

# The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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## We've Made It

Don't want to make a big song and dance but we are 50 editions old at long last. It seems like only yesterday since we published the manifesto edition which set our stall for possible future editions. After moaning about the lack of a magazine like The Speedway Researcher we decided to see how our efforts would be received.

We got a favourable response and then got on with producing more editions with loads of information which needed to be shared.

There are loads of highlights and a few downers as we see loyal contributors and subscribers pass away.

We've made a lot of long distance friendships and spent a lot of time helping fellow researchers track down that vital bit of information. It is particularly heartening to see the number of authors who have acknowledged the magazine.

The web has added a new dimension to what we can do and has made so much information available to so many. It can only grow and expand but only as an adjunct to the magazine.

We will continue to put back numbers on to the web site and let others share in the fruits of the efforts. We suspect very few magazines have been so open with their back numbers.

So, we'd like to say thanks to everyone who has contributed and subscribed over the years. Without out your support we probably would have fizzled out a long time ago.

Here is to edition 100. Cheers.

**Graham and Jim**

## **Preston Speedway 1929-1932** **Part 3: The 1929 Season Concludes**

In this intermittent history of one of the pioneer teams of British speedway, Preston, we have so far seen a competitive team operation in

a Northern Speedway league that saw some teams fail to start the season (Long Eaton); others start but fail after a small number of meetings (Bolton, Burnley & Hanley) whilst more continued to compete but failed to fulfil all their fixtures by the seasons end.

The last part of this history took us to the end of August 1929 with the Lancashire team competitive at the top of the League and in the League KO Cup. Throughout this time Preston ran two meetings a week at their Farringdon Park Stadium, with usually a midweek open meeting and a weekend league match. Speedway stars of the time were tough men. In an open meeting in early September Preston ace rider Ham Burrill was easily leading a Senior Scratch heat when his front wheel came off and he was flung onto the cinder track. As the race continued he hopped off the track and was stretchered away to the dressing rooms waving to the crowd. It was soon announced he was merely “bruised”. In the same week came the bombshell that Belle Vue had resigned from the Northern Dirt Track Riders Association and it was feared they would operate as an “outlaw” track seeking to poach riders from other Northern teams. The local press reported that Belle Vue were interested in signing all the Preston stars but to their credit all the Preston team volunteered not to ride at Belle Vue.

Despite the late stage of the season Preston’s crowds held up well and on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> September a crowd of 8,000 saw Frank Charles beat Vic Huxley in two straight Challenge races.

An inter-track challenge meeting at the Albion Speedway, Salford over four heats and four riders per team saw Salford beat Preston 22-5 although press reports do not indicate who rode for Preston that Friday night.

By 14<sup>th</sup> September 1929 with the League season close to a conclusion the Northern League table looked like this:

White City (Mcr)	P21	38pts
Preston	P24	32pts
Leeds	P21	31pts
Halifax	P21	29pts
Rochdale	P21	22pts
Leicester	P23	20pts
Salford	P21	20pts
Barnsley	P19	16pts
Newcastle	P17	16pts

Sheffield	P18	14pts
Middlesbrough	P21	12pts
Liverpool	P16	12pts

On the following Wednesday Preston travelled to Sheffield in the Second Round of the KO Cup and it was nip and tuck up to Heat 6 with the Tykes leading 22-20, thereafter two 6-1 to the home side saw Sheffield pull away and despite a gallant 6-1 to Preston in the final heat, Sheffield held on for a 35-28 home leg advantage. Fans of the two teams did not having to wait long for the second leg the following evening at Farringdon Park. Over the nine heats the Preston team was on top form winning heats 2-8 by a margin of 6-1 and heats one and nine by a score of 5-2, giving them a thumping 52-11 second leg win and an aggregate victory of 80-46.

Team fixtures followed thick and fast for the rest of September. First saw Preston take on Leicester Stadium in the KO Cup Semi-Final First Leg at Farringdon Park and a comfortable 48-14 advantage to take to the Midlands. Preston won every heat but only homester Frank Charles was able to secure a 12pt maximum score.

Five days later Preston entertained Wembley Stadium at Farringdon Park in a challenge meeting limited to four heats as a number of Preston riders were unavailable competing in a Lancashire v Yorkshire meeting at Wembley on the same evening. The teams were: Wembley: Jack Jackson, Ray Tauser, Harold Crook and Alf Foulds and for Preston: Jack Chiswell, Frank Chiswell, Len Myerscough and Claude Rye. Each team won heat by scores of 5-2 and 4-3 to give a result of 14-14. In the War of the Roses meeting at Wembley Stadium one of the biggest speedway crowds ever seen at the stadium saw a Lancashire team which included Frank Charles, Joe Abbott and Ham Burrill beaten by a Yorkshire team 26-37.

In early October Preston travelled to Leicester Stadium to see if they could reach the final of the KO Cup. In a close contest Leicester were clearly more at home on the own track. They won eight of the nine heats but Preston often filled the minor placing and even won heat 6 with a 6-1. That resulted in a second leg win for Leicester of 39 points to Preston's 24. However Preston went through to the final with a 72-53 aggregate scoreline.

As the season drew to a close crowds diminished so that on Thursday night, 3<sup>rd</sup> October only 1500 turned up to see a Preston 2<sup>nd</sup> team lose at home 8-19 to a Salford 2<sup>nd</sup> team over four heats.

So came the season finale. The English Dirt Track (Northern) League KO Cup Final between Preston and Halifax with the first leg at Farringdon Park on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October, advertised as “the most important match of the season”. The teams were:

Preston: Ham Burrill, Frank Chiswell, Joe Abbott, Jack Chiswell, Frank Charles, Claude Rye

Halifax: Bert Clayton, Geoff Taylor, Frank Smith, Jack Dudding, Walter Creasor, Geoff Kilburn

The tone of the meeting was set in the first two heats with 6-1 heat advantages to the Lancastrians. By heat five Preston were 28-7 ahead and by the final heat they had secured a crushing victory by 49 points to 15. Frank Charles top scored with an unbeaten 12, followed by Joe Abbott with 10, Ham Burrill & Frank Chiswell on 8, Jack Chiswell with 7 and reserve Claude Rye on 3pts. For Halifax Walter Creasor alone put up resistance with 5pts the remainder of the team picking up between one and three points. Preston could sense the cup was heading their way but they still had to beat a Halifax team who went well around their Thrum Hall track.

A Charity Broadside meeting took place at Preston two days later which brought the curtain down on the first season of speedway at the northern track with proceeds going to three local medical charities. Only the unfortunate W. Yates who, in the Broadside Final fell and not only broke his collar-bone but also fractured his skull, had a bad night, although he was also recorded as the fastest rider of the night!

So to the final meeting of the season the second leg of the KO Cup raced at Owlerton Stadium, Sheffield with Preston holding a 33 point advantage from the first leg. In an early precursor to the guest rider arrangements of recent years, Halifax brought in Squib “Broadside” Burton the Rochdale ace and saw the return of captain, George Reynard. Given the neutral venue and big Preston advantage, a crowd of less than 10,000 was considered disappointing by commentators, particularly given Preston’s earlier league meeting with Sheffield at that stadium saw the gates closed and a full house. Sadly, for the White Rose team Preston fielding the same side as the first leg a week before continued to dominate. And despite off nights for Ham Burrill (5pts) three Preston riders scored double figures; (Frank Chiswell (12), Joe

Abbott (10) and Franck Charles (10) as the Lancastrians won seven heats to three in impressive style. Only Reynard and Burton challenged the winners with 7pts each and thrilled the crowd with their edge of the seat style of racing, as Preston stormed to a second leg win by a score of 39-24 and an aggregate cup winning victory of 87-39.

The trophy was presented to the winning Preston captain Ham Burrill, by Mr W D Marr, Chairman of the North Dirt Track Owners Association, who congratulated the Preston team not only on their fine riding but also their magnificent team spirit. Captain Burrill was persuaded to speak on the "broadcasting apparatus" as the press reports called it and said "he was glad the cup had come to Preston and that they had ridden hard all through for it and against good riders". The winning team paraded the ground with the cup in one of speedway's grading wagons. The cup was next seen in the window of the car dealers of Marks & Baron Ltd in Lancaster Road, Preston.

Shortly after their victory many of the Preston stars headed off for a speedway tour of Holland and I have even heard reports some competing in meetings in Germany.

Speedway's first full season in the north of England saw Preston as one of its premier teams finishing close to the top of a League full of uncompleted fixtures and winning its Cup competitions. It was to be a hard act to follow in 1930. (to be continued) **Graham Fraser**

## **A-Z Australians in UK**

### **Tony Webb's Additions / admendments 1/12/2009**

Bugeja Arlo	SA	Redcar2007/8/9
Davey Mitchell	QLD	Glasgow 007/2008
Gathercole Cory	VIC	IOW 2007/8/9 Swindon Somerset
Grojczonek Josh	QLD	Glasgow 2008/9
Herne Jay	NSW	Weymouth 2007/8 Bournemouth 2009
Holder James	NSW	IOW 2008 Newport 2009
James Scott	SA	Mildenhall 2002/3 Wimbledon 2005 Buxton 2006/7./9 Redcar 2008
Ksiezak Robert	VIC	Edinburgh 2007 Glasgow 2008 Birmingham 2009 Stoke 2009
Kurtz Todd	NSW	Newport 2009-
Mackay Mal	SA	Born UK

Morris Nick	QLD	2009 Exhibition rides
North Dakota	VIC	2009 Mildenhall
Poole Taylor	NSW	2009 Mildenhall
Procter Ty	VIC	Redcar 2008/9
Rutherford Shelby	WA	Newport 2009-
Sedgeman Justin	VIC	Somerset 2009-
Sedgeman Ryan	VIC	Newport 2009
Skidmore Hugh	NSW	Sheffield 2009
Smith Kozza	NSW	Kings Lynn 2008/9
Summers Aaron	SA	Buxton 2007. Edinburgh 2008/9
Sweetman Richard	NSW	IOW 2008 Birmingham 2009
Ward Darcy	QLD	Boston 2008 Kings Lynn 2009
Wethers Matthew	SA	Edinburgh 2007-2009

If you think we've missed any Aussie for the period covered, please do let us know.

### **The Most Boring Meeting I Ever Saw**

We are used to reading about the best. Here **Alan Bates** nominates the worst he ever saw.

The date was Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July 1953 and it was Harringay's 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of their 13<sup>th</sup> season. The occasion was the visit of the Lanarkshire Eagles from Motherwell to Green Lanes for the second leg of the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the National Trophy competition.

The evening before in Scotland the Eagles had won the first leg 63 – 45. The programme notes stated that “Motherwell have been sharpening up their claymores and polishing their dirks in readiness for this great match. They are very hopeful of rendering us the K.O.”

Well, this couldn't have been further from the truth, for it turned out to be the most boring match I ever saw. Harringay won the first five heats 5 – 1 to wipe out the 18 points deficit. Derek Close had been unlucky in Heat 2 when he fell when about to overtake Ken Walsh for second place. Close was out again in Heat 6 and this time he stayed on to clinch second spot to halt the run of maximum heat wins, then followed five more runaway 5 – 1's for Racers. After Heat 11 the score was 54 – 12. Ron How and Johnny Gren fell at the first bend in Heat 12 and although How remounted he couldn't catch Gordon McGregor and so it was only a 4 – 2 for Harringay. However the processions returned for four more consecutive 5 – 1's and after Heat 16 it was 78 – 18.

In Heat 17 Derek Close again made a spirited effort and nearly caught the winner, Ron How, as the home side took a 4 – 2.

In the nominated rider's heat, Harringay tracked their reserves, Allan Quinn and Frank Lawrence against Noel Watson, who had 4 points, and Derek Close who had 6 points.

Quinn knocked Close off and was excluded, but the Motherwell rider was injured and couldn't take part in the rerun. Both he and Quinn had been stretchered off. Gordon McGregor was allowed to take Close's place, and, as Harringay had only one rider, the Eagles managed a 3 – 3. Harringay had won 17 of the 18 Heats and the final score was 85 – 23. What was unusual is that all eight Motherwell riders managed at least one point.

Note: A few weeks earlier I had seen Harringay beat Birmingham 67 – 17 and in the next round of the National Trophy Wimbledon beat Stoke 89 – 19. These were not exactly exciting times for watch speedway in London.

### **1929 - Bluey Wilkinson Takes a Chance.**

With the assistance of Dave Ireland, Brian Collins, Allen Trump, Eric Watson, Nigel Bird, Norman Jacobs, and Myles, Stephanie, and Eileen at the Queensland State Library, **Ross Garrigan** has researched the first season Bluey Wilkinson rode in the UK.

As a result of a dispute between the management and some of the riders who had been advertised to appear on the Bathurst programme on Thursday April 11, 1929, the directors of the speedway company decided to immediately end the season's racing. Those who had been riding regularly at the track had to look elsewhere for somewhere to race. Arthur "Bluey" Wilkinson, who had been one of the riders in dispute with the Bathurst management, found the track at Dubbo to his liking. On Monday, June 3, 1929, Harry Meyers and Wilkinson were the stars at the Dubbo Speedway. Meyers won the Silver Helmet establishing a new track record. Wilkinson finished runner-up to Meyers in the big race, and was also runner-up in the handicap final. Many exciting tales were being heard within Australian speedway circles concerning the exploits of those Australian riders who had ventured to England for the first time in 1928. These tales struck a chord with young Bluey's adventurous spirit, and, with just eight

months racing experience behind him, he made a courageous decision. This is where his friend Bill Townsend, a Bathurst motor mechanic, comes into the story. Bill, who was some eight years Bluey's senior, mentioned to Bluey that he had decided to go to England. Bluey said, "I'm coming with you." Unlike most of the Australian riders who travelled to Britain in those days, Bluey had no contract which would guarantee him employment when he got there; he would have to use his own initiative on arrival, and Bluey, even at such a tender age, had plenty of that. Of course there was not only Bluey's future employment to be considered - his friend Bill would have to find employment as well. Bluey hoped to earn his keep riding speedway, while Bill had his mechanical expertise to assist him in obtaining a position. Some who tried to talk Bluey out of undertaking the risky venture quickly realised that he had his heart set on accompanying Bill. A parting gift to Bluey from some of the Bathurst locals was a wallet containing thirty pounds. The Hibberd brothers were also involved in the sport of motorcycle racing in Australia in the 1920s. Bluey had become friendly with one of the three brothers who obliged by supplying a letter for him to give to another brother, Geoffrey "Buzz" Hibberd, who was at that time in England attached to London's West Ham club. It was hoped that, on presentation of this letter on his arrival in England, Bluey would be granted a trial at that club. For 17 year-old Bluey and 25 year-old Bill to give up their jobs in Bathurst to travel to the other side of the world, without any guarantee of employment, was indeed a huge gamble. At 1.05 p.m. on Tuesday June 4, the day after he had ridden at Dubbo, Bluey, together with Bill Townsend, was aboard the P. & O. Liner "Baradine" when it set sail from Sydney bound for England via ports Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle, Colombo, Aden, Port Said, and Malta. When, at lunch time on July 18, the Baradine arrived at King George Dock in London, there weren't any speedway promoters present eager to obtain Bluey's signature on a contract, in fact there were very few people who even knew Bluey and Bill were coming. Bluey's battle for survival in a new country was just about to begin.

If one checks just where King George Dock was situated in 1929, it is seen that the West Ham track (its offices were in Chancery Lane) wasn't all that far away from where Bluey and Bill disembarked from the Baradine. Bluey wasted little time in tracking down Buzz Hibberd and a trial on the West Ham track was arranged. It was Bluey's spectacular riding style which caught the attention of those who

watched him on the track. The management soon decided to take a chance with Bluey, giving him the contract he so desperately wanted. However, riding spectacularly and consistently finishing races were two completely different matters, something Bluey and the West Ham management were soon to find out.

During the latter part of the 1930 English season, Bluey gave an interview during which he commented on his arrival in England in 1929. He said, "We arrived in this country and I signed on right away for West Ham and Southampton. Bill became my mechanic and he's still part of the Wilkinson team!"

I should add here that the company which promoted at West Ham in 1929 also promoted racing at Southampton and Portsmouth, two other tracks Bluey would appear at.

Perusal of the West Ham programme for the meeting staged on Tuesday July 30 (twelve days after Bluey's arrival) reveals that the feature event was a teams' match raced over nine heats. Also programmed were the heats and the final of an event called the "Pomroy Open Handicap", in which only the four heat winners progressed to the final. Event 15 on the programme is the one which is of most interest to me, this race being the last of the heats of the Pomroy Open Handicap. The legendary American rider Sprouts Elder had won his first two races in the teams' event, but then pulled out of his final heat of that match and also his heat of the Pomroy Open Handicap. Elder was still battling to overcome painful injuries received in a nasty spill at Stamford Bridge. Those spectators who had purchased programmes for the West Ham meeting had to make an alteration in the printed line-up for Event 15 – they replaced the name of "Sprouts Elder" with "Bluey Wilkinson" – this was Bluey's first race appearance at the West Ham track. He rode his Douglas, wore the red helmet colour, and sported number 156. There were five starters in the race; the front marker on 6 seconds was Bill Pryke, Bluey was on 5 seconds, Sam Reid on 4 seconds, and Ivor Creek and Norrie Isbister both on 3 seconds. Bluey won his heat from Isbister in the time of 99.40 seconds – he was into the final.

Bluey had little time to enjoy the thrill of winning at his first race appearance on the West Ham track as he was straight back out for the next race staged, the handicap final. The field for the handicap final consisted of front marker Bluey (black helmet colour, 5 seconds handicap), Cecil Bounds (red, 4 seconds), Wally Lloyd (blue, 3 seconds), and Tiger Stevenson (white, 3 seconds). Bluey knew that if he

stood any chance of winning this race he would have to make good use of his handicap start, not fall during the race, and also rely on his machine remaining sound. This was a huge ask for the young 17 year-old who, during his practice sessions since his arrival, had struggled somewhat to come to terms with the West Ham track, and had also experienced so much mechanical trouble with his old Douglas machine. The favourite to take the handicap final was Tiger Stevenson who, up to that point in the programme, had not only recorded a paid maximum in the teams' event, but had also recorded the fastest race time of the night. Bluey may have been all smiles after winning his handicap heat, but he was ecstatic when he won the final. His time was 95.80 seconds, 3.60 seconds faster than his winning time in the previous race. Stevenson finished second and Lloyd third.

When Bluey arrived at the West Ham track that evening his name wasn't even on the programme and he hadn't expected to get a ride. As a result of Sprouts Elder's withdrawal, Bluey not only got to race on the track for the first time, but ended the evening having recorded two wins from two starts. It was fitting Bluey should win the handicap event named after William James Pomroy. Pomroy, also an Australian from New South Wales, first arrived in Great Britain in April of 1928 in company with Sprouts Elder, Paddy Dean and Geoff Meredith. Pomroy was one of the original directors of Dirt Track Speedways Limited, the company which began promoting speedway racing in Glasgow in April of 1928. The same company, trading as West Ham Stadium Speedway, was operating the West Ham track when Bluey arrived in England in 1929. Pomroy was present at the West Ham track on this July 30 evening acting as a Steward for Dirt Track Speedways Ltd.

The following evening, July 31, Bluey was at Southampton, once again hoping to get a start. As I've already mentioned, the racing at this track was also promoted by Dirt Track Speedways Limited. The feature event on the programme was, according to the local newspaper The Southern Echo, a nine-heat match between Edinburgh and London. This match was reported elsewhere as being between Southampton and Scotland, and also as having been between England and Scotland. I'll stick with the local newspaper's account of the meeting. The programmed London team comprised of Tiger Stevenson, Sprouts Elder, Ivor Creek, Jack Adams, Don Durant, and Don Taylor. Sprouts Elder was present at the track but withdrew from the meeting acting on medical advice. Just as had happened the previous evening at West Ham, Bluey Wilkinson took

Elder's place on the programme and rode in the London team which won the match easily 45-18 (remembering that a race win was worth 4 points and not 3). In Elder's absence, Stevenson assumed the captaincy of the London team. Stevenson and Wilkinson, riding as a pairing for London, were out for the first heat and recorded a 5-2 heat advantage – just the start the team wanted. Stevenson won the race and Wilkinson took third place. In their other two races this pair scored maximum points with Stevenson winning on both occasions and Bluey following him across the line in second place. Their last heat, the eighth, provided the crowd with a thrilling spectacle. Remember that the previous evening Bluey had beaten Stevenson in the handicap final at West Ham. Here is how the Southern Echo reported Heat 8: -

“Tiger Stevenson won full points for London again in heat 8, and this race was remarkable in that it was a case of the London representatives, Stevenson and Bluey Wilkinson, who had replaced Sprouts Elder, fighting fiercely for the premier position with the Edinburgh riders hopelessly behind. Stevenson won the heat by a wheel's breadth from Wilkinson, his partner, at tremendous speed.”

It was as a result of Sprouts Elder's injury problems that Bluey received the opportunity on successive nights to show what he was capable of doing on the racetrack. If Elder had have been fit and fulfilled all of his rides on both programmes, one wonders just when Bluey would have received his chance.

Bluey knew that, if he stood any hope of being offered a West Ham contract for the following season, he had to make the most of any opportunities he should be given to continue to impress the Dirt Track Speedways management. As the season had been half over when Bluey arrived in England, he was giving the rest of the West Ham contracted riders a good three month's start. Another problem Bluey faced was his complete lack of any experience of team racing prior to his arrival in England.

Three evenings later, August 3, Bluey was back at Southampton and once again showed his liking for the track by winning the feature scratch race. The report from the Southern Echo: -

“Bluey Wilkinson gave an exhibition of good riding in the Cobden scratch race. He won his heat well, was first in the semi-final, and went on to beat Eric Lister in the final after a spirited race; a very good performance considering the way that Eric Lister had been riding all the evening.”

In this race, Bluey was slowly away from the start and, on settling, was in third place. He then thrilled those watching when, with a sustained burst of speed, he went from third to first inside one lap.

In the space of five days, Bluey had won a handicap final, a feature scratch race final, and also performed most promisingly for the London team at Southampton. A lot had happened in the two months since Bluey contested his last Australian race start at Dubbo on June 3. He had sailed to England, signed a contract with West Ham, and shown considerable promise in his early races.

On August 10, Bluey was at Southampton riding for the Colonies in a nine heat encounter against the Homeland team. His team mates on that occasion were Sprouts Elder (captain), Buzz Hibberd, Bruce McCallum and Fred Hore. Although in the losing side, Bluey recorded a second and a third placing.

Having made such a promising start to his season, Bluey then experienced some major disappointments. What transpired on Saturday afternoon August 17 at the Portsmouth venue (another track racing under the Dirt Track Speedways Limited promotion) was indicative of the problems he was encountering. Nobody could ever accuse Bluey of not trying in a race, in fact on occasions during the half season he raced in England in 1929 he tried TOO hard, often over-riding and ending up parting company with his motorcycle. Here is a section of a meeting report mentioning Bluey's appearances in the Silver Gauntlet Scratch Race that afternoon at Portsmouth: -

“Bluey Wilkinson, who put up an excellent show in his heat, had the misfortune to crash in the final, and while no serious injury resulted, spoil his chance of a place.”

That same evening Bluey was at Southampton. Here is what happened there: -

“Bluey mounted the fence, climbed up it for a couple of seconds, and was then hurled into the air. Yet he actually succeeded in landing on his machine and, except for a severe shaking, was unhurt. He did not, however, ride again.”

Bluey was again in the wars three days later at West Ham: -

“The thrills of the evening were supplied in the first semi-final of the open handicap..... In this race, Wilkinson appeared a certain winner until he overdid a broadside on the final bend and crashed....”

The 100 pounds West Ham Open Derby, staged on September 10, was won by Australian Frank Arthur. Bluey made it to the semi-final stage

where he thrilled the spectators when he gave the eventual winner of the prestigious event a hard race.

Although Bluey did appear in some of West Ham's league sides during the season, his inability to consistently finish races meant he was often overlooked when the team was announced. Bluey's good nature, together with his driving passion to succeed, impressed both the West Ham management and the team's fans. Whenever Bluey took to the track, the spectators knew it was highly likely they'd either see a thrilling ride or a crash. Bluey himself made the following comment about his early racing in England in 1929: -

"I simply couldn't sit that old Douggie, and during my first month over here I should think I swallowed enough cinders to lay a new track. But I settled down after a time ..."

Bluey won another two handicap finals at West Ham later that season. He also appeared in the finals of a number of other individual events, including finishing runner-up in a Silver Gauntlet final at Southampton. Much to Bluey's delight, he was offered a West Ham contract for 1930. As Bluey had only been in England for some three months when the season concluded, he and Bill decided not to return to Australia, but to "winter" in the Northern Hemisphere. Bluey was not idle during the off-season, in fact he undertook another great adventure.

## Can You Help?

**Jim Henry** needs heat details for the Boston Speedway Training School Xmas Championship 1970? The meeting has a few familiar names such as Edwin (Ted) Howgego, Carl Glover, Peter Smith, Graham Jones (Berwick), and Steve Osborne who all had senior careers.

**Jim Henry** is looking for heat details for Weymouth 1954 and needs

Wednesday 4 <sup>th</sup> August 1954	Young England 48	Young Overseas 35	(Int) SH times
18/08/54	WEYMOUTH v OXFORD	CHALLENGE	37-47 Meeting Details
24/08/54	WEYMOUTH v EXETER	CHALLENGE	43-41 Meeting Details
01/09/54	WEYMOUTH v RAYLEIGH	CHALLENGE	40-44 Meeting Details
15/09/54	WEYMOUTH v WEST OF ENGLAND	CHALLENGE	Meeting Details

**Paul Hornsby**, 1A Otago Road, Whittlesey, Peterborough, PE7 1YJ 01733 202131 [paul@hornsbyp.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:paul@hornsbyp.freeserve.co.uk) is seeking heat details for Peterborough's Junior League matches, Central Junior League 1983, Youth Development League 1988, Amateur League, Conference League, Matches involving Peterborough.

## New League Proposal For 1952

The remaining Promoters of 1951 were concerned about the coming season and one of their ranks put forward this idea for re-structuring. It was amongst the items in what is an interesting archive of material passed on to **Jim** by **Norrie Isbister** and it makes interesting reading but the proposals put forward were never implemented.

“Second Division is faced in 1952 with the loss of Newcastle, Fleetwood, Halifax and Walthamstow as well as of Norwich, the latter by promotion. This would leave eleven teams in the league and if Poole were to be promoted from 3<sup>rd</sup> Division a total of twelve teams. Frankly, I feel that if things remain as they are the crowd figures in 2<sup>nd</sup> Division next year will be lower than ever before at all tracks. To begin with, a twelve team league can only be operated on a two home and two away basis. This would mean that weak teams would be seen twice a year against once as at present. Travelling would be increased by visits to far distant tracks such as Yarmouth and Edinburgh twice instead of once in a season, Severe Prize Money cuts would be inevitable.

I would like to propose that there be an amalgamation of the present 1<sup>st</sup> Division with the top nine in 2<sup>nd</sup> Division for next year. That the remaining teams in 2<sup>nd</sup> Division be amalgamated with the present 3<sup>rd</sup> Division to form a new 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and that there is automatic promotion and relegation between the two leagues. (As I see it, without this incentive, First Division gates will also continue to drop.)

If Norwich alone were to be promoted this year into 1<sup>st</sup> Division I cannot see 1<sup>st</sup> Division agreeing to promotion and relegation. Even if they did in theory, should a London team be bottom in 1952 I can never visualise the theory becoming practice. The method of promotion now in practice is unfair as it means the weakening of the lower league by depriving them of their star attraction without compensation from the higher division and gain no one.

Second Division should be content with the assurance of promotion at the end of the season. The question now arises, how is such a thing to be arrived at from the financial point of view?

1. Prize Money. If the prize money rate in 1<sup>st</sup> Division were to be lowered to £1 per start and £1.50 per point, a reduction of 1<sup>st</sup> league pay and an increase of second league rates and the number of guaranteed heats to be cut, then the new rates from a 2<sup>nd</sup> Division point of view become workable. (It would not follow that promoters would stage

fewer events than at present, in fact they could afford to stage more in many cases.)

I would propose that the size of the teams be cut from eight to six with one travelling reserve who can be used as and where required in the match. If the Test Match formula is used it would be possible to run twelve heats and a Nominated riders heat making a total of thirteen events. This would give team riders a guaranteed four stars with a fifth for the two best men in each team it would also strengthen up the majority of teams by eliminating weak reserves. I would propose that a promoter would be obliged to stage two reserve events including the home and visiting reserve, and two Novice Heats at a reduced Prize Money rate if he so desired.

I would also like to see the league as the final event on the programme with provision made for team men to become adjusted to the track in preliminary introduction races. (See Chart on last page.)

By reducing the present, league from fourteen heats to thirteen, it is making the whole scheme more acceptable to the present 1<sup>st</sup> league tracks. They would then have more scope in their second halves, or first halves, to book in additional attractions if the promoted teams are not considered strong enough without such items.

For 1953, I feel that the teams in 1<sup>st</sup> Division would have become established sufficiently, for the number of heats to be increased to fifteen and a Nominated Rider heat, a total of sixteen in all. By running the league at the end of the meeting, the necessity for second halves would disappear altogether. Build up events for reserves and novices would be sufficiently appealing. Second halves of any description tend to distract from the importance of the league. A sixteen heat match with a six man team and a reserve would give all riders five rides with the possibility of six which seems to be as good as they can get at most tracks today.

#### Proposed New Method of Staging Matches On a Minimum Prize Money Basis

(This method would allow a 'poor' promoter to stage 20 heats for £256.)

- (a) 2 Novice Heats at 50p & 50p      (a) £10
  - (b) 2 Reserve Heats at £1 and £1.50      (b) £26
  - (c) 3 Introductory Heats £1 and £1.50      (c) £39
  - (d) 13 League Heats at £1 and £1.50      (d) £169
- Plus £12 for bonus points      Total £256

Travelling Expenses I would suggest that travelling expenses be pooled in both leagues. It is unfair that any track be penalised because of its geographical location. This would be very much the case in the event of a Scottish team being relegated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division where it would be financial suicide. If the pooling of expenses were to be operated on a track by track basis it would be possible to calculate in advance the team expenses that each track would incur over the season. (Mechanics and team manager of course would be outside this scheme.) If then a total were to be made of all the expenses for the league, and divided by the number of teams in the league, a round figure for each track would be arrived at. A seven man team would also help to cut expenses.

Without a pooling of expenses in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division under this scheme, I cannot see how relegation would be workable without serious hardship to the relegated track if it's geography isolates it from the others.

Leagues Here is how I visualise the two leagues for 1952.

Division One: Wembley, Belle Vue, Wimbledon, West Ham, Birmingham, Bristol, Harringay, New Cross, Bradford, Norwich, Leicester, Edinburgh, Coventry, Walthamstow, Motherwell, Ashfield, Hanley, White City (Glasgow). Division One: Yarmouth, Oxford, Liverpool, Cradley Heath, Poole, Exeter, Aldershot, Rayleigh, Swindon, Plymouth, Cardiff, St Austell, Long Eaton, Wolverhampton, Ipswich, Southampton (???)

This would give 17 matches in Division 1. I would then suggest that the league be zoned into three sections of six as follows: London: Wembley, West Ham, Wimbledon, New Cross, Harringay, Walthamstow. Midland: Birmingham, Bristol, Norwich, Leicester, Coventry, Hanley. Northern: Belle Vue, Bradford, Edinburgh, Ashfield, Motherwell, White City (Glasgow). All told this would give 25 fixtures to every track without any extra competitions. 17 matches in the League and five home matches in the zone.

The leagues have been based on the assumption that Newcastle, Fleetwood and Halifax will be out next year. Walthamstow have stated that they will carry on providing they gain 1<sup>st</sup> league status, so I believe. The decrease in prize money rates would allow Wembley to book in complete teams as an extra event without sustaining an increase in prize money compared with 1951 rates.

The decrease in prize money could be explained to 1<sup>st</sup> Division riders as being a necessary step to put speedway on a solid basis. They should not suffer any great loss at all by the fact that there will be many 'weaker'

second league teams against them where it would be possible for them to earn their money with less effort. Also the reduction enables their promoters to give them more rides than they are getting at the moment. The fate of West Ham should be enough to convince the enlightened riders of what can happen if something is not done to put the sport on a sound basis. Promotion and relegation can save the sport from going down any lower and without prize money reduction this is impossible! One last word. Hardship may appear to have been meted out to the four bottom teams in the 1951 league, Yarmouth, Oxford, Liverpool and Cradley Heath, by their apparent 'demotion' to the present third division. Under this scheme, eighteen tracks as a maximum is the most that can be accommodated in the new 1<sup>st</sup> Division. It is also known that certain of these teams found it hardship to pay the 2<sup>nd</sup> division prize money rates of 1951, particularly Cradley Heath. With the possible exception of Liverpool all four teams are situated geographically in the present Third league sphere of influence and should not suffer unduly with the lower prize money rate and with a pooling of expenses and the assurance of promotion if they win the league.

DAYS OF RUNNING Objections may be made on the grounds that there are too many Saturday tracks involved. I am sure that any Saturday track at present in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division who gain promotion will certainly agree to accommodate existing 1<sup>st</sup> Division tracks on another day at home and arrange some 'shift' arrangement with kindred promoted Saturday tracks. After all, Saturday tracks must expect to make some sacrifices for the obvious advantage they have over mid-week tracks in their night of running.

A Suggested Method of Running a 'Minimum Prize Money' Meeting  
Event 1 Reserve Race using No.7 man of both teams

Event 2 Novice Race

Event 3 Reserve Race No.2

Event 4 Novice race No.2

Event 5 INTRODUCTION RACE No.1 Home Nos 1,2,3,4.

Event 6 INTRODUCTION RACE No.2 Visiting Nos.1,2,3,4.

Event 7 INTRODUCTION RACE No.3 Home and Visiting Nos. 5 & 6

LEAGUE MATCH Heats 1 – 12 as in Test Match plus Nominated Riders Heat No.13. Six riders per team who would ride four times plus two riders who would ride five times by qualifying for Heat 13. Reserves used as required, Interval either following event seven or following Heat six of the match. All riders assured of five starts over the meeting with six starts

for a few. Reserves assured of two starts with possibility of more in the match.

## **Albert E “Bert” Perrigo – Coventry Rider 1929**

**Stuart Staite-Aris** sets out a history of a Pioneer Coventry rider Albert E “Bert” Perrigo. Bert was born in Smallheath Birmingham in the September quarter of 1903 not far from the B.S.A. Industrial premises. Bert died in 1985 in Birmingham where he lived in a flat aged 82. His father wanted him to join him in the family bakery business but instead he started his working life as a driver ferrying former War Department vehicles for dealers following the end of World War One. Bert eventually became a van driver for the Bordesley Engineering Company, a small concern which built and sold Motorcycles under the Connaugh brand name.

While working there Bert was entered by the company in a London to Edinburgh 24 hour trial in which Bert won his first trial Gold medal. Next came a short spell at Humphries and Dawes the manufacturer of OK Supreme motorcycles. He wasn't there long before he was spirited away to the giant concern of B.S.A. Motorcycles.

**Bert at B.S.A.** Bert's post at B.S.A. was in the competitions department and he was to become a vital figure in the birth of the “Gold Star”. Bert became such an important figure between the 1920's to 1930's that he became known as “Mr B.S.A.”

Bert rose to the post of B.S.A. competitions manager and was responsible for some of the companies greatest successes including;

- B.S.A. Brooklands Gold Star success – 1937.
- The Maudes trophy – (Round Europe Tour and 1952 ISDT)

Bert Perrigo was President of the B.S.A. FWD Club in the later 1960s. The National Rally opposite award was presented to the Club by Bert when he succeeded George Savage as president.

Bert Perrigo was a self taught man of many talents with skills in riding, engineering, sales, publicist and executive. He fulfilled all of these roles with great success at B.S.A. where he remained until the company demise in the 1970's.

**Bert Perrigo Riding Career** Bert had done some trials pre-war and was a prominent figure competing on B.S.A. motorcycles. Bert Perrigo was in fact a very well known figure in the motor cycle world from the

1920s to the 1950s. For much of this time he was Chief Engineer and Works Manager of the B.S.A. Motor Cycle team.

In competitions Bert swiftly established himself as a leading trials rider who represented Britain in the I.S.D.T. abroad. Inevitably his trials career led him to compete in all of the premier trials in this country.

**Bert Perrigo Dirt Track Career** The BSA Competitions department soon heard of the inaugural Dirt track meeting staged at High Beech on February 19th 1928. A few weeks (Easter Saturday April 7<sup>th</sup> 1928) later Bert and Jack Parker were sent along to enter a High Beech meeting to try out the new sport.

- Jack Parker entered the 500cc event and won in a speed of 35.22 mph which had only been a fraction slower than Star man Roger Frogley's time in the Scratch Race event.

The following Monday a Bank Holiday (April 9<sup>th</sup> 1928) Bert and Jack returned to High Beech where both had success.

- Jack again won a 500cc event at 35.66 mph.
- Bert won the 350cc handicap event from the scratch starting position at 33.92 mph.

More locally Bert Perrigo was on the programme for the first meeting staged at Monmore Green Wolverhampton on Wednesday May 30<sup>th</sup> 1928. Bert competed in the 350cc event and was awarded the win in the Final after his colleague Jack Parker had been excluded by the meeting steward for looking around. (*Ref: - A History of Wolverhampton Speedway Mark Sawbridge*)

Bert also appeared at the first meeting staged at Kirkmanshulme Lane Belle Vue on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1928 where he rode in the Manchester Handicap from the 3 second mark in a race that included the Australian Star Frank Arthur (*Ref :- Speedway The Pre War Years Robert Bamford*)

Bert was one of the programmed riders for the opening of Brandon Speedway on Saturday September 29<sup>th</sup> 1928. He also appeared in the second meeting on Saturday October 6<sup>th</sup> the fists meeting at Brandon under lights.

His first reported appearance for the Coventry Southern League team of 1929 was against West Ham on Thursday May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Coventry team won 24-17 but Bert only lasted for one race the opening heat of the match. He was sent crashing and the fall resulted in him fracturing a small bone in his foot.

Bert's name never reappeared in meeting reports at Brandon from that point on.

*The report in the Midland Daily Telegraph for the first Coventry Southern League home meeting against Hall Green on Thursday May 9<sup>th</sup> 1929 gave only partial results and incomplete team line ups. If anyone reading this article has a copy of the programme or indeed has full results can they please get in touch to complete the Coventry story and confirm whether Bert rode in this meeting too.*

**1930's Trial Events** Most famous of numerous events were the M.C.C. Lands End, Exeter, and Edinburgh long distance reliability trials. These grew from simple observed runs to the points mentioned, taking in the most fearsome hills on the way, to their modern format of an overnight run followed by a series of Observed Sections.

The observed sections consist of rocky, muddy, boulder strewn steep inclines on private land. The aim is simple, to climb without a 'failure', clearly, since road cars were used, trials were a natural medium for the car manufacturer to demonstrate the prowess of a vehicle: with which the general public could identify.

**Bert Perrigo in Trials Events** Bert Perrigo's appearance in trials using a B.S.A. three-wheeler was a logical step for a company seeking publicity. They sought to make use of his famous name and to use his skill to gain notable success in the only type of event to which the B.S.A. trike was remotely suited.

In addition, B.S.A. realized that a great part of their publicity must be directed towards motorcyclists who would see a three wheeler as the next step up the motoring ladder. As these people would already know of Bert's fame it was logical to chose the trike rather than a four wheeler as the vehicle for Bert to publicize.

Thus it was that between 1933 and 1936 Bert Perrigo competed in aluminium bodied four cylinder three wheeler.

**Perrigo Successes** The only thing that was important was to obtain 'Golds' for completing events without failing a hill. Thus if the machine broke on an event this was an occupational hazard and the local dealer was left to collect the car and send it back to Small Heath by rail.

Bert did in fact obtain Golds on the Lands End and Edinburgh. However, the most coveted award for Gold on all three trials eluded him. This was because the short-comings of front wheel drive grip could not be overcome to allow a clean climb up the Exeter Trial's infamous Simms Hill.

Despite all Bert's efforts to improve grip Frank Cope appears to have been the only person to have obtained the coveted Triple Award in a

B.S.A. Of course Frank used a second engine in the tail which was not an option open to a works driver.

Having established by 1936 that he was attempting the impossible and that a Triple Award was beyond his reach Bert did not wish to carry on promoting a B.S.A. three wheeler in trials. For a works driver whose success was based on 'The will to win' there was little point.

**Bert Perrigo Technical Expertise** His situation at B.S.A. allowed Bert to tackle the problems of making a trike suitable for trials far more comprehensively than the average amateur, particularly as limitless parts were available.

Bert was said to have had a 1204 c.c. engine with alloy head; and modified camshaft, any further power increase would not have been useable and would have affected reliability. Cooling was improved by either an electric or back of dynamo driven fan and a specially made up high efficiency large capacity radiator.

No attempt was made to improve the brakes, which were bad with complete fade on long downhill sections. Bert apparently did report this fact to the 'powers that be' but with no effect. Bert however specifically set out to improve his trike's lock.

In a final attempt to gain grip Bert modified the differential to be partially 'limited slip'. This was done by putting springs on the pinions within the differential, which prevented the classic situation of one wheel being stationary whilst the other spins helplessly.

Such a modification makes the steering really twitchy with a great deal of kick back, hence the need for using two hands. Bert often got the car sent back by train even if there were no mechanical problems rather than face a twitchy drive home.

The more usual aids to grip were also employed, such as a one hundredweight lead bumper and two spare wheels one each side. Standard width tyres were used of various degrees of 'knobbliness' depending on the regulations. The tyres were let right down which necessitated the use of security bolts to prevent the rim turning in the tyre.

Bert did not think that the classic rear wheel drive trick of 'bouncing' helped although both he and his passenger got their weight as far forward as possible.

The body stood up to the treatment it got (specifically with regard to flexing causing the doors to fly open), by using a solid sided body with no doors. This greatly increased the rigidity of the whole structure.

Protection against the winter elements was supplied by a specially made hood and side screens. The hood being of such a construction as to allow it to be 'pulled over' once the occupants were in the care.

**How Bert Tackled the Trials** Bert confirmed that a 'section' was usually tackled from a running start on the flat, though in many cases if there was no other competitor already on this 'section' one simply carried on directly from one's approach without stopping at all. However, much use was made of 'stop and restarts' where the competitor had to stop astride a line somewhere on the climb and then restart and clear the line within a certain time.

One modification to assist at restarts was a remote gear lever bolted to the chassis centre tube. This allowed the passenger to operate the gear lever, leaving the driver free to concentrate on the other controls.

It may also have been that the clutch tended to drag and cause the car to stall as they awaited the restart flag. There was thus a need to disengage the gears and for the passenger to wrench it in with both hands at the appropriate moment.

Inevitably the clutch took a fearful pounding and plates with alternate 'Ferodo material' and cork inserts were used in company with as little oil as possible. Once again only a limited clutch life was necessary as it could be changed between events.

## **It's Got Five Bends**

Where? Marmande in France. Well worth a visit to see this unusual track in the heart of the French Speedway and Grass Track heartland near Bordeaux.

**Deadline for items for next edition is 31st October 2010**

**Web Master: Ron McNeil**

**[www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk](http://www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk)**

**Contact at [info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk](mailto:info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk)**

**Or [jjh1950@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jjh1950@blueyonder.co.uk)**

**The Speedway Researcher is edited and published by:**

**Graham Fraser**

**Jim Henry**

**All mail to Jim at 90 Greenend Gardens,**

**Edinburgh, EH17 7QH please.**

**24 Graham Tel : 01786 471992**

**Jim Tel : 0131 664 7185**