

What an anniversary!

95 years ago cyclists set off for the first time in Poland

It was on 7 September 1928 that the cycling peloton first set off for Poland. The history of what is now the biggest annual sporting event in our part of Europe began in Warsaw. *"We know that we have to look to the future and develop the race, but we also have to remember its rich history, which has been written together with the history of our country,"* says the Tour de Pologne's General Director, Czesław Lang.

The first race was organised by the editors of "Przegląd Sportowy" and activists of the Warsaw Cyclists' Association. On 7 September 1928 in Warsaw, 71 cyclists took part in what was then officially called the "1st Cycling Tour of Poland". The peloton raced from 7 to 16 September, and after eight stages, 43 riders reached the finish line, also in Warsaw. The winner was Feliks Więcek. There were eight stages and the total length of the route was 1491 km.

"I suspect that in 1928 no one could have imagined that such a beautiful story was about to begin, although on the other hand the race had great patrons from the very beginning. The Tour de Pologne, then known as the Tour of Poland, became the showpiece of our country. It has had great moments and gone through crises. All this has contributed to it becoming part of our country's history. More than that, it became a part of it," says the current race director. Interestingly, the Moscow Olympic runner-up himself won our national race in 1980. In turn, thirteen years later, he was responsible for organising it.

"I like diving into the archives, following its history. The history of the Tour de Pologne is the history of Poland. With crises, twists and turns, and recoveries. During the communist era it was overshadowed by the Peace Race, which the communist authorities loved, but it was always important. I know this very well because I remember how important it was for me to win this event. And that is how every cyclist approached the Tour de Pologne," says Lang, who introduced the race to the elite UCI WorldTour series.

"When I started organising it, 30 years ago, we were at a special moment, not just the race, but a whole country. It was just after the change of regime, with the problems of any young democracy, but also with faith and hope. At least for me and the people around me, because many predicted our failure. People didn't have the money or the time for competitive sport, and from the beginning I wanted the Tour de Pologne to be like the races in the West that I had ridden in. Today I know that dreams and self-denial are worthwhile. Step by step we built the brand. We joined the UCI World Tour, which includes only the most important races in the world. We are the only event of this magnitude in our part of Europe, we are reaping the rewards, we see riders from the absolute best teams in the world at the start and we get very good ratings. I saw cycling as a platform to promote not only the sport, but also the country and the companies. All this is coming to fruition in our race and that makes me proud. Although I know that it is also a responsibility. The Tour de Pologne is a race for all Poles and we always remember that. We know that we have to look to the future, develop the race, but also remember its rich history, which was written together with the history of our country," said the Tour de Pologne director.