

SPORTS

Luxury brands tee off with golf's best at Masters

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Ian Poulter, a professional golfer competing in the 2021 Masters Tournament, drives the Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 year-round. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz

By KATIE TAMOLA

As the Masters welcomes back a limited number of spectators to Augusta National Golf Club, an exclusive group of luxury brands has another opportunity to engage affluent audiences.

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While the Masters is more discreet about its sponsorships than other major sporting events, German automaker Mercedes-Benz and Swiss watchmaker Rolex are on the golf tournament's limited roster of financial supporters. Other luxury brands also show support for their golf ambassadors as a way to highlight their offerings and reach fans in attendance or following the tournament at home.

"The primary goal of these sponsors is to build broader awareness for their brands within their target customers and the Masters checks that box," Matt Voda, CEO at [OptiMine Software](#), a cloud-based cross-channel marketing analytics platform. "Additionally, brands seek to reinforce their own core brand promise by associating themselves with an event that shares those same attributes: exclusivity, luxury, leadership and dreams attained."

"There's only one Masters event and it checks all of these boxes for the luxury brand sponsors in a unique way that other events can't provide," he said. "The core positioning value and branding halo for a Masters sponsorship for luxury brands remains the same with or without the pandemic, and that halo has everything to do with an association with a premier, exclusive event that draws viewers from around the globe."

Tee time in luxury

Taking place from April 8 to April 11, this year's tournament began only 144 days after the 2020 edition, which was pushed from April to November due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the fall Masters was held without fans, organizers are now permitting a limited number of attendees.

Although a short amount of time has passed, brands are seizing the opportunity to once again capture consumer attention during a hopeful time amid COVID-19 vaccination rollouts and decreased cases.

"After a long year, people are finally able to gather and come together to celebrate an important moment in time or,

in this case, a particular sport they are passionate about," said Gustavo Calzadilla, U.S. managing director at **Parmigiani Fleurier**. "A large sports event like the Masters brings several benefits, mostly in regards to brand awareness and visibility.

"In addition, it's about connecting with potential clients through a shared passion for a particular sport or lifestyle, and through the shared values," he said.

While the Swiss watchmaker is not a sponsor of the 2021 Masters, many luxury brands recognize the tournament's audience also extends beyond the greens. In 2019, a record 10.8 million viewers tuned in for Masters Sunday, according to **Golf Digest**.

The first Major of the year, **@TheMasters** starts on Thursday at Augusta National Golf Club.

Since its inaugural edition in 1934, players have sought to excel on this famed course, eager to claim the Green Jacket, one of sport's most coveted prizes. **#Perpetual**
pic.twitter.com/jzWNHI4DHw

ROLEX (@ROLEX) April 5, 2021

As a longtime sponsor of the Masters, Mercedes-Benz may be the first luxury brand that comes to mind for fans of the tournament. Last year, the automaker promoted its **#PerfectDrive** campaign by providing each participating player a Mercedes-Benz vehicle to use during their time in Augusta.

Additionally, Mercedes brand ambassadors Bernhard Langer, John Rahm, Rickie Fowler and Ian Poulter have all returned to compete at the Masters this year.

Mr. Poulter is also an ambassador for Swiss watchmaker Audemars Piguet, having posted a playful video on his personal Instagram last September showing him using his watch for some unique golf practice.

Viewers can also catch other Audemars Piguet ambassadors including Tyrrell Hatton, Viktor Hovland, Vijay Singh, Henrik Stenson, Matt Wallace, Lee Westwood, Bernd Wiesberger and Danny Willett playing in this year's tournament.



The nearby Ritz-Carlton Reynolds, Lake Oconee has five onsite golf courses for fans of the game. Image credit: Ritz-Carlton Reynolds, Lake Oconee

For golf fans, the Ritz-Carlton Reynolds, Lake Oconee is the closest luxury resort to Augusta. In the past, the Ritz-Carlton has offered a Masters package with exclusive amenities and experiences for four guests, including tournament badges and transportation to the event.

This year, whether spectating in person or from one's home, it will be difficult for viewers to not catch glimpses of luxury brands throughout the event. With the Masters Tournament, brands are yearning to be noticed on the same stage as the professional golfers.

Where luxury and sports meet

More luxury brands are yearning to be noticed on the same stage as professional athletes.

London-based media platform GAFFER's main priority is to create and distribute compelling content that reaches a new audience. The media platform recently collaborated with Valentino, and is actively connecting brands with

athletes within its wide network to form mutually beneficial relationships where both brands and athletes can connect with bigger audiences ([see story](#)).

Last year, LVMH's Hennessy signed a multiyear deal to make the Cognac brand the official spirit of the National Basketball Association and its affiliate franchises. Hennessy displaced top-selling U.S. whiskey Jack Daniel's as the official spirits partner of the NBA, Women's National Basketball Association and USA Basketball ([see story](#)).

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"The Masters this week may get a boost from the return of fans physically in the gallery, and that might provide extra excitement and engagement from the TV audience, thereby delivering more value to the sponsors," Mr. Voda said.

"And the return of fans at the event may also provide a psychological boost of consumer confidence and a sense of hope that every brand wants to be associated with right now.

"That kind of genuine positivity cannot be bought nor built," he said.

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