Beat: Sports

Pogacar leads a monumental 2026 Vuelta battle from Monaco all the way to Granada

Cycling Tour of Spain

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USPA NEWS - The 2026 Vuelta a España will launch this Saturday from the Principality of Monaco, setting the tone for a three-week contest designed to sustain tension from the opening kilometre to the showdown in Granada on September 13. With Tadej Pogacar headlining the start list, the race immediately acquires the aura of a heavyweight edition, one that gathers the most influential teams in the WorldTour and promises a narrative shaped by ambition, hierarchy and endurance.

The 2026 Vuelta a España will begin this Saturday in the Principality of Monaco with a route designed to maintain competitive tension from the opening day until the final arrival in Granada on September 13. The presence of Tadej Pogacar, one of the major bosses of the world peloton, raises the interest of an edition that will bring together the main teams of the international circuit: UAE Team Emirates, Alpecin Premier Tech, Bahrain Victorious, Decathlon CMA CGM Team, EF Education Easy Post, Groupama FDJ United, Netcompany INEOS Cycling Team, Lidl Trek, Lotto Intermarché, Movistar Team, NSN Cycling Team, Red Bull BORA Hansgrohe, Soudal Quick Step, Team Jayco AlUla, Team Picnic PostNL, Team Visma | Lease a Bike, Uno X Mobility, XDS Astana Team, Tudor Pro Cycling Team, Pinarello Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team, Cofidis, Burgos Burpellet BH, Equipo Kern Pharma. The variety of the route will require riders to master technical time trials, selective summit finishes and demanding stages capable of blowing up the general classification at any moment.

The race will open with a technical time trial through the streets of Monaco, where time trial specialists and explosive rouleurs will chase the first red jersey on a fast course that rewards precision. The second stage, between Monaco and Manosque, will be the longest of the edition, with technical terrain at the start and a favourable approach for sprinters—provided their teams can control the breakaway attempts of the most daring attackers. The third stage, between Gruissan and Font Romeu, will mark the beginning of the mountains with the Col de Mont Louis as the first serious climb before the summit finish, where the grimpeurs should reduce the GC group.

The Andorra stage, short but very tough, will link Envalira, Beixalís, Ordino and La Comella—ideal terrain for pure climbers and for GC leaders to show their first cards. The fifth stage, between Falset and Roquetes, will offer an opportunity for breakaway riders and for sprinter teams that must work to ensure a fast finish. The sixth stage, between Alcocebre and Castelló, will include a gravel sector on the ascent to Bartolo, a perfect scenario for classics specialists and puncheurs who handle sterrato well. The seventh stage will finish at Aramón Valdelinares, the second summit finish, where strong climbers and endurance specialists can make differences. The eighth stage, between Puçol and Xeraco, will be the last chance for sprinters in the first week, provided they survive the climb to Barx. The ninth stage will close the week with more than 5,000 metres of elevation gain and six climbs, including El Miserat and the summit finish at Aitana—a day that can break the race under Mediterranean heat and where endurance riders must manage fatigue.

After the first rest day, the tenth stage between Alcaraz and Elche de la Sierra will offer rolling terrain where transition riders and breakaway specialists may have options. The following day, between Cartagena and Lorca, will be favourable for sprinters if they overcome the Morrón de Totana. The twelfth stage, between Vera and Calar Alto, will bring back the high mountains with the traditional Velefique–Calar Alto double ascent, decisive for GC contenders and pure climbers. The thirteenth stage, between Almuñécar and Loja, will be rolling and difficult to control, suitable for strong riders or resilient sprinters capable of handling the climbs. The fourteenth stage will take the peloton to Sierra de la Pandera, where any weakness can end the GC hopes of team leaders. The fifteenth stage, between Palma del Río and Córdoba, will present punchy terrain before the rest day, with a classics style profile and opportunities for small groups of puncheurs and classics riders.

The third week will begin with an opportunity for sprinters in the stage between Cortegana and La Rábida, with possible crosswinds in the final kilometres. The seventeenth stage, between Dos Hermanas and Sevilla, will be the flattest of the edition and should end in a sprint. The eighteenth stage, between El Puerto de Santa María and Jerez, will offer the second time trial, exposed to wind and key for rouleurs and specialists in prolonged efforts. The nineteenth stage, between Vélez?Málaga and Peñas Blancas, will accumulate difficulty in the Serranía de Ronda before the summit finish, with real chances for the breakaway. The twentieth stage will be the last

major mountain day, with more than 5,000 metres of climbing and a double ascent of Hazallanas, with El Purche in between, before the decisive Collado del Alguacil—an ideal scenario for grimpeurs and GC riders.

The race will conclude in Granada with an urban stage that includes the climb to the Alhambra, perfect for puncheurs and explosive riders, where the winner of the 2026 Vuelta will be crowned.

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