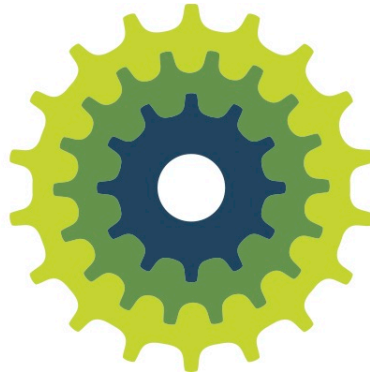




GRAND
PRIX
CYCLISTE
DE QUÉBEC



GRAND
PRIX
CYCLISTE
DE MONTRÉAL

TEAMS AND KEY RIDERS ENTERED

Prepared by:



AG2R LA MONDIALE (FRANCE)

Built to shine in stage races featuring mountain terrain, this French team managed by Vincent Lavenu is coming off an excellent summer. The momentum shift began with Christophe Riblon's remarkable performance in the Alpe d'Huez stage of the Tour de France. The Parisian arrives in Canada with a newfound status.

Founded in: 1992. 2013 wins (as of August 21): 8

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Christophe Riblon (France): Age 32, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 7 wins including Stage 14 of the 2010 Tour de France. This season: 2 wins: Stage 18 of the Tour de France, Stage 2 of the Tour of Poland.

The Paris-born Riblon, who now lives in Picardie, has stayed loyal to AG2R La Mondiale since turning pro. He started out as a track specialist in France, picking up two Silver medals in the World Championships, but came into his own in 2010 with a dominant Tour de France stage win at Ax-3 Domaines. Long hampered by back problems, he silenced the doubters with his win this year atop the Alpe d'Huez, and did it again in August with his excellent third-place showing in the Tour of Poland.

Romain Bardet (France): Age 22, turned pro in 2012. Career highlights: 1 win, 2013 Tour de l'Ain. This season: 15th in the Tour de France.

No sooner had Bardet become the top French rider in the 2013 Tour de France—his first time competing in the storied race, to boot—than he cemented his reputation as one of the promising riders in the bleu-blanc-rouge peloton by winning the Tour de l'Ain in August. Like his countryman Riblon, he's gunning for a spot on the national team at the World Championships in Florence (September 29).

Hugo Houle (Canada): Age 22, turned pro in 2011. Career highlights: 2nd, 2012 Tour de Beauce. This season: 5th, Canadian Time Trial Championships.

This season marked the Québécois rider's introduction to the WorldTour, wearing the colours of this French squad. When training and racing in Europe, he's based near Grenoble. Houle is still learning, but has already shown fine mettle as a *baroudeur*.

ASTANA PRO TEAM (KAZAKHSTAN)

Managed by Olympic champion Alexander Vinokourov, who retired as a pro last winter, the Kazakh squad has a cosmopolitan, well-rounded roster. Even without leader Vincenzo Nibali, who won the Giro d'Italia in May and is currently busy riding the Vuelta a España, they have the right assets to carve out wins on all sorts of terrain.

Founded in: 2007 2013 wins (as of August 21): 13

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Enrico Gasparotto (Italy): Age 31, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 9 wins including the 2005 Italian Championship and 2012 Amstel Gold Race. This season: 6th, Liège–Bastogne–Liège.

A *puncheur* who's quick on uphill finishes and is particularly fond of the Ardennes Classics, this Italian rider should find both the Québec City and Montréal courses to his liking. A top result could earn him a spot on the Italian squad for the Worlds in Florence.

Francesco Gavazzi (Italy): Age 29, turned pro in 2007. Career highlights: 7 wins including Stage 18 of the 2011 Vuelta a España. This season: 6th in the Tour of Belgium.

Part of a strong Italian ridership on the Kazakhstan-based squad, the Lombardy native is appreciated as a support rider, but is also a winner who can deliver a quick burst at just the right moment. He's comfortable on long, exhausting courses.

BELKIN-PRO CYCLING TEAM (NETHERLANDS)

With Dutch financial institution Rabobank fed up with doping allegations and out of the picture, U.S. technology firm Belkin stepped in last June to sponsor one of the oldest teams in the peloton. They did well in the Tour de France thanks to the duo of Bauke Mollema and Laurens ten Dam, and are looking to carry the momentum of a successful month of August into Canada, with two leaders who've enjoyed great results in Québec City and Montréal in the past.

Founded in: 1996 2013 wins (as of August 21): 23

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Robert Gesink (Netherlands): Age 27, turned pro in 2005. 14 wins including the 2010 Montréal GP and 2012 Tour of California. This season: 4th, Tour of Murcia, 6th, Tour of Catalonia.

This climbing specialist turned heads with his 2nd-place showing in the 2006 Tour de l'Avenir, and was hailed as the leader of a new wave in Dutch cycling. Despite a respectable *palmarès* highlighted by his win in the inaugural edition of the Montréal GP, Gesink has yet to live up to expectations on the Grand Tours (6th in the 2010 Tour de France, 6th in the 2009 and 2012 editions of the Vuelta a España), where his shortcomings as a time trialist and several crashes have thus far kept him off the podiums.

Lars Petter Nordhaug (Norway): Age 29, turned pro in 2005. 6 wins including the 2012 Montréal GP. This season: 2nd in the Tour des Fjords.

Nordhaug, who notched a surprise win at the 2012 Montréal GP not long after he announced he would be leaving Team Sky, was slowed by injury problems earlier this season but has bounced back since competing for the first time in the Tour de France. The time may be right for him to repeat as champion in Montréal...

BMC RACING TEAM (UNITED STATES)

After wrapping up the Tour de France with results nowhere near their objectives, this U.S. squad underwent a revolution, parting ways with directeur sportif John Lelangue, among others. Since then the team, backed by deep-pocketed Swiss entrepreneur Andy Rihs, has been racking up the wins (11 since the Grande Boucle) and enjoying newfound momentum—even if one of its stars, reigning World Champion Philippe Gilbert of Belgium, has had a mostly listless season and is still looking for his first win.

Founded in: 2007

2013 wins (as of August 21): 24

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Cadel Evans (Australia): Age 36, turned pro in 2001. 30 wins including the 2009 World Championships and 2011 Tour de France. This season: 3rd in the Giro d'Italia.

Though aged 36, the Australian had enough gas in the tank to climb onto the podium of a very demanding Giro d'Italia this year—but then slumped to 39th overall in the Tour de France. But

the winner of the 2011 Grande Boucle refuses to view that disappointment as symptomatic of a decline, and will be out to prove it as the racing season winds down.

Greg Van Avermaet (Belgium): Age 28, turned pro in 2006. 17 wins including the 2011 Paris–Tours. This season: 3 wins including the Tour de Wallonie.

After making a splash when he first joined the professional ranks, the Belgian seemed content to settle into a supporting role in the shadow of stars Tom Boonen and Philippe Gilbert. But he returned to the spotlight by winning Paris–Tours in 2011, recovered his competitiveness, and very nearly won last year’s Québec City GP on the final lap.

CANNONDALE PRO CYCLING (ITALY)

Now bankrolled by U.S. bike manufacturer Cannondale, the Italian team formerly known as Liquigas has mostly been built around Peter Sagan since the departure of Vincenzo Nibali. Not that they’re complaining: the young Slovak rider keeps on adding to his *palmarès*.

Founded in: 2005

2013 wins (as of August 21): 25

THE RIDER TO WATCH

Peter Sagan (Slovakia): Age 23, 55 wins including 4 stages in the Tour de France (3 in 2012, 1 in 2013). This season: 16 wins including Gent–Wevelgem.

Now a two-time winner of the Tour de France Green Jersey as points classification leader, the Slovak keeps adding to his reputation as one of the prodigies of the international peloton. He can win in a sprint, on a breakaway, in a bunched group and even on undulating terrain. He finished second in the inaugural Montréal GP in 2010, and has made the Canadian races his end-of-season priority this year.

EUSKALTEL EUSKADI (SPAIN)

After 19 years in the professional peloton, the team from the Basque Country with the distinctive orange kit recently announced that it will shut down at the end of this season, for lack of a sponsor. Despite that cloud hanging over them, the riders are still showing plenty of determination in races and a legitimate desire for results.

Founded in: 1994 2013 wins (as of August 21): 6

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Ion Izagirre (Spain): Age 24, turned pro in 2010. Career highlights: 2 wins including Stage 16 of the 2012 Giro d'Italia. This season: 2nd in the Tour of Poland, 4th in the Tour Down Under.

He may still ride in the shadow of cyclists like Samuel Sanchez and Mikel Nieve, but the younger Izagirre (his brother Gorka is also a pro with Euskaltel) is brimming with talent. His stage win in the 2012 Giro gave him a major dose of confidence, and he's spent 2013 proving that he's a top-level racer.

Romain Sicard (France): Age 25, turned pro in 2009. Career highlights: 1 win, 2009 Subida al Naranco. This season: 12th, Eneco Tour.

The 2009 Under-23 World Champion seemed to have lost his way after joining Euskaltel, where serious fitness problems have kept him from breaking out. He rode the Tour de France for the first time this summer, and throughout August has been posting results more in keeping with his potential.

FDJ.fr (FRANCE)

The team managed by Marc Madiot has had a loyal financial partner—the French national lottery—since 1997, and its policy as a training ground has borne fruit for several seasons now, leading to the emergence of riders like Thibaut Pinot, Arnaud Démare (who's had a splendid season so far with 8 wins) and Arthur Vichot, on whom they'll be counting for the Québec City and Montréal races.

Founded in: 1997 2013 wins (as of August 21): 22

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Pierrick Fédrigo (France): Age 33, turned pro in 2000. Career highlights: 24 wins including 4 Tour de France stage wins in 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2012. This season: 1 win, Paris–Camembert.

Fédrigo is a well-respected road captain for the team with the clover-leaf jersey. His career stats are among the most impressive among active French cyclists, and he's played a key role in helping younger riders break out. He has fond memories of Canadian roads, having finished second in the 2011 Montréal GP.

Arthur Vichot (France): Age 24, turned pro in 2010. Career highlights: 6 wins including Stage 5 of the 2012 Critérium du Dauphiné. This season: 3 wins including the French National Championships.

He became one of the youngest-ever national champions this past June, and this native of Franche-Comté region of eastern France is a born winner, with at least one victory every season since his début as a pro. After finishing in the middle of the pack in the Tour de France, he's hoping for strong showings at the Grands Prix Cyclistes, especially in Montréal, where he came 8th in 2011.

Dominique Rollin (Canada): Age 30, turned pro in 2001. 6 wins including Stage 4 of the 2008 Tour of California 2008. This season: 6th in the Grand Prix Cholet–Pays de la Loire.

At home in the Classics of Northern Europe, the Québécois knows he'll find the Québec City and Montréal courses tough going. Look for him to work hard for his teammates, and maybe even make a bold move.

GARMIN SHARP (UNITED STATES)

While this U.S. squad's 2013 season may appear lacklustre compared with last year, partly because its sprint specialists have underperformed, there have been bright spots courtesy of Irishman Dan Martin (who won the Tour of Catalonia, Liège–Bastogne–Liège and a stage of the Tour de France). Directeur sportif and manager Jonathan Vaughters is pinning late-season hopes on these Canadian races: among other things, Ryder Hesjedal could use a boost after his especially unlucky campaign.

Founded in: 2005

2013 wins (as of August 21): 13

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Ryder Hesjedal (Canada): Age 32, turned pro in 2003. Career highlights: 4 wins including the 2012 Giro d'Italia. This season: 8th, Liège–Bastogne–Liège.

Illness during the Giro d'Italia, which forced him to withdraw. A crash on the very first day of the Tour de France, a broken rib and a 70th-place finish in the general classification. The Victoria native definitely hasn't had the same kind of year he did in 2012, when he became the first Canadian to win a Grand Tour. He believes in his chances as the season draws to a close, however, and is determined to do well at home, especially in the Québec City GP, where he finished 4th in 2010.

Andrew Talansky (U.S.): Age 24, turned pro in 2008. Career highlights: 3 wins including the 2012 Tour de l'Ain. This season: 1 win, Stage 3 of Paris–Nice.

The young American first came to prominence in the 2012 Tour de Romandie when he finished second behind Bradley Wiggins, and this year his 2nd-place showing in Paris–Nice and, especially, his 10th place overall in his first-ever Tour de France have shown that he is indeed one of the most promising hopefuls of his generation. But he's less effective in single-day races, and will be mostly looking to log saddle time in the final run-up to the Worlds.

KATUSHA (RUSSIA)

Financed by the government and natural-gas companies, the Russian squad boasts one of the biggest budgets among the ProTeams, and riders suited to all types of races. A standout is Spaniard Joaquim Rodríguez, third in this year's Tour de France and one of the best in the world right now. In the Canadian races, they'll be relying on their *baroudeurs*.

Founded in: 2009 2013 wins (as of August 21): 25

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Aleksandr Kolobnev (Russia): Age 32, turned pro in 2002. Career highlights: 7 wins including Stage 3 of the 2007 Paris–Nice. This season: 1 win, Stage 1 of the Tour de Wallonie.

The Russian tends to attract less attention these days than in years past, but remains a man to watch in one-day races, where he can always be counted on to come on strong near the end of

the contest (though he rarely holds on to win). With his third-place finish in the Tour de Wallonie in August, he proved that he's still fit.

Simon Špilak (Slovenia): Age 27, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 7 wins including the 2010 Tour de Romandie. This season: 3 wins including the Frankfurt GP.

Considered one of the best up-and-comers of his generation, the Slovenian has had a fairly discreet career so far, punctuated by some spectacular finishes. And he's proved this year that he's well suited to one-day races, particularly multi-lap events.

LAMPRE-MERIDA (ITALY)

One of two Italian teams on the WorldTour, Lampre-Merida had pinned its hopes this season on veterans Cunego and Pozzato, both in their thirties—and who'll both be the key men in Canada. But as it turns out, it's youngsters Diego Ulissi and Adriano Malori who have been delivering the goods for manager Giuseppe Saronni.

Founded in: 1991

2013 wins (as of August 21): 10

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Damiano Cunego (Italy): Age 31, turned pro in 2002. Career highlights: 48 wins including the 2004 Giro d'Italia and the Tour de Lombardie in 2004, 2007 and 2008. This season: 1 win, Stage 3 of the Settimana Coppi e Bartali.

Quickly and no doubt prematurely thrust into the spotlight after winning the Giro when he was just 23, the Italian has never really lived up to the hype in the big stage races, though he did register a 7th place overall in the 2011 Tour de France. Even his characteristic punch in the Classics has weakened during a forgettable 2013 campaign.

Filippo Pozzato (Italy): Age 32, turned pro in 2000. Career highlights: 45 wins including Milan–San Remo in 2006. This season: 2 wins including the Coppa Agostoni.

After a well-engineered comeback with Pro Continental team Vini Fantini in 2012 (2nd in the Tour des Flandres), the man from Veneto returned to a top-tier squad with great expectations. After a disappointing spring with no results (in the Flanders Classics, for example) he seems to be getting his groove back, as seen in his recent Coppa Agostoni victory.

LOTTO BELISOL (BELGIUM)

The team sponsored by Belgian national lottery, one of the oldest in the European peloton, can rely on other solid riders besides its sprinter, Germany's André Greipel, to win races. Several of its members can deliver on various types of terrain, and they can also count on one-day specialists like Jurgen Roelandts.

Founded in: 1985

2013 wins (as of August 21): 23

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Jurgen Roelandts (Belgium): Age 28, turned pro in 2004. Career highlights: 9 wins including the 2008 Belgian National Championship and 2012 Circuit Franco-Belge. This season: 1 win, Stage 3 of the Tour Méditerranéen.

It has taken some time for this Flemish rider, who was Belgian champion at just 23, to live up to his great potential as a flat rider / sprinter. But an array of top-ten finishes on difficult courses (e.g., 3rd in the Tour of Flanders this year) speaks to his strong temperament. And he's fond of the layout at the Montréal GP, where he finished 4th in 2011 and 7th in 2012.

Tim Wellens (Belgium): Age 21, turned pro in 2012. Career highlights: no major wins. This season: 8th in the Tour de Wallonie.

A former winner of the Classique des Alpes as a junior, Wellens is one of the young Belgian climbing specialists to watch. He has real talent that's gradually blossoming at the élite level.

MOVISTAR TEAM (SPAIN)

The Spanish team is one of the most serious threats in the professional peloton, and excelled during this year's Tour de France thanks to superb showings by Colombian climber Nairo Quintana. They've got plenty of other talented riders in their ranks as well, like Portugal's Rui Costa, who won the Montréal GP in 2011. Although he's headed to another team next season, he'll be looking to shine once more in Canada.

Founded in: 1980

2013 wins (as of August 21): 28

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Rui Costa (Portugal): Age 26, turned pro in 2008. 17 wins including the 2011 Montréal GP and the Tour of Switzerland in both 2012 and 2013. This season: 7 wins including Stages 16 and 19 of the Tour de France.

On a good day, the Portuguese all-rounder is a major threat. He's consistently put up great results season after season, and 2013 is no exception: he won his second Tour of Switzerland, and showed pure class in capturing the Gap and Grand-Bornand stages of the Tour de France. He's a legitimate contender for another win in North America.

Andrey Amador (Costa Rica): Age 27, turned pro in 2009. Career highlights: 1 win, Stage 14 of the 2012 Giro d'Italia. This season: 8th in the Tirreno–Adriatico.

The Costa Rican is an invaluable team rider, as shown in the most recent Tour de France, who's spent his entire pro career with Movistar (previously Caisse d'Épargne) under manager Eusebio Unzué. He has an atypical rider profile, and is equally at home in mountainous stages and flat races like the Flanders Classics. A rare gem.

OMEGA PHARMA - QUICK-STEP CYCLING TEAM (BELGIUM)

Going by sheer number of victories, the Belgian squad managed by Patrick Lefèvre is number one in the world this season—and ten of its riders have at least one win apiece. Results posted by the likes of Mark Cavendish, Tony Martin and Sylvain Chavanel have even made us forget the setbacks of the aging and unlucky Tom Boonen.

Founded in: 2003 2013 wins (as of August 21): 47

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Sylvain Chavanel (France): Age 34, turned pro in 2000. Career highlights: 37 wins including 3 Tour de France stages (1 in 2009, 2 in 2011). This season: 5 wins including the Three Days of De Panne.

The five-time French national time-trial champion is one of the very best riders in the pro peloton right now, a peerless *baroudeur* who can also shine in the Classics. After working hard for teammate Mark Cavendish in the Tour de France, he's taking advantage of the end of this season to show off his skills—next year, he'll be joining the newly launched Swiss team IAM.

Michal Kwiatkowski (Poland): Age 23, turned pro in 2010. Career highlights: 2 wins including le 2013 Polish National Championships. This season: 1 win, Stage 11 of the Tour de France.

The revelation of this year's Tour de France. After making a splash with fourth-place finishes in both the Tirreno–Adriatico and the Amstel Gold Race, he wore the White Jersey as best young rider for several stages of the Grande Boucle, eventually losing it to Nairo Quintana in the Alps. A quick and versatile all-rounder, he's equally good on the flat and on hills, and likes demanding courses.

ORICA GREENEDGE (AUSTRALIA)

The first-ever Australian team in pro cycling has taken things to a new level this year. Success in the Tour de France proved that they are progressing, with a group that includes plenty of finishers and also boasts, in the person of Pieter Weening, a rider who can excel on mountainous courses.

Founded in: 2012

2013 wins (as of August 21): 30

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Michael Albasini (Switzerland): Age 32, turned pro in 2003. Career highlights: 17 wins including the 2012 Tour of Catalonia. This season: 2 wins including Stage 4 of Paris–Nice.

This experienced Swiss rider is a feared opponent in breakaways, where's he's used to cranking out sprint finishes. Over the years, he's put together a respectable *palmarès*. The layout of the Montréal GP should suit him well.

Pieter Weening (Netherlands): Age 32, turned pro in 2002. Career highlights: 7 wins including Stage 8 of the 2005 Tour de France. This season: 1 win, Tour of Poland.

Thrust into the spotlight very early after winning a stage in the Tour de France, the Dutchman had some up-and-down seasons before signing with Australia's Orica-GreenEDGE. Resurgent this year, he won a challenging Tour of Poland in August.

RADIOSHACK LEOPARD (LUXEMBURG)

Born of the merger between RadioShack, put together by Lance Armstrong after his 2009 comeback, and Team Leopard, founded by brothers Andy and Frank Schleck from Luxembourg, this U.S. team, which will be known as Trek starting in 2014, can always be counted on to contend. Success has come this year thanks to Fabian Cancellara in the Classics (he won both the Tour des Flandres and Paris–Roubaix). Andy Schleck, meanwhile, is patiently rebuilding his career after an uninspiring season.

Founded in: 2011 2013 wins (as of August 21): 19

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Andy Schleck (Luxembourg): Age 28, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 11 wins including the 2010 Tour de France. This season: 20th in the Tour de France.

Following a 2012 season spoiled by a hip fracture, the younger of the Schleck brothers seems to be gradually returning to the form that helped him win the Tour de France in 2010 (after Alberto Contador's eventual disqualification). Before setting his sights on 2014 and a full-fledged return, the lanky Luxembourg-born climber hopes to notch a prestige win as the season winds down.

Tony Gallopin (France): Age 25, turned pro in 2008. Career highlights: 4 wins including the 2013 Clásica de San Sebastián. This season: 1 win (San Sebastián); 4th in the Circuit de la Sarthe.

The young Frenchman, who'll be jumping ship to Lotto-Belisol next year after two seasons with U.S. team RadioShack-Leopard (where uncle Alain is a directeur sportif), proved in late July with his win in the Clásica de San Sebastián that he's a force to be reckoned with in major races. He was a serious contender throughout last year's Montréal GP, eventually finishing 10th.

SKY PROCYCLING (GREAT BRITAIN)

The British team has dominated the Tour de France in the past two years, putting Bradley Wiggins and then Chris Froome on the top step of the podium thanks to a very scientific approach to the competition. But the armada managed by Dave Brailsford, who was behind Great Britain's dominance in track cycling at the 2012 Olympics, has had a tougher time of things in one-day races and sprints since the departure of Mark Cavendish. That said, they're sending two big guns to Canada...

Founded in: 2010 2013 wins (as of August 21): 32

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Chris Froome (Great Britain): Age 28, turned pro in 2007. Career highlights: 17 wins including le 2013 Tour de France. This season: 13 wins including the Critérium du Dauphiné, the Tour de Romandie and the Tour de France.

The winner of the 2013 Tour de France has an uncommon background: he was born in Kenya, raised in South Africa and is a citizen of Britain though he's never lived there. Given his triumph in July, one almost tends to forget how dominant he's been in other stage races this season, from the Tour of Oman to the Critérium du Dauphiné to the Tour de Romandie.

Richie Porte (Australia): Age 28, turned pro in 2008. Career highlights: 12 wins including the 2013 Paris–Nice. This season: 5 wins including stages 5 and 7 and 1st overall in Paris–Nice.

The likeable Australian has had a two-faced season: he began as Sky's team leader, exploiting that status to ride to victory at the Paris–Nice, and then shifted to a role as a luxury domestique for Chris Froome, starting with the Critérium International. He craves responsibilities, though, and the British team's staff has assured him that he'll have a lead role in the 2014 Giro d'Italia.

TEAM ARGOS-SHIMANO (NETHERLANDS)

Built around finishers Marcel Kittel and John Degenkolb, the Dutch squad has benefited from the presence of a young manager, Iwan Spekenbrink, and beefed up its ranks for its first season on the WorldTour. They're no longer hesitant to grab the reins in a race, which helped Germany's Kittel to victory in five stages of this year's Tour de France.

Founded in: 2005 2013 wins (as of August 21): 18

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

John Degenkolb (Germany): Age 24, turned pro in 2008. Career highlights: 26 wins including 5 stages of the 2012 Vuelta a España. This season: 1 win, Stage 5 of the Giro d'Italia.

Last year at this time, he was dominating in mass finishes at the Vuelta a España. But in 2013, the sturdy German finisher has fallen short of expectations: he has just one win, in a stage of the Giro. He needs to get back to the carefree daring of his days as a young rider, when he was a threat over (almost) any terrain.

François Parisien (Canada): Age 31, turned pro in 2006. Career highlights: 4 wins including the 2012 Tour of Elk Grove. This season: 1 win, Stage 5 of the Tour of Catalonia.

Argos-Shimano's directors noticed Parisien's qualities during last year's Québec City GP, when he finished 10th in a SpiderTech jersey. Their hunch paid off when the Montrealer made a successful WorldTour début, prevailing in a bunched sprint in Stage 5 of the Tour of Catalonia. He'd like nothing more than a win on home turf.

TEAM SAXO-TINKOFF (DANEMARK)

Though it claimed a fine victory by Roman Kreuziger in the Amstel Gold Race in April, the Danish team managed by Bjarne Riis focused its season mostly on the Tour de France, hoping to deliver a third career win for Alberto Contador. But the Spaniard finished just off the podium, and he'll want to swallow that disappointment and try to salvage his season.

Founded in: 1998 2013 wins (as of August 21): 5

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Alberto Contador (Spain): Age 30, turned pro in 2003. Career highlights: 49 wins including le Tour de France in 2007 and 2009, the 2008 Giro d'Italia and the Vuelta a España in 2008 and 2012. This season: 1 win, Stage 6 of the Tour de San Luis; 4th in the Tour de France.

"El Pistolero" has won all three Grand Tours, and has the shiniest trophy case of all active riders. Coming back after his suspension in August 2012, he achieved the feat of winning the Vuelta a España. This season, however, despite performing at a very high level, he's consistently lagged behind Froome and the new generation.

Matti Breschel (Denmark): Age 29, turned pro in 2004. Career highlights: 18 wins including the 2010 Across Flanders. This season: 2 wins, stages 2 and 3 of the Tour of Denmark.

After turning professional, the solid Dane soon demonstrated great potential as a Classics specialist, but never quite lived up to it. After two seasons with Rabobank, the two-time Road World Championships medalist (3rd in 2008, 2nd in 2010) returned under the wing of manager Riis in a bid to reboot his career.

VACANSOLEIL – DCM PRO CYCLING TEAM (NETHERLANDS)

Set to fold at the end of this season unless a new sponsor comes to its rescue, this Dutch squad had hoped for more from the 2013 campaign, during which Thomas De Gendt (3rd in the 2012 Giro), Liuwe Westra and Grega Bole have failed to perform to expectations.

Founded in: 2005 2013 wins (as of August 21): 10

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Björn Leukemans (Belgium): Age 36, turned pro in 2000. Career highlights: 11 wins including the the Druivenkoers Overijse in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. This season: 1 win.

The Belgian veteran is about to complete his 15th season in the pro ranks. With a 4th-place showing in both the 2007 Paris–Roubaix and the 2010 Tour of Flanders, and a 6th in Québec City in 2011, he’s often missed out on major victories by scant seconds.

Marco Marcato (Italy): Age 29, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 6 wins including the 2012 Paris–Tours. This season: 5th in the Tour de Wallonie.

A tireless *baroudeur*, the Italian had been accustomed to podium placings, and finally scored a prestige win in the Paris–Tours race last year. In 2011, he fared well in both Québec City (8th) and Montréal (7th).

TEAM EUROPCAR (FRANCE)

A Tour de France fixture in recent years, the team managed by Jean-René Bernaudeau had a less-than-stellar showing at the 2013 Grande Boucle, despite a fairly successful season up to that point. They’re no strangers to Canada: Thomas Voeckler won the very first Québec City GP in 2010, and one of the team’s financial partners is the Louis Garneau company. Europcar is the only Pro Continental team invited to race in this year’s Grands Prix Cyclistes.

Founded in: 2005 2013 wins (as of August 21): 23

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

David Veilleux (Canada): Age 25, turned pro in 2007. Career highlights: 9 wins including the 2012 Tre Valli Varesine. This season: 2 wins including Stage 1 of the Critérium du Dauphiné.

His wonderful win at Champéry in the opening stage of this year's Critérium du Dauphiné, along with steady progress, earned this Québécois his first Tour de France selection. And a leadership role for these Canadian races, as he looks to shine in front of the home crowd.

Bryan Coquard (France): Age 21, turned pro in 2013. Career highlights (all this season): 5 wins including stages 8 and 9 of the Tour de Langkawi.

Silver Medalist at the 2012 Olympics in the omnium, and second in the Under-23 Road World Championships, Bryan Coquard is the latest wonder boy of French cycling. As a neo-pro, he already has five victories under his belt and has won over his teammates with his talent and the way he approaches each race as a game. He should be a pleasant discovery for fans in Québec City and Montréal.

CANADIAN NATIONAL TEAM (CANADA)

Made up of members of Continental teams (the third tier of international pro competition) and managed by former professional rider Kevin Fields, the Canuck squad will be out to do its nation proud in front of a partisan crowd.

THE RIDERS TO WATCH

Zach Bell: Age 30, turned pro in 2005. Career highlights: 5 wins including the 2013 Canadian National Road Race Championships. This season: 3 wins, Canadian Championships, Stage 4 in the Tour de Taiwan, Stage 6 in the Tour de Korea.

The reigning Canadian champion, Bell has spent this season with the China-based team Champion System, and should be one of the key members of this Canadian squad. An excellent *rouleur*, he prepped for the Québec City and Montréal GPs by competing in two races in Norway in August, among others.

Ryan Anderson: Age 26, turned pro in 2008. Career highlights: none. This season: 2nd in the Canadian National Road Race Championships, 2nd in the Tour of Elk Grove.

Like teammate Zach Bell, Anderson spent some time as a member of China's Champion System after Canada's Team SpiderTech folded, then moved to U.S.-based Team Optum this past June. He's been turning in good performances since then, and in late August contended strongly in mass finishes at the USA Pro Cycling Challenge in Colorado.