

Lessons from the Tour de France

Carlos Sastre won the Tour de France in Paris on Sunday. After three weeks and nearly 90 hours of racing he beat second-place Cadel Evans by just under one minute.

Sastre didn't gain the race-lead in steady increments over the three weeks, nor did he do it as a result of having a better sprint finish or even by making a break on a flat part of the course.

No, Sastre's victory was grounded in his decisive break along the hardest section of the 3,500 km Tour.

The 13km, 1 in 10 climb to the ski resort of L'Alpe d'Huez comes at the end of a 200km stage that includes two further gruelling mountain climbs. As Sastre said about his two-minute victory over main group of riders, or peloton, *"I suffered a lot on the way to the summit ...but I had to take the risk of attacking from the beginning of the Alpe d'Huez."*

In the business world we have daily evidence that the economy is taking a downturn. It is the sensible choice to hunker down, cut costs and bide your time in your own particular peloton. Then, as the economy picks up, you will be well placed to attack and grow.

However, there is an alternative strategy. Like Sastre you can pick the hardest part of the course to make your move. As your competitors focus on 'making it through' the fall-out from credit crunch, you have the opportunity to drive for longer-term growth and be way ahead of the competition when the economy improves.

In the past week both Amazon and McDonalds delivered profit results that beat market expectations. My belief is that the management of these two companies, possibly unlike some of their competitors, are now focused on how they can build on their growth momentum and establish an even bigger lead in the market.

At the bottom of L'Alpe d'Huez Carlos Sastre climbed out of his saddle, cranked through the gears and rode through the pain to the summit and ultimate victory in Paris. What's your strategy for long-term success through these difficult economic times?