

Track and Field



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A Triumph of Perseverance

It took six attempts at the Strasbourg to Paris race, and more than 3,000 km of training, before the Belgian Robert Schouckens succeeded in winning the world's most famous long-distance walking event. His victory came in June 1977, after he had covered a distance of 507 km in 64 h 11 min 25 sec, and the achievement was a triumph of perseverance and courage. This mason from Binche had worked out all the details of this race so as to meet the favorite Josy Simon on equal terms. In order to succeed, 49-year-old Schouckens lost 4 kg during his four days on the road; he sensibly waited until reaching the plains of Champagne, near Mourmelon with its famous military camp, before attacking his rivals. The Belgian champion had worked his race out well, and was subsequently able, during the next 230 km, to keep at bay a challenge by his competitor from Luxembourg, Josy Simon. A local fair was in progress as he crossed the finishing line in the rain, under all the bunting and decorations; and he chose this moment to announce his retirement from competition. This was in fact his 25th anniversary as a competitor in this field, and he had known

all its joys as well as many of its disappointments. In Strasbourg in 1974, for example, he had been forced to withdraw before the start.

An engagingly uncomplicated walker, he is typical of the sportsman who enjoys prolonged effort, and he has been helped in his career by his wife and two children, Vincent (9) and Jean-Pierre (23). Before embarking on this event, which is one of the toughest in the world of sport, Robert Schouckens had been a speed-walker, and a brilliant international performer for Belgium. He became the second Belgian to win the Strasbourg-Paris, following Robert Rinchart's treble in 1973, 1974 and 1976.

ROBERT SCHOUCKENS

Born May 27, 1928, in Binche, BEL

AWARDS AND RECORDS

Belgian 20 km race-track champion 1961, 1962, 1964, 1968; 50 km champion 1961, 1962, 1964, 1968; 100 km champion 1973, 1974
Belgian record holder over 20 km (1 h 32:57.4); 50 km (4 h 39:29)
Laureate of Lothier Challenge 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965; winner of 12-Hour Marcinelles 1961, 1962; of Besançon 1973; of Ouche Valley Circuit 1972; of Nancy 1972; of 6-Hour Saint-Nazaire 1973, 1974; of Mons 1977
Winner of Strasbourg-Paris 1977 at an average speed of 7.9 km/h

June 1977: Schouckens reaching Paris: 6 years of suffering for 64 h 11: 25 of happiness!