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Sports-LTDL (Twelfth)  
MERCURY WIN THREE TITLES IN LTDL 2000

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 6 (Bernama) -- Debutant team Mercury were the biggest winners in the Le Tour de Langkawi (LTDL) 2000 when they bagged three titles here today.

The relatively unknown team had opened up the eyes of many cycling fraternity when they took the individual, King of the Sprint and team overall titles in the race which ended at the Merdeka Square here today.

Although they are newcomers in the Tour which entered its fifth edition this year, the United States-based Mercury team proved that they are the team to watch in the future.

Christopher Horner, who took over the yellow jersey from Mark Walters of Canada in stage six, from Bentong to Kuantan, emerged as the overall leader in the 12-day race.

The 29-year-old Horner clocked a total time of 38 hours 34 minutes 39 seconds, 27 seconds ahead Julio Alberto Perez of team Panaria Gaerne of Italy and Fortunato Baliani of Aguardiente Nectar who was in third place trailing 29 seconds behind Horner.

"I just find it amazing that we have done extremely well here.

"Initially, I didn't want to come to Malaysia because during training camp, I had been holding the team car for a long time. I told the manager, I didn't want to come here.

"But after 20 hours in flight, it just took me 20 minutes to like this race and the win here was great," said Horner, who did not expect to win the overall crown, after the race today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave away the prizes to the winners.

Gordon Fraser who accumulated 111 points won the green jersey as the King of the Sprint while the Mercury team also won the team overall title with a total time of 115 hours 44 minutes 59 seconds to push the South African team and Linda McCartney of Great Britain in second and third respectively.

Malaysia, who emerged as the overall champion in the East Asian category last year, finished in 15th place overall and third among the East Asian team behind Japan and the Philippines. Japan powered by Hidenori Nodera, Tashiro Yasutaka, Hirose Yoshimasa, Iijima Makoto and Hideto Yukinari recorded an overall time of 116:16:21s while the Philippines 116:48:42s.

Musairi Musa, Tsen Seong Hoong, Suhami Keton, Shahrulneeza Razali, Wong Ah Thiam and Mahadzir Hamad, who represented Malaysia, clocked an overall time of 116:54:49s.

Perez, who won the most grueling stage in the Tour at Genting Highlands in stage 10, grabbed the red polka dot jersey as the King of the Mountain title.

Mercury wrapped up their fine showing here when Jan Bratkowski took stage twelve's Kuala Lumpur criterium race, in the 12-lap race, which covers 6.3km per lap today.

Bratkowski touched the finishing line first followed by Antonio Cruz of team Saturn from the United States and Volker Ordowski of team Gerolsteiner of German with the trio, registering a time of 1 hour 45 minutes and 48 seconds.

-- BERNAMA  
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