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The Tour De France Is One Of The Best Known Sporting Spectacles In The World, And It Is To Be Hoped That The 2011 Tour Will Live Up To The Standard Of Past Events

One of the toughest sporting contests in the world is the Tour De France, the yearly cycling extravaganza which happens during a three week period every summer, and during which the greatest road racers in the world participate in around about twenty different stages of racing and travel a distance of near enough 2,000 miles. The event is an incredible feat of endurance and has been compared to completing several marathons during a similar three week time span.

The Tour has a fascinating history and was first arranged in 1903, having been organised by a newspaper editor as a means to put a competing publication out of business, by exclusively printing coverage of this amazing event. Over the history of the event, the format of the competition has evolved, with entrants made up of all-comers, regional and national teams and commercial teams of cyclists at different times. It has also tried having one stage outside of France in nearby European countries (including in the UK in 2007). But two specifics are always the same – most of the numerous stages take place on a fairly circuitous route around France, and usually alternate between a clockwise race one year and a counter-clockwise one the next year. The end stage always finishes in Paris, in front of many applauding and enthusiastic cycling fans, though the event doesn't bother with the glitzy 'closing ceremony' with fireworks and Laser eye light displays in the same way as many other large sporting events.

There are generally approximately twenty teams participating in the event, each with nine team members. Team-mates are allowed to help each other, and all the teams have their own back-up staff of mechanics and managers who follow along behind the race in cars so that they can resolve any difficulties which arise along the route.

As anyone who has ever witnessed the race will remember, the cyclists are preceded on the course by a huge number of sponsored vehicles which promote their specific products and hand out free gifts and advertising leaflets to the waiting spectators. It is said that there are generally around 250 vehicles taking part in the parade each year and each business will have paid a hefty amount of money for the privilege of being able to publicise their product range at such a world famous event.

The very first business to pay for the privilege of preceding the Tour was a chocolate maker – today, it could be that almost any product would be acceptable – from cars to jewellery, tooth whitening to Laser eye surgery, mobile phones to restaurants, and undoubtedly food and drink (the healthy kinds anyway). As the Tour De France is the most viewed annual sporting occasion in the world through the French TV footage, it's unsurprising that businesses are keen to pay good money to be involved.

In each individual stage of the race, every participant will have his finishing time noted, and as the Tour progresses, the timings for the stages are added to those for previous stages, giving an total score for each rider. Timing technology is now so efficient that each rider is tracked individually by a transponder fitted to their bicycle which records each time they pass one of the marker wires along the course and possibly it is only a matter of time before [Laser eye](#) beams are used rather than actual wires. The rider with the lowest aggregate score is the Tour leader and goes on to wear the well known yellow jersey throughout the next stage. Prizes are also given for winning each stage, but this way of scoring does mean that potentially a rider could end up as the overall winner without ever winning an individual stage, as has happened on a few occasions. Just being consistent throughout the three weeks can give a far superior overall time than the total time for a rider who might ride quickly on the flatter areas of the Tour, but find the mountainous stages more challenging, for example.

The other jersey which most casual viewers of the sport will have heard of is the King Of The Mountains. This is a white jersey with red dots which is allocated to the rider who has earned the most points for reaching the top of specified mountains and hills ahead of all the other participants. Since the route of the event could easily go through the Alps or the Pyrenees, it's not surprising that such a category would be in place to reward those cyclists who are the field leaders in such steep and difficult climbs.

A similar competition exists for those who finish at the front in the less mountainous stages and again points are given based on the rider's finishing position when passing over the finish line. The leader of this competition will then wear a green jersey for the following stage. By now it is quite clear that the Tour De France does actually include a few different ways for competitors to gain points, praise and maybe most importantly, money.

The 2011 race will start on 2nd July and it will be the 98th occasion on which the event has taken place (the missing dates being during both World Wars) and it is anticipated that this year's event will be just as exciting as those we remember from years past. It is also to be hoped that there won't be suspicion of the doping scandals which have plagued the sport of cycling over recent years. There are a handful of legal methods of enhancing performance, for example the golfers who have [Laser eye surgery](#) to enhance the standard of their vision, but taking illegal preparations is wrong in all sport.

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