

GILBERT ROGER, POSSIBLY THE BEST

He may not be as well known as Ugo Frigerio, Harold Whitlock, Vladimir Golubnichi, Hartwig Gauder or Robert Korzenioski but some consider Gilbert Roger the best walker of all time.



In 1949 he won the mythical Paris to Strasbourg, covering the 520 mile walk in 73 hours and 51 minutes. He returned to win in 1953, although the race on that occasion was walked in reverse, from Strasbourg to Paris. Further wins in 1954, 1956, 1957 and 1958 took his grand total of wins to six.

Yet, his story has its own unique twists. Born on 17th February 1914, he debuted as a walker in 1938 but his career was abruptly disrupted by the Second World War. When he tried to enlist in the French army, he was rejected for having flat feet. Then in 1940, he was taken prisoner by the Germans and confined in a concentration camp but he managed to escape and regain freedom after walking nearly 700 miles through enemy territory.

Once the war finished, he was able to resume his walking career and he subsequently took all before him. In 1949, he joined CA Montreuil and he stayed with that club throughout his career. His list of achievements is indeed large and extends from 1946 to 1958

- 1946 Victory in Circuit de Lyon
- 1947 Victory in Circuit de l'Est – Circuit de Lyon - Victory in Genève Lausanne
- 1948 Victory in Circuit de Lyon
- 1949 Victory in Paris Strasbourg
Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de Lyon
- 1950 Victory in Circuit de Paris – Circuit de Lyon
Victory in 24 heures de Charleroi
- 1951 Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de l'Ouest – Circuit de Lyon - Circuit de l'Ile de France
- 1952 Victory in Circuit de Lyon - Victory in Tour d'Alsace
- 1953 Victory in Strasbourg Paris
Victory in Circuit de Lyon – Circuit de Paris – Circuit de Bourgogne
Victory in Tour d'Alsace
- 1954 Victory in Strasbourg Paris
Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de l'Est – Circuit des Flandres
Victory in Tour d'Alsace
Victory in 24 heures de Chalons – Victory in 28 heures de Roubaix
- 1955 Victory in 24 heures de la Banlieue Ouest
Victory in 28 heures de Roubaix
Victory in Circuit de Paris – Victory in Tour d'Alsace
- 1956 Victory in Strasbourg Paris
24 Hour Record en route : 225,350km
Champion de France de la Montagne (UFM)
Victory in 28 heures de Roubaix
Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de l'Est – Circuit de Lyon

1957 Victory in Strasbourg Paris
 Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de l'Est
 1958 Victory in Strasbourg Paris
 Champion du Monde de Grand Fond
 Victory in Circuit du Nord – Circuit de l'Est – Circuit de l'Oise

His major accolades include

- 6 times winner of the Strasbourg-Paris: 1949, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957 and 1958.
- European Champion Gran Fondo (International Federation of March) in 1948, 1949 and 1950.
- World Champion Gran Fondo (International Federation of March) in 1958.

He held the following world records (International Federation de March)

100 km	9:38:40	Nancy	1948
200 km	20:46:00	Lyon	1950
500 km	64:42:00	Strasbourg-Paris	1953
100 miles	16:25:00	Lyon	1950
200 miles	39:28:00	Strasbourg-Paris	1956
300 miles	62:39:00	Strasbourg-Paris	1956
24 hours	225.350 km	Lyson	1950
48 hours	387.250 km	Strasbourg-Paris	1956
72 hours	537.000 km	Strasbourg, Paris	1958

His 6 wins in the Paris-Strasbourg classic make for extraordinary reading - he regularly averaged nearly 8km/hr over the 3 day event.

1949	Paris – Strasbourg	520 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	73h51'
1953	Strasbourg – Paris	515 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	66h50'
1954	Strasbourg – Paris	526 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	70h34'
1956	Strasbourg – Paris	522 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	68h31'
1957	Strasbourg – Paris	522 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	69h38'
1958	Strasbourg – Paris	537 km	ROGER Gilbert	FRA	71h13'

The only thing that prevented Gilbert from further wins was the demise of this great classic after the 1959 staging. It was eventually resurrected in 1970 (and has been going ever since) but by then it was too late for him to look for further victories.

You can see a short French Television video interview with him on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwRMr-zzew0>

He died in 1999 but we remember him as an extraordinary walker and his feats are still celebrated. For instance, when the inaugural 100km Du Perche was held in 2010 (see <http://www.100kmduperche.com/>), an exhibition was put on in tribute to him in his home town of Frazé.

Long may he be remembered!

Tim Erickson
 23 Febraury 2011