

Collectibles at the Tour de France



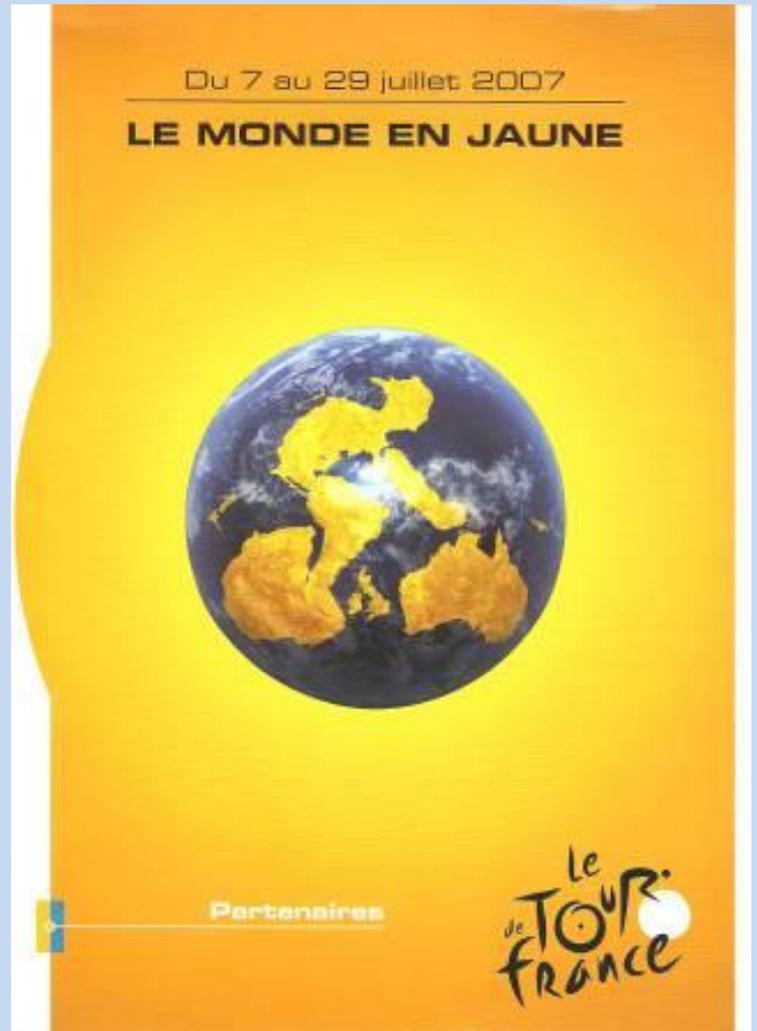
By George Vrechek

This year's logo included "The World in Yellow" with the world turning into a rider

The Tour de France has certainly had a rough go of it lately, continually trying to clean its laundry and still finding dirty clothes in the corners. This year's tour leader, Michael Rasmussen, got axed by his team during the tour ostensibly for not reporting where he was the previous month. Nonetheless the 104-year old event survived with 189 initial riders racing through four countries, over 2,200 miles in 23 days. Past leaders were missing like Lance Armstrong, Jan Ulrich, Ivan Basso, and Floyd Landis; however, new faces emerged such as the top three finishers/survivors: Alberto Contador (Discovery Channel) of Spain, Cadel Evans (Predictor-Lotto) of Australia and Levi Leipheimer (Discovery Channel) of Santa Rosa, California.

Lance Armstrong's partial interest in the Discovery team continued a U.S. presence among the podium winners although it was sad to learn that the Discovery team will disband by year end. The event draws international attention as the team composition reflects the international flavor. Many teams like Discovery and CSC have a truly international composition. Team CSC, for example, is based in Denmark with a U.S. corporate sponsor, a team leader from Spain (Carlos Sastre), two U.S. riders Christian Vande Velde and David Zabriskie plus six other riders from six different countries.

Now the important question for sports collectors is what kind of collectibles does this international event produce that would be fun to have? Fortunately I am able to ask a number of knowledgeable people including a close relative, our daughter Anna Vrechek, who worked at this year's Tour de France. I also had the opportunity to interview cycling's number one collector, Brett Horton.



Anna Vrechek was front and center at the start of stage 9 at Val-d'Isère, Photo by Michael Moore



Unlike baseball, football and basketball there aren't any balls to get signed. It is a little hard to pick up an extra \$8,000 tour bike and have it signed. In the U.S. we produce cardboard trading cards for just about every popular sport, thereby getting us into the sorting, trading and organizing aspect of a collection. The rest of the world hasn't embraced the cardboard the way we have. In fact, cardboard hands have been banned at the tour since a fan's errant wave of an enlarged cardboard hand sliced the arm of tour leader Thor Hushovd in last year's race. What is available for fans?

Hats, Visors, Bags, Bottles and Chatzkees

Corporate sponsors like LCL Bank, Champion, and Skoda are inclined to give away practical items for fans standing in the sun for hours such as hats and visors with LCL or Skoda on them, or the Champion King of the Mountain polka dot rider hats. Popular purchase items are hats, T-shirts and replica jerseys - the polka dot King of the Mountain and yellow jerseys in particular. But if you want something that was genuinely part of the tour, you need to work a little harder. In most stages riders receive feed bags that contain energy bars and drinks. The bags (musettes) get tossed as soon as they are emptied. If you stand in a logical spot down the road from the feed zones, you'll have a chance of picking one up. If you have no results, you get to try again the next day. Water bottles come flying out of the peloton in the same way although a lot less predictably as to when. Teams make used water bottles available to fans at the completion of a stage. If you want a glove or wristband, you might have luck in approaching a rider. Water bottles and feed backs may not be what you had in mind as displayable trophy-like items. However, no rider is going to throw away shoes, pants or jerseys.



Riders are more accessible to fans than other athletes, Photos by Michael Moore

Autographs

The good news is that it is a lot easier to approach a rider at the Tour de France than at a typical sporting event in the U.S. With the purchase of a special pass, you can approach the staging area at the start of the race. In previous years you didn't even need a pass. For some stages this year you still didn't need a pass. Riders arrive in team buses and mill about before the race going to the sign-in, conducting interviews, and warming up. Fans approach for autographs and photos which aren't too difficult to obtain from the majority of riders. The atmosphere is probably similar to what it was like 100 years ago going to a baseball game in the U.S. Photos of riders that fans take themselves are probably the most vivid memento people can collect. Getting the photos printed and a rider to sign one is a bit more challenging so most people settle for autographed visors, hats, jerseys, or purchased photos.

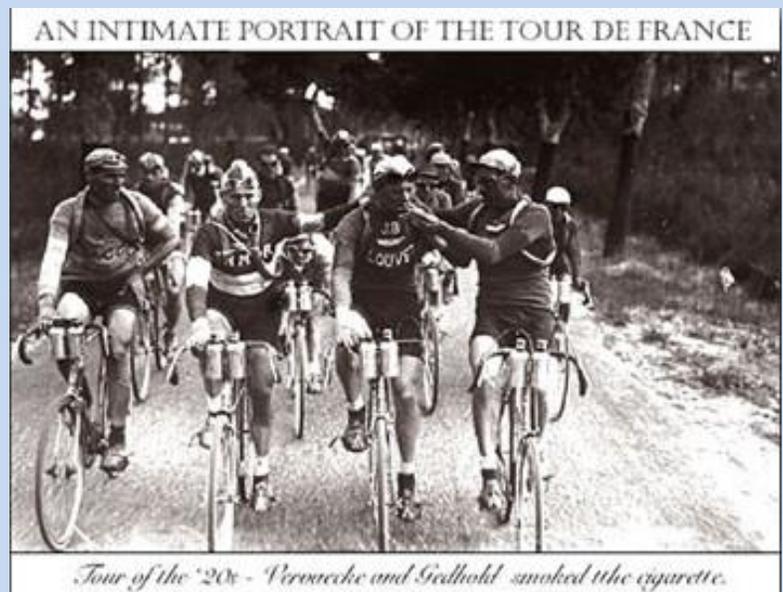
After the race the stage winner and the overall leader submit to interviews from the international press, and they cooperate with their team sponsors even though they are anxious to clean up, eat, rest and get a massage so that they can push their bikes up and down 120 miles of mountainous terrain again the next day. The riders not in the spotlight have an easier time of getting away. Team buses greet them at the finish, although this year one rider grew impatient waiting for his ride so just took off riding his bike back down through the crowds. Unfortunately while he made it through the race without a mishap, he did run into a spectator after the race as he flew back down the mountain. Other riders will do the same if the road is still closed from the race, the hotel is nearby and the bus departure isn't imminent. If the cyclists aren't resting, they can be found in the hotels and are generally very accommodating.



Riders can hit the pavement and be out of the tour in an instant. Not a good time to ask for an autograph

Licensed Apparel

The Tour de France has produced licensed apparel and accessories through companies like Denver-based XP Apparel. Tripp Wall, CEO of XP Apparel, attended this year's tour and provided insight as to collectibles. Wall pointed out that items may come through ASO (Amaury Sport Organisation that runs the Tour de France) but that the teams themselves and individual riders also license products such as team jerseys. Lance Armstrong is in another category by himself. XP Apparel has Tour de France shirts, hats, outerwear, key chains, and posters which can be found at their website: <http://stores.xpapparel.com/>. They also have interesting reproductions of vintage photos from the ASO. One image that Wall liked and XP has for sale is from 1921 (right) and shows tour riders puffing on cigarettes prior to climbing a mountain. The idea was that somehow their lung capacity would increase. Cyclists have always been looking for an edge.



World Cycling Productions of St. Paul, Minnesota carries Tour de France items with replica jerseys from several teams. They also have posters, water bottles, and other gear. ProCycleGear.com of Santa Rosa, California as well as other companies market pro cycling team apparel. You can also go directly to the website of each team and usually find jerseys, pants, helmets, photos, posters, and even bikes. However you may have to brush up on your German, French or Italian to figure out what is available.

Tripp Wall feels that memorabilia from the Tour de France has been retained by fans without any idea of reselling the items or worrying about verifying authenticity. A million people a year have attended tour races and taken home flags, stuffed animals, key chains and other items of sentimental value. Cycling collector Brett Horton commented that fans in Europe are more interested in ephemera such as photos, postcards and books than cycling gear, and their interest is pretty subdued.

Jerseys

There are special jerseys produced just for each day's winners. You may have noticed that when the riders are given their jerseys on the podium, the jerseys zip up from the back. Not too handy if you wanted to actually wear one of these while cycling. The idea is that the front of the jersey will clearly show the team name. The jersey is just a trophy for the day and not meant to be worn. The fabric used is not the "technical" fabric designed to maximize the riders comfort and performance. Versus Television did a piece on "the jersey guy" who works out of a truck and cranks out podium jerseys each day. Until recently, if a podium jersey surfaced, there was a good chance it was the actual jersey given to the rider. Now the "jersey guy" will give winners multiple jerseys at the end of the tour, according to Brett Horton.

Differences are subtle between the jerseys available for purchase and those given to the riders. "Jerseys worn by the racing team members are frequently custom made particularly for the established riders," says Horton. Jerseys are produced for riders with custom dimensions, and their names are sometimes marked on the collar or elsewhere. They also usually have an inside pocket for a radio, which you won't find in jerseys produced for fans. Riders might be given 25 or 50 jerseys to use in a season.

Getting your own action photos isn't that easy.



Photographs

Tour de France photos make great display items. You can take your own photos if you happen to be at the tour, but it isn't that easy to get a focused shot of a peleton of riders zipping by at 30 miles per hour. Fortunately, there are cycling photographers like Tim De Waele, John Pierce and Graham Watson who can get the shot for you. All are based in Europe. Watson's website: <http://www.grahamwatson.com/> displays a collection of photos from his 30 years as a pro cycling photographer. He is at the Tour de France each year taking photos for magazines and has authored several photo books on cycling. His site is more geared to selling photos to the public than some of the others. Tim De Waele's site is <http://www.tdwsport.com/> and includes other sports. John Pierce's website says he is currently "traveling the world."

eBay

In a search of eBay about the only interesting item I ran across included in its description: "Amazing shot of Contador. Top quality glossy 8x10 photo, perfect for any golf fan or for an autograph." Since Contador won the Tour de France you wonder how he would appeal to golf fans – or maybe the seller wasn't sure what he had. Tripp Wall pointed out that there had been a run of 100 autographed Lance Armstrong jerseys on eBay that were bogus in that Lance controls any jerseys he has worn and proceeds from the sale of such jerseys go to Livestrong, the Lance Armstrong Foundation. Such individual jersey sales benefiting the foundation have netted upwards of \$25,000 at auction.

The Horton Collection

Don't tell Brett Horton that there isn't much to collect from the Tour de France. For over 25 years Brett Horton, the Barry Halper of cycling collectors, has been accumulating memorabilia from professional cycling. Like the late Barry Halper who collected baseball memorabilia often with direct contact of the athletes, Brett Horton has put together a significant collection by advertising his interest in the subject and making direct contacts with riders. Barry Halper actually came to visit Horton's collection in San Francisco. Halper heard that Horton was as avid as he was in going after top-quality, historically-significant memorabilia for his favorite sport. Horton says that building a significant collection takes "the trifecta of time, money and contacts and that you need all three."

Horton has attended many of the major cycling events and cultivated relationships. Eddy Merckx has visited his collection. Horton views himself as a "caretaker" for the thousands of historical cycling treasures he has accumulated. He has licensed others to reproduce certain jerseys in his collection and they are available through cycling shops. His website <http://www.thehortoncollection.com/> shows a few reproductions and originals available for purchase but otherwise is a showcase for his cycling memorabilia. He has bikes, photos, team jerseys, podium jerseys, starter flags, posters, musettes, trophies, medals and more. Among the current riders, Erik Zabel has been of interest to Brett, and he has picked up numerous items related to Zabel which isn't that easy in that Zabel is a bit of a collector himself and has retained shoes, jerseys, pants, etc from his entire career.

The Personal Approach

Even though Horton and Halper had never met or talked until both had accumulated significant collections, it is interesting how similar their approaches were. Horton got into collecting cycling memorabilia before many others were interested. He was always concerned about the

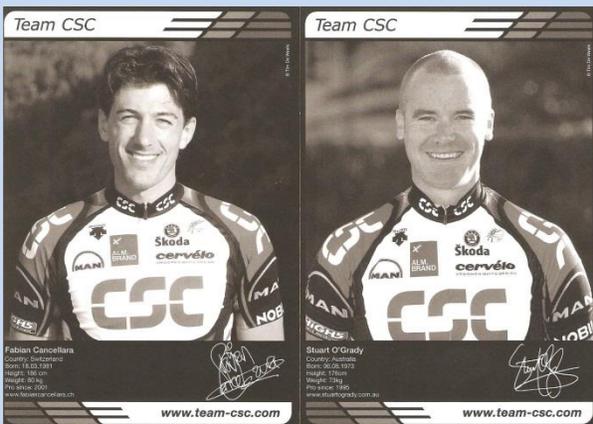
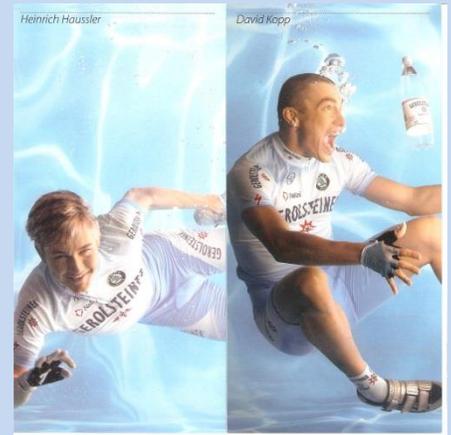
provenance of a collectible. He felt the best way to know what he had was to go as close to the source as possible and be willing to pay a fair price for the item. Horton realizes relationships are not built overnight. He showed his interest when team managers and riders were first starting their careers and has thrown his net rather widely, a bit like baseball collectors following minor league prospects. For example a rider who is a domestique (working on the team to support the team leader) may be just starting his career. If one of the roughly 25 jerseys they are given to use is soiled or ripped, they would probably throw it out or send it to the laundry. If a collector like Horton is enthused about paying them \$30 for the jersey, they are happy to oblige. A dirty jersey with the race number still tacked on the back is just fine. Jerseys from more notable riders can run a lot more.

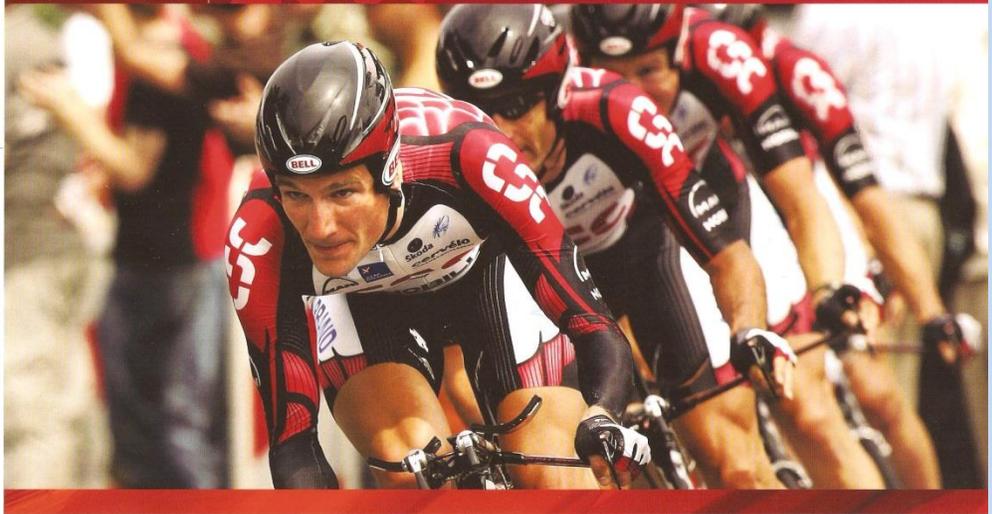
When it comes to bigger ticket items Horton keeps in touch with riders or team staff members, discreetly expresses his willingness to pay a fair price, and stresses his interest in the item remaining unaltered. He doesn't want the jersey washed. He doesn't want a bike rebuilt or altered after its use in an historic race. He doesn't want something that he can't be certain of its provenance. Pro cyclists now visit Horton to see the collection and trade or sell. He always buys dinner.

He has also kept his eyes open for opportunities such as when press agencies went from film to digital. Many entities in Europe were more than happy to sell their photo collections to Horton after scanning them. He picked up over 200,000 photos related to cycling in this manner. Horton and his collection could be the subject of many articles.

“Trading” Cards

While the Tour de France hasn't produced a trading card set that U.S. collectors can neatly stick in our shoeboxes, teams like CSC and Gerolsteiner have produced autograph card sets. For a time such cards are available directly from the teams on their websites.





GEROLSTEINER

GEROLSTEINER



Heinrich Haussler

Geburtsdatum: 23.02.1984
Geburtsort: Innsbruck (AUS)
Größe/Gewicht: 187 cm/59 kg
Wohnort: Cortina
Familienstand: ledig

Profi seit: 2005
Teams: seit 2005 bei Gerolsteiner
Internet: haussler@gerolsteiner.com
www.heinrich-haussler.de

Erfolge

2005 Tappesinger Tour de Capelle
2006 Tappesinger Rheinland-Pfalz-Handicap
zweifacher Tappesinger Münsterlandfahrt, Circuit Franco Belge



David Kopp

Geburtsdatum: 05.01.1979
Geburtsort: Bonn
Größe/Gewicht: 181 cm/78 kg
Wohnort: Köln
Familienstand: ledig

Profi seit: 2002
Teams: Telekom (2002-03), Luminor (2004), WincorNixdorf (2005), seit 2006 bei Gerolsteiner

Internet: david.kopp@gerolsteiner.com

Erfolge

2004 Sieger GP Stad Zutogen, Spokenone Giro Schwaben, Etappensieger Giro del Capo

2005 Sieger Rund um Köln, Etappensieger Bayern-Roadfahrt, Giro del Capo
2006 Sieger Trofeo Cakila, Etappensieger Emble-Tour



2008 Amgen Tour of California

If you aren't able to spend 3 weeks wandering around France next summer, you can still catch most of the pros at the 2008 Amgen Tour of California. This event will be in its third year next season and will run for 700 miles up and down California from Palo Alto to Pasadena between February 17 and 24, 2008. The event has attracted some of the top teams and cyclists in the world. We'll have to see who is on what team by then and what teams remain in operation. Despite the ups and downs of cycling this may be a good time to start collecting cycling memorabilia.



Left to right: T-shirt with the tour logo, a polka-dot King of the Mountain T-shirt, a Discovery team jersey



Water bottles and hats from the 2007 Tour de France.

George Vrechek is a freelance writer for SCD and can be reached at vrechek@ameritech.net

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