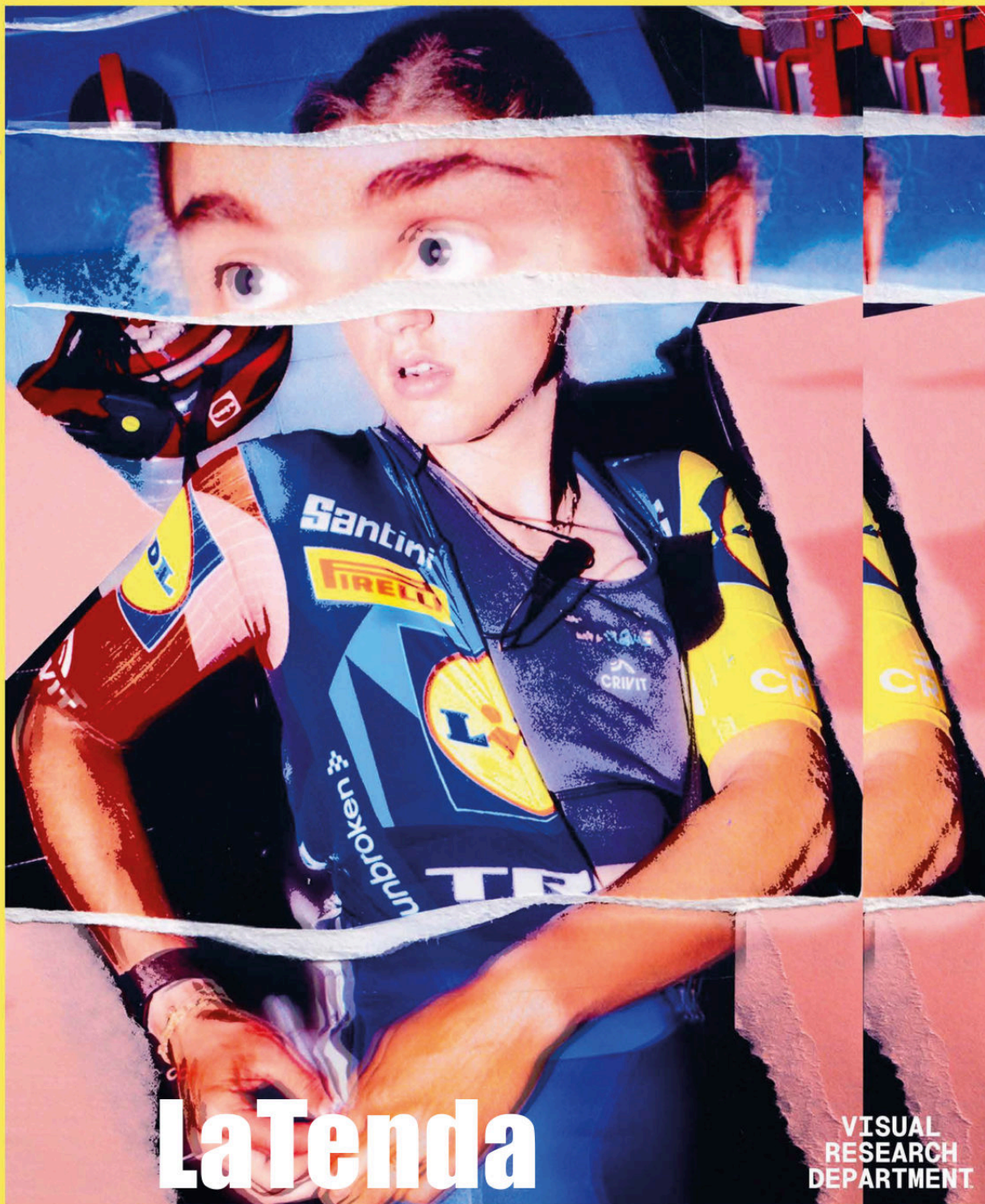


The neutral zone doesn't  
start at kilometre zero.  
It ends at the **black curtain.**

SUBJECT: LIDL | DIRECTIVE: A QUIET RESISTANCE TO THE DISPOSABLE



GIRO D'ITALIA WOMEN - 37TH EDITION  
30 MAY - 07 JUNE 2026

# NERA

# THE KILOMETRES THAT DON'T COUNT

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE BUS, SIGN-ON, KM 0  
AND THE RETURN BEHIND THE BLACK CURTAIN.

## 01 CESENATICO → RAVENNA

BUS ● — 0.9 KM — ○ — 3.8 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 2.7 KM — ● BUS

44.20248, 12.40420 44.42109, 12.22688

## 02 RONCADE → CAORLE

BUS ● — 1.3 KM — ○ — 10.0 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 0.3 KM — ● BUS

45.63798, 12.37465 45.59591, 12.87978

## 03 BIBIONE → BUJA

BUS ● — 0.8 KM — ○ — 9.0 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 1.4 KM — ● BUS

45.63852, 13.05044 46.21000, 13.12600

## 04 BELLUNO → NEVEGAL

BUS ● — 1.0 KM — ○ — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 22.6 KM — ● BUS

46.14540, 12.21420 46.14540, 12.21420

## 05 LONGARONE → SANTO STEFANO DI CADORE

BUS ● — 0.3 KM — ○ — 6.4 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 0.55 KM — ● BUS

46.27830, 12.30900 46.55850, 12.55150

## 06 ALA → BRESCELLO

BUS ● — 1.9 KM — ○ — 3.9 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 2.1 KM — ● BUS

45.76820, 11.00672 44.90100, 10.51500

## 07 SORBOLO MEZZANI → SALICE TERME

BUS ● — TBC — ○ — 10.4 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 1.9 KM — ● BUS

START COORDINATE TBC 44.91500, 9.02600

## 08 RIVOLI → SESTRIERE

BUS ● — 0.6 KM — ○ — 2.0 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 0.8 KM — ● BUS

45.07000, 7.52000 44.95550, 6.87900

## 09 SALUZZO → SALUZZO

BUS ● — 0.6 KM — ○ — 4.4 KM — | KM 0 ..... | FINISH — 2.5 KM — ● BUS

44.64838, 7.49994 44.64838, 7.49994





In professional cycling,  
there is almost nowhere  
left unseen.

But before any of that,  
there is the bus.



# The Black Curtain

## La Tenda Nera

On this baking May day, the heat is heavy on Italy's Adriatic coast. It's unseasonably warm - the kind of suffocating sunshine which leaves your skin perpetually sticky, t-shirt uncomfortably tight, brow carrying a light sheen of moisture. There is some respite to be found in the subtle breeze, wafting its way slowly through springtime air. Though minimal, it causes leaves on trees to flicker, sends grass into a gentle dance, and makes the black curtain covering the door to the team bus twitch.

This thin piece of fabric, moving slowly with the wind, separates the personal from the public. It is the entry to bike racing's waiting room, where both nothing and everything happens. Most of us will never see beyond it, because what lies there is a space intended to be sacred. Fans may strain their necks for a peek, watching people go in and out with interest, but they will never be granted a ticket to pass through that black curtain. The place behind it is reserved, indisputably, irrevocably, for bike riders and the staff around them.

**Just this once though, we will invite you in.**

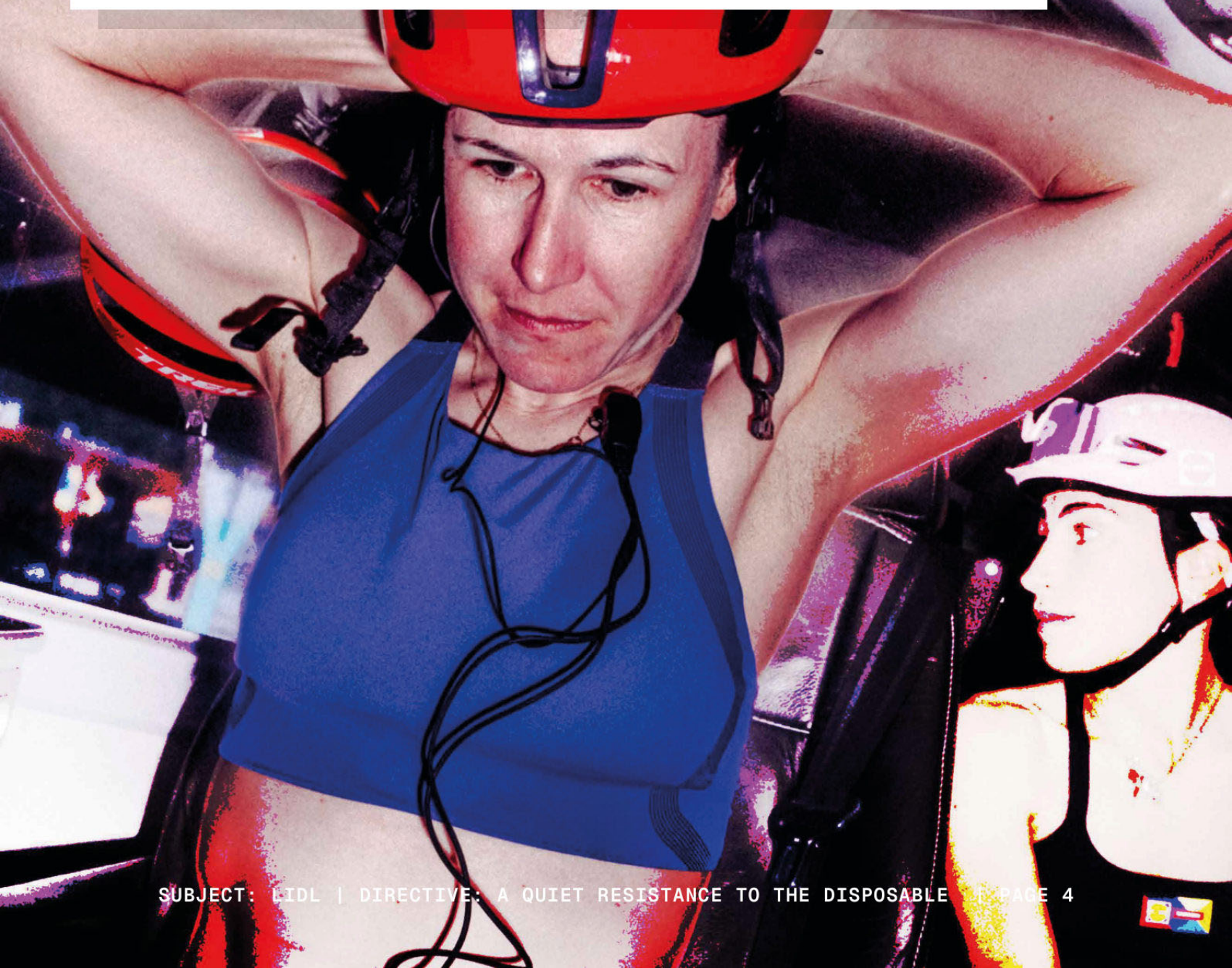




**“Whatever happens on the bus,  
as soon as you step off,  
it’s over.”**

The bus almost feels like our home when we’re on tour. We’re constantly changing hotels and environments, but the bus is the one thing that stays the same. It’s where we focus before the race, but also where we have the hard conversations afterwards. Sometimes it gets emotional, but whatever happens in that moment on the bus, as soon as you step off, it’s over. In this crazy circus where there are always people and media around, the bus is the one place you can escape, communicate freely and reset for the next day.

**AMANDA SPRATT**





A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue tank top, is looking directly at the camera with a playful, slightly pouting expression. She is sitting on a bus, and a red and blue bag with a yellow 'Mips' tag is visible next to her. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting the interior of a vehicle.

**“The hotel is where we sleep, but the rest happens on the bus.”**

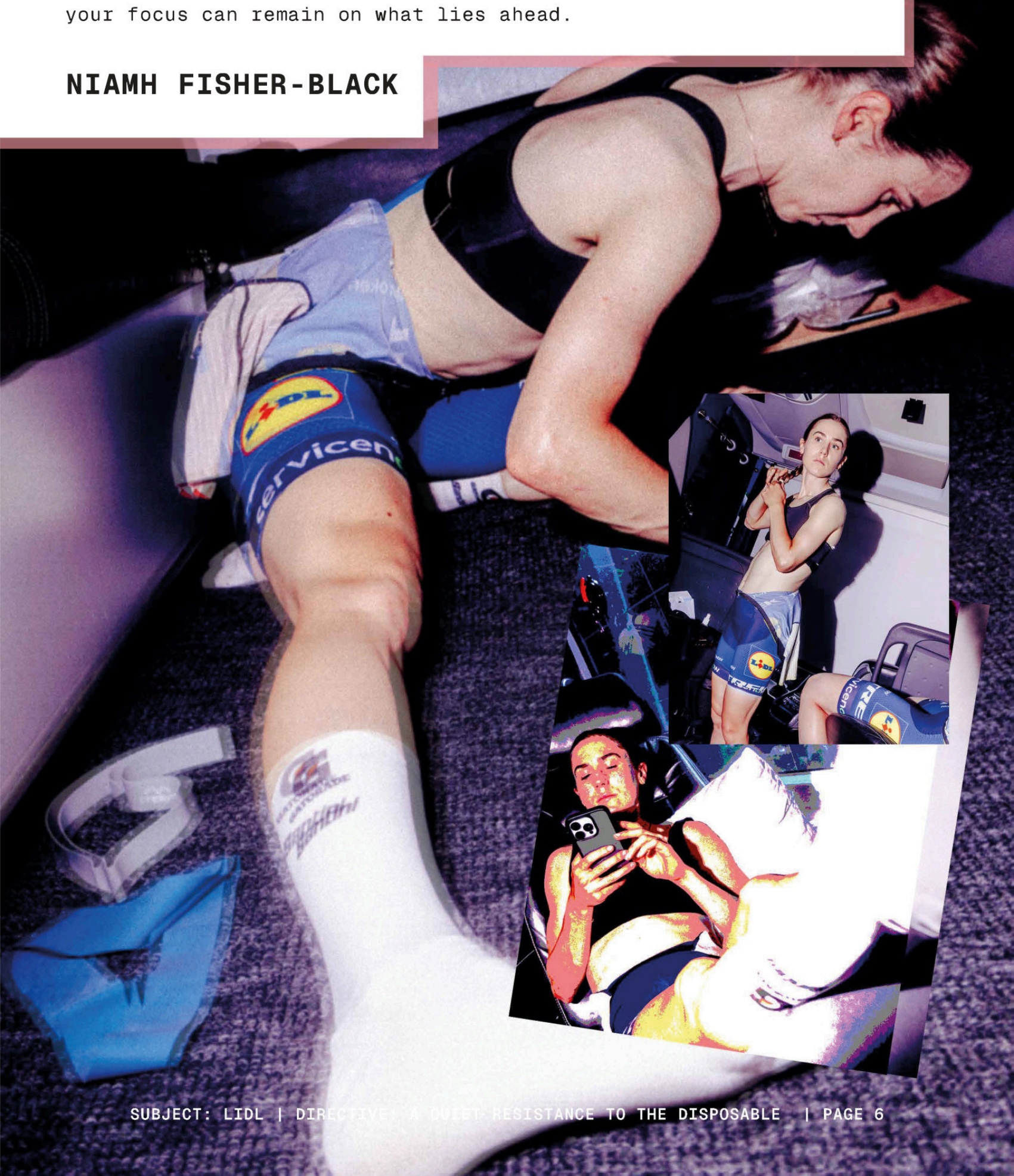
For me the team bus feels like a **little piece of home** because we spend so much time there, especially during a stage race like the Giro. You can relax when you're tired, recover, read, do Sudoku or call your family. Before the race, everything happens there too: the meeting, eating, stretching, preparing. The hotel is where we sleep and have massage, but the rest happens on the bus. It's a place of routine and focus, but also somewhere to reset and process.

**FLEUR MOORS**



The bus is a place of familiarity. We're constantly moving from place to place, sometimes not even sure where we are, but the bus remains constant. In a Grand Tour you create your own little organised chaos around your seat and keep returning to it. Athletes are creatures of habit and we relish control, so having that routine and familiarity helps counter the uncertainty of racing. The more automatic the preparation becomes, the more your focus can remain on what lies ahead.

## NIAMH FISHER-BLACK



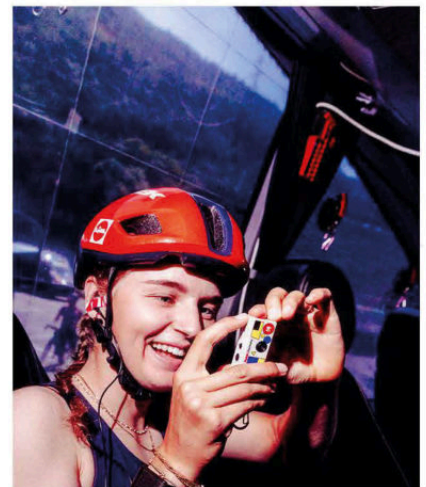
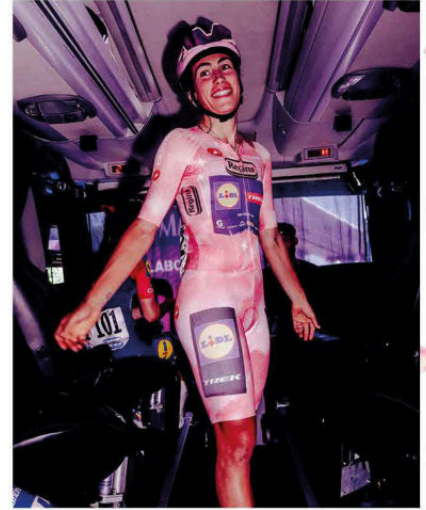


**“You make  
your  
own  
organised  
chaos.”**



It's an exciting morning at the Giro d'Italia Women. Elisa Balsamo is wearing the maglia rosa as race leader for the first time in her career - a true honour for an Italian rider. She's pinning her numbers on her pink jersey with pride, sitting on the front seat of the bus, a spot reserved for the head of the team. Her dark hair is plaited neatly into a tight braid, pushed back from her face with an intensity that says: "this is game day, and nothing will get in my way."

She listens to the voice of her sports director explaining the team's tactics for the stage. He squints as the projector casts changing shapes against the white light on his forehead. Lidl-Trek will sprint for Balsamo today, he tells the group, with the aim of helping her realise her lifetime dream of winning a Giro stage wearing pink. Once he is finished and his powerpoint screen closes, Balsamo speaks. The Italian instructs her teammates where she would like to be positioned in the closing kilometres, pointing out road narrowings and roundabouts, and outlines how her lead-out must work. She is not afraid to ask for what she wants. Today, she believes she can win.



**WORDS:**  
**RACHEL JARY**







The team's experienced road captain, Lucinda Brand, chimes in next. She is also all instruction, focus and planning. Her words are clear and sharp, filled with unshakeable intent. The team bus is the place for this. There are no rivals nearby to hear these conversations or cameras catching the Dutchwoman's words. **Here is a place for truth,** because the black curtain is a barrier to the noise outside.

Some riders are quieter. The general classification hopefuls, Niamh Fisher-Black and Isabella Holmgren sit silently in the meeting. This day, for them, is about getting through safely without losing any time. They don't have the pressure to win that their sprinter does, but the race can be lost here if they allow their concentration to lapse. There is palpable tension in the air as the team bus squeezes the varying emotions of six bike riders into one confined space. Nerves, laughter, ambition, focus: it is a cocktail of feelings that will be shaken once the race begins.



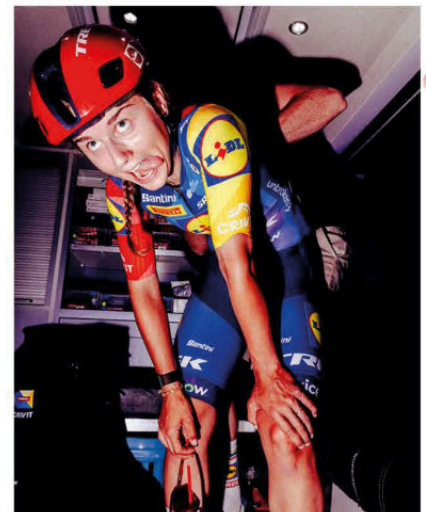
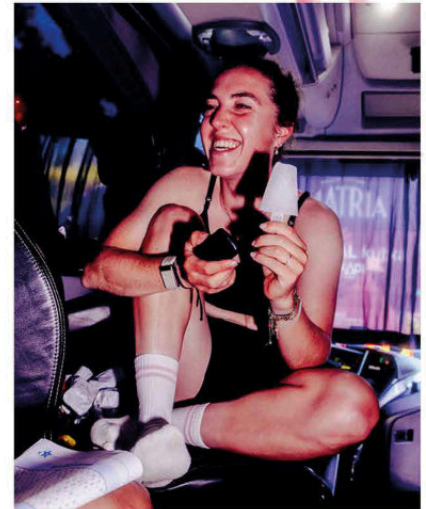
Once the meeting is done, final preparations begin. The staff step off, and these last moments belong solely to the riders. Some fix each other's hair and tape radios to their ears. Others make phone calls home, taking messages of advice and good luck from those who aren't on the road with them. Fisher-Black heads to the back of the bus to stretch, her slender limbs moving like elastic as she primes her body for the suffering it will endure this week. Fleur Moors, the team's young Belgian talent who is riding her maiden Giro, keeps her mind occupied with Sudoku, absentmindedly sucking on an ice lolly as she pens her puzzle.



Each rider has made their bus chair their own. Hairbands, books, games, headphones and good luck charms are scattered around them. These items will come with them this week, small comforts and consistency in an unpredictable sport where everything can change in an instant. This is what the bus gives them: a home away from home, safety in a stressful world. Space for honesty and respite, where no one else is listening.

Because once that curtain opens and they step outside into the heat of the day, everything changes. The timer starts on a day of scrutiny. Television crews, journalists, fans - eyes are everywhere. Performances are analysed intensely, actions are immortalised through live broadcasts. Bike racing is practiced exclusively in public spaces, it is only the bus which imposes limits.

So away they go, free from their metal box and into the hungry jaws of the world outside. The racing happens and Balsamo wins, just like she said she would that morning. A powerful, unmatched sprint gives her that elusive victory and the noise from the Italian tifosi is deafening. Flashes of cameras. Shouts of her name. Microphones waved in her face. She accepts flowers and champagne on the podium and she basks in the applause of her home nation. This is as good as it gets.





But then it is over. Afterwards, she returns to the bus and through the black curtain. The other riders have already left in team cars and are speeding back to their hotel, not waiting for the rigmarole of the podium to be complete. It is only Balsamo on the bus then. As soon as she steps inside, the noise stops and everything is there as she left it in the morning. The last five hours have been lived at the height of intensity, but on the bus it is silent. Nothing has changed.

She showers, she gets dressed, and she eats a bowl of rice. The glamour of victory is short-lived. A team bus can humble you like that.

Tomorrow, it will all happen again. Repetition. Routine. Ritual. Helmets hanging on the windows, race numbers sitting on tables, energy gels waiting in cupboards, a quiet whir of the coffee machine. Outside, there will be a different Italian town, the sun might have turned to rain and the fans will have new faces, but the bus won't have changed. Plans, emotions and outcome might be different, but they will still only be reserved for the few granted permission to come inside.

For everyone else, the **black curtain** is drawn.



Before the race the bus is a mix of nerves and excitement. Having a routine, getting my nutrition ready, cleaning my shoes and checking the route, helps distract my mind and prepares me for the start. After racing it becomes something completely different. You return, organise your things, talk through what happened and begin thinking about recovery and the next day. Almost everything disappears in those first moments back on the bus after a race.

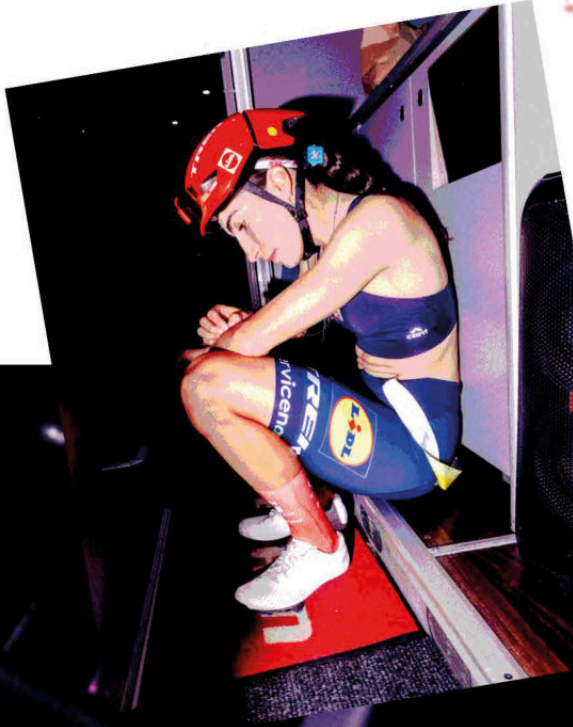
ISABELLA HOLMGREN

**“Almost everything disappears.”**





The bus is a safe place where we can stay quiet and start to focus before the race. It's also where we build something together as a team and where we can speak openly because it is just between us. After racing we have a rule: first we slow down, shower and let the adrenaline drop. Only then, if something went wrong, do we start to talk about it. If you immediately start pointing fingers while the adrenaline is still high, everything becomes worse.

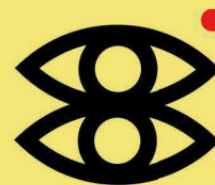


ELISA BALSAMO

**"The bus lets you  
quiet down before  
you start  
speaking."**







► PLEASE SEE BELOW A LETTER THAT EXISTS TO MAKE OUR POSITION CLEAR

\*ARCHIVE INDEX  
VISUAL RESEARCH DEPARTMENT  
RECORD // VRD.001  
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CLASSIFICATION:  
PUBLIC POSITION  
-----

SUBJECT:  
HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT  
-----

METHOD:  
EMBEDDED OBSERVATION  
-----

ARCHIVE NOTE:  
THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE  
READ BEFORE EXPECTATIONS  
FORM AROUND OUTPUT, SPEED  
OR CO-OPERATION

To whom it my concern.

Visual Research Department operates as an ongoing observational study into human achievement.

The study sits at the intersection of story, science and lived practice. It is concerned not only with outcomes, but with how ideas, technologies, and ambitions are conceived and carried forward.

Story is central.

Not as a narrative device, but as a structural necessity. Human achievement unfolds as sequence. Intention precedes action. Hypotheses are formed. Tools are introduced. Methods evolve. Progress is made, stalled, revised, or abandoned. But without continuity and commitment to story, these processes are fragmented.

Our research approach is therefore embedded rather than extractive. We remain present from the early stages of conception through periods of adjustment and uncertainty.

If you are reading this as a partner, collaborator, or institution, it is shared in the spirit of alignment. It should be read before expectations form around output, speed or co-operation.

If you recognise the value of remaining present through uncertainty, iteration, and long-term development, alignment is likely.

If you require immediate resolution, simplified narratives, this document will feel incomplete.

This study is ongoing. It accumulates rather than concludes.

Story remains central. Research remains active. Observation continues.

VRD is a quiet resistance to the disposable.

/

ALL CORRESPONDENCE [archive@visualresearchdepartment.com](mailto:archive@visualresearchdepartment.com)

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RECEIPT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I confirm that I have read  
and understood the position  
outlined in VRC.004

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SIGNATURE .....

DATE .....

STUDIES  
IN HUMAN  
ACHIEVEMENT

