









Each day of the Tour de France, the Publicity Caravan departs from the departure city a couple of hours before the stage departure. The arrival and departure of the publicity caravan from each time point is considered so important, that the timetables issued by the Tour officials also list caravan times. Whereas the timetable for riders lists possible times at each time point according to possible speeds the Peloton is maintaining, the Caravan assumes a standard speed.

The caravan consists of what we might call "floats" passing cars and trucks and decorated mascots, some several yards high, publicizing the various sponsors of the teams, or of products "en France." Dozens of teenagers and college students, obviously living the dream of the best Summer job ever, throw tchotchke to the crowd, yell product slogans through the microphones, or act as DJs for the shortest disco hits ever. The DJ is normally on the central "float" for each product, which might consist of a flotilla of 10-15 floats and other vehicles.

Last Sunday in Dusseldorf, I happened upon the publicity caravan, and while a priest is not the most attractive target for tchotchke, being neither a cute kid, nor a good looking similar age man or woman with whom the tchotchke thrower can flirt, I was not on the receiving end of a lot of goodies. Even so, by accident I picked up a key chain, with built in flashlight, a hat, a bottle, and one of those small auto window shades which, suction cupped into the windshield, has kept my steering wheel relatively cool this week. All that, and as I said, I was not either appealing or trying.

Vittel is one of the sponsors, and they were, perhaps predictably, handing out bottles of their water along the course, probably hundreds of cases each day of the caravan. As one of their floats approached, a

young man could both see me and wanted to give me a bottle. Rather than throwing/catching it, though, I put out my hand, and as they drove by, he passed it on. He passed in on with great force. SMACK, it went into my hand. I quickly realized that if it had not been passed like that, it probably would have spun back onto the racecourse and been crushed by a tire. It would have, at least, been inaccessible to me or any other fan. I was grateful to have this bottle of delicious spring water, from Vittel.

Vittel sounds like it would be a place for good eating... The vittles there, however, consist only of bottles, bottles of water, bottles of spring water, from the source at Vittel, hence the brand name. Vittel features normal, sweet, springs, and thermal baths, known for having curative effects. The village contains both historic aqueducts and other buildings, and a Club Med. It is a town with a strong economy, with fun times abounding, including fairs at Mardi Gras, Frogs Fair time, the Percu'folies (percussions and drums), and at the December 6th feast of Saint-Nicholas. Specialties include mineral waters, frog tart, pâté lorrain, quiche lorraine, Mirabelle, blackberries, myrtles, honey, and Vosges sweets.

The Stage, today, passes through only two departments, Vosges and Haute Saone. Along the way, today, our brave cyclists pass by historic and beautiful chateaux and other buildings, as well as natural reserves featuring rare species in abundance. It is fascinating that the cyclists today pass, at Darney, a historic structure which houses a Czech and Slovak museum. I am sure the supporters of that museum would have been so pleased to greet a famous Slovak cyclist as he cycled by today. Alas, the Tour is sufficiently Mediterranean to make an arbitrary approach part of the mix. No Slovaks today, or at least no big brother

Slovaks. The stage also passes through falderal, not completely unusual, but the town is actually Fougerolles, a saving grace, and a fifth century Church at Faucogney.

The riders pass near a 25th century church at La Chapelle Notre-Dame-du-Haut built on the hill of Bourlémont, at Ronchamp. The Church is a fascinating architectural exhibit, built by the post modern architect La Corbusier. As an architectural specimen it is fascinating, with interplays of curves, textures and light. In that sense, it is beautiful. It is, however, completely unsuitable for the needs of divine worship, and so is interesting architecturally but not liturgically. John Deere is a major manufacturer in Haute Saone, which features as local specialties Canceillotte and munster (cheese), wines of Charcenne and Champlitte, Biscuits of Montbozon, Luxeuil ham, and AOC Kirsch in Fougerolles. What is Kirsch, after all, anyway? Glass and crystal is manufactured at Passavant la Rochère. There are 21 cycling circuits in and around the finishing locale, and Winter sports venues abound.











The ascent to La Planche des Belles Filles sounds fascinating, but there will be no belles filles riding with the cyclists today, or at least in front of them. You see, many of the vehicles in the publicity caravan just don't make the cut to go everywhere the Tour goes. Floats too large for a given archway, or too heavy to be pulled up or down a mountain, or otherwise considered "unsuitable," are forced to leave the Tour early. Anyone living in Europe, or who has followed cycling over the years, has to be used to some arbitrariness, or would have abandoned cycling years ago... As our brave cyclists pass up and down the hills, or pass by Slovak museums, we should think of them, the effort they put into our sport, the arbitrary and often unsuitable conditions in which they operate. Thankfully, unlike the Belles Filles, most of them are not

forced to walk La Planche, but some are, especially when considered unsuitable for cycline worship.

Enjoy the Tour. Enjoy the Day.

Étape 5 : Vittel . La Planche des Belles Filles

Classement général provisoire

1	Christopher Froome		SKY	18h38'
2	Geraint Thomas		SKY	+
3	Fabio Aru		AST	+
4	Daniel Martin		QST	+
5	Richie Porte		BMC	+
6	Simon Yates		ORS	+
7	Romain Bardet		ALM	+
8	Alberto Contador		TFS	+
9	Nairo Quintana		MOV	+
10	Rafal Majka		BOH	+ 1