



We Were Young and Carefree

Laurent Fignon, William Fotheringham (Translator)

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The international bestselling autobiography of twice-Tour-de-France-winner Laurent Fignon, one of the greatest and most charismatic cyclists of all time.

'One of the most charismatic and flamboyant cyclists in recent history' *Daily Telegraph*

Laurent Fignon is one of the giants of modern cycling. Twice-winner of the Tour de France in the early eighties, Fignon became the star for a new generation. In 1989 he took part in one of the most fiercely-contested Tours of all time. Over the course of 3,285 kilometres he lost out to his American arch-rival, Greg LeMond, by an agonising eight seconds on the final Parisian time trial.

In this forthright and unflinching account the former champion spares neither friends nor opponents, nor even himself. In doing so he gives cycling fans a tantalising glimpse of what really went on behind the scenes of this epic sport - the friendships, the rivalries, the betrayals, the scheming, the parties, the girls, and, of course, the performance-enhancing drugs.

Laurent Fignon lived cycling at its peak. He enjoyed a truly exceptional career, winning over eighty titles from 1982 to 1993. The highs were matched by lows of serious injury, periods of self-doubt, and accusations of cheating.

Fignon's story bestrides a golden age in cycling: a time when the headlines spoke of heroes, not doping, and a time when cyclists were afraid of nothing.

Laurent Fignon was born in Paris in 1960. He won the Tour de France in 1983 and 1984 and the Giro d'Italia in 1989. In June 2009, Fignon revealed that he was being treated for advanced intestinal cancer and he died in August 2010.

We Were Young and Carefree Details

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Fotheringham (Translator)

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Phil says

This I found to be a really good read. I was only born in the mid 1980s so while I had an understanding of a lot of Fignon's achievements, there was a lot of other stuff I hadn't been aware of and this was great in that respect of bridging the gap in my knowledge.

Bjørn Kleiven says

A very nice addition to cycling history, even written himself, Laurent Fignon is pretty good at keeping many aspects of his life private. However between the lines and directly in a few, there would be material to write a parallel version with a view from la maison.

Overall for the cycling enthusiast it's a must read, even though biographies in Derrida's view are highly distortions.

Above all I like this legend of cycling, himself to the core, may he rest in peace in all cyclists minds and books of cycling.

Miguel Poveda says

La autobiografía de Laurent Fignon, publicada poco antes de su muerte en 2010, es un libro que, como su autor, no deja indiferente. Desde la distancia, y más la española, Fignon siempre fue considerado un tipo pagado de sí mismo, antipático y gruñón, como enfadado con todo el mundo. También será siempre conocido por perder el Tour de 1989 frente a Greg LeMond por únicamente 8 segundos. En su historia, Fignon narra toda su trayectoria deportiva, desde sus inicios como amateur, su paso a profesional con el equipo del legendario Bernard Hinault, sus dos victorias en el Tour y otra en el Giro, y su caída en desgracia. Como no tenía pelos en la lengua suelta todo lo que piensa (que sea cierto o falso ya es otra cosa) y resulta entretenidísimo. Sus análisis del ciclismo actual coinciden con los míos, subrayando el daño del dopaje y el diseño de los recorridos, cada vez más suaves y que permiten que corredores mediocres puedan obtener más triunfos. Aunque también tiene sus típicas salidas de tono, diciendo que los ciclistas colombianos traían cocaína en sus bicis desde Colombia o que le robaron el Giro de 1984 para que venciera Moser. Un personaje único, un libro único.

Martin Mccann says

While cycling provides the source for the best sports writing, French cyclists take it even further, deviating from the simple linear narrative to something more cerebral-rather than just a "this happened, then this and after that....", there is a more philosophical and historical depth, as found in Bobet's "Tomorrow, We Ride"-Fignon's autobiography continues in that tradition. He kickstarts the whole book with an honest and

insightful retelling of perhaps his most (in)famous moment. losing the 1989 Tour by 8 secs to Greg Lemond (though as Fignon himself says- "I'm not the man who lost the Tour by 8 seconds-I'm the one who won it twice!")

Standing as a testament to not only his career, but his personality, following his death I feel that Fignon does play intellectual games throughout. For example he seems to hint that not everything should be taken as he has recorded it- little clues hidden in seemingly throw away remarks appear to encourage the reading to engage more actively in trying to sift out the contents. An example- despite many people knowing that his nickname was "Le Professeur", Fignon states that he never had a nickname that stuck which seems a bit odd- the feeling is that he can't help but intellectually tease throughout the book.

Despite that, there is plenty of insight into a complex individual who has entered the hallowed pantheon of cycling legends. The personal make up and what exactly is required to win Grand Tours and Classics and be spoken of in the same breath as Hinault and Merckx are laid bare, and the personal and physical sacrifices clearly illustrated and deconstructed, placed in an intellectual framework that enhances rather than plays down the drama.

Paulo Glez Ogando says

I read the English translation by William Fotheringham; not the French original.

Fignon was surely the last great French champion. He won Tour de France in 1983 and 1984, though Hinault (six years older than Fignon, so belonging to the previous generation) was the last French winner of the Tour in 1985. A real champion, he won his first ever race at sixteen, and the Tour de France at his first presence in the race (as the great champions as Merckx, Anquetil, Hinault or Coppi).

Having a strong personality, Fignon was somehow different from what you could find in the bunch. He was by then an example of fight and improvement, even of the romantic force of cycling. But he was, too, part of a fiction. In this book Fignon recognizes having taken amphetamines, and he concedes that performance enhanced drugs was regular for most of the riders in the bunch.

An obsessed worker, he claims that, back in the 80's, doping could not turn an ordinary rider into a champion. However, he believes that in the 90's the stage changed and just that was possible. He suggests his former *domestique* Bjarne Riis as an example for this.

Fignon explains another difference between the 80's and the 90's, the interests to make a good final classification, which brought conservatism and prudence over the desire to win at all costs. He thinks several times about those ways to run.

With all this, and longing for past times, he had no choice but to retire. Fignon was one of the last examples of the previous era in cycling, and his withdrawal from pros left prevailing the golden age of EPO.

As usual, he tends to blame more on others than on himself. But there is some sense of sincerity, even a bit of courage for recognizing having taken amphetamines himself, and stating cycling is full of doping (not saying any names directly). This is not frequent in a world of *omertá* like cycling is.

Besides, I find very interesting his relationship with Cyrille Guimard and with Alain Gallopin. In fact, I wish

he had gone deeper into the latter. There is not much of Fignon's private life in this book, but his professional life.

PS: yes, Fignon lost 1989 Tour de France by eight seconds, and he is famous for that, but he was much more than this story.

Jude Nonesuch says

This book is so good. I'm clearly not feeling in a 5 star mood at the moment. But yes it basically lives up to the promise of its title throughout: reflective and often poetic, in a unique yet understated way, reflections on a past era of cycling. One of the most successful aspects, in the vein of Carson McCullers or Tove Jansson, is how the poetry appears naturally: it stands apart from the factual recollections but seems right and appropriate; it adds an extra perspective, one of the inner life of a human, expanding the context from events to a broader realm of experience.

Nick Sweeney says

The autobiography of one of the men who, for a period in the 1980s, rescued French pro road cycling from the encroachments of Italians, Belgians and, almost, Americans. One of Fignon's most watched moments was his loss of the 1989 Tour de France to Californian* Greg LeMond by a mere eight seconds, and Fignon panders to the car crash watchers by beginning the book with this episode. His dignified riposte to strangers who said, "You're that bloke that lost the Tour de France by eight seconds, aren't you?" was, "No, monsieur, I'm the bloke who won it twice," putting his achievements back in the spotlight.

Fignon seemed an anachronism in the tough world of pro cycling for a while, being degree-educated - to a point, as he gave up his degree for cycling - and nicknamed 'le professeur', more for his trademark specs than anything else and, compared to many of his peers, from a fairly middle-class background. He had a rocky relationship with the press at times, and with his fellow-cyclists and managers, not being a man who was backwards about coming forwards, but he writes as honestly about his faults and failures as his achievements. A great book, I think, but one for people who are into pro cycling really, as it's difficult to get interested in the machinations behind some of the races, and some of the teams and winners, of Fignon's day. He died of cancer last October, so this is his only testament, and it's a worthy one.

*I originally wrote 'Texan', getting LeMond mixed up with another famous cyclist, for some reason...

Torkild says

Spændende indblik i Fignons liv. Så ham, da han kørte for Gatorade. Stor stor mester.

Jimmy Burns says

This is a fine insight to professional cycling and the mindset of a cerebral and outstanding athlete. Fignon was known as 'Le Profesor' during his cycling career and was a big name in an era festooned with big names e.g. Hinault, Jalabert and Lemond.

Fignon was known for his forthright views and was never scared to make them known on or off the bike his confrontational nature was admired by the cycling tifosi if not by the administrators.

This is no-holds barred autobiography that will be enjoyed by all who have an interest in this elegant, savage but ultimately beautiful sport. Laurent Fignon left this world too soon but his memory will be with us forever.

Jtomassetti says

"Aren't you the guy who lost the Tour by 8 seconds?" he answered "No, I'm the guy who won it twice."

LAURENT FIGNON, WE WERE YOUNG AND CAREFREE was first published in French in 2009. Laurent was born in 1960 and passed away from cancer in August 2010. About the time of his death the book was translated into English by William Fotheringham. Because it was written for a French audience there is not much explanation of cycling rules and tactics or the geography of France like one would find in cycling books written specifically for American audiences.

The book is honest and blunt. During the 1989 Tour De France Laurent was given "Prix Citron" by journalist as least likable rider. In the book his unlikable attitude comes across. However, he understands that is the way he is viewed by many people and often defends his actions.

The book is very centered on Fignon's world of cycling. Only cyclist that relate directly to his story are mentioned. The first chapter is very critical of Greg LeMond but then there is not mention of LeMond in the rest of the book. He barely mentions his family, wives or children.

I read the book quickly and I enjoyed it. I recommend it especially for those with interest European bike racing in the 1980s.

Gumble's Yard says

Excellent autobiography, strongly opinionated - Fignon sees his era as characterised by ineffectual doping (which couldn't turn an also ran into a champion) and legendary exploits and the EPO era as characterised by legendary doping (which completely over turned natural form) and ineffectual racing. He argues rest days in mountainous sections of Tours have made doping worse and that races should be harder so that natural talent comes more to the fore.

Garrett says

This is an interesting read into Laurent Fignon cycling career. The book covers the cycling life very well but rarely mentions anything of his family life. I'm not sure if it's me but he doesn't come across as a likeable person in his book. He stops talking to his friend Alan because he goes to work for another team. He always complains about the press and seems to rarely give interviews, what he expected journalists have to make a living by interviewing stars, he was the one of the biggest cyclists of the 80's so of course they need to print articles about him in the paper, also his understanding of sport where he thinks the money he earned came from, from sponsors who need the events covered in the media and for people to see their brand. Businesses don't sponsor teams for no reason they need a return on their investment.

He complains about Lemond sticking to his wheel when Lemond was in the yellow jersey, why would you attach if you're in the yellow jersey why not let your opponent do all the work.

I wonder how truthful the section on the drug taking is, he says he took it once and failed the test and again blaming this on his friend Alan because he wasn't there to motivate him.

But I would recommend reading it if you like cycling books.

Jacqui N says

Laurent Fignon (and Bernard Hinault) were my cycling heroes in the 1980s. I did some local racing, and followed the professional racing scene closely. I subscribed to Velo News and Winning magazine. I haunted the foreign magazine shelves at Out Of Town News and the News Corner in Harvard Square for L'Equipe, Miroir du Cyclisme, and Sport80, occasionally getting lucky to find something in Paris Match, the French version of People Magazine. With all that, Laurent Fignon disclosed as much in his autobiography as he did in the peak years of his cycling career, i.e., very little about his personal life. An appropriate alternate title for this book could have been *Cycling Is My Life*, without exaggeration. Some chapters read like a monologue, as if in some way Fignon felt compelled to write this book to corroborate, define, and cement firmly the reputation to posterity he had long established with the public, the cycling community, and the media.

He was driven, but most champions are. Temperamental, intensely personal, "difficult to get along with," outspoken, honest almost to a fault. Fignon spares himself the least in evaluating the decisions he made during his career and afterwards, but makes few excuses for his failures. I would have been interested to read more about his training, more direct experience during races. However, I feel this book is more of a character portrayal than any kind of grassroots autobiography. Fignon was true to himself to the end. I was very sad to hear of his tragic illness and death.

Gali says

First, I should say that I deeply regret reading this in English because the translation seemed to be wonky and word-for-word a few times. I don't know if the original version is to be blamed, or did the translator just didn't try to write this out to be a good read.

Second, I'm part of the generation of 25-30 year old French people who mainly know Fignon from his

cycling commentary work for France Télévision and archive footage of his wins. While he never seemed like the happiest of chaps, this autobiography certainly destroyed any positive image I had of him. By the end, I was made to think that he was nothing more than a bitter man.

My main issue with this book is that it often focuses on throwing people under the bus before having a sentence or two saying, "but I knew it was my fault". I could only take so many people being badmouthed when it was clear that Fignon's personality was largely at fault also, as he just seemed to have a gift for antagonising others. Perhaps some other aspects of his life should have been highlighted, such as how his family/non-cycling people contributed to his personality, his life. His first wife is mentioned in four sentences, his oldest child is mentioned once, his parents aren't mentioned at all after the first few chapters. As someone who also chose not to have a standard 9-5 job and who has had family and friends step in to keep myself sane, I find it strange not to mention anyone who isn't a cyclist! It's a very restrictive view of the world... so either there is a huge chunk that's missing from this book or Fignon led a horribly sad life.

The other issue I had trouble with was how Fignon seems to contradict himself a lot when talking about drugs. There is one passage I found hilarious:

"To understand that different times in cycling cannot really be compared, you have to be aware that never, in my entire career, did anyone talk to me - or anyone near me - about 'doping'. Occasionally someone would ask: 'Have you taken something?' But that was it. And most of the time, it was not viewed as cheating, which must seem completely incredible."

Possibly he didn't mean to make it sound like he was saying that it wasn't doping because it wasn't called that, but that certainly sounds like it!

The one aspect that was good was the description of the behind-the-scenes directeurs sportifs drama. So, just for that, it might be a good read.

Steve says

An unvarnished, yet fascinating story of a unique, iconic bicycle great, and one of the more unusual autobiographies I've read. With better editorial support (a broader perspective, less repetition, better vocabulary, and tighter editing), this book could have been a classic, but, it was a quick, fun, entertaining read nonetheless. What struck me most about the book, however was that: (1) a reader could conclude that Fignon was such a physical specimen, a legitimate freak of nature, that his success (winning the Tour de France twice, winning the Giro, winning multiple classics) owed little to hard work, discipline, determination, professionalism, and dedication to craft; (2) although Fignon was almost exactly my age, and recently died of cancer (and was dying of cancer while finishing the book), he makes no mention of his cancer or his pending demise; indeed, nothing in the book suggests his pending premature demise; (3) although Fignon appears to have strong feelings on the use of drugs in cycling, it is impossible to understand what lines he draws - he discusses drugs throughout, but seems utterly inconsistent and, frequently, incoherent, in discussing them; and (4) although Fignon discusses getting married, the birth of a son, and the demise of his (first) marriage, he never mentions the birth of his daughter, nor does he name or - in any way - indicate any relationship whatsoever with either of his children. Ultimately, a flawed, but interesting, autobiography of a unique guy in an exciting time and place....
