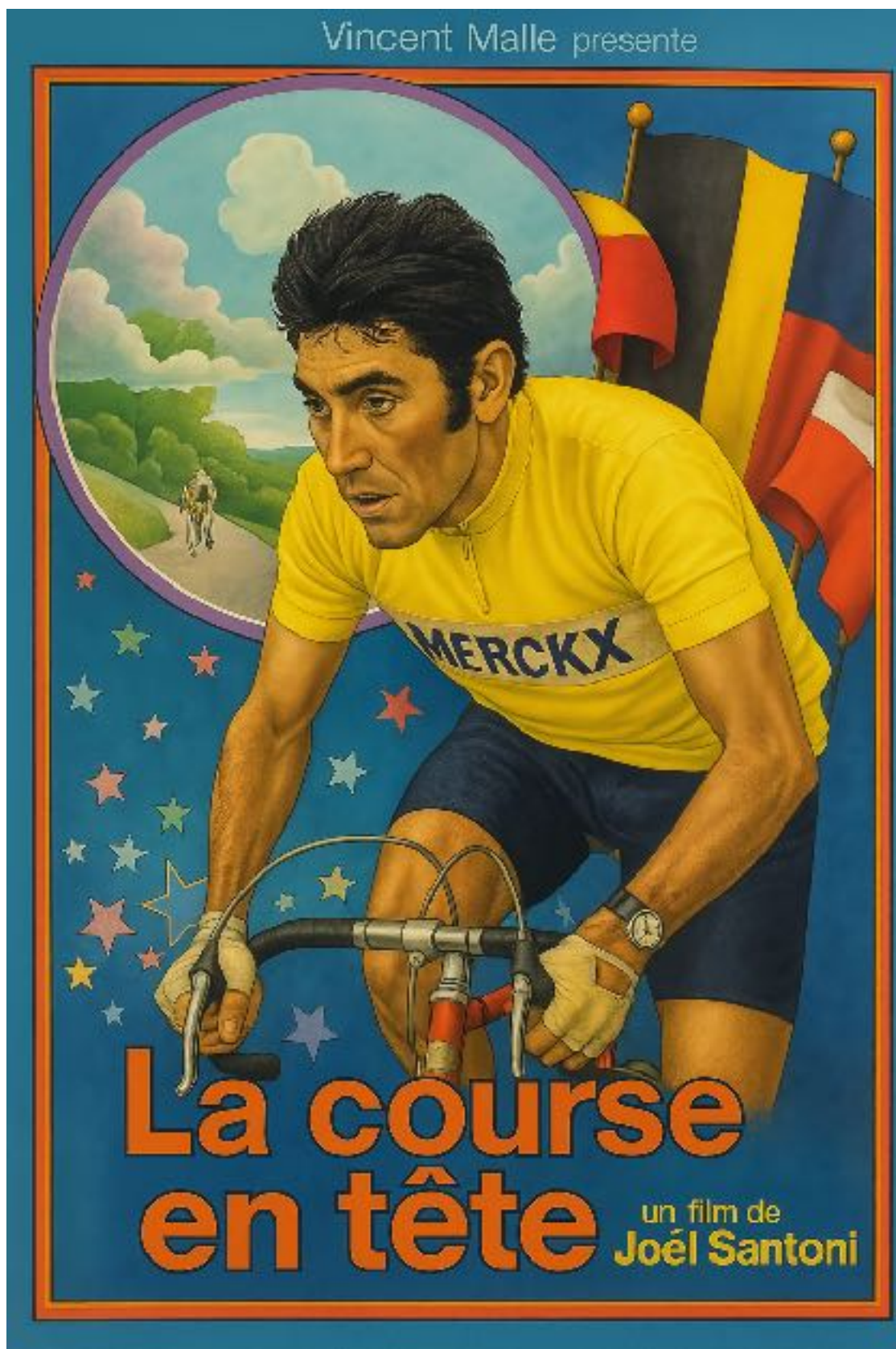




FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION  
CANNES CLASSICS

Vincent Malle presente



DOSSIER PRESSE



## La course en tête - technical sheet

Director	Joel SANTONI
Cinematography	Jacques LOISELEUX Walter BAL
Camera assistants	Michel DELOIR Jean-Jacques FLORY Dominique CHAPUIS Richard ANDRY Yves AGOSTINI Alain SPAAK
Editing	Thierry DEROCLÉS
Editing assistants	Michel DEMOULE Martine BARRAQUE Annie MILLER
Sound	Michel LAURENT Claude BERTRAND Jean-Claude LAUREUX
Sound editing	Annie BARONNET
Sound mixing	Jean Paul LOUBLIER
Music	David MUNROW & THE EARLY MUSIC CONSORTS OF LONDON
Assistant director	Christophe LOISILLON
Motorcyclists	Jules & Alain NIES Jean VAN HUMBEEK
Production managers	Pierre GRUNSTEIN Henri DUTRANNOY Jérôme KANAPA
Producer	Vincent MALLE
Coproduction	V.M. PRODUCTIONS - PARIS I.C.P. - BRUSSELS
Restoration Image & Sound	NEYRAC FILMS
Trailer	NEWKID
Subtitles	BLUE ELEMENTS

Theater release : June 19th 1974

110' - Color

visa n° 41.950

## La course en tête - artistic sheet

The Champion	Eddy MERCKX
His wife	Claudine MERCKX
Claudine's father	Lucien ACOU
The children	Axel et Sabrina
The Commandatore	Piero MOLTENI
1 <sup>st</sup> Sports manager	Giorgio ALBANI
2nd Sports manager	Robert LELANGUE
The soigneur	Guillaume
The masseur	Gust





## La course en tête - Synopsis

### Summary

An intimate portrait of Eddy Merckx, legendary cycling champion, "La Course en tête" goes beyond sport to explore solitude, discipline, and the pursuit of perfection. With a minimalist direction and a spellbinding classical score, Joël Santoni pays tribute to the champion and to all riders, those silent and heroic figures of the peloton.

### Synopsis

"La Course en tête" is a rare and striking documentary about Eddy Merckx, the greatest cyclist of all time, filmed at the peak of his career. Directed in 1974 by Joël Santoni, the film follows Merckx behind the scenes of his daily life - on the road, in training, and in the heat of competition - revealing the physical and mental intensity demanded at the highest level.

But this portrait goes far beyond individual achievement. Through the figure of the champion, the film pays tribute to the whole world of professional cycling: a sport of endurance, suffering, and courage, whose harshness is rendered here with a sober and precise cinematic approach. Without voiceover or commentary, Santoni captures every movement, every breath, every silence with meticulous care.

The classical music score, ever-present, elevates the physical effort to something nearly sacred, lending the images a timeless power. In this high-speed ballet of men, the film also offers a quiet yet profound homage to the anonymous heroes of the peloton - those the camera often overlooks, but without whom no legend could endure.

"La Course en tête" is a unique work, standing at the crossroads of sports documentary and visual poetry, one that will captivate cycling enthusiasts and lovers of great cinema alike.



## La course en tête - director's statement

### Joel Santoni 1973

#### What is he running after?

In 1972, Eddy Merckx, cyclist, is crowned "champion of the year."

An envied and rare title that rewards an exceptional man.

All sports journalists are asking the same question: what is the Merckx phenomenon?

Indeed, more than just a champion, a truly extraordinary figure emerges through his many victories.

The public sees it too. Merckx becomes a star.

He demands more and more from himself - and the public applauds.

But paradoxically, it is this same public that constantly wants more.

Merckx chooses to keep going. His popularity becomes immense.

He is not only a Belgian hero, but an international one.

He is received like a head of state at certain ceremonies.

He even dedicates some of his victories to his sovereign.

He piles up success after success, and earns global recognition.

He enters the mythology of sport - alongside figures like Jules Ladoumègue or Marcel Cerdan.

How does a cyclist reach such glory?

Three main forces seem to shape this destiny:

- the man

- the sport

- the public

#### The Man

When a child rides a bike alone, it's just a game.

When a man forces himself to ride two or three hundred kilometers, and as fast as possible, it's an act of will.

When he's willing to suffer for it, he's a professional.

Sport has always been a means of social advancement.

A man's will, in sport, is a drive toward self-transcendence.

These conquerors of the useless have a goal, and it is this goal we attempt to understand, through the emotions experienced alongside Eddy Merckx - in his private life and in his attitude toward great competitions.

We too often trivialize suffering, and too easily romanticize life.

We too often forget suffering, we too often forget life.

A wife, children, a home, nothing that can't be achieved by a machine.

But this is a man who races, that's the truth.

This is a man who suffers, that's the wonder.

This is a man who wins, that's the admiration.

And who always wins, that's the extraordinary.

#### The Sport

Cycling is arguably one of the most demanding and least inherently spectacular sports.

Yet it never fails to stir passion and attention in the public. Perhaps it's because effort and pain give rise to anticipation.

We follow a race more closely when we sense the fire, the strategy, the intelligence that dictates the pace. A race with Eddy Merckx heightens all of these elements.

A single man keeps an eye on dozens of competitors, trying to wear them down and overpower them. More than mere vigilance, the champion must control the race, guide it according to his own abilities.

He becomes the patriarch of a kind of tribe - master, protector, and adversary.

But cycling is also a public and technological barometer.

Teams overflow with brand logos, taking advantage of the event to celebrate and advertise.

Teams are no longer just made up of athletes: there are soigneurs, mechanics, motorcyclists, and a crowd of colorful characters.

A race is no longer just a sporting event.

It's a show, a circus, a traveling music-hall that shouts: "Long live sport!" and "Thank you, Eddy Merckx - winning machine."

### **The Public**

If the champion exists, the echo of his glory can only be heard because of his public.

What are they after, those who gather in stadiums and along roadsides to watch, for an instant, the rider go by? Do they come to see what they will never be? Or are they trying to identify with the champion?

Is it barbaric games or the suffering that delights the crowd, or are they amateurs who appreciate the rider's grace and intelligence? Perhaps they come just for the huge party that overtakes its marquee to the rhythm of the race.

Few people, in truth, know this sport, few people appreciate it, the star eclipses in their minds the very idea of sporting competition, they come to see a "living god" and all the traditional signs of adoration resurface: autographs, photos, handshakes.

The one who touches Merckx is blessed.

The one who buys his jersey owns a relic.

Sport has been diverted from its original purpose.

It has become spectacle.

And yet, in front of the champion, some people dream, they dream of bicycles, they dream of racing, that they'll run, that they'll win and be stronger than the champion.

## La course en tête - Biographies

### Eddy Merckx

Born in 1945 in Meensel-Kiezegem, Belgium, Eddy Merckx is universally regarded as the greatest cyclist of all time.

His nickname, "The Cannibal," perfectly captures his relentless spirit and refusal to concede victory to anyone - no matter the race or stakes. His unmatched record includes 525 professional wins, among them five Tours de France, five Giro d'Italia, one Vuelta a España, three World Championships, seven Milan-San Remo, five Liège-Bastogne-Liège, and numerous other monumental classics.

But beyond the numbers, Merckx embodies a sporting myth: a pedaling machine, yes, but above all a man of unwavering self-discipline, capable of crushing a race from the first kilometers or enduring suffering with stoic resolve. He didn't just ride to win - he rode to dominate, to impose his will on the peloton, to push himself to the very limits of physical and mental endurance.

This pursuit of the absolute made him far more than a champion - he became a symbol of human transcendence.

His image remains that of a solitary, inscrutable rider - almost monastic in his focus - carving a path between glory and exhaustion, between public adoration and personal rigor.

Through him, a certain idea of sport emerges: one shaped by pain, discipline, greatness, and silence.

### Joël Santoni

Joël Santoni (1943-2018) was a French film director and screenwriter, trained at the prestigious IDHEC (Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies).

From the early 1970s, he established himself as a filmmaker drawn to interiority, human tension, and the subtle portrayal of psychological complexity.

In 1974, he directed "La Course en tête", a documentary dedicated to cycling legend Eddy Merckx. Far from a conventional sports portrait, the film becomes a meditative exploration of effort, solitude, obsession with victory, and the public gaze. With its elegant, pared-down direction and classical score, Santoni elevates the subject matter into a fully cinematic experience.

He also directed several noteworthy fiction features, including "Les Yeux fermés" (1972), "Les oeufs-brouillés" (1976), and most notably "Death on a rainy Sunday" (1986) - a dark, tense psychological thriller starring Nicole Garcia and Jean-Pierre Bacri. Based on a novel by Joan Aiken, the film demonstrated Santoni's talent for creating oppressive atmospheres and deep introspection, and remains one of his most acclaimed and widely viewed works.

Joël Santoni leaves behind a body of work that is discreet yet demanding, always focused on human journeys, contradictions, vulnerabilities, and moments of rupture.

## La course en tête - press contacts

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