

Maddog Unleashed

Lance Makes Headlines, But The Other Guys Are Making the Race



"It's important to have him here because he is a big, big star. We found our George Clooney in Austin." —Angelo Zomegnan, race director of the Giro d'Italia, discussing Lance Armstrong with *The New York Times*

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

It must be tough, racing with Lance Armstrong.

I just finished watching stage 5 of the Giro d'Italia for free, online, thanks to Universal Sports (nice work, guys), and Big Tex got more attention for losing three minutes than Rabobank's Denis Menchov did for winning the stage. That LPR's Danilo Di Luca took the maglia rosa was immaterial. Where's Lance?

Ouch.

When a knackered Armstrong drifted off the back some four miles from the finish, he took three Astana teammates along with him for moral support—Janez Brajkovic, Daniel Navarro Garcia and Jose Luis Rubiera. Up front, the man Armstrong said he was here to work for—Levi Leipheimer, who hung tough with the lead group, finishing fifth and moving into fourth overall—had just one sidekick, Chris Horner.

Double ouch.

Now, having Horner backing you up on a mountainous stage of a grand tour is probably the equivalent of having two or even three lesser men along for the ride. But still, damn.

To his credit, Leipheimer did not complain about being shorthanded in the finale; not where anyone outside la famiglia could hear him, anyway. Speaking with CyclingNews.com, he said simply: "Lance, I think he's doing very well. I saw him two weeks ago and I think he's doing much better."

Writing Headlines, Not Making Them. Having spent a dozen years as a newspaper copy editor, I know a little something about laboring in obscurity. Copy editors are the janitors of journalism, pale creatures of the night whose drudgery goes mostly unnoticed until some toilet of a story is left unswabbed and the stink draws lawyers.

I rarely wrote anything under my own byline in all those years, but I admit to having enjoyed the work. I never had to chase a story—the stories came to me. My hours were regular, I had my days free to ride the bike, and I never had to wear a tie.

Eventually, though, I got tired of cleaning up other people's messes and decided to go make some of my own. The hours are a little less regular, and I don't ride as much as I used to, but I still don't have to wear a tie.

When Hacks Attack. I'm not entirely out of the editing game, though. I chase commas a couple days a week for VeloNews.com, and while the work can be frustrating, even irksome at times, I take some pleasure from the anonymity of it. Like Horner, I'm contributing to the team effort; I just gripe more and grin less.

But I can't ride support all the time, not any more. I love to jump out of the pack, turning a phrase or two of my own, hoping that someone notices and says, "Oh, yeah, that was a good one," instead of just flipping on past to the next page and wondering where the real writers are. If I mostly escape notice it's not for lack of trying.

That's why my sympathies are with riders like Menchov, Di Luca and Leipheimer, guys who are making the race, if not the headlines.

Whether you're friend or foe, racing with Armstrong must be like sharing a scene with George Clooney. Even when you're doing your best work and he's not, everyone's still going to be watching Clooney, not you.