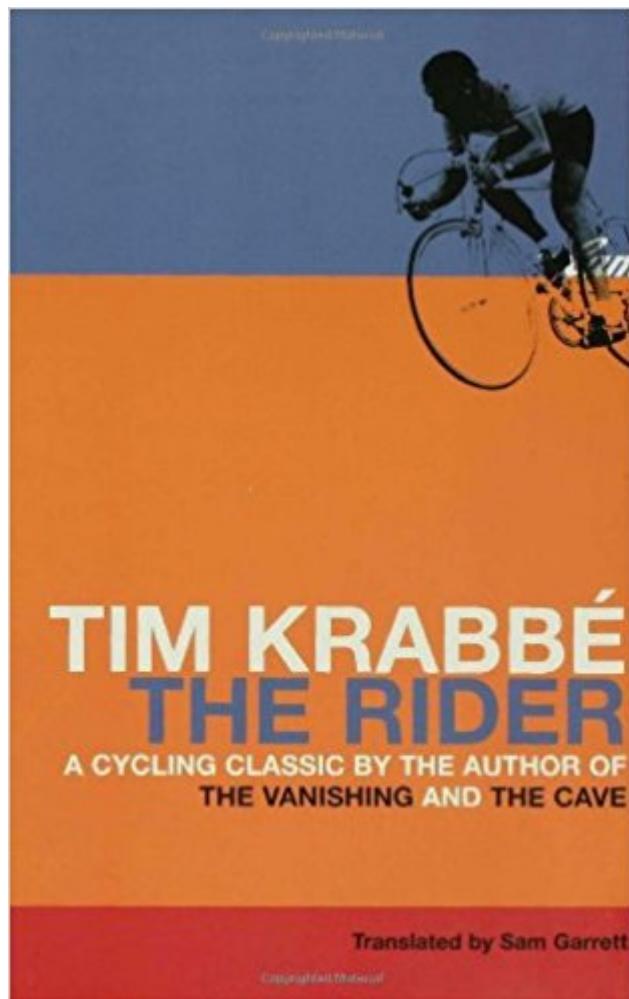


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# The Rider



## Synopsis

Originally published in Holland in 1978, The Rider became an instant cult classic, selling over 100,000 copies. Brilliantly conceived and written at a break-neck pace, it is a loving, imaginative, and, above all, passionate tribute to the art of bicycle road racing. Not a dry history of the sport, The Rider is beloved as a bicycle odyssey, a literary masterpiece that describes in painstaking detail one 150-kilometer race in a mere 150 pages. The Rider is the ultimate book for bike lovers as well as the arm-chair sports enthusiast. Tim Krabbé is one of Holland's leading writers, and his novels are published all over the world. His many books include *The Vanishing*, which was made into a successful film, and *The Cave*. He lives in Amsterdam. 'The Rider is a great read and a great ride. Krabbé's half-day race, delivered kilometer by kilometer onto the page, shows the sport for what it is: painful, exhilarating, tactical, relational, fast, slow, dangerous, consuming, prone to mechanical failure, heroic, futile...' -Donald Antrim '...there's something about Krabbé's spare writing style that lulls even uninitiated readers into a sort of trance-presumably not unlike that of the long-distance racer moving ever closer to the finishing line.' -Time Out New York 'Compelling...irradiated by an intense love of cycling and a fascination with the nature of the racing experience... [Krabbé] captures the rhythm of the race.' -The Economist 'A complex meditation on the nature of extreme physical and mental exertion, wrapped in the guise of a simple account of one bicycle race. It will leave you wrung out, exhilarated, and relieved that you didn't break any bones while experiencing it.' -Bookforum

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At the start of this chronicle of a single bike race, the author glances up from his gear to assess the crowd of spectators. "Non-racers," he writes. "The emptiness of those lives shocks me." In immediate, living prose, Krabb , a novelist as well as a cyclist, takes us with him, inch by inch, as he rides the hundred-and-thirty-seven-kilometre Tour de Mont Aigoual, a course through the mountains that is better known as one of the cruellest stages of the Tour de France. He imagines an official collecting his clothes "after I've died in the race" recalls a champion cyclist who suffocated to death while climbing one particularly nasty hill; and insists that "being a good loser is a despicable evasion." Along the way, he lays bare the athlete's peculiar mixture of arrogance and terror, viciousness and camaraderie, and the result is one of the more convincing love stories of recent memory. Copyright   2005 The New Yorker

"The Rider a beautiful brute, as hard and fast as a thin wheel in a concrete road." The Observer (UK) "Its 148 pages will flash by in a blur of reckless, high-speed pleasure." The Independent (UK) "The Rider is a great read a great ride. Krabb 's half-day race, delivered kilometer by kilometer onto the page, shows the sport for what it is: painful, exhilarating, tactical, relational, fast, slow, dangerous, consuming, prone to mechanical failure, heroic, futile. The race and the book about the race becomes a raining and cold history of the rider's life. But to say that the race is the metaphor for the life is to miss the point. The race is everything. It obliterates whatever isn't racing. Life is the metaphor for the race; --Donald Antrim

It's a translation, so the writing isn't silky smooth...also, he's a rider/racer - but that's what makes the insights so profound! It's just one race with the racer's innermost thoughts layered on the agony of the competition. The tech may have changed since this was written, but the strategies and the pain is the same. And it's short, so don't scare yourself that you're dedicating months to *Atlas Shrugged*.

The Rider probably is the best-written novel on bike racing, edging out Ralph Hurne's *The Yellow Jersey*, but that could be damning with faint praise. If you're a fan of bike racing you should enjoy this book, but as a fan of books, I was often frustrated by the fact this this was so close to being utterly brilliant, but somehow fell short. I'm going to assume it is because the work was translated, but perhaps not. Perhaps it is brilliant, and I need to read it again. As it stands I enjoyed this book, and often found myself smiling (Krabbe clearly knows amateur bike racing and isn't faking knowledge the way so many thriller writers do when they botch scenes involving ordnance, for example) but for me the experience never produced the aesthetic moment wherein the story

elevated itself to art. Krabbe's style is typically stark, and effective. It would be easy to parody. If you have seen the original version of The Vanishing and the U.S. version than you know how Krabbe's work was somehow dumbed-down for Hollywood. I have a suspicion that is what happened with the translated version of this novel. A good book, but certainly not a great book. For overall cycling enjoyment I'd recommend James Starrs anthology on cycling The Noiseless Tenor. Still, this is vastly superior to anything anyone in the U.S. has produced on bike racing.

I'm not a road racer - more of a recreational, Gran Fondo rider who does Ironman distance triathlons. But, you don't have to be a racer (or even a cyclist) to appreciate this book. Former chess prodigy turned pro cyclist and eventually a successful writer succinctly combines all those talents in this book. He's strategic in his musings, bringing up competitors' histories and figuring out his split second alliances and next steps. Anyone who's been in a competitive event chalk full of endorphins understands the "narrow", hyper-focused mind he refers to and how exhilarating the feeling of finishing can be - thus how normal people's lives can feel "empty". Why wouldn't everyone want to feel this free and fulfilled? No putting anyone down, just wondering why more people don't partake in this free therapy of sorts. Is written in a unique, stream-of-consciousness narrative - not Faulkner-esque and difficult to follow - but rather simple, concise and every word has a meaning. That's why it's only 148 pages! So many great one-liners and spot-on descriptions of an athlete's mind. Reads more like a psychological thriller than non-fiction novel. Pick it up and I dare you not to read through it as fast as their breaks through Mont Aigoual :)

Just finished this book. I started racing in the era described in the book. Toe clips, no indexed shifting, no power bars or energy drinks. Little sandwiches, pieces of fruit etc in your jersey pockets, and diluted de-carbonated Coke in your water bottle. Worrying about "hitting your shift" clean and sprinting in a 15. It certainly captured the feeling of racing very well in that era even if the translation was a little weird at times. That said, I can't really visualize great champions like Roger De Vlaeminck, Sean Kelly, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault, or Jacques Anquetil overthinking and waxing philosophical during or after a race. That seems more the realm of the more educated, financially comfortable, and intellectual bike nut like myself. Types that can become very good racing cyclists, but rarely dominate the sport like the real champions. It was fun to read and brought back memories. Bicycle racing is extremely unpleasant. Body screaming for mercy and your brain trying to push harder. 30mph elbow to elbow with virtually nothing between yourself and the road. Finishing an event totally wasted, throwing up, having to be lifted off your bike, blacking out, and 10 minutes later

thinking "I could have gone a little harder." You definitely have to be crazy to do it.

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