



## **Statement from T.RF Thüringer Sportmarketing GmbH (T.RF) regarding the cancellation of the 37th LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour**

Erfurt, March 25, 2025. With this statement, we would like to make the exact reasons and circumstances of the cancellation transparent to all sponsors, supporters, employees, media representatives, and cycling fans.

This decision was certainly not an easy one for us.

### **Dear cycling friends,**

On March 17, 2025, the organizing staff of the 37th LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour officially canceled the race planned and prepared for 2025 in a message to all involved and announced that the unavoidable reasons for this tough decision would be made public after a thorough evaluation of the situation. The following statement documents the status of preparations for the race at the time of the cancellation and outlines the events that led to this decision.

The LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour 2025 (LTLT) was scheduled to start in just under three months on June 17, 2025, in Leinefelde-Worbis. The opening stage would feature an 18% climb to Scharfenstein Castle, and the race would continue for five more stages until June 22, 2025.

The date had been included in the UCI World Cycling Federation's calendar since July 2024.

The lineup for the tour, which had been finalized in January, included nine teams from the Women's World Tour (the highest UCI category in women's cycling), several Pro Conti teams (second-highest category), and three German teams, including the national team.

Three German Olympic champions from Tokyo 2020 were scheduled to be on the starting line: Lisa Klein, Franziska Brausse, and Mieke Kröger. Lisa Klein studied and trained at the sports school in Erfurt and owes her successes in part to Thuringian cycling.

### **With great commitment to the oldest women's cycling stage race in the world**

The LTLT is the oldest women's cycling tour in the world. Launched in 1986 as the International Thuringia Tour of Women, it steadily gained in sporting importance and was considered one of the best-organized events in the women's cycling sector until its 2024 edition. This quality is primarily thanks to Tour Director Vera Hohlfeld, who, with her team, managed to continuously develop the tour and establish it as a permanent fixture on the UCI calendar.

Olympic, world, and European champions have always been at the start, national teams from Europe and overseas have been regulars, and before each event, more teams applied to participate than could be admitted to the race.

### **Positive images from Thuringia visible worldwide**

Starting in 2021, the organizer organized live television broadcasts of the LTLT, which MDR has since broadcast in special daily programs and even described as a flagship project with the highest priority for the Free State of Thuringia.

International media interest in the tour also grew; the US media group Discovery Channel and its channels (such as Eurosport) have been broadcasting hour-long live broadcasts since 2022.

Under Minister-President Bodo Ramelow, the Free State of Thuringia recognized the promotional potential of the tour. Two years ago, a very fruitful collaboration for both sides began. The tour incorporated symbols such as the castle (Thuringia's history), the heraldic lion, and the tree (Thuringian Forest and Rennsteig Trail) into its media communications. A special classification jersey for the Free State of Thuringia was introduced, and Thuringia's core brands were broadcast more prominently and effectively than ever before via television images and photos to national and international media representatives around the world. The organizers linked these core brands of women's cycling and the Free State of Thuringia with compelling keywords, resulting in a significant increase in Google rankings.

This professional marketing concept boosted the reputation and visibility of the Free State of Thuringia. The television broadcasts and photos from the LTLT illustrated cities, towns, landscapes, tourist hotspots, and visitors along the route, creating added media value for Thuringia. One could hardly wish for a better platform for the external presentation of a federal state. In short: We implemented a highly

professional marketing concept that significantly strengthened the visibility and reputation of the Free State of Thuringia. We, the organizers, understood and treated the financial support of the Free State of Thuringia for the implementation and presentation of the LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour not as a subsidy with funds, but rather as a consideration for the media promotion of the Free State of Thuringia, whose image as a tourist destination benefited from it.

After the support from the previous state government was assured for 2025, we have been working motivated and diligently since the middle of last year on the upcoming LTLT edition from June 17-22, 2025.

Since the beginning of the calendar year, we have been trying to establish personal contact with the new state government. Our initial questions and subsequent cries for help were ignored by the Thuringian State Chancellery.

### **The chronology of the attempted dialogue**

**January 9, 2025** - First telephone contact with the Thuringian State Chancellery (Ministry of Sport) with a request for a short-term appointment, which was confirmed by telephone. An additional email was sent to the State Chancellery on the same topic. No response for a week.

After another reminder, the LTLT organization received the following response: "We have forwarded the matter to the responsible department for evaluation and will get back to you after review and evaluation (...)"

**January 16, 2025** - Another email to the minister with an urgent request for an appointment. A call was made with the request to refrain from further contact - they would get back to us in due course.

January 27, 2025 - Another attempt to contact Minister Gruhner - this time through a third party - to arrange an appointment. The minister's response was that he would get back to us.

There was no way to explain our special situation to the Minister for Federal and European Affairs, Sports, Volunteering, and Head of the State Chancellery. Time was running out; at this point, we were already forced to enter the critical phase of tour planning and make the first important investments.

### **Early February** - Invitation to the State Chancellery on **February 12, 2025**

**February 12, 2025** - At the beginning of the meeting, Minister Gruhner apologized and did not attend the meeting.

However, the meeting was not productive. We were informed that the Free State of Bavaria could not provide any financial resources. Very sobering.

By this time, at the latest, there should have been real interest in the tour. Then a joint rescue plan would have been possible.

**In the following three weeks**, the LTLT organizers made repeated attempts to contact the State Chancellery (via various sources) to obtain a decision from Mr. Gruhner or Mr. Voigt as to whether or not the LTLT would receive the subsidy agreed upon with the previous government. No response, only a whispered rumor that the Free State had no money available for this and that the budget already set aside for the event by the previous state government was not available in the preliminary budget.

**March 7, 2025** - The organizers were forced to inform employees and partners about the status and, together with MDR, their long-standing and most important media partner, issued a press release with the headline: "**The tour is threatened with cancellation.**"

**March 10, 2025** - The written cancellation from the State Chancellery landed in the LTLT organization's mailbox, to date the only binding statement in written form. MDR broadcasts a report that the 37th edition of the LTLT is threatened with cancellation, and that there is criticism of the State Chancellery's decision from various quarters.

**March 11, 2025** - A call from the Thuringian State Chancellery, an employee of the Minister of Sport, signals to the LTLT organizers that they are interested in discussions, but the offers - even in the form of a possibility - were far below what was necessary.



**March 12, 2025** – Online meeting with Minister Gruhner – One option that was proposed is unacceptable to us: providing funding from the funds related to the "Volunteer Act." We don't want any money that might be diverted from other volunteers.

The time had come when the backlog of work – even if the €200,000 promised last year were still paid out – could hardly be made up.

**March 17, 2025** – official cancellation of the 37th edition of the LTLT. This day was the last opportunity to cancel hotels for the teams, riders, UCI commissioners, and staff without cancellation fees. In addition, the first large binding sums would have had to be paid.

**On March 18, 2025**, Minister President Voigt claimed on the MDR program "Sport im Osten" that "A privately organized tour cannot be financed almost 80 percent with public funds." This statement is false. Everyone involved in organizing the LTLT felt it was a snub and a direct slap in the face.

Now Hohlfeld and her team are supposed to take an unacceptable risk and not only do the same, but even more – to catch up and hold a safe tour according to UCI specifications, including all requirements of the state, cities, and municipalities? Just because, on March 12, 2025, they suddenly realized how important the LTLT is?

Perhaps the Thuringian State Chancellery's rethink was due to the fact that the cancellation attracted worldwide attention – from Denmark to Mexico, from Great Britain to Australia. This underscores the international importance and reputation of this oldest professional women's cycling tour in the world.

### **Criticism & Evaluation**

This foundation of trust was completely destroyed by the actions of the Thuringian State Chancellery. Our many years of work were disrespectfully trampled upon, which is now the stab in the back for the 37th edition of the LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour.

It should be noted that no one from the State Chancellery has even the slightest concern with the tour and its value for the Free State of Thuringia, nor with the history of the international women's tour through Thuringia since 1986.

The Thuringian State Chancellery, with its Minister-President Mario Voigt (CDU) and the Minister for Federal and European Affairs, Sports and Volunteering and Head of the State Chancellery Stefan Gruhner (CDU), have thus proven themselves to be unreliable partners for cooperation with the LTLT. A respectful, fair, and trusting relationship with the LTLT is lacking.

In the short time available, no potentially comparable partner could be found. Even the restructuring of the marketing concept, tailored to a new sponsor, is impossible to achieve in three months.

Under these conditions, implementation is no longer possible.

### **Innovation and drive have always been our primary goal**

We have tirelessly approached cities, partners, and sponsors, contacted companies directly, and presented them with customized concepts – especially in the last four years with growing television presence. However, Thuringia is economically significantly weaker than Bayern or Baden-Württemberg.

Nevertheless, we have continued to succeed in attracting new partners, such as: For example, we hope to secure AOKPLUS as a new major main sponsor for 2025. Fruitful discussions have already taken place with new and larger interested partners for the LTLT2026.

### **Conclusion**

Women's cycling is and will unfortunately remain a fringe sport in Germany. Therefore, it requires patience, persuasiveness, and a lot of commitment. The number of cycling events in Germany is small –



and the financial support is not comparable to that of football or winter sports – and we don't expect that either.

But: Every cycling race in the world is permanently dependent on support from the state, municipalities, cities, and regions. This is not unusual – even the Tour de France (ASO) charges well for every start and finish location.

The accusation that we haven't tried hard enough to secure sponsors is simply false.

We understand the current budget situation and we know that the Free State of Bavaria is not obligated to support the LTLT. But honest and timely communication on an equal footing would have helped a lot.

For the future, we would like to see a women's tour as part of the Deutschland Tour – perhaps with Lidl as a new sponsor. And we hope that the Free State of Thuringia will then give women's cycling a fair chance.

Over the years, Hohlfeld and her team have foregone a significant portion of their salary, which would have been appropriate for their work, because they believed in the potential of the tour and women's cycling!

This passion was not rewarded, and in our view, cycling in the Free State of Thuringia has suffered serious damage. The LTLT was also the most important pillar of women's cycling in Germany.

Female cyclists and coaches, as well as cycling fans from all parts of the world, followers of all cultures and religions, were always warmly welcomed. International women's cycling in Thuringia stood for cross-border, cross-religious, and cross-cultural friendships, and the LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour stood for diversity and tolerance. We ask for precisely this tolerance in comments on this statement.



### **Personal Remarks by Vera Hohlfeld**

The LTLT requires immense energy every year. Preparing, organizing, and executing an event of this high standard—while simultaneously managing financial resources as efficiently as possible—requires a great willingness to take personal risks. The last three to four months of the intensive preparation phase demand superhuman commitment and maximum passion, not just from me, but from all of us.

Neglecting all personal interests and putting one's private life aside is a common occurrence, often at the expense of one's health.

In the end, there was simply no longer enough energy to face the ministers in the State Chancellery and continue to beg for every cent, as if at a bazaar.

What is particularly painful is that, on the one hand, LTLT employees were willing to cover their own hotel costs and even forgo their daily allowances just to keep the tour afloat. On the other hand, the Minister-President demanded in a press release: "The Ladies Tour must question its funding" and "The Minister-President expects the organizer to rethink its approach." In this context, the comparison with football in Thuringia (Regionalliga) and the world's elite LTLT was the height of humiliation and painfully reminded me of our status here in Thuringia.

The mere thought of it brought tears to my eyes, making it impossible for me to continue negotiating with the State Chancellery under these circumstances.

I realize that not everyone can understand my decision. However, I ask that you respect this drastic step. It is time to stand up for myself again and find the balance between my career, appreciation, and private interests.

In the 15 years that I have led the tour, a family has grown together, consisting of over 100 people who have given their heart and soul, as well as our loyal sponsors and partners. I am very proud of that. Something like this is unique these days and has made up for all the hardships I've had to endure over the years. So, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you!

Thank you for staying loyal to us all these years. Thank you for your selfless and tireless commitment, and thank you for making the tour what it was!

You were the LOTTO Thuringia Ladies Tour!

Yours, Vera Hohlfeld