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# Drugs issue refuses to go away due to winner's Ferrari links

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The tarnished image is difficult to shake off, writes William Fotheringham

**Monday July 30, 2001**  
**The Guardian**

In a neat twist in the tail of this year's Tour, the organisers placed yesterday's final intermediate sprint of the race at Chatenay-Malabry, the little town in the south-west suburbs of Paris where France's anti-doping laboratory developed the test for the banned blood booster erythropoietin (EPO) and where urine samples taken during the Tour are tested.

It was a small reminder that the EPO test is being used for the first time in the Tour this year, and by happy coincidence the International Cycling Union revealed yesterday that of the 122 of the 170 drug samples taken on the Tour tested there so far, only one - from Txema Del Olmo - had been positive. They concluded: "We think that the problem of EPO no longer influences cycling at the highest level."

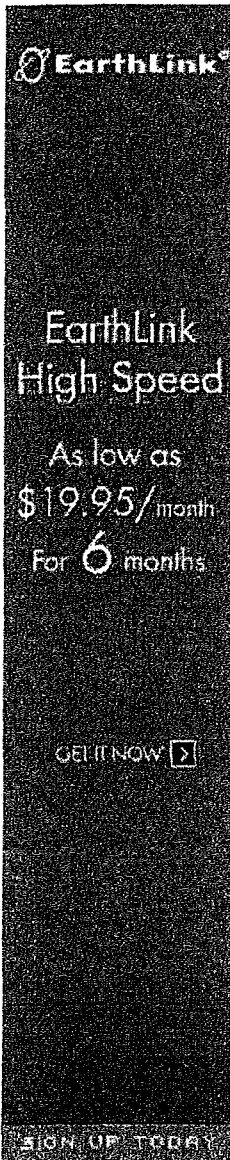
Though progress in combating EPO is undeniable, the signals from the Tour remain mixed three years after the Festina drugs scandal blew the sport apart. On Saturday, French campaigners against doping in all sports held a conference only 50 yards from the start in Orleans, where the French "Association for Fighting Doping" is based. You would not have known it if you were a spectator enjoying the show as the riders signed on.

The campaigners, who included grass-roots groups, the former Festina trainer Antoine Vayer and the former Tour stage winner Gilles Delion, and who had ridden on their bikes from Friday's finish 100 miles to the south, clearly felt marginalised. Indeed Vayer went so far as say they were "treated like the devil".

The rumblings about Lance Armstrong's work with the controversial Italian trainer Michele Ferrari continued yesterday, when Greg LeMond, a triple winner of the Tour




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summed up the feelings of many on this Tour in saying: "When Lance won the prologue to the 1999 Tour I was close to tears, but when I heard he was working with Michele Ferrari I was devastated. In the light of Lance's relationship with Ferrari, I just don't want to comment on this year's Tour. This is not sour grapes. I'm disappointed in Lance, that's all it is."

Even the Tour organiser Jean-Marie Leblanc concedes the name of Ferrari is a dubious one. "I am not happy the two names are mixed, but as long as there is no decision in court we have to wait," he said. Leblanc feels the Tour is cleaner this year, but says "the questioning of Armstrong lacks dignity, as the presumption of innocence is fundamental. For Armstrong it is the presumption of guilt. The world is turned upside down."

Armstrong himself says of the relationship with Ferrari: "Is it questionable? Perhaps." But he adds, referring to himself in the third person: "Has Lance Armstrong ever tested positive? No. Has Lance Armstrong been tested? A lot."

Vayer, who has watched the Festina riders dope themselves in the past with undetectable products, and has attacked Armstrong before, spoke of why the Tour organisers have kept at a distance from the campaigners. "They are afraid of us," he said. "They think we are about polemic."

Squaring the circle of Armstrong, who shouts his clean-ness from the rooftops, and Ferrari, who is to go on trial on drugs charges, has proved impossible for many, for all the Texan's protestations. Their work is about altitude training and low-oxygen chambers and diet, but surely there are other specialists in these areas who are not facing charges of recommending banned, and possibly dangerous, hormones?

Not so, says the man who manages Armstrong's training, Chris Carmichael. "It's about putting together the best people with the best athlete, searching high and low."

Armstrong's agent and lawyer Bill Stapleton describes Ferrari as a brilliant scientist with an awful public reputation who has made very, very irresponsible comments. With complete confidence, he concludes: "I'm not worried, because he [Armstrong] will never, ever test positive."

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