



Odds-on favourites

Picking the winners for 2021

Betting slips at the ready – here's who will win the big races this season, as predicted by *Cyclist's* panel of experts

Words FELIXLOWE Illustration BILLMcCONKEY

Plenty of people predicted that a Slovenian would win last year's Tour de France and a Brit would win the Giro. But – be honest now – how many of us thought the winners would be Primož Roglič and Geraint Thomas and not first-timers Tadej Pogačar and Tao Geoghegan Hart? Attempting to predict the 2020 season proved to be a mug's game as a new generation of young stars tore up the rulebook and put the old guard to the sword. Will that shift continue into 2021 or will we see a return of the usual suspects in the major races?

Who better to peer into their crystal balls than a crack core of seasoned sportscasters and industry insiders? The 10-strong *Cyclist* panel includes a triple Tour winner, a king of the Classics, a WorldTour *directeur sportif*, plus commentators from Eurosport, ITV, GCN and more.

Almost half the *Cyclist* panel foresees Roglič burying his demons in the Tour de France

'We're in such a great position commentating on the world's best races that part of the fun is to put your neck on the line and help create a bit of debate,' says commentator and speaker Anthony McCrossan.

And you don't get much more brass-necked than predicting a David Gaudu win in La Vuelta and Oliver Naesen to take victory in Flanders. Anthony, bless him, may live to regret such capriciousness.

Some other daring punts include Wout van Aert to win the Tour (Carlton Kirby), Filippo Ganna winning Paris-Roubaix (Dan Lloyd), Chris Froome taking a third Vuelta (José Been) and Leonard Kämna becoming World Champion (go easy on the eggnog, Carlton).

In his defence, Kirby is quick to remind *Cyclist* of his occasional ability to back the right horse: 'Just remember, my pre-race prediction of Tadej Pogačar to win the 2020

Tour went completely unheralded,' he boasts. 'So don't start on the goodness-what-a-surprise stuff when it happens!'

In the battle of the rookies versus the veterans, Kirby backs old hand Vincenzo Nibali to roll back the years in the Giro, while Greg LeMond goes the other way and tips youngster Remco Evenepoel to win the Tour.

Elsewhere there's more of a consensus, with 80% backing Annemiek van Vleuten to win the Giro Rosa, 50% calling a home win for Van Aert in the Worlds in Flanders, and 70% opting for either Van Aert and rival Mathieu van der Poel to tame the Hell of the North. Almost half the panel foresees a second Giro win for Richard Carapaz, a maiden Monument for Marc Hirschi at Liège-Bastogne-Liège and Primož Roglič burying his demons in the Tour.

Interestingly, only two people think Pogačar will retain the yellow jersey, and poor old Tao Geoghegan

Hart receives not a single mention from anyone on the panel.

Sentimentality perhaps shrouds Sean Kelly's vision when he singles out fellow Irishman Sam Bennett as the favourite for the rainbow jersey. Partisanship, meanwhile, comes from Team BikeExchange (formerly Orica-Scott) DS Matt White, who, perhaps for the sake of team morale, is backing Michael Matthews to win Milan-San Remo and Simon Yates to finally win the Giro.

Of course, with Covid still raging, all bets could be off, and at this stage we don't know if the calendar will even run as planned. And as if making predictions wasn't tough enough, this year has the added curve ball of the Tokyo Olympics to factor in. Can Alejandro Valverde's career end with gold? Someone thinks so. *To see the full, unedited list of expert predictions for 2021 go to cyclist.co.uk/2021predictions*



Daniel Lloyd GCN & Eurosport presenter

Milan-San Remo
Winner: Caleb Ewan

Why: The race

has been won from an attack in recent times, so it's about time for a sprint.

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Mathieu van der Poel

Why: Why not? Especially now he's got a Monument under his belt.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Filippo Ganna

Why: This is slightly off the wall, I know, but I've long thought that Paris-Roubaix is a race for him.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Anna van der Breggen

Why: This will be her only opportunity to win this one.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Richard Carapaz

Why: With the proper preparation, I think he'll be the man to beat.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: It's really hard to see past her when it comes to the high mountains of Italy.

Tour de France

Winner: Tadej Pogačar

Why: How do you beat him? Incredible at climbing, incredible at time-trialling, a great bike handler.

La Course

Winner: Lorena Wiebes

Why: The sprinter to beat these days in the women's peloton.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Enric Mas

Why: If everything goes 100% to plan for him at his home Grand Tour, he could do it.



Ned Boulting Presenter and commentator for ITV

Milan-San Remo
Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: Because he's a climber

who can sprint, a sprinter who can climb, a climber who can time-trial, and a time-triallist who can sprint. And climb.

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Julian Alaphilippe

Why: Unfinished business.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Peter Sagan

Why: I think he's got one last big win left in him. And it's this.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Anna van der Breggen

Why: Anna van der Breggen.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Richard Carapaz

Why: Ineos will back a different horse

for the Tour. So Carapaz goes to the Giro. And wins it.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: Annemiek van Vleuten.

Tour de France

Winner: Primož Roglič

Why: It's a more controllable route for him than it was in 2020.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Marc Hirschi

Why: Because he's bound to win something very big in 2021.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Marianne Vos

Why: Because everyone would love it.

Il Lombardia

Winner: Alexander Vlasov

Why: Could have won it last year when he was riding for Jakob Fuglsang. He'll learn from that. ☛



Greg LeMond

Three-time Tour de France winner

Milan-San Remo

Winner: Julian Alaphilippe

Why: The best

puncher, descender and all-round cyclist in the peloton.

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Mathieu van der Poel

Why: The defending champion's resume speaks for itself.

Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: His bike-handling skills make Roubaix the ideal Classic for Wout.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Marc Hirschi

Why: Finished second behind Roglič last year but could have done better.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Richard Carapaz

Why: He may be a super-domestique

for Bernal in the Tour but he won't be satisfied playing second fiddle.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Anna van der Breggen

Why: She is strong on all terrain.

Tour de France

Winner: Remco Evenepoel

Why: Perhaps the best talent from Belgium since Eddy Merckx.

La Course

Winner: Anna van der Breggen

Why: Six repeats up the Mûr-de-Bretagne give Anna the advantage.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: Steep, Flandrian climbs.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Anna van der Breggen

Why: This will put her stamp as the best women's rider in 2021.



José Been

Dutch journalist and commentator

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Greg Van Avermaet

Why: Being an older, experienced rider helps on the cobbles.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Lucinda Brand

Why: The perfect combination of cyclocross skills and natural endurance as a road racer.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Geraint Thomas

Why: To show the world he's not a one-time Grand Tour winner.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: She has a score to settle after crashing out in 2020.

Tour de France

Winner: Primož Roglič

Why: Jumbo-Visma won't make the same mistakes as last year.

La Course

Winner: Marianne Vos

Why: She's not the cannibal she once was but when she wins it's in style.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Chris Froome

Why: Froome may never get back to his old self but a third Vuelta would be a great win for him.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Lizzie Deignan

Why: The British operate as a team and will be 100% behind Deignan.

Olympic Road Race

My heart says that Alejandro Valverde

will take the gold. It's his last chance

and the only thing on his mind since

his world title. Marianne Vos for the

women's race.



Anthony McCrossan

Cycling commentator and speaker

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Oliver Naesen

Why: He'll be the

rider that everyone knew could win a huge race but forgot to worry about in the finale.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Mathieu van der Poel

Why: His would be a win no cycling fan could fail to celebrate.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Chantal van den Broek-Blaak

Why: She has the power, the mental toughness and the skills to win.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Simon Yates

Why: It will all go right for him in 2021.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: She will dominate again.

Tour de France

Winner: Richard Carapaz

Why: Joint leadership with Egan Bernal leaves Carapaz as leader in the finale.

La Course

Winner: Audrey Cordon Ragot

Why: She lives 30km from the Mûr and knows the area. She will deliver.

Vuelta a España

Winner: David Gaudu

Why: Coming into the 2020 race he was recovering from injury and supporting Pinot, yet walked away with two wins.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: A Belgian in Belgium. Can you imagine the reaction if he wins?

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Elisa Longo Borghini

Why: Elisa is a rider for a big occasion.



Carlton Kirby

Commentator for Eurosport

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Peter Sagan

Why: He's been

very quiet but this is an ideal place for him to hit back.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: He can do anything and everything. Terrible conditions will be his friend.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Megan Jastrab

Why: Potentially the new Queen of everything. Young and fearless.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Marc Hirschi

Why: Could've and should've in 2020... he will do it this time.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Vincenzo Nibali

Why: Oldies will be goodies in a return to a 'normal' season.

Tour de France

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: On an attacker's course he'll be (or should be) the 'alternative' leader... but maybe only in my dreams.

La Course

Winner: Elynor Bäckstedt

Why: Her dad says so and he's too big to argue with.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Primož Roglič

Why: He likes it. Tapas and kickass!

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Leonard Kämna

Why: I want my predictions of his greatness to be realised.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Amalie Dideriksen

Why: She's been too quiet lately. ☘



Matt White

DS for Team BikeExchange

Milan-San Remo

Winner: Michael Matthews

Why: He's got all the tools, plus a team that's 100% behind him.

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: For Belgians it's the most special race of the year.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Ellen van Dijk

Why: She'll float across the cobbles.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Marc Hirschi

Why: He'll be upset with the 2020 result and it's a race that suits him.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Simon Yates

Why: It's a hard course and if selected he'll be keen to make amends for 2020.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: The harder it is, the easier it will be for her to win.

Tour de France

Winner: Primož Roglič

Why: The two long TTs don't suit the likes of Bernal and Pogačar.

La Course

Winner: Marianne Vos

Why: She's a great all-rounder.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: Belgie at home.

Women's Road Race World Champs

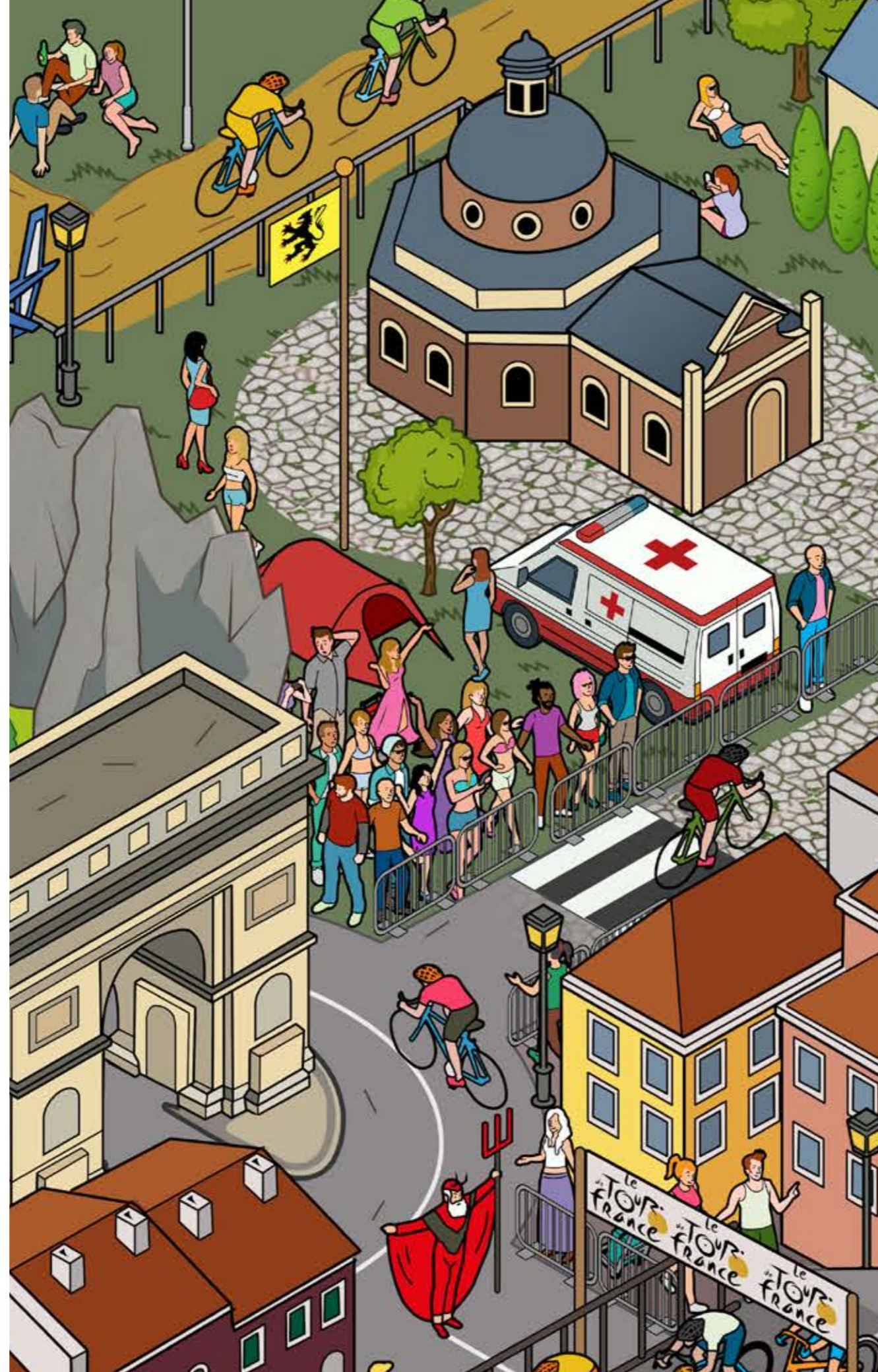
Winner: Marianne Vos

Why: She's the fastest of the Dutch.

Il Lombardia

Winner: Thibaut Pinot

Why: I don't think he'll do the Tour.



Declan Quigley

Cycling commentator and journalist

Milan-San Remo

Winner: Mathieu van der Poel

Why: Anything

Wout can do...

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Kasper Asgreen

Why: He knows the race and is coming into his best years.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Julian Alaphilippe

Why: Winning in the rainbow bands will be redemption for the 2020 miss.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Geraint Thomas

Why: The teak-tough Welshman will be eager to exorcise the ghost of the 2020 'bidon-gate'.

Giro Rosa

Winner: Annemiek van Vleuten

Why: She'll be tough to beat.

Tour de France

Winner: Tadej Pogačar

Why: This time last year we were saying that Egan Bernal was going to win it for years. Now it's Tadej's turn.

La Course

Winner: Kasia Niewiadoma

Why: Even with six times up the Mûr-de-Bretagne she won't be afraid.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Remco Evenepoel

Why: He may be young but his racing prowess is already established.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Remco Evenepoel

Why: A Remco win in Flanders. What could be more amazing than that?

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Lizzie Deignan

Why: Tokyo is the focus but Flanders may suit her better.



Seb Piquet

The voice of the Tour on Radio Tour

Milan-San Remo

Winner: Peter Sagan

Why: To show he still has it.

Tour de France

Winner: Egan Bernal

Why: He will return with a vengeance.

La Course

Winner: Cecilie Uttrup Ludwig

Why: Because we all need a good celebration and post-race interview.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Tadej Pogačar

Why: Revenge for quitting the Tour.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: It's on home soil.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Lizzie Deignan

Why: Revenge after failing to be Olympic champion.

Il Lombardia

Winner: Remco Evenepoel

Why: Like Alaphilippe at Flanders, it completes the redemption.

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Julian Alaphilippe

Why: It would make a good story.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Wout van Aert

Why: He would have won it in 2020.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Chantal van den Broek-Blaak

Why: She would have won it in 2020.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Mark Hirschi

Why: The first of a long series.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Tom Dumoulin

Why: He won't be prepared to be number two at the Tour again.



Sean Kelly

Commentator and Classics legend

Ronde van Vlaanderen

Winner: Julian Alaphilippe

Why: This time

he'll attack from further out – maybe the Paterberg.

Men's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Mathieu van der Poel

Why: A wet race would suit him.

Women's Paris-Roubaix

Winner: Marianne Vos

Why: Her experience will prove very important in a race like Roubaix.

Liège-Bastogne-Liège

Winner: Tadej Pogačar

Why: He is not afraid to attack from quite a bit out for a solo win.

Giro d'Italia

Winner: Richard Carapaz

Why: A past winner who has proved he is a consistent three-week rider.

Tour de France

Winner: Primož Roglič

Why: The team will ensure he hits top form in the third week when he has seemed to run into difficulties.

La Course

Winner: Lizzie Deignan

Why: She won it last year and the 2021 route could suit her even better.

Vuelta a España

Winner: Enric Mas

Why: If the Movistar man can get his build up right he is capable of a win.

Men's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Sam Bennett

Why: He will hold his form after the Tour de France.

Women's Road Race World Champs

Winner: Elisa Balsamo

Why: She is a very good sprinter and an up-and-coming star of the future. 🇮🇹