

Pello Bilbao to kick off the Tour de Pologne UCI WorldTour for the first time

A great challenge for the Basque champion, motivated and curious to measure himself against totally new terrain

First time competing in the Tour de Pologne for Pello Bilbao (Team Bahrain Victorious) who, after a long period of rest with the recent addition to his family, is returning to competition starting with the Polish race. Starting on 30th July, the 79th edition will be a real challenge for him.

"It will be a really good opportunity for me," he explained. "It's strange to be at the start of a World Tour race for the first time after twelve years as a pro cyclist, but these things happen when the season schedule never coincides with certain appointments. Finally this year my calendar has given me this opportunity. It will definitely be a great challenge, I'm excited and super curious about the race and also this country that I'm visiting for the first time."

Bilbao also said he got an idea of what the Tour de Pologne entails from his colleagues.

"From what they told me, I understood that this is an intense race, always very open, with long stages and short, explosive climbs. I'll have a chance to test myself in a different type of terrain to the ones I'm used to and that motivates me a lot; after so many years in the pros, it's hard to find something new to measure yourself against. I am coming to this race after a long period of rest; a lot of new things have happened in my life that give me the energy to return one hundred percent to competition."

An elegant and pure climber, the Basque is certainly expected in the mountain fractions but it would not be a surprise to find him competing for the general classification. After a quick look at the altitude profiles of the stages, he is fairly certain that the individual time trial will be the key point of the week, thanks to its significant elevation gain.

"The stages are all new to me, I can't say which one would be tailored to my characteristics," he admitted. "For sure all the fractions require a lot of concentration and the individual time trial will be crucial to aim for the overall victory. As for me, I'll evaluate my chances day by day - also with the team and my teammates - but it would be interesting to arrive on the eve of stage six with a good position in the classification and try to fight for the jersey."

Pello also spoke about his natural terrain, the climbs. He is still unfamiliar with the Polish ones - which always turn out to be short and steep - but confessed that it is not a problem for him to compete on climbs that are different from his aptitudes.

"These days will be very challenging for me, I think the most difficult part will be to understand how my body will react to long distances; I have seen that some stages are over 200km and it will not be easy to sustain this mileage after the break I have had. But I am ready and willing to race, it will all be a good challenge. I hope I feel fresh, have the ability to be reactive and be active in the race. Either way it will be a great experience for sure" he concluded.