

Tour de France draws smaller sponsors

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After the doping scandals, big-name sponsors are not as common. Now the Tour de France offers smaller companies a big TV audience.

As the world's top cyclists spend three weeks speeding across the French countryside in July, viewers of the Tour de France may find themselves wondering: Who the heck are all these companies with their names plastered on the riders' jerseys? When a rider sporting an Agritubel jersey speeds from the front of the pack in yet another doomed breakaway, for example, even French viewers could be forgiven for not knowing that the company is a leading maker of dairy farming equipment.

Big-name sponsors are fairly rare at the Tour de France, especially after doping scandals in recent years helped drive away companies such as Deutsche Telekom's (DT) T-Mobile or sportswear maker Adidas (ADSG.DE). But the absence of marquee brands is an opportunity for midsize companies to gain international exposure for a relatively low price.

Global exposure for a few million

Many teams operate on budgets of less than \$10 million, and some of the cost is shared by secondary sponsors. So for a few million, companies such as Taiwanese mobile-phone maker HTC or the Netherlands' Rabobank gain a global TV audience. (A major motivation for riders to break away from the pack, even when their chances of winning are zero, is that the time out in front brings extra TV exposure for the sponsor.)

These economics make for a cast of corporate sponsors that are every bit as colorful as the riders' Lycra outfits. Sponsors of Tour de France teams range from national lotteries to flooring-product makers to petro-dictatorships. To keep track as the riders make their way to the finale in Paris on July 26, check out our slide show of the teams and their main financial supporters.

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