

Tour 3: Tour of the French Alps – Geneva to Nice



Saturday 18th to Saturday 25th June 2016

Have you ever fancied riding the famous climbs of the Tour de France in a multi-day tour as part of a team of cyclists? Well perhaps The Tour of the French Alps is what you have been looking for. The Tour of the French Alps is a week-long route taking in more than 10 of the iconic Alpine cols of the Tour de France. With 6 days back-to-back riding covering a total distance of 651km and ascending 19,000m this really is a Grand Tour-like challenge. Riding this tour with Team Infinity really has the feel of a pro-team experience.

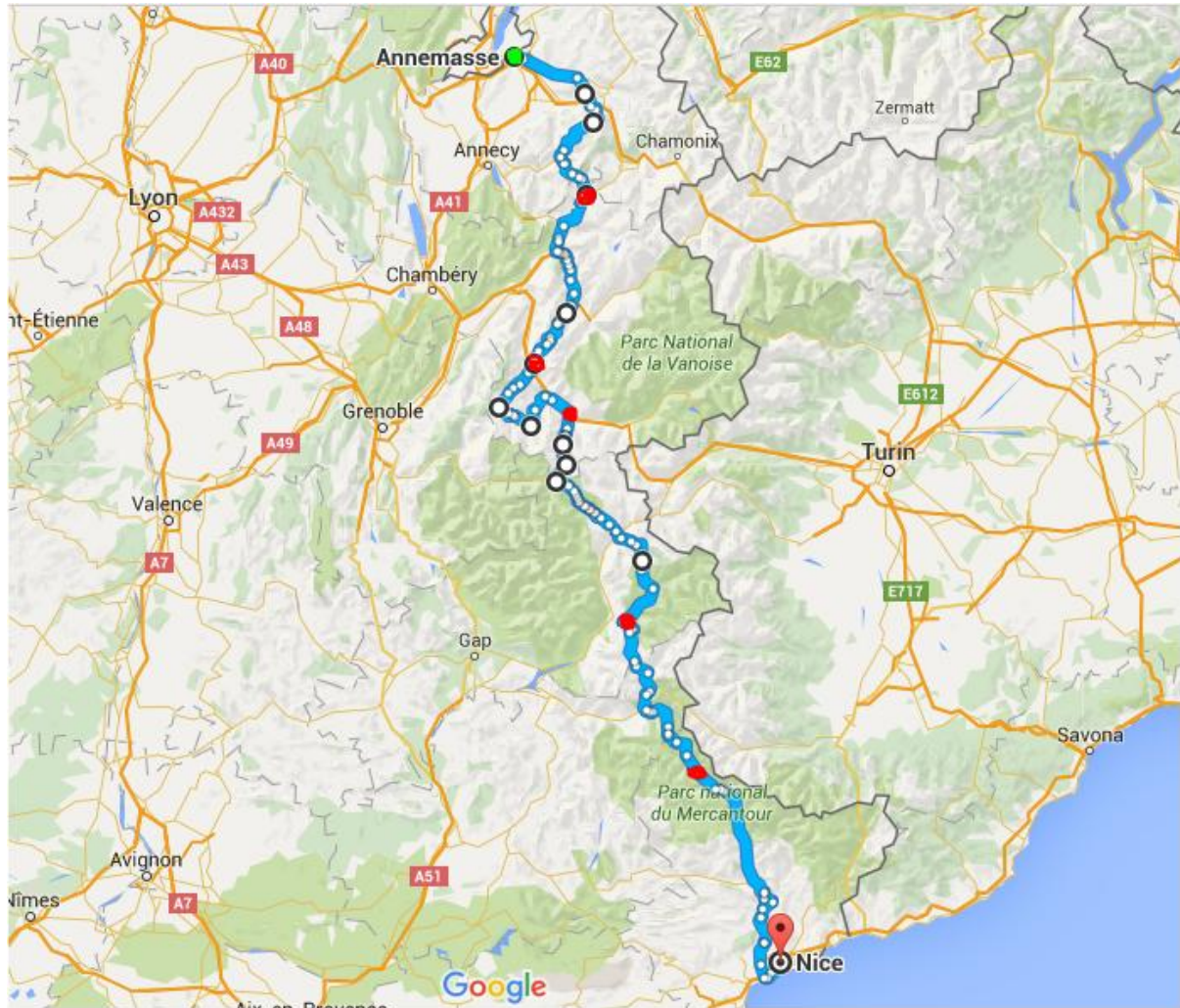
The Tour of the French Alps will take place from Saturday 18th to Saturday 25th June (ride days are Sunday 19th to Friday 24th June). The weather is very favourable for riding at this time of year – snow has cleared from the high passes in all but the most extreme cases and warm sunshine can be expected. With just 3 weeks to go before the Tour de France proper this is a great time to visit the Alps and get into the atmosphere of the Grand Tour.

With 2 Rider Guides and 2 support vehicles per group of 12 riders you will have all the physical and moral support required to successfully complete this trip and share the fun with likeminded riders. Spare clothing, food, drink and mechanical support is never far away leaving you to enjoy the day's riding. Morning coffee and lunch stops will be taken to separate the big climbs to allow some rest, recovery, refuelling and banter to take place before the rides continue into the early afternoon. Rides will finish with a warm down, stretching and protein recovery drinks.

The first 2 stages are slightly shorter enabling us to warm up gently. The middle 2 stages over the biggest climbs are likely to take the longest time, but the final Stage into Nice, at 138km is the greatest distance but has the advantage of finishing at sea level. To whet your appetite here are the list of climbs we go over on this Tour: -

Col de la Colombière
Col des Aravis
Col de Madeleine

Col du Glandon
Col de la Croix de Fer
La Toussuire
Lacets de Mont Vernier
Col du Télégraphe
Col du Galibier
Col d'Izoard
Col de Vars
Cime de la Bonette
Col Saint-Martin
Col de Turini



Accommodation on the route is top class with predominantly 3-star hotels and twin rooms all at half board. However, the first hotel on the arrival night of Saturday 18th June is the 4-star rated Mercure Annemasse Porte de Geneve Hotel. This is a top of the line hotel and a great welcome to Team Infinity awaits. It is situated a short drive from Geneva Airport and rail station. Transfers from them at the beginning and to Nice Airport at the end of the tour are included in the price. The hotel has all the facilities you expect from such an established name but perhaps all we will have time to fully enjoy are the dining and sleeping amenities. After a warm welcome everyone will be keen to eat, get to know each other and discuss the plans for the coming days. And depending on personal preferences it may be an early morning or late night re-building and adjusting bikes. But just in case you fancy it there's an outdoor swimming pool and sauna (indoor!).



Stage 1 <https://www.strava.com/routes/3756218>

Date: Sunday 19th June

Route: Annemasse to Flumet

Cols: Col de la Colombière and Col des Aravis.

Distance: - 94km

Ascent: - 2467m.



Geneva to Nice Stage 1

94.2 km **2,467 m**
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 4:02:21

From Hotel Mercure in Annemasse it is a short ride on to the D907. This is initially a wide smooth road and on a Sunday morning is pleasant and quiet. However, we're soon out of town and into the countryside. This is a great chance for us to ride together as a peloton and get to know each other's riding style. It is 35km to Cluses and we will use this first section to take it easy, enjoy taking in the atmosphere, make sure everyone is okay, that the bikes have been set up right and generally let everyone settle into what is going to be a great week. Cluses is a great place to stop for morning coffee and a chance for the Team to bond before the climbing starts. The first ascent of the Stage is Col de la Colombière. This is an Hors Category climb with an average gradient of 7% covering 16.5km. The descent to Le Grand-Bornand is less steep and with gentle sweeping bends is generally fast.

Lunch stop is planned for La Clusaz which has a varied selection of snack bars. Col des Aravis is the day's second major climb. This is a shorter climb than the morning by virtue of the height already gained. The gradient is an almost constant 6% except the final kilometre which is almost flat. The descent from the summit is one of the fastest, and care should be taken not to get too excited, especially if the road has any dampness. The hamlet of Flumet appears out of the woods at the bottom of the descent.

Accommodation for the night is another 1km to the south at Hotel du Vivier. This is a traditional chalet style hotel restaurant serving Savoyard specialities. It has a bar and lounge with a pool room. The underground secure garage is great for bike storage and for carrying out any adjustments that are needed. Rooms are twin bedded with ensuite bath or shower and have TV and free wifi connections.



Stage 2 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3756325>

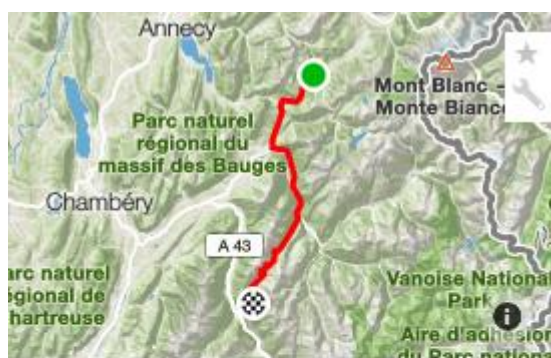
Date: Monday 20th June

Route: Flumet to Montainmont

Cols: Col de la Madeleine

Distance: - 87km

Ascent: - 2487m



Geneva to Nice Stage 2

87.2 km **2,487 m**
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 3:44:30

Stage 2 starts immediately from Hotel du Vivier. A short gentle rise is followed by a sweeping descent for 2.5km until the D109 is reached. This country road traverses the valley side through traditional alps until above Ugine. The view into the L'Arly valley is inviting, knowing that our destiny lies down the way. The descent into Ugine is equal to the best on the whole route. From there the Stage follows the D1212 for a short while until the cycleway signs direct us onto the East bank of the river. Don't worry too much about the quality of the cycle trail – it is of good standard, but there is the occasional bollard so care is needed to avoid an embarrassing crash in front of the team. The cycleway not only avoids a busy main road but also the complications of the town centre of Albertville and brings us out right on the D990 where we need to be. This small road is followed on the north bank of the River L'Isere all the way to

Feissons-sur-Isère where a Bar-Tabac-Restaurant on the roadside is conveniently located for a late morning coffee and snack.

The one and only climb of Stage 2 starts a short distance from Feissons-sur-Isère. The famous Col de la Madeleine is spectacular and one of the greats of the Tour de France. At 25km it is one of the longest. The average gradient is 6% but large sections in the upper half are constantly in the 9-12% range. At the time of writing the Strava KOM is Laurens ten Dam and if you can complete it in less than 1 hour 5 minutes you can steal his crown! For us mere mortals it is more likely to take nearer 2 hours. A well-deserved break at one of the summit restaurants will be the order of the day.

The final 18 km of the day consist of 15 km of the finest descent ever followed by 3km of slow ascent to Montainmont and the warm welcome from Isabelle at Hotel Le Beausejour. We will have this place to ourselves, and weather permitting will be able to enjoy a relaxing drink and evening meal together on the terrace overlooking Col du Glandon. Le Beausejour serves quality traditional cuisine, suitable to top up the reserves and the bar is a great place to relax and chat in the evening probably anticipating

tomorrow's adventures. Rooms are twin or triple bedded with ensuite or shower rooms and have TV and wifi connections.



Stage 3 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3756517>

Date: Tuesday 21st June

Route: Montainmont to St Michel de Maurienne

Cols: Col du Glandon, Col de la Croix de Fer, La Toussuire, Lacets de Mont Vernier

Distance: - 119km

Ascent: - 3,982m



Geneva to Nice Stage 3

118.8 km **3,982 m**
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 5:05:43

Stage 3 is an homage to the 2015 Tour de France Stages 18 and 19, with ascents of Col de la Croix de Fer, La Toussuire AND Mont Vernier. The ride starts immediately from Hotel Le Beausejour. After a rapid descent to La Chambre the climbing on this mountain stage starts in earnest with the ascent over the Col du Glandon, which leads almost seamlessly on to the Col de la Croix de Fer. The Glandon is 19km long but combined with the Croix de Fer the climb continues for 23km. Ascent to the Croix de Fer including the Glandon is 1564m. With 2 more climbs planned on Stage 3 it is probably worthwhile not staying for more than a morning coffee at the summit café.

The next climb to the ski station of La Toussuire begins after a 24km drop. The ascent is 14km long and today's KOM, Thibaut Pinot, managed to do it in

an incredible 34minutes – that's an average speed of 23.5km/h! We may take a little longer ☺.

The best of Stage 3 is still to come. No, not the fabulous descent to the valley floor, regardless of how exhilarating it is, but the climb of the 18 hairpins of the Lacets de Mont Vernier! Anyone watching Stage 18 of the 2015 Tour de France will not forget seeing the peloton and caravan meandering slowly along the serpentine road. At just 3.7km it's a very short climb by Alpine standards, but the engineering is spectacular and great to marvel at when gasping for breath. Actually this is a splendid climb to be tackled together as a team because at all the hairpins the road flattens out, and this is an opportunity to regroup and check out if everyone is having fun.

The finale to the day is a steady ride up the valley to St Michel-de-Maurienne and the resting place for the night at the Savoy Hotel. This cosy hotel caters especially for cyclists on their tours around the region with good traditional local food such as tartiflettes and the famous Savoyard Fondue, twin rooms with ensuite shower rooms, Satellite TV, wifi and a secure garage for the bikes overnight.



Stage 4 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3756573>

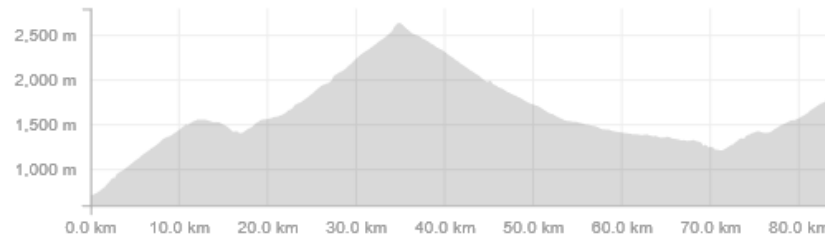
Date: Wednesday 22nd June

Route: St Michel de Maurienne to Guillestre

Cols: Col du Télégraphe, Col du Galibier, Col d'Izoard

Distance: - 121km

Ascent: - 3,882m



Geneva to Nice Stage 4

121.1 km **3,882 m**

Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 5:11:36

Stage 4 is the second of two very mountainous days and covers the most iconic of all the Alpine climbs – Col du Galibier via Col du Telegraphe. These climbs are steeped in Tour history. To be able to ride these at all is an achievement; to conquer them as part of a cycling team will remain in the memory for a lifetime.

The day's climbing starts without warning so overnight preparation is key. The ascent to the summit of the Galibier is a huge 35km, although once the Col du Telegraphe is crested at 12km there is a slight descent for 5km. Is this positive or negative? It can work either way. At 2643m the Galibier is the 4th highest paved road in France (after Cime de la Bonette, Col del'Iseran and Col Agnel). It is also the most frequented Tour de France alpine climb, and the highest Tour summit finish. Enjoy!

A big climb is always followed by a big descent and the Col du Galibier is no exception. The advantage of having the Team Infinity support vehicles alongside is that additional clothing that you may need on the descent is readily available if you need it. And if the weather is so bad that riding is dangerous or the cold is too intense then a lift can always be taken. From the summit café to Briançon via Col du Lauteret is a distance of 36km and it is all downhill. Spectacular! Briançon, then, is the ideal spot for lunch and a chance to warm up and refuel if needed.

The second and final col of the day is Col d'Izoard. This beautiful and famous col is just short of 20km long on the north side from Briançon and climbs to 2371m. The north side is quite lush and green whereas over the top on the south side it is dry and brown. It is an HC categorised climb and has featured in many Tours over the years. It is the famous setting for many battles of Fausto Coppi and Louison Bobet and a monument to them lies a short way below the summit.

The final 31km of Stage 4 are all downhill, so relax and enjoy. It is likely that we will regroup below Les Moulins and ride the valley road through the gorge as one so we arrive together at the hotel. Tonight's accommodation is Hotel Les Barnieres, sited close to the centre of the lovely village of

Guillestre. This chalet style hotel offers a balcony with a view of the surrounding countryside from every room. Each room has an ensuite bathroom as well as television, and if you still have energy left after a hard day you may like to take a swim in the heated outdoor pool.



Stage 5 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3759920>

Date: Thursday 23rd June

Route: Guillestre to St Étienne de Tinée

Cols: Col de Vars, Cime de la Bonette

Distance: - 92km

Ascent: - 3200m



Geneva to Nice Stage 5

91.6 km **3,197 m**

Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 3:55:44

The penultimate day: Stage 5 is a day of 2 hills. It actually forms the first part of the forthcoming Stage 20 of the 2016 Giro d'Italia from Guillestre to Sant'Anna di Vinadio. The first climb, Col de Vars starts right from the hotel door (sorry); but it is nearly 19km overall so there is plenty of time to warm up. Initially we face a 7km climb at a steady 7.7% but then there is a flat section for some recovery for 4km until the ski village of Vars. From there the climb ramps up again, but rarely does it exceed 9%. In some ways it is a shame that the col is so close as this is a lovely climb, particularly because it is so quiet. There's a small café at the pass, but it is probably better, depending on the weather conditions, to continue, especially since the town of Jausiers is only 22km away and the descent is likely to take only 30 minutes or so. The initial part of the descent is very winding, but lower down once the

main valley road, D900, is reached the angle relents. It is a good idea to regroup at the D900 and ride together to Jausiers. This town has plenty of cafes for a lunch snack and it is recommended that we stop here as the following climb is quite big and has few places to stop on the way.

Cime de la Bonette is strictly speaking NOT a pass but a summit, and as such is not classed as the highest pass in the Alps. However, it claims to be the highest tarmacked road in the Alps. It has been used many times on the Tour de France; the last time in 2008 it was the scene of the crash of South African John Lee Augustyn who plummeted over the edge of a sharp right hand bend on the descent shortly after cresting the high point. Today we will tackle it from Jausier, just like the Giro in May. From this side it is 22km to the summit and all at a steady 7-9% except the very last 300m section which ramps up to ~20%. Apart from the magnificent view from the summit the best thing about the Cime is the descent: one of the fastest, first over high Alpine pastures, and then later through the pine forest, popping out in the centre of St Etienne de Tinee.

Successful completion of Stage 5 deserves a real team celebration and what better place to do so than at Hotel Lou Ben Manja, right over the bridge in St Etienne? There is always a warm welcome here from our hosts and the hotel is a great place to relax, recover and enthuse about a superb day in the saddle. The cosy rooms are twin or triples with ensuite shower room, TV and wifi. The cuisine at Lou Ben Manja will satisfy the best appetite, and believe me there will be some big appetites. We are almost guaranteed to spend the evening chatting in the bar and preparing for the final Stage to Nice tomorrow.



Stage 6 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3759968>

Date: Friday 24th June

Route: St Étienne de Tinée to Nice

Cols: Col de Saint-Martin, Col du Turini, Col du Savel

Distance: - 138km

Ascent: - 3,166m



Geneva to Nice Stage 6

138.3 km **3,166 m**

Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 5:55:55

The Final Stage! And the Longest Stage. But do not be put off because the headline should be all about descending. We depart from St Etienne at an altitude of 1170m above sea level, and finish on the coast. So although the two climbs of the day add up to 3166m the amount of descending exceeds this by 220m. But most impressively the day consists of 102km of downhill.

The descent starts immediately with a gentle drop following the D2205 alongside the River Tinee. This road is superb for riding as a team with spectacular views into the gorge below but better to watch the wheel in front if you can. All too soon the junction of the M2565 is reached and ascending must start once more. Col de Saint-Martin, the first of 2 climbs on Stage 6 is 16km long at a consistent angle of 7%. This can be quite hot now that we are so far south and it

is great that we will have the support crew close by to hand out fresh cool water. Higher up we enter the trees and we can enjoy some shade. The col may not come soon enough for some of us, but the following 20km of descent will definitely pass quickly.

A lunch stop in the town of Roquebilliere is recommended before the final climb of the Stage and Tour is contemplated. Yes, the legs will be tired so now is a great chance to ride the final col together. However, it will be hard not to get competitive as the summit approaches. A right turn on the pass takes us on a gentle descent for 10km before a stunning series of hairpins first over Col Saint Roch and then passing Col du Savel and the village of Contes takes us into the Paillon valley. It's important that we follow the plotted route as we approach Nice as it is all too easy to end up on busy roads. The planned approach to Nice takes us on the Route de Turin, which turns into the car-free Avenue de la Republique, finishing in the open square of Place Garibaldi. The Stage would not be complete without a celebratory ride first to the Quai Cassini and then on to the coast, finally finishing on the Promenade des Anglais.

The Tour will finish in style with a night at the Grand Hotel Le Florence and a celebratory meal, possibly with lots of wine and beer, and even a chance of a late night swim in the Mediterranean Sea!

