



DOUBLE DUTCH: Six young cyclists from Holland have a bit of fun on their visit to Tuam.

Visiting Dutch riders like our cycling — and scenery

WRITING about specialist mountain cyclists from Holland is akin to scribbling about the Swiss sea angling team, or the Jamaican bob-sleigh team, in that the natural environment of their countries does not allow for the pursuit of excellence in their respective sports.

However, in order to overcome the lack of hills in their own patch, a group of Dutch cyclists from the TWC Tempo Veldhoven team last week arrived in Tuam where they stayed with the families of the club officers and had daily runs in the hills of Connemara and Achill as well as a series of punishing races for their 17-year-old members.

Team boss Henk Tinnens told *The Herald* that he was very pleased with the performance of his young charges in competition in Ireland.

The team are based in Veldhoven, a town with a population of about 40,000 located not far from Eindhoven, and they train twice weekly on one of the many auto-track circuits where they can practise safely without the danger of passing cars, as is the case in Ireland where aspiring cyclists have to hone their skills out on the open road.

"We have some mountains in the southern part of the

country, near the Belgian border, but this is the first time that these young riders have encountered hills like you have here in Ireland," explained Henk, who told me that cycling is still a very expensive sport in Holland and that the moment, the most impact the Dutch are making on the world cycling scene is on the junior scene.

"The lads have really enjoyed the scenery here. We were in Connemara and down in Achill and we visited Ashford Castle," he said, adding that because many of them had left their vacations to come on this trip, they were not as well prepared for the competition as they should have been, but upon their return they will be heading into a period of intensive training in readiness for their own national time trials.

Veldhoven is the location for one of the country's largest cycling classics, the annual Omloop der Kempen, which is organised by Henk and the other administrators of the TWV Tempo (Speed-Team) club. It's an event which requires mammoth organisation and which attracts thousands of cyclists and officials to the Dutch town, generating valuable revenue for the local economy.

Tuam cycling club officials David Burke and Seamus Quinn were accompanying the Dutch visitors during their trip and they were very pleased with the reaction of the group of six cyclists and six officials to the scenic beauty of Connemara and Achill.

Henk expressed the Dutch admiration for Irish cyclists, especially Stephen Roche and Sean Kelly, with Kelly coming in for special praise: "Roche was more of a one-night wonder, whereas Kelly was a top class cyclist for a lot longer. I feel Ireland are currently producing good junior cyclists who will be able to move into the senior ranks in a few years time."

This is the first time that the team have been to Ireland, although they have competed in Luxembourg, France and Belgium in the past, and Henk is hopeful that some of his team will be here participating in some of the classics in a few years time.

In last weekend's Egan Cup races, the novices gave it a good go in a tough field, with Henk's son Theo finishing 7th, Johann Van Grootel 18th; Ronald Van Boonen 25th; Patrick Van Ven 26th and Tom Deiling 31st.

— Declan Varley