

# The 2019 UCI World Road Race Championships explained

Written by Brian Keighley, Captain Otley Cycle Club in 2019.

The UCI World Road Race Championships are held every year in September. The first World Championship Road Race was held in 1927 and won by Alfredo Binda of Italy in Germany at The Nurburgring. The current World men's Champion (written in 2019) is Alejandro Valverde of Spain. The first Women's World Championship Road Race was held in 1958 and won by Elsy Jacobs of Luxembourg, in Reims, France. The current Women's World Champion is Anna van der Breggen of The Netherlands, at the race in Innsbruck, Austria.



The winner of any UCI World Championship event receives the Rainbow Jersey. The jersey is white with five horizontal-coloured bands across the chest, of blue, red, black, yellow and green. The World Champion has the privilege of wearing the Rainbow Jersey for the next twelve months up until the next Worlds.

There are other jerseys won in cycling that can also be worn for the next twelve months — the National Champions jersey, which for Great Britain is white with red, white and blue horizontal bands, the European Champions jersey and The World Cup leader's jersey. There is no jersey for the Olympic Champion as it is not a UCI event.

The Rainbow Jersey can be worn at any time by the World Champion over the next twelve months, such as out training or even on a club run. There are strict UCI rules when it can be worn in racing though. The World Champion can only wear it when riding in the discipline in which he or she won it. For instance, the World Road Race Champion would not be allowed to wear the Rainbow Jersey in any time trial. This also applies to National Champion jerseys.

When a World Champion is riding in a discipline in which the jersey was won, the Rainbow Jersey must be worn. Only the current World Champ is allowed to wear the Rainbow Jersey, although a World Championship win is for life. All former World Champions have the Rainbow bands on the cuffs of their jerseys. Former National Champions have the colours of their nation on their cuffs.

Lizzie Diegnan is a three times British Champion but she will always have the Rainbow bands on her jersey as a World Championship win outranks all else. When Lizzie retires from professional cycle racing and comes out to ride with Otley Cycle Club, we will have to have made a unique one-off top for her displaying the Rainbow bands.



Rainbow jerseys can easily be bought, but they are only replicas and not the real thing. The only authentic Rainbow Jerseys are those given to Champions of the World. You can often see people wearing Rainbow Jerseys, but they are just pretenders, a Rainbow Jersey must be earned. We have two real Rainbow Jerseys in the Otley Cycle Club club rooms. One won by Beryl Burton and the other by Lizzie Diegnan. These jerseys probably don't have much monetary value, though they are precious to the club to the world of cycling, to the riders who won them and to Otley.

In the World Championships Olympics and Commonwealth Games competitors ride for their countries, not for their trade teams, which they do for the rest of the year.

Great Britain has had seven winners. Two men and four women. The first was Beryl Burton in 1960, Karl Marx Stadt, East Germany. Tom Simpson in 1965 San Sabastian, Spain. Beryl Burton (again) in 1967, Herleen, The Netherlands. Mandy Jones 1982, Goodwood, UK. Nicole Cooke, 2008, Varese, Italy. Mark Cavendish 2011, Copenhagen, Denmark, and a member of our club Lizzie Diegnan 2015, Richmond, Virginia, USA.

The country with the most wins is Belgium with 27, 26 male wins and one woman.

Of the seven British wins, three are by Yorkshire riders. Beryl Burton (two wins) and Lizzie Diegnan. (Tom Simpson was born in County Durham). Beryl is the only British rider to have won the Worlds twice. Nicole Cooke was the first rider in the world, man or women, to win the World Championship Road Race and the Olympic Road Race in the same year.



National teams in the Road World Championship need not have an equal number of riders. The maximum for a men's team is eight and the women 7. For a country to start with eight male riders or 7 women, that country must secure enough points which are earned by achievement in UCI ranked races throughout the year.

Consequently, some countries will start with just one rider while others will have 8, or 7 in the women's race. The big cycling nations, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy have no problem acquiring enough points to gain them the maximum number of riders. Whereas smaller countries such as Switzerland, home of Fabian Cancellara and Slovakia home of Peter Sagan usually only start with three, although this didn't stop Peter winning the World Championship three times. This may appear unfair to many, but the UCI has a good reason for making it this way, I will explain later.

There is a strong argument by many race fans that the World Championship Road Race is a poor way to select a Champion of the World. The case is that it is a single day race where the course might favour a sprinter or climbers. Also, misfortune can and often does affect the outcome of the race. A leading rider may have a mechanical problem or be involved in a crash which puts him or her out of the race.

Another view is that the World's Number One rider would be a worthier recipient of the World Championship jersey. Simon Yates was the 2018 World Number One, having gained more points than any other pro rider that season. Julian Alaphillipe is leading this year's competition, with Annemiek Van Vleuten leading the women's.

Points are awarded for achievement in UCI regulated races throughout the season, many races of many different types, starting with the early season races like Paris – Nice and finishing with the Tour of Lombardy. Many riders have been World Number One but never worn the Rainbow Jersey of World Champion. Sean Kelly was World Number One for several years but was never Champion of the World. There are exceptional riders who have been World Number One and also World Road Race Champion, Eddy Merckx, and our very own Lizzie are two riders who have this achievement.

The UCI case is that the World Road Race Championship is a race for individual nations, like the football World Cup and other popular team sports. Whereas riders gain points for the World Number One competition by riding in their trade teams with teammates from all over the world. For a nation to secure the eight riders for men, 7 for women that country's riders must gain

enough points over the season before the Worlds. So, the number of cyclists in any nations team is a reflection of how that nation's riders have performed in their trade teams over the season.

Each country's cycling federation selects teams for the Worlds. When team selections have been announced it often leads to heated debates in the cycling press and among racing fans and riders (read Nicole Cooke's autobiography), about which riders have been selected, and which should have been. For instance, when Lizzie won the World Championship in Richmond, Virginia, I would have thought for a rider to be considered for selection for the British team, the ability to do the distance would be a prime requirement, read the next paragraph.

I think it is worth pointing out that Lizzie's victory in Richmond Virginia was outstanding, considering going into the final lap all of her teammates had gone. Not one of them finished the race. On her own, she was up against formidable opponents, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and Australia. Every one of these teams outnumbered Lizzie; she was on her own. Onto the final climb up Libby Hill before the finish line, Lizzie attacked, changing up into a bigger gear, she dropped Georgia Bronzini which she had to do, Bronzini one of the world's best sprinters and herself a double World Champion. Over the top and onto the finishing straight she was up against it with the world's strongest riders surrounding her including Anna van der Breggen, Elisa Longo Borgini, and Megan Guarnier. No one was going to beat Lizzie that day.

To go out there and beat the best riders and nations of the world is very special. She did that!

You can watch Lizzie's victory on Youtube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kICyQgQI0Z0&t=49s>