

31 DEC 2002
Lokman-LTdL
LTDL 2003: 22 TEAMS ALL SET FOR ACTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 31 (Bernama) -- The final cast for the Telekom Malaysia Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) 2003 is now complete with 22 teams all set to see action in the eighth edition of the race scheduled for Jan 31 to Feb 9.

French team MBK-Oktos-St.Quentin was the final team to confirm their entry to organisers First Cartel (M) Sdn Bhd today.

"I figure 22 is the ideal number for the race. It makes the peloton much easier to control as we wouldn't want the road to be overcrowded and most importantly to ensure safety and early season crashes," First Cartel Executive Chairman Datuk Wan Lokman Datuk Paduka Wan Ibrahim said in a statement released here today.

Of the 22 teams, 15 were professional outfits from France, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Colombia, Slovakia and the United States.

Six national teams -- Iran, South Africa, Japan, Canada, Philippines and Malaysia -- together with Team Telekom Malaysia were also slated to compete.

Wan Lokman said the higher tag of 22 would give more excitement to the race as higher points and attractive monetary rewards were expected to inspire teams and riders to give their best in the 10-day event.

Making it more interesting was the fact that four past champions of the race, Paolo Lanfranchini of Panaria (1999 and 2001), Gabriel Missaglia of Lampre (1998), Chris Horner of Saturn (2000) and Hernan Darion Munoz of Selle Italia (2002) would square off against each other for the first time in the race's seven-year history.

On the Asian front, competition was expected to be stiff with the inclusion of debutant Iran, one of Asia's cycling powerhouse and the consistent Team Telekom Malaysia, a mixed team made up of European and Asian riders.

He also urged Asian riders to utilize the race as a platform to raise their standard and match the professionals.

Riders like Wong Kam Po (Hong Kong), Tonton Susanto (Indonesia) and Ghader Mizbani (Iran) have earned recognition and proved that Asians do have the qualities to match some of the sport's big names.

The race starts on Jan 31 with an individual time trial race which takes riders on a 9.5km journey on the island.

It is held under the patronage of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with recognition from the sport's international body UCI, Asian Cycling Confederation and Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF).

-- BERNAMA
RW AZZ AO