

## **Vous êtes formidable!**

On Monday 10 July 2006, at 7.00am, Dentaïd supporter Richard Whatley set off among 7,548 amateur riders on the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the Etape du Tour organised by Vélo Magazine, to cycle one of the toughest stages of the Tour De France. On a road closed to general traffic and flanked by motorcycle outriders and official cars, the first 60km was largely downhill and Richard bowled along at a speed of over 35kmph towards Guillestre and the start of the Col d'Izoard. By 08:00am a heat haze was already shimmering along the tarmac road from the burning sun overhead and a steady, cruel headwind sprung up to add to the enormity of the challenge, as the riders approached the base of L'Alpe d'Huez.

Climbing through the Guil gorge for 17km, at Arvieux the gradient kicked up sharply at the start of the climb proper past La Chalp, Brunissard and then the route followed up through the pine forests to the lunar landscape at the top of the Izoard. The views from the summit were truly magnificent and Richard stopped to refuel, and take a rest from the scorching sun and exhausting climb.

The swift descent down to Briançon, reaching a top speed of 74.2kmph, was exhilarating, but all too soon Richard was climbing again heading toward the Lauteret. This was a steady, leg sapping climb with the strong headwind making the average 4% gradient feel like 7%. By the time he reached the next summit at 13:15pm his kit was streaked with sweat marks and he was visibly trembling when he stopped to meet his support team. All around him, fellow riders were showing the effects of the very hot conditions, as the mercury had risen steadily towards a high of 38 degrees Celsius.

The next five hours passed by in a haze of exhaustion as long descents were followed by relentless switchbacks in the afternoon heat. Richard finally reached the summit and finishing line with 50 minutes to spare, safe in the knowledge that he'd honoured the commitment to his many sponsors. He finished 4442<sup>nd</sup>, in 10 hours 7 mins and 58secs, having burned up a staggering 7,314 calories. It was a truly magnificent achievement, undertaken in savagely hot weather. More importantly, Richard had avoided the cruel fate of many fellow riders whose dreams were shattered when ran out of time and were swept up by the "broom wagon". Only 5,477 riders completed the course.

A big thank you and "well done" to Richard on his amazing effort. With the help of Sheree (wife, chief fundraiser and rider support team!) Richard's effort has raised a staggering £6932 to date for Dentaïd's work overseas.