

# Paris-Roubaix – The Queen of the Spring Classics

## Paris-Roubaix

Created by **Matt Scheffer**

Training Type: **Threshold/Race Day**

Working HR Zones: **Zone 3 to Zone 5**

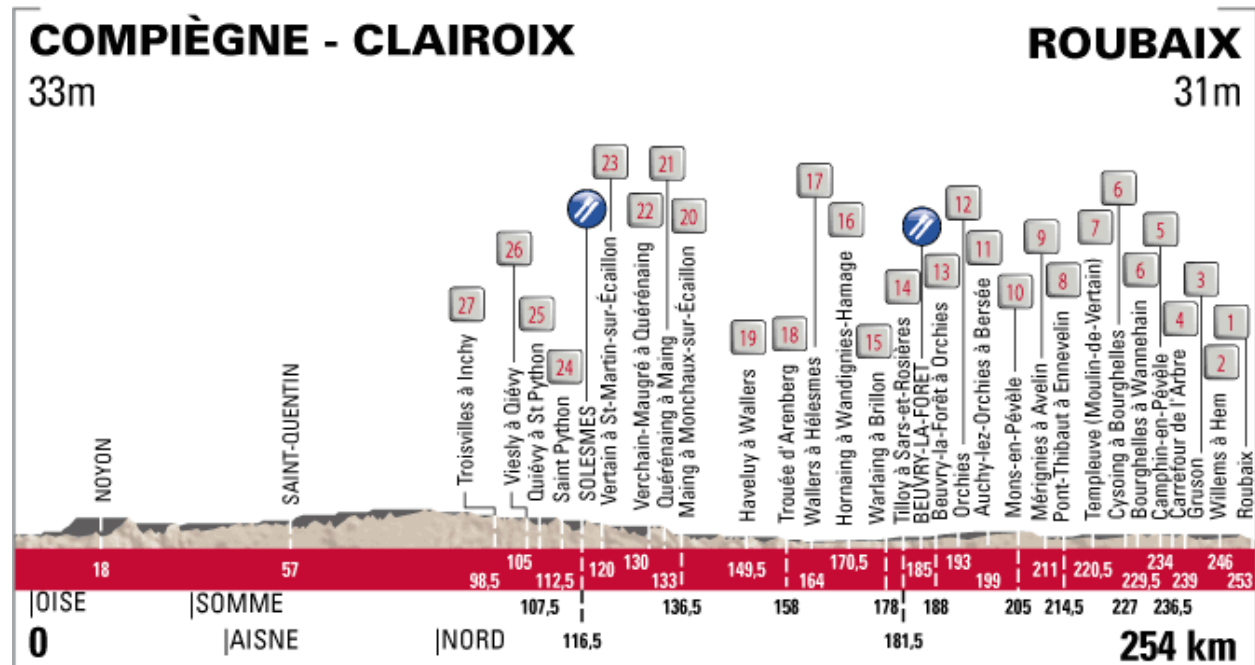
Total Class Length: **60 minutes**



### Profile Description

Paris Roubaix is the most famous of the “Spring Classic” races that take place in Northern Europe every spring. It is a long race at 257 km (~160 miles), end boasts such nicknames as “L’Enfer du Nord” (The Hell of the North) and the Queen of the Classics. Its defining feature is the cobbled sections of road or “pavé”. The Tour de France will be covering some of these famous cobbled sections in Stage 5 of this year’s race.

(Note: Pavé is pronounced “pah-vay”).





**A picture of the “pavé”**

### **Objective and Intensity**

Paris-Roubaix is known as one of the hardest single day races on the cycling calendar. We will ride the cobbled sections between Zones 3–5 depending on the length and difficulty of the particular section. In between cobbled sections riders will try to maintain race pace and ride at high Zone 3- high Zone 4. There is small recovery in the middle of the race, which will take us down to Zone 2.

### **Background of Paris-Roubaix**

Paris–Roubaix is a one-day race in northern France, one of the Spring Classics. The Spring Classics are a series of one day races all taking place in northern Europe that indicate the “real” start of the cycling season. While they are not nearly as well known as the grand tours that take place in the summer (the Giro d’Italia, the Tour de France) they are some of the most exciting races to watch. The riding is much less conservative than is seen in the Grand Tours and makes for sometimes unpredictable but always entertaining races.

The race starts north of Paris and finishes on the Belgian frontier. From its beginning in 1896 until 1967 it started in Paris and ended in Roubaix; since 1968 the start has been in Compiègne (about 85 kilometres (53 mi) north-east from Paris centre). The finish is still in Roubaix. It was first run in 1896 and has stopped only for two world wars. The race was created

by two Roubaix textile manufacturers, who built a velodrome in Roubaix where the race finishes every year.

The race usually leaves riders caked in mud and grit, from the cobbled roads and rutted tracks of northern France's former coal-mining region. However, this is not how this race earned the name l'Enfer du Nord, or Hell of the North. The term was used to describe the route of the race after World War I. Organizers and journalists set off from Paris in 1919 to see how much of the route had survived four years of shelling and trench warfare. Procycling reported:

They knew little of the permanent effects of the war. Nine million had died and France lost more than any. But, as elsewhere, news was scant. Who even knew if there was still a road to Roubaix? If Roubaix was still there? The car of organisers and journalists made its way along the route those first riders had gone. And at first all looked well. There was destruction and there was poverty and there was a strange shortage of men. But France had survived. But then, as they neared the north, the air began to reek of broken drains, raw sewage and the stench of rotting cattle. Trees which had begun to look forward to spring became instead blackened, ragged stumps, their twisted branches pushed to the sky like the crippled arms of a dying man. Everywhere was mud. Nobody knows who first described it as 'hell', but there was no better word. And that's how it appeared next day in the papers: that little party had seen 'the hell of the north.'

The words in L'Auto were:

We enter into the centre of the battlefield. There's not a tree, everything is flattened! Not a square metre that has not been hurled upside down. There's one shell hole after another. The only things that stand out in this churned earth are the crosses with their ribbons in blue, white and red. It is hell! '

*This wasn't a race. It was a pilgrimage.*

Henri Pélissier, speaking of his 1919 victory

## 27 cobbled sectors

The Paris-Roubaix is unique in that there are no climbs, yet it is as brutal as the hardest mountain stage in the Tour. The pavé are punishing and relentless. There is no easy way to manage them. They are large with gaps just big enough to catch a tire, making for perilous riding. The pavé sections are very narrow, lending to the danger. The race to be on the front entering the pavé sections is critical, as being caught behind an accident on the pavé can easily cost you the race.

The cobbles are graded on a 5-star system based on length, irregularity, general condition and their position in the race, anywhere from 1 to 5 stars. In this case “5 stars” is a little different than a 5 star hotel! It means it is the hardest, longest section.

There are three sectors considered maximum difficulty. As well as the Trouée d'Arenberg (The Forest of Arenberg), difficult sections include the 3000m Mons-en-Pévèle (213 km) and the 2100 m Carrefour de l'Arbre (244 km) — often decisive in the final kilometers.

The Trouée d'Arenberg (The Forest of Arenberg) is like entering a different world. The cobbles are from Napoleonic times, on roads that were built to move armies. With its dense trees, the forest feels and looks like something out of a Robin Hood movie or the Princess Bride. It's such a special road that it is only used for the race, and no traffic is permitted any other time of year.

The weather plays a huge factor in the race. When the cobbles are dry, they are dusty and slippery. The clouds of dust kicked up by the motorbikes makes it impossible to see and breathe at times. If luck is not with the riders, and it rains, the cobbles become like a skating rink, ready to slip a tire into a rut or a ditch with out warning. The dust and mud accumulates on the riders throughout the race, and by the end they look like someone who just completed a Tough Mudder adventure race.

Taking on the cobbles mean that riders prepare differently than they would for other races. You may see riders using extra layers of bar tape and riding wider tires with very low pressures to try to reduce the rattling produced by the cobbles.

There's no race that engenders such a broad mix of emotions as Roubaix. Some riders absolutely hate it, especially the rail-thin GC riders (riders who generally are in the top 20–30 or so of the “general classification” of a stage race like the tour de France or Giro d'Italia), while others thrive. The cobbles favor the “heavier” riders who have raw power. Since there are no hills, power-to-weight ratio does not matter, and the “heavier” riders get rattled less by the punishing pavé. Some of the modern day kings of the Classics are Tom Boonen and Fabian Cancellara, who have 7 wins between them at Paris-Roubaix.

This year Bradley Wiggins road the Paris-Roubaix for Team Sky and was the first Grand Tour winner since Greg Lemond to ride in this race.

Experience counts for a lot in the classics. The distance, the punishing *parcours* (the race route), the weather and wind, all add up to a complex, intriguing Rubik's Cube on two wheels that requires as strong a mind as motor.

## Unique Equipment

The Paris-Roubaix brings out a huge array of equipment to deal with the unique challenges of the race.

The equipment used on this single Sunday in April is special, so much so that it is rarely touched for the hundreds of other racing days on the calendar. There is no race on the planet that is

tougher on equipment than Paris-Roubaix. Mark Cavendish, a sprinter, has compared Paris-Roubaix to riding a shopping cart down a riverbed.

Wheels and tires bear the brunt of the brutish day, and receive special attention as a result. Riders and mechanics spend days on the cobbles, fine-tuning product choice and tire pressure. Most teams ignore sponsor obligations at Roubaix and use special tires. The tires are unique in their construction to deal with the extremely low pressures that the racers use. When running such low pressures, the risk of pinch flats is high using regular tires with tubes. For Paris-Roubaix the tires are typically one piece with no tube to deal with the challenge. Riders also use wider tires to increase traction and reduce vibration. This causes brakes to be changed to be able to accommodate the wider tires.

The terrain also presents a challenge for the race organizers, who use moto-cross bikes instead of typical motorcycles to handle the pavé.



## Paris–Roubaix Profile

### **Warm-up**

**White Line, Neil Young, 2:57**

**Get Off This, Cracker, 4:20**

Lead the class through a gradual warm up, having them add a little resistance every minute.

*Today you are going to tackle what is called by many, the hardest one day race in cycling, the Paris-Roubaix.*

*Why is this race that has no hills so difficult? The pavé, or cobbles, that's why! In a race of 160 miles there are 30 miles of cobbles that rattle the riders and sap their strength.*

*The easiest way to ride the cobbles in real life is to use a larger gear and a lower cadence. This allows the riders to “float” a little more over the cobbles. Inside, this is tough to replicate, but what we are going to do today is to add gear (resistance), and pick up our cadence in the cobbled sections to simulate the tiring nature of the pavé.*

*A small primer on the cobbles; they are rated from 1 to 5 stars, and it doesn't work quite the same way as a hotel or restaurant rating. In the case of pavé, 5 stars means the longest, roughest, hardest sections. We have three 5 star rated sections today, so when you encounter those sections keep in mind their brutality and adjust your effort accordingly.*

### **1st sector of pavé - Viesly to Quiévy (1.8km): 3 stars**

**Communication Breakdown, Led Zeppelin, 2:28**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 3 effort.

*Here is the first sector of pavé. It has a 3 star rating, so add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up your cadence. This first sector is short, providing just a taste of what's to come. It's the first of a relentless race.*

### **Short recovery**

**People Are Strange, The Doors, 2:11**

Have the class back their effort down to Zone 2 and recover from the first section of cobbles.

*Back it down and take a short recovery from that first section of cobbles. How was it? Harder than you expected? Easier? We have a little longer, little rougher section coming up.*

## **2nd sector of pave, Quienvy to Saint Python (3.7km): 4 stars**

### **Aint Talkin About Love, Van Halen, 3:48**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 3 effort.

*Again, we're back on the pavé. It has a 3 star rating, and is longer than the last section. Add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up your cadence.*

*These initial sectors of pavé are not too bad, but there are harder sections to come, each accumulating in its toll taken on the body. Not bad being a relative term, because there is always a uneven stretch of cobbles waiting to catch a wheel, or cause a crash in front of you. A war of attrition...*

## **Riding tempo between the pavé**

### **Standing in the Sun, Slash (feat. Myles Kennedy), 4:04**

Have the class back it down to a smooth flat road, with a little headwind. They should be targeting a moderate, Zone 3 effort.

*In between cobbled sections we get slight let up as we are back on pavement, but the race doesn't slow down. To simulate that fact we are going to ride tempo in between pavé sections. This should be a moderate effort that feels like a "working flat". You're not out for a Sunday ride, but you're not riding all-out either. It's a moderately-hard, sustainable pace.*

## **3rd sector of pave, Saint-Python (1.5km): 2 stars**

### **This Ain't My Girl, Wax Audio (Mashup), 2:51**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 3 effort.

*The pavé just keeps coming. Luckily this one is a little bit easier. It has a 2 star rating, so add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up your cadence. This is our easiest pavé section for the rest of class. Enjoy it!*

## **Riding tempo between the pavé**

### **White Riot, The Clash, 1:58**

Have the class back it down to a smooth flat road, with a little headwind. They should be targeting a moderate, high Zone 3, low Zone 4 effort.

*Again, back on that "working flat". This is a short section that leads us into the hardest section of pavé yet.*

*It is critical to be at the front of the peleton as we enter the Forest, since we don't want to get caught behind the inevitable crashes that will occur. Getting caught behind a crash can cost us the race. So keep the pace high, and get ready for the infamous Forest of Arenberg.*

#### **4th sector of pavé, Trouée d'Arenberg (2.4km): 5 stars (hardest)**

**Superunknown, Soundgarden, 5:06**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 4 effort. This will be the hardest cobbles they've seen yet.

*Welcome to the infamous Forest of Arenberg! This is a brutal stretch of almost 2.5 km of terribly jagged pavé. There is no gutter to ride in here. There is barely enough road for riders to fit 3 across. There are barriers on your right side full of screaming fans. On the left side of the road you notice they were nice enough to plow the ground to make a nice furrow, and take away any place to avoid the cobbles. How sporting of them... The race has truly begun in earnest.*

*Add on more resistance than your previous effort and pick up the cadence into the 90s. This is a long hard effort!*

*They say you can't win the Paris Roubaix here, but you can definitely lose it.*

*The pavé here are from Napoleonic times! They are jagged and rough, the better to give cart horses traction, but not friendly for a modern bike!*

*There is no room for team cars in this section, so you see your mechanics standing at the side of the road with wheels in case you get an untimely flat. Luckily there are no flat tires indoors!*

#### **Recovery section (last recovery of class)**

**D'yer Mak'er, Sheryl Crow (Led Zepplin cover), 4:21**

Have the class let up on the resistance and cadence and bring it back to a Zone 2 recovery effort.

*Back it down and take a recovery from that hard effort in the forest. How was it?*

*This is our last recovery of the ride. After this is all pavé and tempo. The race is truly on now and we need to gather our strength for the remaining pavé sections.*

*The last 2 sections of pavé are 5 star sections and once we get off them there will be no time to rest as we push to the finish in the velodrome.*



## **5th sector pavé, starting to take its toll, Mons-en-Pévèle (3km): 5 stars (hardest)**

**Misty Mountain Hop, 4 Non Blondes (Led Zeppelin cover), 5:47**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a mid to high Zone 4 effort.

*Another 5 star section of pavé, our second to last one. By now you should know what to expect with these. This one is our longest section yet. This is when the real contenders start coming out.*

*Are you a contender today? If so stick with it. We're not quite ready to put in our final attack, but we definitely want to push the pace to try to tire out our competition.*

## **Tempo before the final pavé**

**Desire, U2, 3:00**

Have the class back it down to a smooth flat road, with a little headwind. They should be targeting a moderate, Zone 3 effort.

*Again, back on that "working flat". This section of tempo is quick and leads to our final attack. A section of 5 star pavé and the run into the velodrome!*

## **Final suffering on the pavé, Le Carrefour de l'Arbre (2.1km): 5 stars**

**Jammin Me, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, 4:08**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 4 effort.

*Our final section of pavé, Le Carrefour de l'Arbre: 5 stars and time to break this race open once and for all.*

*Here is where we are going to make our attack. This is where so many winning moves have taken place before. Take a quick look over your shoulder at your main rival, and drop the hammer. Add some resistance and pick up the pace.*

*Hang on, we are almost there! As we come to the end of the pavé we still have a 5-minute push to the finish line!*

## **Final push to the finish, entrance into the Velodrome**

**Uprising, Muse, 5:05**

Have the class add a moderate amount of resistance and pick up their cadence. They should be targeting a high Zone 4 – low Zone 5 effort.

*Our final push! The cobbles are done but we need to make sure that attack we made on the cobbles sticks!*

*What ever is left in the tank, let's use it now! Dig in!*

*As you get closer to the velodrome, the crowds grow bigger and bigger! They are cheering your name!*

*Today is the day you write you name into cycling history!*

With about 1 minute remaining in the song:

*You make the final right turn into the velodrome, and you hear the crowds. You enter the velodrome and hear the bell for the final lap. Don't let up, you only have a couple seconds on the chase group!*

*And as you come around the track for the final time, and cross the line, you've done it!*

## **Cool Down**

**Drive, The Cars, 3:58**

**Going to California, Never The Bride (Led Zepplin cover), 4:25**

Have the class back down their effort, take off the resistance and cool down.

*Incredible effort today! A lot of times the riders collapse in the grass in the middle of the velodrome, spent from the effort. If we have stretch of grass I'd invite you to join them. But your troubles and suffering you get one of the coolest trophies in sports. A pavé Stone!*

## Some memorable images of the Paris–Roubaix



*And don't forget to stop by the famous showers in the velodrome. We can surely use it after the grit and dust we've encountered.*

*All the past champions have a plaque with their name on it in an individual shower. Make sure you check out where your plaque is going!*



*The showers are not fancy, they are basic, but have all that is needed, including lots of hot water. Riders from different teams gather here. There is no plush team bus to retreat to. The showers are symbolic of the great equalizing nature of the Paris-Roubaix. The grit, the difficulty, the pavé reduces everyone to their essence, a cyclist who has survived the Paris-Roubaix.*



**PARIS-ROUBAIX QUICK PROFILE**

Song	Artist	Album	Length	Source
White Line	Neil Young	Ragged Glory	2:57	eMusic/ iTunes
Get Off This	Cracker	Get On With It: The Best of Cracker	4:20	eMusic/iTunes
Communication Breakdown	Led Zeppelin	Mothership	2:28	eMusic/iTunes
People Are Strange	The Doors	Best of the Doors (Disc 1)	2:11	eMusic/iTunes
Ain't Talkin About Love	Van Halen	The Best of Van Halen, Vol I	3:48	eMusic/iTunes
Standing in the Sun	Slash	Apocalyptic Love (feat. Myles Kennedy)	4:04	eMusic/iTunes
This Ain't My Girl	Wax Audio	Mashopolos II – The Mashening	2:51	<a href="http://www.waxaudio.com.au/audio/albums/the_mashening">http://www.waxaudio.com.au/audio/albums/the_mashening</a>
White Riot	The Clash	The Clash	1:58	eMusic/iTunes
Superunknown	Soundgarden	Superunknown	5:06	eMusic/iTunes
D'yer Mak'er	Sheryl Crow	Encomium: A Tribute to Led Zeppelin	4:21	eMusic/iTunes
Misty Mountain Hop	4 Non Blondes	Encomium: A Tribute to Led Zeppelin	5:47	eMusic/iTunes



Song	Artist	Album	Length	Source
Desire	U2	Rattle and Hum	3:00	eMusic/iTunes
Jammin Me	Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers	Anthology Through the Years (Disc 2)	4:08	eMusic/iTunes
Uprising	Muse	The Resistance	5:05	eMusic/iTunes
Drive	The Cars	Complete Greatest Hits	3:58	eMusic/iTunes
Going to California	Never the Bride	Encomium: A Tribute to Led Zeppelin	4:25	eMusic/iTunes