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Cyclist

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Ed's Letter

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A stone's throw from the snow-capped peaks of the Australian Alps, Cyclist embarks on a gravel adventure across the NSW Snowy Monaro

Photo Mandy Lamont



As we put this issue to bed, lockdown restrictions – in NSW and Victoria, in particular – are finally beginning to ease. However, the 5km radius rule still applies for many Australians, and here at

Cyclist that's the one restriction we're *really* interested in seeing consigned to history. Don't get us wrong, Picnic Day was great and all, but what we truly want is to head out for a ride that takes in some roads *outside* of our collective local government areas. Take, for example, our Melbourne-based reviewer, Nick Squillari, who instead of taking a brand-new set of Cadex 36 Disc wheels (page 26) out to his usual testing grounds in Kinglake, in this issue had to settle for a slog around the slightly more suburban Kew Boulevard.

Cycling may be a privilege, but the freedom and exhilaration it offers is so vital to our physical and mental wellbeing that it can be a shock to discover just how much we need it and miss it when it's taken away from us. True, in the hierarchy of troubles facing the planet – from pandemics to climate change to global poverty – the tribulations of a bunch of cyclists unable to go on a jaunt to the mountains come very far down the list, but that

doesn't make them any less valid. These are the moments we live for: the sweep of a perfect hairpin; the sound of rubber on tarmac; the view from the summit that was so hard won.

Of course, once the radius rules have eased, we'll start to look towards an even more joyous occasion: the day that international travel returns. And when we do, we've found a new place high on our list of must-visits: the Flandrien Hotel & Art Gallery, a 100% cycling-dedicated hotel in Flanders, Belgium that's run by Jamie Anderson, an Aussie professor and competitive cyclist. We interview Jamie on page 42 to find out how he brought to life this haven for cycling types.

And don't miss this issue's Big Ride in the Snowy Monaro (page 54), which explores one of the gravel routes on the multi-day itinerary of the new Drops + Hoods event (dropsandhoods.com), scheduled to for 2-5 December 2021. The ride is a doozy, and Drops + Hoods undoubtedly will be too.



PEAKS CHALLENGE FALLS CREEK SUNDAY 13 MARCH 2022

Keen for a 235km, 13-hour ride with 4,000+ metres of climbing, set against the backdrop of the beautiful Victorian Alps? At Peaks Challenge Falls Creek, you'll tackle the ascents of Tawonga Gap, Mount Hotham and, finally, 'The Beast' that is the back of Falls. Sign up before early bird ends on Sunday 28 November to beat the price rise.

Visit bicyclenetwork.com.au/rides-and-events/peaks-challenge for more information.



Q&A Jamie Anderson



Meet Jamie Anderson, the Aussie co-owner of the Flandrien Hotel, a unique, new and 100% cycling-focused hotel in Flanders, Belgium

Words **JACK LYNCH**

The Flandrien Hotel is a newly opened boutique hotel located in Brakel, Belgium, that is 100% geared towards serving cycling tourists in one of the sport's true hot spots. It's the brainchild of co-owner Jamie Anderson, an Australian professor of innovation management in Antwerp and a competitive cyclist. We sit down with Anderson to find out more about what this luxury cycle tourism destination has to offer.

Cyclist: For Aussies, the Flanders region seems almost mystical. Do the famous races we see in Flanders represent the cycling experience in this region?

Jamie Anderson: Absolutely. The Flanders Classics like De Ronde and Gent-Wevelgem might stretch over distances of around 200km, but the courses are condensed in a very compact geographic area. So, guests to the region can cover pretty much all of the most iconic climbs and cobbled sections of these races in just a few days.

Cyc: What do you think people visiting your Hotel & Art Gallery enjoy most about the region?

JA: Flanders lives and breathes cycling, and there is a deep respect for the heritage of the sport. Although many people come here to experience the Spring Classics races, there is also an

incredible number of more local amateur *kermis* competitions occurring on an almost daily basis. This is real grassroots Flanders cycling, and the atmosphere is just wonderful with beer, Belgian fries and young and old alike sitting on their doorsteps cheering on passing riders. Our visitors not only get the chance to experience this kind of local *kermis* racing, but we can also help amateur and masters cyclists to participate by arranging transport, entries and full race support.

Cyc: We often think of wind, rain and mud when thinking about Flanders. When's the best time to travel to the region?

JA: As the Flemish say, 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.' But inclement weather has actually become much less of a deterrent to visiting the region in recent years. Climate change is a tragedy, but one of the realities is winter and spring in Belgium have become milder. It's not unusual to experience clear skies during the Spring Classics in April and May. But the best months in terms of warmer weather are still June to September. Unless you love cyclocross, of course – then you need to be here from November to January. But you had better bring some warm woollies!

Anderson (right) with childhood hero Allan Peiper. Anderson says, 'For me, Allan Peiper represents one of the first international Flandrien, the hard men from Australia, UK and North America who came to Belgium to make their mark'

Cyc: How does Flandrien Hotel stand out as the destination of choice for travelling cyclists?

JA: The reality is that most hotels have leisure travellers in mind. While they might claim to be cyclist-friendly, what that typically means is that they tolerate Lycra-clad bikers and might have a dusty room someplace in the basement to store your bike. We have created a hotel that is 100% geared to cyclists – everything from airport transfers to a workshop, secure bike storage, free washing machines and dryers and – very importantly – late checkout as standard. But the practical aspects are just one component of the experience; what is truly special is the 'home away from home' atmosphere, our incredible collection of classic bikes and inspiring Flandrien Art Gallery. People are truly amazed by what they experience here – the place just lives and breathes cycling.

Cyc: What's behind the name, Flandrien?

JA: The nickname 'Flandrien' was first used to describe the tough Flemish track cyclists who competed at the six-day races in the USA in the early decades of the 20th century. The term was later adopted for the gutsy riders from Flanders who dominated the Ronde van Vlaanderen and other Spring Classics. Since 2003, the annual Flandrien-Trophy has been handed to the professional cyclists who most embody the tough and hard-working values of the Flandrien cyclists of years gone by. Chris Froome summed up these sentiments when he accepted the award in 2013, saying, 'A Flandrien is to me someone who, no matter how tough the conditions are, never gives up. Someone who has the character of a fighter.' Today, the term Flandrien is not so much about a nationality, but rather a mentality of grit, determination and perseverance – a mentality that we celebrate at the Flandrien Hotel.

Cyc: Which of the famous classics routes can you ride from the doorstep of Flandrien Hotel?

JA: The hotel is located bang in the centre of the route of the Tour of Flanders, and most of our guests come to ride the nearby bergs and cobbled sections of the race. But we are also only 45 minutes' drive from the Roubaix velodrome and 90 minutes to Liège, so it is completely possible for us to arrange day trips to those classics routes also.

Top left: A cyclist takes on the Flanders' infamous Muur

Bottom left: Bicycles adorn the walls of the Flandrien Hotel

Right: The hotel even has an old Peugeot-Michelin team car as its shuttle



'The term Flandrien is not so much about a nationality, but rather a mentality of grit, determination and perseverance'

Cyc: By the time this magazine is printed, the 2021 UCI World Championships would have been run and won in Flanders. How will the region and your hotel come alive for that event?

JA: The day after the World Championships conclude in Leuven we will officially launch our African Riders Development Program in partnership with the Phil Liggett Foundation. The Program will create a base here at the Flandrien Hotel for U23 riders from Africa to have a chance to train and race in Belgium, with a long-term vision to boost the numbers of African riders in the pro ranks. We will also premiere our new Flandrien Gallery Pop-Art Exhibition, which celebrates the World Championships wins of Rik Van Looy and Eddy Merckx in 1961 and 1971 respectively, representing the 60th and 50th anniversary of those victories. The signed artworks have been created by Flemish artist John Mettepenningen, who is known as the 'Andy Warhol of Cycling'.

Cyc: Which feature of Flandrien do you think will have the most lasting impact on your guests?

JA: It goes without saying that our guests experience complete peace of mind with regards to the practical stuff like the facilities and amenities we provide. And they are inspired by our bike collection

and artworks. But what we hear the most from our guests relates to the 'home away from home' feel of the Flandrien. It's the authentic and warm welcome they receive, and the friendships they make while staying with us.

Cyc: As a relatively new business, how do you see the future of your hotel and how do you want to affect travelling cyclists?

JA: There are more than 250,000 international cycling tourists coming to Flanders each year, and yet we are the first hotel in the region to offer a fully integrated guest experience for bikers. We're already working with Visit Flanders (the Flemish Government Tourism Authority) to invite other Belgian and international hoteliers to come to our hotel to share best practices. In November we will offer our first three-day course on 'Entrepreneurship in the Cycling Industry' under the umbrella of our Flandrien Learning Institute, and we are in discussions to franchise our Flandrien Art Gallery concept to business partners in China and Australia. We plan to have fully fledged Flandrien Hotels modelled on our current Belgian hotel opened in other cycling hot spots around the world within the next 3-5 years. ☺

For further information on the Flandrien Hotel, visit flandrienhotel.com