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As polo season unfolds, luxury brands secure sponsorships

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Luxury brands are waiting for the international polo season to hit full stride so they can court the affluent through sponsorships, special products and brand alignment.

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Luxury watchmakers, automakers, hospitality leaders, spirits brands and fashion labels have flocked to the world of polo to cosset the crowds and gain the elite cachet it imparts. While mainstream sports provide brands with lots of noise useful for spreading campaign awareness, sports with high barriers of entry generate loyalists.

"Federation of International Polo fans are enjoying an exciting 2014 season," said Richard T. Caleel, president of the [Federation of International Polo](#), Carpinteria, CA.

"Polo is growing globally at a steady pace," he said. "There is exceptional growth in China and Eastern Europe.

"Many luxury brands have been involved as sponsors for polo internationally."

Membership required

Polo is a sport with global appeal that nonetheless has a high barrier to entry. Unlike many mainstream sports that simply require land and a ball, polo calls for a horse, which

instantly shears away those without the necessary means.

Also, the affluent gravitate toward the sport precisely because of this exclusivity. Discussing and playing polo acts as a kind of status currency, with the most versed participants able to groom their social standing.

Obviously, luxury brands stand to gain by displaying an affinity for polo, not only because it reaches a concentrated audience, but also because it boosts reputation among this preferred clientele.

Indeed, The International Polo Club in Wellington, FL, has found its matches gain popularity among wealthy consumers from around the world who embrace the lifestyle of the sport.

The Club has partnered with many luxury marketers including Maserati, Veuve Clicquot, Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach and Piaget. The organization strives to provide a superior lifestyle for affluent consumers in its limited invitation-only membership ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands often choose to sponsor isolated events so their name is tied to something tangible.

Italian automaker Maserati propelled the brand with its title sponsorship of the 2013 United States Polo Association's U.S. Open Polo Championships at the International Polo Club in Palm Beach, FL.



Actress Bo Derek getting comfortable with a Maserati

During the tournament, Maserati had its full range of vehicles on the grounds acting as continual reminders of the brand's presence and drawing the interest of attendees ([see story](#)).

Other brands adopt players or entire teams to show their commitment to the sport.

Swiss watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre targeted affluent watch enthusiasts in the emerging Latin American market with a sports sponsorship in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Jaeger-LeCoultre brand ambassador and polo player Eduardo Novillo Astrada

The Argentine Polo Open of Palermo is the oldest polo tournament in the world, having just celebrated its 120th anniversary. During the Argentine Polo Open of Palermo Jaeger-LeCoultre acted as official sponsor and official timekeeper for all matches ([see story](#)).



Campo Argentino de Polo in Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Starwood's St. Regis Hotels & Resorts and British automaker Land Rover both have teams that faced off at the Sentebale Royal Salute Polo Cup fundraiser at the Greenwich Polo Club in Greenwich, CT.

The Sentebale charity was founded by Britain's Prince Harry and Prince Seeiso of Lesotho to help the neediest children of Lesotho, Africa. St. Regis and Land Rover joined other brands such as Hearst's Town & Country, whiskey maker Royal Salute and British jeweler Garrard to support the fundraising event ([see story](#)).

St. Regis is also trying to educate its consumers about the nuances of the sport with a [microsite](#).

Events are generally scattered throughout the year.

"The Snow Polo World Championships were held in January in Tianjin, China, with 12 countries participating and England winning the Championship," Mr. Caleel said.

"The FIP European Championship is scheduled for September in Chantilly, France," he said. "The FIP Polo Day at the World Equestrian Games is also scheduled in Deauville, France, in September of this year.

"The FIP Super Nations Cup will be played in Tianjin, China, this October. Additionally, there will be FIP Ambassador Cup tournaments played in the United States, Italy, Iran, Germany, Dominican Republic and Argentina this year. FIP sponsored Children's Tournament are also ongoing globally."

Product placement

Luxury brands with lengthy ties to the sport will also roll out dedicated products.

Richemont-owned Piaget celebrated its sixth year of sponsoring the United States Polo Association Gold Cup and its status as the official timekeeper of the International Polo Club in Palm Beach, FL, with a new timepiece.



Piaget's polo brand ambassador Jeff Hall

The new Polo FortyFive Black is releasing as a celebration of the Gold Cup sponsorship and the 10th anniversary of the International Polo Club in Palm Beach. This watch will add on to Piaget's established collection of polo watches ([see story](#)).

"The athletes playing polo are almost always affluent," said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#), Miami, FL. "The affluence attracts those who desire to be affluent.

"It is a sexy sport, and between sex, affluence, youth and the exotic nature of the sport, it's very attractive to brands who want to exude these qualities," he said.

"Brands are judged by the brands to which they associate."

Final Take

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