

Perryman Reading le Tour continued...

The Armstrong case was eventually uncovered because of the dogged determination of the very best investigative sports journalism. And now with the revelations made spectacularly public and entirely unchangeable Armstrong's team-mates are producing confessional-style books to help reveal the mire of performance-enhancing drug culture the sport had relationship become part of. George Hincapie's [The Loyal Lieutenant](#) the latest, and as such a close and long-standing team mate of Armstrong's, one of the most revealing to date too. Juliet Macur's [Cycle of Lies](#) provides the panoramic view of perhaps the greatest story of decline and fall in the history of sport with a rare ability to get to grips with what Armstrong, the good the bad and the drugs, came to represent in and beyond his sport.

The Tour de France differs markedly from other sports mega-events - most obviously football's World Cup - in the close relationship between spectating and participating. A huge proportion of those watching *Le Tour* in Yorkshire will be cyclists themselves, many pedalling their way to reach a prized vantage point on a hill climb. And lots in the weeks before, and after, will cycle a chunk of the official route with all the speed and energy they can muster dreaming of being in the mighty peloton on the day itself. This is in many ways a do-it-yourself sports culture, armed with the [Pocket Road Bike Maintenance](#) handbook and the [Cyclist's Training Manual](#) the advice will be more than enough to keep bike and body in the kind of shape to ride a Tour stage, or even two. The binary opposition of recreation vs competition blurred by the race which is mainly against the clock and our own body's capacity to perform at speed, to ride a 'sportive' the aim for some, as documented in [Successful Sportives](#). A tad muscle-bound some of this stuff, certainly gendering the way cycling is consumed and practiced. A welcome relief therefore provided by Caz Nicklin's pioneering [The Girls' Bicycle Handbook](#).

A sense of the potential inclusiveness of cycling is provided by Robert Penn's almost philosophical [It's All About The Bike](#). Penn is a missionary for cycling, he makes no apology for his two-wheeled evangelism. A bike as mode of transport, a means to a holiday, a family outing, a race to the finish. All this and more Robert Penn promises we can expect from our bike.

The rich variety of inspiration cycle racing can inspire is admirably showcased in the latest volume of [The Cycling Anthology](#). Ranging over history, philosophy, the mediation and culture of the sport, this is high quality writing for the seriously enthusiastic.

And my book of *Le Tour*? Richard Moore's superb [Étape](#). There have been many histories of the Tour de France but instead of a dry chronology Richard Moore takes his reader to the core meaning of this most intriguing of races, the stages where the Yellow Jersey is decided by a lone break, a climb that defies human frailty, a calamity on the road, a rivalry unfolding. It takes three weeks to ride the Tour, every day filled with drama. This book helps us to understand its ensuring and growing appeal, and to appreciate the tradition and culture this year's Yorkshire *Grand Départ* will be contributing to in no doubt its own very special way.

Note *No links in this review are to Amazon. If you can avoid purchasing your books from tax-dodgers please do so.*

Mark Perryman is the co-founder of the self-styled 'sporting outfitters of intellectual distinction'. aka [Philosophy Football](#).