

CYCLING

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WEEKLY

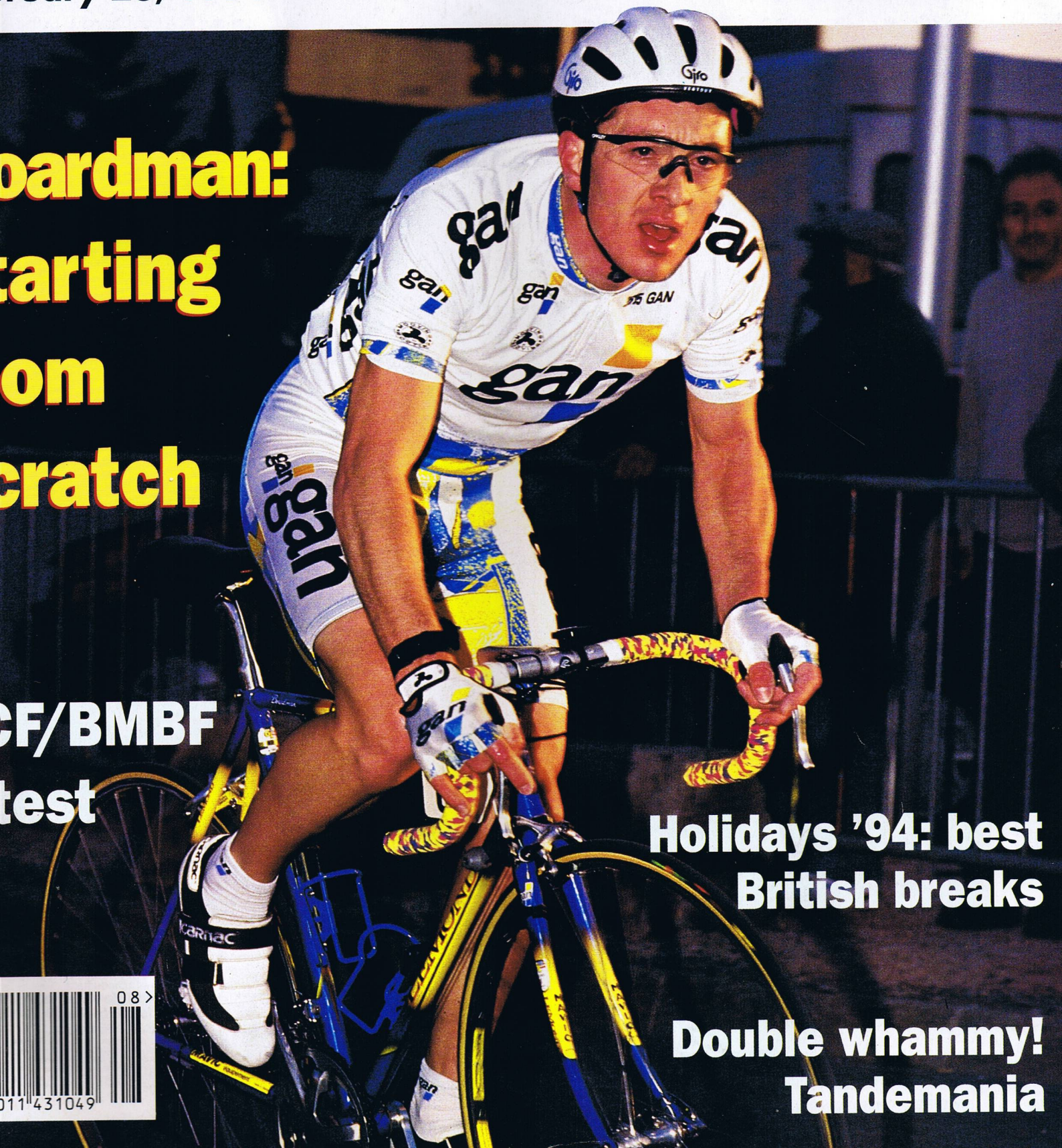
**boardman:
starting
from
scratch**

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Tour of duty

Chris Boardman's introduction to top professional road racing came in the recent Tour of the Mediterranean. It wasn't easy, he explained to Kenny Pryde.

'SEE he's dropped the rainbow stripes around his arms,' noted one observer of the pro scene, 'I suppose he's realised he's got to earn them.' It was true that Boardman's GAN jersey was now bereft of the rainbow stripes that Roger Legeay had supplied Boardman with for early team pictures. But the phrase 'earning his stripes' was an appropriate military expression, because that was the way that Boardman was looking at his first experience of the Euro pro peloton.



Photo: Phil O'Connor

Narrow roads were OK on the way up: descents were the problem for Chris.

'It's like I'm on my first tour of duty, that's the way I look at it. I did the Med, then another couple of races before I go home,' explains Boardman in his Toulon hotel. 'I came here and I knew that it was probably going to be hard, I knew there was a fair chance I would get my head kicked in, but I never really thought it would be like this. I feel like I'm starting from zero, in fact it's not that I feel I'm at zero, I know I am starting from zero.'

After three days on the flat, grovelling in the gutter in strong crosswinds, Boardman was taking stock of his situation and his first exposure to a new environment. 'Things seem really relaxed on the team, which I find a bit surprising. I realise that it's a long season and that you can't rely on a flat-out on every race, but there really doesn't seem to be any expectation of anyone doing anything. The team time trial on stage one was fun because normally I would have gone over the course to have a really good look at it. It was only 20 kilometres long and we did ride over it, but it wasn't serious, everyone was chatting away rather than checking it out. We rode it on normal road bikes too and in the end there were only four of us going through out of a team of six.'

Predictably, for a rider who rode time trials, the track and British road races, Boardman was finding it difficult to cope with the 150-man bunch on some of the narrow roads that wound their way through the hills of the Var region. 'My bottle went on a couple of the descents, so I ended up chasing then getting back on at the foot of another climb, going through guys getting shelled out and having to chase all the way down the other side again. I know that's not the way to ride and I reckon I'll get used to it, it's just a bit of a shock to the system. We go hammering down the descents at 80 kilometres per hour and suddenly my imagination starts working overtime. Maybe I'll learn to ride them or maybe I won't. I can't say just now.'

Apart from getting used to so many tightly packed bodies on such narrow roads, Boardman was surprised by the sheer quality of the field and not just the big names either. 'The bunch here is like any bunch really, there is a cross-section of ability. There are the top guys who are miles better than anyone else and then there are the rest. The difference though is that you never appreciate just how good almost all of these guys are, it's like the line between being good and being an also-ran at this level is so fine. It has been a bit of a shock to me to come here, because back home I could more or less pick the races I wanted to do well in and I was fairly sure of succeeding. Here I'm back to square one, I've got everything to learn. The other thing is that all my references as far as tactics are totally useless. Back home you know that the first attack of the day isn't going to go anywhere, but here it could be the winning move. When these guys attack it's almost always serious, there's just no way to know.'

Boardman and his long standing coach Peter Keen are great believers in liquid feeding. As far as Boardman and Keen are concerned, the best way to feed while racing is to take carbohydrate in liquid form, rendering all solid food redundant while you are on the move. In the conservative world of pro bike racing, this sort of conviction is seen as heresy by some teams, but Boardman is sticking to his guns. 'I make up my own feed bags before the race and if I miss my bag at the feed then I just go back to the car and take a bottle I've prepared from there. There hasn't been a problem yet and as soon as I finish a stage I take a mix of carbohydrate and 30 grammes of protein. It's worked fine so far.'

It has to be said though that Boardman's team-mates, the majority of whom were second-year pros (Aubier, Rous, Seigneur) clearly were unsure what to make of him. When Boardman suggested that maybe he would go for a 40-kilometre ride before the stage one morning both Pascal Lance and Serge Beucherie's eyebrows were raised in surprise. What was clear from their comments though was that they see Boardman as a track rider and little more, not knowing that Boardman has a good reputation as a roadman, too.

After losing 2-26 on stage 6(a), which ended in another bunch sprint won by Cipollini, the short afternoon stage which finished at the top of Mont Faron saw Boardman right at the front of race. 'It wasn't a premeditated move or anything, it was just that the stage was always going to be a bit crazy since it was so short, so I thought I had better stay at the front. Then, when the other two guys attacked I went with them. Heynderickx was nailed to the ground, but Moncassin was going all right.'



Boardman in Toulon. Don't be fooled by the palm trees and blue sky; the Tour of the Med was no picnic.

'I thought, well, if we get 1-30 then maybe there is a chance of getting up with the top guys, but there was no way to escape the train behind us. I'd never climbed Mont Faron before and it was probably just as well I hadn't. After I got to the top I realised that 1-30 wouldn't have been enough anyway, it was a hell of a climb,' said Boardman, laughing a little at his naive new-pro dreamings. 'After the Tour of the Med and a couple of other races down here I am going to go back and analyse everything that has happened with Peter to see what sort of aims I reckon are realistic for the rest of the year. I've got a long way to go.'

'I'm filling in a little sheet every night after each stage and the last question is always 'why didn't you win today' I just write in — not good enough.'



GAN mechanic Julien Devriese had his work cut out for himself

Trusty steed?

CHRIS Boardman started the Tour of the Mediterranean sitting too low, too crunched up and stretching too far down to get to the drops of his bars. When you are already finding it hard to cope with riding in a 160-man bunch on narrow, twisting roads in your first European pro road race, the last thing you want to be worrying about is your sense of well-being and comfort.

'I'm not used to the depth of the drops on the bars that there are on the bike,' noted Boardman, 'it feels as though I'm reaching down onto the road, so I am going to ask the mechanic to change them. Apart from that I feel a little bit squeezed. The bottom bracket is at least a centimetre lower than on my old road bike and I feel as though I'm very close to grounding the pedal when I am pedalling round some corners.'

The GAN team mechanics did indeed have a busy time at the Tour of the Med, changing stems that were too long or too short, headsets that were too tight and generally carrying out all manner of fine-tuning exercises. 'We are going to put new bars on Chris' bike, as well as shortening his stem by 1cm and putting his saddle up a bit,' explained mechanic Julien Devriese. Hopefully the tweaks will help Boardman adjust that little bit quicker to the demands of riding in a bunch.

Boardman's mount

Frame: LeMond Excel acier tubing.

Wheels: Mavic SSC 32 spoke rims, Vittoria Corsa CX squadre pro tubs.

Groupset: Mavic Zap gears and brakes.

Chainset: Mavic, 53 - 42 rings.

Pedals: Time Magnesium Equipe.

Saddle: Selle Italia Rolls, Rohloff seat-pin.

Bars: Cinelli 62-42 bars and steel stem. Cinelli cork ribbon bar tape.

The only items on Boardman's bike which were non-production were the brake blocks on his Mavic calipers, which, we were assured, were a special rubber composite, green in colour.