



New Opportunities, Combinations and Races

For the short time that I have been solely concentrating on the road, I can honestly say I have really enjoyed every minute of it and have kind of wondered why I didn't see the road as a viable option before now!

I'm going to go as far as saying that Road is where it is at! Here is where I get the opportunity to ride against the world's best week in week out, rather than on the track where you get that opportunity sometimes as little as three times per year. Still women's cycling tends to feel like it goes a little bit unnoticed at times. However, in saying this it sure does get a lot more attention over here in Europe than it does back home in Oz.

For me a definite highlight this year has been racing on the same day as the pro-men at Fleche Wallone. It was such an awesome experience. I've never seen so many people lining the sides of a 25% berg cheering on women's racing. This may have had something to do with the fact that the pro-men's race was coming through in about an hour and a half's time, and the race goers wanted to secure their place for the best possible vantage point to see Phillippe Gilbert launch! Nevertheless, they were there and yelling and cheering for us women very vocally. It was an experience I will never forget, but at the same time it made me think that there are a number of other opportunities lost where the combination of men's and women's racing could be worth a try.

I was quite surprised on race day to have a guy come up to me before the start of the race and ask: "is there a women's race on here also today?" Unbeknown to some cycling fans women actually have a race that fits alongside the famous 'Classic' races such as Flanders and Fleche Wallone.

It is fantastic that we do have a small number of these 'Classic' races scheduled on our calendar, as it brings the racing for us to a whole new level. Each year the talent in women's cycling is stepping up and growing, and I believe deserves greater recognition.



Belinda

Simon Hayes

After this experience it has really highlighted to me the fact that there is a lack of major pro-women's events that coincide with the men's – and with this being the case, the women's racing can hardly expect to reach the level of backing and support that it deserves.

Personally, I believe the growth of women's cycling would benefit enormously if there was further opportunities to race more women's events alongside the famous men's races. Each of these men's races receive wide television coverage, with the races running alongside each other it may allow the women's to gain some also.

It may be a way that we can increase the awareness that we too are out there training and racing hard and can also provide a great spectacle – and provide the girls of the peloton a greater reason to push each other to the limit.

And now to my own racing experiences so far – most of the races that I have been to in Europe this season have had 150 plus starters, and on some occasions up to 220.

That's a lot of girls, but if you stay near the front you tend not to notice how many there actually are.

Concentrating for three or four hours while waiting for the last 20km is taxing on the brain as well as the body. This has been a major change for me from the track where my races were at their longest, raced for only 35-40 minutes.

Getting to know who's who in the peloton has been a part of a learning curve for me – which wheel to follow, what train to get on, which way is the twisty road going to turn, when does it narrow and when does it widen? Add this to the constant communication and chit chat amongst our team – and you have what I tend to think and do during the race. Before you know it we've covered 130km of roads, and it is time to put these thoughts into actions and get ready for the fun part – the mad final sprint. 🚴

Happy training!
Belinda