



# Money

SECTION B

May 19, 2005

## Ford joins forces with Ironman for tough sell

### 'Built Ford Tough' slogan linked to race

By Michael McCarthy  
USA TODAY

The Ironman Triathlon is getting Ford tough. The grueling race is signing up Ford as its first title sponsor in a decade.

The three-year, multimillion-dollar deal, which could be announced as early as today, calls for all eight U.S. Ironman events to be renamed "Ford Ironman Triathlon," including the world championship in Hawaii, as well as full Ironman and Half Ironman races in Florida, New York, Wisconsin and Idaho. As part of the deal, Ford is boosting the prize purse for the race in Hawaii — the "Super Bowl" of triathlons — by \$100,000 to a total of \$580,000.

The 27-year-old Ironman has avoided title sponsorship for years: the last was Gatorade from 1990-95. But consumers are increasingly embracing extreme sports, and Ironman has been adding sponsors such as Dell, Timex, Michelin and Foster Grant while expanding its licensed lines of gear, treadmills and weights.

"This year we'll have 50,000 people racing in Ironman events worldwide," says

Ben Fertic, president of privately held World Triathlon, which owns the Ironman brand. "Ironman is unique in that it's a sport but also a lifestyle."

A full Ironman triathlon includes a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile marathon, and it must be completed in 17 hours or less. The first Ironman contest in 1978 attracted only 15 participants. But triathlons are going mainstream.

This year 150,000 to 200,000 Americans will attempt a multisport event, according to the USA Triathlon, the sport's governing body. The percentage of female triathletes has grown to 29% from 11% in the early 1990s. NBC has a multiyear TV deal to broadcast Ironman, which now stages 28 events worldwide. The sport's popularity took a quantum leap when triathlons were included on an Olympic program for the first time in 2000.

Ford uses the theme "Built Ford Tough" to market its trucks. New ads humorously sell the message that Ford owners are as tough as their vehicles. So Ford executives say the notoriously difficult Ironman is a natural fit with their strategy to sponsor events such as NASCAR and Professional Bull Riding. Ford also will feature its vehicles inside the TV programming, which has become a big plus on Madison Avenue.

"Take a look at the sports in the Olympics these days: They are taking on a more



By Baron Sekiya, AP

**2004:** Normann Stadler, 33, of Germany wins championship in Hawaii on Oct. 16.

extreme appeal," says Christine Feuell, SUV group marketing manager for Ford, who's training to run a half-triathlon herself. "People are pushing themselves from 5K to 10K races, and then from half marathons and full marathons. After they run a marathon, they ask, 'What's next?'"