 gave the French public a burst of pride during years when – as normal politics regained previous patterns of Left–Right strife and France's colonial problems in Indochina and Algeria came to head government agendas – concern grew over the long-term viability of the youthful Fourth Republic. Bobet's six preparatory participations in the Tour since 1947 seemed to reflect France's period of post-war reconstruction and reorganization, and by winning the 50th anniversary Tour in 1953 and those of the following two years, Bobet seemed to lay claim again to the Tour as France's national competition, just as riders such as Garin, Cornet, Trousselier and others had done in its initial founding period from 1903 until 1909.

Bobet's Tours – as a reflection of their period – introduced innovations and changes: in 1953 Goddet inaugurated the sprint competition (the points jersey was green because it was sponsored by a French garden equipment company); in 1954 the Tour's first stage departed from Amsterdam (the first foreign start); in 1955 German riders participated for the first time since 1939. Although Bobet was a popular champion, giving the French pride in France at a time when the loss of Indochina (1954) and the rise of unrest in Algeria undermined confidence in politics and divided society, his domination of competition led some to hope for the appearance of challengers (even foreign) who would make the Tours less predictable. Thus Charly Gaul, from Luxembourg, was much supported in the 1955 Tour, purely because his climbing abilities made him the only competitor able to put in doubt (to use Yonnet's principle of 'uncertainty') Bobet's overall control of events (Yonnet, 1998). But a treble of victories for France – even at the expense of Tours that were boring for the general public – was sufficient in terms of popular identification with national success to make Bobet a national hero. In 1954 Bobet won both the Tour and the world championships, giving France both a yellow and a rainbow jersey.

Bobet won his Tours as a rider of the French national team so his status as a national champion, rather than simply a winner who happened to be French though riding for a foreign team, is even more to be emphasized. Bobet's image and significance as an icon of cycling was defined both in opposition to the foreign champions he raced – the

Italians Coppi and Bartali, the Swiss Koblet, and the Luxemburger Gaul – and by his relationships with the main French contenders of his era. These relations were by no means always cordial, and centred essentially around rivalry between Bobet and the champions of the late 1940s (the ageing Vietto and the touchy Robic) and later the youthful Jacques Anquetil, whose record in the Tour in the late 1950s and 1960s surpassed even that of Bobet. In 1947 and 1948, for example, the young Bobet did well in his first two Tours but struggled to be accepted by Vietto (who had twice nearly won the Tour before the war) and Robic (also a Breton but who criticized Bobet as ‘un Breton de l’extérieur’, unfaithful to his roots). Tension in the national team in 1948 was such that the influential journalist Jean Leuliot of *Miroir-Sprint* complained that the French team was made up of a rag-bag of stars all more egotistical and self-centred than each other, the pity being that the team’s strength was actually a weakness, since everyone felt they could win individually (Ollivier, 1992b: 56). Bobet’s strong showing in 1948 was sabotaged by inadequate support from team-mates and then by ill health; in 1949 Robic was ruled out of the national team because of his unwillingness to work with the rising young star, leaving Vietto to represent the older guard; and feuding surfaced again between Robic and Bobet in 1950. The status of ‘national’ champions for France was also complicated by the existence of regional teams, in which other French riders – not selected for the national team but frequently strong competitors – also raced in the Tour. The Tour of 1953, eventually to be the first of Bobet’s victories, in which Robic competed as a member of the West regional team, provided a clear example of this as the West squad tried to sabotage Bobet’s duel with Bartali (Augendre, 1997: 21–22). Team orders that year gave no special priority to Bobet, but when it transpired that Bobet and team-mate Geminiani were both well placed for victory, Bobet claimed the support of the team for his efforts by promising all his race winnings to them. Bobet’s image in the pantheon of French cycling stars is almost always positive: the criticisms that were occasionally made of him were outweighed by the cycling public’s appreciation of his style and racing behaviour, and the general public in France was delighted that confidence in post-war recovery could be bolstered by national sporting success in the Tour. In comparison with later French champions, Bobet’s career was played out in an arguably simpler sporting and media context.

In conclusion to this section on the French heroes of the post-war Tour de France, it is worth quoting in full the view expressed by Louis Aragon in the communist evening paper *Ce Soir*, as the 1947 Tour de France was about to start. Aragon’s interpretation of what the Tour

meant to France as it was run again for the first time in seven years reveals quite how much the Tour and its riders were significant in French representations of identity and community. In a piece tellingly entitled 'L'Énergie nationale, 1947', he wrote:

Le Tour, c'est la fête d'un été d'hommes, c'est aussi la fête de tout notre pays, d'une passion singulièrement française: tant pis pour ceux qui ne savent pas en partager les émotions, les folies, les espoirs. Je n'ai pas perdu cet espoir de mon enfance pour le grand rite tous les ans renouvelé. Mais j'ai appris à y voir, à y lire autre chose; autre chose qui est écrit dans les yeux anxieux des coureurs, dans l'effort de leurs muscles, dans la sueur et la douleur volontaire des coureurs. La leçon de l'énergie nationale, le goût violent de vaincre la nature et son propre corps, l'exaltation de tous pour les meilleurs... La leçon tous les ans renouvelée, et qui manifeste que la France est vivante, et que le Tour est bien le Tour de France. (Aragon, 1947)

Next, however, we look at how cycling in popular culture was betraying signs of the pressures it was facing because of France's ongoing modernization and rising prosperity.

Cycling in difficulty: obsolescence, compromise, resistance?

During the late 1940s and the 1950s cycle sport was able to recommence its highly popular activities at all levels of competition within France and, of course, to showcase France's recovery and modernity through a reinvigorated Tour de France in which French champions vied against 'Other' emblematic icons of sporting prowess in struggles that reflected France's rebirth after the difficulties of the war and the shame of Vichy. The Tour itself, as well as allowing the French population to identify positively with new heroes such as Robic, Bobet and later Jacques Anquetil, was constantly innovating by inventing new twists to the race or the route, or encouraging new technologies and practices of reporting. The Tour during these decades was relentlessly innovative. Thus, in 1947, the Tour visited its first foreign capital, in an excursion to Brussels; in 1948 the finish was broadcast by live television for the first time; in 1951 Mont Ventoux was included in the route for the first time; in 1952 the first stage to end at altitude was run; in 1953, to mark the 50th anniversary, the green jersey points competition was introduced and an *extra-sportif* sponsor (Nivea) became involved for the first time; in 1955 television introduced a daily highlights programme; and in 1957 riders' jerseys carried commercial advertising for the first time.¹⁰

In contrast to the vibrancy, innovation and modernity of cycle sport during the Fourth Republic, what might be termed everyday cycling

suffered during the 1940s and 1950s from the very modernity that was helping reinscribe the Tour de France as a traditional yet contemporary heroic saga of sporting endurance. In terms of utility cycling and general leisure cycling, the traditional use of bicycles for transport and the acceptance of any need for endurance were rapidly being rendered outdated by rising prosperity and the availability of new forms of transport such as the moped and the car. In the conceptual framework suggested by the sociologist and historian of cycling Philippe Gaboriau, the 1940s and 1950s represent the middle of the 'second age' of cycling in France, that of *la vitesse populaire*, which spanned the period from 1900 until the early 1970s (Gaboriau, 1991: 21).

Obsolescent cycling in popular culture: Jour de Fête

One of the most famous works of the celebrated film director Jacques Tati is the 1949 masterpiece of comedy and sociocultural observation and satire, *Jour de Fête*. One of the principal roles in the film is played by a bicycle, used as the transport of the struggling local postman who is the hero of unfolding events. A recurrent theme in the work of Jacques Tati (1907–82) was technology, and his concern that western societies were too reliant on technological fixes to solve real or merely apparent problems. In *Jour de Fête*, this consistent leitmotif of Tati's cinema intersects neatly with France's anxieties over its technological, social and cultural modernization in the post-war period, and the bicycle is the symbol both of France's feared backwardness and of its feverish attempts to keep pace with American models of behaviour and technical innovations. Kristin Ross, in her discussion of French culture and society in the 1950s, summarizes Tati's work as dealing essentially with the 'Americanization' of everyday life (Ross, 1995: 42).

Set in the classically rural village of Sainte-Sévère-sur-Indre and its bucolic environs, *Jour de Fête* presents an inefficiently inept and too readily distracted local *facteur*, who is generally more keen on chatting with the recipients of the mail than actually delivering it on time and accurately. As an employee of La Poste, the long-standing French national public postal service, this figure of the lazy and ineffectual postman is a clear metaphor for perceived waste and inefficiency in French business and administration during the 1940s and 1950s, as the state and the private sector attempted to foster production, productivity and efficiency gains in a drive towards growth and modernization. Tati's choice to locate the action in the countryside rather than in France's rapidly developing urban industrial centres – the film was shot in 1947 – emphasizes even more strongly the contrast between American moder-

nity and a France of manual labour whose emblematic technology in the film consists of a bicycle, old tractors or the rocking-horse merry-go-round of a traditional travelling fair. David Bellos, in a discussion of how the funding and making of *Jour de Fête* reflect the complicated cultural and commercial relationship between French and US cinema during this period, describes the work as a ‘nostalgic comedy of *la France profonde*’ and, in effect, ‘a relatively heavy-handed reassertion of French and rural values’ (Bellos, 1999: 145, 158).

Having drunk too much during a celebration in the town – significantly, the *jour de fête* concerned seems to be Bastille Day, France’s national holiday – and mistakenly and unduly influenced by his viewing during the party of a newsreel film praising the US Postal Service’s use of aeroplanes, helicopters and Harley-Davidsons in order to expedite mail deliveries in reflection of the American slogan ‘Time is Money!’, the postman François makes strenuous efforts to improve his performance. Doing his round ‘American-style’ because “‘Impossible” n’est pas français’ involves him taking lessons in speed-cycling, franking letters while his bicycle is hitched to the tailgate of a speeding lorry and a variety of other time-saving stunts in which the bicycle and French traditions are equated, and – implicitly – compared negatively with American practices and attitudes in terms of efficiency. François even becomes involved in a bicycle race, overtaking the peloton and then being paced, *derny*-style, by a villager on a *mobylette*. But, on a deeper level, the film shows sympathy for French traditions of living, because even though the post is delivered more quickly, human contact and sociability are lost. After a crash, François and the bicycle are brought home on a horse and cart. As they pass a field where the harvest is similarly being brought home, he declares ‘Me voilà arrivé’, and joins in the work. When a villager asks him, ‘C’est fini, ta tournée américaine?’, with a resigned but dismissive ‘bof’ he renounces his ambition to ‘faire vite, comme les Américains’; and as the fair whose newsreel had started the whole adventure leaves town, a small boy – the next generation – takes up François’ *bécane* (an old-fashioned slang term for bike) to deliver the mail in the time-honoured tradition.

As Bellos demonstrates (1999: 157) in his discussion of differences between Tati’s different versions of the film, *Jour de Fête* is in essence less an ‘anti-American’ film than a film which is ‘pro-French’. And throughout this durably iconic artifact of popular culture and its assertion of ‘French values’, we find a constant association between *tradition* and the bicycle, while all around in politics, economics and society, France was modernizing rapidly.

Compromise: motorized cycling, the Vélo-Solex

The opening sequences of Jacques Tati's later film *Monsieur Hulot* (1958) show the eponymous hero travelling by *Vélo-Solex*, and it is this vehicle that marks his avuncular progress through the film and the streets of Paris: a mere decade after *Jour de Fête*, the bicycle as nostalgic cipher for the everyday routine of French life and transport had thus been displaced by a motorized cycle. The *Vélo-Solex* powered bicycle, first marketed in France in 1946, was a French-designed and French-produced personal transport icon of the post-war period until the advent of truly affordable cars for the masses in the 1960s weakened its financial attractiveness to all those needing inexpensive, short-range, lightweight but load-carrying individual mobility. Described as a *cyclomoteur* and powered by either a 45cc or more latterly (from 1953) a 49cc engine mounted above the front wheel and driving it directly, the *Vélo-Solex* was – because of its similarity to classic cycles and by virtue of its small engine-size – exempt from licensing and road tax. Although the *Vélo-Solex* has yet to be the subject of an exhaustive academic history, the factual discussion that follows here is based on a small number of enthusiast and commemorative studies (Méneret and Méneret, 2004; 2006; Goyard and Méneret, 2002; Salvat, Pascal and Goyard, 1989).

Designed by Maurice Goudard and Marcel Menesson (who trained in engineering at the *Ecole des Mines*, Paris) in 1941 (although they had been considering the concept since as early as 1916) and developed during the early and mid-1940s until it came into production after the war, the *Vélo-Solex* constituted an important link in terms of everyday personal mobility between the bicycle as work or leisure transport for the masses – Gaboriau's 'second age' of cycling, or *la vitesse des pauvres* – and mass car ownership. In an age of post-war austerity as the French economy recovered from the destruction and distortions to industry wrought by occupation and conflict, a simple-to-manufacture powered bicycle designed to use a minimum of parts and materials filled an obvious market niche. Attractively priced – consistently during the 1940s and 1950s – at around twice the cost of a normal bicycle, the *Vélo-Solex* was the two-wheeled urban/rural equivalent of the other transport solution for post-war France, the Citroën 2CV, first marketed in late 1948.

Initial models used already available frames from the well-known Alcyon brand of bicycles, to which were added the motor, normal pedal-operated drive train (the *cyclomoteur* could be pedalled as well as operating under its own power), comfortable saddle, racks and other attachments for luggage or panniers and the usual cycle components. Original versions featured an elegant swan's-neck frame allowing an easy

step-through action to mount the bicycle, facilitating their use by women wearing dresses or priests wearing the cassock, and later versions retained this ‘uni-sex’ feature, although slightly strengthened and flattened frames became standard. Power output from the two-stroke engine varied between a basic 0.4 bhp and a maximum for later versions of 0.8 bhp, and the maximum speed was limited to 20 kph. In 1958–59 the vehicle’s operation was upgraded with the addition of a clutch to help manage the input of the engine to driving the bicycle, and from the late 1950s until the end of production in 1988 the final design model – the *Vélo-Solex* 1010 – sold over a million units. Overall, between 1946 and 1988, the original French-produced *Vélo-Solex* sold some 8 million units before production and ownership of the brand moved abroad.

In June 2010 the *Vélo-Solex* was honoured by being the subject of a documentary by the serious Franco-German television channel Arte in a ten-programme series on design classics (Guétari, 2010).¹¹ Taking its place alongside other 1950s products such as the Fiat Nuova 500 car (1957), the Bic Cristal ballpoint pen (1950) and the Lego brick (1959) as a cult-object defining its time, the French *cyclomoteur* was celebrated for its intrinsic simplicity of design and for its cultural role in society in its hey-day decades of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. In reference to the writer Jacques Steenberg, whose autobiography included an impassioned chapter praising the *Vélo-Solex* (Steenberg, 1977), the Arte documentary also evoked the ways in which the experience of the *Solex* (as it was most usually called) was invariably described by its users through terms invoking freedom, absence of constraint and independence, as well as straightforward practicality (as had been the case for the bicycle in earlier times). Even when the *Vélo-Solex* was used ostensibly merely as a means of transport for utility or work-related purposes – the documentary suggests that in the 1940s it was used principally by priests, in the 1950s mainly by travelling salesmen and in the 1960s by students – it always represented ‘freedom’, and as its use, in preference to a car, became increasingly a lifestyle choice, the social and cultural meaning of the *vélo-moteur* was transformed. Writing in 1977, at a time when in terms of utility transport the *Vélo-Solex* was already becoming something of an anachronistic curiosity, Jacques Steenberg praised its ability to *lose* time, in a piece that it is worth quoting in full:

De même que la Mobylette est le véhicule du garçon livreur ou du prolo pressé de bouffer du kilomètre pour aller pointer, le Solex est celui du calme raté, un peu employé, un peu représentant indolent de lui-même, un peu flâneur, voyeur rêveur, qui est très évidemment en marge de son époque, de cette époque de sprints furieux, de virages pris à la corde, de folie routière, d’ambition forcenée et de rage d’arriver à plus de 200 km à l’heure au

tombeau. [...] Et, comme j'aurais pu le prévoir, mon Solex m'aura surtout servi, non pas à gagner du temps, mais à en perdre avec infiniment de douceur. Pour goûter cette douceur, il faut évidemment remplir certaines conditions: avoir en soi un inaltérable mépris de la vitesse et du record, savoir comment remettre à plus tard n'importe quel rendez-vous, préférer le vent aux courants d'air et le soleil à la chaleur des radiateurs, n'entretenir qu'un minimum d'ambition sociale, posséder au plus haut point l'art de faire passer le plaisir avant l'efficacité et aussi celui de pouvoir à n'importe quel moment remettre les choses au lendemain. Il faut également entretenir une inépuisable soif de liberté, être toujours à la disposition, non pas d'un patron ou d'une femme, mais de cette liberté. (Steenberg, 1977: 58–59)

The *Vélo-Solex*, although powered by an engine as well as pedals, was more a bicycle than anything else, and in the 2000s, as electric-powered bicycles became increasingly popular, the freedom of two wheels was still available to those who preferred it, just as in the Fourth Republic the *Vélo-Solex* complemented the traditional bicycle.

Innovation/resistance: the Vélo-cross club de Paris

Although everyday cycling in terms of utility, commuting and general leisure practices was under threat during the 1950s, leading to a crisis in the 1960s, there were occasional instances of resistance to the trends that were increasingly dividing cycling into either an elite, highly commercialized and mediatized sport emblematic of France's modernization and modernity, or a banal, backwards-looking, archaically traditional throwback to previous modes of personal transport and leisure. One such example of innovation during the 1950s was the development by a group of young cyclists from the outskirts of Paris of a form of leisure cycling that essentially anticipated the 'Californian' mountain-biking revolution in cycling in the 1970s (*VTT Magazine*, 1998; 1999). This small-scale, localized, home-grown and home-made modification of technologies and cycling practices produced a form of recreational/competitive cycling called *le vélo-cross*, which should be seen as a significant French precursor to what became, in the 1980s, a veritable craze for mountain-biking (*le VTT*) imported from the US that relaunched cycling in France. Indeed, as a new form of cycling practised essentially in urban and suburban space, *le vélo-cross* was in many ways as much a precursor of BMX riding – which similarly contributed to redynamizing cycling in France in the 1980s – as mountain-biking.¹² In a later chapter we will consider the VTT phenomenon, but here we concentrate on the little-known activities of the *Vélo-cross club de Paris*.

Le vélo-cross requires competitors to cover the course by riding

alone, in contradistinction to the well-established if rather specialized form of cycle racing termed cyclo-cross, in which competitors race on a circuit or course comprising both sections of riding and of running while carrying the bike. The *vélo-cross* courses have steep slopes to try to force riders into difficulties on the ascent, involve non-asphalted surfaces, significant volumes of mud and often require acrobatic bike-handling. As well as being interested in traditional cyclo-cross categories of cycle sport, adolescents in the urban periphery of Paris during the early 1950s were also much taken with moto-cross, whose meetings on abandoned areas of ground around the old city fortifications attracted significant crowds of spectators, keen to enjoy the excitement of motorized sport at low cost in the straitened circumstances of the time. The activity of *vélo-cross* was soon envisioned, in which racers were obliged to remain on their bikes. Some versions of the history of mountain-biking attribute the invention of the concept to Jean-Louis Swiners (b. 1935) of Saint-Mandé in Paris, who in 1948 first started to use an adapted pre-war bicycle to do 'rough-stuff' (in other words, *vélo-cross* cycling) in the more rugged and sloping areas of the Bois de Vincennes. In partnership with Pierre Gady and Jack Berthier, Swiners popularized the term *vélo-cross* and founded the (unrecognized by the sports federations) *Association sportive du vélo tout-terrain* (ASVTT).¹³

At more or less the same period as Swiners was promoting his activities in the Bois de Vincennes and the Buttes at Morel, more to the north of Paris in Les Lilas a group of some twenty youngsters led by Jean Duda created an official 'association' named the *Vélo-cross club de Paris* (VCCP) as a structure within which they could develop their interest in creating hybridized bicycles that incorporated motorcycle suspension elements but remained unpowered, allowing their riders to use similar courses and terrains to the moto-cross riders, and emphasizing the technical difficulty of the slopes, turns, jumps and landings. This popular-cultural technological, sporting and social *bricolage* (or DIY adaptation) reasserted the appeal of unpowered cycling in the face of moto-cross and affirmed the pleasures and excitement of an essentially amateur, 'fun' form of physical expression using an item of technology – the bicycle – that was otherwise being superseded in its attractiveness by motorcycles and cars. The impecunious youngsters collaborating with Jean Duda were cyclists, but also aspiring motorcycle owners, and the hybrid of moto-cross and cyclo-cross that they invented was a true 'everyday' development of leisure/sporting practices and materials/technologies/equipment.

In reflection perhaps of the ways in which the bicycle and motorcycle

manufacturers were addressing the issue of the declining popularity of the bicycle for commuting by creating the hybrid bicycle/motorcycle exemplified by the *Vélo-Solex*, the VCCP's technical *bricolage/cannibalism* of available materials was similarly constructing new forms of bicycle that married the technological aspects of motorcycles that allowed control at speed with the classic simplicity and human power source. Duda and his fellow enthusiasts salvaged suspension front forks, handlebar-mounted gearchanges, drum brakes and other components from the small 100cc motorcycles that were readily available in scrap yards, producing radically 'modern' designs of bicycle that were later taken up by mass production for specialist VTT/mountain-biking in the 1970s and 1980s and, in the 2000s, featured strongly in the majority of non road-racing bicycle designs.

The popularity of the entertaining antics of the VCCP during the intermissions between moto-cross races – they would ride the course, showing off with wheelies, bunny-hops and other acrobatic antics – provoked some resentful animosity from the motorcycling fraternity, and in a pattern not unfamiliar in French sport, the sports federations of both motorcycling and cycling were discouraging of the innovative hybrid. Preferring to concentrate solely on motorized competition (*sport mécanique*), the motorcycling authorities rejected the VCCP's overtures for help in developing the sport, and the *Fédération française de cyclisme* imposed such stringent conditions for affiliation (compulsory insurance, helmets, licences and so on) that the fledgling new form of cycling was disheartened.

Although many of the technical innovations introduced by the VCCP in the 1950s had at one stage or another in the rich history of cycling technology also been invented by manufacturers or impassioned amateurs, the experiences of this group of adolescent cycling enthusiasts, driven to 'modernize' their sport in a period when its popularity was waning, seem a significant act of localized, everyday, grassroots resistance, both to the declining popularity of cycling in general, and to the dominance of road racing as the pre-eminent form of cycle sport. Whereas the bicycle of the postman in *Jour de Fête* had been an old-fashioned throwback to the 1890s, the VCCP's machines anticipated the vogues in MTB design of the late 1970s and 1980s, and were exciting enough to deflect the attention of some young people at least from the more sedate comfort of the siren *vélomoteurs*.

Cycling during the 1940s and 1950s accompanied and reflected both the modernization and development of French society and the French economy, but it also, in terms of politics and public policies in favour of sport and leisure, underwent and resisted the institutional modifications wrought by both the Vichy regime and the French state in the Fourth Republic. As we have seen, the Tour de France remained core to the experience and meaning of cycling during this period, providing a metaphor and iconic heroes for French citizens to imagine their community by. In the continuing history of the bicycle as both harbinger of speed, modernity and change, and also as an emblem of past ways of doing things, the 1940s and 1950s saw a particularly clear example of the Janus-like symbolism of cycling, as French culture and society began to change at a faster pace than ever. What is clear, however, in the cultural and social history of cycling in France during these momentous decades is the enduring centrality of the varied activities of cycling to the lived experience of most people. On a range of levels of experience, varying from the entirely everyday need for personal utility transport (the *Vélo-Solex*), through the intermediate levels of occasional leisure cycling and sociability (nascent new forms of leisure/competition riding exemplified by the VCCP) to what might be termed the higher levels of imagined national identity represented by the Tour (France in a race with the rest of the world) and *Jour de Fête* (France in a dialogue with its past), cycling was a prime instrument of conceiving French identities.

Notes

- 1 Detailed discussion of the ‘Appel’ seems elusive, but it is cited and commented on briefly in Bœuf and Léonard (2003: 123–25) and Marchand (2002: 55–57).
- 2 Although avowedly apolitical, *L’Auto* had from its inception been politically marked by its association with the sports–industrial complex and the Right.
- 3 See the documentary film *Les Miroirs du Tour* (INA). Cited in Lagrue (2004).
- 4 The new paper continued the avowed ambition of *L’Auto* not to become involved, at least directly, in politics.
- 5 The *Fédération française de cyclisme* decreed in 1946 that races should be restricted to only five stages, because of the shortages of equipment and food rationing.
- 6 The pejorative phrase ‘la France de l’apéro’ is variously attributed, but the extreme right-wing writer Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle is a likely candidate.
- 7 The Italian Brambilla was racing for a team of Italians living and racing in France, and memories of the war were sufficiently alive to have made his victory rather unpopular with both French riders and the general public alike.
- 8 He turned professional in 1943, and first competed as a pro in the 1944 season. He rode his final Tour in 1959, competing in ten Tours overall.
- 9 Robic’s father was also a carpenter and a successful part-time racing cyclist,

later owning a cycling shop. Robic was good at school but left to take up an apprenticeship. When asked after his retirement what his greatest achievement in cycling had been he dismissed victory in the Tour in 1947 and his other successes and described his pride in having single-handedly repaired the gearbox of his car at the roadside, at night, on his way to the start of a national championships: a lot of riders could ride, but few were as good mechanics as he.

- 10 For a convenient listing of the principal innovations introduced to the Tour de France on a year-by-year basis, see Dauncey and Hare (2003: 267–73).
- 11 Documentary by Hélène Guétari, *Le Solex, véhicule de la liberté*, first broadcast 13 June 2010. See <http://drsorex.over-blog.com/article-video-arte-design-le-velosorex-juin-2010-59071371.html> (accessed 18 August 2011).
- 12 BMX riding – for leisure or for sport – has developed from somewhat uncertain beginnings in France in the late 1970s and early 1980s to become an accepted strand of the forms of cycling recognized by the *Fédération française de cyclisme*. The activity is generally analysed as a form of ‘ludo-sportif’ appropriation of urban/suburban space; see, for example, Escaffrel (2005). Although there is no space here to discuss BMX in France, a study of it by the author is underway.
- 13 See http://www.intelligence-creative.com/541_invention_vtt_jls.html (accessed 17 August 2011).

Cycling's Glory Years and their Mediatization, 1960–1980

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of great change in French politics, society and culture. Demographically, the boom in the birth rate in the late 1940s was, by the early 1960s, beginning to feed into the adult population and workforce; France was a younger country than it had been for decades, and the younger citizens had new social, political and cultural aspirations and terms of reference, some of which led to the explosion of discontent at the Gaullist state and its ordering of society that occurred in May–June 1968. Politically, the return to power of General Charles de Gaulle in June 1958 led to the replacement of the Fourth Republic by the Fifth Republic later that year and a gradual rebuilding of the apparatus and efficiency of the state as part of de Gaulle's drive to bring France into phase with the century, and to restore the grandeur that he felt was natural to France. Economically, the industrialization and growth that had accelerated from the mid-1940s produced transformations in society and the economy that prompted the celebrated sociologist and economist Jean Fourastié to suggest that by the mid-1970s, '30 glorious years of growth' had created 'two Frances', one stagnant for millennia until 1945, and the new France of technological development, urbanized industrial society and technocracy (Fourastié, 1979). Although from about 1975 France suffered the effects of the oil crisis much like other western European nations, with inflation and unemployment, its economy had indeed been radically modernized, partly due to the leading technocratic role of the Gaullist state since 1958. The state also had a stake in sport, accompanying what have been termed a 'première sportivisation' in 1958–75 (Chantelat and Tétart, 2007: 33) and an 'explosion des pratiques sportives' from the late 1960s onwards (Attali, 2007: 63).

The Popular Front in the 1930s, then the *Etat français* in the 1940s and to a lesser extent the Fourth Republic in the 1950s had all increased the French state's involvement in the organization of sport and recreation (Callède, 2000). It was during the 1960s, in the early years of the modernizing, technocratic and ambitious Fifth Republic, that the state's interest

in promoting sport would reach its peak (Chifflet, 1995). As popular interest in the Tour de France continued, and was heightened by new approaches to its mediatization through television and by continually innovative approaches in the written press, the Gaullist ambition of creating 'la France qui gagne' found some realization in the resounding success of national track cycling teams and individuals in the 1960s and 1970s.

In this chapter we will examine how the professional cycling industry, in terms of its organization of the economics of competition, reflected new demands and constraints in the mediatization of the Tour de France and developments in the Tour's own continually evolving model of racing. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Tour was frequently won by French riders, whose exploits and rivalries came to symbolize themes in the ongoing modernization of French culture and society, and we will therefore look in some detail at the significance of iconic champions such as Jacques Anquetil, Raymond Poulidor and Bernard Thévenet. The duel between the often victorious Anquetil and the (almost always) losing Poulidor can, for example, be interpreted as a metaphor of France's modernization, which was rapid and ruthless, but came at the expense of various categories of French citizens (the rural working classes, for instance) who were less well-placed than others to profit from 'the fruits of growth'. We shall also examine the evolving role of the cycling media, and consider the success of Olympic track stars such as the multi-champion Daniel Morelon.

Pro-cycling: economics and competition

The 1950s were essentially the 'Golden Age' of French professional cycling competition. The Tour de France, which naturally dominated the sporting calendar and the industry as a whole, had recovered from the interruption of the Occupation and Liberation and had developed into an ever-more popular summer saga of sporting heroism. French champions such as Robic, Bobet and Anquetil had recreated the myth of the *géants de la route* for the post-war public, and growing affluence was allowing more and more fans of cycling either to follow the Tour on their summer holidays or to absorb the burgeoning press, radio and television media coverage of the event. But the Tour was struggling to define its own rules concerning rider participation: should competitors ride as members of national teams or as representatives of commercial teams? And behind this question of the structure of the Tour lay complicated

developments in the nature of the cycling industry and its relations with *L'Equipe* and the Tour de France, organizers of the majority of professional races. In the 1960s and 1970s the Tour and professional cycling in general were required to change their approaches to competition, as the economics of the sector evolved.

The Tour in 1962 – a return to commercial teams

Commercial teams had originally been banned by Desgrange in the Tours of 1903–08, before being permitted from 1909 to 1913, banned again from 1919 to 1924, authorized again from 1925 to 1928, and then, from 1930 to 1962, durably replaced by national teams (Reed, 2003). Desgrange's constant innovations and changes of approach reflected his search for a way of organizing the Tour that would ensure *L'Auto's* control of the competition. What lay behind the issue of commercial teams was not only the nature of the Tour itself, but also who was in control of professional cycling. Desgrange was concerned that running the Tour with commercial teams tended to create a race in which true competition was stifled and perverted by strong financial interests and by the inevitable agreements between teams and their sponsors to provide results satisfactory to all. For *L'Auto*, the Tour had to be a spectacle of competition that the newspaper could sell to its readers and advertisers as a *feuilleton sportif* of uncertainty and heroism, where success could turn to failure in a single stage; but a sponsor of a commercial team was happy to see their 'champion' heading the classification all through the race, by fair means or foul.

Commercial sponsors could be of two main kinds: companies directly involved in the cycle industry (manufacturers of frames, bicycles, components) or businesses from outside the industry, known as *extra-sportifs*, seeking to use the publicity and advertising of the Tour and professional cycling to promote their products. Traditionally, until the early and mid-1950s, professional cycling was financed by commercial interests directly related to the sport, but during the 1950s the huge public interest in cycling champions such as Bobet, Coppi, Bartali and others began to attract new financial backers, keen to use cycling to exploit the development of consumer society. At the same time as these new sponsors began to appear, traditional financiers of professional cycling started to feel the squeeze of a flagging cycle industry, sapped by competition from *cyclo-moteurs* such as the *Vélo-Solex* and various *mobylettes* and motorcycles, as well as by increasingly affordable cars.

By 1956 finance from outside the traditional confines of the cycle industry was responsible for more than half of advertising in cycling

competition, and in partnership with the riders, rather than the race organizers or the manufacturers, these new sponsors were putting pressure on the long-standing stakeholders of professional cycling to modify its organization, most strikingly through the reintroduction of commercially sponsored teams, replacing the convoluted systems of national and regional teams (and other arrangements) used by the Tour since 1930 (Calvet, 1981: 182). In a position of weakness, traditional industry sponsors worked with race organizers to modify international rulings on cycling sport: for example the *Association internationale des organisateurs de courses cyclistes* (AIOCC) successfully lobbied the UCI to redefine 'groupes sportifs' as mixed 'industry' and 'hors-branche' partnerships. The cycle industry and the new commercial sponsors also worked together to present a united front in negotiations with race organizers in the *Association française des constructeurs et associés sportifs* (AFCAS) (Calvet, 1981: 182).

During the late 1950s the Tour was systematically undermined by the new sponsors of professional cycling teams, which either prevented their star riders from taking part (Rik van Looy and Jacques Anquetil missed the Tour in 1960, as did Raymond Poulidor in 1961) or interfered in the competition by pressuring their riders working in national teams not to help riders sponsored by other advertisers. France arguably lost the 1959 Tour when divisions caused by sponsors within the main national team allowed the Spaniard Federico Bahamontes to win, at the expense of the French rider Henri Anglade, who was riding for a French 'regional' squad. Despite *L'Equipe's* desperately repeated claims to the effect that 'Ce ne sont pas les champions qui font le Tour; c'est le Tour qui fait les champions', the pressure exerted on the Tour was such that in 1962 the national teams were abolished, putting in place the model of race organization and of professional cycling overall that is still, essentially, current today.¹

The recreation of cycling 'stars' – finance and television

During the 1960s and 1970s the new structuring of professional cycling contributed to a recreation of the sporting hero in cycling. Although Bobet, for example, in the 1950s had been an exemplary star of his era, the new organization of teams and finances in cycle sport led to a redefinition of the nature of racing and of champions. The changes that came about resulted essentially from the increased money available in sponsorship and from television's increased coverage of the Tour.

In the new commercial teams, stability of employment and of career development was much weaker than in the previous system, where a

progression through amateur riding to national team was possible and where experience could be gained gradually. The sometimes fleeting attachment of non-cycling sponsors to Tour de France teams meant that results were required rapidly (if not immediately) and that teams were built piecemeal from combinations of riders, organized as a team only in so far as the majority of the members of the squad were employed specifically to support the team leader, who was usually an already established champion. One of the automatic structuring effects of this strategy was a reduction in the number of 'champions' overall, as each team would normally only have a single leader (not always good enough to win major races), and if one rider and his squad were dominant, then he would be able to monopolize racing as long as his talent remained and his team was preserved intact. Jacques Anquetil was a prime example of this system in the 1960s, as was the Belgian Eddy Merckx in the 1970s and Bernard Hinault in the 1980s, and an accompanying feature of their overall dominance in the Tour and in other professional racing was a reduction in the 'uncertainty' (Yonnet, 1998) of competitions: for cycling fans, competition could even seem boring. Because of the amounts of money now flowing into cycling, team leaders of established ability were paid good salaries to provide results based on the support of their *équipiers*, and so the professional teams were structured along strongly hierarchical lines, with supporting riders being expected to sacrifice themselves to facilitate victory by a team leader. In comparison with the 1940s and 1950s, surprises in the stages of the Tour, for example, were few and far between, and the durability of what we might here term 'super' champions such as Anquetil or Merckx was much appreciated by their team financiers.

In an attempt to reintroduce competitive uncertainty into the racing of the Tour, in order to make the competition more exciting, its organizers invented a variety of features – sprint bonuses, time bonuses and so on – whose overall effect on the attractiveness of the event was nevertheless debatable. Often, since the bonuses and extra competitions were sponsored by the same companies that financed the teams and attracted money to the Tour, their impact seemed slight, and as with the multiplicity of competitions within the Tour as a whole (King of the Mountains, sprint jersey, leader under 21, and so on), opportunities were ample for teams and riders to 'manage' racing uncertainty by trading positions and bartering compromises in one aspect of the race against another.

Another innovation that partially contributed to the recreation of the cycling star was television, which increasingly in the 1960s and 1970s

became the prime medium through which the public was informed of professional racing (Wille, 2003). Television's concentration on riders as visible advertisements for their sponsors – sandwich-board men moving at 40 kph through the French countryside – reinforced the need for champions almost to 'perform on cue', supported by their teams, at the same time as it demonstrated that sport was subordinated to commercial interests rather than the nobility of pure athletic competition. The focus of broadcasts on the concluding kilometres of stages led to concentration on team pursuits of lone breakaways, where sponsors' jerseys and equipment could be shown to best advantage. Cycling champions of the past had certainly been associated with particular makes of bicycle or particular team sponsors, but arguably the advent of television introduced a change in the public's perception of their heroes, alongside a change in the nature of the racing itself.

New pressures to dope – new campaigns against drugs

Cycling's new financial model from the end of the 1950s and from the reinstatement of commercial teams from 1962, although in many ways improving the lot of both star and journeyman riders alike, also brought new pressures to bear on professional riders. The sociologist, economist and historian of cycling Jacques Calvet has suggested that there were three main reasons why the job of the professional rider became more difficult in the 1960s. Firstly, because commercial sponsors were keen to maximize the advertising potential of their squads, teams of riders were required to compete as much as possible during the whole length of the season and were thus more fatigued than under the old model of sponsorship, in which manufacturers and race organizers had been more sensitive to the riders' needs for recuperation. Secondly, the patterns of racing became more unpredictable and varied, with periods of calm progress alternating with extreme efforts often linked to sponsored sprints, bonus points or minor competitions, or the final televised section of a stage or race. Thirdly, competitions such as the Tour de France became increasingly intensive, with fewer rest days, more frequent tiring transitions from one *ville-étape* to another, and generally the requirement for racing to fit the schedules of advertisers, radio, television, the press and host towns (Calvet, 1981: 194–96).

Although doping had a long and seamless history in professional cycling (Mignon, 2003), it seems probable that it was in the 1960s, in these conditions of enhanced pressure on riders, that the contemporary phase of performance-enhancing drug-taking was introduced. Pressures on riders of all categories – champions and *domestiques* (supporting

riders, fetching and carrying and protecting the elite team leaders) alike – to perform at high levels throughout the season and on demand, allied with the fluid and unstable composition of professional squads where riders were hired and fired in the building of competitive units destined for success in specific races, created the context for systematic recourse to doping. Additionally, the increasingly modern approaches of riders, trainers and teams towards physical preparation and medical support meant that opportunities and strategies for doping seemed all the more 'scientific', rational and acceptable.

It was during the 1960s that the French state first became actively involved in the detection and repression of doping in sport, partly at least because of growing concern in professional cycling over the ever-increasing incidences of blatant performance-enhancement. Calvet suggests that doping was only identified as a problem within cycling when its negative perceptions in public opinion began to detract from the commercially attractive myth of the *géants de la route* (Calvet, 1981: 185). In this perspective, extrapolating from Calvet's argument, drug-taking in the period before 1962 had been tolerated and hidden by all involved (riders, organizers, sponsors) both because the attitudes of society in general were more tolerant towards substance abuse and because the commercial model of professional cycling was not of a kind or nature to be destabilized by nascent or partial concerns over doping. In the 1960s the rapid modernization of French society and social values led both to increased belief in individual freedoms and a breakdown of deference towards authority and established patterns of behaviour: it was perhaps a combination of these trends that allowed Jacques Anquetil to defend his own doping practices by declaring that it was idiotic for anyone to think that professional racers did *not* use drugs (he was happy to declare to all and sundry that races were not run and won on mineral water). It would seem that Anquetil was articulating the view that it was his right to organize his professional life as he saw fit, given the demands imposed on him by the stakeholders in professional cycling, and notwithstanding the bad faith and dishonesty of attitudes towards doping in the past. Additionally, of course, the status of Anquetil, as a multiple Tour-winner and national champion, and especially the personal wealth provided for such a champion by the new model of pro-cycling, gave him the sporting capital to speak forthrightly. Anquetil's other famous declaration that to win by more than a second was a waste of effort is also, intriguingly, a rational response to the system of competition in which he found himself during the 1960s: in a context where commercial concerns seemed to dominate sporting values, winning by any margin is

what matters to publicize one's sponsor (he also, perhaps cynically, defined the difference between amateurism and professionalism as residing principally in the fact that amateurs do not pay tax on their winnings).

Anquetil's carefully studied and almost cynical approach to racing was somehow 'technocratic', whereas the less successful style of another of France's cycling heroes, Raymond Poulidor, seemed evocative of the less thrusting France of the 1930s and 1940s. We now turn to an unpacking of the social and cultural symbolism of these heroes of the Tour.

Anquetil, Poulidor, Thévenet: the meaning of Tour champions

Sporting champions have an iconic status, and the cycling champions of France's national race exercise a particular hold over the popular imagination, as we have seen in earlier analyses of cycling stars such as Bobet and Robic. In the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, as the mediatization of the Tour reached new intensity, and as France continued to negotiate her developing identity in a period of social and cultural change, Tour winners such as Anquetil and Thévenet, and the 'nearly-man' Poulidor, took on various meanings and symbolisms, as reflections and projections of French ambitions and insecurities.

Jacques Anquetil: sporting technocratic perfection in the Fifth Republic
 Jacques Anquetil – 'Maître Jacques' – died in 1987 at the age of 53. Much – respectful – speculation centred on whether the stomach and liver cancer that caused his death could be attributed to the drugs that he openly admitted using during his racing career, purely to enable him to compete. Anquetil was the first rider to win four, and subsequently five, Tours: he dominated the race and won it in 1957, 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1964. Commenting on Anquetil's first Tour victory in 1957, the reporter René Dunn of the high-sales newspaper *France-Soir* presented his win in grandiose terms, combining some of the atavistic regionalist stereotypes common in much French sports journalism with a suggestion of Anquetil's new status as a national cycling hero:

Il est venu, il a vu, il a vaincu. [...] Souple comme un Normand, tête comme un Breton, avisé comme un Auvergnat, doux comme un Provençal, Anquetil, devenu 'Jacquot' – suprême test de gloire –, affronte maintenant un rôle beaucoup plus lourd que celui qu'il accomplit sur cinq mille kilomètres de route. [...] Il est plus difficile de porter le costume de ville que le maillot jaune. [...] A toi de jouer, Jacques! La France t'admire mais te regarde aussi. (Ollivier, 1994b: 113–16)

Although the French public admired his success, they never accepted Anquetil quite as warmly as they did other French heroes, constantly monitoring him for signs of the fatal flaw of 'arrogance' that can distance heroes from their fans. And Anquetil could often appear to be an arrogant champion: as early as 1957, after his initial Tour victory, Anquetil was honoured with the award of 'la Coupe de l'élégance sportive', only to arrive late at the ceremony because he had over-indulged in champagne. Anquetil was a champion whose technical achievements in terms of race victories and cycling style were unquestionable, but his behaviour – as a champion in the public eye and also occasionally in the 'privacy' of the peloton as a competitor – was often seen as somehow infelicitous. His attachment to champagne is an interesting example of both of these mismatches between expectations and reality. Rather paradoxically, given that Tour audiences knew and accepted that riders took stimulants to help them through the race, there was simultaneously the expectation that as elite athletes they should avoid everyday pleasures such as alcohol, and Anquetil's over-fondness for champagne was interpreted as an almost insulting rejection of the principles of 'proper' training. Anquetil's justification of his behaviour was simple, but no more likely to win favour, or allay suspicions of arrogance: 'Ce n'est pas de propos délibéré que je mène une existence contraire aux principes établis en matière de préparation cycliste, je ne fais que suivre ma nature' (Ollivier, 1994b: 119).

Anquetil's image was of a champion whose domination was frequently so total and whose apparent confidence in his abilities was such that they constituted 'insolent facility'. In the 1961 Tour he won the yellow jersey on the very first stage and retained it until the end of the race.² The ease with which Anquetil achieved his Tour wins produced a reputation – noted, for example, by *Miroir des Sports* journalist Roger Bastide – for 'la froideur de la perfection', and comment in the sporting press that he had transformed competitive cycling into an 'exact science' from which uncertainty, emotion and suspense had been banished (Ollivier, 1994b: 175).³ Whereas Bobet's treble of wins had had the potential to produce a similar disaffection in the cycling public in 1955, the situation had been saved by spectators' admiring awe at Bobet's duplication of Thys's three wins in a row and by the champion's invariably friendly and positive image. But in the 1960s, as French society began to question the technocratic drive of the new Fifth Republic in a process that would ultimately lead to the crisis of confidence that was May '68, Anquetil's calculating approach to racing tactics rendered his successes flawed in some way – in 1962 whistles of disapproval sounded as he

arrived at the Parc des Princes finish of his third victorious Tour. Anquetil once summed up his difference from Bobet in terms suggesting an attitude towards competition that was informed more by ego than by sporting *panache*: 'Quand j'ai perdu une course, je n'en fais pas une maladie comme Bobet, mais je mûris une revanche que j'obtiens assez souvent' (Ollivier, 1994b: 119). Foreign champions such Gaul, Bahamontes, Gimondi and Nancini also provided foils for Anquetil's reputation as 'Monsieur Chrono' (a reference to his invincibility in individual time trials, riding against the stopwatch chronograph) or 'Monsieur Millimètre' (his tendency to do no more than was necessary to win). But in essence, Anquetil as a hero of French cycling was defined by his relations with the French champions of the recent past – Robic and Bobet – and with the French 'nearly-champion' of the 1960s and 1970s, Raymond Poulidor.

Anquetil was perhaps the major cycling champion whose career spanned the especially confused period of transition between widespread drug-taking in cycling being tacitly accepted by the professional cycling community, race organizers, public and state, and the period ushered in by the French law on drug-taking that became operational on 14 June 1966, leading to the infamous inaugural drug test in the Tour at the finish of the Royan–Bordeaux stage on 28 June 1966. Although Anquetil won his fifth and final Tour in 1964, he continued in competition until 1967 when the world hour record he had just established was refused ratification by the world cycling authorities (the UCI) because of his positive drug test. The implementation of the law against doping in France was patently unable to discourage drug-taking among professional cyclists, as was demonstrated by a series of positive tests, scandals and tragedies, including the death of the British rider Tom Simpson on Mont Ventoux during the 1967 Tour,⁴ but the new attitude of the cycling authorities and the French state transformed the culture of doping from an 'amateur' practice overseen by riders and their *soigneurs* into a 'professional' practice frequently supervised by doctors. Anquetil's unapologetic admissions of his drug-taking were representative of the view shared by most competitive cyclists that the physical demands of racing in general and the superhuman nature of specific races such as the Tour obliged the riders to seek artificial assistance. This explicit avowal of doping was honest and treated the spectating public as a mature audience with a sophisticated understanding of the mechanisms and processes at work in sporting competitions such as the Tour. However, seen from within the conceptual framework of competitive sport suggested by Paul Yonnet (1998), Anquetil's willingness to destroy his fans' illusion that professional

cyclists could accomplish what they did without drugs was maybe based too much on his status as a champion of the 'official' competition (the 'rules of the game' giving him five Tour victories) and belied any real desire on his part to appear (or remain) a truly 'popular' national sporting hero, embodying both naive and informed views of what racing and champions were.

Anquetil's popularity was complicated, involving public respect for his technical accomplishments (both in terms of races won and pedalling technique, for example pushing bigger gears than anyone else) balanced by irritation at his domination and the reduction in the uncertainty about the final result of the Tour, all mixed up with popular affection for his *sens de la fête*. Anquetil's weakness for champagne, his attractive blonde wife stolen from his doctor and his elegant dress sense helped compensate for his reputation as a rider whose objective was always to win, but by the smallest necessary margin.

Raymond Poulidor: social change and heroic failure

Raymond Poulidor is the prime example of a French rider in the Tour de France whose media image and reputation is that of *l'éternel second*. The name 'Poulidor' has even entered common parlance as a term designating someone who never manages better than runner-up (Calvet, 1981: 24). Poulidor's career was long, lasting from 1962 to 1976, and spanned from the early years of de Gaulle's Fifth Republic to the early years of Giscard d'Estaing's modernizing presidency. Despite participating many times in the Tour, Poulidor never won the race and never wore the yellow jersey. Although the latter part of his career saw him losing to Eddy Merckx and other dominant riders after Anquetil's retirement in 1967, Poulidor's status as a heroic French failure is inextricably associated with the career and dominance of 'Maître Jacques'. Poulidor's public image during his career and subsequently has always been that of a quiet, modest and honest rider, untouched by allegations of doping and consistently admired for his courage and combativeness in the Tour and other races, despite the unbeatable superiority of champions such as Anquetil and Merckx. During the 1960s and 1970s his nickname 'Poupou' was universally recognized, and the public supported his efforts to impose himself against the 'insolent facility' of Anquetil or Merckx's 'cannibalistic' competitive spirit. As Yonnet (1998) has pointed out, popularity (even if unaccompanied by success in the technical competition of times and points) can be translated into financial gain, and since his retirement Poulidor has worked profitably as a television consultant and commentator on cycling.

An iconic image of the post-war Tour is the photograph of Poulidor and Anquetil climbing side-by-side up the Puy-de-Dôme in 1964 – as usual, even in this most iconic ‘duel on the mountain’, Poulidor failed to beat a struggling Anquetil by enough to wrench the yellow jersey from him (Bossdorf and Bossdorf, 2001: 63). This duel has recently been expertly analysed by Dine (2008) in a stimulating discussion of the nature of Poulidor’s star status. In a brief analysis of the rivalry of Anquetil and Poulidor, the sociologist of sport Christian Pociello suggests that they exemplify what he terms ‘l’effet Carpentier’ in French sport, in other words a dramatization of the relationship between competitors that is produced when there exist two rivals whose physical, stylistic, tactical and other features are completely opposed (Pociello, 1995: 114-15). Anquetil was blond, thin, northern (from Normandy), an expert in technical events such as time trials, a dominant member of the peloton and a multiple champion; Poulidor, contrastingly, was dark, heavier in build, from central France (the Limousin region), a good climber, a rider with no special influence within the peloton and a nearly-man.

The duels between top champions that the French sporting press is keen to report or even invent – as Pociello reminds us, the media (particularly some influential cycling journalists) are seduced by the interplay of signs, figures and styles that facilitates the creation of a dramatized narration of sporting stories – are exemplified by the rivalry between Anquetil and Poulidor. It is possible that the duel between these riders was never a ‘true’ reality, given the long-term disparity in their records (can Poulidor really have been ‘unlucky’ for fifteen years?). In the same way that the duel between Bobet (as his career concluded) and the emerging Anquetil in the late 1950s was ‘more theoretical than practical’ (Ichah and Bouilly, 1992: 217), it is possible that the rivalry between Anquetil and Poulidor was more an artifact of the fevered imaginations of sports journalists and of the two riders’ desires to create public images that benefited them than a real physical contest of near equality. As the sports journalists Ichah and Bouilly have pointed out, as early as the 1961 Tour Poulidor was aware of the strategies required to build rivalries and success, since he declined to compete in the national French team where he would have been contracted to ride in support of Anquetil. Only from 1962 and the return of commercial teams was the fruitful rivalry between Anquetil and Poulidor able to flourish. Ichah and Bouilly describe how by 1963 the antagonism between the two riders had become ‘a product which sold well’, suggesting that Poulidor knew that it was in his interest, as long as he won races from time to time (so as to still appear a ‘champion’), to seem the victim of a devilish opponent. Since, as Ichah and

Bouilly suggest, sporting France loves the unlucky and gives herself more easily to nice losers than to insolent winners, Poulidor was the beneficiary (Ichah and Bouilly, 1992: 219–20).

Such a perspective on public images and the heroic status of riders in the Tour de France reflects the idea developed by Yonnet that the riders in a competition such as the Tour have a set of values that is their own, and that they operate often in opposition to those of the 'official' race, as defined by the Tour organizers and the French state. Jacques Calvet, whose economic study of cycling champions is pointedly entitled *Le Mythe des géants de la route*, is one of the few analysts to address the vexed issue of the true nature of Poulidor as a competitor. Whereas the myth that still has popular currency thirty-five years after his retirement is that Poulidor was loved for his open and courageous nature by the French public and fellow riders, while Anquetil was merely respected or, at best, liked, according to Calvet Poulidor was in reality disliked by the peloton for his ill humour and selfish tactics, whereas Anquetil was appreciated for his fair play and courtesy. Thus the public image confected by Poulidor and Anquetil together was in fact a 'product' for consumption by followers of the Tour based on a myth that was the opposite of sporting reality. Calvet reports that when two journalists wrote articles exploding the Poulidor myth in the mid-1960s, their magazine received such outraged mail from fans that they were asked by the editor to revert to the usual presentation of the rider (Calvet, 1981: 208).

One sociocultural and sociopolitical interpretation of the symbiotic rivalry of Anquetil and Poulidor is that they implicitly represented two antagonistic trends in French society in the 1960s, whose interplay found expression in France's national sporting event (Winock, 1987). One characteristic of true champions is sometimes claimed to be innovation, in the sense that they redefine the nature of the sport itself, and in this perspective Anquetil's greatness is confirmed both in terms of sporting records (he was the first to complete the double of the Dauphiné–Libéré and Bordeaux–Paris, in 1965) and in terms of his approach to racing. Despite his idiosyncratic approach to training he was still profoundly influenced by the meticulous ('scientific') approach popularized post-war by Coppi, and his technical mastery of the time trial ('man against machine') reflected French society's technocratic and technological modernization during the later Fourth Republic and under de Gaulle. Poulidor, in contrast, although of rural extraction like Anquetil, represented much less the new confident France of the Fifth Republic advancing towards technological and sociopolitical modernity under the guidance of national planning and a new Constitution, and much more

la France profonde of Poupou's native and still-archaic Limousin. This interpretation portrays Poulidor as the anachronistic representative – still loved as the underdog, like the other symbolic figures such as Astérix, Vercingétorix, Roland, Joan of Arc and Charles de Gaulle listed by Pociello (1995: 116) – of the France of the Fourth Republic's uncertainties and weaknesses, and casts Anquetil as the embodiment of Gaullist 'grandeur' in the Fifth Republic and as the harbinger of 'la France qui gagne'. A perceptive recent study of Poulidor's 'stardom' has suggested that Poupou's amalgam of traditional values and modern sporting entrepreneurialism was just the kind of 'cultural reassurance' sought by a French public stressed by the societal changes of the 1960s (Dine, 2008: 96).

Bernard Thévenet: the forgotten 1970s

Bernard Thévenet's professional career spanned the period 1970–81, and he can be seen as a cycling champion who is representative of a transitional period both for competitive cycling itself and for French society in general. Although not a multiple Tour de France winner of the same stature as Anquetil and Bernard Hinault (who also won five Tours in the late 1970s and mid-1980s), Thévenet did take the yellow jersey in 1975 and 1977, defeating the legendary Eddy Merckx in 1977 and thereby contributing to his eventual retirement from the sport. Thévenet's career also coincided with the declining years of Poulidor's participation in the Tour, and he thus replaced Anquetil as the successful foil to Poupou's heroic failure, although Thévenet's own social origins and approach to cycle sport were in fact more akin to those of Poulidor than of Anquetil. Thévenet came from a similar background of agricultural working-class life as the older Poulidor and his attitude towards racing was arguably similar to Poupou's heart-on-the-sleeve honest endeavour. Unlike Hinault, his successor as French icon of the Tour, Thévenet was a relatively discreet and self-effacing champion whose work ethic was one of quiet professionalism in the service of his long-standing and well-established sponsor and team, Peugeot. Whereas Peugeot was a classic cycle-industry sponsor, characteristic of the essence of the Tour and professional cycling from the earliest days, Hinault rode initially for the similarly traditional Gitane-Campagnolo team (1975–77), then the innovative Renault-Elf Gitane squad (1978–83), before leading (1984–86) the iconoclastically *extra-sportif* Vie Claire squad set up by the mercurial entrepreneur Bernard Tapie. In contrast to the charismatic Hinault, whose personality and drive fitted perfectly with the demands in the 1980s for cycling to modernize and attract ever-increasing television

coverage and advertising revenues, Thévenet was a strangely muted hero whose star-status deserves some unpacking in future work.

Cycling/media: the Tour and TV, *Le Miroir du cyclisme*, *L'Equipe*

The 1960s and 1970s were something of a period of transition for cycling and for cycling media, as French society evolved rapidly towards complete modernization under the influence of economic growth and prosperity (albeit with some difficulties during the mid-to-late 1970s) and the post-war demographic bulge of baby-boom children reached working and consuming age. The Tour de France was, as ever, central to developments: Jacques Goddet's *L'Equipe* continued its traditional dense coverage of cycling sport and sport in general, maintaining its prime position as France's newspaper of reference for sporting news and comment, and through the 'literary' approach of the novelist Antoine Blondin, whose articles it hosted during the summer weeks of the Tour, it encouraged a nostalgically old-fashioned style of media reporting. However, the advent of increasing television coverage of the Tour also facilitated and accelerated changes in the media coverage of sport in general. While *L'Equipe* covered the Tour and cycling in traditional style, and television developed an evolving relationship with the race that was eventually to become almost as much a cultural artifact during French summers as the race itself, other areas of the cycling media either satisfied themselves with the crumbs left over from Goddet's near-stranglehold over events and information, or in the case of the communist *Le Miroir du cyclisme*, actively attempted to provide an alternative coverage of sport in general and cycling in particular.

L'Equipe and Antoine Blondin's writing on the Tour

The novelist, dramatist and sporting journalist Antoine Blondin (1922–91) was a life-long passionate follower of cycling and of the Tour de France in particular. Blondin's loving daily reports on each day's racing of the Tour, published in *L'Equipe* from 1954 to 1982, form a body of sports journalism that exemplifies a literary tradition in French media coverage of sport dating back to the earliest days of news and sports reporting (Blondin, 1988; 1996; 2001).⁵ Links between literature and sport in France have always been closer than in Anglo-Saxon understandings of journalism, for example, and the Tour has been the subject of pieces by Colette (1918), Albert Londres (1996), Roland Barthes (1957), Lucien Bodard (1971) Tristan Bernard (1935), Jacques Perret

(2005) and others.⁶ It could be argued – and Ducoin (2003) and Augendre (2005) are typical of this perspective – that Blondin’s work on the Tour also in some ways represents the peak of this literary influence in sports journalism, as he produced his *œuvre* in a period when the written word of the press still dominated the mediation of the Tour to sports fans, despite growing competition from television.⁷

Blondin was essentially of right-wing political and cultural sympathies, but his enthusiasm for sport and the Tour meant that his work was accepted by people of all ideological leanings in France for its literary qualities and passionate celebration of the Tour. The 524 *chroniques* that he produced in his coverage of the 28 Tours he followed for *L’Equipe* map out a vision and understanding of the race that is idiosyncratically illuminating. Blondin’s approach to the suffering and courage of the Tour is that of a celebration of triumph and defeat set in the context of the French countryside and France’s towns and regions. The tone of his chronicles is almost always humorous, relying extensively on complicated punning and wordplay of all kinds, with which he interweaves the human actors of his dramas, the locations of their travails, French history and current affairs. The complexity of the allusions and of the wordplay is such that only the most well-informed and linguistically aware readers are able to read the full meaning of his pieces, and they are effectively un-translatable from the original French.

The quality of the stage reports is all the more astonishing since they were apparently produced under the same harsh time constraints as those more conventional treatments of daily racing hurriedly filed after the stage-finish by Tour journalists writing for other daily newspapers. In a borrowing of Londres’ terminology, Blondin would famously claim that the human drama of sport and the Tour obliged sports journalists to become ‘forçats du Larousse, car entre deux mots, ils ne choisissent jamais le moindre’. One of Blondin’s most famous remarks on the Tour was that ‘Le général de Gaulle est le président des Français onze mois sur douze. En juillet, c’est Jacques Goddet’, which in the politically highly charged context of the 1960s was an elegant understatement of the popular importance of France’s annual summer festival.⁸ The *chroniques* were also packed with evocations of national and regional history, into which were interwoven references to French literature and other classic authors of French geography and science. In a comprehensive and interesting interpretation of Blondin’s significance as a sports journalist, Ruadhán Cooke and Philip Dine suggest that his work served to facilitate the reinvention of French sport in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s within the context of France’s socioeconomic modernization (Cooke and Dine,

2007). This analysis underlines the paradox of Blondin's literary and essentially anachronistic reporting of the Tour, namely that his nostalgic attachments to a France of pre-war values and traditions and their evocation in the *chroniques* helped the French public in its growing enthusiasm for sport during the period of growth and modernization known as the *Trente glorieuses*. Cooke and Dine show how Blondin's narratives melded the old and the new France, in a joyous festive celebration of the Tour and a cultural legitimization of sport. As the journalist, writer and cycling fanatic Serge Laget has suggested: 'Le Tour de France, c'est Noël en juillet... et le 14 juillet tous les jours' (Laget, 2010: 2), and this 'festive' dimension of the Tour is certainly appropriate to Blondin's love of the sport of cycling and of the Tour as institution and surrogate family.

Television and the Tour de France: innovation

In the 1980s the rules of French television broadcasting were radically changed, firstly by socialist administrations who moved to liberalize the state monopolies in broadcasting that had prevailed since the introduction of the medium, and then by right-wing governments keen to continue the free-market shake-up of television (Kuhn, 1994: 185–203). The creation of Canal Plus in 1984 and the privatization of the first public channel, TF1, in 1986 were the prime symbols of these transformations, and both of these television stations moved to invest heavily in sport (particularly football) as a key product for commercial success. The 1960s and 1970s, by contrast, were a period of more gradual but equally significant developments in techniques and the organization of relationships between sport and television, and the Tour de France was a key sporting event whose televising contributed significantly to the evolution of sports television, as Fabien Wille, in particular, has described in an analysis of the Tour's effects on media production (Wille, 2003). From the perspective of a media practitioner, the film-maker Hervé Le Roux has also given insights into how the Tour has influenced developments in television reporting of sports (Morice, 2003). Conversely, the new medium of television also had an impact on the competition itself. Although the press and radio as the traditional media of cycling reporting and commentary mostly maintained their dominance during this period (though some of the written press suffered from new rivals, exemplified for instance by the slow decline of *Le Miroir du cyclisme*), television, as the direct, live representation of a sporting event, was the obvious medium for showing competition. The Tour was the subject of French television's second-ever live outside broadcast, when on 25 July 1948 the finish of the final day's stage was shown to the very few in France who

possessed TV sets. Technologies and techniques for live broadcasts were crude in 1948 and following years, and the Tour appeared on television during the 1950s mainly thanks to ‘summaries’ of racing compiled from 16mm cinema-reel footage. These ‘news-reports’ presented each day’s riding as a self-contained and immediately comprehensible narrative involving characters and morals, villains and heroes, landscapes and routes, in ways similar to the traditions of written sports journalism, which would be challenged by the ‘live’ depiction of events as they unfolded which arrived in the 1960s. Between 1957 – when television and the national cycling federations disagreed over the terms of the coverage of the Tour – and 1962, the viewing public was deprived of live commentary on the race, but in 1963 the ‘contemporary era’ of Tour broadcasting was begun.

Le Miroir du cyclisme: an alternative voice?

The cycling press was always traditionally – and remains, despite competition from newer media – closely related to sport, leisure and more utilitarian forms of cycling. This long-standing partnership is discussed for example by Déon and Seray (1996), whose analysis shows the roots and development of a symbiotic media–sport ‘complex’, which has been varied in its politics and perspectives from the Left–Right quarrels between *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto* at the turn of the twentieth century, to enduring struggles of various organs with the dominant *L’Equipe* in the post-war period. For example, in recent decades, old copies of *Le Miroir du cyclisme* have become collectors’ items for cycling fans, but their attractiveness to contemporary enthusiasts concerns more than simply their profiles of star riders and race reports. *Le Miroir du cyclisme* was, in its hey-day of the 1960s and 1970s, an important and influential alternative voice on professional cycling, providing contrasting perspectives on the sport to those furnished by *L’Equipe*, the ‘official’ organ of the the group that owned the Tour de France and many of the other major races. *Le Miroir du cyclisme* was published between 1960 and 1994, initially by the publisher ‘éditions J’, closely linked to the French Communist Party (PCF), and subsequently, from 1980, by Editions Vaillant-Miroir Sprint, also part of the PCF’s media operations. The general sports magazine *Le Miroir-Sprint* had been founded in 1947 by interests close to the communist resistance movements (at the same time as *L’Equipe* was reinventing itself after the collaborationist attitudes of *L’Auto*), and during the 1950s it periodically brought out special numbers to cover the Tour: *Le Miroir du cyclisme* was an extension of this policy. The change of *Le Miroir*’s publisher in 1980 came as a conse-

quence of falling sales of the magazine during the late 1970s, when increasing costs of paper, general production and postage (half of the readership had postal subscriptions) had aggravated the decline in readership figures. Financial problems continued for the magazine during the 1980s, at the same time that its 'alternative' political stance on sport found itself weakened by the fact that France was now governed by socialists rather than by the Right. In 1981 the new socialist sports minister, Edwige Avice, explained the government's sports policy in numbers 308 and 309 of *Le Miroir*, exemplifying how the magazine had suddenly become not so much an instrument of pressure on right-wing governments and commercial interests, but more a fellow-traveller of official attitudes (Avice, 1981). But in 1992, amid continual restructuring, changes of ownership and loss-making, the founding editor and journalist Maurice Vidal abandoned *Le Miroir du cyclisme*, which finally disappeared in 1994. The magazine was thus at the height of its popularity and influence during the 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s, when its left-wing criticisms of government policies towards sports and leisure, and its antagonism to the worst excesses of *sport-spectacle* (often those organized by that symbol of capitalist exploitation of sporting 'workers', *L'Equipe*) reached a mass audience as yet still faithful to traditional sports reporting.⁹

One example of *Le Miroir*'s opposition to *sport-spectacle* was to be found in its support during the early 1960s and again in 1975–76 for the organization of the Tour de France with national teams rather than commercially sponsored groupings; in this case, *Le Miroir du cyclisme* was unusually in accord with the views of *La Société du Tour*, which was keen to retain national teams in order to better maintain its own commercial control of the competition. Maurice Vidal (*Libération*), Emile Besson (*L'Humanité*), Yves Bordenave (*L'Humanité*), Attilio Camoriano (*L'Unità*), André Chaillot (*Libération*), Abel Michéa (*L'Humanité*) and Henri Quiquére (*La Vie ouvrière*) were some of the major figures of left-wing sports journalism who contributed substantially to the magazine, and *Le Miroir* was a central agent in the media coverage of cycling and the setting of agendas in cycling and sports/leisure policy. Jacques Goddet's hostility towards anything or anyone that challenged his group's domination of French cycling and sport in general meant that few journalists working regularly for *L'Equipe* dared also to contribute to *Le Miroir*, but some significant figures such as Jacques Augendre, Pierre Chany and Jacques Marchand managed to do so and see their careers survive. As well as following and critiquing developments in professional racing, until the mid-1970s *Le Miroir* also encouraged other

aspects of cycling of more practical leisure interest to the general public. Thus cycle touring was covered in regular articles from the early years of publication until 1976; in 1972 the magazine made space in its columns for an appeal from the *Amis de la Terre*; in 1973 Maurice Vidal launched an early campaign (as part of the 1974 presidential election) in favour of cycle routes (Vidal, 1973). In 1975–76, however, the editorial policy started concentrating more on elite cycle sport and less on these general interest agendas, as pressure mounted to provide the readership with coverage of its principal interest.

Olympic and world success in track racing

The French track sprinter Daniel Morelon is one of the major figures of world cycling. His racing career stretched from 1962 until 1980, resulting in five Olympic medals (two golds) and seven world championship gold medals. On retirement from competition he became involved in training France's elite track riders, winning considerable success in the 1990s with champions such as Arnaud Tournant, Florian Rousseau and Félicia Ballanger. Honoured by the French state with various awards and decorations (he was made *Chevalier* in the *Ordre national du mérite* in 1966, awarded the *Grand Prix Olympique* by the *Académie des Sports* in 1972 and appointed *Chevalier* in the *Légion d'honneur* in 1995), he also figures on a postage stamp commemorating his Olympic gold medal won at Munich in 1972. The significance of Morelon's career and influence is analogous to the situation in the United Kingdom during the late 1990s and 2000s, when interest in competitive cycling initially on the track and then subsequently in the Tour de France stimulated an uptake of cycling as leisure and competition. The success of British Olympic track racers such as Chris Boardman, Bradley Wiggins, Sir Chris Hoy and others was taken up by the mainstream sporting media, and helped transform the backwaters of British cycle sport – an ageing and declining time-trial tradition and languishing cycling club membership – into a highly visible and highly commercial business activity, with British teams in the Tour de France and famous riders vying for Olympic golds in 2012. Morelon's sporting celebrity in the late 1960s and 1970s produced similar effects, and his work in coaching and managing sport has also directly and indirectly stimulated French cycling – elite and leisure – in many ways. In the early 1980s Morelon captured the French literary imagination sufficiently to be the subject of a magical-realist imagined interview by the author Georges Londeix:

Présenter Daniel Morelon... Déjà, j'hésite: 'coureur cycliste'? Non. 'Champion cycliste'? Non plus. Dire seulement: 'champion'. Champion, Morelon l'est au plus haut degré. Champion nimbé d'hellénisme et de chevalerie, qui, par une extraordinaire trajectoire, s'en vient triompher au siècle de la vitesse, inscrivant même ses exploits dans le futur, au-delà peut-être de l'an 2000. Figure si pure, si éternelle, qu'on craint de l'avilir en dénombant ses titres officiels: quatorze fois champion de France; trois fois champion olympique; huit fois champion du monde. (Londeix, 1981: 113).

Daniel Morelon's career as both competitor and trainer encapsulates a number of significant features of French cycling and French elite sport in general during the latter part of the twentieth century. Although he won major medals right until the end of his competitive career, his most important successes came in the 1968 and 1972 Olympics, when the French government was particularly keen to see sporting achievements on the world scene. His Olympic and world championship gold medals thus need to be considered in the context of the French state's new interest in sport, introduced by de Gaulle with the advent of the Fifth Republic in 1958. As a trainer for the French national track team from 1978 until 2005, supervising elite athletes at the facilities of the *Institut national du sport et de l'éducation physique* at Hyères in the Var department in the south of France, and at Vincennes in Paris, Morelon was again instrumental – in a different capacity – in realizing the French state's ambitions for national sporting success.

France and the Olympics in the 1960s and 1970s

The Fifth Republic brought with it a change in the French state's relationship to sport. After the hesitations and confusion of the Fourth Republic, governments during the 1960s under the presidency of de Gaulle took sport of all kinds and all levels much more seriously, and the ministerial structures, relations with the sports federations and general principles informing the state's understanding of the importance of sport that were set up in the late 1950s and early 1960s remained broadly consistent until the 1980s (Mourlane, 2007; Chifflet, 1995; Callède, 2000). Essentially, it was recognized firstly that sport had become such a widespread leisure practice that public provision of facilities beyond what had traditionally been the case was now necessary, and, secondly, that elite sport and the success of French sportsmen and women in international competitions was a legitimate and useful expression of France's national image. In the view current at the time, these two dimensions of sporting practice and contribution to the nation were interlinked, as the 'pyramidal' understanding of the relationship between the everyday practice of sport by the masses saw a solid base as essential for the production of a

strong crop of elite athletes capable of representing French sport in the Olympics, world championships and other international sporting arenas. The fundamental principle of government policy was simple: encourage people to undertake sporting activities within the frameworks of competitive sport provided by the sports federations (football, rugby, athletics, swimming, gymnastics and so on), and then support more strongly than before the efforts of these federations to identify the champions who could demonstrate French sporting prowess in international competition.

What became known as the *Plan de rénovation du sport français* provided – over a period of some fifteen years from 1960 – the new impetus, finance, policies and infrastructure to stimulate sport in the federations and to improve France’s performance in the medal tables of the Olympics and world championships. The story is often told that it was de Gaulle’s exasperation over France’s meagre medals haul at the Rome Olympics in 1960 – five medals in total, the worst result thus far, in an event beamed into French homes by television for the first time – that prompted the drive to develop *les sports nationaux* and *le sport de haut niveau*.¹⁰ De Gaulle’s views on France’s rightful place in the world in terms of international relations are well known and scarcely need repeating here, except in the summary form of his famous assertion that ‘La France ne peut être la France sans la Grandeur’ (de Gaulle, 1954: 5). The failure of the French Olympic team in 1960 was an affront to the Gaullist understanding of the – necessary – prestige and grandeur of the French state and of France itself, and fuelled government attempts to foster elite success in subsequent Olympics and sporting mega-events in general, where – in an international context in which elite sport was highly politicized by the Soviet and Eastern bloc’s use of international athletics competition as part of the Cold War struggle with the USA – French athletes such as Morelon could demonstrate to both East and West how ‘strong’ France was. As Chifflet among others has described, sport was harnessed ‘au service de la grandeur nationale’ (Chifflet, 1995: 115–24). Part of the French drive to instrumentalize sport in the service of national prestige was also the organizing of mega-events in France itself, in particular the hosting of the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble (Terret, 1990), but also a failed bid for the 1968 Olympics, which were eventually awarded to Mexico City (Dauncey, 2010b).

Morelon – world, Olympic and national champion sans-pareil

Although Morelon has not yet been the subject of a biography, reflecting the enduring domination of road racing (rather than track competition) in the French sporting imagination, various specialist websites provide

detailed factual information about his career, foremost among which is that of the *Mémoire du cyclisme* organization.¹¹ Morelon was born in 1944 in the provincial town of Bourg-en-Bresse, not far from Lyon. He is thus a representative of France's 'baby-boom' generations, having spent his childhood under the Fourth Republic and reached maturity during the early years of de Gaulle's new Fifth Republic. His first truly notable success came in 1964, at the age of 20, when he took the title of French national sprint champion. This was while he was still officially undertaking his military service, and was in part due to the opportunities for training that had been offered to him – as had been the case previously for Jacques Anquetil, among others – by the army. Although he lost this title the following year, he regained it in 1966 and won the sprint championship every subsequent year until 1977. He also repeatedly won the French national team sprint titles, and dominated European Grand Prix track racing between 1965 and the mid-1970s, monopolizing first place on the podium at the GPs of Aarhus, Copenhagen, Paris, Odense and Milan. By profession originally a policeman, Morelon retired from competition in 1980 after a couple of fallow years in 1978 and 1979, winning the national sprint championships for a final time – now as a professional – as well as securing the new title of European champion. Few riders have exercised such a stranglehold over a discipline, albeit a highly specialized one, for such a period, and Morelon remains an iconic figure within French cycling for his domination of sprinting in the 1960s and 1970s.

But it was Morelon's international successes at the Olympics of 1964, 1968, 1972 and 1976 and annually at the (amateur) world championships from 1965 until 1975 that brought him fame outside France and that publicized France's new commitment to elite sport to the world. At the Tokyo Olympics of 1964, French track cycling was still in the shadow of other long-established European cycling nations. Of the seven gold medals available in cycling overall (there were five track events), Italy took three, and Belgium, Holland, Germany and Czechoslovakia one apiece. France won only two bronzes, taken by Morelon in the sprint and by his friend and tandem-sprint partner Pierre Trentin in the kilometre time trial. The return was sparse, but still a great improvement on the total absence of medals in Athens in 1960, which had been a huge disappointment since France had won two golds and two silvers at the Melbourne Games of 1956, a bronze in Helsinki in 1952 and three golds and two bronzes in London in 1948. So Morelon was, single-handedly, contributing significantly to the Gaullist ambition of *grandeur nationale* through elite international sport.

In 1968 in Mexico City, France topped the cycling medals table, with four golds and a bronze, way ahead of Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands, which each took only a single gold and a handful of minor medals. The Mexico Games were perhaps the high-water mark of French Olympic cycling during the Morelon years, with victories in the kilometre (Trentin), the sprint (Morelon), the tandem sprint (Morelon and Trentin) and the pursuit (Daniel Rebillard). Morelon took the sprint title four years later in the Munich Games of 1972, but his gold was France's only medal in cycling that year as the Soviet Union and hosts West Germany dominated competition, and as East Germany also began to show promise in the discipline. The Munich Games were relatively successful for France, with a medals tally of two golds, four silvers and seven bronzes, and 17th position overall, but the message from the Eastern bloc was clearly that in all disciplines, Western nations would need to raise their game in future competitions in order to match the performances of athletes trained by the new highly intensive and scientific programmes of the USSR and the GDR. The ambitions of the Eastern bloc countries to be competitive in all sports meant that countries such as France, which had previously relied on their accumulated sporting experience in disciplines of traditional national interest – for example, cycling – required action to consolidate this inherent expertise. In 1976 at Montreal the USSR, West Germany and East Germany again headed the cycling medals table, and France managed – with Morelon now ageing at 32 – only a silver in the sprint. Overall, at the Montreal Games, France was rewarded with two golds, three silvers and four bronzes, finishing in 15th position.

Partly in response to the new demands of international elite competition, the *Institut national du sport et de l'éducation physique* (INSEP) – originally founded in 1945 as the *Institut national des sports* – was gradually developed in 1975–77 through merger with the *Ecole normale supérieure d'éducation physique*. The new organization had the three-fold task of conducting scientific research into sports medicine, pedagogy and techniques, training high-level sports coaches and managers, and managing the preparation of national teams and elite sportsmen and women (Callède, 2000: 149–51). Throughout the second half of the 1970s, and particularly from 1979, when new director Robert Bobin gave renewed emphasis to the organization's role in elite sport, INSEP began to foster French strength in international competition. At the 1980 Moscow Games, France did indeed improve its overall performance, garnering six golds, five silvers and three bronzes. In cycling, the emerging new generation of French track stars, some of whom were training under the guidance of Daniel Morelon, began to gain success: Yavé Cahard

took silver in the sprint and Alain Bondue took silver in the pursuit, but the full blossoming of Morelon's contribution to the training of elite cyclists was not to come until the 1990s.

Le 'tandem' Morelon-Quintyn – making new champions

Londeix (1981) in his magical-realist evocation of Morelon's status as a champion was already hinting that his heroic influence might endure until the 2000s, and such was in fact the case. On his retirement from competition in 1980 at the age of 36, Morelon moved seamlessly into the full-time coaching of his successors in the national team, having already taken up some training responsibilities in 1978. His entry into coaching coincided with the first real functioning of the institutions and policies for stimulating elite sport that had been set in place during the mid-1970s. French track (and road) cycling in the 1980s, however, was in the doldrums: in 1984 in Los Angeles Fabrice Colas won the sole French cycling medal with a bronze in the kilometre time trial. In 1988 at the Seoul Games, France won nothing in track cycling; in 1991 Francis Moreau was the world champion in individual pursuit; and at the Barcelona Olympics of 1992 France managed only a bronze in the team road race.

Nevertheless, two of Morelon's protégés in the 1990s and early 2000s – Félicia Ballanger and Florian Rousseau – eventually garnered even greater hauls of medals than he did himself. Under Morelon's supervision (with Gérard Quintyn), France obtained significant success in international track racing, most notably with world champions such as Florian Rousseau (men's kilometre, 1993, 1994 and men's sprint, 1996, 1997, 1998); Arnaud Tournant (men's sprint, 2001 and kilometre, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001); Franck Depine and Yavé Cahard (tandem sprint, 1979); Depine and Philippe Vernet (tandem sprint, 1983); Isabelle Nicoloso (women's sprint, 1984); Fabrice Colas and Frédéric Magné (tandem sprint, 1987, 1988, 1989); Félicia Ballanger (women's sprint and 500 metres, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999); and Laurent Gané (men's sprint, 1999). Riders trained by Morelon and his colleagues have also won Olympic titles, such as Rousseau (kilometre, 1996, points, 2000), Gané (sprint, 1999), Ballanger (women's sprint, 1996) and Nathalie Lancien (women's points, 1996).

This success has vindicated INSEP's interpretation of its mission to provide elite champions to further French grandeur, as well as stimulating interest in competitive sport at all levels and sport as leisure. In cycling, as in other sports such as football and rugby, the system of coaching based around *Centres permanents d'entraînement et de forma-*

tion at national, regional and local level, and the ‘democratic’ selection of an elite of sportsmen and sportswomen, functions in a clearly structured pyramidal hierarchy. In football, France has provided structures and coaching schemes that have consistently borne fruit (for an accessible discussion of the national coaching system as it applies in soccer, see Hare, 2003: 92–95), and in track cycling Morelon and Quintyn have been key elements (Labrunie, 1998) in similar success.

* * *

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of change and continuity in French cycling, as the Tour de France, cycling media and the professional cycle sport industry developed their models of operation with one eye on the traditions of the past and the other on new technologies of mediatization, new pressures for competitors to cheat, and the overall modernization of French society and culture which made the French public ‘read’ their national champions in changing ways. While the Tour negotiated its late modernity preponderantly in relation to its past and the heritage of media practices, ideologies of sporting effort, patterns of race organization and personas of star performers, the new success of French track cycling in this period marked the changing relationship to elite competitive sport of the French state. Although track cycling was one of cycling’s oldest sporting disciplines, it was a novelty for French track riders to reach the heights of celebrity and success attained by Morelon, and victories in the world championships and in the Olympics fulfilled Gaullist wishes to see ‘une France qui gagne’ in the late 1960s and 1970s. Morelon’s subsequent career as a high-level trainer and national coach exemplified how cycling contributed in later decades to the national system of preparing elite athletes.

Notes

- 1 However, in a later chapter, we will see that the company that owns the Tour de France, Amaury Sport Organization, has in the 1990s and 2000s been in regular conflict with the international bodies regulating cycling worldwide in an ongoing attempt to maintain its ‘French’ control over professional cycling and to preserve the independence of the Tour de France itself from UCI oversight and interference.
- 2 A feat only previously achieved by the Belgian Romain Maes in 1935, and never repeated since.
- 3 This is how the *Miroir des Sports* journalist Roger Bastide commented on Anquetil’s 1961 Tour victory, quoted by Ollivier.

- 4 For a treatment of the facts and myths about the death of Tom Simpson on Mont Ventoux in 1967, see Fotheringham (2002).
- 5 Blondin's contribution to the Tour has been examined in a television documentary created by Jacques Maigne and Serge Garcin, *Le Tour vu par Antoine Blondin* (2003, screened by France 5 on 18 June 2007).
- 6 For one accessible treatment of the links between sport and literature in France, see Voilley (1998).
- 7 See, for example, the commentary on Blondin by Jean-Emmanuel Ducoin published in *L'Humanité* (2003). The famous sports journalist Jacques Augendre has published an account of Blondin's summers with the Tour de France (2005).
- 8 These two Blondinian remarks do not appear to be in his writings; rather, they are comments reported by interviewers or collaborators, and have no accurate referencing (thanks to Ruadhán Cooke, an expert on Blondin's writings on the Tour, for this clarification).
- 9 Average monthly sales in 1962 were 90,000, rising to a peak monthly readership of 175,000 in 1968, before declining to 96,000 in 1983, and then falling progressively until the liquidation of the title in 1994.
- 10 The failure in Rome prompted a famous newspaper cartoon (Jacques Faizant in *Le Figaro*) of a sullen General de Gaulle, incongruously attired in tracksuit and plimsolls, setting off to compete himself, above the grumbling caption 'Dans ce pays, si je ne fais pas tout moi-même...'
- 11 See http://www.memoire-du-cyclisme.net/palmares/morelon_daniel.php (accessed 14 June 2010).

Cycling in Transformation: Industry, Recreation, Sport, 1980–2000

France in the 1980s was marked by the political change of having a socialist president and socialist government for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic. Coming to office in May 1981, François Mitterrand and his governments were faced with economic challenges they inherited from the mid- and late 1970s, when inflation, unemployment and a generally uncompetitive economy threatened to definitively end the economic success story that France had enjoyed since 1945. As the *Trente glorieuses* were replaced by what commonly became known as the *Vingt rugueuses* ('twenty years of rough times'), socioeconomically France was under pressure from inflation, unemployment, public sector austerity and, increasingly, industrial and commercial rivalry with emerging international competitors. As well as being too apt to import Far Eastern consumer electronics and, indeed, Taiwanese bicycles and Japanese cycle components, France also remained open to the importing and adoption of sporting and recreational practices from the United States. We have seen earlier how, especially post-1945, it was the US, more than the UK, which was France's significant Anglo-American 'other', and alongside sports such as rollerblading and skateboarding, the 1980s saw a considerable uptake in mountain-biking in France. The Tour de France during the late 1970s and early 1980s was the scene of French domination, in the persons of national hero Bernard Hinault (winner in 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982 and 1985) and Laurent Fignon (double champion in 1983 and 1984), before, significantly, they were dethroned by the US rider Greg Le Mond (1986, 1989, 1990). However, even their accomplishments pale in comparison with those of a much less well-known French cyclist, the multiple Olympic, world and national champion Jeannie Longo.¹ Longo was also a key figure in the women's Tour de France which was first run in 1984.

We shall start this chapter with an analysis of how the French cycle industry was being forced to adapt to new realities of consumerism, foreign competition and evolving tastes for bicycles among the French

cycling public. We shall see how the French state's concern – expressed by socialist governments from the early 1980s – to improve French competitiveness through fostering high technology also found resonance within the cycle industry, in coexistence with other more traditional and still enduring techniques of bicycle design. Secondly, we will discuss how the new vogue for mountain-biking affected French cycling in terms of the federal structure of cycling (previously divided between racing and touring), as well as everyday practice, and discuss how the new recreation and sport of triathlon – another sport imported from the US – fitted into federal structures of cycling and its other component sports and the ecology of French sporting activities. Finally, since the topics complement each other as studies of the place of women in cycle sport a century and more after the early female racers of the *Belle Epoque*, we discuss the career of Jeannie Longo and the troubled history of the women's Tour de France.

The cycle industry: adaptation and resistance

In 1980 the famous small arms and cycle manufacturer *Manufrance* was declared bankrupt, ending almost a century of production of cycles from its Saint-Etienne factories (as we saw in a previous chapter, the company was founded in 1885, becoming the *Manufacture française des armes et cycles* de Saint-Etienne in 1892). The death throes of the company continued until the late 1980s, as various attempts – including millions of francs of government subsidies – were made to find solutions to keep this major employer in activity. The demise of *Manufrance* was exemplary of the growing difficulties the traditional French cycle manufacturers had in remaining competitive with new imported products from the USA, Japan and Taiwan, both in terms of price and model range. The reaction of some in the French cycle industry was to withdraw from production entirely or to collaborate with foreign producers, thus either ending often very long-standing traditions of French craftsmanship and commerce or losing their independence. Other French manufacturers tried to specialize in the higher ranges of cycle production: finding that they could not compete on price with imported cycles for the mass commuting/leisure market, they identified the sector of specialist racing and leisure cycles as an opportunity to exploit the generally growing prosperity of consumers and the passionate attachment of many serious leisure cyclists to high-tech componentry and frames. At the same time, new methods of distribution began increasingly to modify how cycle

products were made available to the public: the continuing long-term decline of small-scale cycle retailing in local town centre shops was exacerbated by the arrival of mass-market distributors selling affordably priced imported machines. In an attempt to give a synthetic account of how the French cycle industry – for decades one of the strongest in the world – was forced to adapt itself to new conditions in the 1980s and 1990s, here we examine the rise of the Décathlon sports superstore, the success of Look and Time, two representatives of the high-tech specialist sector of cycle manufacture, and finally, the enduring but fragile story of the traditional cycle workshop and retailer Cycles Follis in Lyon.

The rise of new distributors/manufacturers: Décathlon

The expert on the economics of sports entrepreneurialism Dieter Hillairet points out that the French sports industry is essentially characterized by small and very small businesses, and that it is in the distribution of sports goods that the major companies such as Intersport, Go Sport and Décathlon are to be found (Hillairet, 1999; 2002: 11–12). The now worldwide chain of Décathlon sports stores was started in 1976 with the establishment of a single shop in Lille in north-eastern France, and the firm's website provides a useful summary of the company's irresistible rise towards near-domination of the French sports-goods industry.² For the first ten years of its operation Décathlon restricted its activities solely to the distribution of sporting goods manufactured by established companies such as – in cycling – the traditional giant of bicycle production, Peugeot, but in 1986 Peugeot's withdrawal from cycle manufacture led Décathlon to initiate its own production of bicycles, eventually leading to the creation of its own brands in 1996. Décathlon, with its extensive network of inner-city and retail-park stores and superstores selling wide ranges of sporting equipment as well as cycles and cycling equipment, has accompanied and accelerated the decline of the traditional model of cycle production and retail based on major mass-manufacturers, small expert frame-builders and thousands of local specialized cycle shops catering for utility, leisure and sport consumers.

As well as changing the nature of cycle retail through its marketing strategies aimed at high-volume, generally middle-range products, Décathlon's move into the production of sports goods has also transformed the cycle industry. Since 1996 the range of Décathlon cycles has gathered increasing approval from consumers and the specialized media – popular cycling magazines, for example – that exercise a strong influence on cycling enthusiasts and manufacturers alike. Early Décathlon cycles used cheaply manufactured low- and middle-range frames and

components, but as the market for higher specification high-technology cycles for both leisure and sports use grew (a kind of conspicuous consumption, perhaps), carbon-fibre frames and high-range finishing components were introduced. The most expensive Décathlon cycles now receive accolades from cyclists and the cycling media, although there is an ongoing debate over the nature of the relationship between customers and their supplier: the higher the specification of the bike the greater seems to be the need for the kind of personal service generally only found in small cycle shops. In 2001 the Décathlon bicycle design *B'Twin* was given a special commendation by the *Agence de l'environnement et de la maîtrise de l'énergie* (the French environment and energy conservation agency) and the *Agence de promotion de la création industrielle* (APCI) in its annual design competition *Prix Observateur du Design*, marking the firm's successful efforts during the 1990s to create products that were competitively priced and of sufficiently high-quality design to stand favourable comparison with overseas competition and even with products from the smaller-scale domestic manufacturers such as Look and Time, which catered for the top end of the cycling market. As early as 1986, when the first Décathlon-branded articles were produced, the company had an R&D department (in Villeneuve-d'Ascq) employing over 1,000 designers, engineers and other product developers. Components are generally sourced from overseas, but products (from mountain bikes to tents, kites and clothing) are assembled in France, generally by a range of small and medium-sized contractors in the Nord-Pas de Calais region around Lille.

Décathlon's strategy was increasingly to concentrate on products with high added-value and a significant component of high technology (either in terms of bicycles, or sports clothing). Apart from bicycles, which as the key prestige product of the company are always marketed under the name of Décathlon itself, the firm has created a wide range of brands such as Quechua (technical outdoors clothing), Tribord (for water sports), Kipsta (team sports) and Inesis (racket sports). From 100 shops in France in 1993 (and four abroad), by the late 1990s Décathlon had nearly 300 stores in France and approaching 100 overseas (principally in Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and the UK), and has continued its expansion during the 2000s. As Hillairet, Richard and Bouchet have suggested (2009), using the term 'passion-brands', Décathlon has been extremely innovative and successful in maximizing the public's enthusiasm for sport in general and cycling in particular during recent decades, catering both for mass-market practice of cycling as leisure, but also increasingly targeting niches of more expensive and

higher-tech equipment otherwise dominated by firms such as Look and Time.

The rise of French high-tech cycling: Look, Time

Look and Time (both principally located in Nevers, in the Nièvre department south-east of Paris) figure among the most recognizable brand-names of the French and European cycle-component industry. After the dominant firms such as Shimano (Japan) and Campagnolo (Italy), which specialize in whole ranges of components and accessories but not frames, Look Cycle International and Time Sport International, which produce selected ranges of components, accessories and frames (and increasingly offer complete bikes), have a strong visibility and reputation in the French, European and world markets. They represent the dynamism of the French bicycle component sector, which since the early and mid-1980s has been able to relaunch itself after the more difficult times of the 1970s. They also represent, in the wider context of the French economy and manufacturing, a French success in the development and use of high-technology processes and materials within the small and medium-sized business sector.³ Just as the cycling industry in the 1880s and 1890s drove France's industrial development, companies like Look and Time have helped stimulate the French economy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The technical and business successes of Look and Time reflect ongoing trends in French society and culture since the 1970s. Technically and technologically, these two medium-sized firms have epitomized the French state's drive since the 1980s to foster high-technology processes, material and products outside of France's traditional high-tech sectors led by national-champion state-owned companies. The business and commercial success of the two firms has mirrored the rising enthusiasm among French consumers for leisure cycling during the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, government policies were implemented to encourage the technological development of medium- and small-sized companies throughout France's industrial fabric. Look and Time (and other cycle component manufacturers) have benefited directly and indirectly from this change in approach, as their growth has been accompanied by a supportive attitude from regional and national government.⁴ In particular, Look and its products have achieved various awards recognizing their high levels of innovation: the Economics, Finance and Industry Ministry INPI *Trophée* for the most-innovative SME (2008), the *Le Cycle* magazine 'Vélo de l'année' (1994, 2002, 2008, 2012), the French Industry/Culture Ministries' APCI *Etoile du design* (2004, 2007, 2009,

2011) and the German IF Design award (2010).

Look and Time's dynamic innovation during the mid- and late 1980s and 1990s capitalized on, accompanied and catalysed social and cultural developments in French leisure and leisure-sporting practices. The sociocultural watershed of 1968 in France – when under the pressures of demographic change, political tensions and economic change, new aspirations for work and leisure gained a legitimacy that had been denied during the previous decades of forced modernization – created a growth during the 1970s of interest in the environment, in sport and leisure for their own sake and in a healthy lifestyle. Greater prosperity, improving standards of living and the swelling of the French middle classes brought about changes in the practice of cycling, shifting the locus of bicycle use away from a working-class means of transport and an essentially proletarian sport towards a fashionable leisure pastime indulged in by those who had the time and means. The fullest development of cycling as a form of 'green' transport was to come in the 2000s, but it was most strongly in the 1980s and 1990s that a number of trends combined to encourage innovation in the cycle industry. The 1980s saw the introduction into France of new forms of cycling, such as mountain-biking, downhill racing, and other 'fun' ways of enjoying the bicycle, and combined with the rising awareness of environmentalism, these 'Californian' sports stimulated consumer interest in cycles and cycle equipment.⁵ The French cycle industry, hitherto comfortably accustomed to producing either mass-produced traditional cycles (increasingly threatened by Far Eastern imports) or high-quality traditional racing machines (for a small French market and discerning American and other foreign customers) found itself challenged by the demand for innovatively styled and high-tech mountain bikes. During the 1980s in particular, the enthusiasm for MTBs was mainly but not exclusively confined to the moneyed middle classes, who could afford both the purchase of a machine and the free time to enjoy its use, and so French manufacturers responded to demand for these expensive cycles, in a trend that exemplified how cycling was increasingly again become a sign of 'distinction' through technological innovativeness.⁶

The distinction conferred by the possession of an MTB and by the espousal of the healthy new Californian-inspired sporting activities found a counterpart in the more traditional sector of racing bikes in the drive towards technological innovation that also occurred in road racing at around the same time. The French public's interest in professional racing had been growing during the early 1980s, encouraged by the successes of five-time Tour de France winner Bernard Hinault, and the

increased 'visibility' of the sport coincided with technological developments in a field where, for quite a period, equipment and frames had remained essentially the same. Indeed, one of the earliest injections of high technology into the cycle industry came in the early 1980s through the use by Hinault and the Renault-Gitane team of the wind-tunnel facilities at the Ecole aéronautique de Saint-Cyr (Hillairet, 2002: 213), which led to the setting up of the Hinault cycle company. Pressures for change came from Far Eastern firms such as Shimano and Suntour, to which established European manufacturers such as Campagnolo reacted as best they could, but other, smaller French companies such as Look were also aware of the opportunity to redefine cycling for consumers as a leisure/sport pastime that was no longer old-fashionedly proletarian, but innovatively technological, expensive and distinctive. The highly innovative clipless cycling pedal developed by Look in the mid-1980s was a key example of this link between sport, society/leisure and industry. Originally a ski equipment manufacturer, Look had great expertise in the clipless boot attachments used in skiing, and when the company was acquired during the early 1980s by the entrepreneur Bernard Tapie who was sponsoring the Vie Claire professional cycling team in the Tour de France, Look seized the opportunity to develop a *pédale automatique* for cycling that was safer, easier to use and more efficient than previous pedals, cleats and straps.⁷ Hinault's successful showcasing of the technology during the 1985 Tour launched the product, and the technology has since come to dominate pedal design. In 1986 Look produced the first carbon-tubed frame, used by Tour winner Greg Le Mond, and throughout the late 1980s and 1990s continually developed their carbon-frame expertise.

A significant trend in the cycle industry during the 1990s (and also in the early 2000s) was for unit sales to remain relatively stable, but for the overall value of sales to increase (reflecting the importance of 'high-end' demand). The French cycle industry was thus surviving during this period on the strength of two or three different kinds of interest in cycling: firstly, the French seem increasingly enthusiastic about using bikes as part of an ambition to promote sustainable development (cycling to work, cycling holidays and so on); secondly, the passion for new kinds of cycling in the form of MTBs, downhill and so on is sustaining sales; thirdly, racing cycles – and by trickle-down through manufacturers' ranges, almost all bikes – are becoming increasingly technologically advanced, and therefore more costly.

The resilience of small frame-builders: Cycles Follis

The celebrated Lyon cycle manufacturer and retailer Cycles Follis was founded in 1903, and was thus as old as the Tour de France. Its small old shop and cramped adjoining workshops were – until its final closure in July 2007 – still situated in a shabby quarter of central Lyon, the location and style of accommodation both contrasting sharply with the nearby outlets of Go Sport and Décathlon, for example, which are housed in Lyon's glitzy principal shopping mall.⁸ Through a mixture of good fortune and resourceful strategies, Cycles Follis managed to survive throughout the twentieth century, in the face of competition both from the domestic and foreign giants of cycle manufacturing and the companies of the French 'new wave' of frame and component makers such as Lapierre, Look and Time. There are examples of small frame-builders surviving in various locations in France – Angers, for example, which has a history of the trade going back to the 1870s – and serving specialized niches of various kinds in the cycle market, but the uninterrupted longevity of Follis makes it a particularly interesting case-study. Although the future of the company in the early 2000s was ultimately dependent on the date of retirement of its then owner-managers, over the period since the 1970s of rapid change in the cycle industry, Follis had met the challenges posed by cultural and technological changes in cycling practices. Founded in 1903 by Joseph Follis, who was succeeded by his son François and then by his grand-daughter Myriam in 1973, Follis always remained a family firm, closely focused on high-quality touring and racing frames and built-up cycles, as well as their particular speciality of the tandem. In the terminology of French cycling and French employment, Follis provided frames made by *artisans-cadreurs* (for the market of *randonneuses/cadres de course d'artisans* – the importance of the term 'artisan' is obvious, reflecting the 'capital' of traditions and skills developed since the earliest days of French bike manufacture, and the independence and individuality of a self-employed skilled worker).⁹ The reputation and success of the company flourished especially in the post-war years of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s: in the late 1940s, one of the firm's employees, riding a Follis bike, was remarkably successful in a number of 'cyclotourist' competitions, thus creating considerable trade-media interest in the marque, which steadily acquired publicity in Britain and even the United States.¹⁰ Before the changes to cycling brought about by new attitudes and new technologies in the 1970s and 1980s, Follis successfully served the niche market of high-quality, bespoke, handmade, steel-tubed racing and touring cycles and racing and touring tandems. As the French market began to weaken in the 1970s, Follis even managed

to exploit the US bike-boom, providing – in an intriguing reversal of the normal cultural and geographical directions of influence and trade – traditional ‘continental racing frames’ fitted with European componentry to those American cyclists who still saw machines from the country at the heart of professional racing as the *nec plus ultra* of style and quality. As frame-construction in the 1990s increasingly moved towards the use of aluminium tubing and even titanium and carbon fibre – whose characteristics require costly processes and machinery to master – the small-scale in-house expertise of Follis, where everything was done in the central Lyon workshop, made a virtue of their long experience of working with steel tubing by carefully courting customers worldwide who preferred the more ‘old-fashioned’ ride-quality and design of steel frames. As tube-producing companies such as Reynolds, Columbus and Dedacciai progressively refined and lightened their steel tubes in the face of competition from the new materials increasingly used in frames, Follis and other traditional constructors were able to continue to build frames themselves that were almost as light as competing, mass-produced items from Korea, Taiwan, the USA, or French high-tech firms such as Look. As late as 2005 Follis was still able to offer a range of four steel-framed racing cycles, four steel fast-touring cycles, two steel racing tandems and three steel touring tandems, with prices ranging from €2000 to €5000.

The closure of Cycles Follis in summer 2007 thus marked the end of more than a century of quality bicycle production by a small-scale artisan frame-builder whose techniques and organization were little changed in essence from the earliest days of French cycling. Having resisted market pressures throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s through skilful marketing and niche strategies, the retirement of its owners unfortunately brought the tradition to an end. The traditions are still alive, however, as on a smaller scale, the *artisan-cadreur* Daniel Guédon is continuing a frame-building business in premises near to the old Follis workshop.

The cycle industry has thus adapted to the changing demands placed on it by evolving demand for bicycles, international competition and state promotion of high technology in small and medium-sized businesses. More traditional artisan-manufacturing has in some cases been able to resist modernizing trends, maintaining skills and artifacts that reflect the long history of cycling.

VTT, triathlon and ‘militant cycling’

In a study undertaken for the French Ministry of Tourism in the mid-

1990s, Jean Gamond concluded from the surveys of cycling attitudes and styles that he had undertaken that there were essentially five types of cycling in France. These kinds of cycling practice together represented some 20 million cyclists overall. The first category (9.5%) identified was that of *Vélo solitude*, representing an individual sports-oriented activity, practised alone outside of any organization by 1.9 million citizens. The second category was *Vélo promenade* (21.1%), reflecting a family-based, non-sporting leisure use of cycling by 4.2 million people. The third category was *Vélo passion* (27.3%), covering the experience of cycling of those 5.4 million people who were members of cycling clubs and sporting associations. The fourth category was *Vélo pépère* (16.6%), meaning the lowest level of ‘no-hassle’ interest in cycling, expressed by 3.3 million occasional riders. The final category was *Vélo détente-découverte* (25.6%), representing the use of cycling (by 5 million people) for family trips to visit the countryside, see landmarks and make short tours (Gamond, 1995). A number of things can be seen from these basic statistics that give us a better idea of what people’s everyday relationship to cycling was in the early and mid-1990s: of the approximately one-third of the French population who declared an interest in *la pratique du vélo*, 36.8 per cent cycled as part of an interest in physical exercise (*solitude + passion*), and 46.7 per cent (*promenade + détente-découverte*) cycled for leisure, relaxation and tourism. The fact that the study specifically excluded analysis of high-level professional or amateur competition makes the figures for the ‘sportier’ relationships to cycling all the more significant: as well as being, quite understandably, a highly popular form of leisure relaxation and holidaying growing strongly under the influence of mountain-biking, cycling in France was heavily influenced by sport. In this section we do not propose to examine the more traditional sporting dimensions of everyday cycling (essentially the structures of amateur road racing), but rather to consider in more detail the new directions being taken during the 1980s and 1990s by new forms of cycling that were catching the attention of the French public and renewing the experience of cycling in general. One of these new forms of ‘doing’ cycling has an intrinsic competitive element: triathlon; one is purely relaxational in character: leisure cycling; and the third combines elements of leisure and competition: mountain-biking. It is with this combination of sport and leisure – *le VTT* – that we will start.

VTT: a new leisure-sport?

According to the Ministry of Tourism’s study of 1995, 35 per cent of France’s approximately 21 million bicycles were *Vélos tout-terrain*

(VTT), and VTT represented 35 per cent of total sales of bikes in France in 1990, and 71 per cent of sales in 1994 (Gamond, 1995). It is clear that the renewed popularity of cycling in France during the 1980s and 1990s that has continued into the 2000s is in considerable part due to the impact of mountain-biking from the early 1980s onwards. After the declining interest in cycling as a practice during the 1960s and 1970s caused by more affordable motorized transport and the rise of more middle-class sports pastimes such as tennis and skiing as French society grew more prosperous, the 'glamour' of the VTT craze introduced from the United States in the early 1980s, combined with the increasing realization of the importance of regular physical exercise for health, led French citizens of different age groups to adopt the mountain bike, preparing the ground for future expansion of cycling as healthy transport and leisure in the 2000s.

As we have discussed in a previous section, some claims can be made for the 'invention' of mountain-biking in France, in the form of the activities of the *Vélo-cross club parisien* in the 1950s, but it is generally accepted that mountain-biking was another example of an 'imported' sport, brought to France from the United States in the early 1980s and taken up by the French in enthusiastic appropriation of a form of cycling that both intrinsically and organizationally (at least initially) represented 'freedom' and fun. Gamond reports how in the mid-1990s, his respondents still associated mountain-biking with *la défonce* ('high on life'), *s'éclater* ('having fun'), *sensations fortes* ('adrenalin rush'), *plaisirs ludiques* ('playful pleasures') and *convivialité* ('togetherness'), even after the activity had, to a certain extent, been taken over by the French sporting federations. When VTT arrived in the early 1980s it represented precisely the kind of breath of fresh air that the rigid structures of the cycling federations inherited from the 1890s and early twentieth century, locked into internecine quarrels over differences between cycle sport and cycle touring, needed to boost flagging public interest in the practice of cycling (rather than the ritual watching of France's national sport during the Tour de France, and the hard-core activities of amateur racing and club riding).

The 1980s 'godfather' of French mountain-biking is generally acknowledged to be Stéphane Hauvette, who was instrumental in importing bikes to France and who – with Peugeot and the La Plagne ski station authorities – organized the first VTT competition to be held in France (August 1983) and was the founder-member and president of the *Association française de mountain-bike* (AFMB, created 1983). The fact that Hauvette saw the running of a competition as the best way to popu-

larize the nascent activity of VTT, otherwise presented as individualistic *défonce* and *plaisirs ludiques*, as well as reflecting the need for a high-profile event to attract media attention, also demonstrates how necessary it was for this new kind of cycling to possess an identity as ‘competition’ in order to be reported, and to have an administrative structure through which it could exist in relation to the sports federations, Sports Ministry and other public bodies with oversight of leisure and tourism. Interviewed in the very first issue of *VTT Magazine* in 1987, Hauvette explained that by coordinating all VTT activities in France, the AFMB enabled the pastime not only to organize French (1987–), European (1988–) and world championships (1989), but also to administer recognized training courses for VTT instructors and other requirements demanded by the state.

Throughout the development of mountain-biking in France during the 1980s, an apparent tension is visible between the activity’s claims to be ‘free’, individualistic and essentially non-competitive and the necessity to organize administratively, often in accompaniment to the running of competitions. As Hauvette himself stated in April 1988: ‘Parier sur le VTT, c’était prendre en compte trois facteurs. Premièrement: la tradition du cycle en France. Deuxièmement, le développement des sports de nature: randonnée équestre ou pédestre, 4 x 4, moto ou golf, et troisièmement: le vélo devait lui assui suivre ce retour à la nature.’ But equally, he was aware that the activity needed to be publicized as attractive and associated with existing trends in French sport/leisure. It was thus that he linked VTT to ‘sports de glisse’ in order to ‘l’associer à un mouvement, un état d’esprit: l’image du VTT devait être “fun”’ (Hauvette, 1988). *VTT Magazine* was similarly keen to emphasize the ludic and return-to-nature dimensions of mountain-biking: ‘Là où la voiture s’arrête, le royaume du vélo tout-terrain commence. Il a donc un horizon sans autres limites que celles de son utilisateur. Chacun peut ainsi adapter l’engin à ses aspirations’; (in an explicit reference to the aspirations of May ’68) ‘Sous la roue, l’évasion’; and ‘Le VTT est un vélo “open”, le machin des chemins creux, des fleurs bleues ou de l’émotion, façon “glisse”’ (*VTT Magazine*, 1988).

Hauvette’s clever emphasis on the ‘fun’ characteristics of mountain-biking, and the consequent stressing of the nature of VTT riding as leisure, was naturally effective in attracting the general public to try the new kind of bicycles, but, paradoxically, it tended to adversely affect the recognition of VTT by the *Fédération française de cyclisme* to which the AFMB wished to affiliate. The FFC was heavily oriented towards cycle sport (leisure riding/touring was the responsibility of other federations)

and so was unsure how suitable it would be to incorporate such a 'fun'/*glisse* activity into its supervisory oversight of cycling competition. Nevertheless, the AFMB's tireless promotion of VTT races during the mid-1980s demonstrated the strongly hybrid sport/fun-leisure nature of mountain-biking sufficiently clearly for the FFC to eventually accept the VTT 'discipline' of cycle sport into the federation in 1988, with the AFMB becoming the *Commission nationale du VTT* (CNVTT).¹¹ In 1987 the president of the FFC agreed to award the prizes at the French 'national' championships run by the AFMB, suggesting thereby that a rapprochement was imminent.

In 1987 the French cycle industry had produced two new mountain-bikes in the form of the *Peugeot Alpine* and the *MBK Tracker*, whose predecessor the *Ranger* (1984) had laid claim to be the first French VTT bike; and in 1991 the dynamic French company Décathlon marketed the first in a long and developing range of VTT bikes, the *Mach 2*. During the 1990s, supported by the FFC and by industry, mountain-biking developed rapidly in France in terms of sales (although the vast majority of bikes were imported) and activities (although respondents in the 1995 survey conducted for the Ministry of Tourism [Gamond, 1995] still wished for the federations to cater for the widest possible range of practitioners of VTT, and not just racers). The 1990s also saw attempts by Stéphane Hauvette as head of the CNVTT to collaborate with the *Fédération française de cyclo-tourisme*, who were initially dismissive of mountain-biking, although later in the decade the FFCT accepted affiliation to it by increasing numbers of VTT clubs (*Mountain Bike International*, 1991).¹²

Triathlon: new sport, new cycling, new federation

The difficulties experienced by mountain-biking as a new 'mixed' leisure/sport practice in gaining acceptance by the established cycling federations were also encountered by the new sport of triathlon, which also made its initial development in France during the 1980s and 1990s. Although intrinsically much more clearly a sport than a purely leisure practice, and thus less confusing to hidebound organizations such as the Sports Ministry or vested federal interest-groups, the composite nature of triathlon as swimming, cycling and running meant that it would have analogous problems in finding its place within the organizations and structures of French sport.

Perceived by the public and generally presented by its promoters as yet another sport imported from the USA, triathlon reached France in the early 1980s, where the first high-profile competition was organized

in Nice in 1982.¹³ In 1983 the amateur triathlons of Hyères (Var) and of La Grande Motte (Hérault) were staged, and during 1984 a score or so competitions were run, the season opening with a startling 400 triathletes taking part in the Mureaux triathlon (Yvelines). The Nice–Côte d’Azur race in 1982 had been covered by the television channel Antenne 2, and interest from television for this visually spectacular sport was strong enough for Antenne 2 to follow the season of races during 1984, creating a virtual ‘Coupe de France’ that was planned to reach its finale at La Grande Motte.¹⁴ Although the Grande Motte triathlon was cancelled because of adverse weather, those present decided to attempt the creation of a new sports federation exclusively devoted to triathlon and in October 1984 the *Comité national pour le développement du triathlon* (Conadet) was created. Conadet was obliged to counter attempts by the national federations of swimming, cycling and athletics to take control of the sport.

Just as in the 1890s French national sports bodies had been instrumental in creating the international organizations governing various sports, the inchoate state of the international stewardship of triathlon in the 1980s allowed French initiatives to develop their own governing body in the form of a national federation to lead the search for a world triathlon organization. In November 1984 the *Commission de coordination du triathlon en France* (CCTF) was created, working with the French national Olympic committee (CNOSF) and composed of representatives of the three existing sports federations involved in triathlon (FFN – swimming, FFC – cycling and FFA – athletics).¹⁵ In June 1985 Conadet – associated with CNOSF – was officially recognized by the Sports Ministry, and by the 1986 season there were more than 50 recognized clubs, nearly 90 events and a recognized national round of competitions. When in 1989 the International Triathlon Union (ITU) was set up, its founding congress was held in Avignon during March and April, in advance of the organization of the initial triathlon world championships, also organized in Avignon in August of the same year. France and the nascent *Fédération française de triathlon* (FFTri) instituted in October 1989 were thus at the forefront of the new sport’s institutionalization. Just as the public-sector television channel Antenne 2 had contributed to raising awareness of triathlon in the early 1980s, the 1989 world championships in Avignon were broadcast live by the dynamic and innovative private channel Canal Plus, in a concerted move to cover sports. By 2000 the FFTri had almost 17,000 licensed triathletes (*licenciés*) registered, representing the huge development of the sport in the intervening decade.

'Militant cycling': the Mouvement de défense de la bicyclette, and La Rochelle, the first 'ville cyclable'

As we shall see in following sections, during the 2000s, leisure, utility and 'fun' cycling developed strongly under the influence of greater interest in environmentally friendly everyday transport or leisure (either on extended vacation or as a daily health exercise); a reaction of rejection among some more militant bicycle users towards cars and their stranglehold over urban planning; initiatives from the state to foster the use of cycling; and innovative use of the heritage of cycle sport to commercialize cycle leisure-sport. During the 1980s and 1990s the bases for these trends were laid by the craze for VTT, but also by the developing trend in French society towards environmental sensitivity, and one town in particular was at the forefront of moves towards environmentally responsible transport through the use of bicycles: La Rochelle.

French environmentalism developed initially in the 1970s, building on the foundations of the movement laid in the 1960s and profiting particularly from the protests of May 1968, which focused public attention on – among other things – the ways in which modern consumer society was exploiting the environment for financial gain. Especially during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, whose efforts to foster a *société libérale avancée* of tolerance and unity allowed dissenting voices on all kinds of topics greater freedom than they had enjoyed during France's years under de Gaulle and Pompidou, environmental pressure groups publicized the dangers posed by industry in general, and especially by the French nuclear power programme. Famous struggles between the state and environmental protesters – often linked to extreme left-wing political movements born from May '68 – brought environmental issues to the attention of an often uninterested general public, but some seeds of future political success were sown.¹⁶ The 1970s and 1980s also saw the rise of initiatives and movements based around cycling that linked new interests in environmentalism and some of the new aspirations towards personal freedom and self-expression that had been given voice in May '68. Just two of these early ecology-inspired developments in the cultural and social history of cycling in France are the creation of the *Mouvement de défense de la bicyclette* in Paris in 1974, and the launch in 1975–76 in La Rochelle of a system of free municipal bicycles.

The *Mouvement de défense de la bicyclette* (MDB) was launched in 1974 by Jacques Essel, who thus became one of the first French militants for the role of the bicycle in urban transport. Essel had been run over by a car while cycling in a bus lane, and launched a libertarian-inspired campaign to improve cyclists' safe access to public space. Active both

practically and through writing in favour of cycling's role in society and culture, Essel and his MDB were instrumental in launching and maintaining the visibility of everyday cycling for the general public and the authorities in Paris during the 1970s and 1980s (Granger, Essel and Lafaurie, 1977). Essel became distanced from the organizing committee of MDB in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and a year before his death in 2004 – at a time when both central government and municipal authorities were becoming genuinely interested in the potential of non-polluting transport – the *Mouvement* was renamed *Mieux se déplacer à bicyclette*. Under its new 'management', MDB became a more standard lobby working in favour of better facilities for cyclists in Paris and the better integration of cycle transport with public transport in general.

Also during the mid- and late 1970s, the coastal town of La Rochelle (Charente-Maritime) was the pioneer in France of a system of free bicycles provided by the town council to facilitate the short-range urban travel of its inhabitants and tourist-visitors. Initially launched in 1976 with the encouragement of the town's mayor, Michel Crépeau, who was an ecologically minded member of the *Radicaux de Gauche*, the *vélos jaunes*, available to be borrowed by anyone, have become a symbol of how local authorities, ordinary citizens and environmental transport lobbies can work together to successfully improve urban transit. Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s La Rochelle maintained and improved this system of 350 bicycles and 11 racks, and was central to the setting up in 1989 of the *Club des Villes Cyclables* (Huré, 2009). In the 1980s and 1990s La Rochelle instituted plans to facilitate pedestrian access to the centre of the town, initiated the use of electric vehicles for municipal services and created 20 km of cycle paths (Tallut, 1989).

Later initiatives introduced in Strasbourg, Lyon and Paris in the 2000s learned much from the pioneering and successful projects in La Rochelle, which have over a period of thirty years gradually evolved, increasingly integrating bike-use and the protection of the environment into municipal policy and citizens' everyday lives. In a fuller section in the following chapter, we will discuss in more detail the urban-cycling schemes based around self-service bicycles that evolved in France during the 1990s and 2000s in emulation of La Rochelle's pioneering example.

Jeannie Longo: a sporting giant treated as a sporting dwarf?

Jeannie Longo is a figure who has inspired strong emotions in France, both within the sporting community and in society more widely. First

and foremost, she provoked debate over the place of women in contemporary cycle sport and progressed the cause of female competitive cycling. Secondly, she called into question accepted norms for the behaviour of sporting champions and challenged the relationship between athletes and sporting federations in France. Thirdly, she provided a startling example of longevity and professionalism in a gruelling sporting discipline, and demonstrated how athletes could prepare for their professional lives after competition. Longo was a sporting superstar whose career mirrored and helped initiate changes in French sport and society: in 1989, when she broke the world hour record for a third time, the doyen of French cycling reporters, Pierre Chany, commented on Longo's phenomenal success by saying that 'Cette sacrée bonne femme aura vécu avec les records comme d'autres vivent avec les rhumatismes' (Rodeaud, 1996).

Born in 1958, Jeannie Longo is France's most successful ever woman cyclist. She can also lay claim to being the most successful female cyclist in the history of competition. Over her long career (1979–2004), during which she participated in six Olympic Games, she won 944 races in all disciplines of cycle racing, from hill-climbs through the whole range of road racing, cyclocross, track racing and mountain-biking to the world hour records for traditional bikes and outright performance. She was world champion 13 times and Olympic champion once (but won 30 Olympic and world championship medals), she was French national champion in different disciplines 49 times, and held 38 world records. She currently holds the outright world hour record at 48.159 km (Mexico, 1996) and the athletes' world hour record at 45.094 km (Mexico, 2000). She won the Tour de France *féminin* three times (1987, 1988, 1989) and was placed in the top three on another five occasions (1985, 1986, 1992, 1995, 1996). Her contributions to sport have been recognized by the sporting community as well as by the French state: in 1989 she was elected European Sportswoman of the Year and in 2000 she was named Sportswoman of the Century; she is a Commander of the *Légion d'Honneur* (1986, promoted 2011) and Commander in the *Ordre du Mérite* (2000). Her celebrity in France is such that she has a waxwork figure at the *Musée Grévin*, the French equivalent of Madame Tussaud's.

Longo, women and sport

The French Foreign Ministry presents Longo as 'a champion who takes your breath away' and as 'a paragon of independence, determination and longevity' in a sport that – as is emphasized by the ministry – is still traditionally dominated by men. Longo herself seems to accept that she took on the challenge of succeeding in a sport in which women's competitions

were not taken seriously and for which the extreme physical exertion required sits uneasily with many widespread assumptions about femininity. As her English-language profile by the Foreign Ministry states: ‘She has a charming answer for her detractors: “There are still people who don’t like to see a woman get wrinkles through effort. Personally, I think certain wrinkles can be rather attractive.”’ Sponsorship for Longo was hard to come by, as she was regularly informed that women’s cycling did not correspond to companies’ corporate images, although one small business – Ebly – has courageously supported her throughout much of her career.

Longo is an example of the acceptability/non-acceptability debate that has accompanied women’s competition in various sports, which we have touched on in the context of nineteenth-century women’s cycling in France in an earlier chapter. Much of this debate revolves around the enduring Victorian ideal of femininity, and the notion of acceptability/non-acceptability (although much discussed since the birth of modern sport in the late nineteenth century) was introduced by Eleanor Metheny in 1965 with the suggestion that there were some sports in which it was ‘acceptable’ for women to compete and some where female participation was ‘categorically unacceptable’ (Metheny, 1965). Inherent in this view of women and competition is that sport can involve women in contradictory role expectations, where attributes such as risk-taking, aggression, self-confidence and independence of mind that have traditionally been viewed as male are deemed incompatible with traditionally ‘female’ traits of passivity, dependence, intuitiveness and submissiveness. Endurance cycling, for Metheny, would have been categorically unacceptable as a female sport. Where women take part in sports that seem – in relation to Victorian ideas of gender traits – ‘unfeminine’, criticism and innuendo tend to arise about the sexuality of the athlete involved. Perhaps curiously, there has been little such sexual innuendo surrounding Longo, although she is accused of lacking femininity. The close unit formed by Longo and her trainer-husband Patrice Ciprelli perhaps protects her from innuendos about her sexuality that might afflict other female athletes.¹⁷

The sociologist Catherine Louveau has described Jeannie Longo as a counter-example of any claimed feminization of French sport (Louveau, 2000). Despite Longo’s great media visibility, for instance, less than 10 per cent of the membership of the *Fédération française de cyclisme* is female, and Longo herself is treated by the media in a way that reproduces and underscores traditional social constructions and prejudices about male and female roles. At its simplest, the standard division of roles

in sport between men and women is that men 'do' and women 'appear': men are expected to indulge in action whereas women are supposed to appear attractive. Examples of this prejudice, which is perpetuated by frequent media commentaries on the physical attractiveness of female athletes, are numerous in almost all sports, but Louveau cites the scandalous example of the 1999 Tour de France *féminin*, when the riders were actively encouraged to demonstrate their femininity as well as their sporting abilities by wearing make-up, nail varnish and coiffeured hair (Louveau, 2000: 25).

Longo's long career spanned the 1980s and the 1990s (and the 2000s), decades during which French sport, society and feminism evolved considerably. As an athlete, Longo personified the idea of 'une France qui gagne', but her success often seemed to come at the cost of popularity, both with followers of cycling and her fellow competitors, who found either her prickly attitude or the mere fact that women were competing in the sport of *les géants de la route* disturbing. Longo's image and self-presentation also seemed to find difficulties in establishing a working compromise between aggression and competition on the one hand and femininity and charm on the other. Just as female cyclists of the early years of the bicycle in the late nineteenth century often struggled to find a 'respectable identity', as discussed, for example, by Simpson (2001), it seems that Longo, in the much more liberated late twentieth century, also found the creation of her identity as a female cycle-racing champion hard to maintain.

'Et nous, nous sommes des naines?' was her response to people who think female cycling is different to that of the (male) *géants de la route*. Asked in 1997 what her greatest regret was, she replied that it was 'Que le cyclisme féminin ne soit pas mieux reconnu' by the media and by officialdom (some spectators have always taken an interest). She went on to say:

Oui, je regrette que l'on considère le cyclisme féminin comme un concurrent du cyclisme masculin. Comme nous les filles, nous montions les mêmes cols que ces messieurs, cela ne plaisait pas à tout le monde. Bref, il semble que les géants de la route ne doivent pas être concurrencés par des naines. (Hessège, 1997)

Longo, male champions and (male) sports federations

Naturally, the cycling role-models who were available for Longo as she built her career were male, although as she has pointed out, her background in skiing gave her another set of references. At the start of her participation in racing, the dominant male cyclists were champions such

as the recently retired Eddy Merckx, nicknamed the ‘Cannibal’ in tribute to his all-consuming hunger for victory, and the rising French star Bernard Hinault, who was nicknamed the ‘Badger’ in recognition of his ferocity and tenacity in competition. Longo has herself been christened ‘Longo la Cannibale’. In 2005 a TV commercial for Andros fruit jams featuring Jeannie Longo was singled out by the anti-sexist advertising feminist organization *La Meute* (‘The Pack’) as giving a strong example of non-sexist advertising. The awards ceremony for the ‘Prix Femino’ competition organized by *La Meute* gave first, second and third prizes to adverts for electrical goods and soap products, but commended Andros for using the slogan ‘Le plus grand sportif de tous les temps est une femme!’ Jeannie Longo was present at the event – held in the Hôtel de Ville in Paris on International Women’s Day – and was warmly applauded for the role she has played in demonstrating women’s possibilities in sport.¹⁸

As we have discussed in a previous chapter, one of the first documented instances of women in cycle sport was in Bordeaux in 1869, when women competed in a very early race held in one of the public parks. During the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s debates raged in France, as in other countries, over the social, cultural, medical, sexual and political advisability of women’s adoption of cycling as either recreation, transport or sport. Many studies have been made of women and cycling in these early years, and one recent analysis suggests that by about 1914, the realization by manufacturers that the market for female cycling was an untapped goldmine, combined with the drive for women’s liberation, had finally won the right to cycle for French women (Thompson, 2000). The realm of competitive cycling, however, remained difficult for women to access on equal terms with men, as those women-only races that existed were more often regarded as curiosities than proper examples of true sport.

With the creation of the female version of the Tour de France in 1984, however, it could have been assumed that attitudes and prejudices had moved on, but Longo’s difficulties with the cycling authorities perhaps suggest that the male-dominated sporting establishment of the federations and the sporting media find it difficult to accept a female ‘Cannibal’. Throughout her career she has suffered from a conflictual interaction with the *Fédération française de cyclisme* over a variety of issues including her reliance on her trainer-husband Patrice Ciprelli in races when she is representing France (rather than official state-appointed coaches and *directeurs sportifs*), her difficult relationships with teammates in the French squad, her refusal to use the bikes and equipment

provided to the FFC by its official suppliers, her positive drug test in 1987 (which was quashed), or her demands always to be selected for the French team, even when younger riders needed to gain experience. Even as late as 2005 the FFC's selecting of two younger riders to compete in the Madrid world championships in September, despite Longo's strong season, led to threats that the FFC would be taken to court for age discrimination.¹⁹

Longo's individualistic and dismissive attitude towards team-mates is doubtless based on her awareness of her own innate physical superiority, but her competitive persona as a rider who is 'aggressive, bornée, parano' (Rodeaud, 1996) clashes with the need for collaborative tactics in those cycling disciplines where success is achieved through teamwork, such as road racing. Her defence against criticisms that she is egotistical and flouts the usual sporting codes of team sport is varied, but includes her beliefs that top-class athletes are by nature not egotistical but 'corpocentriques', and thus more attuned to themselves than to the needs of team-mates, and that the organization of women's international road racing, for example, in which national teams may have only very few riders, is less a team sport than one in which it is each rider for herself.

Commenting on Longo's world hour record, established in Mexico City in October 1996, the sports journalist Michel Chemin described her in terms that summarize the way she is perceived by the media, federation, public and fellow competitors: 'Longo la rebelle individualiste, dont on ne saura jamais si elle plus misogyne que misanthrope', or '*La Longo, fière et orgueilleuse jusqu'au cale-pied*' (Chemin, 1996b). A fortnight earlier, Chemin had used the terms 'trublion', 'hors-la-loi' and 'chiraquienne emmerdeuse' in reporting her failed first attempt at the hour record and 11th world championship victory in the Lugano time trial (Chemin, 1996a).²⁰ Part of Longo's animosity towards the FFC is doubtless born of the fact that women's teams are frequently managed by men, and that the FFC is almost entirely staffed by men, who have opposed her wish to assume responsibilities within the federation. One woman who became vice-president of the FFC – Félicia Ballanger, who had won two gold medals at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 – resigned after 18 months of frustration at the divorce between thinking in the federation and the realities of cycling both as a sport and leisure pursuit (Hennion, 2002).

Longevity, training and life after competition

One of Longo's most famous self-descriptions is 'Je suis dure au mal' ('tough and resistant to suffering'). She seems to attribute her phenomenal success to a combination of factors drawn from, firstly, her

upbringing and nature, secondly, her intrinsic capacity for work and training, and thirdly, the highly organized nature of her approach to sport. Her 'psychological profile' or mindset blends a highly developed awareness of the natural world, weather, seasons, fresh air and the solitude of human effort with an iron will never to give up and to succeed at almost any cost, and a logistically efficient scientific organization of training and competition. Much of this mindset is summarized in her book *Vivre en forme*:

J'ai eu la chance, dès mon enfance, de m'épanouir dans un environnement privilégié, au cœur du massif du Mont-Blanc. Les valeurs enseignées par la nature m'ont détournée de l'artificiel. Une alimentation saine, des activités sportives et l'air montagnard ont sûrement été à la base de la solidité de mon organisme. Plus tard, ma volonté d'atteindre des objectifs sportifs mondiaux m'a incitée à prendre en compte tous les paramètres qui mènent à la performance: la programmation de l'entraînement, le choix des compétitions, la recherche technologique, la maîtrise psychologique, mais aussi les atouts qui permettent au corps d'offrir le rendement optimum, la réponse immédiate aux sollicitations dans l'effort: la nutrition et l'hygiène de vie. (Longo, 2002)

Longo is vegetarian and produces much of her food herself in order to monitor its quality – although her parents were not farmers, Longo's interviews are strewn with references to her chickens and an almost peasant-like attention to the details of hard work and effort.

Longo has not, of course, been immune to accusations of drug-taking in the paranoid context of late 1990s cycling and given her overwhelming superiority, but essentially she was considered to be a clean athlete. Two issues that arose concerned her positive testing in 1987 for use of an ephedrine-related stimulant and subsequently, in 2004, her apparent support for the use of the muscle-building dietary supplement creatine. In 1987 she was absolved of taking a prescribed substance, as she claimed it had been contained in a proprietary drug she had taken of whose contents she was unaware. In 2004 the daily paper *Le Parisien* accused her of promoting the sale and use of creatine through her personal website, and after a court case in 2005, the newspaper's claims were upheld, although Longo subsequently appealed. In late 2011 and early 2012, however, significant doubts over the ethics of her husband and trainer Patrice Ciprelli arose, as he was arrested for suspected purchases of the performance-enhancing drug EPO.

Longo is an exemplar of another trend in contemporary professional sport, namely the relatively new concern to ensure the livelihood of former athletes when they have retired from competition through attention to education and training while they are still active. Whereas professional riders of the past might have hoped to open a cycle shop

trading on their former fame, or more rarely to continue in the sport by managing a team or commentating for the media, new frameworks of support created to facilitate the integration of elite athletes into 'normal' employment have widened the range of careers for retired racers. Although as obviously exceptional in terms of her drive to acquire qualifications as she has been to win races – she holds a postgraduate qualification in sports management and another in sports law and economics – Longo has nevertheless demonstrated to other athletes that successful reconversion to non-sporting life is possible, and that preparation for a future after sport begins while an athlete is still active.²¹ As well as co-authoring books on training, health, diet and other related topics and running a website summarizing her career and current business activities, Longo has been employed as a technical advisor on cycling by the French Sports Ministry, a role that made her claimed support for creatine even more damaging.

Longo's political commitment to the neo-Gaullist RPR (Jacques Chirac's party) in the 1990s sometimes aroused comment, especially as she was not averse to flaunting her politics and her political friendships. As a municipal councillor in Grenoble until 1995 she supported the RPR mayor, Alain Carignon, who was later to fall from grace and serve a prison sentence for fraud, and during the period of political 'cohabitation' in 1986 she ostentatiously avoided receiving her *Légion d'honneur* from President Mitterrand, choosing instead to be decorated by the then RPR prime minister, Jacques Chirac.²² Even in politics, however, she is independent, claiming that although she feels more in tune with the sports policies of the Right, she would happily support any party that she felt defended the right values.

The experienced sports journalist for the left-leaning newspaper *Libération*, Michel Chemin, has compared Longo and Marie-José Perec, two sporting champions whose rebellious natures served them well in competition, but suggests that their behaviour has little to teach us about society in general, such is the conventionality of their life and thought outside sport:

Ni Jeannie Longo, ni Marie-José Perec ne recevront jamais le prix Orange pour le prix de la camaraderie. [...] En ces temps d'austérité et de rigueur où la dialectique est soumission ou démission, Jeannie Longo et Marie-José Perec ont ouvert avec succès une troisième voie: la rébellion. Il ne s'agit pas ici de chercher le sens de leur comportement au-delà du champ sportif, tant par ailleurs elles peuvent être d'un conventionnel affligé. (Chemin, 1995)

Such a view must be taken as representing precisely the 'establishment position' on an athlete whose career has challenged accepted notions of

the normal and the acceptable. Overall, Jeannie Longo is a complex example of a modern female sporting hero whose private and public personas fit ill with what the public, fellow athletes and the sporting establishment have traditionally experienced. She is, however, unquestionably an important figure of French cycling, society and culture.

The women's Tours

The Tour de France *féminin* (invented by the *Société du Tour de France*) was first run in the summer of 1984. In a sport that had been dominated for decades by a traditionally macho attitude towards female participation – even as recreation, in many cases – a women's Tour was a significant event. As is detailed in subsequent discussion, since the early 1990s a variety of 'women's Tours' have been organized by competing organizations, with occasional years where no significant women's national stage-race was run, as cycle competition of this nature has struggled to establish itself in the face of gender bias, commercial difficulties and the institutional constraints of the international governance of cycle racing.

The innovation of a women's Tour was opportune. The Tour de France in the late 1970s was struggling to negotiate its way through a number of problems: doping was beginning to emerge as a serious issue; the transition between the Merckx era and what was to become the Hinault era was taking place in a peloton where real stars seemed lacking; and the economic sponsorship of professional cycling was uncertain, as companies hit hard by economic recession in the 1970s withdrew their financing of teams. Hinault's domination of the Tour during the period 1978–86 helped to renew interest in the race among sponsors through his uncompromising attitude towards racing and undeniable charisma. Indeed, Hinault's team sponsors Renault and later La Vie Claire were emblematic of the renewed health of pro-cycling sponsorship in the early and mid-1980s in a period when media coverage of the Tour was strong, and when the reorganization of French television in particular was allowing the organizers of sporting events to tout their products to a growing range of competing state and private television companies. The climate was one of change and opportunity, and the organizers of the Tour were keen to maximize the attractiveness of the race by opening it to amateurs as well as professionals and by encouraging its 'internationalization' through the encouragement of riders hailing from outside the confines of 'old' Europe.

The genesis of the women's Tour

It was in this context of change and opportunity that Félix Lévitan (administrative director of the Tour de France and head of sport at the newspaper *Le Parisien libéré*) launched the idea of a women's Tour in 1983 (Thompson, 2006: 132). Outside the world of the *Société du Tour de France*, the sporting community worldwide had been recognizing that women had the right to compete in the widest possible range of events, regardless of previous biases against the 'weaker' sex's participation in endurance sports, and as Thompson (2006) points out, preparation for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics had included both a women's marathon and a women's bicycle road race for the first time. Although in some ways it therefore seemed almost natural for the Tour to reflect such developments in international sport, especially at a time when media interest in covering the innovation was likely to be highly enthusiastic, there were structural and cultural obstacles to any immediate success for the *Tour féminin*. Culturally, French society in general and the world of cycling and of the Tour in particular were still not wholly at ease with the idea that women could (or should) compete in a sport traditionally deemed to be enormously demanding and, indeed, whose entire image had been manufactured around the notion of 'extreme' male physicality and suffering. Conventional interpretations of gender and gender roles still saw the *Tour féminin* as a difficult reconciliation of – albeit evolving – ideals of femininity and sporting effort and suffering. These issues will be discussed below in more detail, but structurally female cycling in the early 1980s was also still some way from a position of strength. Although women's cycling had been recognized by the UCI and the FFC as a competitive sport since the 1950s, its development had been slow in the 1960s and early 1970s, and even by 1982 only 1,500 women were signed up as members of the FFC (out of a total membership of over 56,000). Because of the slow growth in numbers of competitors, the range of women's races had likewise remained relatively limited, and outdated UCI regulations governing such issues as obligatory rest periods for female riders in stage-races had not been changed. So despite the feeling that the time was right for a women's Tour to be tried, its success was far from guaranteed.

The inaugural women's Tour

Rémy Pigois (1986) has provided a simple account of the early years of the women's Tour, allowing us to present the main features of the event. The inaugural Tour de France *féminin* in 1984 attracted a starting field of 36 women, who competed in six national teams representing coun-

tries – France (two teams) and the Netherlands – where cycling and riding the Tour had long been strong male traditions, and Anglo-Saxon countries – the United States, Canada and Great Britain – where female sporting emancipation had progressed far enough and quickly enough to encourage women to participate in a version of the world’s hardest cycle race. In fact, the first women’s Tour should have seen a field of riders twice the size of that which took the start, as numerous potential entrants could not compete because of commitments in races elsewhere, or were keen to prepare quietly for the Olympics that followed the *Tour féminin*. The two strongest competitors in women’s cycling in the 1980s – Maria Canins of Italy and Jeannie Longo of France – were noticeably absent from the field and the race was eventually won by the American rider Mary-Ann Martin, who beat Hélène Hage of Holland and Deborah Schumway of the USA into second and third places respectively. The race was run in 18 stages and covered a total of 1,080 km (approximately a quarter of the length of the men’s Tour) at an average speed for the winner of almost 36 kph. Only one rider failed to complete the course, and the remaining 35 competitors were quite closely bunched, as the *lanterne rouge* took only 49 minutes longer than the winner’s 29 hours and 39 minutes.

Organized between 30 June and 22 July, the women’s Tour ran in parallel with the Tour de France, partially covering the route of the male professional teams. Because the women’s itineraries generally used only the last 60 km of the daily route set out for the male riders, the stage-finishes of the men’s and women’s Tours coincided, but the start-towns differed. In addition, the women’s racing was broken by five rest days – two more than permitted for the men – which were planned to allow the riders to recover from their efforts. The average stage length was 61 km, and the timings of departures and finishes were carefully arranged so that the women’s race would serve as an innovative sporting distraction for the crowds lining the roads in anticipation of the passing of the *Tour masculin*. The women’s race was thus in effect an ‘opener’ for the *caravane publicitaire*, itself carefully sandwiched between the two races, and this role as advertisement for the men’s Tour (as well as being in general a novelty attracting media attention and debate) was somewhat reflected in the fact that the *Société du Tour* agreed to take on the financing of the women’s race, in the absence of sufficient funding from the national cycling federation, the FFC.

The women’s Tour: changing formats

The women’s Tour in various formulations has now existed for more

than thirty years. As has been suggested, its history has not been completely straightforward. The women's Tour changed formats, organizers and names in reflection of the complex interplay of stakeholders involved in professional cycling and differing views on what women's racing should be. From 1984 until 1989 the *Société du Tour de France* organized a women's race around France called the *Tour de France féminin*, but from 1990 to 1993 the race's format was significantly changed to include countries other than France, being renamed the *Tour de la CEE féminin* (Tour of the European Community), though still organized by the *Société du Tour*. This race was withdrawn from the cycling calendar after its last running in 1993. From 1992 to 2009 another women's race around France was organized by the *Racing Club olympique de Toulouse* (thus running in competition with the *Société du Tour*'s *Tour de la CEE féminin* in 1992 and 1993), called first the *Tour cycliste féminin*, then from 1999 the *Grande boucle féminine internationale* (GBFI). The GBFI was last run in its full form in 2003 (it was not run in 2004) and from 2005 until its final iteration in 2009 it was a less significant race with fewer stages, smaller fields and a lower rating from the UCI. From 2006 to 2010 an alternative *Route de France féminine* was also on the calendar of women's stage-races, organized by *Route et Cycles* magazine. The cancellation of the *Route de France féminine* in 2011 seemingly deprived women's cycling in France – and internationally – of its last remaining major competition, but in 2012 the race was again planned for 4–12 August, with 13 teams of six riders aiming to cover ten stages in the north-east of France.

In the early 1990s the women's Tour was thus organized not by the *Société du Tour* (which had ended its running of the female Tour in 1989 in order to stage the short-lived Tour of the European Community) but by the competing *Team France Organisation* (TFO) of Jean Boué, in conjunction with the Toulouse-based sports club *Racing Club olympique* (RCO). Because of the curious ways in which different organizations can hold different and conflicting rights to the staging of specific races (a situation that dates back to famous rivalries between newspapers over the running of Paris–Brest–Paris in the 1890s and early 1900s), RCO held the rights – allocated by the UCI – to the dates in July allotted for the *Tour (cycliste) féminin*, but TFO was the actual organizer of the race in practice.

During the mid-1990s the women's Tour de France organized by TFO–RCO was repeatedly pursued in the law courts by the litigious *Société du Tour*, which saw the naming of the race as either the *Tour cycliste féminin* (until 1998) or as the *Grande boucle féminine* as an abuse

of intellectual property rights. In addition to these legal problems, TFO–RCO encountered other difficulties in staging the race. In part these vicissitudes were caused by the intransigent hostility of the *Société du Tour*, but the inherent complexity of running a race on the scale of the women’s Tour also proved problematic. The fields of riders generally varied from 60 to 90, competing either as national teams, commercial teams or mixes of national and pro-teams. Because of the impracticality of running the race at the same time as the men’s Tour, the TFO–RCO’s women’s tour was staged in August, sometimes conflicting with preparation and recuperation for other competitions held in the autumn. Logistically and financially, too, the women’s Tour proved to be something of a challenge for a hybrid organization lacking the practical expertise, political influence and commercial power of the *Société du Tour*: over the years, the TFO–RCO Tour acquired something of a reputation for mismanagement, with riders complaining regularly about lengthy stages and time-consuming and tiring transfers between stages (occasioned in part by the difficulties in finding interested host-towns), as well as unpaid prize money. Tensions between TFO and RCO came to a head in 2002–04 when a court case centred on a dispute over the payment of prize money for the 2002 race split the partnership, leaving TFO with the rights to the race in 2003, but with no confirmed dates. The 2003 race was eventually run – by Boué’s new company Vélo-Féminin – in difficult circumstances caused by the late notification of new dates from the UCI. In 2004 no race was organized, but in 2005 the competition returned in abbreviated form as a much shorter stage-race (five days). At the same time, the (equally truncated) competing race proposed by the magazine *Routes et Cycles* in the form of the *Route de France féminine* was hotly contested in the courts by RCO, which deemed the race to conflict unfairly with its own planned challenge to Vélo-Féminin’s competition, the *AuTour des Féminines*.

Les géantes de la route: suffering and femininity?

The women’s Tour de France in its various and confusing forms has, partly because of its high visibility, been a primary site of the renegotiation of French attitudes towards elite sport and gender roles. The discussions and debates that arose around the first Tour *féminin* in 1984 about women and endurance sport (which have continued to some extent ever since) have summarized much of France’s enduringly macho attitudes towards femininity. In many ways, the fact that consideration of gender roles in sport and society in general was focused through the somewhat distorting prism of the world’s hardest, most macho, most

atavistically physical sporting event has perhaps distorted the discussion. Elite competitive cycling is indisputably one of the most demanding endurance sports, and the traditional rhetoric of the Tour itself and of its media commentators through the decades has been of male effort, male sacrifice, male bravery and male survival: in the context of such a tradition of discourse and representation the women's Tour raised many questions.

Media commentary on the first women's Tour focused on the one hand on the competitors' physical abilities (speed and strength) and on their psychological qualities (willpower, courage), and on the other hand, on their appearance and general behaviour. In the first case, most of the coverage trod an uneasy path between machismo and feminism, oscillating between the traditional misogyny of those who felt that women had no place in the hard world of competitive cycling, and those who deemed that women racers were performing athletically and morally in ways that equalled male exploits. In the second case, discussion centred on the femininity of the riders' appearance and behaviour in an attempt to determine, essentially, whether it was possible to combine (traditionally) feminine appearance and domesticity of behaviour with the extreme physical effort and fatigue and competitive instinct required to succeed in racing. As has been pointed out by Thompson, the terms of the debate had scarcely changed from those of moral panics in the late nineteenth century over the 'indecent' of women cyclists and their attire (Thompson, 2000). In his brief but incisive treatment of the first women's Tour Thompson (2006: 132–39) describes how one potential difference was that some commentators were extremely positive about the sporting quality – both moral and physical – of performances in the 1984 Tour, claiming that the riders knew how to suffer agony in the same ways as men did, praising the apparently high average speed and the fact that all but one of the racers made it to Paris. With the benefit of hindsight, it could seem that such praise was motivated at least in part by an early French form of 'gender-correctness', and was born of the desire of everyone – promoters, managers, journalists – to make the inaugural event appear a success. In fact, in comparison with not only the male Tour of 1984 (4,020 km at 35 kph, admittedly EPO-assisted) but with subsequent *Tours féminins*, the race of 1984 was short and not particularly fast or competitive, so praise of the very low attrition rate (one retiree, because of a broken collarbone) as evidence of female abilities to resist pain was perhaps not really justified.

Overall, the women's Tour has been an example of what Terret (2007: 300–08) has described as a situation in which 'performance

féminine' often occurs within a context of 'séduction et plafond de verre'. The history of the *Tour féminin* (in all its forms) has been marred by obstructiveness from the Tour de France itself, by difficulties in obtaining finance, and by the problems of overcoming gender stereotyping. It remains, nevertheless, an intriguing case-study of the ideology and practice of cycle racing in France, more than a century after the invention of the Tour de France upon which it is modelled.

* * *

Setting to one side the signal success of male French professional riders (Hinault, Fignon) and teams (Renault, La Vie Claire) in France's national annual cycling race during the early 1980s, people's experience of the bicycle and cycling in France during the 1980s and the 1990s was much coloured by high-profile *female* cycle sport and by changes in the nature of the cycle industry and cycling as a recreational pastime. Apart from, and separate to, the final flourish of male French dominance in the Tour, the changing social and cultural values of the 1980s and 1990s included high-profile women's emancipation in sport. Jeannie Longo's example as a female *Campionnissima* whose exploits equalled, if not surpassed, those of the most celebrated male racing cyclists will long endure as a subject of wonder and admiration, as well as for the contribution that she made to furthering the cause of women's competitive cycling and emancipation overall. Admittedly, the future of the women's Tour de France seems less assured, but it remains an intriguing case-study of the difficulties that surround female elite professional cycling and of the philosophies of women's involvement in sport in general and endurance sports in particular. In terms of the cycle industry, although Cycles Follis in Lyon closed in 2007, the tradition of artisan frame-building is maintained there by a former employee, and high-tech top-of-the range frames and components are produced in ever-increasing numbers and diversity by the flourishing companies Time and Look, as well as by a growing high-tech sports sector in general, which develops new and more efficient styles of retailing and distribution. During these decades, cycling overall was indeed in a process of transformation, not only in terms of gender, technology and commerce/industry, but also in the ways in which new uses and meanings of the bicycle and of cycling were developed in mass-participation leisure and sport (VTT and triathlon) and, more radically, in the growing identification between cycling and ecology.

Notes

- 1 Hinault is one of the key figures of the contemporary Tour de France and of French sport in general in the late twentieth century – for more discussion, see a forthcoming study by Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, ‘Bernard Hinault: national champion or sporting celebrity?’, currently in preparation. Hinault and Fignon are still, at the time of writing, the last French winners of the Tour de France, and arguably represent the end of French and even European dominance of the Tour as it has internationalized so successfully in the 1990s and 2000s, with multiple wins for the American rider Lance Armstrong and, in 2011, the Australian Cadel Evans. 2012 saw a British winner, Bradley Wiggins.
- 2 http://www.decathlon.fr/ecfr/m/zip/37351_1_3.zip_dir/entreprise/histoire.html (accessed 9 March 2012)
- 3 The discussion that follows is based on interviews undertaken by Paul Benneworth and Hugh Dauncey in April 2006 with the managing directors of Look and Time, on-site in Nevers. Originally founded in 1951 as a single company, in 1987 the company split into two with the creation of Time. Since 1987 the two firms have led parallel existences in the high end of the French, European and world cycle component industry. Both companies attach enormous importance to innovation, new technologies and products.
- 4 Look, for example, has been supported in its development of high-technology carbon-fibre frames for bicycles by the Oséo organization, set up by French government to help foster the adoption and use of high-technology processes by small and medium-sized businesses. Oséo is a partnership between the French national agency for innovation (ANVAR) and the public-sector development bank for small/medium sized firms (BDPME). The ‘585’ carbon frame developed in the mid-2000s benefited notably from this support. See: http://www.oseo.fr/a_la_une/paroles_d_entrepreneurs/archives_reportages_lci/lci/look_cycle_international (accessed 28 February 2012) and http://www.pce.oseo.fr/a_la_une/paroles_d_entrepreneurs/autres_temoignages/look_cycle_international (accessed 28 February 2012)
- 5 The term *sport californien* in French perhaps most strictly refers to physical activities that reached France in the 1970s and 1980s from the US, and whose ‘playful’ and individualistic nature rendered them problematic for assimilation by the rigid structures of French sports federations. Typical sports in this category were skateboarding, street basketball or football, surfing or rollerblading. Mountain-biking, as a sport whose origins are generally thought to have been in California, seems to qualify as well, although to a lesser extent. See Loret (1995) and Loret and Waser (2001) for discussion.
- 6 The French company that capitalized perhaps most directly and successfully on the boom in demand for high-quality mountain bikes was probably Lapiere Cycles, located in Dijon, a family firm that, although originally founded in 1946, was able to predict the boom in MTB riding in the 1980s, sponsoring riders with their bikes from 1988 and dominating the market niche.
- 7 The PP65 pedal was designed in 1984. For more details on the innovative approach of Look and Time to cycling componentry and on the links between elite cycle sport and technological innovation, see a forthcoming article by Paul Benneworth and Hugh Dauncey, ‘“It’s all about the bike”: French Innovation policy and Cycle-sport’, currently in preparation.
- 8 The discussion in this section is partly based on conversations with the manager of the Follis workshop, M. Jean-Claude Cholet.
- 9 *Une randonneuse*: a touring bike; *cadre de course*: racing frame.

- 10 The Follis mechanic Roger Billet won the Poly de Chanteloup in 1946, and also beat the record for climbing Mont Ventoux set by the professional racing star René Vietto. He became known as the 'Roi des cyclotouristes' (*L'Equipe*) and the 'Champion des cyclotouristes' (*Sport-Vu*).
- 11 After La Plagne in August 1983, it would seem that VTT in France went through a period of 'incubation' until essentially 1986, as the AFMB lobbied manufacturers (especially Peugeot, who through their presence in the US were more aware of MTBs than other French constructors), raised awareness by participating in cycle industry trade fairs and tried to convince public and para-public authorities such as the Sports Ministry, the FFC and various regional chambers of commerce of the importance of the new *sport-loisir*. In 1986 the spectacular *24 heures d'Auvergne* race raised awareness further, and combined with the break-through of sponsorship from the *Chambre économique de la Loire* for the Saint Etienne–Clermont race, heightened industry, federation and government attention on VTT.
- 12 FFCT officials reportedly described VTTs as 'vélos de cirque'.
- 13 The American sports-management group IMG-McCormack was instrumental in bring the sport to Europe, thereby furthering the careers of US stars such Mark Allen, who won the Nice race in 1982 and many others that year.
- 14 Antenne 2 produced a documentary on the 1982 race in Nice entitled 'Voyage au bout de la souffrance' which naturally stressed the 'extreme' nature of the sport. Rather than discouraging people from adopting the sport, this doubtless served as positive publicity. Antenne 2 also sponsored a 14-race round of triathlons during 1984 (the Antenne 2-Sportus-Coq Sportif-Wander-Jogging International series).
- 15 Seven members of the CCTF represented Conadet, two each for the swimming, cycling and athletics federations, and one representing CNOSEF. Conadet was thus placed 'in charge'.
- 16 The now emblematic campaigns of the Larzac plateau in southern France (where protesters set up to farm on land earmarked by the Defence Ministry for a military base) or at Plogoff in Brittany (where demonstrations against a nuclear power station were brutally dispersed by riot police) set the tone for the development of French ecology in the 1970s and 1980s: groups of activists lobbying – sometimes violently – an indifferent state.
- 17 The Billie Jean King case in the US in the early 1980s was a prime example of this kind of gender intolerance. The French lesbian tennis player Amélie Mauresmo has in the 2000s attracted less unfavourable comment on her sexuality, perhaps partly because of French laws and customs regarding the private life of celebrities.
- 18 For the website of *La Meute*, see <http://www.lameute.fr> (accessed 18 March 2010).
- 19 In 1992 Longo won a court case against the FFC which had wanted to oblige her to use Look pedals and official supplier wheels for the Barcelona Olympic Games. She subsequently agreed to use the wheels, if not the pedals.
- 20 The terms can loosely be translated as 'trouble-maker', 'outlaw' and 'trouble-stirring female follower of Chirac'.
- 21 She holds a *Maîtrise de Gestion* and a *DESS in Droit économique du sport*.
- 22 In January 2011 she was promoted to the rank of Commander in the *Légion d'Honneur*. And in June 2011 she won her fourth French national time trial in a row (2008–11) at the age of 52.

French Cycling in Quest of a New Identity, 2000–2011

Cycling of all kinds in France during the 2000s has been the subject of increased interest from citizens and the state. The cycle industry has benefited from a growing uptake of cycling as recreational sport, transport/personal mobility and recreational leisure. And professional cycle sport, in the form of the Tour de France, has maintained its hold on the popular imagination, despite frequent suspicions that the endemic drug-taking of the 1990s that culminated in the ‘Tour of Shame’ in 1998 could sound the death-knell of the event. In 2003 no less official an institution than the august *Bibliothèque nationale de France* at Tolbiac hosted a conference to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Tour.¹ The new-found popularity of the Tour was in part due to the heavy mediatisation – by *L’Equipe* and by most other French newspapers as well as other media – of the phenomenal success of the US rider and cancer-survivor Lance Armstrong, whose seven wins in the event inspired admiration, suspicion and resentment in equal measure among sports commentators, fans and the general public. The French public avidly consumed books by or about Armstrong (Armstrong, Jenkins and Renaudo, 2000; Armstrong, Jenkins and Girard, 2003; Ballester and Walsh, 2006; Laborde, 2006; Ducoin, 2009; Ledanff, 2010). If the ambivalence over Armstrong’s domination of pro-racing’s flagship event reflected the enduring French love–hate relationship with the United States since 1945 and before, it was also driven by misgivings about his often-alleged but never-proven use of performance-enhancing ‘preparation’ (something of a new concern, historically, given the long history of doping in pro-cycling) and by a distaste for his business-like method of winning, deemed by some to be cynical and disrespectful to the traditions and ethics of sport. Thus what we can call the ‘Armstrong Affair’ of the 2000s mobilized concerns around the ‘purity’ of sport similar to those which in the 1880s and 1890s had exercised defenders of amateurism against professionalism, of pacing against individual riding or other principles of fair competition. Although there had been little awareness in the

founding decades of cycling in France of the need to protect the environment (although similar issues could perhaps be found in inchoate form in the defence of recreational tourism or the philosophy of long-distance riding developed by *Vélocio*), developing concerns in the 2000s over urban and rural cycling as a sustainable form of personal mobility nevertheless echo ongoing linkages throughout the decades between the bicycle and freedom, independence and solidarity.

In this chapter, we shall first consider how the bicycle has contributed to and facilitated environmentalism in France through government recognition of public interest in cycling and its importance in reducing the externalities of poor health among French citizens and traffic-congested urban centres. We shall look at the state's *Monsieur Vélo* appointed in 2004 to champion cycling throughout government, and then, building on the brief evocation of La Rochelle's urban-cycle scheme of the late 1970s and 1980s in the previous chapter, consider the major self-service cycle systems implemented in Strasbourg, Lyon and Paris. Secondly, we will discuss the new forms of cycling recreation in sport and leisure that have arisen in the 2000s, as well as the more militant urban activism represented by the *Vélorution* movement. Thirdly, because the Tour de France is still important in contributing to French debates about the identity of France and the nature of sport, we shall look at the 'Armstrong Affair'; and we shall conclude with a survey of the current state – at the end of the 2000s – of cycling in France, as revealed by a comprehensive recent official survey and weighty report.

The bicycle and 'environmentalism'

From the 1990s, but especially in the early years of the new millennium, there was rising interest in France in environmental issues and in the ways in which lifestyles could be adapted to reduce society's impact on ecology. Cycling was one of the major strands in France's renewed concern with balancing the demands of modern life with more sustainable approaches to the environment. Although France is in many ways one of the *lanternes rouges* of cycling in Europe in terms of transport – only 3 per cent of trips are made by bike in France, compared with 10 per cent in Belgium and Germany, and 27 per cent in Holland² – citizens and government and a whole range of stakeholders in cycling coalesced around the need to promote cycling as an environmentally friendly (and healthy) mode of transport. Following the initiative of La Rochelle, which instituted a modest free cycle system in the mid- and late 1970s that progressively

became integrated during the 1980s and 1990s into a more ambitious plan to encourage alternative means of transport in the town, in the 2000s major cities such as Strasbourg, Lyon and Paris also embraced cycling as part of the solution to urban transport congestion.

Monsieur Vélo: government planning for cycling

Attempts to create a coordinated government approach to cycling as a non-polluting means of transport and thus a way of protecting the environment date essentially from 1994 and the creation of a *Comité de suivi de la politique du vélo* (CSPV), and, during the latter part of the 1990s, government requests to the Ministry of Transport to consider the feasibility of cycling infrastructures in new transport systems. With increasing awareness of the gravity of pollution, the 1996 *Loi sur l'air et l'utilisation rationnelle de l'énergie* (LAURE) further underlined the importance of cycle transport, as did the 2000 *Loi sur la solidarité et le renouvellement urbain* (SRU), which helped to join up the thinking of transport policy and urban planning and compel towns and cities to include proper provision for cycle travel in their transport plans. State support for cycling and the cultural and social importance of cycling as an everyday practice has thus come essentially from growing concerns about climate change, pollution and congestion. The practical work of the CSPV – modifying the Highway Code in favour of cycling in 1998 and 2003, launching the national mission for *véloroutes et voies vertes* in 2003, organizing the international conference 'Vélocity' in Paris in 2003 – as well as its role in coordinating the interaction of the numerous stakeholders in French cycle policy – government ministries, regional/departmental authorities, user associations, the SNCF and RATP and other organizations – prepared the ground for serious initiatives in 2004 and 2006 in favour of cycling for commuting, leisure and tourism.³

In March 2004 the Raffarin government considered the Le Brethon report (Le Brethon, 2004) on how cycling could be encouraged in France, which came from the work undertaken by the CSPV. One of the first practical suggestions of this report was that overall government policy should be coordinated by a 'cycling Czar' – a *Monsieur Vélo* – who would have general oversight of all policy issues pertaining to the use of bicycles in urban transport. This 2004 report on the state of cycling in France – *Propositions pour encourager le développement de la bicyclette en France* – set out how important cycling was considered to be in terms of a wide range of public-policy fields: urban planning, quality of life, health, solidarity and *cohésion territoriale* (the linking of different areas by tourist cycle routes / *voies vertes*, for example). The report concluded,

in a rather typically *dirigiste* fashion, that although various initiatives had been launched during the previous decade, there was a certain amount of confusion around planning for cycling, and that a clear policy could best be achieved firstly by strengthening the cross-departmental coordination of decision-making and secondly by defining a single clear objective. *Monsieur Vélo* was charged with improving coordination, and the concrete target suggested by the report was that of increasing the percentage of daily trips made on bikes in towns.

The current *Monsieur Vélo*, Hubert Peigné, was appointed in April 2006, and was previously in charge of the *Comité de suivi de la politique du vélo*, and thus has significant experience of the sector; he is helped in his task by other *messieurs Vélo* in each French *département*, whose job is to ensure that cycling is considered in any new transport infrastructures.⁴ The three-year promotional plan for cycling that Peigné was charged with preparing appeared in summer 2007, entitled *Développer l'usage du vélo dans notre vie quotidienne*, and set out a number of areas in which progress was needed to move France from the bottom range of European countries ranked by use of cycling (0.2 km/day on average, and only 3% of transport by bicycle).⁵ This was a situation that had obviously concerned Le Brethon in her 2004 report, and from 2007 onwards, once a budget had been allocated to his activities, Peigné's team managed to work quite effectively in favour of cycling, carrying out numerous studies of the strengths and weaknesses of French cycling and identifying how transport infrastructures in both urban and rural environments could be improved to encourage mobility through cycling. Peigné's responsibility as cycling Czar was renewed for another three-year term in late 2009 and he continued his coordinating and analytical activities. In July 2011 a further working party on the development of cycling as leisure and transport was set up, with the brief of drawing up a *Plan national vélo*, and in January 2012 the plan (Goujon, 2012) was submitted to the minister for transport, Thierry Mariani.

Urban commuter cycling: Strasbourg and Lyon

Various cities and towns in France have taken measures to increase the use of bicycles by citizens in order to decrease traffic congestion and inner-city pollution. In Rennes, 200 bicycles were supplied for use by residents and tourists in June 1998; the cycles were garaged at a variety of 'stations' throughout the town and their borrowing was administered via an intelligent card system. Whereas in Rennes the scheme was relatively small-scale and run by the advertising hoarding company Adshel, Bordeaux implemented a more ambitious system, run by the city author-

ities. There the council launched a scheme in June 2001 by which 2,000 bicycles were made freely available to local inhabitants. Cycles were lent out to individuals for periods of between one week and one month, at no cost to their users, all maintenance and repair being undertaken by the municipality. Also in June 2001 the home of the French cycle industry, Clermont-Ferrand, introduced a system whereby holders of city travel-passes could make use of 50 normal bicycles or 50 electric cycles, available from two hire points in the town. Although Paris has also endeavoured to improve facilities for city cyclists, the two major urban centres that have made the most significant efforts to encourage the take-up of cycling have been Strasbourg and Lyon.

In Strasbourg, the first *Plan vélo* was instituted as early as 1978, being rejuvenated in the 1994 by the new socialist mayor, Catherine Trautmann, when the radial pattern of cycle paths developed since the late 1970s began to be transformed into a proper network of routes covering the whole city and adjoining areas, and when a *Charte du vélo* was drawn up setting out the principles of the municipality's support for urban cycle transport. Strasbourg's efforts to encourage healthy, pollution- and congestion-free commuting and leisure transport have been supported by the adjoining Bas-Rhin *département* (which has a strong system of rural cycle paths), and in 2001 studies of commuting patterns in the city centre revealed that between 2,000 and 5,000 bikes passed through key points such as the Pont d'Austerlitz or the Quai Pasteur (Hauser, 2001). In addition to these achievements, in the early-to-mid-2000s Strasbourg's commitment to cycling gained new vigour, supported by the new legislative framework of the LAURE and the SRU and redynamized by the new mayoral team of Fabienne Keller and Robert Grossman, who gained control of the city in 2004. Whereas in 1978 there had been only 53 km of cycle paths in the city, rising to 150 km in 1993, by 2006 Strasbourg's extended metropolitan area (the *Communauté urbaine de Strasbourg*) boasted 483 km of cycle paths, over 3,000 short-term cycle park-points in city-centre streets, and almost 1,000 secure cycle-storage areas in car parks and transport nodes. Strasbourg's slogan is 'La ville de France qui a un vélo d'avance' – municipal spending on cycle-related issues amounts to about €10 per inhabitant per year – but the key word in the town's policy is 'ecomobility' or the promotion of all means of transport that reduce reliance on the car. In this scheme, cycling has a major role to play, especially in terms of the interrelation between cycle trips and public transport: a significant detail of Strasbourg's innovations has been the facilitating of links between cycles and trams and trains. In some ways, Strasbourg's strategy has been a

‘classic’ case of encouraging eco-friendly transport through infrastructures – cycle paths and parking areas – with uptake of these facilities being supported by strong political/municipal communication, provision of hire bikes and some reviews of legislation.⁶

In Lyon, which developed its substantive policy towards cycling considerably later than Strasbourg, the approach has been somewhat different, blending attention to the infrastructural needs of cyclists with an innovative partnership with private industry to provide hireable cycles. Strasbourg has always provided bikes for hire at strategic city-centre points (1,500 pickup points and 20,000 bikes planned for end-2007), but Lyon (and also Paris) were prominent in the mid-2000s for their collaboration with the advertising hoarding firm JC Decaux (Jérôme, 2007; Girard, 2007). The facilities for cyclists in central Lyon were much criticized in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and Lyon was indeed seen as being much too dependent on car transport, despite the creation of tramways in the late 1990s (Lamy, 2002). In March 2001 the *Verts* party in Lyon produced a report lobbying for greater support for cycling and as thinking in the town hall gradually turned towards the opportunity of reducing Lyon’s lag in environmentally friendly transport, a *Plan Vélo* was eventually set out in 2003, forming part of the conurbation’s overall *Plan modes doux* (or means of sustainable transport) (Massin, 2005). Part of the *Plan Vélo* included the construction of 200 extra kilometres of cycle paths, and also the implementation of a system of bikes for hire, providing citizens with ready-to-hand cycles for short-distance travel within the city. The *Vélo’V* facility was subsequently launched in May 2005, as a partnership between the Greater Lyon council and JC Decaux. In exchange for the contract to provide Lyon’s needs in ‘street furniture’ over a period of years, JC Decaux promised to run a network of bikes from a large number of pick-up and drop-off points, providing and maintaining the bikes free-of-charge to Greater Lyon, and allowing free use of the facility for users needing bikes for less than half an hour (or an hour for users holding a Lyon public transport travel-pass). For longer periods of hire, costs were set at low sums – €1 or €2 per hour – so the network was actually not particularly profitable for JC Decaux, in the face of what transpired to be quite heavy maintenance costs, being financed mainly from the advertising returns from the company’s hoardings in Lyon. With over 2,000 bikes available from 250 stations located approximately every 300 metres in Lyon and Villeurbanne, the network was sufficiently dense and reliable – despite various complaints about the quality of the cycles, broken machines, the need to register to use the facility or use a bank card, and the increase in

advertising surfaces – to be deemed successful after a year of operation (Landrin, 2006). Lyon's experience of *Vélo'V* encouraged Brussels to introduce the facility in 2006 under the name *Cyclocity*, and Paris implemented a similar system in 2007. The public–private partnership between municipal councils and JC Decaux is seen as a convenient mechanism by which city authorities can encourage citizens to use sustainable transport whose provision and upkeep is guaranteed by external franchising, thus allowing the public sector to concentrate more on infrastructure. For some cycling/transport pressure groups, however, JC Decaux's increased involvement in public space through the advertising allowed on the cycle stations, and even the minor costs entailed by users, represent an unacceptable compromise from what should, in their view, be a totally free, public-sector managed scheme.

Vélib' in Paris

The *Vélib'* system of urban cycles was introduced to central Paris in July 2007. Following the example of Lyon, rather than Rennes – which in June 1998 had partnered the Clear Channel street furniture/outdoor advertising company in the provision of the *Vélo à la carte* facility – Paris chose JC Decaux to manage its bicycle-sharing project. Initially proposed by the media-savvy socialist mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, who was known for his high-profile but sometimes kitschy initiatives to effect change in Parisian society and politics, the project was initially viewed with some scepticism, but it has in fact proved to be remarkably successful, albeit with various problems and criticism from some quarters. Initially set up with 750 hire-stations and 7,500 bicycles, the scheme has expanded to provide more than 20,000 bicycles and 1,200 stations. In terms of its finances and the numbers of bicycles hired, *Vélib'* was sufficiently successful during its first year of operation for the Paris council authorities to decide that the scheme should be extended outside central Paris into the surrounding suburbs of the *petite couronne*. Legal wrangling between Clear Channel and the Ville de Paris over the automatic extension of JC Decaux's contract for central Paris to cover the *petite couronne* delayed the implementation of the suburban scheme until 2009.

Although 26 million hires were made in the first year of operation and 200,000 subscribers signed up, the number of subscribers has since gradually declined to approximately 180,000 in July 2011, as users have seemed to prefer a more 'opportunistic' use of the system. The fall in subscriptions is perhaps influenced by the practical rather than legal problems suffered by *Vélib'*, some of which are due to the topography

of Paris, some caused by social issues outside the control of JC Decaux and the city council, and some resulting from operational mistakes. The hilly nature of some areas of Paris has resulted in uneven patterns of return to the docking stations, with elevated areas such as Montmartre suffering scarcity of bicycles; added to the general problems of the computerized system that ensures satisfactory matching of supply and demand, this has frequently discouraged potential users. The system has also suffered from substantial vandalism and theft as well as from broken-down bicycles: the third generation of improved bicycles is currently in use, and an astonishing 80 per cent of the nearly 21,000 machines have suffered from theft or vandalism (at one stage in late 2009 only some 14,000 machines were fit for hire). In addition to the sometimes uneven availability of *Vélib*'s, the hire-stations could not be located at railway stations until late 2010, initially because advertising on SNCF property was contracted to Clear Channel rather than JC Decaux (until 2008) and subsequently because JC Decaux and the SNCF could not agree on terms.

In addition to these practical difficulties, the *Vélib*' scheme has suffered criticisms that might be deemed more 'ideological', emanating principally from the essentially left-wing cycling organizations and also from trades unions concerned at the apparent exploitation of *Vélib*' workers by JC Decaux. *Vélorution*, for instance, has been dismissive of what it sees as an unholy alliance between the socialist mayor of Paris and the commercial advertising empire in charge of what should rather be – in their view – a collectively provided, publicly run and free-to-the-user service. For *Vélorution* and other 'militant' cycling associations, JC Decaux slogans such as 'Le Vélib' est à vous – protégez-le!' disingenuously distract Parisians from the fact that the *Vélib*' system is merely the price/bribe paid by JC Decaux for its previous long-term contract for street-furniture advertising to be renewed in 2007, as well as being a cash cow for the city council, rather than the philanthropic and personally liberating revolution in personal urban mobility that it should be.⁷ Attacking the perceived 'neo-liberal' take-over of individual utility cycling from a more traditional direction is the trades union and communist denunciation of the low wages, long hours and generally poor working conditions suffered by many *Vélib*' employees (Laske and Petitdémange, 2008; Chaignon, 2008). And conversely, the right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro* has been consistently critical of the *Vélib*' scheme, denouncing its costs, inefficiencies and technical problems in order to undermine the socialist-led Paris council (Tabet, 2008).

In May 2010 a study conducted for the *Commissariat général du*

développement durable concluded that, in socioeconomic terms, France's self-service bicycle facilities were essentially breaking even, but that it was mostly in the larger cities such as Lyon and Paris, where the facilities could be used most intensively, that real benefits could be gained (Cabanne, 2010). It is interesting to note that it is not state-backed national projects but rather 'local' big-city systems of self-service cycling that have succeeded, suggesting that for the promotion of cycling, as for other initiatives such as the encouragement of football and football clubs, it has proved to be governance at city/region level which is currently most responsive in France.

New forms of cycling: sport, activism, leisure/tourism

During the 2000s amateur recreational sport developed in ways that reflected the huge importance of the Tour de France to practising cyclists as well as the population as a whole: thousands of riders regularly signed up to events that mirrored the routes taken by Tour stages. The passion of more urban and everyday cyclists was also evident in the (counterculture) activism of those who swelled the ranks of organizations that lobbied in favour of better cycling infrastructures and policies in French towns and cities, and in rural France, tourism on country cycle paths and tracks.

L'Etape du Tour, L'Etape de Légende and 'cyclosporatives'

L'Etape du Tour, an annual event in which thousands of highly prepared sports-leisure cyclists cover the route of one of the Tour's more mountainous stages, was first run in 1993. It has now become a major national sporting fixture that reflects the passionate attachment of high-performing leisure cyclists to the Tour de France and to the competitive genre of the *cyclosporitive*. In 2007 a similar event was inaugurated – the *Etape de Légende* – that likewise draws on the enthusiasm of *cyclosporitif* cyclists to compete on the routes of the Tour de France. Participation in both of these races is international (although strongly dominated by French riders) and represents a lucrative commercial exploitation of the Tour's enduring popularity and sporting heritage. The *Etape du Tour* was originally run and sponsored by the monthly cycling magazine *Vélo-Magazine* (part of the Amaury media group), which organized the event between 1993 and 2007 in conjunction with the Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO), which owns and runs the Tour de France itself. Since 2007 the *Etape du Tour* has been run in partnership between ASO

and the Mondovélo cycle-sales subsidiary of the consortium Groupe Sport 2000.⁸

The *Etape du Tour* (EdT) and more recently the *Etape de Légende* (EdL) arguably form a special category of *cyclosporatives*, both because of their predominantly 'national' and international nature (in contrast with the majority of *cyclosporatives*, whose identity is generally linked to famous regional riders or specific areas of rural France, and which are run by local cycling clubs) and because of their linkage to the Tour, as a national sporting event. Because of their scale (several thousands of riders), and the desire on the part of their organizers to commercialize their running to the highest degree, they represent a significant financial stake. Not only do the two races bring thousands of competitors and their families to stay in the area of the races, thus considerably stimulating tourism, but various sporting holiday/tour operators work in partnership with the race organizers to provide packaged travel and accommodation for foreign participants. Numerous industrial interests sponsor these races in order to gain publicity; for example, the Taiwanese company Giant was 'official partner' of the EdT in 2005–07 (*Le Cycle*, 2006).⁹ The events represent a highly successful commercial exploitation of the 'back-catalogue' of the Tour de France, managed through the same organizational techniques (negotiation with *villes-étapes* and local police, for example). The first *Etape de Légende* was run on 23 September 2007 along the route of Stage 8 from the 1967 Tour de France: Strasbourg–Ballon d'Alsace. The Ballon d'Alsace was the first mountain stage included in the Tour, in 1905, and so the *Etape de Légende* was contributing doubly to the construction of the 'memory' of the Tour as a national sporting event. Not only was the race an opportunity to review the early years of the invention of the Tour, but it also evoked the glory days for French cycling of 1967, when the stage was won by French champion Lucien Aimar.

The intrinsic rationale of both the EdT and the EdL is that participants follow the same route as the professional riders of the true Tour de France. For the EdT, the route is taken by the amateurs only a week or so before the Tour peloton, whereas the 'heritage' dimension of the EdL means that the relationship between contemporary competition and 'legend' is more historical. Both the EdT and the EdL are competitive, highly so for the top riders especially, but to a lesser degree for almost all the participants. More so than the majority of French *cyclosporatives*, these two most prestigious races in the 'mass' amateur calendar provide an opportunity for aspiring riders to make their name (hoping for interest from a professional team) or for retired/returning professionals to

demonstrate their prowess, as well as for others to simply enjoy the moment. The sociologist Paul Yonnet has proposed an interpretation of sporting activity that suggests that all sporting competitions function through an interaction of 'uncertainty' (competitors have equal or unequal chances of winning) and 'identification' (a sense of shared identity or difference), and has applied this approach to the analysis of mass sporting events such as the marathons of New York and Paris (Yonnet, 1998). Yonnet's conclusions can help in understanding the function and meaning of *cyclosporatives* such as the EdT and the EdL: for Yonnet, the popular international marathons are examples of mass sport in which individual non-elite competitors assert their diversity within the context of a sociability based on difference and inequality. In these marathons, Yonnet highlights the inequalities of gender (men and women running together), of ability (runners of all fitness and experience compete *en masse*), and even of appearance (different kit, even disguises and fancy dress), and underlines how 'obsessive' measurement of time, pulse, distance and other aspects of the race serve to underline 'difference' through hierarchies of performance. The EdT and the EdL are unarguably 'mass' events (some 8,500 competitors of all nationalities take part annually in the EdT), and there is undeniably a 'festive' dimension to their running (groups of friends ride together, sponsorship of individuals and groups raises money for charities, social events before and after the races create convivial links between participants of all nationalities), but in contrast to the international marathons of Paris, New York or London, for example, taking part is arguably more predicated on a desire to emulate the performance of professional champions. Although supported by the strong general interest in competitive amateur riding in France, these *cyclosporatives* remain strongly anchored to the myths of the Tour de France and the commercial sports empire of ASO.

Another significant but more 'cultural' dimension of the EdT and EdL, and indeed of many *cyclosporitive* events, which warrants further discussion is their nature as 'heritage'. By allowing everyday cyclists to compete on the legendary routes of the Tour, the EdT and the EdL create linkages between contemporary mass practice and current elite competition, as well as serving to celebrate and commemorate the heritage of professional cycling. When in 2004 *cyclosporitive* events were officially recognized by the Sports Ministry and Interior Ministry as an officially accepted sporting discipline, it became clear to the FFC that the variety of competitive cycling practices warranted the creation of an umbrella body to liaise between the range of cycling federations. The *Commission permanente interfédérations du cyclisme* was created to manage the

policy of *Cyclisme pour tous* (or at least ‘competitive’ cycling, for all).¹⁰ Part of the brief of the *Cyclisme pour tous* campaign has been, since the mid-2000s, to identify what are termed ‘itinéraires de référence du cyclisme français’ and to facilitate the use of these routes by cycle-sport riders and leisure/tourist cyclists alike. Whereas many *cyclosporatives* run by cycling clubs label their races with reference to famous local professional cyclists (e.g. ‘la Raymond Poulidor’, ‘la Bernard Thévenet’ or ‘la Laurent Fignon’) or to the geographical area of the route (e.g. *la Cyclo du Morbihan* or *la Ronde Châtelleraudaise*) and thus link indirectly to an intangible cultural heritage, the listing of classic routes of the Tour and other races such as Paris–Roubaix as certified elements of France’s sporting identity reflects even more strongly the closeness of links between cycle sport and everyday cycling in France.

Vélorution and ‘critical mass’: counterculture urban cycling

The sociologist of cycling and technology Paul Rosen has suggested that some appropriations of cycling can be considered essentially as ‘countercultures’, adopting and adapting cycling and its technology in ways that subvert established patterns and meanings (Rosen, 2002). In France, the *Vélorution* movement seems interestingly to fit into such a framework of analysis. *Vélorution* is a term created from the conflation of *vélo* and *révolution*, and is in many ways the French equivalent of the American Critical Mass movement (born in the early 1990s), which lobbies in favour of the use of non-polluting, ecologically sustainable forms of personal transport. It has developed into a loosely organized grouping of individuals and associations whose major aim has become protest against contemporary Western capitalist society’s reliance on the car, and government support for the automobile industry (Carlsson, 2003).¹¹ Although the ‘grouping’ includes rollerbladers, skateboarders and other practitioners of environmentally acceptable forms of urban transport, the principal alternative to the car suggested by *Vélorution* is naturally the bicycle, and the pressure group contributed much in the late 1990s and 2000s to the developing debate in France over urban congestion, transport pollution and road safety, encouraging city councils to consider the introduction of cycle paths and cycle-hire schemes. Behind the grouping’s relatively weak national coordination there lies a score or so of local associations of militant cyclists in most of France’s major towns and cities, which organize frequent and regular events to publicize the cause of the bicycle and to highlight the dangers of over-reliance on motorized individual transport. Although the term *vélorution* was hijacked both by the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, as early as 2002

(Webster, 2002) to describe the municipal bike-hire scheme introduced in 2007, and by cycle retailers, the pressure group remains essentially independent, 'alternative', left-wing in inspiration and critical of the conventional free-market organization of transport and work. The local branches of the grouping (in Angers, Cherbourg, Montpellier or wherever) often claim that they are politically and religiously neutral and independent of trades union influence, but the rejection of the car and of the industrial and social complex that a culture dependent on the automobile reflects remains nevertheless essentially 'revolutionary' in inspiration.

As with most French environmentalism, *Vélorution* draws much, historically, from the ecological concerns of the 1970s, when the anarchistic, libertarian and questioning spirit of May '68 merged with concerns over nuclear power (the demonstrations at the Plogoff power station in Brittany, for example), the armed forces' damage to the Larzac plateau or more widely the perceived drawbacks to growth, industrialization, urbanization and reliance on individual transport in the form of the car. The candidature of the ecologist René Dumont for the presidential elections of 1974 and the notable success of ecology candidates in the 1977 municipal elections focused attention on cycling as one possible answer to the problems identified by the rising environmental movement in France, and in 1977 the *Amis de la Terre* published a *Manifeste Vélorutionnaire* as part of a critique of transport policy (Amis de la Terre, 1977). The actual origin of the term *vélorution* is uncertain, but a strong claim is that of Aguiqui Mouna (otherwise known as André Dupont) who undertook his non-campaign as a non-candidate in the 1974 presidential election on his bicycle, proclaiming to all and sundry: 'Je suis un cyclodidacte; la vélorution est en marche!'¹²

The concept of *masse critique* gained currency in France during the late 1990s and especially during the 2000s, giving rise to a range of campaigning bodies and movements. Critical Mass in the US describes itself as 'an idea and an event, *not* an organization' and the idea/event both in the US and in France is loth to consider itself as something that has leaders or organizers of any kind, the idea of a critical mass of cyclists being derived initially from the chance coming-together of numbers of cyclists at crossroads in China, thus allowing them to actually move through the traffic. This reluctance to be formally organized is reminiscent of French left-wing protest movements and parties of the 1970s and 1980s and the personnel and general tenor of *Vélorution* is substantially left-leaning, anti-capitalist, ecological and radical/anarchist. There is a significant – but slightly disorganized – web-presence of sites (some

personal, some belonging to 'associations') that provide a basic exchange of information, but the movement remains spontaneous and eclectic. Because there is no central, national coordination of the French *Vélorution* and because, in principle, the movement declines to set fixed objectives or themes beyond the general promotion of cycling, the local groupings in the provinces tend to prosecute a variety of agendas, all centred around the rights of cyclists to equal use of the roads and the contribution of cycling to a cleaner fairer world, but often including issues of wider scope.

In practice, the local *vélorutions* tend to organize monthly or weekly cycle rides in their respective towns and cities, monopolizing the roads for short periods, distributing leaflets and haranguing passing cars and pedestrians. Beyond the more local and practical aspects of their campaigning, French *Vélorution* movements have shared a variety of left-wing, anti-capitalist, alternative globalization (*altermondialisme*) objectives. Some common themes that have mobilized French *vélorutions* have been the Paris–Dakar car and motorcycle rally; anti-advertising campaigns; *décroissance* (or degrowth/sustainability); nuclear power; and the development of the *Code de la rue*. The left-wing perspectives of the movement are also reflected by the link of a number of the local branches with the organization *Chiche!*

Analysis of the history of the various *Vélorution* 'chapels' that have appeared across France suggests that it was essentially in 2004 and 2005 that the movement became a significant force. The *Vélo-cité* movement in Montpellier was active from 1999 onwards, and an event was organized in Paris in 2003, but in 2004 critical-mass style meetings of cyclists occurred in Grenoble (April), Angers (September) and Toulouse (October) and in 2005 the activism reached Rennes (April), Saint-Etienne (July), Tours (November), Nancy and Avignon (December). Bordeaux (January 2006) and Lyon (April 2006) were major cities whose cyclists reacted slightly more slowly to the growing activist interest in 'reclaiming' urban roads from motorized transport and town councils' overly car-centred urban development plans. The movement is continuing to develop: in early July 2011 the three-day international *Vélorution universelle* occurred in Paris and *Vélorution* is in many ways the central node of a growing network of militant cycling groups.¹³ The press release for *Vélorution universelle 2011* summarized the ethos and objectives of the event, and in an explicit swipe at the Tour de France (starting that weekend) explained in answer to the ironic question: 'Alors, c'est comme le Tour de France?' that 'L'esprit de compétition, les intérêts commerciaux ou l'acceptation passive des dopants sont des valeurs que la

Vélorution Universelle ne véhiculera pas'. Examples given of how *Vélorution (universelle)* was the antithesis of the Tour de France were its participant organizations: *L'Alter-Tour* (a supportive, sharing journey of cyclists travelling in solidarity with each other),¹⁴ the *CycloTrans-Européenne* (riding to develop the transnational network of *voies vertes cyclables*),¹⁵ and the *Heureux-cyclage* network of bicycle workshops providing free technical assistance to all and sundry.¹⁶

Véloroutes and voies vertes: rural leisure cycling

In contrast to the new forms of competitive cycling that have arisen in the 2000s either around the Tour de France in the form of *L'Etape du Tour*, or around the cycling community and manufacturers in the form of various *cyclosporives*, there has also been a resurgence of interest in leisure cycling and touring, linked to new concerns about environmental issues. Unlike the major concerns of 'militant' cycling represented by *Vélorution*, the major focus of leisure cycling is essentially rural.

In 1998 the French government adopted – as part of the wider planning on bicycle use – a scheme to develop the infrastructures and use of what were termed *véloroutes et voies vertes* (often conflated to VVV). Although the two terms are almost always used together, they designate slightly different ways of favouring cycle use: *véloroutes* are best understood as cyclable routes in either urban or rural contexts that are specially signed and designed to protect cycle users from cars, whereas *voies vertes* are more specifically reserved for non-motorized traffic such as cycles, pedestrians or even horse-riders or rollerbladers. Whereas *véloroutes* are generally more akin to the kinds of cycle paths linked to road systems developed successfully in Strasbourg and other bike-friendly cities, *voies vertes* are usually constructed on old railway lines, alongside rivers, canals or lakes, in forests or next to rural roads. The VVV plan fixed the objective of creating a national network of 7,000–8,000 kilometres of cycle routes, with cyclable routes linking urban and rural areas, and at least one *voie verte* in each region encouraging healthy leisure activities for local inhabitants and incoming tourist revenues. Interestingly, the initial idea to foster VVV came not from government but from the *Fédération française de cyclotourisme* and the pressure group the *Association française de développement des véloroutes et voies vertes* (AF3V), whose original lobbying convinced the then Green environment minister Dominique Voynet.

In May 2001 a *Mission nationale VVV* was set up, associating a large number of government departments that had an interest in the ways in which VVV could promote cycling. The departments concerned were

environment and sustainable development, transport and infrastructures, tourism, youth and sports, and agriculture, reflecting the way in which cycling was seen as an activity that could both benefit from the new enthusiasm for environmental sensitivity and simultaneously promote sustainability and tourism, health and other government priorities. Significantly, the presidency of the *Mission nationale* was entrusted to the *Ministère de l'écologie et du développement durable*, in recognition of the government's ambition to promote cycling both to combat global warming and to encourage tourism and health. The *voies vertes* in particular have become quite successful. By January 2007 France could boast over 150 VVV, with a total distance of 6,155 km, and official studies were confident that in many departments and regions VVV were rapidly becoming financially self-sustaining innovative tourist attractions (ODIT, 2007). Some of the more eye-catching VVV were the *Eurovéloroute des fleuves* which links Nantes to Budapest, and the *Loire à vélo*, which will eventually take riders from Cuffy, near Sancerre (Cher) to Saint-Brévin-les-Pins (Loire-Atlantique). In May 2010, following discussions during 2009/10 between various stakeholders, a revised *Schéma national des véloroutes and voies vertes* (SN3V) was ratified, as part of an overall long-term plan to create 20,000 km of cycling routes.

The Armstrong Affair: an American 'Other' and cycling traditions

From 1999 until 2005 the Tour de France was dominated by the American rider Lance Armstrong. He announced his retirement after winning his seventh consecutive Tour in 2005, but, controversially, returned to participate unsuccessfully in the Tours of 2009 and 2010. Attention was acutely focused on the Texan both as the dominant cycling athlete of his generation and the hoped-for 'clean' successor to what were now seen as the tainted heroes of the 'EPO years', and as a professional rider whose example could help cycle sport adopt a new model of racing. It might seem strange that a study of the cultural significance of cycling in France should devote space to a consideration of one foreign rider among many others, but even more than was the case with foreign champions before him such as Indurain, Merckx, Coppi and Bartali, the relationship between Armstrong and the Tour has defined the culture of sport in France in the contemporary period.¹⁷ The reaction of the French press, cycling establishment and Tour de France to the previous American multi-yellow jersey, Greg Le Mond (winner in 1986, 1989 and 1990) was far less extreme and antagonistic, despite frequent frictions. The fame –

and notoriety – of Lance Armstrong was based on three aspects of his sporting career: his recovery from a severe form of testicular cancer in the mid- and late 1990s; his seven successive wins in the Tour de France between 1999 and 2005; and his constant denial of accusations of doping. Armstrong's controversial reign at the Tour and thus at the summit of French, European and world cycling came during a period when the sport was trying to adjust to the trauma and aftershocks of the 1998 'Tour of Shame', and negotiating a modernization of the organization of the professional sport in the form of the UCI-imposed Pro-Tour competition.

Hopes that Armstrong would bring cycle sport into a new era were not fulfilled, since persistent suspicions of doping surrounded him throughout his career, despite the lack of any scientifically incontrovertible or legally unquestionable proof. And as the unchallenged 'boss' of the peloton, his approach of turning up to the Tour every year, winning – generally amid bad temper and tension – and then departing again did little to help facilitate changes in the sport. Armstrong's significance as a hero and anti-hero of French cycling can be considered in terms of French relations with the US, his approach to the profession of cycle racing and his alleged doping. These issues frequently intersect and provide a useful framework for analysis.

Armstrong and France; France and Armstrong

The precise nature of the French view of Lance Armstrong is difficult to define, partly because of the variety of groups who hold opinions, mediated through a varying number of filters and at greater or lesser proximity to the subject. Arguably, Armstrong's 'star persona' is more complex than that of other Tour de France champions before him: not only is he the ultimate *campionissimo* as a seven-times winner, but he is American, a survivor of cancer, a medical charity campaigner known worldwide, a friend of American President George W. Bush, and the partner for some time of the music industry celebrity Sheryl Crow. The story of Greg Le Mond, whose own successful relaunch of his career after a gunshot wound from a hunting accident seemed in the late 1980s to be an improbable fairy-tale, pales in comparison. In summary, however, France seems to entertain a complicated love-hate relationship with Armstrong. The general public is largely admiring, if piqued by the absence of French or European winners; the cycling community admires the achievements of Armstrong as a rider whether drug-enhanced or not, but worries about the possibility that his success is indeed based on medical assistance, and finds that the manner of his success sometimes lacks in style and tact; the

French cycling establishment (in the form of the Amaury Sport Organisation, the Tour de France and *L'Equipe*) is torn between gratitude for the international marketing boost to their product and a nagging suspicion that Armstrong's dominance is essentially based on a lack of respect for the traditions of cycling as well as on doping. The French Sports Ministry, cycling federation and the UCI have looked on in some helplessness during the Armstrong era as repeated doubts have been raised about the 'cleanness' of its champion and claims have been made about the continued existence of a 'two-speed' peloton of professional riders.

France has long entertained a love-hate relationship with the US, but in terms of sport in general and cycle sport in particular opportunities have been rare for interaction. It was only during the 1980s that the Tour started properly to internationalize its recruitment of teams and riders, following the successful Europeanization of the post-war races and the variety of European riders involved since the earliest years of the competition. As John Marks has suggested (Marks, 2003), the opening of the Tour in the 1980s and 1990s to riders from the US has been less successful than its early Europeanization or the later involvement of riders from Paraguay, Columbia and even Australia. Le Mond's approach to riding in the late 1980s offered an early insight into differences of interpretation of the 'job' of pro-racing between American and European racers, as he was accused of riding firstly to make money, and only secondly to win. During Le Mond's period of activity in the Tour, the acute contemporary French concerns about the place of France in a globalized and Americanized world had not yet fully developed, so Armstrong's difficulties in achieving acceptance in the late 2000s, after two Gulf wars had estranged French public opinion, seem hardly surprising. Armstrong has struggled both as a representation of an America resented by the French public and as an American rider who appears to the French to concentrate too much on money and on an overly business-like approach to sport.

Armstrong's approach to the 'business' of cycle sport

Marks has suggested that one of Le Mond's handicaps in gaining acceptance was that his attitude to racing was born of middle-class social origins that divorced him from the traditional working-class model of the Tour champion: in essence, to the French, he was a bourgeois American, cherry-picking races to win and aiming to earn as much money as possible, but without the legitimacy that would have come from a background of hardship (Marks, 2003: 221–22). From this perspective, Armstrong, as someone raised by a single mother in the small town of

Plano, Texas, and keenly aware of the importance of prize money and of the social advancement possible through elite sport, should have better fitted the expectations of European pro-cycling teams and of the Tour organizers. But both before and after his cancer, Armstrong's attitude disappointed managers, organizers and commentators. Before 1996 Armstrong seemed talented but lacking in application, but on his return from illness he began to show precisely the single-mindedly business-like approach to riding and winning that had jeopardized Le Mond's acceptance by the profession ten years earlier. Armstrong's view was that only the Tour mattered – in itself surely a compliment to ASO – and that riding other races was either foolhardy and a waste of time (one-day classics) or merely a way of training and gauging form (minor stage-races). Champions such as Hinault had shared the view that races such as Paris–Roubaix were dangerous and perhaps a distraction from the more serious matter of the major tours, but Hinault rode – and won – Paris–Roubaix out of respect for tradition and pride in his place in it, and participated in a much wider range of races than Armstrong. Armstrong's focus almost uniquely on the Tour de France was seen as a slight against the traditions of European pro-cycling, in which the season-long calendar of events amounts to the history of the sport and winners enter the pantheon of past victors. The US Postal team's obsessive preparation for the Tour while other squads were competing in a wider selection of races seemed somehow disloyal, but Armstrong and his *directeur sportif* Johan Bruyneel rejected criticisms by saying that the Tour was difficult enough and important enough to warrant a special approach. For Armstrong, the Tour was his annual objective, both financially and as the pinnacle of cycle sport, and training for it to the exclusion of other races was simply a professional choice based on financial as well as sporting criteria.

Another criticism of Armstrong's interpretation of racing was that his manner of winning was too calculated and that he used his team and his own dominance of the peloton in ways that diminished the entertainment of the race and the profession of cycle sport. Armstrong's strengths as a time-triallist and as a climber allowed him to challenge for the Tour by performing strongly in the individual and team time trials, and establishing a lead that could then be protected during the rest of the race by a powerful and strictly organized team and, if necessary, by a good personal performance in the Alps or Pyrenees. Such tactics, which led annually to a Tour controlled by US Postal/Discovery, were viewed as boring and – to use the traditional French term – lacking in *panache*.¹⁸ In defence of Armstrong, who was never shy of pointing out that the

point of riding the race was to win rather than to entertain, it seemed that the Tour organizers repeatedly designed itineraries that suited US Postal strengths. Other champions in the past had shared the opinion that winning with unnecessary effort was senseless: Anquetil had famously declared that victory by more than a second was a waste of energy.¹⁹ But despite his dominance and his technocratic theories about racing, Anquetil was favoured by the peloton and by the cycling press and public, perhaps because his personal duels with Poulidor and other rivals gave him a human dimension and also because of his fondness for high living off the bike. Armstrong, in contrast, had no rivals to help foster a human image of a champion challenged by adversity, and his approach to preparation – based on an obsession with training, diet, weight, power and aerodynamics – was the opposite of the champagne lifestyle espoused by Anquetil.

Armstrong and the doping issue

Speaking on the winning podium for the 2005 Tour on the Champs-Élysées, Armstrong – movingly, or cynically, depending on one's perspective – hit out at the critics who had consistently denigrated his victories and the integrity of professional cycling, and presented himself, as ever, as an ordinary American who works hard for what he wins and earns:

I'm sorry you don't believe in miracles. But this is a hell of a race. You should believe in these athletes, and you should believe in these people. I'll be a fan of the Tour de France for as long as I live. And there are no secrets – this is a hard sporting event and hard work wins it [...] An individual can never dictate their legacy. That's not my job. It doesn't matter. Whatever the people decide it is, it is. I'm a kid from Texas that learned how to ride a bike fast and overcame a life-threatening illness to come back and win the hardest sporting event in the world seven times. So I'll let the other people write on the tombstone. (Wyatt, 2005)

Armstrong's position on the doping issue is simple: he has consistently denied that he has ever taken performance-enhancing drugs. He has always backed up these denials by pointing out that, despite having been one of the most regularly and frequently tested athletes in the world, he has never failed a drug test. To those who suggest that he must be 'on something' to ride the way he has, he has retorted that he is 'on his bike', training 365 days a year, when other riders are taking breaks. Armstrong's other perspective on the doping issue is that he has been consistently the subject of a vendetta by the French press, keen to prove at any costs that he is not a clean rider. Throughout his racing career, Armstrong was certainly treated with suspicion by the French and

European media, who frequently analysed his performances in terms that suggested they were beyond the unaided reach of any rider, however physiologically talented. Apart from such criticisms – which interestingly continue the theme of the cycle racer as a human machine producing a quantifiable output – Armstrong’s victories were consistently presented in newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Libération* and *L’Equipe* in tones of some reservation, typified by the commentaries of Jean-Louis Le Touzet in *Libération* (Le Touzet, 2004; 2005; 2008; 2009a; 2009b). Armstrong presents this persecution as ‘sour grapes’ from people who resent his domination – as an American and as a racer who approaches his job differently – of the Tour de France, but the underlying motivation for this press criticism has been frustration that the official bodies responsible for eradicating doping have been unable to unmask someone who ‘must be’ the prime suspect, despite his negative tests.

The role of *L’Equipe* here has been complex. As part of the ASO group that owns the *Société du Tour de France*, it has been torn between its roles as guardian of the Tour’s history, keeper of the faith in the idea of a new cleaner Tour post-1998, and publicist of the spectacle of the contemporary Tour. Such schizophrenia doubtless explains the ‘archness’ of much of *L’Equipe*’s coverage of the Armstrong years, as well as the fact that perhaps the most damning, but still circumstantial, evidence for Armstrong’s use of doping was broken by the paper only some months after his seventh victory and initial retirement in 2005. In 2011 Armstrong became the subject of a federal Grand Jury investigation in Los Angeles into claims by former team-mates that had taken performance-enhancing products. Any conclusion to ‘the did he/didn’t he?’ saga would inevitable trigger a review of how he is thought of in France, and of the Tour itself, but in early 2012 all investigations were dropped. However, yet another twist in the story came in June 2012, as the American Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) launched its own pursuit of Armstrong, despite the shelving of the previous federal investigation. Armstrong’s defence of his record remains as robust as ever, at the time of writing, leaving the ‘Armstrong Myth’ and, for France, the ‘Armstrong Affair’ intact in all its confusion and lack of closure.

Cycling in France: sport, leisure and utility

In 2006 the Crédit Lyonnais bank – one of the major sponsors of the Tour de France since the early 1970s, partly because the bank’s colour-identity is bright yellow, matching the leader’s jersey – commissioned a

substantial opinion poll on cycling in France. The results of this study were published in May 2006 under the title *Les Français et le vélo* (CSA/LCL, 2006). In 2009, interested to gauge better the nature of what was perceived as rising interest in cycling of all kinds during the early and mid-2000s, the French state, in the form of the *Direction générale de la compétitivité de l'industrie et des services* (DGCIS) and the ATOUT body responsible for promoting French tourism, commissioned a 500-page report on the economic significance of cycling. This was published later in 2009 under the title *L'Économie du vélo en France* (Atout France, 2009). A range of other studies of the development of cycling in France were also undertaken in the 2000s, by industry bodies such as the *Conseil national des professions du cycle* and by the rising number of pro-cycling organizations that were developing to promote different forms of the everyday practice of cycling.²⁰

Some of the themes and conclusions of these and other studies have been touched on in previous chapters or in other sections of this current chapter. But it is useful to consider the state of cycling in France as it is portrayed statistically and factually in these snapshots of the activity and sector in the 2000s.

The cycle industry: stronger performance

As has been discussed in the previous chapter in consideration of the rise of new distributors, retailers and manufacturers of cycles such as Décathlon which filled the space left by declining traditional giants of the bicycle industry typified by Manufrance or Peugeot, the market for large-scale bicycle sales in the 1980s and 1990s was difficult, and dominated by the vogue for mountain bikes. In terms of the specialist market for racing bicycles, high-tech frame or component manufacturers such as Look, Time, Lapierre or Mavic were able to capitalize on their market niches, as did a small number of remaining 'traditional' frame/bicycle builders, such as Cycles Follis. In the 2000s, however, the overall picture of a market characterized by demand for a dominant and generally relatively inexpensive product, the mass-produced MTB, with pockets of resistance in high value-added high-tech items for an elite of consumers, has changed substantially. As cycling has become ever more popular under the influence of increased interest in environmental sustainability and healthy living in general and the publicity for bicycle use generated by bike-hire schemes in various towns and cities, the cycle industry has become the focus of attention for its stronger – but still fragile – performances.

The ATOUT/DGCIS study underlines how difficult it is to collate

overall statistics on the economy of cycling in France, since the sole item that appears in isolation in national accounting is the production of bicycles.²¹ Much information on the commercial details of cycling comes therefore from the trade body created as early as the 1890s to federate the then rapidly developing industry, and now known as the *Conseil national des professions du cycle* (CNPC) and its statistical arm, the *Observatoire du cycle*.²² While noting the rise in sales of bicycles that occurred in the early 1990s (essentially MTBs), the CNPC has identified another surge in sales during the period 2000–05, when unit sales varied between 2.5 and 3.5 million per annum. Overall, France has 5.7 bicycles per 100 inhabitants, a level of ownership only beaten by Japan, Holland and the US. This high level of bicycle purchasing is, however, paradoxical, given that in France – as in Britain – the average distance cycled annually per citizen is low in European terms, and the proportion of people undertaking regular cycling activity is equally comparatively low. Whereas in Holland and Denmark the average distance cycled per annum is 1,000 km and 50 per cent of the population cycle every week, in France and the UK only 10–15 per cent of citizens cycle on a weekly basis, and they cover only 80 km each year. France and Britain are thus low users of bicycles compared with the European leaders Holland and Denmark, and with strong performers such as Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Austria and Sweden. Only Spain, Portugal, southern Italy and Greece, where cycling is predominantly concerned more with strong interest in following cycle sport than in utility or leisure riding as practice, perform worse than France and the UK (Atout France, 2009: 137–44).

In terms of the types of bicycles bought in France, the 2000s have seen the continued domination of market share by adult MTBs, measured both in unit sales (c. 30%) and in terms of sales value (c. 45%). However, from the peak levels of the 1990s – more than two-thirds of unit sales in 1994, for example – MTB sales are in relative decline, although the models sold tend to be higher-range than in previous decades, as the overall market progressively develops to cover a wider range of styles of product (particularly ‘town bikes’). Whereas children’s bicycles (40%) and racing bicycles (6%) remain stable in their share of the market, it is town bikes that have risen in popularity in the 2000s, reaching 7 per cent of sales in 2007. Although sales of electrically assisted bicycles are still relatively low (10,000 in 2007) this niche seems to be developing significantly in the later 2000s (Atout France, 2009: 146–48).

In terms of the structure of the industry, French companies involved in bicycle and component manufacturing have been in difficulty since the 1990s, figures for 2005 suggesting that, from 128 businesses of over 20

employees in 1998, the sector has contracted to only 90 or so, and is heavily concentrated around companies such as Décathlon/Promiles, Look and Time whose success in the 1980s and 1990s has previously been discussed, as well as Lapierre, Mavic/Salomon, Cycleurope Industrie, Planetfun, Quantum International and Zéfal. Whereas the French cycle industry suffered heavy losses during the 1980s in competition with Far Eastern manufacturers, and with some notable exceptions was unable to adapt to the MTB-dominated market, during the late 1990s and 2000s, thanks to its high-tech products, high quality and high value, in balance of trade terms the French exported as much as they imported. The studies suggest that if French companies can continue to compete in the higher end of product ranges, maintain high levels of R&D and capitalize on the rising interest domestically in France in cycling of all kinds, the French cycle industry will be able to maintain its position.

The (relative) strength of the cycle industry in the 2000s is, of course, substantially reliant on the strength of cycling as a practice within France, and it is a consideration of this that now follows.

Cycling as leisure: recreation, tourism and sport

During the 2000s leisure cycling of all kinds developed significantly, encouraged by state and municipal campaigns in favour of alternative and sustainable transport solutions for congested cities, healthier lifestyles in general, or sustainable and environmentally friendly holiday activities. The continuing fascination exerted by the Tour de France and by professional cycling overall maintained the interest of more athletic cyclists in cycling competition at all levels and of all kinds, from the most basic of club-organized local races to local/regional *cyclosporives* and national events such as the *Etape du Tour*, the *Etape de Légende*, the *Ardéchoise* or the *Marmotte*.

Recent studies of the preferred leisure activities of the French indicate that cycling as recreation is practised by median age groups, in contrast to the pastimes of hunting and rambling, for example, which are often dominated by older age groups, or rugby, mainly played by the young. However, cycling is clearly the preferred physical leisure activity of older people (50–59 and above), 25 per cent of whom undertake it on a regular basis. The nature of leisure cycling as a ‘senior’ activity has meant that the state is keen to encourage take-up of riding, especially on the *voies vertes*, which are apparently more attractive to female cyclists, in order to diminish the health problems associated with ageing. Overall, it seems that leisure riding represents perhaps only 15 per cent of riding, and a third of the total annual distance covered by bikes, but that unlike

high-intensity sports cycling (10% of all cyclists) or ‘utility’ riding (33% of cyclists), ‘going for a bike ride’ as leisure is an activity undertaken essentially by all cyclists at some point, and is thus a key target for policies to improve the health of women and older people (Atout France, 2009: 84–87).

Cycling as leisure in the form of tourism, of course, has a history as long as cycling itself, as has been discussed in previous chapters considering institutions such as the *Fédération française de cyclotourisme* or Vélocio’s theories on the benefits and rules of long-distance tourist riding. During the 2000s, with developing projects such as the national and international *voies vertes* networks and municipal, departmental and regional initiatives to improve cycle-path systems, there has been much encouragement of leisure/holiday cycle touring by individuals and, increasingly, families. Tourist cycling also encompasses the use of bicycles while on holiday, rather than as the sole means/purpose of transport/enjoyment, either as a means of (local) transport or as a distraction undertaken on holiday. Despite the varying definitions of precisely what holiday/tourist cycling is, studies have demonstrated that cycling is the second most-favoured physical activity of French people on holiday (3.3%) behind rambling/walking (7.3%) but in preference to skiing (2.6%). And holidays classed as ‘cycling’ represent some 5.5 million nights away from home annually (Atout France, 2009: 97–104).

A further significant dimension of cycling as leisure that has arisen particularly during the 2000s is the development of cycling tour packages for foreign tourists (whose cycling holidays overall amount to 1.8 million nights per annum). Many of these cycling tours are run in famous wine-making regions such as Alsace, Bourgogne and the Loire area and focus on cultural heritage and gastronomy, but – linked to the success of Lance Armstrong in the Tour – a considerable number of US tour operators have introduced physically exerting holiday-cycling packages in the Alps, Pyrenees or other areas associated with the Tour de France and including spectating at a stage of the Tour itself.

Sports cycling – road or VTT – as leisure is the final major category of non-professional, non-utility bicycle use for which some summary details are useful. As is discussed in analysis elsewhere of the high-profile *cyclosporives* of various kinds that have grown up in the 1990s and 2000s, there is a significant demand for competitive, semi-competitive and recreational cycling that is essentially related to cycle sport. Most of this kind of cycling takes place in the context of activities organized by cycling and other sports clubs, overseen by the relevant national sporting federations such as the FFC and the FFCT, or by ‘multi-sport’ federa-

tions whose members 'do' cycling alongside other activities (for instance the FFTri or the *Fédération sportive et gymnique du travail*). It is clear that there are difficulties in defining precisely what constitutes a 'sporting' interpretation of cycling as a leisure practice, but looking at statistics for membership of clubs, actual involvement in competition, sales of top-of-the-range racing bikes and VTTs, and even annual distances covered and average speeds allows a general picture to be drawn up. According to these indicators, it seems that 500,000 French citizens are members of cycling clubs of various kinds, two million road cyclists can be described as having a sports approach to their cycling leisure (using a racing bike, covering more than 3,000 km per annum, and undertaking rides of more than 40 km at more than 25 kph), and that the great majority of these riders are male and aged 50–65. In terms of mountain-biking, surveys indicate that 6.6 million French citizens (25% of all cyclists in France) use a VTT for one purpose or another, but only 60,000 are members of clubs and federations, indulging in mountain-biking as a sporting form of leisure such as downhill, cross-country, free-riding, enduro and so on (Atout France, 2009: 91–96).

Cycling as utility: commuting, class and the Code de la rue

The use of cycling as a means of local, daily transport was in steady decline from the 1950s until the early 2000s. Studies compiling information from various sources have concluded that the utility use of cycling in Lyon fell by two-thirds between 1976 and 1984 and halved in Grenoble (1978–85), Lille (1976–98) and Paris (1976–91). But although data from the most recent study of national transport patterns conducted in 2007–08 is not yet available, partial studies suggest that urban cycle commuting is gathering strength in the 2000s, albeit from low base levels. Thus in Lille, surveys of household behaviour have suggested a 50 per cent rise in utility cycling during 1998–2006 (nine trips per day per 100 inhabitants), and in Lyon/Villeurbanne, commuting/utility cycling increased four-fold between 1995 and 2006 (Atout France, 2009: 48–49). Overall the picture seems to be that of a slackening of decline during the late 1990s and early 2000s, followed by a modest uptake of urban/suburban commuting and other practical cycle use since about 2005. Qualitatively as well as quantitatively, the patterns of utility cycling seem to be evolving as well: rather than being the necessary means of mobility of those unable to afford cars or the cost of public transport, practical cycling is now frequently undertaken by members of households whose socio-professional and financial standing enables them to afford other forms of mobility. Indeed, it seems that frequent utility cycling is

increasingly dominated by *cadres* (managerial classes) and *professions intermédiaires* (middle-ranking professional employment) rather than by the traditional categories of manual and white-collar workers, schoolchildren, students, pensioners and the unemployed. Indeed, it seems that in general, and more markedly in cities such as Lyon, the period 1990–2010 has brought evidence of the shift of cycling practice towards the middle classes, in terms of utility cycling and leisure/sports cycling, with some 47 per cent of *cadres supérieurs* and *professions libérales* compared with only 28 per cent of *ouvriers* and 50 per cent of students and schoolchildren cycling regularly in 2006 (Atout France, 2009: 60–61).

Urban commuter cycling in France was facilitated by a range of factors in the 2000s, which taken together created a context favourable to the continuing uptake of cycling as everyday personal mobility. Firstly, long-standing initiatives in favour of cycling in the urban environment such as cycle paths, the integration of cycle routes and cycle parks with other forms of transport, the improvement of cyclists' road safety through the *Code de la route* and the *Code de la rue* and more generally the pressure exerted on municipal authorities across France by associations such as the *Club des villes cyclables* have much improved the practicalities of urban riding.²³ Secondly, the implementation of self-service cycle-hire systems such as *Vélo'V* in Lyon and *Vélib'* in Paris have publicized the advantages of urban and suburban cycle-mobility, and manufacturers have developed the market for 'city bikes' in a diversification of supply intended to attract urban cyclists rather than the VTT enthusiasts who dominated sales during the 1980s and 1990s. Thirdly, rising awareness of environmental problems and increasing aspirations towards healthy living, combined with the desire of the state to maximize the health 'externalities' of cycling, have come together to promote cycling of all kinds, but especially urban utility riding.

The ways in which France and French citizens related to cycling during the 2000s reflected both continuities and innovations in the social and cultural history of the bicycle in France. What can be seen in some ways as the twenty-first century's 'boom' in cycling (*cyclosportives*, *voies vertes*, Critical Mass and *Vélorution*, urban utility cycling and sales of *vélos de ville*, self-service city-cycling schemes and so on) in many ways mirrors the nineteenth-century vogue for *vélocipédie* in all its forms that started the whole system of interconnected uses, meanings and repre-

sentations of cycling. The Tour de France, irritatingly to those who resent its overarching position in the ecological system of cycling in France, continues – as professional, commercial sport – to fascinate the French public and serves enduringly as an instrument for the negotiation of debates about the identity of France and the nature of sport. What is perhaps more novel in the 2000s is the involvement of the state and of regional and municipal governance in the organization of cycling on a practical level. Although government in the late nineteenth century had been interested enough in the popularity of cycling to slap an annual licence fee on the possession of bicycles, and various fiscal initiatives have periodically been implemented to subsidize cycle production and sales, it is new to see town councils and local government at the level of regions and *départements* implementing plans and infrastructures in favour of everyday cycling, as well as the state.²⁴ The role of *Monsieur Vélo*, although needing continued definition and support, seems to represent the state's recognition of the importance of cycling in general, in all its forms, and a willingness on the part of central government to imitate the 'reactivity' of lower levels of governance that have been so successful in accompanying and facilitating the rise in everyday cycling through schemes such as the Parisian *Vélib'*.

Notes

- 1 Journée-hommage organisée par la Bibliothèque nationale de France avec Georges Vigarello, directeur d'études à l'EHESS en collaboration avec le Musée national du sport.
- 2 See the ministry website <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/Diaporamas-et-presentations,12539.html> (accessed 21 August 2011).
- 3 At least six ministries are involved in discussions on cycling issues: interior, transport, economy, environment, youth and sports, tourism and regional authorities.
- 4 The official term is *Coordonnateur interministériel pour le développement de l'usage du vélo*. This post was created for three years, by the décret n°2006-444 of 14 April 2006, and was renewed in November 2009. The budget for the post was only made available in 2007.
- 5 Compared with 2.3 km/day and 27 per cent in Holland and 0.2 km/day and 2 per cent in the UK. See the brief presentation of this plan at the ministry website <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/Diaporamas-et-presentations,12539.html> (accessed 21 August 2011).
- 6 For example, the CUS has experimented with the *Code de la route*, notably with cycle counter-flow systems and right-turns at traffic lights, as well as with waived fines for cyclists.
- 7 See, for example, the page on <http://velorution.org> devoted to 'JC Decaux, Vélib' et Paris' (accessed 6 June 2011).
- 8 The report commissioned on the economics of cycling in France by the *Direction*

- générale de la compétitivité de l'industrie et des services*, published in 2009, very briefly summarizes the activities of French *cyclosporives*: approximately 150 races are organized per annum, of which 40 attract more than 1,000 participants and 750 attract more than 500 riders; approximately 128,000 riders take part, all told; the Ardéchoise caters for 12, 000–15,000 riders alone. See Atout France/AlterModal (2009: 313–18).
- 9 A relatively recent but predictable innovation in the 2000s has been the staging of *cyclosporive* races by major national French cycling manufacturers, such as Time, Look and others. These races – *la Look, la Time-Mégève Mont-Blanc* – often allow companies to showcase new products by loaning bikes to riders, for example, or simply to publicize their commitment to cycling beyond commercial gain. See *Le Cycle* (2006).
 - 10 See the website of the *Cyclisme pour tous* initiative at <http://www.cyclospor.info/>
 - 11 *Vélorution* in France has a website (<http://velorution.org>) that provides a good sense of the movement's broad interests.
 - 12 For details of the *amuseur public* and anarchist Aguiqui Mouna (1911–99) see the forthcoming article by Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare, “Les Valeurs morales ne sont pas cotées en bourse”: Aguiqui Mouna as “amuseur public” in the 1970s’, currently in preparation.
 - 13 For example, to cite just a few, of varying kinds: the *Fédération française des usagers de la bicyclette*, whose slogan is ‘Le vélo au quotidien’ (and has a useful newsletter entitled *Vélocité*); the *Club des villes et territoires cyclables*; the *Association française de développement des véloroutes et voies vertes*; and the *Vélotaf* discussion site (slogan: ‘Pédaler mieux, vivre utile’).
 - 14 See <http://altertour.net>. The 2011 AlterTour had the slogan ‘Vers la sobriété énergétique’ and the AlterTour has run annually since 2008 in stigmatization of the Tour de France’s perceived unholy alliance of doping, competition and individualism.
 - 15 See <http://transeuropeenne.free.fr/>
 - 16 See <http://www.heureux-cyclage.org/>
 - 17 For an interesting treatment of the cultural significance of other foreign riders in the Tour de France, see Marks (2003).
 - 18 Just as in football, where a ‘champagne style’ is often desired for the national team, and in rugby, where attractive play is likewise appreciated, cycling sport in general and French cycling in particular, perhaps, place much weight on the *manner* of winning.
 - 19 See the discussion in a previous chapter of Anquetil’s ‘technocratic’ approach to competing and winning. The parallels between the French national hero in the 1950s and 1960s and the US outsider Armstrong in the 2000s are intriguing.
 - 20 See for example: *Vélo-pratic* (2010) or *FUBicy/Club des Villes cyclables* (2008), or IFE (2003).
 - 21 The national French statistics institute INSEE considers bicycles as part of the category E15 ‘cycles, motocycles, matériel de transport divers’; see, for example, INSEE (2009).
 - 22 See the CNPC website at <http://www.tousavelo.com>
 - 23 The *Code de la route* is the French equivalent of the British Highway Code, whereas the *Code de la rue* is essentially a consultation exercise set up in 2006 that aims to introduce greater consideration for pedestrians and cyclists to the motorized concerns of the *Code de la route*.
 - 24 The annual *impôt sur les vélocipèdes* was implemented in 1893 and only withdrawn in 1959. The original tax was 10 francs, reduced to 6 francs in 1898 but subsequently raised again to 12 francs in the Fourth Republic.

A Sense of Cycling in France

At the conclusion of this rapid and necessarily selective overview of cycling and the bicycle in France, it seems sensible to attempt to draw together some tentative general remarks about how this technology of transport and its varied uses can be interpreted to tell us something about French culture and society. Following the framework set out in the Introduction, where we suggested a conceptualization of cycling and the bicycle in France that necessarily had to find appropriate space for the Tour de France while at the same time addressing the wider and deeper complexity of the issues at stake through the themes of leisure, sport, industry, utility, and identity, we shall here briefly revisit these topics. We shall also consider how the chronology of analysis provided in the previous eight chapters fits with the developing story of cycling and the bicycle in French culture and society.

Cycling as leisure, sport, industry, utility

Leisure, in various forms, has been a key theme of the discussions of cycling in the previous chapters. Those who dislike the prominence of the Tour in the mental imagery of French cycling would stress that cycling for most people in France is – albeit against the background of a memorial awareness of the Tour de France – about leisure, recreation and associated forms of sociability. As we have seen in the discussion of cycling during the 1920s and 1930s, the capacity of cycling to afford personal mobility and the opportunity of leisure activities has been a key element of people's relationship with the bicycle. Writing about the Popular Front, Benigno Cacérès suggests rightly that 'le tandem est resté l'image de 1936. Il a valeur de symbole. Il incarne le passage à la civilisation de loisirs' (Cacérès, 1981: 33). Although in a future study it might be interesting to unpack a little more the iconicity of the tandem for the Popular Front's 'invention' of *loisirs*, cycling has enduringly been associated with leisure and freedom from constraints imposed by established patterns and modes of transport or by social mores. In the later nine-

teenth century, the debates in *véloce-clubs* and within cycling federations over the relative merits and places of *la course* and *le tourisme*, and the consequent divisions between aficionados of touring and partisans of racing, led to the setting up of separate national associations and the development of an institutionalized dual ecology of *cyclo-sport* and *cyclo-tourisme* within French cycling.

Until the late 1940s and the subsequent period of socioeconomic modernization and prosperity that redefined France for thirty years after 1945, the uses and meanings of cycling as leisure remained arguably relatively stable: the discovery of rural France by cyclists of all social classes and the 'emancipation' of women or of those who were financially unable to avail themselves of other mobilities for the enjoyment of free time. But after the reconstruction of the French economy during the late 1940s, and in step with rising prosperity and the availability of new forms of transport such as *cyclomoteurs* like the *Vélo-Solex* and then increasingly affordable automobiles, it could be suggested that an attachment to cycling became more 'marked' as an expression of leisure choices. The examples that we have discussed for the 1950s such as the nostalgic meaning of the bicycle in *Jour de Fête* and the resistance and compromise of practices and technologies such as *vélo-cross* and the *Vélo-Solex* demonstrate the evolving patterns of leisure that obtained around cycling during this period. And in the years after the end of the *Trente glorieuses*, as more widely generalized prosperity and car-ownership further defined cycling as a specific leisure option of 'resistance', the strong developing trends of cycle touring through the *véloroutes* and various other *voies vertes* demonstrated the growing linkages between cycle leisure and the environmental movements that had grown in France since 1968. Most recently, however, it could be argued that cycling *qua* leisure in France has also been inflected towards urban rather than the more traditionally rural uses of the bicycle, through the development and uptake for healthy exercise of city-cycle schemes such as *Vélo'V* and *Vélib'*, in a crossover between utility and leisure.

Cycling as sport and as competition has consistently been a core element of how cycling has been perceived in France since the earliest years of its development. Compared with Britain, where the official obstacles placed in the way of mass-start road races in the continental style meant that cycle sport was for long periods relegated to the status of a minority-interest athletic activity undertaken almost in secret by time-triallists racing 'against the clock' on early morning deserted roads, cycle sport of all kinds in France has been central to public perceptions. As we suggested earlier, current strong public interest in Britain in the

fortunes of the Team Sky cycling squad and its BBC sports personality of the year (2011) Mark Cavendish in the Tour, and delight at Bradley Wiggins' victories in the 2012 Tour and Olympic time trial, or the popularity of Sir Chris Hoy and other stars of the UK track team such as Victoria Pendleton amount to only a fraction of the impact of cycle racing in general in France throughout the twentieth century or, more specifically, the popularity of multi-Olympic champion Daniel Morelon in the 1960s.

Another concomitant difference between the UK and France in terms of the everyday reality of cycle sport has been the significant lack of media coverage of cycling in Britain, compared with the centrality of the cycling/sporting press initially and then later the audiovisual media in France. Whereas in Britain, information on cycling competition has been purveyed arguably almost single-handedly by the long-running *Cycling Weekly*, we have seen how in France the media have at all stages of the development of cycle sport been key partners and stakeholders in its initiation and perpetuation. Our discussion of the role of *Le Véloce-Sport* in creating Bordeaux–Paris in 1891, Giffard's creation of Paris–Brest–Paris in 1891 for *Le Petit Journal*, the struggle between *Le Vélo* and *L'Auto-Vélo* that created the Tour de France in 1903, and the initiative of *Le Populaire* in organizing the Paris–Roubaix *travailliste* in 1935 have suggested how closely media and sport were imbricated in the founding decades of cycling in France. And since 1945, in the contemporary period, the political significance of the change from *L'Auto* to *L'Equipe* after the war, the 'alternative voice' of *Le Miroir du cyclisme* in the 1960s, and the interaction between the Tour and new technologies of sports reporting such as live television in the 1960s and 1970s where coverage of cycling was the driver of televisual innovation are further case-studies of the contribution of the media to the sports–media–industrial complex in France that is exemplified by cycling.

The industrial, commercial and technological dimensions of cycling and the bicycle in France have been central features in defining aspects of the meaning of cycling throughout the decades. As we suggested in the brief discussion of the cycle industry during the *Belle Epoque*, cycle technology was the trigger of industrial success for regions and towns such as Saint-Etienne, but was also an early driver of industrial modernization for the country as a whole: the early years of racing in general (Terront's use of Michelin tyres, for example, in Paris–Brest–Paris, 1891) and in particular of the Tour de France, when riders and teams were closely identified with the makes of bicycle they used, show how closely industry was linked with competition. We have passed over the long

period during which the French cycle industry managed the long-term decline in cycle-use and ownership and increasing competition from abroad – essentially from the late 1940s until the mid-1970s – in favour of concentrating on contemporary developments since the 1980s, when the French cycle industry regained a small but significant role in stimulating French technological and industrial development through high-tech componentry and frames. The case-studies of Look and Time, as ‘shop windows’ of France’s SME high-tech enterprise and testing grounds of government innovation policy suggest how, despite a much less central importance to the economy overall than obtained during the 1890s, cycling still has an industrial significance in contemporary France.

Cycling as utility has in many ways been the most elusive of the themes considered in this book, partly because of the lack of reliable information on the issues – particularly for the earlier periods – and also because of the difficulty mentioned in the Introduction of finding things to say that are other than stating the obvious. But, principally in the chapters that discussed the most recent trends in French cycling such as the municipal self-service bicycle schemes (La Rochelle since the 1970s, Strasbourg, Lyon, Paris in later decades) and the crossovers between environmentalism and ‘militant cycling’, it is hoped that some impression has been given of how cycling nowadays can still be as ‘revolutionary’ a pastime as it was often considered to be in the late nineteenth century.

Complexity and identity: speed over time and nostalgia

As Horton, Rosen and Cox (2007: 5) have emphasized, ‘cycling is many things, varying according to both time and place’, and this volume naturally concurs with this judgement. In the same section of the Introduction to their edited collection of studies entitled simply *Cycling and Society*, they go on to underline their belief in the inescapable ‘complexity’ of cycling: ‘Historically, geographically, sociologically and culturally, cycling is a complex and diverse practice’ (2007: 7). Geographically, our study has been restricted to metropolitan France, and although there is obviously a rationale for extending the analysis to the whole Francophone world, the diversity and complexity of issues has been sufficiently challenging merely within *l’Hexagone*.

Looking at the complexity and diversity of cycling in France within the chronological span and framework that we have used in previous chapters allows us to make some tentative suggestions about just how French cycling has been ‘many things, varying according to time’. And

to provide a peg upon which to hang this brief concluding overview, Henri Desgrange's famous dictum of 'head and legs' seems potentially useful. In his volume *La Tête et les jambes*, Desgrange set out the idea that cycle racing was a sport that required a peculiar mix of qualities: 'le sport cycliste exige de la part de celui qui veut s'y adonner deux genres de qualité, d'ordre bien différent, qui se complètent l'un et l'autre: la tête et les jambes (Desgrange, 1894). If we adapt this notion slightly to express the idea that cycling is often about identities (*la tête*) and communities as well as about physicalities (*les jambes*) and practicalities, then Desgrange, even now, as the Tour struggles to maintain itself, can seem of some relevance.

In terms of identities and communities, cycling over time in France has seemed to be durably attached to notions of national identity and prestige, defined by the Tour itself (Robic, Bobet, Anquetil), but also by institutions such as the UCI (with France as founder-member) and competition in world championships and the Olympics (Longo, Morelon and so on), with the precise content of imagined community and identity varying as France has negotiated a changing place within the international system since the Franco-Prussian war. Also in terms of identity, cycling as an activity both sporting and utilitarian has enduringly reflected issues of class and sociocultural and socioeconomic status within France, linked, arguably to its iterations as work and pleasure for differing groups of French citizens. Here the insight of Philippe Gaboriau about cycling oscillating between 'la lenteur des riches and la vitesse des pauvres' seems to take on a significance wider than that to which he originally referred in his seminal studies (1981; 1991) of cycling's early history.

Over the time span that this book has considered, cycling as technology of movement has varied, precisely, in its varying forms between speed or conspicuously consumed slowness (reflecting the complex interactions between work and pleasure for different groups), between modernity and archaism, between progress and nostalgia. Thus, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, cycling was symbolic of modernity, either as the leisured speed of the upper classes or as the laboured speed (for utility purposes or for professional racing) of the working classes. However, by the post-war period, as scrutiny of Tati's *Jour de Fête* revealed, the partial 'obsolescence' of the bicycle as a technology of movement/transport was increasingly identifying it with archaism and the past, rather than modernity and progress. And as the world has progressively speeded up since – arguably – the 1960s, using cycling as a metaphor for slowness and indeed nostalgia has been increas-

ingly prevalent: the enthusiasm for rural holiday cycling on *véloroutes* since the 1990s reflects a 'return to nature' and simple pleasures; the principal concern in professional cycling is no longer 'how fast?' but rather 'how slow?', as doping has invalidated belief in speed as a marker of progress. And as the speed and pressures of urban life have increased, French urban planners have increasingly listened to the critical masses of citizens who prefer the bicycle as an option for utility commuting, very recently allowing cyclists to ride up one-way streets in the 'wrong' direction, for example. And overall, the enthusiastic adoption by a range of French cities of cycle-loan schemes seems to demonstrate a developing new strand of ecological progressiveness in French urban planning.

The longevity of cycling as a mass popular activity has thus enabled a reversal of one of the initial drivers of its appeal: the speed = progress equation has been replaced by slow = clean. But longevity is also a key factor in creating a popular-historical memory of cycling that arguably should be seen as a major factor in the permanence of cycling in people's affections. As we have seen in looking at *Jour de Fête*, nostalgia and the narrative of past iterations of cycling are a key element of its enduring centrality.

The Tour de France as modesty rather than *grandeur*

For many people in France whose perhaps begrudging admiration of Lance Armstrong's domination of the Tour de France was tempered by just too much suspicion and resentment, the lengthy investigation into recurring allegations of doping by the US champion undertaken by US federal investigators from July 2010 until early 2012 represented a hope that light could finally be shed on the true status of his stardom and on the real state of professional cycling. For such sceptical and reluctant fans, and for others keen more simply to see a foreign, tainted and unloved champion laid low, the decision of the US federal investigators on 3 February 2012 to drop their inquiry was a further blow to any belief in a 'clean' Tour, despite the progress made since the 1998 'Tour of Shame'.¹ As has been suggested in the previous chapter's analysis of the complex relationship obtaining between France and Armstrong, the failure of the Grand Jury in California meant that no 'closure' on the 'Armstrong Affair' would ever probably be achieved, in France particularly.

The lack of closure on Armstrong came only months after the first Tour of the definitively post-Armstrong era, which had witnessed an even more than usually emotional attachment of the viewing public to the

fortunes of French riders in general, and the plucky Thomas Voeckler in particular. France's enthusiasm for the latest iteration of the 'Astérix complex' in sport has notably been chronicled in *Le Monde* (Dupré, 2011) and *Libération* (Auffray, 2011; Le Touzet, 2011a; 2011b). Voeckler's new status as the modest French hero of the Tour is an intriguing reversal of past expectations of iconic riders such as those we have considered in previous chapters. Whereas Robic, Bobet, Anquetil and even Poulidor were expected to win for the greater glory of France and for the strengthening of French identity as defined by sporting success in the Tour, Voeckler's persona centres on the hope and hopelessness of his ever winning. Although Voeckler managed to wear the yellow jersey for ten days, he always maintained to the media commentators who followed his every move that, given his obvious weaknesses compared with the riders favoured to win outright, he was not 'là pour gagner', predicting on a daily basis – 'C'est promis, aujourd'hui je perds mon Maillot jaune' – that he would lose the lead during the course of the stage. As well as accepting that he was not 'de la caste des meilleurs', he also more positively asserted that the fact that he – as a clean rider – was able to have some success was a positive sign for cycling in general. In terms of his approach to the sport, he stated that he was guided by 'une obligation morale pour aller au bout de la souffrance' (Le Touzet, 2011b). As well as honesty and lucidity about the strength of French cycling, two key terms of Voeckler's time in yellow in 2011 were 'rêve' and 'plaisir', reflecting as ever, the identification between the *course nationale* and the French public. Towards the end of his tenure of the lead, Voeckler opined that it was good to 'donner du plaisir aux Français par les temps qui courent', and commentators such as Gérard Holtz thanked him and the Tour for having 'fait du bien à la France' and for the 'rêve offert aux Français'.

It is one of the features of the Tour that it throws up incongruous interactions of people and ideas, either through the sinuous itineraries of its routes through rural and urban France – for example, the visit of the Tour to Colombey-les-deux-Eglises in 1960, when two national myths came together (Dauncey, 2003: 175) – or, more prosaically, events such as President Sarkozy's presence in the race director's car in 2010. Two discussions of the Tour in this volume have suggested a strange meeting of minds between Lance Armstrong and Louis Aragon. Considering the 'meaning' of the symbolic Tour of 1947, when the first of the post-war Tours was run in a tired and under-nourished country struggling to regain normality and a sense of pride, we touched on Aragon's view, expressed in the communist newspaper *Ce Soir*, that 'Le Tour, c'est la

fête d'un été d'hommes, c'est aussi la fête de tout notre pays, d'une passion singulièrement française: tant pis pour ceux qui ne savent pas en partager les émotions, les folies, les espoirs' (Aragon, 1947). And fast-forwarding to 2005, to the end of the first 'Armstrong Era', when the retiring champion said his farewells to France and the Tour on the Champs-Élysées podium, there is an echo of Aragon's statement of passion for the race, if not for France: 'I'm sorry you don't believe in miracles. But this is a hell of a race. You should believe in these athletes, and you should believe in these people. I'll be a fan of the Tour de France for as long as I live. And there are no secrets – this is a hard sporting event and hard work wins it' (Wyatt, 2005). Although the plucky exploits of clean riders such as Voeckler in 2011 give hope to idealists who wish to see the Tour as a pure test of athletic prowess, the reality remains that the passions it elicits in riders and fans of all degrees are still tainted by the issue of doping, and this intrinsic flaw of the Tour and the sport of cycling in general makes the meaning of France's *course nationale* – or in Barthes' formulation (1957: 119) her 'fait national fascinant' – less felicitous than it might be.

Whereas in the 1890s and early 1900s, cycling was a 'point of entry' for French sport, politics and society into the modern international community both in terms of international competitions but also through the creation of the *Union cycliste internationale*, it is poignantly yet significantly interesting to note that, in the late 1990s and 2000s, France has similarly been negotiating with world sporting and anti-doping bodies, principally because of Armstrong and the Tour de France. During the *Belle Époque* and France's development towards modernity, cycling was a facilitator of change and of the introduction of French influence into the international sporting arena, whereas in the 2000s the 'national cycle race' of the Tour is no longer a laboratory for the invention of France, but an international testing ground for anti-doping procedures and legislation.

Cycling as a contemporary *bienfait social*

The final words on cycling in France can perhaps usefully re-engage with one of the earliest French attempts to circumscribe the meaning and significance of cycling. We have already returned to Henri Desgrange, and his notion of the inextricability of the cerebral and physical dimensions of cycling, so it is only fitting to conclude with his rival progenitor of cycle sport in the 1890s, Pierre Giffard. As a popularizer of both prac-

tical cycling and of cycle sport, Giffard was an incomparable figure, remembered for his launching of cycle races such as Paris–Brest–Paris for *Le Petit Journal* in 1891, and numerous other competitions, as well as for stimulating the growth of the sporting press through the iconic *Le Vélo*. Only Vélocio, perhaps, can rival Giffard and Desgrange for the theoretical and practical contributions they made to French cycling. Giffard's most famous definition of cycling was that 'la vélocipédie est autre chose qu'un sport; c'est un bienfait social'. To locate this judgement in its principal context of the 1890s requires us to recognize the essentially revolutionary appeal of cycling in the *Belle Epoque* in terms of technology, mobility, speed, emancipation and the attendant freedoms that came with these transformations of individual experience. Different elements of the nexus of activities making up cycling as both a sport and a 'service to society' developed from the late nineteenth century onwards into the strands of cycling that now constitute its taxonomic complexity: commercialized sport and entertainment; amateur sport and entertainment; amateur leisure and entertainment; everyday transport and utility. It would seem that the strength and permanency of cycling as a varied and complex practice has, in France at least, been dependent in large part upon the association between its various forms and leisure/pleasure. What is perhaps particular to the case of France has been the special strength of the form of cycling defined as competition (primarily professional, but also amateur), highly mediatised and packaged as 'sports-entertainment', exemplified for more than a century by the Tour de France, but also by traditions of competition dating back to the great races of Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Brest–Paris in 1891 and even before.

In the early twenty-first century, as French citizens and public-policy makers become increasingly aware of the limitations and costs of motorized transport and move towards adopting ecologically sustainable forms of tourism and urban transport in which the bicycle is a key element, it may be that cycling is becoming once again primarily to be conceived as a *bienfait social*, whose very pleasurable slowness has become a sign of progress for current times.

Note

- 1 In August 2012, Armstrong surprised supporters and detractors alike, when he apparently capitulated in the face of USADA evidence that he had cheated throughout his career. Although not admitting guilt, Armstrong abandoned his struggle with the US authorities, leaving the UCI and ASO to determine what – if any – sanctions should apply to his record in the Tour de France.

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