

In 2016 a strange rich man wants to become the leader of his nation and have Mexico pay for a “great, great wall” on his country’s southern border. Years ago, when the same man financed a race, a Mexican claimed the title...

There were only two Tours de Trump and the second edition left a deep impression on me, the video cassette of the stage race was watched over and over until, at some point, the tape broke. I grew up in Denver and by 14 was already racing with the top amateurs and some professionals. The pros used the Colorado races as a strenuous warm-up for the bigger, international stage races. We had these weekday rides at Meridian Park just south of Denver where my friends and I would jump in the race and guys like Davis Phinney, Andy Hampsten, and Olympic gold medal-winner Alexi Grewal would chew us up and often spit us out. One time Steve Bauer showed up and we all fought just to sit on his wheel. Riding alongside such professionals, for a teenager, was heavenly.

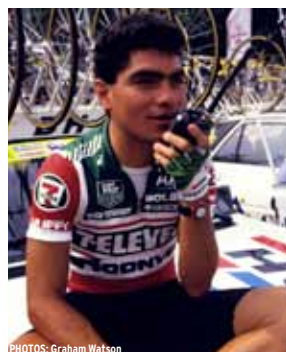
As groupies, we’d compare stats and talk about who was the best. There was the Coors Silver Bullet riders, the Crest Team Racing line-up, and there was 7-Eleven, a team which every Colorado junior cyclist had a poster of on their wall. Lastly, there was that unimpeachable rider, Greg LeMond.

To us young American riders, LeMond was almost more European than he was American.

Hampsten had won the Giro d’Italia, but LeMond had won the Tour de France! He never dithered with American rivalries. He tussled with Hinault. LeMond was so far removed from American cycling relativity, we weren’t even sure how to admire him. During the first Tour de Trump we all watched Greg LeMond struggle. The press grilled him and he came up with excuse after excuse. We all doubted. Quietly agreeing that he was a one-hit wonder.

After doing terribly in the first Tour de Trump, he won the Tour de France, famously beating Fignon by eight seconds. Right after that, he won the world championships. That autumn, right next to the 7-Eleven team on the wall, went the poster of LeMond outsprinting Sean Kelly and Dmitri Konyshhev to win the rainbow jersey.

— By Erik Raschke



CROSSING CULTURAL DIVIDES... Cycling is an international sport and Raul Alcalá (above and right) was one of the true pioneers in a globalised peloton.

The first Tour de Trump was 10 stages. The second was 12. Until then, stage races in America were puny. European riders, if they crossed the Atlantic, came for the big-money one-day crits so as to justify a tax-break for their Disneyland vacation. We all knew John Tesh was a cyclist and mocked his cheese-ambient music and nightly, pre-TMZ celebrity round-up program, *Entertainment Tonight*. But he got Donald Trump to put his brand and money down and the biggest American stage race was born.

We all laughed about the Trump pink jersey, the patronising commentary which painstakingly explained terms like breakaways and time trials to an American

audience who wondered why their golf game or fishing show was suddenly replaced by images of guys in lycra. But just to see the 7-Eleven team racing against Panasonic and PDM on American soil was thrilling. We marvelled at how the Europeans refused to wear helmets, especially Gert-Jan Theunisse who was determined to let his long hair flow behind him as he charged up the Catskills.

By the second Tour de Trump, in 1990, LeMond had just signed a \$5.5 million contract, 7-Eleven was fading, the smaller domestic teams like Coors Light, Crest and Taco Bell were rising. And amidst the Russians, who had invaded the previous year, young riders like Viatcheslav Ekimov – who had won a few stages and challenged the best – returned as pros. Ekimov was now riding for Panasonic.

The second year, we all watched a 20-year-old Bobby Julich ride off for the prologue. Jonathan Vaughters went to my rival high school and together we regularly rode with Julich up Mt Evans. Julich was our age. He was from Colorado. And there he was suddenly, in the junior national champion jersey, riding with great European cyclists.

The year before, coming back from nationals, I had been waiting at customs. The man in front of me was holding an enormous 7-Eleven bag. I first thought, why would someone need such a big bag from a convenience store? Then I saw his legs. As teen racers we could recognise professional cyclists’ legs from a mile away. I looked up. It was Raul Alcalá. I was stunned, amazed. I stammered out how great I thought he was. He autographed my boarding card.

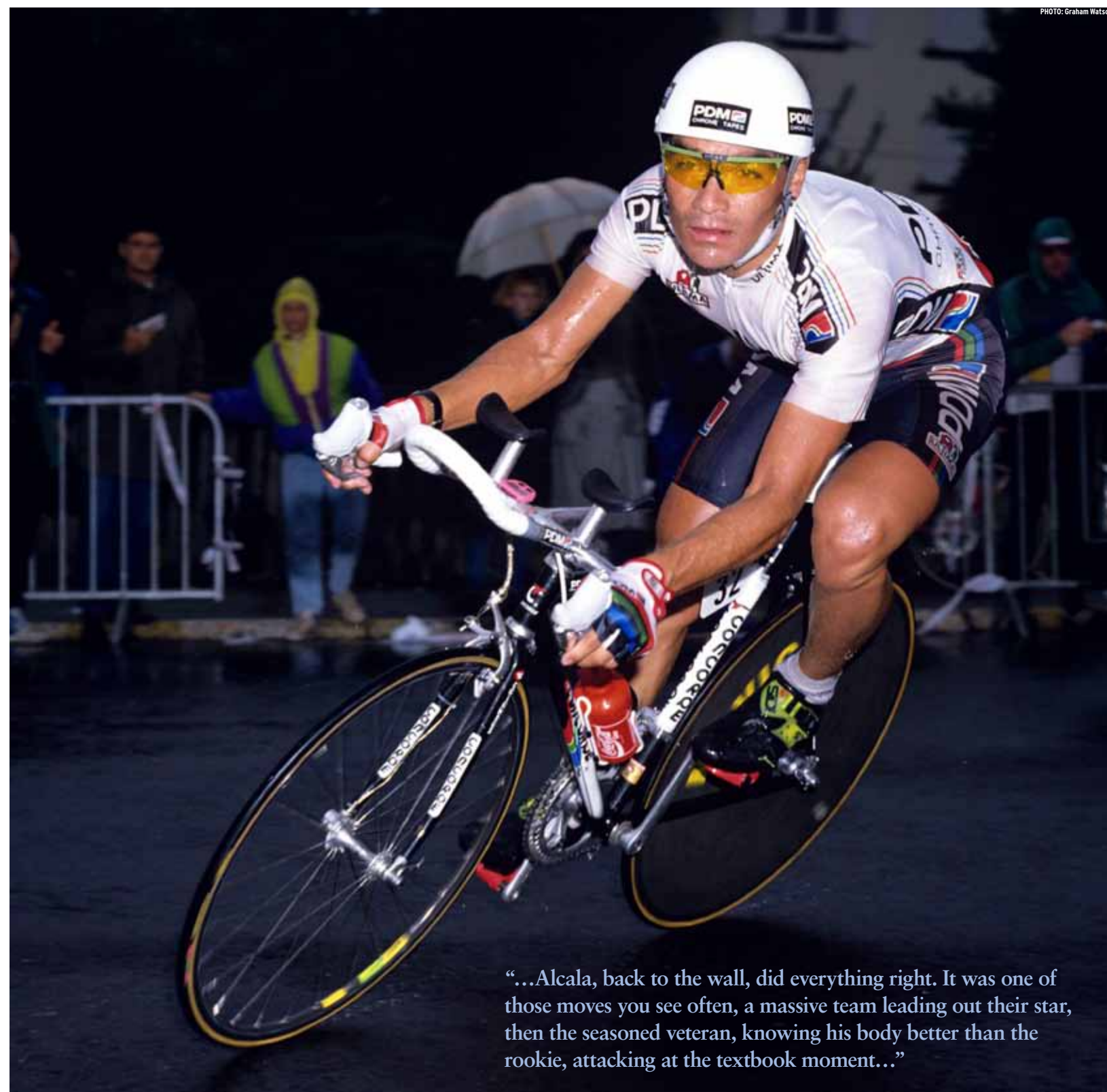
For the second Tour de Trump, Alcalá was riding for PDM. Concerned that he might never get out from under the shadow of Hampsten, Alcalá went European. At the time, PDM was the Manchester United of cycling: Delgado, Kelly, Rooks, Breukink... they’d all passed through.

Alcalá had a lot riding on the second Tour de Trump. The team was working for him. So that was why, on the third stage, when an unknown 18-year-old named Vladislav Bobrik – whose Russian team was sponsored by the now of nut-job-fame John DuPont – broke away and gained nearly 30 minutes on the rest of the peloton, we were amazed. This kid, two years older than us, was suddenly in that atrocious pink jersey.

Stage after stage we watched as riders making millions hunted the Russian teenager only to watch him climb the podium, day after day, as the overall leader. The best part, Bobrik’s team failed on so many levels, especially on the team time trial, that by stage nine, when Alcalá made a tremendous break, it was his rivals, Ekimov and Julich, pulling tiny Bobrik along.

By the end of stage nine, Alcalá had barely made a dent in Bobrik’s lead. By this time the second great powerhouse team, Panasonic, had secured the bottom of the bottom of the race and was in negotiations to head back to Holland. David was beating Goliath.

On a side note, there was Michel Zanoli, a huge Dutch rider who rode for Coors Light. He was a force in criteriums and a sprinter like no other. We had ridden with him at Meridian and went to races specifically to see him tear apart the middle-bracket American pros. In the second Tour de Trump, he sprinted through pouring rain to win stage 10. His grandmother had flown to America just to see him race. After retirement he returned to the Netherlands, tried to kill himself. Failed at the attempt. Got addicted to coke. Died of



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a heart attack. One of the many quiet casualties, one suspects, of the depression that follows steroid abuse. (It wouldn’t be a proper flashback to the 1990s without at least one reference to doping of some kind.)

On stage 11, a criterium in Central Park, LeMond, anticipating the crowds, attacked with pizzazz. Sinead O’Connor blared from the loudspeakers. We watched, rapt, as these great pros hurled through Manhattan.

It wasn’t until the last stage, in the Catskills, that Alcalá, back to the wall, did everything right. It was one of those moves you see often, a massive team leading out their star, then the seasoned veteran, knowing his body better than

the rookie, attacking at the textbook moment. When Bobrik realised Alcalá’s lead, you see him pleading with Phinney for help. But it was over.

The Mexican walked away with Donald Trump’s cash. At the finish of stage 12, you could see Bobrik, exhausted, weary, utterly defeated. But for us American juniors, he was a star. He had held the biggest team in professional cycling off for nine stages.

I think that summer when we went back to Meridian to ride against Grewal and Phinney and they chewed us up, we all thought of Bobrik and, for the first time, sneered, attacked, and never looked back.

ERIK RASCHKE