

STU BRASS FROM SNOWBOARD CLUB UK AND SOUL SPORTS TELLS US WHAT THOSE LONGED-FOR SPONSORS ARE LOOKING FOR...HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES?



# Is it possible to become a sponsored rider?



If your name's Shaun White then obviously yes! But what about for the rest of us, living the dream? For most it's probably a pipe dream, may it be a half or quarter pipe. Nonetheless if you're super talented and you've got something special then you might get lucky.

Sponsors are looking for someone that fits their brand image, to enhance the credibility of their products. In some cases a rider is used to move the direction of a brand in to new markets.

## Have you got the talent?

Talent is the overriding factor, which will decide how far a rider moves up the sponsorship ladder. Nowadays the younger a rider is the more appealing they are to a brand, as they are able to build a long term relationship with the rider and consumers will then associate the rider with the brand.

Probably the second most important factor if you are to make it to the top rung is the level of exposure a rider achieves within the media. In some cases this is the most important aspect. Core exposure (eg Snowboard UK) is key for credibility, where mainstream exposure (eg FHM) reaches a far broader audience offering a greater return.

It might seem that actually winning comps is less important than the amount of exposure...but winners prove a product to be better than its competitors. Titles are also important - especially British/European/World titles or wins at other well known events.

## Look good, think smart...

By far the shallowest factor is how photogenic or good looking the rider is. This becomes apparent when a brand wants to use close up images of the rider - because sex sells. It's the same

in any industry the world over, sadly. Social behaviour can also affect a rider's ability to get sponsored; the image needs to fit with the brand's ethos. It works both ways - having a bad boy image may suit one brand, whereas a clean-cut image fits another. But no one likes an idiot!

A riders' ability to communicate is also important, they need to update their sponsors with activity reports and media exposure. A rider who communicates with media and their contacts on a regular basis means that the rider can promote their products without the sponsor having to do all the work.

Potential sponsors will look at a rider's previous backers. They will consider many things such as loyalty to a previous brand, to see what they can expect from a rider. It could be difficult for a brand to sponsor a rider who has had a long-term relationship with a competitor as it can take a while to dissociate the rider with their previous sponsor...but it could be a great scoop!

## It's not just the riding...

Any rider who has other interests or skills will always have the advantage as it broadens their appeal. Snowboarders that can skate, surf, BMX, DJ, MC, write or have other artistic skills provide other avenues for sponsors to further promote their brand. Classic surf brands such as Billabong, Quiksilver or O'Neill will utilize riders that crossover to get across the image of being a freesports brand.

## What's in it for me?

If you're lucky enough to get sponsored, what can you expect? There are different levels of sponsorship out there. Several levels have the word sponsorship associated with them and



only a few give a rider the right to call themselves a 'Pro Rider'.

The most basic sponsorship is a 'Trade Deal' where a rider usually contacts a brand or distributor direct. Mainly for rising stars, it's a starting point and with trade prices on product rather than freebies. Most riders begin their careers by getting a local shop to give them cheap or free products.

The next step up is a 'National Pro Team Rider' and this can come in two ways, with product only or including some cash. The rider deals direct with the UK distributor or agency who provide free product. If you manage prominent positions at events, you can look forward to more free stuff, as well as some money for entry fees and road trips. Sponsors will be looking for strong results and good media promotion, including UK snowboard videos if possible.

Riders at this level can also be offered incentives, such as a 'Travel Budget'. This is a set budget for the year used for specific events, season passes, trips, photo shoots etc. A travel budget encourages you as a rider to travel and broaden your exposure. Typically a sponsor will pay for trips with a magazine where the mag is

guaranteeing coverage, for example; a five page article about a trip to Spain.

It's when you get to the level of 'retainers', that it becomes exciting. This is cold hard cash! The rider is employed because by the sponsor, because the rider has proved their ability to generate publicity consistently throughout previous years.

Unsurprisingly 'International Team Rider' means you've hit the international level. Many brands have a tiered system within international teams such as Rookie, B, A, Pro or even through different continents.

At this point the rider is expected to project the brand on a global stage level. They might assist with product development, perform at the top international events, have coverage in a mainstream movies and interviews with the top magazines. In return the rider will be provided with an almost unlimited amount of product (possibly including a signature pro model with royalties), decent cash payments and support through times when an injury may interrupt a season.

When you're a 'Legend', the world is your oyster, including sections in MTV's Cribs, your own DVD, video game and celeb status...



### SUB-HEAD HERE

For riders aspiring to become pro or looking for sponsorship then you should head out to the **British Snowboard & Freeski Championships in Laax, Switzerland 29 March - 05 April 08**. It's the best place to be spotted by the key brands and gain the all important media exposure or results [www.brits08.com](http://www.brits08.com)

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