



Charles Berg

The Gobert Trail—Is this steep enough for you?

Villard-de-Lans, a beautiful little French town in the hilly Vercors region at the foot of the French Alps, is not unknown to cycling buffs. The Tour de France has often stopped here in the past; in this year's Tour, Ireland's Stephen Roche took the yellow jersey on its slopes.

The obvious race favorites for this mountain event, however, were all Americans: Ned Overend and Joe Murray, Jacquie Phelan and Mary Lee Atkins.

After a mass start for the one cross-country race, Overend's supremacy was overwhelming on the tricky and narrow Gobert Trail. He built a three-minute lead over Murray, who had punctured, and then another minute-and-a-half over the next competitors.

Unlike the predictions, the two Americans still increased their leads in the descent, despite French daredevil Jacques Devi who came down like a bullet and passed more than a couple of rivals to finish third.

In the women's competition, the American superiority was even more blatant. It went almost unnoticed, though, because the female riders were lost in the pack. Nevertheless, Mary Lee Atkins finished more than 20 minutes ahead of Michele Larrieux. Jacquie Phelan finished third in spite of the race doctor withdrawing her due to a nasty virus. But her third place was not officially taken into account, and went to Sophie Eglin instead.

According to the experienced Americans, the 30-mile course was perfect. It started with an up-and-down route, and then came the hard part. A long climb, where bikes had to be carried part of the way, led to the *Sentier Gobert*, a very narrow five-mile-long track, right across the slope, with the mountain wall to the left, and the dive to Villard on the right. It was impressive and not without danger, especially since the trail was strewn with rocks, rubble and tree roots.

Finally came the descent, a long and technical one, where everything depended on braking skills, equilibrium and plain daring. According to Ned Overend, "With that kind of finish, Joe and I had to out-distance the others earlier on. Some of them were obviously very strong bike-handlers. They were going to be very fast downhillers, whereas we tend to be a little more conservative. But consistency is our strong point."

Winning Club
World
Mountain Bike
Championships
Villard-de-Lans,
France

August 15, 1987

CROSS COUNTRY

Men

- 1 Ned Overend (USA) 1:48:35
- 2 Joe Murray (USA) 1:53:39
- 3 Jacques Devi (FRA) 1:55:26

Women

- 1 Mary Lee Atkins (USA) 2:22:03
- 2 Michelle Larrieux (FRA) 2:43:54
- 3 Sophie Eglin (FRA) 2:50:38

...And The Other World Championships

Villard-de-Lans, France

by Bruno Prinzie

Enthusiasm for off-road cycling has grown fast in Europe. So fast that organizing a truly international competition, where both American champions and European contenders could compete, stopped being a crazy idea. Winning Club, with its long experience in organizing off-road events on both sides of the Atlantic, was a logical choice for setting up this mountain bike world championship.

On August 15, close to 300 participants, more than 10,000 spectators and eight international TV crews gathered at Villard-de-Lans to watch the test of skills between contenders from France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, the British Isles and, of course, the United States.

This is the beginning of the mountain bike explosion in Europe.



Thierry Desobry