

French Impressions: Muller's Tour de France (8 May to 5 July 2013)



Cycle route -----

Travel by car -----

Travel by train ++++++

I won't bore you with a blow by blow description of the barge and bike week and the other 3 300 km we cycled through France, but just a few high/low lights.

Weather

Coldest/wettest May and June on record in the parts of France we visited.

Of 53 days riding, 21 days rain, 21 days cold and overcast, 12 days sunny!! I think we picked the wrong year!

Getting there and back.

Emirates were excellent in accommodating our bikes, As they were included in our luggage allowance and we were also taking camping gear, we did not want heavy bike boxes. Plastic wrap was acceptable to them. We strapped the tent and fly to our chain stays to protect the derailleur and locked the brakes and steering. Bikes travelled safely with no damage. (The hole in the plastic wrap near the tyres was cut by quarantine in Australia to inspect the tyres).



Lyon Airport

We flew Perth-Dubai-Lyon. Lyon is a great airport; small and much better than Charles De Gaulle. Very quick passport check. There was no delay at customs because there was no customs check! We had to wait for our bikes to be unloaded, then we stripped off the plastic and put pedals and panniers on. Maybe customs officers got sick of waiting and packed up and went home. Anyway, the only delay in riding away from the airport was navigating in the dark.

Roads and Velo Routes

There are velo routes and velo routes. The velo routes along the Atlantic coast and Loire Valley are part of the EuroVelo network, the minimum standards for which include no grade more than 6%, hard surfaced, wide enough for two cyclists. This was certainly the case for these two routes that we followed (more or less) for more than 1000 km, including some very nice voie vertes (greenways) away from roads. The only down side was the signposting. Instead of the signs facing you as you rode along, they were generally placed parallel to the route, and often hidden behind bushes. In one case at a T intersection the sign was placed with the back facing you, so we did not see it till we retraced our steps looking for the route!!



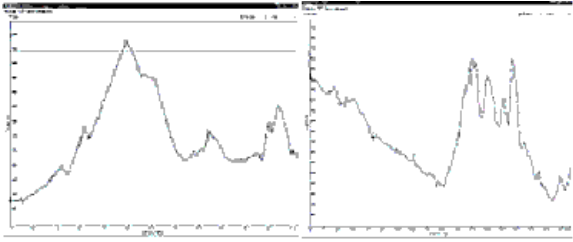
To complicate matters further, in one area they used the same signs to show the way on local routes, so we discovered some different areas than intended, and spent some frustrating time finding the right route.

Not all velo routes met the Eurovelo standard with respect to grade, surface or width. Sections along the Canal Du Midi deteriorated into muddy single track that was so bad that even mountain bike riders without panniers abandoned the attempt to ride along the towpath. The roads were a much better

proposition.



The route through the Luberon certainly exceeded



the Eurovelo 6% standard. The old hilltop fortified villages were built on some of the steepest rises for defence. I'm sure the slopes would have slowed up the enemy. Certainly slowed us up. (My GPS said one short pinch was 28%.) But

the efforts were rewarded with some great views .

French wine

Excellent wines available at much lower cost than for the equivalent quality in Australia. A couple of Platypreserves were an essential part of our equipment, enabling us to carry the wine without the weight of, or fear of breaking, bottles. I won't bore you with a blow by blow description of the barge and bike week and the other 3 300 km we cycled through France, but just a few high/low lights. Coldest, wettest May and June on record in the parts of France we visited. Of 53 days riding, 21 days rain, 21 days cold and overcast, 12 days sunny!! I think we picked the wrong year!

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Boulangeries and Patisseries

Yum. Why can't we get baguettes like that in Australia?

French Drivers

By law, there is a minimum passing distance of 1m in urban areas, and 1.5 m in rural areas, and this was generally well observed. Almost without exception drivers were very aware of and considerate towards cyclists. Truck drivers in particular would wait patiently to pass until they could move completely into the other lane, give plenty of clearance, and not cut back in till well clear. Whilst we did not enjoy riding along main roads, it was a lot less harrowing than in WA. (that time). I hope we will get back, so maybe next time???

