

IT'S CHICKEN AND RICE FOR STARS OF TOUR

THEY'RE the ultimate green machines.

The Tour of Ireland cyclists are creating a real buzz as they roll into towns all over the country at speeds of up to 65 miles an hour.

So I was a bit surprised when they told me they were fuelled by... rocket.

It turned out they meant the leafy variety. Along with lettuce, pasta, potatoes, bread and the classic meat-and-two-veg, it's what greases the wheels for these human dynamos.

None of those carbs made a bulge in their gleaming skintight lycra suits. The human equivalent of Ferraris looked more at home in the carpark than inside posh Ritz Carlton in Enniskerry, Co Wicklow.

Pampered

While other pampered guests ordered the €350 caviar-and-champers breakfast in bed, the cycling heroes had chicken and rice for breakfast in the main dining hall as they prepared for the first leg of their trip this week.

DiscoverIreland.ie put the 112 top riders up in the posh hotel to give them a real Irish welcome before they started their gruelling 576-km trip.

Even the gentle hills in the drive of Powerscourt House were a bit steep for yours truly. So I let Swiss cyclists Michael Schar and Belgian Kenny Lisabeth do all the pedalling as they gave me some tips.

Michael, who is on Lance Armstrong's Astana team, had already been for a spin around Enniskerry village and said it reminded him of the Alpine



NO MONKEY BUSINESS: Adrian Niyonshuti, Geraldine Comiskey and Jock Boyer at the Ritz Carlton

By GERALDINE COMISKEY ● Pics By CIARAN MCGOWAN

foothills back home in Lucerne. Kenny, who is based in Belgium with Sean Kelly's An Post team, said it was a change from the flat roads of Belgium.

Of course, their experience is a world away from the typical tourists' holiday in Ireland. Most of the beautiful scenery of Wicklow, Carlow, Tipperary, Kerry and West Cork will be just a blur for them.

But when the three-day race finishes in Cork city this afternoon, the real winners will be Irish tourism.

And, with two Irish teams competing, one of them run by Irish cycling legend Sean Kelly, it looks like we're returning to the glory days of the 80s when Kelly and Stephen Roche put Ireland on the map.

Sadly, 31-year-old Paul Healion, a star of the Irish

national team, died in a car crash last Sunday.

Both the Team Ireland and An Post team-members attended his funeral on Thursday.

And, as a mark of respect to Paul, Team Ireland left his name on the programme along with David McCann, Sean Downey, Philip Lavery, Paul Griffin, Martyn Irvine and Sam Bennett.

Legend

Meanwhile, legend Sean, whose An Post/Sean Kelly team includes three

Irishmen, was mobbed by fans as he sat in the foyer on Thursday.

But he was happy to sign autographs for fans - unlike Lance Armstrong, whose heavy-handed goons knocked over a little boy who was trying to get his picture taken with his hero.

Quick-thinking Lance picked the child up and asked "Are you OK?" but the child was too embarrassed to reply.

But mum-of-two Cora Byrne was one of the hundreds who turned up hoping to meet Lance Armstrong. "I came here specially to see him. I might even go down to Cork and see if I can get his auto-



LEGEND: Team manager Sean Kelly

graph there, "I just admire him so much."

The 57-year-old from Glenealy, Co Wicklow, added, admitting: "My son and daughter would be ashamed if they saw me acting the groupie."

Meanwhile one American man, dressed in head-to-toe neon lycra, told our Sean Kelly: "I came all the way from the States just to see you!"

The former champ told the *Sunday World* he still does a "little bit of cycling just for leisure."

Rwandan champ Adrien Niyonshuti and his manager Jock Boyer were just relieved there were no monkeys in the Irish countryside.

The cheeky creatures are a nuisance back in Adrien's home country Rwanda, where Jock is based.

"They jump out in front of your bike and scare you", Jock said, adding that he is glad the gorillas are too shy to bother blokes on bikes."

Massacre

Adrian, whose six brothers were killed in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, says cycling has helped him come to terms with the horrific massacre. He was just seven when soldiers murdered most of his family 15 years ago, and now lives in South Africa, says: "Cycling is my life now."

His one remaining brother back in Rwanda will be watching the race with friends and neighbours on TV in a community hall in their home village.

"The people in Rwanda don't all have TVs in their homes. Most of them don't even have electricity", Jock, originally from California, explained.

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WILLIS: Devoted dad
Kids are the secret says Bruce

BY NEIL FETHERSTON

SUPER ex-husband Bruce Willis has put his perfect relationship with former wife Demi Moore down to his kids.

The *Die Hard* star says he would never have stayed friends with Demi following their split had it not been for their offspring and his devotion to them.

"It's a process like anything else," says Bruce on the secret of his relationship with Demi and her new husband, Ashton Kutcher.

"The easy part was putting the kids first. Everything else just follows that. That's the trick."

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