

THE ROCKET MAN

If your name is Tom Boonen there are high expectations placed on you. The Classics are a top priority, specifically Flanders, Roubaix and Milan San Remo. Then there is the Tour de France and the quest for another Green Jersey. And this is an Olympic year as well. And like a gun fighter at the O.K. Corral, there are always younger riders looking to knock you off. It's not easy being Tom.





Do you feel pressure to win every race you enter as a favorite?

TOM BOONEN: No, it's not a matter of pressure, or better I try not to feel the too much pressure due to that. Very often, in fact, it is the external environment that tries to pressure us.

What motivates you for the 2008 season?

BOONEN: This year my target will be the first part of the season with the Classics on the pavé. Afterwards, in the summer I will concentrate once more on Tour.

How big of a priority is Milan San Remo?

BOONEN: Do you know this in the U.S. too [with a smile]? For me the Milan San Remo is a wonderful race. It's clear that a rider with my characteristics must try and win it sooner or later. We'll see what's going to happen this year. The fact of the matter is that I cannot be 100% at San Remo and not compromise the Holy Week that is the Tour of Flanders and Roubaix. However, the history of cycling teaches us that it is possible to win San Remo even if your condition is only 80%. You need some luck.

What do you think you need to do to in order to win Milan San Remo?

BOONEN: Luck and also to be as fresh as possible to the finish line.

Is there a Classic win that has eluded you that you feel you must win before you retire?

BOONEN: Someone tells me that with a different scheduling I might be more competitive at Amstel Gold race. The truth is that it is often more convenient to do what you can do better, for some more years on.

Tour de France's Green Jersey another big goal?

BOONEN: If everything is okay, for sure.

You had a strong start to the season last year, but didn't win a Classic. Are you doing something differently this season?

BOONEN: We had less intensity during the pre-season's retreats. The training was less dense. Also the density of specific trainings was diminished. We worked hard on aerobics.

You've decided not to participate in the Olympics road race, but you've suggested that you might race the pursuit. Is that still a possibility?

BOONEN: No, that was a joke. This is something the journalists wrote and constructed. To prepare for the track competitions you need some specific training, feelings and experience. It seems a bit too much to me. That's not for me.

What was your off-season training?

BOONEN: At the end of the season, I took some good rest, afterwards I started again. I had a lot of fun with the mountain bike. From December on, I started to train in a more serious way.

Whom do you consider your biggest rival during the season?

BOONEN: They are always the same riders, from Cancellara, O'Grady, Pozzato, Ballan and Hoste. We're a good group of riders for the Classics.

Tour of Qatar was a race you won three stages and have a running total of 14 stage wins. Do you look at those results and feel good about the upcoming season.

BOONEN: Yes, but I also know how to make results become relative. The real season has not yet got started.

What is it about Qatar that makes you return every year? It seems like with the headwinds and pan-flat roads is a bit dangerous and could ruin your Classics season.

BOONEN: No, it's on the contrary. That's a good training week. The wind makes us do some intensity work. It's a very good week. No, I would say this is an optimal start. And then to win immediately is very good for the morale.

On Tour of Qatar stage 2: You mentioned how everyone was a bloc the whole race, and said the average speed was 57kph. What, if anything is going through your head during a stage like that? Also with regard to riding in crazy wind—how do mere mortals get strong enough to ride fast in serious wind?

BOONEN: I like to ride in the wind. Where I was born and grew up, it's a constant. For me it's a natural element, like water for fish. When a race gets harder I enjoy it better. The wind makes races more technical too, the satisfaction from winning is certainly higher than in a usual race.

What was it that attracted you to the Tour of California?

BOONEN: The will of discovering a new territory. For years I have been doing the same program, so I wanted to go for a change. My teammates told me this is a very nice race. I'm coming with extreme pleasure, even if it's not the first time [to California]. I had already been to California when I was with US Postal. And then I also would like to know better the history of Specialized. During the last year and half they did a great job for me.

Has your bike for this year been changed this year versus last year?

BOONEN: This is the same bike I have had starting from Tour de France 2007 on. The bike was changed a lot from the beginning of the season, both in the geometry and in the performance. The technicians were really good in meeting my needs.

What's the fastest have you driven your Lamborghini?

BOONEN: I cannot say that!

You versus Cipo in a race with your own personal cars. Who wins?

BOONEN: Maybe he'd win. I haven't my Lamborghini any longer!

Favorite Belgian beer?

BOONEN: Schuf.

Someone from the web wants to know when your next half-naked photo shoot is?

BOONEN: Never I guess.

Your nick name according to the Quick Step website is "Benny Love." Please explain.

What happened to "The Tornado"?

BOONEN: Really? It's a webmaster error. No, I'm joking, it's an old nickname. My real nickname is surely Tornado Tom. 

