

## NISSAN TOUR

# Golz breathes life into Nissan Classic

BY KEITH BINGHAM PICTURES STEWART CLARKE

The banner held by two spectators pleaded: "Come 'awn, Sean". But alas for Kelly supporters, the world's number one did not have it in his legs. There was to be no fourth consecutive victory for "God" – as he is affectionately known at home – as West Germany's Rolf Golz breathed life into the five-day 586-mile Nissan International Classic with a coolly executed victory.

Organisers Sport for Television, irritated by press reports of boring racing after the first stage, could sigh with relief after Golz took the yellow jersey in Cork on the penultimate day, and held his slim six-seconds advantage to the finish in Dublin's O'Connell Street on Sunday.

For had Kelly, who was third at 15 seconds, overtaken Malcolm Elliott who was lying second, and gone on to topple Golz on that final stage, the polite word for such a result would have been "predictable".

And for that the organisers would only have had themselves to blame. Setting aside the organisational brilliance which created the Nissan and brought the

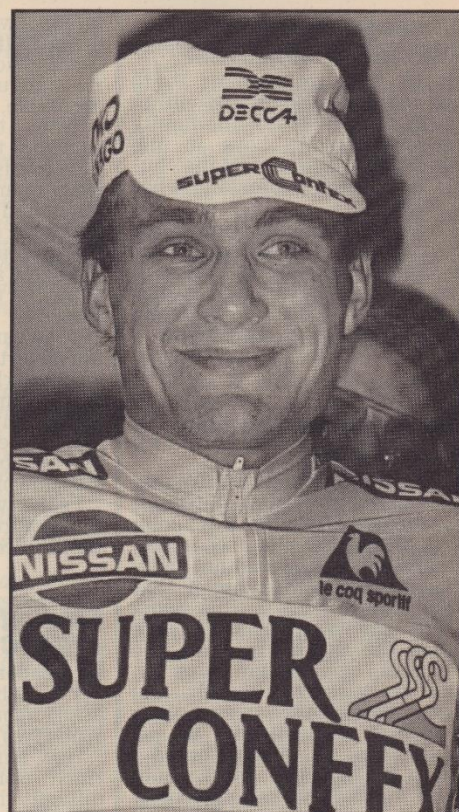
world's top pros to Ireland, the powerful marketing hype and hard-sell to get it all on television and grab public attention, created an air of show business about the previous three editions of the race.

Cynics asked, is this a bike race or a soap opera? And this unreal atmosphere persisted for a while in the 1988 version, until close examination of what was going on out there on the road revealed that underneath the marketing men's "these guys do 40mph" message, which translates to the public as an unreal 40mph all day, we did have a race going on, although at a slightly more realistic pace.

For a start there was nothing predictable about this year's fourth Nissan when the yellow jersey changed hands four times in five days of highly tactical racing.

Unlike last year, when the riders seemed unwilling to challenge Kelly after he took the lead on the second stage, we saw no such truce.

In truth, perhaps the Kelly of 1987 was just too strong for the opposition and, being slightly jaded after a long season,



Rolf Golz after winning the five-day Nissan International Classic.

they saw no reason to stretch themselves.

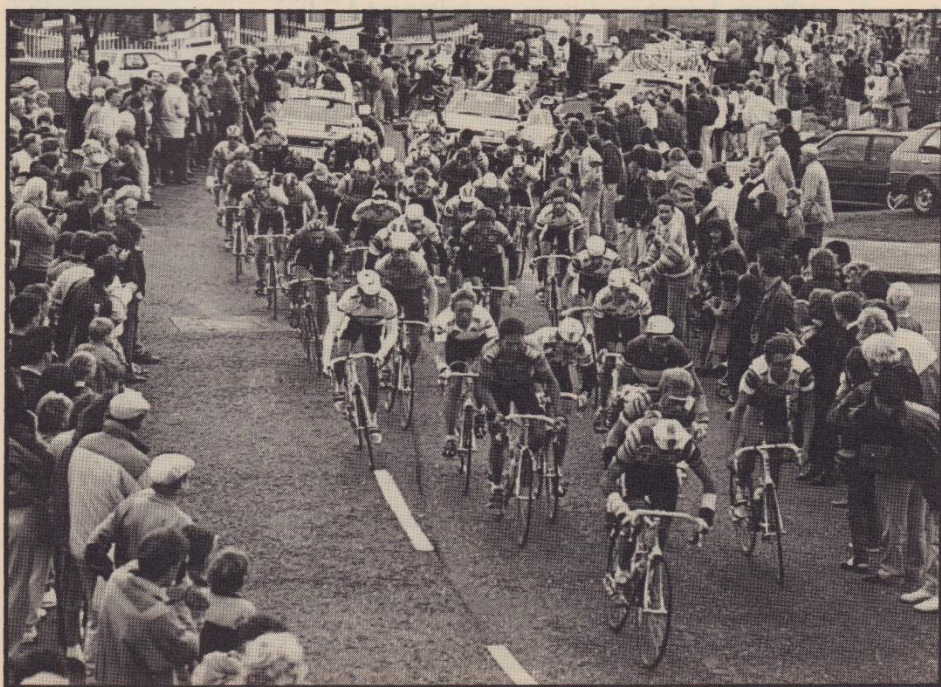
This year he hardly got in the fight, but of those who did, the three yellow jersey holders before Golz, two of them were left stranded with flat tyres and the third fell victim to the superior tactics of the German and his Superconfex team.

As each yellow jersey faltered, the vultures dived to strip him of his overall lead in what seemed a frenzy of attacking when compared with the comparatively sedate pace which preceded each action.

This slow pace bothered some reporters, resulting in the "boring" headline in one Irish newspaper. This surely must have confused television viewers in Ireland, treated to an action-packed nightly programme of each day's racing condensed into half-an-hour hour.

And therein lies the crux of the matter for are not the organisers called "Sport for Television"?

Television, by highlighting certain images, gives a distorted impression. Take Match of the Day: 90 minutes football into 45 minutes, all the goals, fouls and exciting tackles tightly edited in the name of entertainment. Take cricket on the news: five batsman given out in 20 seconds of edited film, with the other six hours of film discarded on the cutting room floor. Nothing wrong with this, it's all good stuff for the armchair sports fan. Trouble is, will he get bored with the real thing when a whole host of Tour de France and world championship stars amble past at half the speed he had



The main field climbs The Howth during the giant loop around Dublin County and the city on the final stage of the Nissan.



expected.

Let us try to find the right perspective to correct the TV image. In a war armies prefer to hold fire until they are in a good tactical position. They study the lie of the ground and gather intelligence on the opposition. Soldiers don't go firing madly at everything that moves, or make a run for it across no-man's-land.

And so the pro' peloton, containing a pack of rival teams out for victory, roams its course looking and waiting for precisely the right moment to attack and the wind and hills will dictate their every move.

As Allan Peiper (Panasonic) said, pros do not use up valuable energy unless they are pretty sure they will be rewarded for it. I was reminded of these words as Peiper raced in to win the final stage at Dublin after a carefully thought out early breakaway move took advantage of the stalemate race leader Golz had contrived to effect on his challengers for overall victory.

Peiper, reading the race well, had taken a calculated risk and then poured body and soul into that attack.

In fact, that final stage had seen a lot of action, a tribute to race director Pat McQuaid who inserted three Hot Spot sprints carrying vital bonuses to force the major players and their teams to react. So we saw the yellow jersey Golz seize the initiative and surprise Elliott by taking the first one after only 17 miles. It gained him only one second, but the sight of the German's back wheel slammed shut a mental cage around Elliott who lost an important psychological advantage.

And when Elliott's Fagor team made a mess of bringing the Peiper break back, in an effort to save the other bonuses for the Elliott-Golz-Kelly battle, the race played right into Golz's hands. As Peiper took a well-deserved lone victory on crowd-packed O'Connell Street, both Elliott and Kelly were powerless at the hands of Golz and his men. The race for the yellow jersey had ended out there on the 82-mile circuit around Dublin County. So where had it begun?

The race had left Dublin the previous Wednesday and crawled reluctantly into a strong headwind, through heavy cold rain showers, towards Boyle 100 miles to the east.

You had to feel sorry for promoter Alan Rushton, who sounded embarrassed every time he announced over the



**Eric Caritoux leads Charly Mottet, Sean Kelly and Gerrit Solleveld and the field through a crowd-packed town centre.**

radio, "Still no action." They stirred themselves for Hot Spots, only to settle back to below 20mph.

As Peiper pointed out, there was no point in banging away into that headwind just for the sake of appearances. The course was not difficult enough to force the issue. Like poker players, no-one wanted to show their hand this early in the game. Never mind what the promoter expects.

On the hill on the circuit at Boyle the right combination of circumstances were finally presented to the peloton when Christophe Lavainne of Systeme-U raced away to win the stage and riders left at the back of the race lost as much time as if this had been in the Pyrenees.

The wide gaps between winners and losers was the legacy of a long season. These were long stages and these men are mortal, after all.

So Lavainne began stage two in the yellow jersey, riding forth from Sligo into the wild and beautiful roads

through the mountains of Connemara. Another Frenchman, Martial Gayant (Toshiba) was mountains leader but while he would fight and successfully hold this position to the end, the yellow jersey was to become a far more elusive garment. Anyone who looked at the course and noted the still troublesome wind could have pinpointed, more or less, the precise point to attack Lavainne.

It should have come as no surprise that for five hours no-one would make a move. Sadly, four men retired before then, Fignon with a sore knee after only 10 miles, then Planckaert, Bernard and Janus Kuem (ADR), after 51 miles, at the feed at Pontoon. "Three go bust at Pontoon", observed the man from the Independent.

It was at the small town of Leenane, where the Atlantic Ocean runs up a long fiord, where the course swung left after 93 miles and the wind swung firmly behind for the climb over the Maamturk Mountains, that the day's racing began.

Adrie Van der Poel (PDM) attacked Gayant and took the prime and the pace shot up as the field sped over the summit and down into cross winds. The nightmare began as the race split into three echelons. Lavainne punctured and panicked, and instead of waiting for a team car, he took a team-mate's wheel so disabling a useful pacer for the chase back to the front group powering away

## SHORTER STAGES IN 1989

Nissan Race Controller Alan Rushton promised shorter stages for the 1989 race.

As an ex-racing man, Rushton is aware of the problems posed by long stage mileages in a late-season event, but when compiling a route other considerations have to be taken into account, like the need to find stage towns which can accommodate 500 people overnight.

"The sponsors were delighted with the race," said Rushton. Next year's event is the last one they are contracted to sponsor,

although they have an option on 1990 and 1991.

Nissan's enthusiasm was not even dented when one of their senior women executives had to be hauled out of the sun roof of a crashed following car after it went off the road on the Silvermines climb.

"It was very classy field, and all the big teams want to be back," said Rushton. "There is also a spin-off which helps the Kellogg's Tour, when the continental teams realise it's the same organising outfit."

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under another team-mate's influence, Mottet. And Fignon was out already.

Although Mottet dropped back to mount a rescue bid, he and Lavainne never regained the leaders. It was Australia's Phil Anderson (TVM-TNT) who leapt away to take the stage victory and the overall lead.

But he, too, would lose it next day. By now the race was so fragmented by the furious pace over the final miles, riders way down the classification could attempt to win a stage.

So while Anderson in the yellow jersey and his rivals like Elliott, Kelly and Golz, marked time once again, Britain's Darryl Webster (PMS-Dawes) struck out alone with a superb lone 96-mile break to Limerick. He enjoyed 19 minutes lead at Nenagh (76 miles) and this came down rapidly once the top men stomped all over Anderson when his tyre went down. But well out of all that was Webster, who won before the huge crowd packing the main streets of the town, holding on to some three minutes of his once big lead.

The end came quickly for Anderson. One moment he was leading the rest on the road with Gayant over the summit of Silvermines Mountain with 44 miles to go. The next, he had a flat tyre and no service car available. He stood at the side of the road as gleeful rivals stepped on the gas, and another five minutes elapsed before a team-mate showed up to give up a wheel.

Kelly won a long sprint for second place in Limerick, with Elliott second, benefiting from earlier bonuses won on the road to take the yellow jersey, the "kiss of death" as he called it.

Now the race pattern had developed well and a number of tactical possibilities presented themselves. So we had action from the gun on stage three, with Elliott snatching the Shannon Hot Spot one mile from the start. Then his team-mate Sean Yates shot off on a 31-mile lone attack before anyone had rubbed the sleep from their eyes.

Meanwhile Roche, or "The Great One" according to Irish folk-lore, fell with a mighty bang. He got up and rejoined but he had hurt his hand.

Largely due to Thomas Wegmuller's attacking and chasing on behalf of Kelly, the field caught Yates. There was far more action throughout the rest of the stage, with breakaway groups stirring them up and Elliott getting placed in vital Hot Spots building his lead over Kelly.

Too late he saw that Golz, fourth overall, had given him the slip on the finishing circuit in Cork, getting away with a small group spearheaded by Anderson who won his second stage. And Golz jumped to first as Elliott lost the advantage he had worked all day to maintain.

The very next day saw Golz repeat Elliott's move and take the first Hot Spot. And then he waited and watched for any counter-attack. But in allowing



the breakaway of Peiper, Pascal Poisson (Toshiba) and Dublin's Paul Kimmage (RMO) to stay away and take bonuses at two more Hot Spots Elliott's Fagor team slipped up.

Their work was not entirely in vain, for Fagor won the overall team prize, displacing Kelly's Kas team on the final stage. Best of the home-based pros overall was Steve Douce (Raleigh-Banana) 30th at 16-35. But besides Webster's fine lone break and victory, the home-based teams made little impression.

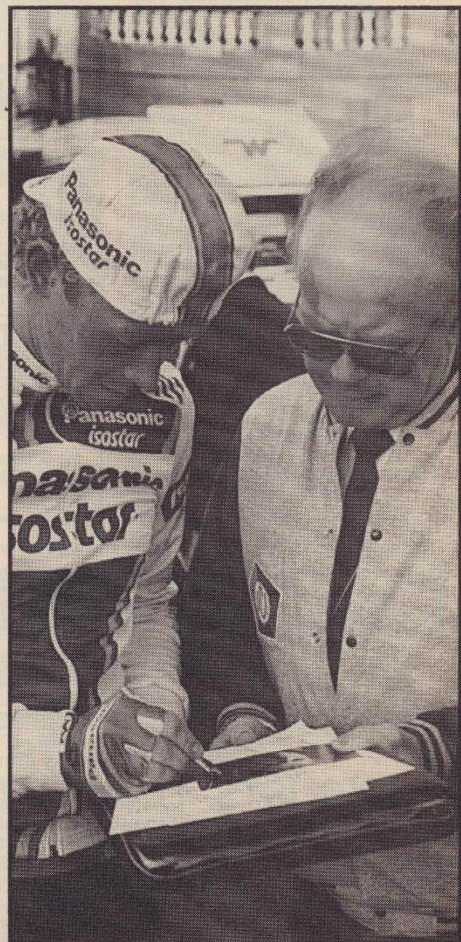
Of the 15 amateurs in the race, best placed was Alex Nederlof of Holland. But he was not in the Dutch amateur team. Instead he was heavily disguised in Superconfex colours, a trial period to ease his transition to the pro ranks. And manager Jan Raas was pleased to have him on board.

Elliott and Kelly were forced to swallow the bitter pill of defeat. They were outwitted fair and square. But the same cannot be said for Phil Anderson who, after losing the yellow jersey because no service car was near when he punctured on stage three, found himself the victim of a more bizarre situation which cost him the green jersey of points leader.

He had taken over this classification when winning his second stage at Cork, only to lose it when the main field was held up by a traffic jam of race vehicles at the entry to the O'Connell Street finishing circuit at Dublin. But his rival Adrie Van der Poel (PDM) sneaked through to race ahead and score points to take the jersey off Anderson.

Bar that unfortunate incident, this was a good race, with a good result. There is only one change I'd make to the organisation out of respect for the host nation. Swop the English announcers for Irish.

Dublin's Paul Kimmage takes the prime first time up The Howth, ahead of France's Pascal Poisson and Australia's Allan Peiper, who went on to win this final stage.



Eric Vanderaerden won the points award.