

Getting ready for the World: Radio Free Peloton

By Ed Arzouian, Competition Coordinator, Hamilton 2003

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OOO-kay, here's the thing, I need 50Gs by June 1st.

Well, I don't really need it personally, though that would be nice. No, I need it to broadcast the world championships' Radio Tour on a private FM band so everybody in Hamilton – from spectators around the course to all the vehicles in the race caravan – can hear without it having to use expensive mobile radios.



Pierre Hutsebaut at the L.A. Olympics

The idea isn't really mine. It came to my boss, Pierre Hutsebaut, during an early meeting we had about two months ago with the CRTC (Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission), part of the "Federal Family" assisting us to put on the world's.

The Government of Canada (Canadian Heritage, actually) assigned us a permanent governmental liaison named Vanessa Pyrcce to coordinate the "family." If you need something done, if you need to cut red tape and Lord knows there's a lot of that, you call Vanessa and she wades her way through it. Glad it's her and not me. Her boss, Sheila Copps, is the Minister of Canadian Heritage which manages Sport Canada and the Member of Parliament for Hamilton East. Minister

Copps is also in the running to be the next Canadian Prime Minister.

The FM radio idea was not originally Pierre's either, he actually remembered it from one of the Men's World Cups held in Montreal back in the late 1980s and early '90s. How it works is that instead of renting 55 radios for all the team vehicles you broadcast Radio Tour, the info that is used to communicate everything to the race caravan and the start/finish, on a commercial FM band given temporarily to the race organizers. In Euro' caravans communication to teams is only one-way, not like in North America, there's no discussion with UCI Commissaires. This idea may have been used elsewhere and if you know that it was, I'd appreciate hearing from you.

A word about Pierre Hutsebaut who is the Director of Sport here for Hamilton 2003 on temporary leave from his permanent job as Director General of the Canadian Cycling Association. Pierre is Canadian cycling's secret weapon. In the U.S., my fellow Americans generally buy or bully their way to get what they need or want from the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) and everybody else for that matter (sorry but you... er we, do)

Here in Canada they have neither the cash nor the muscle to do that but they do have Pierre who speaks the language of the UCI, French, and understands their game.

Furthermore, his name carries a great deal of respect in European race organizations, his uncle is almost legendary, having trained most of the veteran commissaries running all the events in France and familiar to all the big-name French riders.

Pierre himself has been to every world championship since '81 (Freddy Martens won that one... you remember that great poster from Campy that was out there for years) and he can tell you who won every year and how. He created the team that surrounded Steve Bauer when he won a silver medal at the L.A. Olympics in 1984.

There's a nice picture of him hanging in his office giving Steve a bottle in the pro world's three months after L.A. Steve got another medal there, bronze that time.

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In '92 when I wanted to take my Evian team pro (when going pro still meant something) and do the Worlds in Benidorm, Spain, I gave up my Director Sportif spot to Pierre because I knew he could do a better job. I was general manager. I wouldn't have given that team to just anybody, it was my baby. Pierre has been quietly building permanent, self-sustaining cycling training centres across Canada. He bought the Atlanta velodrome from Disney and now it's sitting in Bromont, Quebec. The track that was in Bromont is now the Louis Garneau Velodrome in Quebec City. Garneau was part of that '84 CDN team in LA. Where Quebec had no cycling track a few years ago, we now have two thanks to Pierre.

Cycling runs continues to run in his family; Pierre's brother runs two teams in Paris, France. His niece assists doing that, worked for the Societe Tour de France and is now in Hamilton coordinating athlete services. She gives me a tough time because she knows almost as much as I do but she's younger, a lot better looking and with that Parisian accent, a force to be reckoned with!

Only four of us speak French in the office. So much for bilingualism in Canada. It's a great policy to keep the country together but not really working on a practical level. Just don't tell Quebec though, not yet.

Pierre's daughter races the Canadian National Team. You can't get much more involved in the sport.

For anybody that thinks I'm being a little sycophantic here or kissing a little butt, you obviously don't know me. I'm better known for not simply for burning bridges but completely incinerating them and leaving total devastation in my wake! I still haven't met a boss I can get along with. Pierre and I didn't always get along either but he's earned my respect and I like to think I have earned his.

Anyway, I digress. I need \$50,000CDN (that's peanuts in U.S. dollars) for a June 1 deadline to get our own private FM radio station operational by October. You would not believe how complex it is to get something like this off the ground. There are loads of testing, certification and paperwork to crawl through and consultants that have to be paid to do it. It's not like I'm going to do it myself!

Now, normally, I'd be out there selling this radio idea myself but I can't do that either in Hamilton. I've already ticked off the sales guys because I went and got Triumph motorcycles to sponsor both our CDN nationals (June 29, \$6,500 in Elite Men prize money, UCI points, all on the world's course, open to all trade teams and national federations for the first time, by the way) and the world's without running it by anybody.

That didn't go over too well. So now if I have an idea (and I have many), I have to leave it with the sales guys. My radio station isn't the biggest thing on their list and neither am I.

We have not budgeted for anything but conventional radios; mobile, the kind that sit in cars and plug into lighters or hand-held (walkie-talkies to most people). On the competition side of things we need about 110 radios with four channels: UCI, Commissaries, Information and Radio Tour. On the event side of things, Laura Zamprogna, Event Coordinator's side, she needs another 150 or so radios with something like 15 channels, (security, concessions, sales, supervisors, EMS, operations, course marshals and who knows what, I'm glad that's her mess and not mine but since she has experience at the Victoria Commonwealth Games in '94, Atlanta in '96 and Sydney in 2000, she can handle it). So that's almost 300 radios for close to two weeks, an expense of about \$40,000. Radio Tour on FM would save about \$6000. Saving the cost and the handling involved with the radios (charging, repairing, dispensing and retrieving) isn't really why I want to see this get done. No, I want to do it because it has never been done in the World before and it would be a big bonus to spectators around the course and people living everywhere in Hamilton, even those that don't appreciate us being here and there are a few of them! I'd like to raise the bar a bit for our Europeans friends in Verona, Italy who do the worlds next.'

Ideally, a retail sponsor, like, say, a grocery store or hardware chain could turn around and sell its own ad spots to its suppliers to spread the cost. To me it seems like an excellent opportunity but I don't have \$50,000. How often can you buy your own turnkey radio station without any having to deal with any licensing issues and other red tape? For a week you've got YOUR radio station to do whatever you like, even play opera music during off-race hours if you like.

Maybe next time I'll get to how the radios work and their place in the race caravan operation, unless you'd rather hear about something else.