

The Nevstar's Tour De France Guide – 2026

The 113th edition of the Tour de France, inarguably the world's greatest bike race, gets under way on Saturday 4th July with the Grand Depart taking place in Barcelona with a rare team trial. The peloton* this year will contest a 21 stage, 3,333-kilometre route over three weeks culminating with the finish in Paris. The start in Spain means that the Pyrenees are featured early in the 2026 edition, but the Tour also visits the mountain ranges of Massif Central, Vosges, Jura and the Alps as the Tour route cuts across France from west to east.

* See appendix for French terms used in cycling



The 2026 Tour de France main storyline is very similar to last year – who or what can stop **Tadej Pogačar** winning the race? The defending champion has again been in dominating form in 2026, and he is at short odds to add a fifth Tour de France crown and join cycling immortals such as Anquetil, Merckx, Hinault and Induráin. However, most of the headlines might be garnered by a new entrant to the peloton. **Paul Seixas** is a young cycling prodigy from France who may emerge as the main threat to Tadej. Plus, we have two-time champion **Jonas Vingegaard** attempting the Giro – Tour double, former World Road and Time Trial champion **Remco Evenepoel** seeking Tour de France glory and last year’s winner of the Young Riders classification **Florian Lipowitz** returning with a one more years’ experience. Grand Tours can be unpredictable and it’s just possible that Tadej might face some stress on the road to Paris before his likely coronation as 2026 Tour de France champion.

The Nevstar Tour de France Guide will examine the main contenders for the yellow jersey as well as the three other jerseys that are contested, look at this year's route and then identify some key stages to watch before making some podium predictions. Allons y!

The Contenders

We get to witness true greatness so rarely, but the 2026 Tour de France will likely be won by one of the greatest cyclists of all times in the form of 28-year-old Slovenian **Tadej Pogačar** of UAE Team Emirates. He is currently the UCI world #1 cyclist having held the position for a record 257 weeks. He has won the Tour de France four times already along with the mountains (3x) and young rider classifications (4x). He is two-time defending world road race champion and has won four of the five cycling one day monuments adding Milan – San Remo to his palmares this year and now has 11 in total trailing only the immortal Eddy Merckx. In 2026, he has raced 16 times at the top level for 13 wins. He warmed up for the Tour by winning the Tour de Suisse in absolutely dominating fashion riding off the front in stage one and soloing 71km to the finish before winning the time trial and then the final queen stage. So, if for no other reason, tune into the Tour de France to see an absolute legend at the peak of his powers.

Pogačar will also be supported by a very strong team at the Tour in 2026 with UAE Team Emirates having one of the most talented squads in the sport and the group will be dedicated solely to helping Tadej win his fifth Tour. His key lieutenant will be **Adam Yates** who himself finished third in the 2023 Tour de France. Along with him will likely be **Brandon McNulty**, **Tim Wellens**, and **Isaac del Toro**. Del Toro is particularly interesting as the 22-year-old Mexican completely dominated the field in the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alps in June which is one of the key Tour lead up races. If Pogačar strikes problems, Del Toro may well be in a position to take over team leadership. UAE will however be missing the supremely talented **João Almeida** as he has ruled himself out of the race this year after a difficult spring.

Tadej's main competition usually comes in the form of **Jonas Vingegaard** from Denmark who rides for Visma–Lease a Bike. Lest we forget, Vingegaard (29) is himself a two-time winner of the Tour de France besting Pogačar in both 2022 and 2023. He came second to the Slovenian last year by just over four minutes and recorded no stage victories as compared with Pogačar's four. While he was inevitably the last person to be dropped by Tadej, he was never able to match or best him on the key climbs. It is notable that Vingegaard has changed his Tour preparations this year. Rather than specifically targeting the Tour, Jonas took the opportunity to race and indeed won the 2026 Giro d'Italia becoming only the eighth rider in history to win all three grand Tours (Giro, Tour and Vuelta). It is generally difficult to be at your peak fitness in the Tour if you have already ridden the Giro a month previously and this perhaps indicates that Vingegaard himself is dubious of his chances against Pogačar. Vingegaard's prospects were also dealt a savage blow recently with the news that super-domestique **Wout van Aert** would not participate in the Tour de France this year. Following a training crash at the recent Tour Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, van Aert developed a severe bacterial infection on his left elbow and the team determined that he would not be fit enough to take the start line in Barcelona. Van Aert was a key part of the Dane's two victories, and his absence is a massive blow to the Vingegaard's chances. Visma will still have a strong team at the Tour with the likes of **Matteo Jorgenson**, **Sepp Kuss** helping in the mountains and the immense **Victor Campenaerts** helping pull the peleton along the valley roads. Jorgenson shapes as a second yellow jersey option if Vingegaard is off the pace for any reason.

If you are reading any French newspapers in the next few weeks, the ONLY tour story will be the debut in the 2026 Tour de France of 19-year-old Frenchman **Paul Seixas** riding for the Decathlon CMA-CGM Team. Simply put, Seixas might be the most exciting talent emerging from the host nation in decades. Remember it is now 41 years since a Frenchman has stood on the top step of the podium, and Seixas is the latest local to carry the hopes of France breaking that embarrassing drought. Seixas has burst onto the scene of the pro peleton and quickly demonstrated that he has that required combination of aerobic capacity and competitive instinct.

He first showcased his talent when he won the junior time trial at the 2024 World Championships before going on to win the 2025 Tour de l'Avenir which is the junior version of the Tour de France (won by Pogačar himself in 2018). He also completed a remarkable feat at the hilly Tour of Basque Country this year where he won three of six stages and took the leaders, points, mountain and young riders' classifications! But it was in this year's Liège-Bastogne-Liège that he really caught the Nevstar's eye. The race is one of the spring classics, the oldest bike race in the world and raced over a very hilly parcours by one of the deepest fields of the year. Pogačar was in great form during the spring and looked like he would dominate the pack. He attacked with around 30km to go and turned around to find only the indomitable Seixas of the elite field still with him. Twice more he surged and only with the last effort was he finally able to drop the Frenchman riding in his first full year as a professional. It was an immensely impressive effort by Seixas, finishing second on the day and going toe to toe with the best rider of this and perhaps any generation. Clearly he is one to watch and potentially a future Tour de France champion, but it would be VERY surprising if he is competitive or even completed the Tour this year. 19 years old is very young to ride a gruelling three-week grand tour and experienced commentators have even urged him to wait a year or two. The demands of the French media means that is unlikely so it is bound to be one of the main storylines this year and will be fascinating to see how he fares.

The final podium position in last year's Tour and the winner of the young rider's classification in 2025 was German rider **Florian Lipowitz** who rides for the **Red Bull–Bora–Hansgrohe** team. Only 25 years old and thus still eligible for the white jersey, Lipowitz has raced sparingly in 2026 in stark contrast to the heavier programmes of Pogačar, Seixas and Vingegaard. He came second to Pogačar in the Tour of Romandie (by only 42 seconds) and second to Seixas at the Tour of Basque Country. He is a strong climber but also good in the time trial. Indeed, he will head a dual attack by Red Bull with team-mate **Remco Evenepoel**. Remco is an outstanding cyclist and has been a World Champion at both the Road Race (2022) and Time Trial (2023 and 2024). He won two Olympic Gold medals at the Paris Olympics and has won a Grand Tour already in the form of the Vuelta a España in 2022. The collective strength of Lipowitz and Evenepoel means their team is probably favourite to win the opening team time trial and take the first yellow jersey. Having two cards to play could cause problems for Pogačar in the mountains as he needs to be worried about both of them. Lipowitz is a bit of a dark horse in this year's race in the Nevstar's view, and it would not surprise if he was right in the mix for yellow as the Tour reaches the Alps.

Of the other yellow jersey aspirants, **Richard Carapaz** of EF Education – EasyPost is a perennial Grand Tour contender. The Colombian is stage racing specialist with a penchant for the mountains and who finished second to Pogačar in the Tour de Suisse. He will likely be prominent throughout the final steep climbs particularly in the team's bright pink jerseys. However, I think it is possible that Carapaz may ship time to the leaders early on and look to target the mountains classification (see below) which he won at the 2024 Tour de France. **Juan Ayuso** is a young Spanish rider for Lidl-Trek who is likely to be prominent when the peloton is reduced to the key contenders. He is an excellent climber who won the Tour of Algalve this year and placed third in the Tour warm-up race, the Tour Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. **Oscar Onley** placed a surprising fourth in last year's Tour for the Netcompany INEOS team, but the talented Scot suffered a nasty crash in June falling into a ravine and was a late withdrawal from the Tour start list as a result of injuries suffered in that crash. Other dark horse candidates include **Tobias Halland Johannessen** of Uno-X Mobility who finished 6th on his Tour debut last year and **Kevin Vauquelin** of Netcompany Ineos who finished 7th. One other young rookie who may surprise in the mountains is **Cian Uijdebroucks** of Movistar who is one of the best pure climbers in the peloton. Lastly keep an eye out for **Antonio Tiberi** of Bahrain Victorious who makes his Tour debut after highly creditable performance in the Giro this year.

In terms of prestige, the most important jersey after the famous Yellow jersey is the Green jersey which is targeted by the best sprinters in the peloton. The Green jersey is a points competition with the biggest haul of points awarded for high places on the flat stages. Smaller amounts of points are also awarded for intermediate sprints during the stages and on the hilly stages. It is arguably a harder jersey to win as there are no “off” days. While the yellow jersey candidates can roll along in the peloton during flat stages, the sprinters will need to be near the front for all bunch finishes before hauling their heavier builds over the prodigious mountain passes.

The Green jersey was won last year by the sensational **Jonathan Milan** of Lidl-Trek who won two stages and amassed enough points to comfortably win the points classification. He is powerful rather than fast which is important in the chaotic sprint stages at the Tour. The energetic Eritrean **Biniam Girmay** of NSN Cycling won the green jersey in 2024 and will also be in the mix for stages wins. He also has a little more climbing skills than Milan and may look to pick up points in the intermediate sprints when they come after an early hill climb. **Olav Kooij** is one of the fastest pure sprinters in the peloton as is the mercurial **Jasper Philipsen** of Alpecin-Premier Tech although Philipsen has struggled to find his absolute best form of late. Jasper will however be ably assisted by the incredible **Mathieu van der Poel** who will provide impeccable lead outs. Van der Poel is one of the strongest one-day riders in the world and should be visible at the front of the lead out trains late in stages. He is also a contender for the individual time trial stage win where he will be up against former world time trial champion **Filippo Ganna** of Netcompany INEOS. **Tim Merlier** (Soudal Quick Step) and **Arnaud De Lie** (Lotto–Intermarché) are the other leading sprint stage contenders.

The white jersey is given to the best young rider over the lap around France with that being defined as someone under the age of 26 at the start of the year. Leading contenders for this hotly contested jersey are the aforementioned **Florian Lipowitz**, **Isaac Del Toro** and also **Carlos Rodríguez** of Netcompany INEOS.

The last jersey up for grabs is the Polka Dot jersey worn by the leader of the mountain’s classification. This is another points-based competition with points awarded for each of the categorised climbs in the tour. The one who collects the most points is awarded the delightfully named *Maillot à Pois Rouge*. The mountains competition used to be won by someone who is not necessarily the best climber, but a decent climber who got in lots of early breakaways. To try and make the jersey more relevant to its name, the organisers have more recently started giving more points to the truly giant climbs and double points for mountain top stage finishes. So, one of the main combatants like Pogačar or Vingegaard will likely secure the polka dot jersey in Paris. Other possibilities include **Valentin Paret Peintre** of Soudal Quick Step and **Lenny Martinez** of Bahrain Victorious. As above, Richard Carapaz may also target this jersey rather than yellow.

At the time of writing, it was not clear how many New Zealanders will be selected as some teams are yet to finalise their start list. Unfortunately, with teams limited to only 8 riders, there may not be room for two of our best cyclists. Both **Laurence Pithie** and **Finn Fisher-Black** ride for the powerful Red Bull – Bora Hansgrohe team who seem focused on the GC prospects of Evenepoel and Lipowitz as detailed above. That’s a shame as both have had stellar years with Pithie notching a highly creditable overall win in the Four Days of Dunkirk along with three top ten finishes in Paris – Nice and a stage win at the Tour of Slovenia. Fisher-Black was also very prominent with a 2nd, 3rd, and 9th in the prestigious Tour of Romandie. Hopefully at least one makes the starting list as both are capable of stage wins. Our best chances of representation probably lie with the NSN Cycling team which has the NZ champion **George Bennett** and the current top rated NZ cyclist in **Corbin Strong**. Bennett in particular has been in a rich vein of form and was highly prominent in the recent Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alps being right in the main group of contenders on the final climbs. Strong competed in the Giro D’Italia and notched three top tens so could be an outside chance of a result if selected.

The Route

The organisers of the Tour de France plot a different route every year simultaneously trying to provide a spectacle to fans, a challenge for riders, and a showcase of the beauty of France. The route in 2026 is a slightly unusual shape as a consequence of the Grand Depart from Barcelona. As a result, the peleton hits the Pyrenees quite early in 2026 before slashing across the middle of France towards the Alps. Large parts of the country in the northwest and southeast are completely absent although the tour does manage to traverse four mountain ranges : the Pyrenees, the Massif Central, the Jura and finally the Alps. There is a team time trial to start which will be great viewing as they have changed the rules around timing (see below) plus a 26km Individual Time Trial. The peleton will also summit the famous Alpe d'Huez on consecutive days for the first time on stages 19 and 20. Overall, there are five mountain top finishes across the three-week Tour and a total of over 54,450 metres of climbing – that's to the top of Everest and back six times!

Tour director Christian Prudhomme has maintained the same format for the final stage which sees the peleton take on the climb to Montmartre three times before finishing on the Champs Elyses.

Stages to Watch

While the Nevstar will be watching every stage, for the casual fan there are certainly some stages which are more watchable than others. So, if you want to circle a few dates on the calendar, here are the stages which the Nevstar thinks will be the most entertaining.

STAGE 1 : BARCELONE > BARCELONE, 19.6 KM (4 JULY)

The first stage of the tour will be a team time trial for the first time since 1971. Team time trials are aesthetically pleasing with all eight riders stretched out in formation. However, the organisers have announced a change to the timing of this year's Team Time Trial. Previously, the time was taken on the four or fifth rider meaning most of the team had to stay together. Now, times are recorded individually when each rider crosses the line. In effect, teams will need to efficiently plot how to deliver their best rider close to the finish to allow the GC contender to power up the slight incline at the end. The format was used in the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alps, and it was very exciting with different tactics utilised by teams based on their respective strengths.

STAGE 6 : PAU > GAVARNIE-GÈDRE, 186 KM (9 JULY)

While there is a 'mountain' stage on stage 3, the first real test of the main contenders is this classic Pyrenean stage featuring the redoubtable Category 1* Col d'Aspin and the monstrous Hors Catégorie Col du Tourmalet before finishing up a long although not overly steep climb to the pretty setting of Cirque de Gavarnie.

* All hill climbs are categorised based on their length, vertical climb, and gradient. The easiest is category 4, then category 3, category 2 and category 1. The French then have a final category "HC" which stands for 'hors categorie' or 'beyond category'. The old adage was that the designation was roughly the car gear that you would need to engage to drive up the hill. Fourth gear for Cat 4, third gear for Cat 3 etc. For HC, the hill was considered so steep, you probably shouldn't be driving your car on this road!

STAGE 9 : MALEMORT > USSEL, 185 KM (12 JULY)

Probably not a GC day, but could be some of the best racing as the parcours suits the breakaway specialists with rolling terrain and over 3,300m of climbing. The last categorised climb comes with a steep ramp with 20km to go allowing those with good legs to make a dash for tour glory at the end of week one.

STAGE 10 : AURILLAC > LE LIORAN, 167 KM (14 JULY)

Bastille Day! Always one of the best days of racing on the Tour is the French National Day celebrating the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. The Tour planners have set another demanding route for the peloton which should guarantee some exciting racing. The stage is only 167km long but features seven categorised climbs and 3,800 vertical metres of climbing. You know it isn't going to be a fun day when you finish at the top of a ski station!

STAGE 15: CHAMPAGNOLE > PLATEAU DE SOLAISON, 184 KM (19 JULY)

The yellow jersey combatants will be out to play today. The stage features two very steep sharp climbs starting with the steep Col de la Croisette (4.6km @11%) before finishing on the climb to Plateau de Solaison which is a brutal 11km at 9% gradient. The finish features a fantastic vista so hopefully it will be a nice day for those amazing helicopter shots of the gorgeous Alps.

STAGE 20: LE BOURG D'OISANS > ALPE D'HUEZ, 171KM (25 JULY)

The queen stage of the 2026 Tour de France is the penultimate one. An Alps classic starting at the foot of Alpe d'Huez at Le Bourg D'Oisans, the peloton heads away to ride up Col de la Croix de Fer, Col du Télégraphe, Col du Galibier, and the Col de Sarenne before finishing at Alpe d'Huez. That route contains 5,450m of climbing guaranteeing that even if you are several minutes down, you might still have a chance of yellow. I can guarantee you that I will be watching absolutely every second of this stage. Alpe D'Huez is the greatest cycling mountain but the Col de Galibier is my favourite. The views as you ride up are absolutely sensational.



The Nevstar's Picks

The Tour de France is generally a difficult event to predict. Part of the Tour's charm is that it is unpredictable due to weather, form, fatigue, and the vagaries of cycling over public roads with literally hundreds of thousands of spectators constantly within touching distance. Having said that, it would be a big surprise if either Pogačar did not become the fifth man to win five Tour de France titles.

As noted earlier, Pogačar is a dominant force in a very competitive sport and it's a rare privilege to be able to watch one of the all-time greats, in any sport, at the zenith of their powers. Pogačar in his late 20s is arguably at the peak of his career and matches his incredible talent with a fiercely competitive zest for winning. Only a crash, illness or some spectacular loss of form would see him fail to defend his title.

As impressive as Paul Seixas is, I believe that the rigours of a three-week Grand Tour will be too much for the young Frenchman and I think he is unlikely to complete his first attempt around France. Jonas Vingegaard will no doubt be ever present and it is likely that we will see several stages when Jonas and Tadej are the last two left at the front of the race. But the weariness of the Giro d'Italia means he is unlikely to be at his peak. I think it's likely he will lose significant time in one of the mountain stages in the last week.

Therefore, my pick for second place is Florian Lipowitz who seems to be coming into form nicely at the right time, has had a preparation targeting the Tour specifically and will ride with the support of a strong team and competitive ally in Remco Evenepoel.

The final spot on the podium could be Vingegaard, but I think he might be bested by the young Mexican Isaac del Toro who showed his immense talent in the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alps where he won the final two mountain stages. While he rides in Pogačar's team, it is likely the team will want at least one other GC contender in the mix to help pace Pogačar and be there in the event of any mishap or accident to their team leader.

Winner: Tadej Pogačar
Second: Florian Lipowitz
Third: Isaac del Toro

So ends the Nevstar's Guide to the Tour de France 2026 edition.

Sky Sport will have every stage live and often has the last two hours available to watch each morning. There are a number of podcasts dedicated to the Tour and the best two in my opinion are [THEMOVE](#) featuring Lance Armstrong and George Hincapie and [The Cycling Podcast](#).

Bonne nuit et bon courage
The Nevstar

Appendix

The sport of cycling is replete with French terms that are used to describe different elements of the sport. Here are a few of the common ones you might hear during the Tour coverage.

Autobus – a group of riders, usually sprinters, who form together at the back of the race and ride together to try and beat the time limit on a mountain stage. Also called a *grupetto* in Italian.

Commissaire – the referee who makes decisions about the race

Director Sportif – the manager or coach of the cycling team

Domestique – support rider for the team leader

Echelon – when the wind is blowing across the road, riders may form an “*echelon*” which is a diagonal line across the road in order to get maximum protection from the wind. See below.



Flamme Rouge – red banner indicating 1km to go in the stage

Hors Catégorie – beyond classification denoting the hardest mountain passes. All mountain passes are given a category with “4” being the easiest and “1” the hardest. However, some mountains are considered “beyond classification” and therefore known as “HC” or hors categorie.

Lantern Rouge – colloquial term for the last person in the general classification. The phrase literally translates as “red lantern” which was the light hung on the last carriage of a train in times past.

Maillot Blanc – the white jersey (denoting leader of the young rider’s classification)

Maillot Jaune – the yellow jersey (denoting leader of the general classification)

Maillot à Pois Rouge – the polka dot jersey (denoting leader of the mountains classification)

Maillot Verte – the green jersey (denoting leader of the points classification)

Palmares – a cyclist CV containing all their achievements

Parcours - course or route

Peloton – the main body of cyclists

Poursuivant(s) – chasing cyclist or group of cyclists

Rouleur - a rider who goes well on the flat or rolling terrain and can produce very high wattage for short bursts

Soigneur – a rider’s assistant who supplies drinks, food, and support

Tete de la course – leader of the race on the road