

# Greg LeMond Wins the Red Badge of Courage While the Russians Headline the Best International Field Yet at the Coors Classic

## Susan Weaver

"The Russians are not automatons like everybody thinks, but they're here to race. There's no nonsense about their workouts." — Mike Farrell, interpreter

"The Soviets are not *that* strong; they're dying. They're not used to racing against the pros." — George Mount, U.S. pro

Fireworks lit the entire American landscape on July Fourth, but in the foothills of Colorado the hottest sparks were struck on a bike race course outside Boulder called the Morgul Bismarck. There all five Soviet luminaries, including the gold medal winner from last year's Olympic road race, rocketed off the front of the pack, midway through a 92-mile race on a barren, treeless course that fairly simmered in the sun.

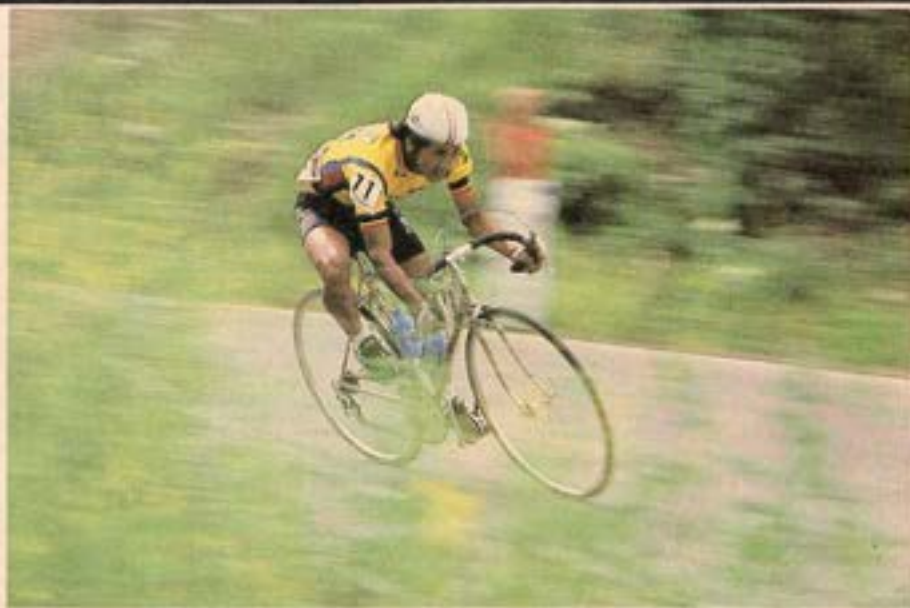
From the press truck we watched the move that would make American bike race history in this year's Coors Classic: the five red Russian jerseys took off, and right behind came a slender, blond firecracker named Greg LeMond, calling "Hey, hey!" to the pack and beckoning for help. Only one rider had the artillery and was in position to join him; that was Alessandro Pozzi, an Italian pro and veteran of the Tour de France. With hopes for an American win pinned on LeMond, only 53 miles and the finish line would tell the story. But the young American pro knew that with wily tactics the Russians might wear him down and drop him.

While LeMond held the overall lead, if he lost the Red locomotive now, he would be out of the leader's jersey by the end of the stage, with just one more day left to regain it. We encouraged him from the press truck, but his blue eyes looked desperate, and he shook his head. "I'm finished!" came the strangled cry.

## The Russians Are Coming!

"Yes, it's true there are some 75,000 registered racers in Russia, and most train on bikes that wouldn't be considered very good here. That's the reason the Russians are so good: they're not spoiled by a lot of fancy equipment." — Mike Neel, former USCF coach and American pro

Long before the start of the 1981 Coors International Bicycle Classic (June 26–July 5) — in fact, at the end



Kenneth Rodding



(Top) The tiny Colombian, Caceres, who briefly wore the leader's jersey, hopes to become a U.S. citizen and race for this country. (Bottom) The race spectacle is partly human, partly geography.

of last year's race — word was out that the Russians would be invited to Colorado for 1981. Would they accept? In recent years they'd been winning anything there was to win in amateur European stage races — for example: three years in a row now, a Russian has won the Tour of Britain, a race of over 1,000 miles and a dozen stages known as the Milk Race.

True to form, the Russians did not accept their first invitation on American soil half-heartedly. To Colorado they brought none other than their Olympic road team, including 1980 gold and bronze medalists Sergei Soukhoroutchenkov and Yuri Barinov.

Facing off against them, riders from nine other countries plus many of America's best amateurs joined two

## Coors Classic

new U.S. pros, Greg LeMond and George Mount, the latter recently seasoned in the Giro d'Italia (Tour of Italy) where he finished 25th. LeMond, who last year considered contracts from three European pro teams before signing on with Renault-Elf-Gitane, had returned to the States with the laurels from a brilliant first pro season. Now the Elf, with four of his French teammates, would play Jack the Giantkiller in the rarified air of Colorado. The 537 miles of racing for men would take criteriums to Boulder, Estes Park, Vail, Snowmass, and Denver. Road races would include long mountain pass ascents and gut-wrenching downhills.

### Sometimes You Eat the Bear; Sometimes the Bear Eats You

"The Russians speak English, but they just don't let on. In the break we said to Soukho 'Don't sprint, don't sprint.' He said 'Okay.'" — Davis Phinney, U.S. amateur

The Russians quickly showed their teeth in the first event of the bike race,

a 1.3-mile time trial, in which each individual rides against the clock and, in this case, the elements. Especially in the early going, thunder, lightning, wind, and rain in torrents turned the course into a stormy nightmare for some riders (cue in Mussorgsky's "Night on the Bare Mountain") and cleared for others. When it was over, the Soviets had wheeled into first in the team standings, which are determined by adding the times of the team's three highest finishers; the lowest composite time ranks highest. First was a spot obviously to their liking, as they would remain there through all 11 stages.

But LeMond, celebrating his 20th birthday, must have blown all the candles out and got his wish: a victory in the first stage, seven seconds up on second-place finisher, the much-dreaded Soukhoroutchenkov.

The leader's jersey would not weight LeMond's shoulders for long, however.

### Center Stage

"They don't care who wins on their team; the Russians are totally unselfish. They have the best teamwork here." — Michael Fatka, coach, SunTour/Raleigh

Fatka stood on an uphill grade of a one-mile loop beneath the venerable Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, where that celluloid bloodbath, "The Shining," had been shot. While his own Matt Eaton was the crowd pleaser, taking a ten-lap flyer off the front near the finish of the 45-mile criterium that constituted Stage 4, the American coach was nevertheless able to appreciate the subtler intricacies of Soviet teamwork.

Indeed, "group think" was at work before his very eyes. Russians had taken turns at or near the front of the pack throughout the stage, attacking or monitoring any attempts to get very far ahead. While at one point four red-black-and-yellow jerseys — Eaton's teammates — were seen trying to slow the chasing pack, the Red tide could not be contained. With about a dozen laps to go, as if unseen floodgates had been opened, each member of the Soviet team took his turn leading the fierce chase.

To do so, not only must the spirit be willing, but the flesh must be strong. The Soviets had five impressive individuals (three of them had won the prestigious Peace Race, a 14-stage race for amateurs in the Eastern bloc



Greg LeMond takes a "hand-up" on the Morgul Blismarck. Note Greg's unique treatment of the leader's jersey (for ventilation) made it holler than thou.

David Epperson

countries — Soukhoroutchenkov in '79, Barinov in '80, and Zagretidinov in '81). And the socialist emphasis on collectives had been amply demonstrated in their well organized attacks, their willingness to take orders from a strong coach, and their uncanny ability for each member of the team to be in the right place at the right time.

So, leading the pack, they caught Eaton with four laps to go. Then in the electrifying photo finish that climaxed the stage, Zagretidinov somehow found a hole that no one knew was there and unleashed a powerful sprint, materializing at the line, just in front of Greg LeMond and third-place finisher, Davis Phinney, a Colorado favorite.

### The Red Steamroller

"At home we don't have such big mountains to train in. I have been staying in the city of Rostov. Mainly it is plains and no mountains." — Yuri Kashirin, U.S.S.R.

With the completion of Stage 2, a mountain road race which he took away from George Mount, Yuri Kashirin moved into overall race leadership, demonstrating the Russian prowess and,

briefly, his sense of humor: "The race leader's jersey is red," he observed with a rare smile. "I am already wearing a red jersey."

As the days passed, Kashirin held the leadership through Stage 6 (though it was never the several-minute margin the Soviets like to accumulate), and the Russians appeared regularly among the top three stage winners on the victory stand.

But on the day when the Mighty Muscovites were expected to win big, in an 83-mile road race with an ascent to almost 12,000 feet at Loveland Pass, the Soviet whom European cycling federations had voted cyclist of the year for 1979 and 1980, gambled and lost. Altitude was apparently the nemesis for Sergei Soukhoroutchenkov, who had gone solo on a seek-and-destroy mission and then continued on alone — 50 miles all together — 'til he succumbed at the start of yet another uphill grade. With the pack suddenly on his heels, we saw him sit up, exhausted, waiting for the inevitable. He would finish 21st.

Instead, Stage 5 went to a tiny Colombian, Noberto Caceres, whom Soukho had chased in the beginning and who, of all things, was at the Coors

race on his honeymoon. Altitude to Caceres was like the briar patch to Brer Rabbit: Noberto had grown up and raced for ten years as a top amateur in the mountains of Colombia and captained his country's national team on 22 occasions. Winning this stage of the Coors catapulted him from 17th to second in the overall ranking.

### 38 Big Miles

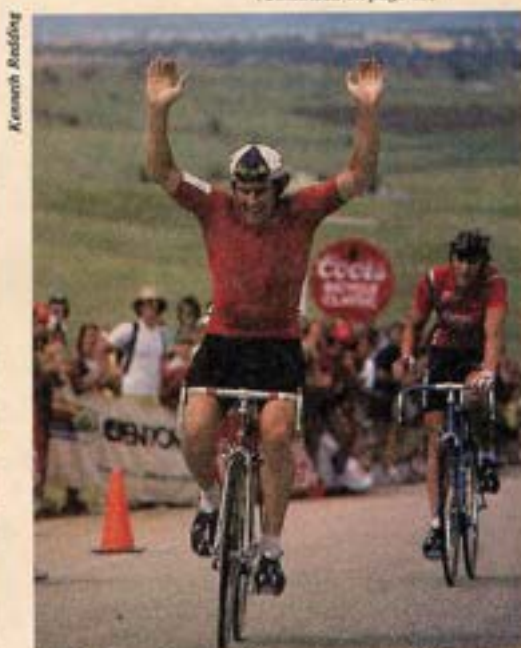
"I think some of the Russians were over-confident when they came here." — Dale Stetina, U.S. amateur

July 1 was definitely LeMond's day. Always a good climber, Greg had been honing his skills this year in Europe on 16, 17, 18 percent grades, astounding everyone by staying with the top pros. And to LeMond, the high altitude of the Rockies was as good as home.

In the steep, hilly circuit of Stage 7 at Snowmass with its long 13 percent grade, teamwork would mean little and climbing would be everything in this 18-lap 30-mile race appropriately called "Suicide Hill." After a few laps, LeMond and Caceres were off, working together, and nobody could catch them. While the Russians' eyes were glazing over, Greg and Noberto powered over the hills as if everyone else were crawling. With four laps to go, LeMond left even the Colombian mountain goat, finishing alone by a half-minute.

Caceres' silver in the stage bumped him into the leader's jersey, with Greg

(Continued on page 82)



(Left) The red locomotive on the Morgul-Bismarck: Pozzi is in the center of this Soviet sandwich, with Greg riding sixth and determined to hang on. (Above) At the finish of the same stage, it's Barinov across the line first with LeMond, second but no loser.