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Friday, Sep. 26, 2008

## Cyclist Lance Armstrong confirms ride through Merced on Tour of California

**The cycling legend says he will participate in 2009 Tour of California race; Stage 5 runs from Merced to Clovis**

By JILLIAN HANKS  
The Modesto Bee

MERCED -- Cycling star Lance Armstrong announced Thursday in Las Vegas that he will participate in the 2009 Amgen Tour of California, putting him on course to ride through Merced in February.

The Tour of California, an 800-mile course that runs Feb. 14-22, is the largest and most prestigious road race in the United States. Stage 4 will run between San Jose and Modesto on Feb. 17. Stage 5 will go between Merced and Clovis on Feb. 18.

"We are delighted that Lance Armstrong will be participating in the 2009 Amgen Tour of California," said Andrew Messick, president of AEG Sports and owner and operator of the Amgen Tour. "It's a great opportunity for all of us who are involved in this to bring what we really expect to be an unprecedented level of attention to the Amgen Tour." Messick said Armstrong will use the Amgen Tour to raise awareness, money and resources for his global fight against cancer as well as give him a shot at an eighth Tour de France title.

"The level of competition, the challenge of the course and the highly professional atmosphere make it the ideal situation for me to continue my training," Armstrong stated in a release. He will be racing for the Astana Cycling Team.



AP Photo

In this July 24m 2005 file photo, Lance Armstrong, of Austin, Texas, toasts with champagne with Discovery team sports director Johan Bruyneel, left, during the 21st and final stage of the Tour de France cycling race between Corbeil-Essonnes and Paris. Seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong will join Team Astana for his return to competitive cycling, the Kazakh Cycling Federation said Wednesday. Astana's team leader is Johan Bruyneel, who was Armstrong's team director for all of his Tour de France victories with the U.S. Postal and Discovery teams. The two are close friends.

September 26, 2008

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The Tour of California will be the second race the seven-time Tour de France champion attempts in his comeback from retirement. Armstrong announced Wednesday that he also plans to ride in the Jan. 20-25 Tour Down Under in Australia. When Armstrong made that announcement, Australian media questioned race officials about whether Armstrong was receiving a personal guarantee to make his first competitive Australian performance. No answer was given.

The 37-year-old Texan said Wednesday he is not taking a salary from his new team, Astana, and that his purpose in racing was to raise money for his cancer foundation, Livestrong.

Also Thursday, the Associated Press reported Tour de France officials said that as long as Astana remained free of doping controversies that the team would be invited to participate in the 2009 Tour de France.

Last summer, Tour officials refused entry to Astana because of doping problems in 2007. Because Astana was one of several teams to have been caught up in recurring drug scandals, it seemed as if Astana's Tour de France ban was extra punishment aimed at team leader Johan Bruyneel for his associations with Armstrong.

It is no secret that Tour officials have long suspected Armstrong of doping. Instead, French investigations uncovered doping among other prominent cyclists, and champions such as Jan Ullrich, Ivan Basso and Floyd Landis were knocked out of the sport.

Messick called Armstrong's decision to ride in California, "great news for Amgen, for American cycling and for the cancer cause. Lance has a singular ability to create a lot of attention and focus people's eyeballs on cycling and do an enormous amount of good for cancer." But Messick said he did not feel pressure to attract Armstrong to his race.


"The importance was to realize that this isn't just a Lance Armstrong race," Messick said. "It's a race where the best teams and best riders want to compete. Having Lance here is verification of that, but we'd like to think we're getting to a point where we're a race and not reliant on a single personality."

The Los Angeles Times contributed to this report.

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**I wonder if he knows that if he stops anywhere in Merced the likelihood of his bicycle getting graffitied is really high!** :: 09/26/08 7:13am - radwks 

**If Lance comes to Merced he'll get hooked on meth! He'll test positive and they'll trace it back to Merced and from then on Merced will be know for the downfall of Lance**

**Armstrong!!** :: 09/26/08 7:08am - mercedistrash 

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