

Preparing for *Paris* *Brest* *Paris*

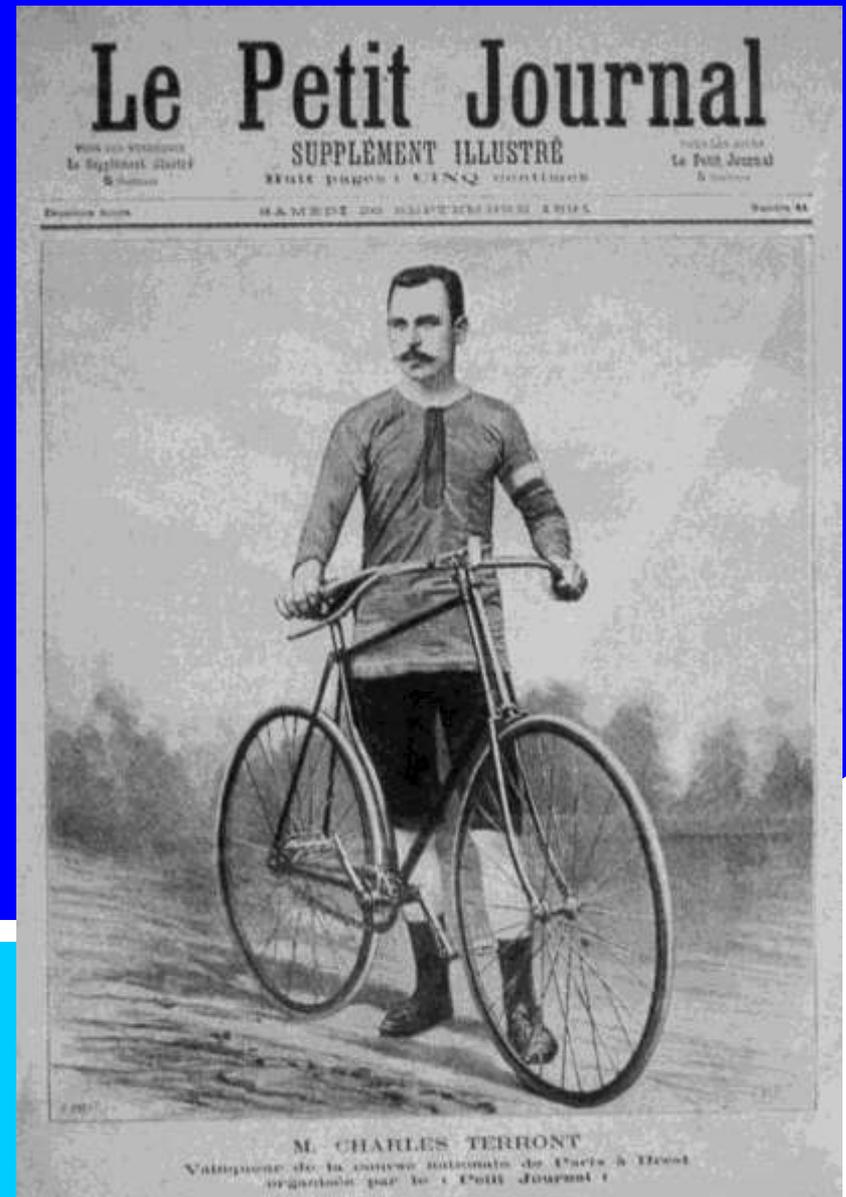
Things to know before you go

Tom Baker

Tempe, AZ

rvan50@gmail.com

May 2015



Audience and Purpose

While this presentation is primarily intended for first time entrants, if you're an *ancien* or *anciennes* you might also find this material helpful

Purpose of this presentation is to help you:

- **Be successful and finish PBP**
- Form a mental picture of what to expect in France and on the route
- Gain information so that you can plan now, rather than react once you're there
- Avoid problems that could potentially lead to abandoning –having knowledge of what to expect greatly increases ones chances of finishing
- Benefit from some 'school of hard knocks' experience
- Gain insights into the race history, cultural differences and what it's like riding in a country where cyclists are truly 'equals on the road'
- Overcome one of the biggest obstacles in the past to Americans finishing– riding in an unfamiliar place on unfamiliar roads without having a good idea of what to expect
- **I believe an hour spent studying and mentally preparing can be worth more than a full week of riding in enhancing ones chances of finishing PBP**

Disclaimer:

This is intended to be a help to first time PBP riders and much of the material is a result of my experiences, which are most likely somewhat different than anyone else's, but the information should be relatively consistent with what others would also experience

It is impossible to even begin to describe the many facets of a ride of the proportions and history of PBP, but I hope that this information is helpful in some way to a successful finish at PBP



Points of Discussion

- Short history of PBP
- Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines communities
- Start/finish at the *Velodrome National*
- Time table of registering and getting to the start line
- Bike check on Saturday and Sunday
- Starting group strategy
- Finishing times
- Support
- Pre-start and start
- 1st 50 miles
- 11 Control and layover towns
- Rest stops/controls
- Villaines-la-Juhel control
- Your control book
- Brest or Bust
- Breton language
- On the road
- Route following
- Along the route
- Bike equipment
- Weather
- Route changes for 2011
- Language proficiency
- Cultural considerations
- Bike terminology
- Finish in Montigny-Le-Brettonneux
- Racing, tradition and something new
- A French description of PBP
- Web resources



1921 winner Mottiat in the streets of Brest, returning to Paris

Short one slide history of PBP

Charles Terront, winner in 1891



- PBP is the oldest of the “classics” – 1891, compared to Milano San Remo (1897), Paris- Roubaix (1893).
- **Precursor to the Tour de France and 12 years older**
- In 1891 *Le Petit Journal* organized the first Paris-Brest-Paris. Pierre Giffard, head of the paper, promoted the 1200km race **to demonstrate the practicality of the bicycle.**
- Charles Terront won the race, riding without sleep for 71h22m with an average of 17.59 kph on the way out and 16.78 on the way back. He rode on some of the first tires made by the brothers Michelin, who used his success to promote their new removable tires. The last finisher completed the course in 245 hours (10 days)
- In 1901 American Charly Miller finished in 56:40. His feat is all the more remarkable because he first had to travel to New York, travel to Europe by ship, travel to Paris, regain some fitness before PBP, complete the ride, take the ship back to the US and then travel back home – an incredible journey compared to today’s travel.
- In 1931 a fundamental change came to PBP. While still a very prestigious professional race, the organizers dropped the category for the unglamorous *touristes-routiers*. **Luckily for today's randonneurs, the Audax Club Parisien stepped in and organized a 1200-kilometer brevet run alongside the race with a 96 hour time limit. 80 riders also did the audax event.**
- In 1948 a new rule required randonneurs to ride the whole course on the same bike. Manufacturers competed for rankings based on the times of their 3 fastest riders.
- 1948 and 1951 were the last pro category races, as the randonneuring event became more successful. Bikes could not be changed and had to be equipped with lights and a frame number. The route card had to be validated and following vehicles were forbidden.
- **The event was planned as a professional race in 1956 and 1961, but cancelled due to lack of interest. The cyclo tourists, however, rode as usual with both a Audax and a Randonneurs edition being organized.** Unfortunately the tide was waning; only 250 registered and 220 started on September 05th near the pub *Aux trois obus*.
- As interest in PBP among the professional racing world died out in the years following World War II, the amateur versions-both *randonneur* and *audax*-would keep PBP very much alive. **There have been ACP Paris-Brest-Paris Randonneurs events in 1931, 1948, 1951, 1956, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011.**
- PBP in its present form is no longer considered one of the racing classics, however, since pros haven’t raced it since 1951 and are now not allowed to ride it.
- 1956 had both audax and randonneur events. 1971 was the last year shared by audax and randonneurs in the same year until 1991. 328 audax riders, split into 17 groups, started 4 days before the main PBP at 04:00 and all finished inside 90 hours. The 325 randonneurs set off with a massed start at 16:00 on Monday September 6th in the first Paris-Brest-Paris managed by Robert Lepertel. **Route arrows were used for the first time.** 8 riders did both the audax and randonneur events.
- In 1975 1st time riders were required to complete a 600k qualifying ride, *anciens* were required to complete a 400k qualifier. **Afterwards, the ACP allowed European countries to organize their own brevets.**
- **In 1979 the Super Randonneur series of qualifying brevets was required. 3 starting times were offered.**
- In 1983 the duo **Herman De Munck** (Belgian) and Bernard Piguet (from CT Montferrandais) finished together in 43h24, in front of the 1,903 successful riders. They had ridden alone from Villaines la Juhel. Following them were Fantino, Sauret, Poncin, and **Scott Dickson**-the first American to finish that year. They arrived in 44h40. The first woman to finish was **Susan Notorangelo. The BRM was created and countries around the world were allowed to organize qualifying brevets.**
- In 1987 2597 started. First back in Rueil-Malmaison, ahead of 220 Americans, **Scott Dickson finished with the fastest time. He repeated this feat for the following two events. American rider, Kay Richson was the first woman to finish, in less than 62h.**
- In 1995, the 13th PBP randonneur, organized by a similar commission as in 1991, lead by Robert Lepertel, boasted 2,860 starters from 2976 entries.. The modifications to rules made in 1991 were kept, and are still included in the rules for the 2011 PBP. **The most notable change made at that time being that fenders were no longer compulsory and tri-bars were banned for reasons of safety.**
- In 1991, the PBP Centennial was celebrated by the ACP and the UAF; both events were run simultaneously. This was also when the two clubs decided to “bury the hatchet” and relations have been harmonious ever since. As a concession to the ever-growing congestion in the Paris region, the start location was moved to **St. Quentin-en-Yvelines**, a Parisian suburb near Versailles. A prologue leg from the Paris *Hotel de Ville* to the *gymnase* followed a speech by Jacques Chirac.
- In 2003, a well trained team replaced Robert Lepertel at the head of the organization. He first headed the organization in 1971 and had a major impact on the event. For the first time, more riders came from outside France; 2064 starters vs. 2005 for France. A group of 6 riders were awarded the time of 44h40, after time penalties, from a group of 18 who had arrived at Brest in 19h55. **Alpo Kuusisto of Finland rode successfully on a kick scooter.**
- In 2003, for the 1st time the fastest finishers were not recognized as the racing aspect was essentially removed from the event, with finishing riders listed alphabetically.
- 2007 saw one of the rainiest editions, with 5160 starters, including 591 Americans. Two randonneurs completed their 10th PBP, raising the total to 5 who have done 10
- **22,445 riders have finished PBP since 1931! 1366 Americans had finished PBP, by my count.**
- In August 2011, 5002 randonneurs gathered in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and 4068 finished the 17th PARIS-BREST-PARIS (P.B.P.) Randonneur. Two riders completed their 11th PBP!
- In 2015 the start location moves to the Velodrome National de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015

Brest

Paris

Slide 4

Velodrome National in Montigny-le-Bretonneux (location of start and finish)

- **Montigny-le-Bretonneux** is one of 7 townships that comprise Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines
- The city center of **Montigny-le-Bretonneux** is very close to the velodrome and there are hotels, the train station, stores, office buildings and a maze of residential area that surrounds the city center – it is not a quaint French village, but rather a community planned about 40 years ago
- The communities are post modern and are quite unlike what is seen along the route
- The primary shopping area is located *below ground level* near the Campanile hotel. There is a large grocery store (Carrefour hypermarket) and many different types of stores, including a bike shop. There is also a 2nd shop at ground level near the shopping center
- The Carrefour has a wide range of items besides food, since it's a hypermarket
- If you don't know the French names of foods, it is helpful to use the fruit and vegetable displays in the big stores to learn the names of the foods, which may come in handy when buying food out on the course
- Many Americans stay at the Campanile and Mercure hotels – go there if you desire to be around Americans
- Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines is about 25 km from Paris and about 5 km from Versailles

Montigny-le-Bretonneux



Montigny-le-Bretonneux street scene



Bike storage room in the Campanile hotel



Campanile hotel, where many Americans stay

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines



Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines is located:
25 km far from Paris using A12 and A13.

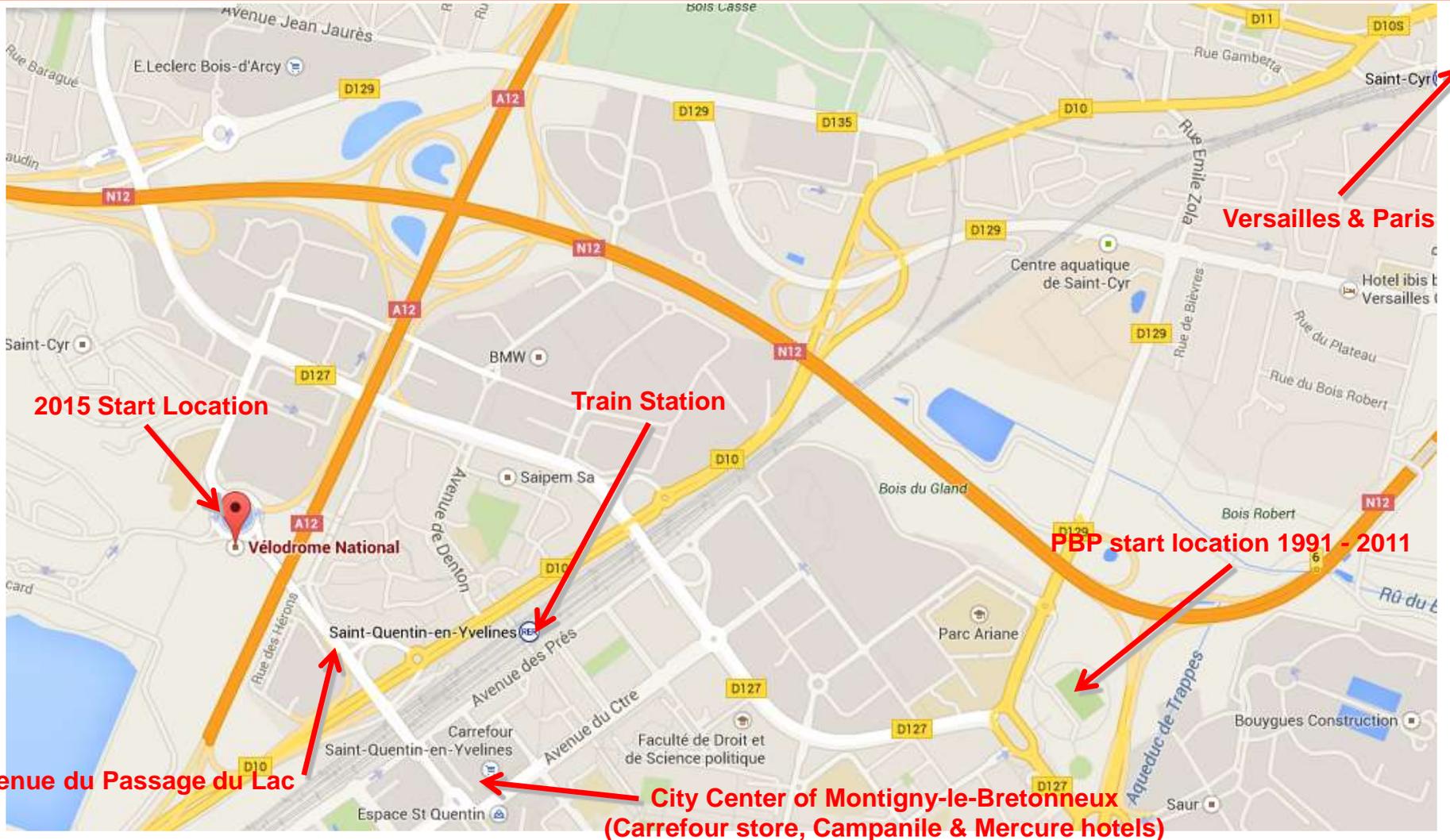
Travel to Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

- Saint-Quentin-in-Yvelines is an agglomeration made up of seven communes : Elancourt, Guyancourt, Magny-les-Hameaux, Montigny-le-Bretonneux, Trappes, la Verrière et Voisins-le-Bretonneux.

Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines is Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines is located :

- 26 min. from the business center "La Défense" by SNCF direct train, with a connection towards the RER A train
- 25 min. from the Paris-Montparnasse station by SNCF train with a connection to the Atlantic TGV
- 35 min. from Paris center through les Invalides, 40 min. from Saint-Michel/Notre-Dame station and 45 min. far from Austerlitz station with the RER C train.
- The communes of Saint-Quentin-in-Yvelines and its surroundings are served by 20 lines of bus. 23 interurban lines of bus connect the agglomeration to the cities of Haut-de-Seine, of Essonne, of the valley of Chevreuse and the Parisian outskirts, to Paris.

Velodrome National



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Slide 8

Velodrome National de St.-Quentin-en-Yvelines start / finish



Connected right across from the Montigny-le-Bretonneux town center using Avenue du Passage du Lac, which crosses over the A12, D10 roads and the railroad tracks – much closer to the hotels than the gymnasium used since 1991 - nice!

Moves the start to the west of all the autoroutes, freeways and railroad tracks that had to be crossed at the start & finish in prior years – nice!

Has rooms for meetings, so there should be plenty of room for check-in, meet-up, and vendors

Is used for over 40 different events throughout the year – concerts, art exhibitions, receptions and different sporting events outside of cycling

Before the start - Saturday / Sunday

- **Saturday check in for those starting on Sunday**

Process only takes about 15-20 minutes. Open from 8 am to 7 pm, but try to go at your chosen time

Pick up brevet card, frame badge, tracking device, reflective vest and jersey (if ordered) at the table for

Americans, where English is spoken (in past years Jennifer Wise has been at the table!)

At the bike check: show that you have working lights and reflective gear and have an approval mark put on your reflective vest

- **Sunday check in for those starting on Monday**

Open from 8 am to 1:00 pm, but go at your chosen time, although it doesn't seem to really be a problem if you don't

Many of the 80 and 90 hour starters mill around all day Sunday building up nervous energy that will all be released right at the start and for the first 50 km of the ride– white knuckle time!

- **Start**

Different starting times available, but you are locked into the one you specified on your registration, once chosen you can't change

Color of frame number is different for the different start times – easy way to tell which group riders are in farther down the road as everyone from the different starting times gets mixed together after 400 miles

My theory: Just getting to the start line of PBP is about half the effort of finishing and making it through the 1st 50 miles without crashing is worth another 10% - so you're 60% done after just 50 miles!!



Saturday or Sunday, depending on starting time – packet pickup, a meeting place & vendors



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Bike parking on Saturday and Sunday – great for seeing bikes from around the world



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Bike check on Saturday or Sunday



- Sunday night start – 80 hour and 90 hour
 - 80 hour group starts out like a 50 mile road race
 - 90 hour group is huge
- Monday morning – 84 hour

Starting group strategy:

In the past, the 80 hour group returning from Brest met the 90 hour group heading out at the Carhaix control. This is one of the reasons why the new rest stops were added, to alleviate the crowding at the Carhaix control

How fast will you be riding – 80 hours vs. 90 hours?

Consider the riders who will be in each group – speed, number, probable finishing time

Starting Sunday night – start at 4 pm so that gives over 4 hours of light at the start, but unless one finishes in less than 53 hours it would be 3 nights and 2 days of riding

At the latitude of Paris, the days are relatively long compared to most of the US

I have come to like the 84 hour group. It starts at 5 am – 3 days + 2 or 3 nights

- Allows maximizing your sleep time before the start
- Much smaller group than the 90 hour start
- The check points *can* be much less crowded
- It is possible to ride almost the entire distance in daylight



Starting times and your strategy

START	TYPE OF CYCLE	TIME LIMIT	CONTROLS
Sunday 16 :00 - 17 :00 pm New earlier time!	Solo and all-terrain cycles	80 hours	Unrestricted
Sunday 17:15 pm New earlier time!	Tandems, triplets, tricycles and all special cycles	90 hours	Unrestricted
Sunday 17:30 - 20:00 pm New earlier time!	Solo and all-terrain cycles	90 hours	To be respected
Monday 04:50 am	Tandems, triplets, tricycles and all special cycles	84 hours	To be respected
Monday 05:00 – 05:15 am	Solo and all-terrain cycles	84 hours	To be respected

Choosing your start time

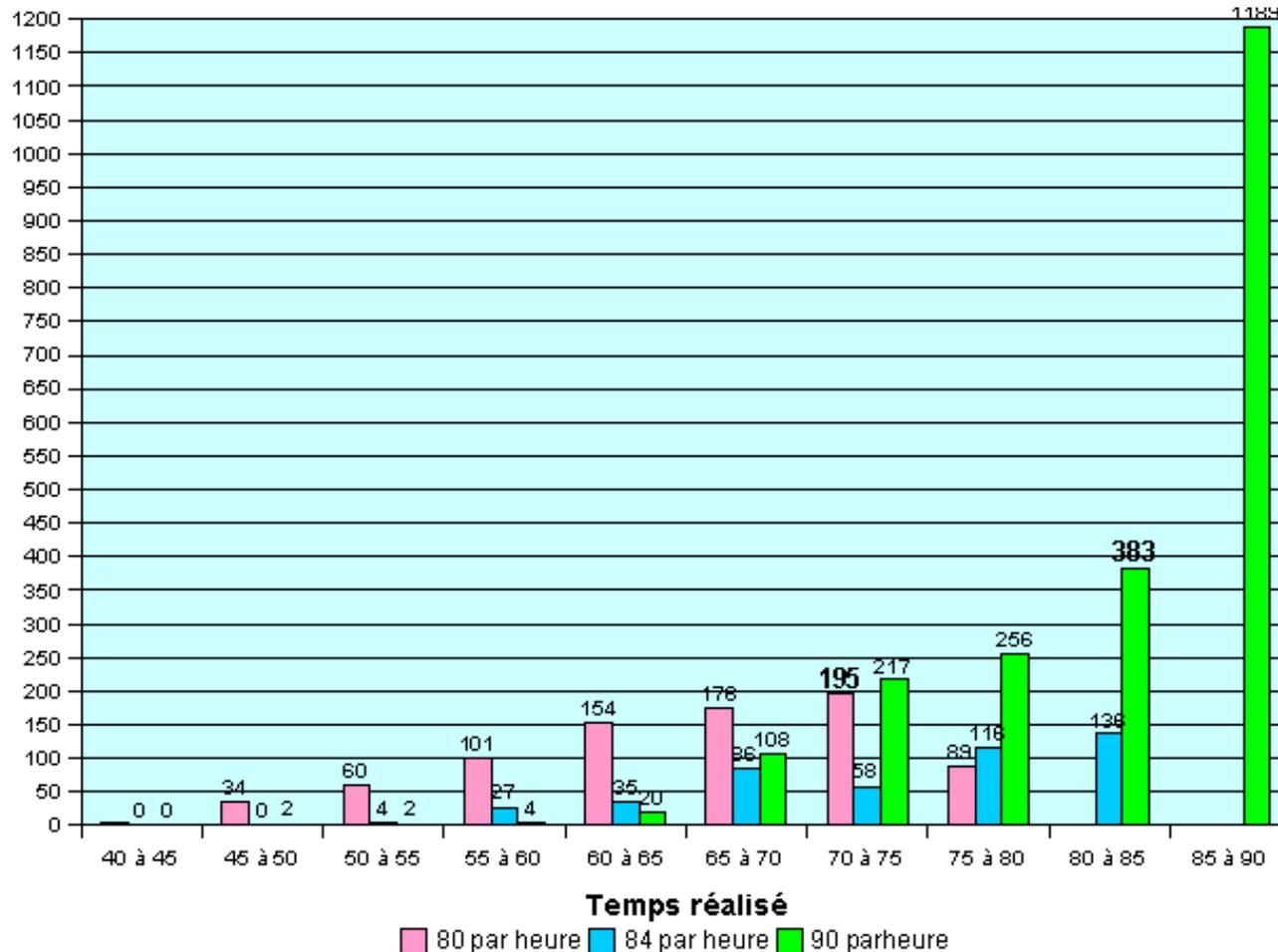
Finishing time statistics listed here are from the organizers. They've taken rider's 2007 600k qualifier times and correlated them with their PBP finishing times:

PBP 2007 time	600k avg time	Std deviation	Number
50 hr and less	27h08	1h41	30
50h to 60h	27h47	2h36	117
60h to 70h	29h28	2h44	469
70h to 80h	32h02	2h53	910
80h to 84h	34h10	1h06	468
84h to 90h	35h45	1h31	1613

In the 2015 PBP brochure, the organizers show the data a little differently. They list the 2011 times as percentages related to the 600km times, with a strong correlation shown between PBP times and 600km times.

The vast majority of riders finish in the 85-90 hour range, based on the Pareto charts shown every 4 years on finishing times. For example, on the next slide. . .

Typical histogram of finishing times from an earlier PBP (2003)



- The organizers discourage support vehicles, with statistics showing that supported riders are more likely to DNF. However, almost 33% of riders had support vehicles in 2011!
- Support vehicles *must use different routes* than the riders, which can be a challenge for drivers
- Support vehicles *must be registered* and have their support sign in the window
- It can be very difficult for a single support person to keep up with a fast rider without skipping some check points. Front runners sometimes use 2 support teams that leap frog controls
- A support person who is very knowledgeable and experienced at doing support in the US may not be as successful at PBP because of a lack of experience driving in France and a lack of experience with an event like PBP
- Driving support in France can be very challenging, compared to the US as the roads are somewhat more complex than many places in the U.S. Route planning for drivers is essential
- Support vehicles take up a lot of space around the controls and the support crews mill around the controls, often times making it difficult for riders to move about
- I found that a support person doesn't necessarily save large amounts of time, even though the food is already bought and ready to eat when I arrive
- Many of the French support crews have little kitchens set up outside the controls on the street for their riders
- Volunteers (*benevolents*) watch support vehicles closely at the checkpoints for any rule breaking. There are about 1500 *benevolents* at PBP!
- Always be appreciative of the many *benevolents* that make PBP possible! They offer incredible help with all the many details of the ride and are working hard at the controls
- Support people in line at the cafeterias at the controls must wait to be served after riders in line have been served



Pre-start and start



2011 90 hour starters waiting Steve Atkins photo



2011 90 hour start Steve Atkins photo



The Motards of ANEC lead the riders at the start



2011 84 hour start, early Monday Steve Atkins photo

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



There is lots of nervous energy built up by everyone waiting for the start, that has to be burned off

I've seen a number of riders crash out in the first 5 km – I've been taken down in a crash 500m after the start and also had the rider directly in front of me crash hard about 2 km from the start

1st 20-30 miles led by motorcyclists (The Motards of ANEC) who are very enthusiastic, but have in the past lead the pack the wrong way

Starting in the front allows for riding through the stop lights with the motorcycle escort at the start, but it is also rather risky because of the pack and the motorcycles

Starting in the front rows requires an understanding of how Europeans hold position in groups, which is unlike the way Americans politely queue up

For 20 miles riders slam on their brakes, speed up, then brake and speed up until the nervous energy is burnt off and the pack spreads out

1st 50 miles are wooded and hilly, real white knuckle riding in a big pack

After 50 miles it opens up into fields as the route passes north of Chartres. This is more typical of the route for the next 100 miles

Be especially aware of a real hazard in small villages – road furniture (poles, curbs, *ralentisseurs* (speed bumps) etc.) in the road designed to slow car traffic. Hitting one of those while riding in a pack or alone at night could be disastrous

If you make it through the 1st 50 miles OK, consider the ride 60% completed

11 Control and layover towns

- Saint-Quentin-En-Yvelines – *Velodrome National* start and finish
- Mortagne-au-Perche – a rest stop (*ravitaillement*) on the way out with water and food, not a control. It is a control on the return. This town is on top of a hill (naturally).
- Villaines-la-Juhel – *bag drops here in both directions*
- Fougères – ½ way to Brest, Medieval castle near the route, a classic
- Tinténiac – School of Bel Air hosts the control
- Loudéac – *bag drop here in both directions*. usual overcrowding for sleeping here is alleviated by the addition of Saint Nicolas du Pélem rest stop, steepest hills are in this region
- Saint Nicolas du Pélem and Quédillac –added in 2011 to provide more sleeping places. Not control towns, but a rest stop
- Carhaix-Plouguer
- Brest – Cross the Albert Louppe Bridge over the Elorn River & Goulet Strait to enter Brest
- Dreux – the last control before the finishing control. Added back into the route in 2003, after a long absence.



Rest stops / controls

- It seems that most people stop and rest – some even plan on riding very little at night – it is possible
- There are significantly less riders out at night and in the morning one sees waves of riders as the sun comes up
- There is floor space at Carhaix and the other rest stops – maybe it means laying down on the gym floor at a school. Bringing along a Mylar reflective sheet might be helpful for staying warm while sleeping.
- Most controls are at schools or town community centers because they have the facilities for making and serving food. *There are no convenience stores along the route.*
- Remember that PBP is a major money maker for these villages with 5000 riders coming through and spending money for food
- Also, people along the route have food and drinks that they either sell or offer to the riders!
- The food is not cheap and it is best compared to what one would find in the Midwest U.S. – not fancy, but good food
- Last time the food I chose often times alternated between chicken and rice and meat and potatoes, or pasta
- I like to eat the food and fill my tray at the controls - it's part of the experience and a hot meal is nice
- They always have soup (*potage*) and bread (*pain*) at the controls
- Expect to also see a wide range of drinks, including wine
- It is possible to get a really upset stomach with some of the intense mineral waters available
- Even though there are so many riders, they are spread out over great distances, so the controls really aren't that crowded, *considering that there are 5000 riders*
- The longest wait in a food line is usually 10-15 minutes, but many riders often times wait much longer at the crowded controls
- There rarely is a wait to have your book stamped
- Expect to pay over \$120 for food if you eat at each control
- There are also vendors at some of the check points with bike equipment for sale, if you need it
- There are also mechanics at some of the controls – they could be a real ride saver
- Bag drops are available from Des Peres Travel – a bag at Villaines la Juhel and one at Loudéac, so that makes 4 total times at your drop bags. Use a waterproof bag inside your bag, so everything stays dry in the bag
- Some of the control facilities are at rather large schools – expect to walk or ride 300 yards as you visit the check-in, cafeteria, bathroom, bag drop



Rest stops / control points



Typical fare found at the controls



Food line and eating area



Road side food stops are becoming more common as people realize there's money to be made from 5000 riders going by



Villaines-la-Juhel cafeteria dining room

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015





Tinténiac control



Villaines-la-Juhel 2011 Steve Atkins photo

There are always volunteers at the street directing riders into the controls
The whole ride feels like being on a journey, rather than a bike ride



Steve Atkins photo

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Villaines-la-Juhel control



- The 2nd and 11th controls are at Villaines-la-Juhel
- The control is in the *Hotel de Ville* up the steps
- Cafeteria set up across the street
- Bag drop – must find it, but it is usually right down the street
- The city in some years gives you a key chain and a CD about their town at sign in (nice souvenirs, but not nice to carry for 600 miles)
- Notice all the people in the photos milling around

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Your control book

<p>ST-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES le 24/08 - 04 h.45 Tandems - Triplettes Tricycles - Vélos "spéciaux"</p> <p>LETTRE</p> <p>le 24/08 - à 05 h.00 Vélos "solo" - V.T.T.</p>	<p>LOUDÉAC du 24/08 - 18 h.25 au 25/08 - 03 h.35</p>  <p>1.0h 444 km</p>	<p>CARHAIX du 25/08 - 03 h.10 au 26/08 - 01 h.00</p> <p>CARHAIX-PLOUGUER</p> <p>16h19 684 km</p>	<p>FOUGÈRES du 25/08 - 11 h.35 au 26/08 - 18 h.25</p>  <p>899 km</p>
<p>VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL du 24/08 - 11 h.25 au 24/08 - 18 h.40</p> <p>Cyclo-Tourisme</p> <p>53700 VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL 13-10 219 km</p>	<p>CARHAIX du 24/08 - 21 h.10 au 25/08 - 13 h.20</p> <p>CARHAIX-PLOUGUER</p> <p>6h26 520 km</p>	<p>LOUDÉAC du 25/08 - 05 h.10 au 26/08 - 07 h.10</p>  <p>20h23 60 km</p>	<p>VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL du 25/08 - 15 h.00 au 27/08 - 01 h.20</p> <p>Cyclo-Tourisme</p> <p>13423 100 ANS 1063 km</p>
<p>VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL du 24/08 - 11 h.25 au 24/08 - 18 h.40</p> <p>Cyclo-Tourisme</p> <p>53700 VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL 13-10 219 km</p>	<p>BREST du 25/08 - 00 h.00 au 25/08 - 18 h.30</p>  <p>11h11 603 km</p>	<p>L'OUTIL DU BOUTILLER TINTÉNIAC du 25/08 - 09 h.30 au 26/08 - 14 h.00</p> <p>5, quai de la Donac 35190 TINTÉNIAC</p> <p>08.58 845 km</p>	<p>MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE du 25/08 - 18 h.30 au 27/08 - 07 h.00</p> <p>13423 100 ANS 1063 km</p>
<p>FOUGÈRES du 24/08 - 14 h.05 au 25/08 - 00 h.00</p>  <p>17h08 305 km</p>	<p>CORLAY</p> <p>SECRET H#20</p>	 <p>SECRET 23h40</p>	<p>MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE NOGENT-LE-ROI du 25/08 - 22 h.30 au 27/08 - 13 h.00</p> <p>NOGENT-LE-ROI</p> <p>17h28 1204 km</p>
<p>L'OUTIL ET DES METIERS du 24/08 - 15 h.45 au 25/08 - 03 h.20</p> <p>5, quai de la Donac 35190 TINTÉNIAC</p> <p>20h13 359 km</p>	<p>SECRET</p>	<p>SECRET</p>	<p>ST-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES du 26/08 - 00 h.00 au 27/08 - 17 h.00</p>  <p>20h26 1204 km</p>

Use of the control book continues in 2015, in addition to the chips that enable following your progress on the web

Notice the secret controls – usually the secret controls are easy to see when you get to them, but sometimes they are not entirely obvious

The first order of business at the control is to get the book stamped, because it's easy to get caught up in everything going on and forget



- The last 75-100 miles to Brest are relatively hilly
- The “big climb”, the *Roc Trevezel*, is a very gradual climb of about 2 miles up a very big hill
- I’ve noticed that many riders when they get really tired run their gears ‘rail to rail’ on the climbs – smallest gear on the short climb, followed by biggest gear on the short descent – there are no big mountain climbs in PBP, but 100s of hills
- You know you’ve all but made it to Brest when you reach the Albert Louppe Bridge over the Elorn River & Goulet Strait. It is closed to car traffic, which the adjacent newer bridge carries. Once on the other side, the route now goes fully into the city and port of Brest.
- The control in Brest in 2011 was a facility run by the French Navy
- Many riders stop to take a picture of the Brest city sign:





The newer bridge across the waterway to the Atlantic as seen from the bike/pedestrian bridge



Brest in the distance



Countryside approaching Brest

Breton Language still in use in Brittany

- Brittany has had links with Wales and southwest England since the Dark Ages, when people immigrated from there.
- Their influence on the language and culture continues today
- Bretons played a major role in William of Norman's conquest of England in 1066 and controlled 10% of England at one time
- Brittany is home to the Breton language, which is separate from French and it was the common language through the Middle Ages, although it rapidly died out in the 20th century
- Breton place names traditionally start with prefixes such as Plou, Lan, Tre and Ker
- You'll notice the town names on the signs are in French and Breton
- Read the Breton name and it is a great phonetic aid in pronouncing the name of the town in French. For example Quimper is Kemper in Breton.
- Knowing the reason for the two names on village signs is another way to feel part of the culture while riding along in Brittany



- Drivers are typically respectful of riders – this is not only because cycling is a major element of the culture, but because there are very strict laws protecting cyclists in France
- Total altitude gain measured last time on my altimeter was 10,800 m (35,400 ft)
- Plenty of places along the route to find food as cafes and restaurants are in every village
- Be aware though, that most little villages will not have food available at night
- There is a village about every 7 miles and it always has a church with a steeple in the center, which is usually at a high point in the countryside
- There is always something to see – never a dull section, and you never know what new sight is around a corner – maybe a medieval castle, as in Fougères
- There is only one major highway crossing and they have volunteers out there at the highway watching out for the riders
- The roads are uniformly excellent
- People come out to the end of their road and watch the riders go by. Even at midnight they will be out there in the darkness, with no lights, watching and clapping
- Many people set up water and food tables along the route – it is good form to stop
- Children set up water tables and love to fill your bottles – sometimes they ask for your autograph! I like to carry a roll of American quarters to hand out to the children as souvenirs
- At night, most small villages are completely dark with all of the shutters closed and no security lights – they seem like ghost towns – very spooky
- However, some small villages are out in force at night to cheer the riders as they pass through
- You'll notice that as you are riding along and passing rural houses they have signs in front of them with a name. This is the given name of their house – which they use as their mailing address, instead of a street or highway address



Route following

- PBP is completely different than American brevets in terms of route following
- Route sheets aren't really even needed – few riders seem to use them
- Simply follow the arrows – there are arrow signs wherever you have the opportunity to make a decision on which way to go
- Due to road conditions, the organizers have in the past made little changes to the route, which can cause real problems if you don't pick up on it and try to follow your route sheet instead of the arrows, so follow the arrows
- There must be about 1000 arrows on the route with different colors used for the outbound and returning directions
- Maybe in 2015 the slightly reflective arrow signs will again be used
- In '91 the signs used a dark, non-reflective arrow on a dark blue background – I had to stop many times and shine a light around at intersections to find the arrow
- **One has to always be paranoid about finding the arrows to stay on course**
- **Simply following French riders is no guarantee of being on course – most of them don't live in Brittany**
- In many cases, volunteers driving around have stopped and given riders who are off course directions back to the course (saved me a couple of times)
- If you don't see an arrow for a long time, you should probably assume you're off course. You can either start back tracking, or wait and see if any other riders come along – there is always going to be someone riding a few minutes behind you
- Of course, **GPS** may negate the necessity of following the arrows for some riders. However, a GPS route needs to be used with caution as noted by the organizers : “The route is subject to change based on the road works and the decisions of the French administration.”



Always be on the lookout for these arrows

Route (cue) Sheet

Way Out		
78	SAINT-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES	
	MONTIGNY-LE-BRETONNEUX	
	Vélodyrome	0,0
	Rue du Pas du Lac / Av. des Prés	
	TRAPPES	
	Rue Mormouseau	5,0
	Port Marcel Cachin	1,0
	Roundabout la Boissière	3,0
D 23	ELANCOURT	
	Exit Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines	3,0
D 15	JOUARS	
	Junction D 15 / D 23	3,0
D 23	BAZOCHES-sur-GUYONNE	
	Junction D 155 / D 138 / D 112	4,0
D 138	MONTFORT-LAMAURY	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	1,0
D 112	GAMBAIS	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	11,0
D 179	FAVEROLLES	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	0,5
D 983	NOGENT-LE-ROI	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	12,5
D 26	TREMBLAY-LES-VILLAGES	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	7,0
D 140	CHATEAUNEUF-EN-THYMERAIS	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	13,0
D 20	JAUDRAIS	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	12,0
D 8	SENONCHES	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	9,0
61	NEUILLY-SUR-EURE	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	7,0
	LONGNY-AU-PERCHE	
	Junction D 112 / D 179	11,0
	Junction D 931 / D 311	13,0
D 931	MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE	
	Junction D 931 / D 311	19,0
72	MAMERS	
	Bypass	23,5
D 310	LA HUTTE	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	8,5
	(safety hazard)	16,0
D 15	FRESNAY-SUR-SARTHE	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	5,5
D 119	AVERTON	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	22,5
D 113	VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	5,0
D 147	LOUPFOUGERES	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	6,0
	LA CROIX BARBE	4,0
	LE RIBAY (safety hazard)	8,0
D 33	CHARCIGNÉ	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	4,0
	LASSAY-LES-CHATEAUX	7,0
	CHANTRIGNÉ	6,5
	AMBRIERES-LES-VALLEES	5,5
	GORRON	14,0
D 808	LE LOROUX	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	20,0
D 808	FOUGERES	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	14,0
D 147	ROMAGNE	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	8,0
	SAINT-SALVEUR-DES-LANDES	3,0
	SAINT-HILAIRE-DES-LANDES	3,0
D 33	SENS-DE-BRETAGNE	
	Junction D 311 / D 310	15,0
	FEINS	9,0
	DINGE	6,5
D 20	TINTENIAC	
	Junction D 20 / D 220	9,5
D 220	BECHEREL	
	Junction D 20 / D 220	10,0
	MEDREAC	2,0
	Junction D 20 / D 220	8,0
QUEDILLAC		
	Junction D 20 / D 220	8,0
D 188	LA PREVOSTAIE	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	3,5
D 168	SAINTE-MEEN-LE-GRAND	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	3,5
D 88	LOSQUET-SUR-MEU	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	2,0
	ELIGAUT	4,0
	MENEAC	9,0
D 733	LA TRINITE-PORHOET	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	9,0
D 68	PLUMIEUX	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	8,5
D 14	LA CHEZE	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	3,0
D 778	LOUDEAC	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	7,0
D 41	LOUDEAC	
	Junction D 188 / D 166bis	9,5
D 7	TREVE	
	Junction D 41 / D 7	6,0
D 38	GRACE-UZEL	
	Junction D 41 / D 7	4,0
D 53	LES AUNECADES	
	Junction D 7 / RD / D 35	4,0
	MERLEAC	1,0
	Junction D 7 / RD / D 35	2,0
	SAINT-MARTIN-DES-PRES	3,5
	Junction D 63 / D 44	5,5
	Junction D 63 / D 44	1,5
D 787	CORLAY	
	Junction D 44 / D 787	7,5
D 780	SAINT-NICOLAS-DU-PELEM	
	Junction D 44 / D 787	2,0
D 4	SAINT-NICOLAS-DU-PELEM	
	Junction D 790 / D 4	6,5
D 790	LONGNY-AU-PERCHE	
	Junction D 4 / D 790	2,0
D 49	NEUILLY-SUR-EURE	
	Junction D 790 / D 49	3,5
	SAINT-LUBIN	2,0
	Junction D 790 / D 49	5,0
D 23	NEUILLY-SUR-EURE	
	Junction D 49 / D 23	4,0

29	D 49	MAEL-CARHAIX	5,0	510,0
		Entrée	2,0	518,0
	D 784	CARHAIX-PLOUGUER		
		Junction D 784 / D 789	Control	6,0
		Junction D 784 / D 789	4,5	528,0
		POULLAOUEN	7,5	538,0
	D 789A	Junction D 789 / D 789A	7,5	545,0
		HUELGOAT	3,5	549,0
	D 784	Junction D 789A / D 784	6,0	555,0
		Le FEUILLEE	4,0	559,0
		ROC TREVEZEL	4,5	563,5
		SEZUN	19,0	579,5
	D 87	Junction D 784 / D 87 - Le Oeff	9,5	588,0
	CD	Junction CD	1,0	589,0
	C 1	Roundabout D 770	5,0	594,0
	D 33	DIRINET	2,0	596,0
		LOFERNET	4,5	600,5
		PLOUGASTEL-DAOULAS	4,5	605,0
		Port Albert Louppe	2,5	607,5
		BREST		
		Rue de Quimper	3,5	611,0
		Place de Strasbourg		
		Lycee Vauban		
		Control	5,0	220,0
		Way Back		
29	D 712	BREST		614,0
		Rue de Choiseul		
	D 784	GUPRAVAS CENTRE	7,0	621,0
		LANDERNEAU	12,0	633,0
		SEZUN	17,0	650,0
		ROC TREVEZEL	19,0	669,0
		D 49	CARHAIX-PLOUGUER	
		Control	33,0	698,0
22	D 23	MAEL-CARHAIX	10,0	708,0
	CR	ROSTRENN ENTRY	9,0	717,0
	D 790	Junction CR / D 790	3,0	720,0
		D 4	SAINT-NICOLAS-DU-PELEM	
		Food - Sleep	13,0	733,0
	D 69	LOWER PART OF CANIHUEL	7,0	740,0
	D 787	CORLAY	5,0	745,0
	D 44	Junction D 787 / D 44	1,5	746,5
		Junction D 44 / D 53	3,5	750,0
		SAINT-MARTIN-DES-PRES	4,0	754,0
		The St Martin-des-Prés to Mortagne section is identical on both ways		
		LOUDEAC		
		Control	26,0	780,0
35		QUEDILLAC		
		Food - Sleep	59,0	839,0
		TINTENIAC		
		Control	26,0	865,0
		FOUGÈRES		
		Control	54,0	919,0
53		VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL		
		Control	89,0	1008,0
61		MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE		
	D 8	NEUILLY-SUR-EURE	80,0	1088,0
		NEUILLY-SUR-EURE	19,0	1107,0
	D 20	SENONCHES	13,0	1120,0
		SENONCHES	11,0	1131,0
		VERNOUILLET	39,0	1169,0
	D 929	DREUX		
		Control	3,0	1188,0
	D 152	MORONVAL	3,0	1189,0
	D 147	MEZIERES-EN-DROUAI	3,0	1192,0
		MARSAUCEUX	1,5	1193,5
		GERMAINVILLE	3,5	1197,0
		BROUE	3,0	1180,0
		BOUTIGNY	5,0	1185,0
		Junction D 147 / D 983	5,5	1190,5
	D 983	CONDE-SUR-VEGRO	0,5	1191,0
		GAMBAIS	3,5	1194,5
	D 179	Junction D 179 / D 112	0,5	1195,0
	D 112	Junction D 112 / D 138	10,0	1205,0
	D 138	Junction D 138 / D 155	1,0	1206,0
	D 155	MONTFORT-LAMAURY	1,0	1207,0
	D 13	BAZOCHES-SUR-GUYONNE	4,0	1211,0
	D 15	Junction D 23 / D 15		
	D 23	JOUARS	3,0	1214,0
		Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines Entry	4,0	1218,0
		ELANCOURT		
		TRAPPES		
		Avenue Eugène Delacroix	6,0	1224,0
		Ile de Loisirs Entry	1,0	1225,0
		MONTIGNY-LE-BRETONNEUX	5,0	1230,0

- Think of the route sheet as a backup, not something to follow along, as on an American brevet
- The route may have small, last minute changes that won't be reflected in the route sheet

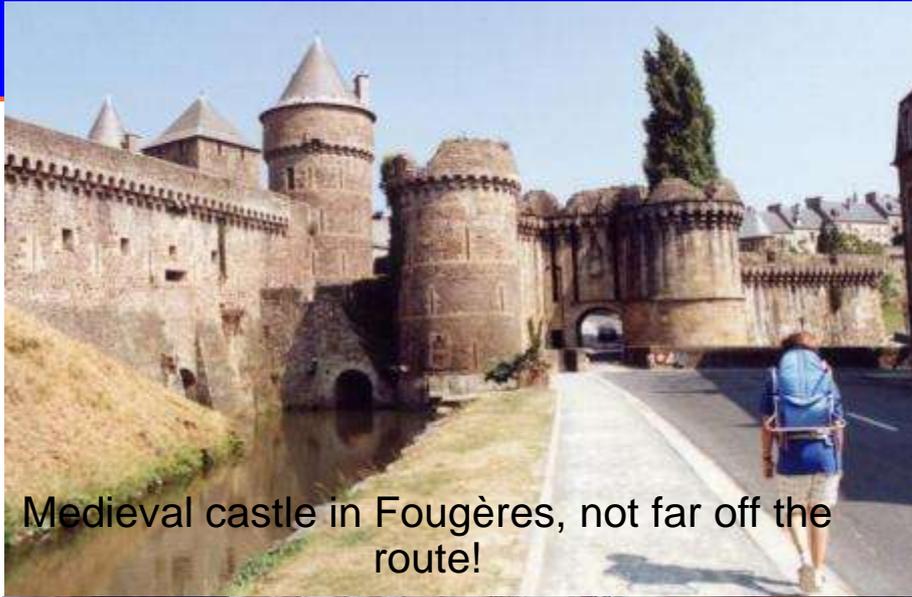




The French government has a Department of Flowers, which awards villages the *Village Fleuri* honor for their flower displays



Along the Route in the cities



Medieval castle in Fougères, not far off the route!



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Along the route



Sizun



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015

Brest



Paris

Slide 35

Equipment

- What I've learned the hard way is to not use older, seemingly reliable equipment, as it tends to break right during PBP
- I've broken a pedal spindle, a handlebar bag support, bottom bracket, generator and fender over the years at PBP
- Improvising can be a tremendous asset when something that might otherwise stop you can be transformed into only a minor inconvenience and a great story to recount later
- Bike shops aren't necessarily like shops in the US, with a full range of parts. There are 2 shops near the start in Montigny-le-Bretonneux. There are also shops in Paris. Decathlon stores also have some bikes and parts
- There are mechanics at the controls and also bike part vendors.
- It used to be that if you weren't riding on a French threaded bike, you were out of luck finding English threaded parts, but not so anymore. The mechanics at the controls now have English threaded parts, however they don't have every possible part, so having a great running bike is very important
- Are fenders an option? I don't think so, and maybe others feel the same after the rain of the last two events.**
- Expect to see all sorts of improperly attached lights and equipment come flying off of bikes in the 1st 10 km, which is scary when riding in a fast moving pack
- One of the great benefits of PBP is the wide range of bikes that riders from all over the world ride— great fun to see them all in the bike parking area at the bike check

- Forewarned is forearmed – rain like in '87, '07 and '11 can easily happen again
- Most riders now do not use fenders – I can't imagine riding in the rain for 12 hours straight with no fenders. Fenders made the rain very tolerable for me in 2007.
- In '87 it rained for almost a day straight – at the 1st check point I had items floating around in my handlebar bag. In '07 many riders quit because of the rain
- In '91 there was a solid tailwind to Brest, which was a solid headwind back
- In 2003 I brought along tights for the 1st time – I couldn't have ridden at night without them and it wasn't raining – it was quite chilly
- In 2007 I wore tights the entire ride day and night in the rain
- I've spent enough nights shivering at controls to know to bring warmer clothes
- *Northern France is at the same latitude as Maine*, so August doesn't necessarily mean hot temperatures
- However, it has also been uncomfortably warm at PBP

Riding in mid-afternoon in the 2007 edition



- Language is too big of a topic to cover, other than to say that many Americans don't seem to make the effort to learn a little French
- If you only use *bonjour* and *merci*, they go a long way at the controls and in France in general
- Learning a few basic words is most helpful and greatly adds to the level of understanding of your surroundings and lowers your frustration level at times – it is time well spent in making the ride easier for yourself
- Learning a few rules of pronunciation will help immensely, even if you don't learn basic words– especially in saying place names
- Away from Paris rural people are less likely to speak English, but on the ride one can figure out most things without using French
- French cyclists are perhaps the worst enunciators in the French population – mumbling is the norm, especially after having ridden 1000 km
- At PBP, English has become very common on the ride and the results book that you receive some months after the ride is now in English – although it makes it easier to do the ride, it does take away from the challenge, character and flavor of the event



A few cultural considerations

There are plenty of books on this subject, but some lessons I have learned:

- There aren't many different ways to say simple niceties in French – *bonjour* and *merci* work 99 % of the time, whereas in English there are many ways to say hello
- Always say *bonjour* when entering a *patisserie*, if only to hear a beautiful *bonjour* in reply – greetings are always appreciated and reciprocated
- These next 3 rules apply to French culture in general, and not necessarily to PBP. These are an essential part of what makes France so interesting and should always be remembered when trying to understand why things are as they are.
- Rule # 1 in France – nothing is done for your convenience
- Rule # 2 – when you ask for something the immediate response is no, which doesn't mean no, it means ask me again with more details
- Rule # 3 - employees working at a large store are not there to help you, but generally to have a job and stay busy
- The American concept of standing in line and waiting your turn is not part of the culture, as can be seen sometimes at the controls
- Do as the French do when in France. Just riding a bike is a big help to do this anywhere in France. It's especially fun when someone native to France asks *you* for directions when your riding.



Bike terminology in French

Knowing the names of the parts on the bike can be very beneficial when asking for help at a bike shop or from a mechanic at the controls on the ride

You probably won't find a lot of these in a standard French-English dictionary

Bicycle – vélo
Frame – cadre
Fork – fourche
Headset – jeu de direction
Tires – pneus (wired-on) or boyaux (sew-up)
Tubes – chambres à air
Rims – jantes
Spokes – rayons
Hubs - moyeux
Stem – potence
Handlebars – cintre or guidon
Saddle – selle
Seatpost – tige de selle

Brakes – freins
Pedals- pédales
Crankset – pédalier
Bottom bracket – boîtier de pédalier
Water bottle – bidon
Water bottle cage – porte bidon
Wheel – roue
Rack – porte-bagages
Handlebar bag – sacoche de guidon
Seat bag – sacoches de selle
Fenders – garde-boue
Lights -lumières
Headlight – phare
Taillight – feu arrière
Bolt – boulon
Nut – écrou
Oil – l'huile

Finish in Montigny-Le-Bretonneux



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Slide 41

A French description of PBP

A very apropos description from the organizers in 2003:

“By entering this mythical ride, you will test your cycling agility and your human endurance.

You will strive to obtain your Personal Best or you will try simply to rally the arrival... but you will always do your best to live this adventure while supporting each other and building friendships with those who participate in this endurance monument, which is much more than a simple hike. No place of honor, nor any podium, only the pleasure of the challenge alone will help you to overcome the suffering... and the magic moment of the arrival will obliterate the doubtful moments on the roads of Brittany or of Normandy.

You will not be alone: you will be in the company of entrants from all over the world. You will appreciate the charms of France and you will be united by the same goal: to rally BREST and return to PARIS.

You will not be alone : many spectators - or rather admirers – will encourage you throughout your journey, indeed will support you in attaining the fixed goal. You will appreciate also the hundreds of volunteers who will help throughout the journey.”



Rencontre – meeting of riders going to Brest and returning from Brest, 1948



Hendrickx at Mortagne with 146 km to go, “Je vais gagner PBP” (I will win), 1948

Tradition and something new



Alpo Kuusisto's famous kick scooter in 2003

Paris – Brest – Paris 2015

Brest



Paris

Slide 44

<http://www.paris-brest-paris.org/index2.php?lang=en&cat=accueil&page=edito>

<http://www.rusa.org/pbp.html>

<http://www.audax-club-parisien.com/EN/>

<http://www.parisbrestparis.tv/>
(Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines site)



http://www.paris-brest-paris.org/index2.php?lang=en&cat=presentation&page=information_general

(Information booklet)



Bonne route et bonne courage

Slides are only so good at conveying information. Talking through them would obviously allow more information to be discussed and presented.

I hope these slides present information that answers many questions and also raises many questions that leads you to think through your mental preparation for PBP so that you are successful in finishing the greatest of all rides

As the volunteers say to the riders as they leave the controls and head back out on the road “*bonne route et bonne courage*”



Paris – Brest – Paris 2015



Slide 46