

The Tour wouldn't be the Tour without the Dutch fans who descend on Alpe d'Huez every time the race visits

Alpe d'Huez: Orange disorder on Dutch Corner

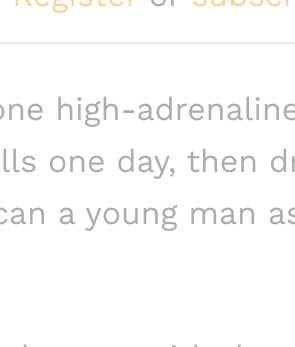
C by Geoff Waugh — July 14, 2022 in Pro cycling and racing, Rides, climbs and travel

Each of Alpe d'Huez's famous 21 bends is special, but the hordes of orange-clad, booze-fuelled, car-rocking, Europop-singing Dutch fans on corner seven create a spectacle of noise and colour that's unique in all of cycling.

Words and photography: Geoff Waugh

At Dutch Corner during the Tour de France, it's no surprise to see a guy dressed in the red and white costume of the Pamplona bull runners.

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He's probably looking to keep the buzz factor high by flitting from one high-adrenaline event to another in the space of a week. Get chased by enraged bulls one day, then drink solidly for a week before chasing pro cyclists up a hill. What more can a young man ask for?

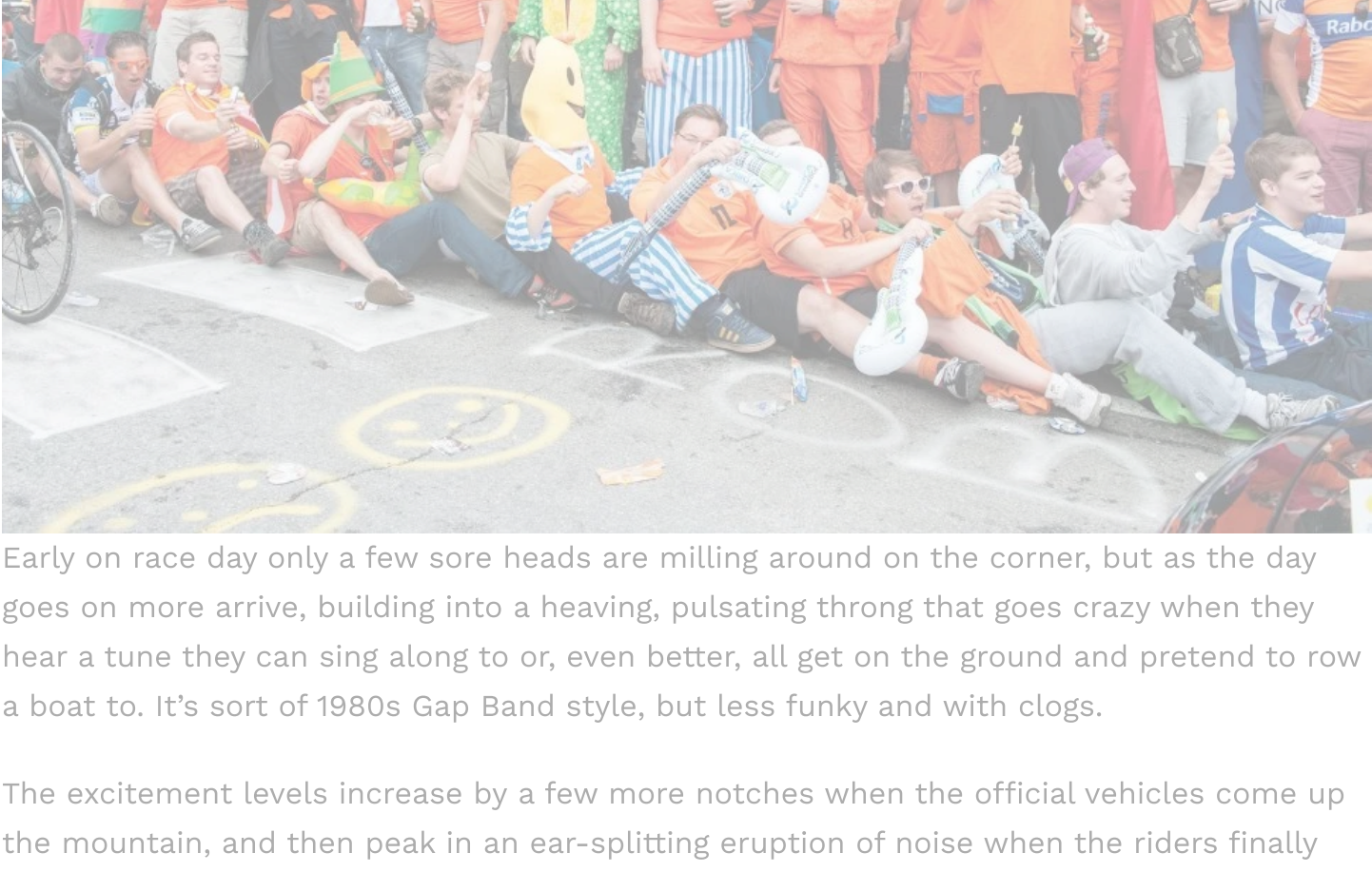
Quickly he is gone, sucked into a whirlpool of orange that pulses and sways with the incessant battering of Euro-beats and fuelled by a seemingly never-ending supply of Heineken.

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Corner seven of arguably the Tour's most famous climb certainly contains the race's most famous fans. For years hordes of Dutch have been gathering around the Église Saint-Ferréol that's located here. Indeed, Alpe d'Huez's other name is the Dutch Mountain.

They come in camper vans, they come in cars, they come as surely as birds fly south for winter. For days before the racers arrive they nestle precariously on the slopes, tents pitched at improbable angles, singing and shouting their songs.

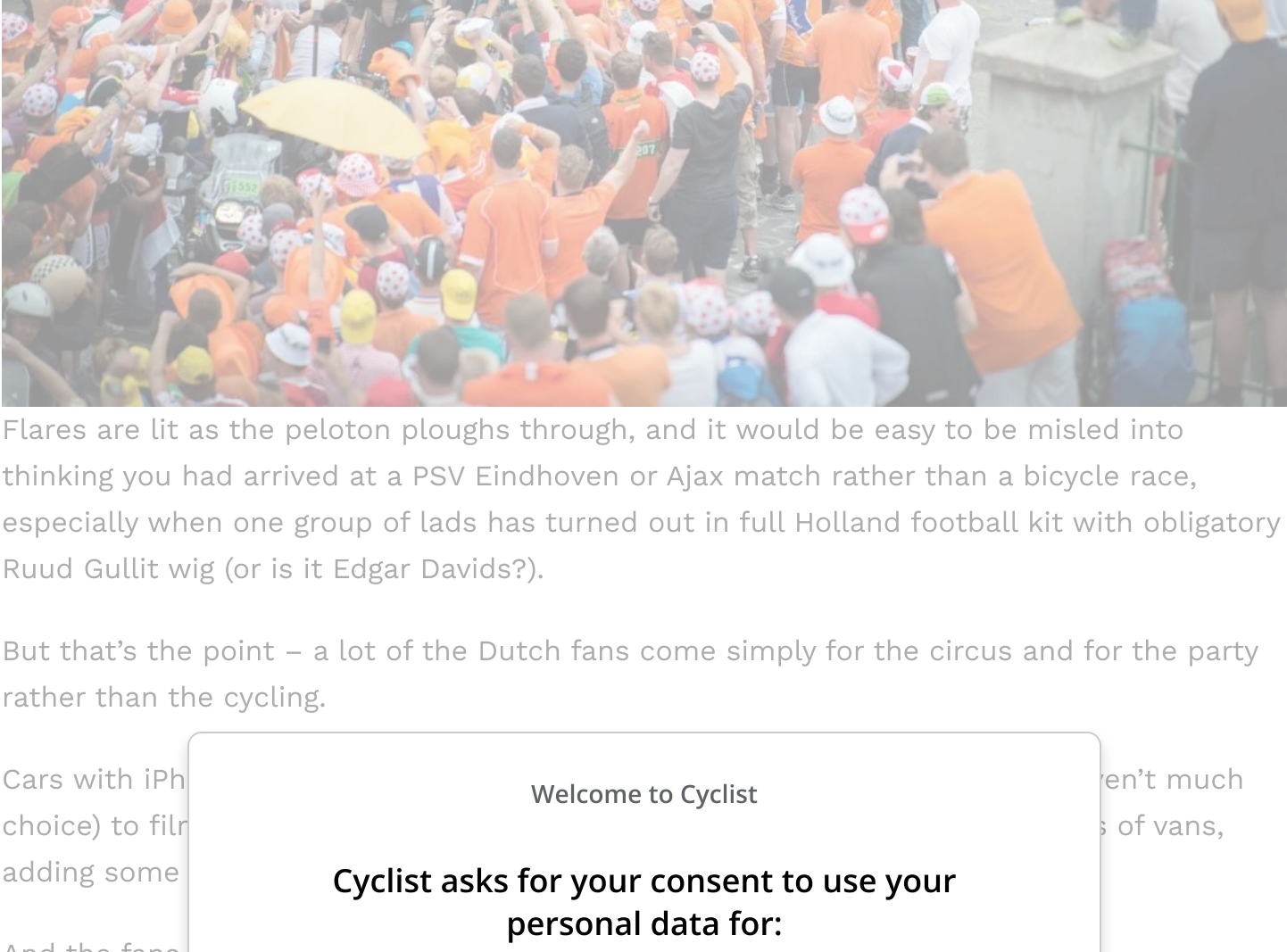


Early on race day only a few sore heads are milling around on the corner, but as the day goes on more arrive, building into a heaving, pulsating throng that goes crazy when they hear a tune they can sing along to or, even better, all get on the ground and pretend to row a boat to. It's sort of 1980s Gap Band style, but less funky and with clogs.

The excitement levels increase by a few more notches when the official vehicles come up the mountain, and then peak in an ear-splitting eruption of noise when the riders finally arrive, battling their way through the sea of orange like lycra-clad icebreakers.

Dutch cyclists especially are given such a high-volume, back-slapping welcome as they ride through the corridor of sound their ears will be ringing until well after the race hits Paris.

Team cars are stopped and rocked from side to side, a brave fan leaps onto the roof of a team van and 'surfs' the corner to a resounding cheer. A gendarme pulls him down and the surfer hugs and kisses the policeman. His legend is made.



Flares are lit as the peloton ploughs through, and it would be easy to be misled into thinking you had arrived at a PSV Eindhoven or Ajax match rather than a bicycle race, especially when one group of lads has turned out in full Holland football kit with obligatory Ruud Gullit wig (or is it Edgar Davids?).


But that's the point – a lot of the Dutch fans come simply for the circus and for the party rather than the cycling.

Cars with iPhones (choice) to film the race, adding some of the excitement.


And the fans

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s of vans,

The DJ (these days it's a paying gig) spins a house version of 'Tulips from Amsterdam' and the crowd erupts, all hands in the air, beer spilling liberally amongst the synthetic wigs. Not a problem – there's always more beer.

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'I must find them,' he tells no one in particular while trying to drunkenly text on his phone. 'We have to keep on making the party!'

It appears the Dutch fans have all the qualities of a good cyclist: stamina and an indomitable spirit.

Double Dutch: The view from the hill


Robin Stolk: 'I come from Amsterdam and I have been here for one week and this is my first time. It's crazy. This is my second beer – oh come on, it's ten in the morning! I don't ride a bike at home; I came for the atmosphere.'


Svan Van Hegelsom: 'I am coming from Tilburg in the south of Holland. We came on Tuesday and yesterday I rode up Alpe d'Huez – which was awesome. I think we have drunk about 30 beers a day, plus some wine. Cool!'



Eduard Lindeboom, DJ: 'This is my gig. When there's a party I make the music. I have been here for seven days. I did the gig in 1996 when the start was in Holland. I was 23 and we went on a train and had a big party.'

Bert Lohuis: 'I really like cycling but I like to party a lot. We have the flowers and the wooden shoes and the party! I've been here for four days. You must start drinking slowly and build up – it's like riding a mountain!'

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