

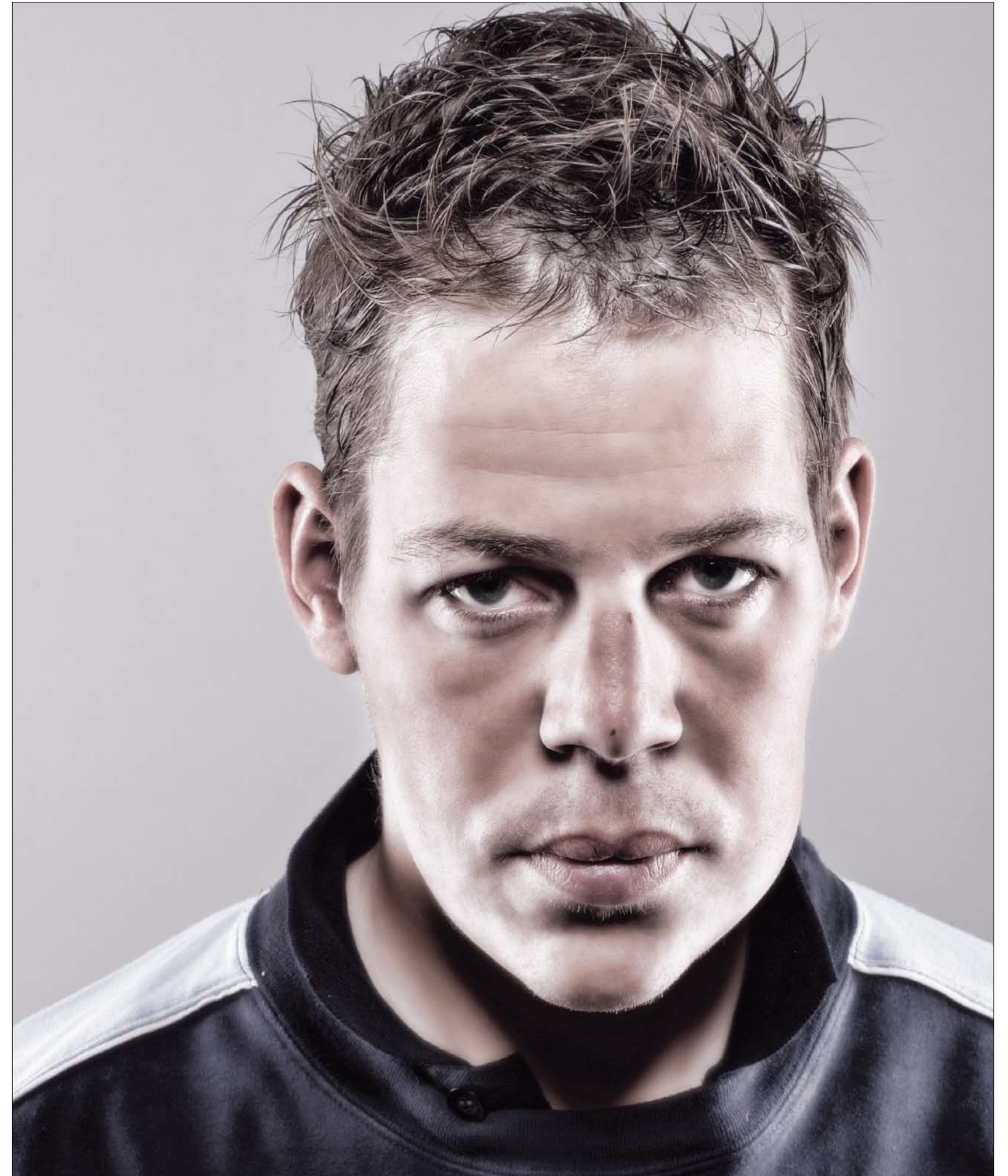
BERNHARD KOHL'S

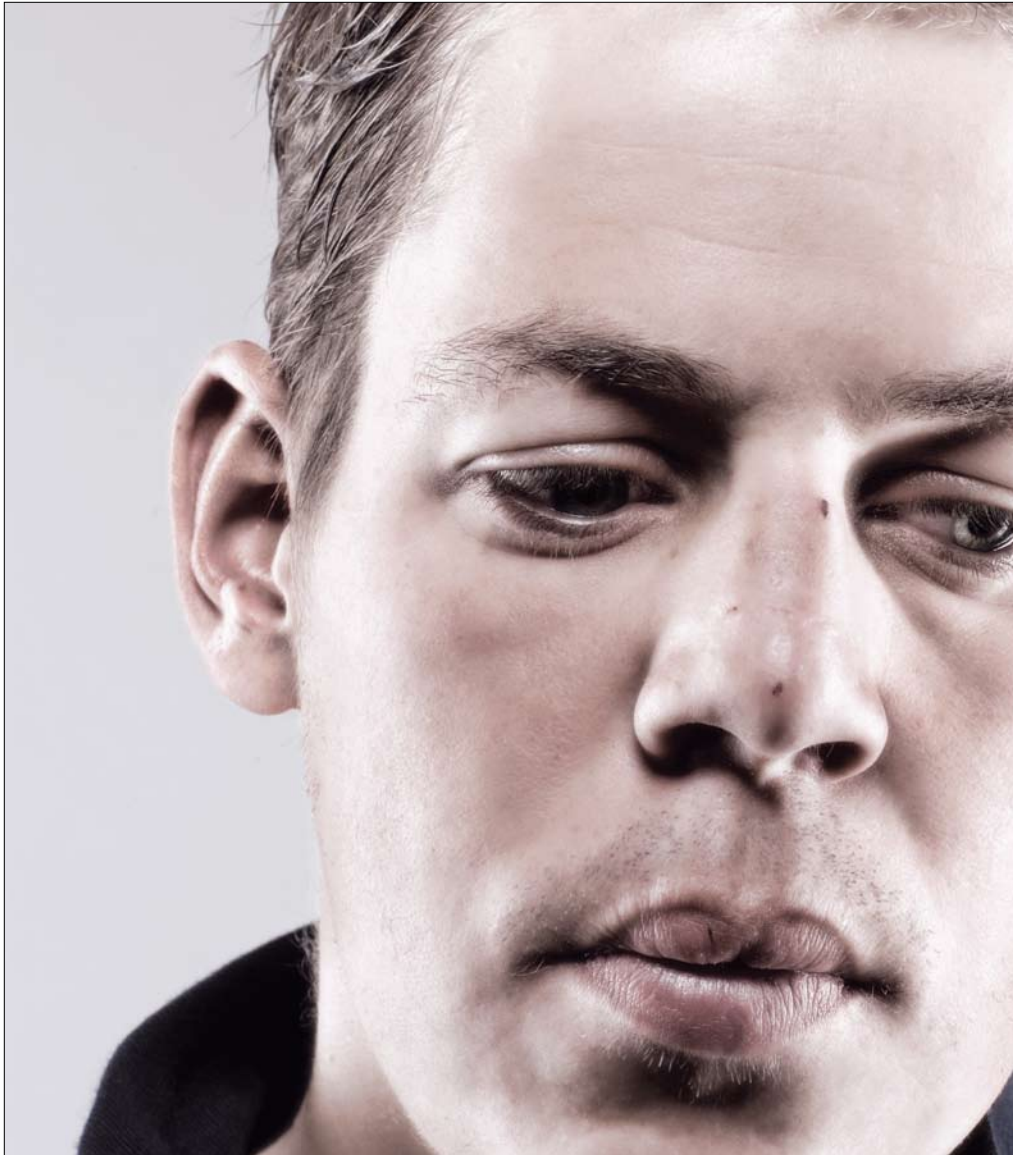
Tour de France was nothing short of remarkable. As a member of the Gerlosteiner squad, the team needed a big result to attract a new title sponsor as the sparkling water company is waving goodbye to the cycling world. Kohl delivered the goods. On stage 15 Kohl inherited the King of the Mountain jersey and started to make a run at the overall, sitting in second place. While always known as a climber, no one thought Kohl was a genuine threat to the

overall. It was on the Alpe d' Huez that he started to crack. He rolled across the finish line and collapsed over his bike. His hold on the KOM jersey was secure but with the time trial looming, the pundits and even Kohl himself wondered aloud if he would plummet from the top of the General Classification. However, in the final time trial Kohl showed his strength and secured third overall. With a little bit of time between himself and the Tour, Kohl reflects on his Tour de France.

kohl's on *fire*

Interview_Browne Images_John Segesta
[johnsegesta.com]





Stage 9 was the first stage where you started getting KOM points. Was that part of the strategy? No, it was my attempt to help Sebastian Lang maintain the Polka Dot Jersey on that day. I wanted to take the points before his opponents could collect them.

Stage 10 seemed like it was the point in the Tour where you were serious about a run at the podium. Is that true? Surprised that you were in 4th place after this stage? A little bit, yes. I mean I suddenly could follow the big names and some I even dropped or they would let me go. This I did not expect even though I knew I had very good legs.

What goes on during the rest day? It's a tradition at Gerolsteiner that we start the rest day with a press conference. Then I stepped over the bike for a little bit, followed by the actual task of rest day, which is relaxing and recovering.

The following stages 11 to 14 are reserved for a breakaway or field sprint. Those stages must be nervous for you. On stages like these you often can't win if you're focused on the overall. But one weak moment can be enough to lose everything you have achieved. And don't think they are easy for us only because we are not in the high mountains. You can suffer a lot on days like these.

After several of these transitional stages how hard is it to get back to the mountains? Stages in the mountains are always hard. That's why they put us up there to race. But hey, it's my terrain; it's where I shine. It's my job.

Stage 15 was an important stage for you and must have been bitter sweet. You moved up to second place on GC, took the KOM jersey, but came close to taking the Yellow Jersey. What were your emotions like that day? I was happy, purely happy. I was happy to see that I probably could reach my targets. But I also was happy about that funny jersey. And I realized that this could be my chance to be present at the ceremony in Paris, which has always been a dream for me.

Another rest day. Team morale must have been high at this point. Yes. But it also was a day where I learned how stressful your life can become when you have reached a leading position in the Tour de France. The press conference took 2 hours of my rest day. It was not really hard work for me but was quite different to what you normally should do on a rest day. I was not the man in yellow or even one of the favorites.

How did you get your start in cycling? My father was a cyclotourist. Once in the neighborhood a cycle race was held and I showed up.

In your pre-cycling life you were a chimney sweep. How did you get into that career? Were you racing/training at this point in your life? I chose this apprenticeship because at that time it allowed me to continue with cycling. My boss was a cycling buddy of my dad.

At the start of the season did you target the Tour for the climber's jersey? No, I was always focused to end in the top-10 of the Tour.

Did you even think a podium spot was possible? No, I only wanted to try to improve my result from 2007 (31st place). I think I also would have been satisfied if I ended around 15th. But the podium? I never spent one thought on it.

Your first week was quiet and after the time trial (stage 4) you were in 24th. Did that even concern you at that point? No, not really. In fact I did not have a great deficit to the favorites.

Your teammate Stefan Schumacher won stage 4's time trial. Did you discuss the course with each other? A good time trial is also a result of teamwork! Of course we discussed the course with the team. Hans-Michael Holczer, Christian Henn, Sebastian Lang our time trial specialist we had in the team, Stefan Schumacher Markus Fothen and me were mostly involved. But the other guys on the team also delivered good information from their runs.

Stage 6 was the first mountain stage and you were not in the results for KOM points. Was the KOM not even a thought at this point? No, especially on this stage we tried to defend the Yellow Jersey for Stefan. This was our main objective.

Stage 16 was a great day for the Gerolsteiner team: Schumacher was off the front covering for you, you were in second place on GC and you retained the KOM jersey for the following day up Alpe d'Huez. Did you think at this point that the overall was possible? I was rather sure to stay in the top-10. But the podium was only a dream because I expected Menchev and Evans to be much better in the time trial than I ended up doing.

Stage 17 was the Alpe d'Huez, a legendary stage for a climber. Did you feel the

pressure? Actually not. I was a little bit nervous because I expected a hard day. We also expected a showdown of CSC, and that later happened. So no pressure. Maybe I was excited if our forecast would come true.

Sastre took off at the bottom. Did you not react because you thought he went too early? Were you unsure of how you felt that day? My problem was that I could not really do what I needed to do. Normally I would join Sastre, and also Evans too would join him. But both of us were not strong enough to hold him. Additionally

we also had to follow each other! So I went 40 to 50 minutes full gas always hoping that Evans would not successfully counter-attack me.

You looked completely spent at the finish. Has there ever been a harder day for you? No. This really was the hardest day of my life.

The following stages were again reserved for the opportunists. During these stages were you thinking about stage 20's time trial? You only think about how to hold your position all day long. Not to crash, not to spend too much power, eat early and eat enough, and so on. Plans you've made in the evening, not during the stage.

You are quoted as saying that you didn't think that you would be able to time trial fast enough to stay on the podium. Were you surprised at your time trial performance? A little bit. I knew I had good legs and I improved in the time trial the first time around. But when I heard the first time-splits on the way I became more and more confident that at the end I could come in the overall ranking of top-5 or better.

At the end of the Tour on the Champs and you're on the final podium did it sink in yet of what you had accomplished? It was a great feeling. I mean this jersey has been on the backs of so many great riders and all big names. And now it's on my shoulders! It's awesome. At this moment you feel like flying. It's a moment every young rider has dreamt of and then it has suddenly come true. Only a handful of guys in the world of professional cycling have worn this jersey, and I am one of them. What can I say?

Overall, Gerolsteiner had an amazing Tour de France. Are you thinking about next year's Tour already? Not yet. First I have to ride the rest of the season, then recover, and then vacation. But when I start again with training in November it will be on my mind I am sure of that!

What gear ratios do you typically use when climbing? I think in the Tour they gave me a 39 in the front and a 25 tooth on the rear. *R*

