

Tour de France

# Froome wins mountain time trial, increases Tour lead

By ANDREW DAMPF  
Associated Press

MEGEVE, France — Chris Froome won a mountain time trial and opened up a seemingly insurmountable lead of nearly four minutes over his closest challenger in the 18th stage of the Tour de France on Thursday.

Riding in a yellow bodysuit and yellow aerodynamic helmet, Froome pumped his right fist after clocking slightly more than half an hour over the 17-kilometer (10.5-mile) route from Sallanches to the Megeve ski resort — which featured majestic views of Mont Blanc.

"He deserves his win. He's the strongest," said cycling great Eddy Merckx, a five-time Tour winner. "I can't see what could prevent him from keeping this yellow jersey until Paris. His opponents just stay on his teammates' wheels. Barring an incident, nobody can beat him on this Tour."

Taking his second stage win of this year's Tour, Froome finished 21 seconds ahead of Dutch rider Tom Dumoulin.

Froome's overall lead of 3 minutes, 52 seconds over Dutch rider Bauke Mollema will be



AP Photo/Peter Dejong

**Supporters cheer Britain's Chris Froome, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey as he rides during the eighteenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race, an individual time trial over 17 kilometers (10.6 miles) with start in Sallanches and finish in Megeve, France, Thursday, July 21, 2016.**

difficult to erase over the final two Alpine stages before Sunday's mostly ceremonial finish on the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

"The main thing for me now is staying safe," Froome said. "Obviously I've got a fantastic advantage now. So now it's about looking after

that advantage and not taking any risks.

"It's not over until we cross that final finish line, but today is a huge boost of confidence," Froome added. "I think over these next couple of days we're going to see more of a race for podium spots."

Froome stood only fifth at the first checkpoint, the top of the Cote de Domancy climb, but the British rider clearly saved energy for the second half of the stage, surging in front over the final kilometers.

"It was a pulsating race, but I knew it was going to be difficult. I was expecting to lose," said Dumoulin, who rode 90 minutes before the race leader. "Froome just showed he is the strongest."

Spanish Vuelta champion Fabio Aru of Italy finished third in the stage, 33 seconds behind.

It was the Tour's first mountain time trial since the 2004 race against the clock up l'Alpe d'Huez. Besides the flat opening four kilometers (2.5 miles) and a short descent at the finish, it was entirely uphill.

Adam Yates of Britain remained third overall, 4:16 behind, and two-time runner-up Nairo Quintana stayed fourth but now trails by 4:37 after another difficult day for the Colombian.

Froome's other stage win this year came with an audacious downhill attack in Stage 8 in the Pyrenees. The Kenyan-born rider with Team Sky also won a time trial in the 2013 Tour, when he took his first overall victory.

Having also won the Tour last

year, Froome is on course for his third title in four years.

Considering that most of the route was uphill, many riders used road bikes fitted with bars to lay their arms on for a more aerodynamic position.

Froome was one of the few riders to use a full time trial setup with an aerodynamic rear disc wheel instead of traditional spokes.

"I think that was a big part of today's stage, selecting the right equipment," Froome said. "The other aspect of today was pacing. It was important not to go too fast too early."

Fans lined the major climb of the route, the Cote de Domancy, getting up close to the riders to shout encouragement — with glaciers and snowcapped mountains in the distance.

Stage 19 on Friday follows a 146-kilometer (91-mile) route over four ascents from Albertville to Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc. The penultimate leg on Saturday concludes with a tricky descent to Morzine after four more climbs through the Alps.

AP Sports Writer Samuel Petrequin contributed to this report.

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