

Something has changed in the 25th season, we interview Levante Fuji Shizuoka who continues their winning streak

Levante Fuji Shizuoka is a community-based cycle racing team supported by JATCO. The team, which is based at the Fuji City Cycle Station "Fujikuru", right next to the JATCO 1 District, had never won a race since its inception in 2020 until last season. But this year, we're halfway through the season and we've already won four races. Let's unravel the mystery behind this rapid progress.



Road racing is not an individual sport, it is a team sport.

We asked Mario Takanashi, who is leading the team as captain this season, about the differences from last season. Then I began to understand why the team has become so strong this season.



Team captain Mario Takanashi

The first is the attitude of going for the win as a team.

If you've ever seen the manga Yowamushi Pedal, you may know that road racing is a team sport. Riders with different characteristics - some who are good on slopes, some who can produce explosive power for a moment, some who can cruise for long periods of time, and some who are good on courses with lots of ups and downs - will help each other out and shape the course. The deciding factor in the race is how well you can bring the strongest athletes to the final sprint, the moment when you make an all-out attack before the finish line.

"There has been a lot more communication between players this season. We communicated with each other during the race and controlled how things were going." Captain Takanashi Mario's words are filled with confidence. This also shows how strong the bond between the players is this season. This is because communication has deepened not only during practice but also on a daily basis, which has enabled them to understand each other better and fight as a united team.

Another factor is the presence of new player Siim Kiskonen.

In one-word, Estonian athlete Siimu Kiskonen is a strategist. He is known for his skill at positioning himself well during the race, his ability to lead the team while responding flexibly to ever-changing race developments, and his role as the team's brain, including discussing racing styles with team members in advance.

In addition to his dedicated training, Kiskonen's attitude towards cycling seems to be a great inspiration to other riders; he even creates programs to measure, calculate, and analyze air resistance, rolling resistance, and drivetrain losses.

With the team's strength, we are now able to send players to win based on the characteristics of the course.

All four wins this season have been won by different players.

The Challenge Cycle Road Race, held at the Japan Cycle Sports Center in Shuzenji, Izu in April, featured a challenging course with many ups and downs. The team went into the race determined to help Ryota Tokoi, who is the strongest on this course, win, and he went on to take a brilliant victory.

And this is where Levante's winning streak began!



About a month later, on May 3rd, at the KINAN AACUP Round 4 held along the Nagara River in Gifu Prefecture, Siim Kiskonen won the 100km race by breaking away alone in the final 2km.

At the Kiso Village Road Race held in Kiso Village, Nagano Prefecture on May 12th, Mario Takanashi finished in first place despite being an open participant.

At the Ontake Hill Climb held in Kiso County, Nagano Prefecture on May 18th, two of Levante's proud climbers took an unexpected one-two finish. Sharma Kanta won first place, and Yamaguchi Eiji came in second. When we interviewed Sharma Kanta immediately after the race, he told us, "The runner in front of us had gotten away, but with some fierce pulling from Yamaguchi Eiji we were able to catch up." Once again, the team's determination to win was apparent in the result.



Going to win the All Japan Championship 🏆

The All-Japan Cycling Championships Road Race, Japan's most prestigious race, will be held at the Japan Cycle Sports Center in Shuzenji, Izu from June 21st to 22nd. From Levante, four riders are scheduled to participate: all-rounder and ace Tokoi, captain Takanashi Mario from Fujinomiya, Levante Mountain god Yamaguchi Eiji, a current Shizuoka University student, and young top climber Sharma Kanta.

When we spoke to team representative Nito, he said, "The players are in very good condition, and everyone has a chance. Maybe it will happen!" He said with a confident smile.

Levante is strong this year! This is a great opportunity to watch the fierce race to decide Japan's best from up close. Please come to the venue and join in calling out the players' names!

