

Tour de California gains prestige in cycling circles

By John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

The world's best cycling races drip with tradition. The Tour de France started in 1903, the Giro d'Italia in 1909 and the Vuelta a España in 1935.



Any discussion of the sport's standout events begins with those three grand tours, each lasting three weeks and testing the skills and stamina of the world's top riders.

But the Amgen Tour of California, set to begin its sixth year Sunday with an opening stage at Lake Tahoe, has quickly thrust its way into the conversation.

The eight-day stage race, which is scheduled to reach Sacramento with a Stage 2 finish Monday at the state Capitol, is widely considered the top cycling event in the United States.

It doesn't have the grand tours' history or the prestige of the World Championships or Olympic Games, but the Tour of California is highly regarded by many in the cycling world.

A 2010 Cyclingnews Reader Poll ranked the Tour of California the third-best stage race in the world, trailing only the Tour de France and the Giro d'Italia.

Riders also give the event high marks.

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