

Britain's vanished Tour de France champion reappears - as a woman

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Known as "King of the Mountains", cyclist Robert Millar was Britain's best performer in the Tour de France and an inspiration to a generation of fans.

He was named BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 1984 and became an elder statesman of cycling once his racing days were over.

Then, four years ago, he simply disappeared - and even a year's research for a newly published biography failed to track him down.

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Then: Robert Millar during one of his epic Tour de France rides, Now: Philippa York pictured near her home this week

But as the latest Tour de France starts in London today, the Daily Mail can reveal that Millar, 48, will never be able to use the title "King of the Mountains" again.

For the powerful sporting hero who once failed a drugs test for having too much testosterone is now living as a woman under the name Philippa York in a Dorset village.

A neighbour said last night: "Everyone knows Philippa used to be a man but is too polite to speak to her about her previous life."

"She still likes cycling - you often see her on her bike, in all the gear, and with her long hair sticking out the sides of her cycling helmet."

Robert Millar was raised in the Gorbals district of Glasgow, and his talent was spotted when he was a teenage engineering apprentice.

He later moved to France and swiftly established a Tour de France record which exceeds that of any other British cyclist.

Over 11 years he finished in the top 20 five times, had three wins in the mountain stages, and in 1984 was awarded the polka dot jersey given to the man named King of the Mountains for the best performance at altitude.

He is the only English-speaking cyclist to reach Paris in the polka dot jersey and the only Briton to stand on the Tour de France podium in the Champs Elysees.

But he remained an enigma, scarcely speaking to other cyclists or anyone else. His motivation for his ferocious mountain climbs remained a mystery.

Millar once said in a terse interview: "The mountains are the only chance I get of making the other guys suffer. But I have to suffer that much to make them suffer that I don't enjoy it."

In 1985, he married Frenchwoman Sylvie Transler, but his family did not attend the ceremony. The couple had a son, but the marriage soon ended.

Unusually in cycling, Millar was a vegetarian - but despite his fanaticism about avoiding chemicals, he failed a drugs test in 1992, when he was found to have too high a testosterone count.

He was fined £1,100 and given a three-month ban, but continued to be a leading figure in cycling.

Seven years ago, the first inkling of something unusual in his life came when he was seen in pigtails and with a suggestion of breasts under his top. A friend said at the time: "Every time we meet him he seems to have a bigger chest, but he won't talk about it."

In 2003, he suddenly disappeared from his home in Daventry, Northamptonshire. In fact, the Daily Mail has discovered, Millar had changed his name to Philippa York and moved to a £350,000 three-bed home in Dorset with girlfriend Linda Purr, 46.

Miss York is now retired, and this week was busy in the garage repairing a motorbike. She refused to discuss her previous life.

Miss Purr, who works for North Dorset district council, similarly refused to make any comment.

When Millar became one of a select few chosen for the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame four years ago, he did not make contact with the organisers, never mind turn up for the ceremony.

The author of the new book *In Search of Robert Millar*, sports journalist Richard Moore, failed to get any clue to his hero's whereabouts in a year's research, but did eventually exchange e-mails with him.

In one, asked where he'd disappeared to, the former Robert Millar wrote: "Disappeared? Not really. Moved on, relaxed, chilled, or only doing things that please me."