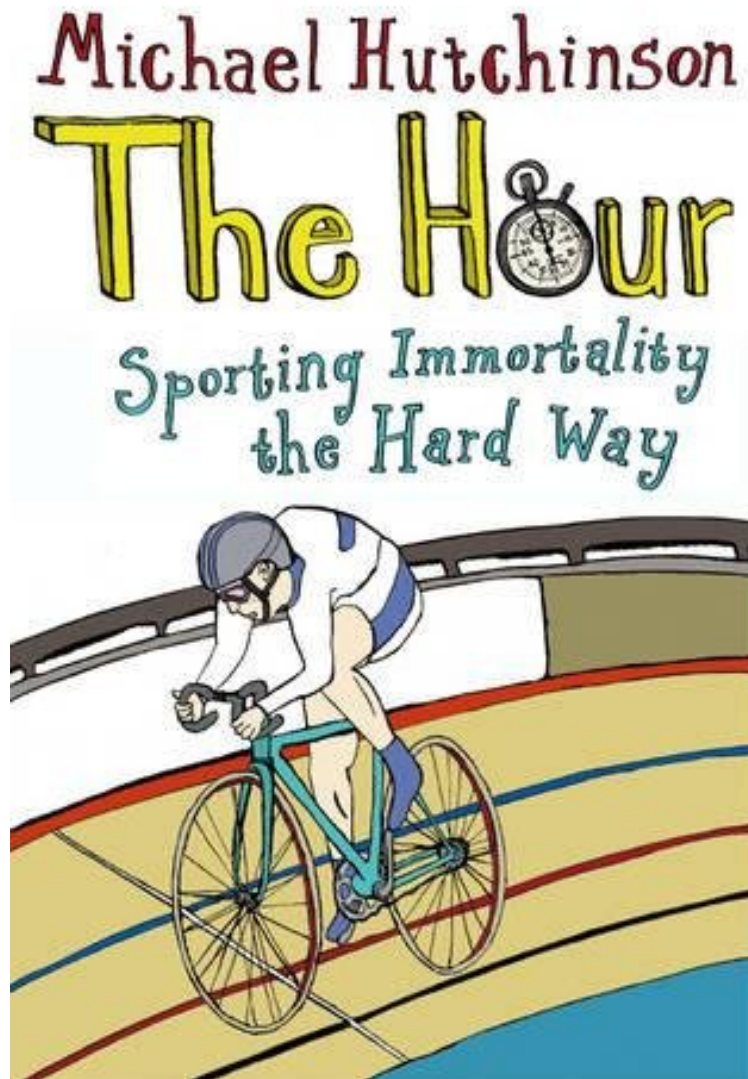


(Download free ebook) The Hour: Sporting Immortality the Hard Way

The Hour: Sporting Immortality the Hard Way

Michael Hutchinson

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Michael Hutchinson : The Hour: Sporting Immortality the Hard Way before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hour: Sporting Immortality the Hard Way:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Alone, against the past. In 18.2 second laps...By Leslie Reissner In 2004, there were stories circulating suggesting that multiple Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong might go after

the legendary World Hour Record of cycling. Given his immense power output and single-minded dedication to training, this seemed like a great idea. And the stories got better: he would do the ride at altitude; he would do it in a specially-built velodrome that would be only used once and then torn down. It would have been a sensation and I, for one, would have paid good money for a ticket to see Big Tex go round and round and round for an hour at insanely high speed. But it did not come to pass. The Hour Record has been a target of many of cycling's greats-held by Coppi, Anquetil, Merckx, Indurain-but Michael Hutchinson is, in spite of being an excellent rider at the national level, admittedly not one of these. An academic, he came to bike racing very late and thanks to the support of a large bike company was able to turn his passion for cycling into a professional career, albeit one that focused pretty much entirely on time trialling in the United Kingdom. His book is about his attempt to go after the Hour Record at the Manchester Velodrome, a record which he felt was attainable and could be accomplished by the rather modest Team Hutchinson, which seems to have numbered no more than six people. This is a shoestring project but the author puts in an enormous effort to succeed. After recounting the history of the Hour Record, of which the international cycling governing body, the UCI, has, through its bizarre rule changes, reduced the lustre, he writes of his own career and how he wished to go out with some glory. Seizing on the idea of the Hour Record, suggested by a friend, he sets about organizing his training and equipment in a methodical, even obsessive manner, that does not seem to equate with reality very often. It is clear that self-reliance has pitfalls. Pursuing a record at a velodrome is hard enough, but when you need to do it on a bicycle similar to that ridden by Eddy Merckx in 1972 it becomes a serious issue just in terms of acquiring materiel. In an ideal world, Mr. Hutchinson should have been left to focus on his training preparation, rather than chasing around for parts and, in the book's grimmest chapter, picking up frames from a courier at Heathrow and dragging them home in their gigantic box. Geeky, obsessive and seemingly more terrified of losing than inspired by winning, the author is not so good at dealing with the inevitable setbacks. His description of the war between road racers and time triallists in post-war Britain suggests that there might in fact be a difference between the two tribes. And in the background is the goofy UCI, which decided that it did not like Graham Obree breaking the record in 1994 and decided in 2000 that all the records after Merckx's effort in 1972 did not count. The post-1972 records became classified as "Best Hour Performance" and the rules now mean that it is unlikely that Chris Boardman's 1996 distance of 56.375 km can be bettered. The Merckx record has now become the benchmark for "the Athlete's Hour," which does not permit any aerodynamic features on bike or rider. Chris Boardman, riding at the Manchester Velodrome in 2000, broke Merckx's record with a ride of 49.441 km and then ended his career. It was this record that Michael Hutchinson wished to better. The book is certainly quirky, befitting its author, and the climax seems to come with the chapter featuring the Heathrow handover, rather than the record attempt ride itself. Mr. Hutchinson is a gifted athlete who can do a 40 km time trial in 48 minutes but he is often so self-deprecating in the book that he begins to sound like one of those bungling amateurs, a sort of two-wheeled Scott of the Antarctic, so beloved by the British. This conflicts with the impression given by the amount of time he spends training for the attempt and dilutes that story of someone who, with minimal resources but clear talent, wants to accomplish something big. The book, which is primarily of interest to cyclists, is rather basic when talking about training and rather sparse on technical information. And it would have been nice to have some photographs of the principals, including the author's valiant girlfriend, Louisa. For those of us who open themselves to the challenge of athletic competition and believe it is better to set a high goal and fail than a small one that does not test us, the book could be more inspirational. The Athlete's Hour has become of little consequence now in the world of pro cycling but it is enjoyable to read about Mr. Hutchinson's struggle with Mr. Murphy's Law.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It's not all glory
By W. S. Chen
I bought this book in London thinking that, given the relative obscurity of the topic, I'd never see it in the USA. Luckily, that's not the case. I wasn't familiar with Michael Hutchinson before reading the book since I'm not a big follower of the British time trialing scene or, despite being a fan of cycling, the hour record. I think that pretty much sums up the general take on the hour record- if you don't follow it, you don't really pay much attention to the attempts on it, especially when the hopefuls aren't big names like Lance or Miguel or even Chris or Graeme. So it was quite enlightening to hear of this record attempt by perhaps as close to an everyman as one might find in such an endeavor. Hutchinson is an academic whose turn to cycling is as much (or more) a way to escape a potentially unsatisfying career as it is a love of the sensation of riding. In fact, this relationship to cycling is perhaps one of the most interesting parts of the book; at the same time, it will likely be the most disappointing to many aspiring amateurs looking to for tales of struggle glory. He demythologizes cycling in a way that is plain and unromantic. The book didn't make me want to go out and try the hour record or race my bike- it does give a good reality check for those occasional thoughts that all I need to do to get a place on a ProTour team is a ride a lot and get on a good doping program. Overall, the book was a quick, satisfying read. Not necessarily the most extensive insight into the human psyche, but quite a bit more than the standard sports tales of hardship and overcoming. The historical bits about the record were entertaining as well. Sometimes the mundane details seemed a little too mundane, but perhaps that was the point.

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Quirky - for Cyclists only.
By David Landman
A quirky little book. Focused completely on the British author's obsession with the Hour Record in track cycling. For the serious cyclist, it is full of history and anecdote about the Hour, plus an equally obsessive and often neurotic account of the author's preparation for - or lack thereof - an attempt

on the Hour. Laced with much self-deprecating British humor - too much of it, in my view. Not enough true technical detail - almost nothing on gearing, aerodynamic data or frame design. Much better on the history of the Hour Record itself. Really more of a "bumblers' guide" to the Hour, despite Hutchinson's impeccable racing record and undisputed talent. There is no question that Hutchinson was both dedicated and consumed by his attempt - but by the end of the book, one really has to question his seeming absence of true passion. Much as I was both amused and exasperated by this story, I would only recommend it to an amateur racer or racing fanatic.

Gripping, very funny and packed with fascinating stories, *The Hour* is the story of one man and his bike against the clock in the quest for pure speed and an attempt to add his name to the list of illustrious record holders in the only cycling record that matters.

About the Author Michael Hutchinson became a full-time cyclist in 2000 after becoming disillusioned with an academic career. Over the following six years he has won more than twenty national titles, and the gold medal in the Masters' Pursuit World Championships. He is now a writer and journalist (and cyclist) and lives in south London.