

Riders in the storm

adapted from an article by MIKE CORDER



- 1 NEELTJE JANS, Netherlands (AP) — Call them riders in the storm. While much of northern Europe hunkered down Sunday and hoped that Storm Ciara would blow over quickly with its hurricane-force winds, an intrepid band of cyclists made the most of the conditions to take part in the Dutch Headwind Cycling Championships, an annual ride that is announced three days before a storm is expected.
- 2 The ingredients were simple: A basic bicycle with no gears, no featherweight carbon race frame, no drop handlebars, strong legs, steely resolve and wind. Lots of wind. Yet completing the 8.5-kilometer (5.3-mile) course along the coast of Zeeland province in the southern Netherlands and across a storm water barrier as heavy winds blasted riders with sand from nearby beaches was anything but simple, even for experienced riders. Organizers provided vomit buckets at the end. 36, the gale-force winds became too strong even for this punishing event. Organizers brought the race to an early end after 250 of the 300 riders had finished.
- 3 While the idea of plowing headfirst into a major storm on a bicycle may sound like madness, it's surprisingly popular in the Netherlands, where many people commute to work by bicycle despite wind or rain. Some 11,000 people expressed interest online in taking part but organizers only had a maximum of 300 places available.

- 4 This was, organizers say, as close as you can get in the largely pancake-flat Netherlands to tackling an Alpine stage in a bike race. “We call this the Dutch mountain,” organizer Robrecht Stoekenbroek told The Associated Press. “It’s like climbing a 10% slope on the worst bike you can imagine.”
- 5 With red-and-white wind socks snapping in the wind, riders hunched over their handlebars in a desperate attempt to remain as aerodynamic as possible. Many competitors wore tight Lycra cycling clothes. Crossing the Oosterscheldekering storm barrier, riders weaved across the cycle path as they struggled to maintain their balance.
- 6 Many participants, who rode one-by-one against the clock, weren’t too interested in their times. It was simply about completing the event. “This is a bucket list thing,” Edwin van Gaalen said, as he leaned, gasping for breath, on his handlebars after finishing. He paused to further explain. “When you’ve done it once, you want to do it twice. And more and more and more. You have to take part in this to feel the wind, to feel the experience, to get it all,” he said.

apnews.com, 2020