

Ask the coach

A.C. writes, "I heard you talking during last Saturdays' ride about the cycling trip you took to France. I am planning on going next year. How do I train for this?"

Hi A.C.

Thank you for your question. Quite a few people have asked me about this so I decided to do a little article.

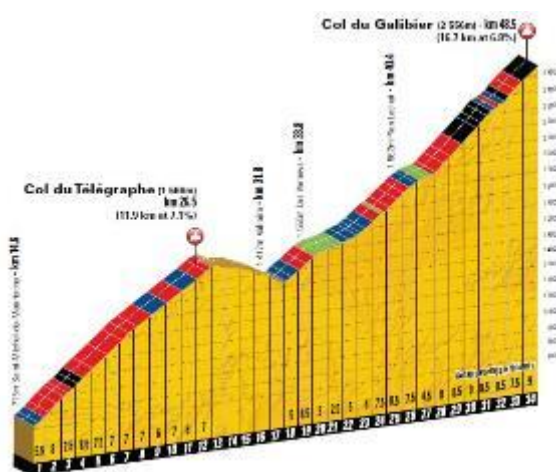
The trip we took was from a tour company called Custom Getaways. They have numerous trip packages including Tour de France (TDF), Giro d'Italia and the World Cycling Championships.

Our trip was very professionally supported and our package included riding on the actual roads that the pros ride in the TDF. We climbed

- Alpe d'Huez. A beyond category (HC) 13.8km (8.6mile) climb at 8.1% average grade, with 1,135m (3,725ft) of elevation gained - 725m (2,379ft) to 1860m (6,102ft).
- Col d'Telegraphe & Col d'Galibier. Another HC climb, 34km (21 miles) at 7% average grade, with 1,846m (6,057ft) of elevation gained - 710m (2,329ft) to 2,556m (8,386ft). It's a little more than that, 150m (500ft) more, since there is a downhill between these two giants.
- Col d'Izoard. Two ways to the top. This years' tour took the road from Briancon. A favorite place to be dropped off is at the top of Col de Vars, a category 1 climb. You will have an 18km (11mile) descent to Guillore which is 1,025m (3,363ft) in elevation. From here you will ascend 32km (20miles) ending at a HC climb at the top of Col d'Izoard at an elevation of 2,360m (7,743ft) for 1,335m (4,380ft) elevation gain.
- Embrun to Salon-de-Provence. This was Stage 19 of the 2017 Tour de France. A 223km (135.5mile) stage. Rolling hills and only 3 category 3 climbs, two which are in the first 50km (31miles). Since this is such a long stage, most tour companies will limit you to 97km-112km (60miles-70miles) depending on the fitness of the group.

HOW TO TRAIN

Ultimately, you want to increase your cardio as well as condition your legs. Since most climbs are 1-3 hours,



you want to over train time so that you can easily last the 1-3 hours of climbing without cramping. As you get closer to the date of your tour, make sure you can do a greater than 4-hour 'high power' endurance ride.

Specific tips follow.

- 1) You want to be one of the fittest riders in the tour group. The reason being is that you will be able to do more riding, more of the climbs. For example, only 2 out of 12 of us did both Col d'Telegraphe & Col d'Galibier. The other 10 were not as fit and voted to do only one of the climbs. They were dropped off at the top of Col d'Telegraphe and after a fast descent, they started climbing Col d'Galibier. They missed out on the experience and all the different sights and sounds on the Col d'Telegraphe. We still caught them at the top of Col d'Galibier.
- 2) Bike Fit – If you have gotten a recent bike fit or will be getting a bike fit, make sure to have the fitter write down all the critical measurements. Take this paper with you so the tour company can fit your rental bike with your numbers. A better solution is to take a photo of the measurements with your smart phone.
- 3) Drop as much weight as you can prior to your tour. Even dropping 10 pounds will make a tremendous difference.
- 4) Bike Specifics. My regular bike is a Cervelo R5ca. My rental bike was a low-end Wilier GTR (a \$2,500 bike). The Cervelo is light, the Wilier was HEAVY, so heavy I could tell there was a big difference. In retrospect, I should have at least weighed down the Cervelo with a cheap pair of heavy clinchers.
 - a. The rental bikes will be heavier than your bike. You might want to invest in a cheap pair of heavy training clinchers.
 - b. Gearing - Setup the gearing on your training bike the same as the tour rental bikes. Gearing on the tour bikes was compact - 50/34 up front and 11-32 in the rear. For me this was more than enough gearing for all the climbs but several of the others in the group complained that it wasn't enough. They would have preferred an underdrive triple.
 - c. If you have any specific equipment you need, bring it along. Several people brought their GoPro and the tour company was happy to help install the GoPro mounts. Several brought their +17° stem. One person brought their own saddle. It's OK to bring what you need.
- 5) Training plan. Talk with a coach about a training plan. Depending on your current fitness level, you might need 3-6 months to get in shape to do all the climbs.
- 6) Most of the climbing is mental. Looking up at a mountain like Galibier can be daunting. Mentally, know that you can do it. What I found best is to break up the climb into segments (for example each switchback can be a segment). Complete each segment, give yourself a pat on the back and then on to the next segment. A friend of mine, a retired US Navy SEAL told me that during his "Hell Week", a BUD/S instructor told him "When your mind says QUIT, your body still has 40% more to give." Most drop out of BUD/S (SEAL training) because they have given up mentally.
- 7) Manage your Power. If you have a power meter, perfect. Train with it and after several months, you will know what power you are pushing and how long you can maintain it for. The rental bikes won't have power meters.



- 8) Keep drinking and drinking so you don't cramp. Tour companies will usually give you a single water bottle as part of the package (along with a jersey). Bring your own as well. It's better to have two than a single empty one. Most tour companies will usually ride up and down the climbs checking on their riders. If you need help, give them a thumb down and they will stop so you can replenish water and energy bars.
- 9) Maximize power for a given duration. For example, the Alpe d'Huez is less than a 50-minute climb for a category 1 racer and a 75-minute climb for a fit club cyclist who regularly trains hills. A typical club cyclist would take 90 minutes. There were cyclists that took 3 hours to climb Alpe d'Huez.
- 10) Cadence, cadence, cadence. Spend the next several months spinning more. Try and climb at 90 RPM cadence.
- 11) Spin Class will help. Start taking a spin class. The trick is to give each class 110%. You will increase your cardio ability as well as gain some strength.
- 12) Yoga. Get into a stretching program right away, Yoga is a great way to start.
- 13) AND FINALLY, do rides that simulate these climbs.
 - a. Even though you will probably not find a Col d'Galibier in your backyard, find the longest 7%-8% grade hill you can and do hill repeats.
 - b. If you don't have any hills, do steady-state high-power output for 2-3 hours. This can be done on the flats or an indoor.
 - c. As you get closer to the date of your tour, make sure you can do a greater than 4-hour 'high power' endurance ride

TOUR COMPANIES

There are quite a few selections and the decision on which tour company can be overwhelming. To help simplify, here are 3 that several of us have gone with and are recommended. Some companies specialize in more riding and less of the Tour, other companies specialize in a little riding and a lot of VIP and paddock access. Depending on what you want to get out of the trip, ask about the agenda and itinerary. The following companies come highly recommended. Read the descriptions carefully as each specializes in and is targeted to a different crowd.

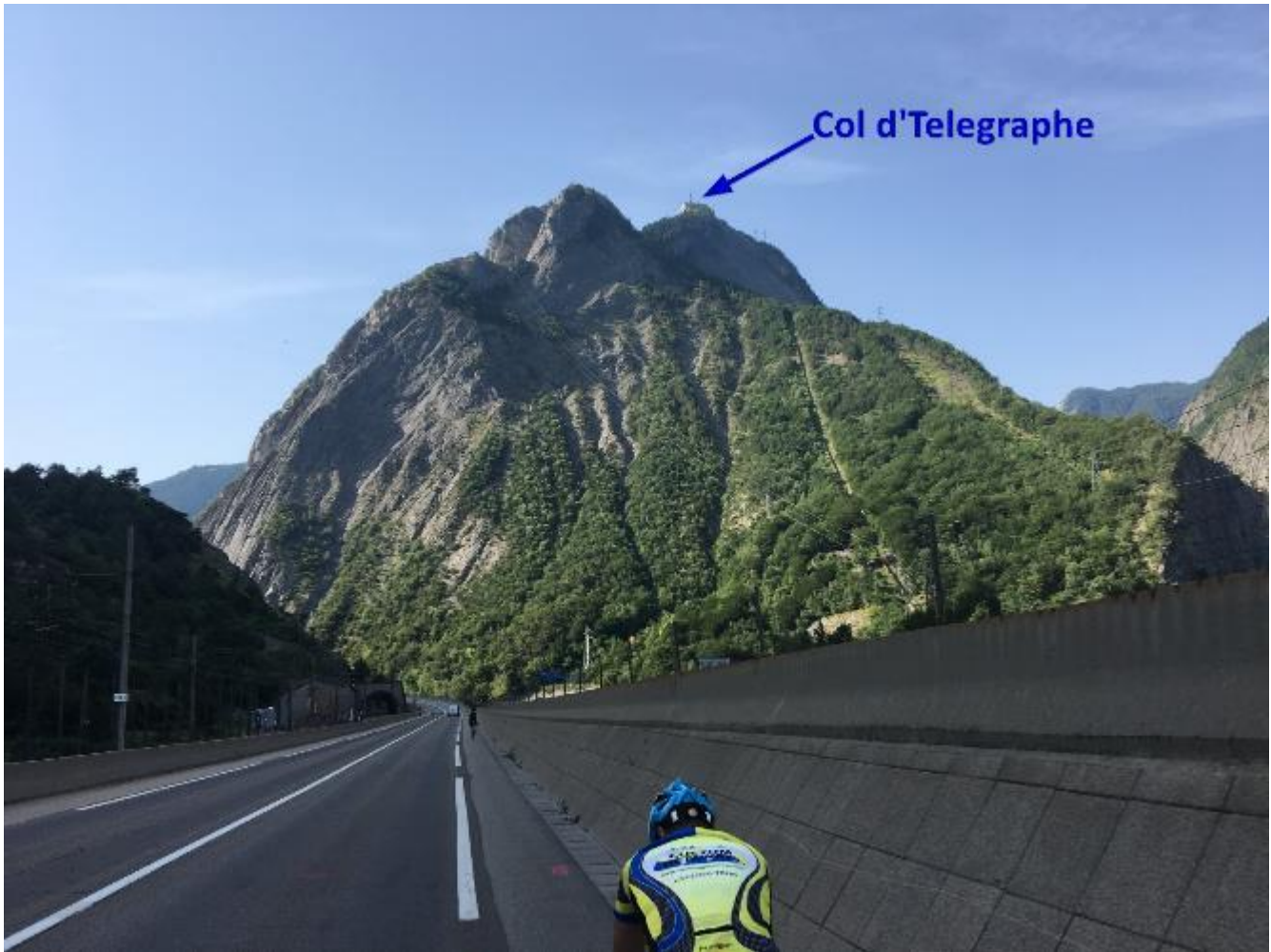
- 1) Custom Getaways (<http://www.customgetaways.com/>)
- 2) Sports Tours International (<https://www.sportstoursinternational.co.uk/>)
- 3) Duvine Cycling Adventures (<https://www.duvine.com/region/>)

Rick Schultz
Bike Fitness Coaching





A view from HALF-WAY up Alpe d'Huez



Col d'Telegraphe, Galibier hidden around backside.



Half-way up Col d'Telegraphe. Road we were just on can be seen below.



Col d'Galibier, 1/3 of the way to the top.

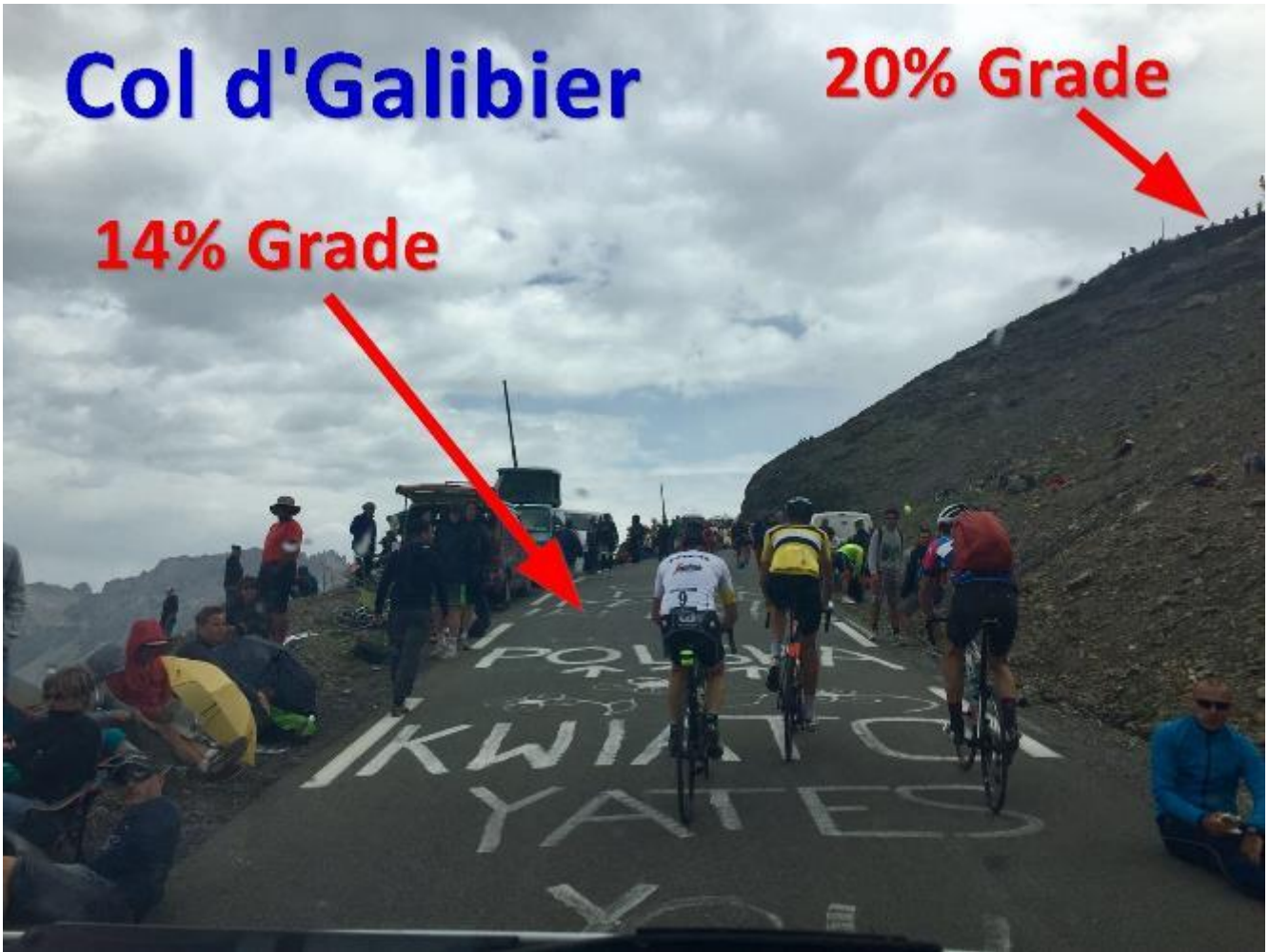


Col d'Galibier half-way up

Col d'Galibier

20% Grade

14% Grade



One more switchback to the top!



Col d'Galibier – View from the Top



Finish line at the top of Col d'Izoard. Italy and the Italian Alps can be seen in the distance.