

Speed appeal: Top male cyclists rated more attractive

February 5 2014, by Richard Ingham, Mariette Le Roux



Britain's Bradley Wiggins is pictured prior to take the start of the 5th stage of 96th Giro d'Italia cycling race on May 8, 2013 in Matera

Women rate top male endurance cyclists more attractive than lower-ranked ones even without knowing who they are, a finding that sheds light on the mating game, a scientist said Wednesday.

Evolutionary biologist Erik Postma of the University of Zurich selected

portraits of 80 cyclists who took part in the 2012 Tour de France, one of the most gruelling events in sport, and asked participants in an online survey to rate the faces for attractiveness.

A total of 816 people took part in the vote, nearly three-quarters of whom were women.

What emerged, says Postma, was a remarkable link between a rider's average success in the competition and his perceived good looks.

"Riders that performed consistently well across the whole race received the highest performance score," Postma told AFP.

"This performance correlated well with their final placing" in the Tour de France.

The top 10 percent best-performing riders on average were considered a quarter more [attractive](#) than the bottom 10 percent, Postma found.

One example was Maxime Monfort, who came 3rd in terms of attractiveness and 6th in terms of performance.

Rui Alberto Costa—current world champion—came 9th in terms of attractiveness and 15th in terms of performance in the 2012 Tour.

Preference for faster riders was strongest in women who were not on the Pill, which affects hormone levels.

The riders' performance criteria was based on Postma's own yardstick, assessing riders for endurance across the race. He factored in a rider's time during the prologue, the two time trials and the overall race.

In 2012, 198 cyclists started the race. Postma excluded from his batch all

those who didn't finish and those who were pictured wearing sunglasses, caps, or beards in their photographs.

Also excluded were those pictured in unusual lighting conditions or not photographed from the front.

Those ruled out from the batch included the winner, Britain's Bradley Wiggins, who was wearing sunglasses in his picture.

This left 104 portraits that were standardised as much as possible, of which Postma randomly selected 80.

Most of the respondents knew next to nothing about professional cycling, additional questions on the survey found.

The three most famous riders in the 80 were known by less than eight percent of the raters—and 59 out of the 80 were recognised by one percent or less.

Overall, the research suggests that endurance in a man is a big plus for women, a finding that Postma says is consistent with Darwinian theories about mating choice.

During the course of human evolution, hunting success—and by extension, feeding a family—depended on a man's ability to chase game for hours or even days.

"That's why [endurance performance](#) was a key evolutionary factor," said Postma.

The stamina so prized by women is likely to be reflected in [facial attractiveness](#), goes his hypothesis.

There are also other factors for attractiveness, though, Postma stressed.

No. 1 hunk was Amael Moinard, who on Postma's performance card was ranked a less-than-stellar 42nd out of 80.

"This shows that there is no one-to-one relationship between attractiveness and performance, and there are many other things that affect both a rider's attractiveness and his performance," Postma said.

More information: A relationship between attractiveness and performance in professional cyclists, *Biology Letters*, rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2013.0966

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