

Dakar Rally star Lyndon Poskitt (right) says the rider's work is only beginning with the signing of a sponsor. Stephanie Miskell (bottom) is an engineer who races expert class in the Loudon Road Race Series, thanks to sponsor support.



## GETTING A SPONSOR

It takes more than fast riding to earn financial support. Racers must add value to the brand.

► By **Alisa Clickenger**

For many riders, getting sponsored is a dream come true. It's the intersection of our passion, feeling of purpose, and validation that our efforts have been hugely successful.

Perhaps you've become so enamored with a certain product that you'll use nothing else, or you're a racer who's taking your game to the next level. If you could get a sponsor to give you the cash, product or other support you need to achieve the winning edge, you could bring them to the podium and allow them to share in your success.

There are many types of sponsorships, ranging from discounted or free products and apparel, to contingency

racing and even endorsements. Sponsorships are a way for both parties to gain exposure and give riders and racers the support they need to achieve their goals.

Sponsorship—in whichever form fits your goals—is much more than merely getting cheap or free kit; it's a business relationship in which expectations should be set and met, as in any other business transaction.

Stephanie Miskell started racing as a novice in the Loudon Road Race Series in 2014, and in 2018 will be sponsored to race as an expert.

"I would not have been able to race expert without the help of my sponsors," said Miskell, an engineer by day, who maintains several motorcycles and goes



through many sets of tires.

Her sponsors give her the security of knowing that she always has the right services and equipment available, so she can focus on her racing.

Value-add is always a consideration for sponsors. The value you bring to the brands you are representing, and how you can highlight them and bring them to new audiences in an authentic and organic way, is an important part of the equation. In addition to the two championships she won last year, Miskell is also a control rider for New England's Penguin Racing School. That also puts

MARTIN HANLON, STEPHANIE MISKELL

her, and her sponsors, in front of large groups of people when she's not on the track.

REV'IT! is an apparel company whose marketers look for someone who amplifies the brand voice, aligns with the values of the brand, is passionate and has an audience. They look for people who are representative of the brand and who have multiple channels of media presence, so they can reach the largest possible audience.

"We look at four primary things from sponsor requests," REV'IT Senior Brand Relations Manager Tracy Motz said. "Do they have a good, engaged audience? This generally means social media or an online following, but not necessarily. The important part is that a defined audience is already established.

"Secondly, do they have a compelling story or something that stands out; a unique angle? The third thing we look for is brand alignment. Do they share the same values as our brand? Do we think they will be an appropriate representative? Are they respectful? And finally, can they create excellent visual or written content on a consistent basis? Our bar for 'excellent' is very high."

REV'IT! launched an ingenious marketing and sponsorship program last year, sponsoring an entire team made up of individual riders. In 2017, REV'IT! began with three women and expanded the program to five women in 2018. They received a lot of social media mileage from the auditions each year.

This U.S.-based team was composed of self-motivated women, sponsored for different reasons, and each designed her own program, based on guidelines given by the company. For some, this meant appearing at events, for others it was editorial contributions to magazines, but all were reaching a sizable audience. The only firm requirement was that they all attend one rally together in team spirit.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR GETTING SPONSORED

Sponsorship managers get thousands of requests each year. **Tim Clark**, 541 Marketing/Bell Helmets Athlete Support Program, manages several thousand applications from potential athletes. Most of Clark's contracts are with racers, yet he does entertain the occasional traveler or other types of motorcyclist.

Clark gave us the following pointers for a riding resume that has the best chance of success with him:

- » **Include your contact information:** name, address, telephone number, email and social media accounts. Many resumes don't include such basic informational items, which is a big mistake.
- » **Submit only two images:** A head-and-shoulders shot and your best close-up, engaged in the discipline you represent.
- » **A list of recent accomplishments:** Only include highlights from the last three years, not what you did 10 years ago.
- » **Make it fit on one page.**
- » **Only send a PDF:** The best cross-platform format.
- » **Make sure your name is the file name:** e.g., John\_Smith\_resume.pdf

"Always set expectations and always deliver on your promises," Dakar superstar Lyndon Poskitt said. "There is no such thing as a free ride. Work hard; nothing comes for free. At least good, long-term sponsorship relationships don't. Be credible, pick your sponsors wisely and stick with them. A short-term win with a new sponsor might burn a potential long-term relationship."

Some riders may think that having to produce media or results in return for sponsorship is a downside, but it's part of the deal. Sponsorships are business relationships, and most often there's an expected return on investment by the sponsors, even if it's not clearly defined. The most successful sponsorships, however, are very clearly defined.

"I don't see any downsides, if managed correctly," Poskitt said. "Not if the relationship is two-way."

Both riders interviewed were gracious and extremely grateful to their sponsors.

"It's important to go in every year not expecting the same level of support [as the prior year]. Make an effort to show you're not assuming they'll support

you," Miskell said. "I wouldn't be able to commit myself as fully timewise or financial-ly without the help of my sponsors. I always follow up at the end of the year with a thank you and my results of the season."

When seeking sponsorship, remember the brand and marketing managers you are petitioning receive hundreds, sometimes thousands of requests. They are incredibly busy. It's a tight-knit community with a lot of competition and multiple demands on time.

You must put forth the same effort indentifying, contacting and convincing the decision makers as you would when applying for a job. Make your pitch short, sweet and honest, with a compelling list of reasons why your application stands above the crowd.

Once you land a sponsorship, make your contact's job easier by providing concise communication, easy-to share social media content, and reporting on a timely basis. Sponsor managers are accountable for their budgets, so help them look good by providing easy-to-use content and statistics that they can share on social media or distill into reports.

"Be prepared to produce media and exposure in return for what you are getting," Poskitt said. "As a minimum, know what the sponsor expects from you and deliver it. It's a job. You have to work hard at it to achieve more."

Twisted Throttle fully equipped my own Suzuki DR650 for a solo ride from their headquarters in Exeter, Rhode Island, to Argentina, back when it wasn't a superhighway of southbound travelers. I have always been grateful to the people there, for their patronage. Even now, almost 10 years later, I still tell anyone who will listen how great the Mefo Tires were; one of the many items they provided.

Even lapsed sponsorships can provide value to both parties, long after the relationship formally concludes. **MCN**