

# The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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## The First Speedway Special

An advert in the Speedway News for 21<sup>st</sup> August 1931 proclaimed the arrival of the first Speedway Special. It must have been inserted by Belle Vue speedway as it offered a return rail trip from London Euston, entry to Belle Vue for the England v Australia Test Match including reserved seats and reserved seats for the great Military Firework Spectacle “Battle of Waterloo”. The train left London at 12 noon and passengers were back in London at 25 past midnight the next day.

I know that fans travelled between the Scottish cities and sometimes special trains were put on for the big events at Motherwell. However, does anyone know when the last rail speedway special was operated?

**Jim Henry**

**PS** A scanning exercise of copies of 1931 Speedway News turned up a letter from the Hon Sec of the Sheffield Speedway Supporters’ Club that he had organised a special train from Sheffield to Manchester some time in August 1931. (Now, if I’d time, I suspect I could dig up references to a special train from Glasgow to Edinburgh 1929 / 1930 for the Scottish Championship.)

## Caxton Speedway

Whilst this venue is mentioned in the excellent “Homes of British Speedway” it is probably one of the more obscure venues of the pre-war era. The track, which opened for business in 1931, was in Cambridgeshire west of Cambridge but, as yet an exact location has not been identified. The local Ordnance Survey maps for the area were not re-surveyed in the 1930s so they must have been gone by the time of the most recent re-survey. The adverts for the venue describe it as being on the main Cambridge to St Neot’s road near Caxton Gibbet. It was a standalone track and a greyhound track was built immediately adjacent

to it in 1932. Together the two venues must have taken up fair amount of space for car parking at what was a rural venue was thrown in to the equation.

The track opened on Easter Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1931 and contemporary press (Cambridge Daily News) photographs show a couple of riders with the leading man throwing up material from his trailing foot. The safety fence appears to be a standard post and wire fence but the quality of the photo does not provide any greater detail. Members of the reported 5,000 crowd were allowed to the edge of the fence.

The 1931 season saw regular meetings, mostly on Sundays, featuring men who probably were local to East Anglia. The meetings were mostly two event, Handicap and Scratch Race competitions, but team meetings were also staged. Interestingly the team called Cambridge raced a team from Staines and Grays were speedway action has not been known in 1931. Even more interesting is that the fixture reported as versus Grays was originally advertised as being versus Dagenham Speedway, again a venue not thought to operating in 1931. Full records of 1931 are not available but what there is is now on the web site.

In 1932 the team became known as Caxton and the team raced against a number of sides including a team of Australians (featuring Spencer Stratton, Dick Bird, Boyd Pratt, Bill Newman and Eric Spencer), and teams representing Staines, Lea Bridge (featuring Alf Foulds), Leicester Super, and, Nottingham. A programme survives from the meeting v Peterborough but the team from their local rivals were probably made up of the men who rode at the speedway style grass track there. Again, such information as there is in the local press is available on the web site.

The track operated in 1933 with the season opening on 8<sup>th</sup> April but meeting reports are at a premium. Research has yet to be completed for this year and work is needed to establish if the track operated beyond 1933.

This, together with information of a track operating in Cambridge in 1939, at the Newmarket Road Greyhound Stadium, leads me to suspect that there may still yet be a few more previously “unrecorded” venues in East Anglia in the pre-war era. Also some work is needed to look at Grays and Dagenham in 1931.

**Jim Henry**

P S **Bob Ozanne**, our pre-war researcher has had an unsuccessful look for Staines in 1931.

## Fred Tracey

**Tony Webb** tells us about a man who was better known as a promoter than a rider, TRACEY FRED born Richmond Melbourne 1909.

Fred "Tracker" Tracey was probably better known as the man who revived speedway in Melbourne in 1951 when he took over the Marlbyrnong track, also known as Kirjon, renamed it Traceys speedway and attracted some of the best drivers and solos to Victoria's capital.

Fred's own career on solos was long and spectacular he started racing at Thebarton and Jubilee Oval in 1928 where he was billed as "Little Fred Tracey" in a series of match races with English rider Fred Hore.. When speedway began at Melbourne exhibition he was a regular there winning his first victorian championship in 1932. He travelled to England in 1934 joining the Walthamstow team who replaced the Lea Bridge team in the League. Returning to Melbourne in 1935 he took up the position of workshop manager with the engineering company of T.F. Collins. His skill as a tuner were held in high regard as he prepared the engines for Reg East who won the Australian TT at Phillip Island After the Exhibition track closed Fred raced at Olympic Park up until the war years.

Fred, after a few meetings at Wangarratta was there at the first opening of Maribyrnong on February 10 1947, 10,000 spectators crammed into the stadium and another 10,000 broke down fences to get in. The attraction was an American solo team and Fred Tracey. After winning the 1948 Victorian title Fred returned to England in April 1948 to ride for Coventry Bees. He sustained a badly injured hand after only seven meetings and had no option but to return home. With his riding future finished Fred and his wife Beryl took over the Maribyrnong track which had lain dormant for two years after the failure of the previous promotion, Kirjon Speedway Ltd., the track was renamed Traceys Speedway drawing a 8.000 crowd on the opening night on November 8 1951. Operating under strict noise controls and a curfew, Tracey was able to keep the peace with the surrounding residents in what was a high populated area. The red brick dust surface caused a problem with competitors, spectators and neighbours, to counter act this Fred top dressed the track with calcium chloride, an expensive exercise but it solved the problem. Stars of the first season were Ken Walsh, Junior Bainbridge, Peter Moore, Jack Geran and Norman Lindsay. From 1951

until its closure in 1964 a galaxy of Australian and overseas star performers graced the 440 yard track. Fay Tylour, Bob Tattersall, Frank 'Satan' Brewer, Jack O'Dea and Jimmy Davies are just a few that come to mind.

Traceys speedway often made the newspaper headlines, one notable event in January 1952 created a riot with the police called in to restore law and order. Sidecar drivers Alan Tousan and Bob Farmer had one hell of a race which ended in a crash, Fred Tracey called on a re run, another sidecar pair won the rerun, on returning to the pits Tousan and Farmer got into a fight, then the crowd turned on the photographer as they claimed his flash caused the original crash. Mayhem continued until police reinforcements arrived.

The meeting of January 2 1952 was another drama filled night, no less than six riders were sent to hospital including visiting English star Gerry Jackson. The Argus reported that there was a shuttle service of ambulances transporting the injured to the hospital.

Fred was lucky to escape serious injuries on the night of February 9 1953 during the running of the butchers picnic, Frank Brewers car bounced off the fence at 70 mph, headed for the infield and missed Fred by inches.

Fred Tracey created many lasting memories of a golden age for speedway fans, the old stadium still stands today, a testimony to a memorable past.

## **Star Championship Trophy Competition 1931**

**Stuart Staite-Aris** looks at the major championship event staged over the 1931 season.

Each of the eleven Southern League tracks were to run a series of scratch races open to only the tracks contracted riders. The championship sponsor The Star newspaper was to give the scratch race final winner at each track a bronze star. The winner of each track's qualifying event was to represent his track at the final at Wembley on September 18<sup>th</sup> with the second placed man as reserve.

Each track's supporters were to have a voting slip to vote for a rider other than the two qualifiers that they would like to represent the track at Wembley. That was designed to ensure that any mishaps did not prevent the tracks best rider from reaching the Star Championship Final.

### **Southern League Qualifying Events**

### **Nottingham – Thursday May 7th 1931**

The Nottingham supporters' vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Fred Strecker and Nobby Kendrick resulted in a vote for Billy Ellmore. The Nottingham fans were faced with a formidable task of who to vote for as Billy Ellmore would have won his semi final but for machinery problems and Nobby Key crashed in his second heat of the preceding friendly match with Belle Vue and wasn't fit enough to take part. As a result Fred Strecker virtually had things all his own way and never had to hurry to win his heat, semi final or the final.

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Fred Strecker** Syd Jackson had been easily leading this heat when his engine conked out half way through the last lap.

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Fred Strecker**

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Fred Strecker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nobby Kendrick Time 77 3/5 secs**

### **Southampton – Monday May 25<sup>th</sup> 1931**

The Southampton supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Ernie Rickman and Norman Parker resulted in a vote for Jack Parker.

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Ernie Rickman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Norman Parker Time 75 3/5 secs**

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Vic Collins, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dick Sulway Time 76 1/5 secs**

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Jack Parker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Frank Bond Time 74 2/5 secs**

**Heat 4 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Goulden, 2<sup>nd</sup> Clarrie Eldridge Time 74 3/5 secs**

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Ernie Rickman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Norman Parker, [Vic Collins, Dick Sulway Time 74 1/5 secs**

**Semi Final 2 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Goulden, 2<sup>nd</sup> Frank Bond, 3<sup>rd</sup> Clarrie Eldridge, 4<sup>th</sup> Jack Parker (fell) Time 74 4/5 secs**

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Ernie Rickman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Norman Parker, 3<sup>rd</sup> Frank Bond 4<sup>th</sup> Frank Goulden (mt) Time 75 1/5 secs**

Ernie Rickman who had been riding consistently well throughout the meeting beat Norman Parker in a great finish by half a wheel after he had done the last lap on a flat tyre.

### **Coventry – Thursday June 18<sup>th</sup> 1931**

The Coventry supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Les Patrick and Arthur Tims resulted in a vote for Syd Jackson with a majority of nearly 900 over Lew Lancaster.

**Heat 1**

**1<sup>st</sup> Bunny Wilcox, 2<sup>nd</sup> John Deeley Time 78 secs**

Syd Jackson had been easily leading this heat when his engine conked out half way through the last lap.

### **Heat 2**

**1<sup>st</sup> Arthur Tims, 2<sup>nd</sup> Les Patrick Time 75 4/5 secs**

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Les Patrick, 2<sup>nd</sup> Arthur Tims Time 77 3/5 secs**

### **Lea Bridge – Wednesday July 1<sup>st</sup> 1931**

The Lea Bridge supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Squib Burton and Harold Hastings resulted in a vote for Charlie Spinks.

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Squib Burton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Don Durant Time 87 secs**

Squib Burton won easily by a quarter of a lap and this was also the fastest time of the whole meeting.

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Wally Lloyd, 2<sup>nd</sup> Martin Harvey**

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Roy Dook, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harold Hastings**

This was the only good race in the heats as Harold Hastings was no more than a length behind Roy Dook at the finish.

**Heat 4 1<sup>st</sup> Eric Collins, 2<sup>nd</sup> Stan Lupton**

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Squib Burton 2<sup>nd</sup> Wally Lloyd**

Squib Burton once again had an easy victory

**Semi Final 2 1<sup>st</sup> Roy Dook, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harold Hastings**

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Squib Burton, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harold Hastings ,3<sup>rd</sup> Roy Dook**

Harold Hastings reserved his best effort in finishing second in the final even though he stood no real chance of defeating Squib Burton.

### **West Ham – Tuesday July 28<sup>th</sup>**

The West Ham supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Tommy Croombs and Reg Bounds resulted in a vote for Bluey Wilkinson.

**Preliminary Heat 1<sup>st</sup> Jack Barnett**

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Bluey Wilkinson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Morian Hansen**

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Reg Bounds, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bloss Blomfield**

Reg Bounds won with Bloss Blomfield close behind him.

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Tommy Croombs, 2<sup>nd</sup> Con Cantwell**

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Tommy Croombs, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reg Bounds, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bluey Wilkinson (mt) Time 84.6 secs**

Tommy Croombs showed an exceptional turn of speed in winning the final. Bluey Wilkinson was also going well when he packed up on the second lap and it was left to Reg Bounds to keep interest alive in the

race. Bounds was particularly quick over the last two laps and wasn't far behind Croombs at the finish.

### **Crystal Palace – Saturday August 1<sup>st</sup> 1931**

The Crystal Palace supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Harry Shepherd and Triss Sharp resulted in a vote for Ron Johnson.

#### **Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Joe Francis, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nobby Key**

Joe Francis won after a terrific battle with Nobby Key. Key held the lead for nearly three laps until Francis gained the upper hand.

#### **Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Ron Johnson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harry Shepherd**

Ron Johnson won what was an extremely fast heat with Harry Shepherd doing well to stay within a few lengths of him.

#### **Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Triss Sharp, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jim Cowie, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tom Farndon (mt)**

Tom Farndon suffered a machine failure coming out of the first corner so virtually handing victory to Triss Sharp who won well ahead of Jim Cowie.

#### **Final 1<sup>st</sup> Harry Shepherd, 2<sup>nd</sup> Triss Sharp, 3<sup>rd</sup> Joe Francis (fell) 4<sup>th</sup> Ron Johnson (fell)**

Joe Francis shot into the lead at the start of the final and was slightly in front by the apex of the first turn. At this point Ron Johnson attempted an inside pass but over slid and came down and in doing so he hit Francis' back wheel causing him to fall too.

That left only Triss Sharp and Harry Shepherd in the race. Sharp held the lead for more than half the distance until Shepherd got past him and won very easily.

### **Kings Oak – Monday August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1931**

The Kings Oak supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Syd Edmonds and Arthur Fenn resulted in a vote for Phil Bishop.

#### **Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Syd Edmonds, 2<sup>nd</sup> Phil Tiger Hart Speed 42.17 mph**

#### **Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Billy Dallison, 2<sup>nd</sup> Charlie Traynor 3<sup>rd</sup> Phil Bishop (fell)**

#### **Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Arthur Fenn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reg Hutchings**

#### **Heat 4 1<sup>st</sup> Tommy McDonald, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bobby Blake (mt)**

#### **Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Syd Edmonds, 2<sup>nd</sup> Billy Dallison Speed 42 mph**

#### **Semi Final 2 1<sup>st</sup> Reg Hutchings, 2<sup>nd</sup> Arthur Fenn**

The first two in each Semi Final then met in one round match races.

#### **Match Race 1 1<sup>st</sup> Syd Edmonds Speed 42.28 mph**

## **Match Race 2 1<sup>st</sup> Arthur Fenn**

### **Final 1<sup>st</sup> Syd Edmonds**

#### **Wembley – Thursday August 6<sup>th</sup> 1931**

The first portion of the Wembley programme was occupied by the three heats and final of the Star championship eliminating competition. All the leading Wembley riders attached to the track were in action apart from Jack Ormston following a fall on the preceding Bank holiday Monday. The Wembley supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Col Stewart and Buster Frogley resulted in a vote for Colin Watson.

#### **Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Lionel Van Praag, 2<sup>nd</sup> Norman Evans, 3<sup>rd</sup> Colin Watson**

It was somewhat of a surprise for Colin Watson to be left trailing at the back right from the start. Lionel Van Praag took the lead and easily held it throughout. His time was nothing remarkable but he was riding so comfortably that he seemed well able to improve on it if necessary.

#### **Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Col Stewart, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jack Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> Wally Kilmister**

Col Stewart found himself shut out on the first corner and almost pushed into the safety fence. After that he gradually began to improve his position firstly overtaking Wally Kilmister and then on lap three he got level with Jack Jackson and passed him before going on to win easily

#### **Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Buster Frogley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harry Whitfield, 3<sup>rd</sup> George Greenwood Time 81 1/5 secs**

The only man who appeared fit fast and clever was Buster Frogley who recorded the fastest time over the three heats and won by some distance. Harry Whitfield was afflicted by a slow motor and George Greenwood did not appear to be fully fit.

#### **Final 1<sup>st</sup> Col Stewart, 2<sup>nd</sup> Buster Frogley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Lionel Van Praag (ret) Time 79 3/5 secs**

Lionel Van Praag got filled in by Buster Frogley on the first lap and retired from the race. Col Stewart took the lead down the back straight and covered the four laps in a fast time. He was quite the unexpected champion. Buster Frogley finished nearly a quarter of a lap behind struggling with a misfire which got worse the longer the race progressed.

#### **Wimbledon – Monday August 17<sup>th</sup> 1931**

The Wimbledon supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final



along with Vic Huxley and Claude Rye resulted in a vote for Ray Tauser who polled just on a thousand votes more than his nearest rival. Next to him came Billy Lamont and about one hundred votes behind Lamont was Claude Rye and fourth was Jim Kempster.

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Claude Rye, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jim Kempster**

Claude Rye pulled off somewhat of a surprise in beating Jim Kempster. Kempster didn't appear to put in the all out effort expected of him possibly because both riders went into the next round.

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Vic Huxley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ernie Evans**

Vic Huxley won very easily

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Ivor Hill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Stan Lemon**

Ivor Hill won very easily

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Claude Rye, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ernie Evans**

Claude Rye had a good win over Ernie Evans by a few lengths

**Semi Final 2 1<sup>st</sup> Vic Huxley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jim Kempster**

Huxley won rather easily from Jim Kempster who was again just happy to obtain second place thinking it was good enough

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Vic Huxley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Claude Rye**

Vic Huxley was far too good for Claude Rye in the final

**Stamford Bridge – Saturday August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1931**

The Stamford Bridge supporters vote as to which unsuccessful rider in this qualifier would travel to Wembley for the Star Championship Final along with Frank Arthur and Gus Kuhn resulted in a vote for Arthur Warwick. Warwick led the vote by a thousand with Wal Phillips the next in line.

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fred Ralph, 3<sup>rd</sup> Les Blakeborough**

Frank Arthur won easily

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Dicky Smythe, 2<sup>nd</sup> Charlie Blacklock (fell)**

Dicky Smythe and Charlie Blacklock were involved in an interesting battle until Blacklock charged into the safety fence leaving Smythe to win as he pleased

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Arthur Warwick, Heat 4 1<sup>st</sup> Gus Kuhn**

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dicky Smythe (fell)**

**Semi Final 2 1<sup>st</sup> Gus Kuhn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Arthur Warwick (mt)**

Arthur Warwick looked to be an easy winner of the second semi final and was leading by several lengths when he suffered machinery problems and lost out to Gus Kuhn

**Final 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Gus Kuhn**

Gus Kuhn put in a great effort against Frank Arthur but was still beaten by half a dozen lengths. The winners bronze star was presented by Wal Phillips.

### **Southern League Riders Star Final Championship**

#### **Wembley - Friday September 18<sup>th</sup> 1931**

Twenty riders were to take part in the Star Championship Final. These included the ten men who had won their track qualifying event and the ten riders nominated by their tracks supporters.

The only track not represented in the competition was Manchester.

The prize money available for the event was over £400.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place – A Silver Star and £100.00
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place – A Bronze Star and £50
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place - £25

The draw for the event was made at the offices of the National Speedway Association (Southern) Ltd in the presence of Mr Harrison the Speedway correspondent of The Star newspaper.

The five qualifying heats were to see the first and second placed rider's progress to the Semi Final stage of the competition along with the two fastest third placed men.

#### **Star Championship Qualifiers 1931**

<b>Team</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
<b>Coventry</b>	<b>Les Patrick</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Syd Jackson</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Arthur Tims</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Crystal Palace</b>	<b>Harry Shepherd</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Ron Johnson</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Triss Sharp</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Wimbledon</b>	<b>Vic Huxley</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Ray Tauser</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Claude Rye</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Stamford Bridge</b>	<b>Frank Arthur</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Arthur Warwick</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Gus Kuhn</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Lea Bridge</b>	<b>Squib Burton</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Charlie Spinks</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Harold Hastings</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>West Ham</b>	<b>Tommy Croombs</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Bluey Wilkinson</b>	<b>Voted For</b>

	<b>Reg Bounds</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Wembley</b>	<b>Col Stewart</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Colin Watson</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Buster Frogley</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Nottingham</b>	<b>Fred Strecker</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Billy Ellmore</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Nobby Kendrick</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Southampton</b>	<b>Ernie Rickman</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Jack Parker</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Norman Parker</b>	<b>Reserve</b>
<b>Kings Oak</b>	<b>Syd Edmonds</b>	<b>Qualifier</b>
	<b>Phil Bishop</b>	<b>Voted For</b>
	<b>Arthur Fenn</b>	<b>Reserve</b>

Missing from the line up through injury despite qualifying were:-

Lea Bridge - Squib Burton replaced by Harold Hastings and Reserve became Roy Dook

Nottingham - Billy Ellmore replaced by Reserve Nobby Kendrick

Also Missing the Final:-

Coventry - Syd Jackson won the nomination but he was replaced on the night by Arthur Tims

### Heat Details

**Heat 1 1<sup>st</sup> Colin Watson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ray Tauser, 3<sup>rd</sup> Harry Shepherd  
4<sup>th</sup> Phil Bishop Time 81 3/5 secs**

Harry Shepherd took the initial lead but first Colin Watson and then Ray Tauser passed him.

**Heat 2 1<sup>st</sup> Jack Parker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ernie Rickman, 3<sup>rd</sup> Arthur Tims  
4<sup>th</sup> Col Stewart Time 81 3/5 secs**

**Heat 3 1<sup>st</sup> Arthur Warwick, 2<sup>nd</sup> Harold Hastings (fell), 3<sup>rd</sup> Bluey Wilkinson (mt), 4<sup>th</sup> Syd Edmonds (fell) Time 86 4/5 secs**

Arthur Warwick was a very lucky winner of heat 3. Harold Hastings took the lead but was soon passed by Bluey Wilkinson. When Syd Edmonds fell Warwick was already running a poor last, however events were to go his way. Bluey Wilkinson was first to go with a machine failure and then Harold Hastings hit a bump on the pits turn and fell in a heap.

**Heat 4 1<sup>st</sup> Tommy Croombs, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vic Huxley, 3<sup>rd</sup> Fred Strecker  
4<sup>th</sup> Nobby Kendrick Time 80 3/5 secs**

**Heat 5 1<sup>st</sup> Frank Arthur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Charlie Spinks, 3<sup>rd</sup> Les Patrick (ret),  
4<sup>th</sup> Ron Johnson (ret) Time 81 secs**

**Semi Final 1 1<sup>st</sup> Vic Huxley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ernie Rickman, 3<sup>rd</sup> Colin Watson  
4<sup>th</sup> Arthur Tims Time 80 3/5 secs**

Vic Huxley won but Ernie Rickman once again exceeded expectations riding very well for second place ahead of Colin Watson. Unfortunately at the Semi Final stage only the fastest second proceeded to the final and it wasn't him.

**Semi Final 2 – 3 riders only 1<sup>st</sup> Ray Tauser, 2<sup>nd</sup> Frank Arthur  
3<sup>rd</sup> Arthur Warwick Time 80 3/5 secs**

Ray Tauser got the slightly better start and always led from Frank Arthur

**Semi Final 3 1<sup>st</sup> Jack Parker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tommy Croombs, 3<sup>rd</sup> Harry  
Shepherd, 4<sup>th</sup> Charlie Spinks Time 79 4/5 secs**

This proved to be the fastest race of the competition. Tommy Croombs kept at Jack Parker all the way and made certain of his place in the final by being the fastest second placed finisher of the three Semi Finals.

**Star Championship Final**

**1<sup>st</sup> Ray Tauser (white), 2<sup>nd</sup> Vic Huxley (Red), 3<sup>rd</sup> Tommy Croombs  
(yellow), 4<sup>th</sup> Jack Parker (blue) (ret) Time 80 1/5 secs**

The draw for positions in the final gave red the inside position, white gate two, blue gate 3 and yellow the outside. Jack Parker dropped back on the first turn and tried to squeeze under Ray Tauser in a tight first bend scramble. Tauser however was ready for him and shut the gap. Parker in trying to avoid riding into the American was forced to ride on to the grass and retired from the race as a result knowing he had crossed the white line. Ray Tauser completed the four laps always holding the lead and never pushed with Huxley second and Croombs third.

## **Col Stewart – Australia's Speedway King 1926 – 1931**

This is a delightful book on the short but spectacular speedway career of the above named dare devil from Birregurra, Australia, who was a country boy farmer and became such a force to be reckoned with both in his native country and in the UK in those early days of Dirt Track racing. He is best known for his time at Glasgow White City in 1930 and his spell at Wembley in 1931.

The book is written by his daughter Barbara and luckily her Father kept all his press cuttings, photos and trophies but it was still a mammoth task putting it all together. It traces his early childhood with his brothers on the farm, right through his first motor cycling experiences to his Dirt

Track days. He was a spectacular ‘broadsider’ but on occasions would over do it and end in a heap on the ground – the only way to learn. Each season is dealt with in its own chapter and is packed full of photographs and copies of his treasured press cuttings. When he first came to England he even bought the frame from his Rudge-Whitworth machine in an attempt to talk the factory into making the same for him. Available from: Stuart Towner, 117 Church Lane, Chessington, Surrey KT9 2DP Tel: 0208-397 6599 e-mail [stuart.towner@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:stuart.towner@blueyonder.co.uk) Printed on gloss art paper A5 landscape, 96 pages with 85 photographs. This is a limited edition of just 1,000 copies and un-likely to be repeated. Cost is £15 including post in a stiff backed envelope. Available from mid-October; please make cheques payable to: A Whiff of ‘R’ Promotions Limited.

## **Kilmarnock**

The Ayrshire town of Kilmarnock lies not too far south of Glasgow and some way inland from 1937 speedway venue of Ayr. Up until recently I have not seen any reference to potential speedway activity but it appears that proposals had been formulated to bring National League Division III racing to the town in 1948. My attention to this potential venue was raised when reading an article about the intervention of the Home Secretary into the process of licensing new venues for the 1948 season. It seems he wasn’t too keen on workers spending their free time watching sport and greyhound racing on midweek evenings and for a while it looked as if the new Edinburgh venture would fall foul of this restriction. As we know Monarchs did run in 1948 but the Kilmarnock venture appears to have fallen at this hurdle. A search of the contemporary local papers has failed to find any information about the Kilmarnock proposal but the venue could have been the Rugby Park football stadium or a greyhound track operating there at the time.

**Jim Henry**

## **The Future of Speedway Racing**

It is interesting to look back at ideas people had for speedway and see if anything they suggested was taken up and implemented. **Jack Hill-Bailey**, Clerk of the Course and Racing Manager at King’s Oak (High

Beech) set out his views in an edition of the 1931 Speedway News as follows.

In 1928 when, on behalf of my club, Ilford, we ran the now historic meeting at King's Oak, my one idea was to provide suitable ways and means for the motorcyclist to have his sport just as the cricketer, the lawn tennis player and the footballer have theirs. The day of the meeting turned out exceptionally fine. Thousands of folk turned up to see this "new" sport, and a good many of them began to visualise a big future for it, although none of us could have foreseen what would be the situation little more than three years later.

Yet, despite the rapid growth of the Sport, and its genuine popularity, there are certain points which require immediate attention if the process of development is to continue. For mistakes have been made, as was to be expected, and to make amends we must consider what is the best policy for the future, for in this lies the salvation of the game.

What attracts the crowds today? I do not think there is any possible doubt the answer is League Racing. The British public calls for genuine competition, one body of men pitted against another in reasonably balanced contests, as in cricket or football. To win or lose by an overwhelming margin is of no interest to the keenest enthusiast, and is bad for the game. If league racing is to be seriously considered in the future as the stabilising factor of speedway, promoters must take action along the following lines.

At the close of the present season, or even before then, they should compile a list of all the riders in the game and grade them "A," "B," and "C." This done, they should review all teams as at present constituted. They will find the two or three at the head of their respective leagues immensely strong. Then let them look at those struggling at the bottom, recognise that these lowly team require stiffening, and distribute the riders, especially good all-rounders, as equally as possible, so as to satisfy themselves that, at least on paper, they have so evenly balanced the teams that even a man with inside knowledge would find it hard to pick winners.

The second subject to be tackled is the management of teams and their equipment. How many people, especially among those responsible for the welfare of a speedway team, have ever stopped to think that the fate of teams is in many cases in the hands of what we in the engineering world would call "three-eight mechanics," men – in many cases youths - who have never seen the inside of an engineering shop and have not

the faintest idea of the job they are trying to do. I am not referring to tyre replacements, wheel changing or minor jobs such as cleaning; these items can be seen by the average keen and careful motorcyclist. I am primarily concerned with the “innards” of the engine, and with the hubs, transmissions and alignments. This work demands the brains and experience of men who have been through the racing mill and who have a factory training behind them.

Men of this type are few and far between, and it would be impossible to find one for every rider; even if this could be done, it would be impossible to pay all of them the money they would deserve. Here, therefore, is what I believe to be the only method for the really efficient and economical management of a League team.

All the machines and equipment connected with team operations would be the property of the track concerned, which would have its own workshop controlled and managed by a competent man with two or three assistants. For instance, a track would probably own ten or twelve machines of the type favoured by the engineering in charge, but preferably of one make, to facilitate interchange-ability. These machines would be purchased from the rider at the end of the present season and new motors installed during the winter.

Given, say, twelve machines, all kept in sound condition, the required number with two or three spares could be sent *en bloc* to any track, and not, as at present, one here and some there, with the possibility of some of them being late. With this arrangement we should have first class motors receiving first class attention on and off the track, with consequent freedom from mechanical trouble. If one motor “packed up” another would be immediately forthcoming, thus helping to give clean cut programmes.

The rider, too, could go to the track free from the responsibility of motors, and the worry of a long distance drive with a trailer, and would arrive fit and fresh as in any other occupation. One often finds, for instance, a London rider arriving all hot and bothered at a Provincial track, with a last minute rush around to get everything in order. He is definitely not ready for his job. By adopting this scheme I hope we should solve the problem concerning league team equipment.

Now we come to the riders’ side, and I am about to suggest is the only way of introducing uniformity into team racing, with high efficiency and reasonably economical working.

A rider will be signed on by a track and will receive a retaining fee during the racing season and the close season, this to be set at a standard set rate – that is, both maximum and minimum. As in first class football, he will be under the supervision of a trainer, and will attend the training quarters at specified times for his general physical welfare, a very necessary item that has not been sufficiently considered.

When he is out with the team, his motors will await him either at home or away. As regards personal bookings, and what motors he will use. If a man is to ride apart from his team, he will be provided with two motors from the “stable.” They will be despatched to the track where he will be, collected and brought home.

Appearance money would go by the board. The rider would receive, say, 50 per cent of what he won, 10 per cent would go to the man in charge of the workshop, and he could distribute a small amount to his assistants. The remainder would go to the track that employed him. By this scheme the more the rider wins the better for himself, his workshop and the promoters. The figures are only suggestions and would, of course, have to be closely examined. But the principal of this scheme gives us several things.

1. The rider has no expenses with regard to the provision and upkeep of motors, and is earning all the time with a regular weekly salary.
2. The motors are handled as a whole. Spares are more plentiful, we get more efficiency and reliability, and one can go through a programme more easily. Riders can fulfil all their obligations, as there plenty of machines to use.
3. We get consistency in team racing. The reserve is only likely to be called upon through injury.
4. Having one's riders under a trainer is a right every promoter should have; they should all maintain a sound physical condition.
5. Riders will have no worries with regard to motors blowing up and the colossal cost of upkeep. The relief thus granted to them should lift a terrific burden from their shoulders.
6. It is impossible for a newcomer to start speedway racing. The cost of starting is £100 or £150, and so new material is not being produced. If tracks possessed their own equipment it would be possible to encourage newcomers at small cost. It must be borne in mind that a very reasonable rate of insurance against damage can be obtained, and this is much cheaper if done in bulk.



A great deal lies before those controlling speedway racing. Have they ever said, "What about such-and-such a track; it is too weak. Can't we let them have so-and-so? He is a good rider and we can spare him." It is not enough to offer him at an impossible transfer fee. I must strongly differ from those who think an unbeaten team is everything. People get tired of one-sided results, and will give up attending a track where these are the rule.

With regard to the proposed National League a serious factor enters in. Expenses will be higher through the many extra miles to be travelled, and five or six tracks alone would not make a National League worth while. It is fairly obvious that this is about the number that could keep going under present conditions. Four or five tracks which I have in mind may not agree with me, but if they will examine the situation frankly I believe they will do so, If not, I can only wait for bitter experience to teach them that I am right.

### **A Speedway Ransom Story**

**Graeme Frost** sent us this odd tale headlined "Star paid ransom for his cycles"

It's not every man who has had two of his motor cycles "kidnapped" but that's what happened in England this year to speedway star Ken McKinlay. It all happened like this.

McKinlay rode one night at Wembley Stadium, and after the meeting loaded his two machines into the trailer behind his car and stayed the night at a friend's house. The car, trailer and motor cycles were parked outside—together with spares, extra wheels, clothes and other gear. Next morning, all were gone.

McKinlay immediately went to the police, but even Scotland Yard got nowhere in the investigations. His fans took up a tarpaulin muster and raised enough money to buy him a new motor, which he installed in another machine.

For five weeks there was no further news of his car or machines. Then he advertised in a speedway publication that he would give £100 reward for information leading to the recovery of the machines and the arrest of the culprits. The next day he had a visitor, who warned him to make no attempt to contact the police and told McKinlay he could have his motor cycles back for £150. Some haggling followed, and McKinlay eventually agreed to pay £130 "ransom" money for them.

Then followed a scene which could have been dreamed up by a Hollywood script writer.

At noon the following day, McKinlay and the "contact man" set off in a borrowed car and trailer. The man drove half a mile, stopped, and went into a telephone booth. This process went on for six hours and yet they travelled only 70 miles. Each time a phone call was made, they drove another mile or so and then came yet another phone call.

Finally, at 6 p.m., they drove into a deserted side street where a small van was parked. Inside — and unharmed — were McKinlay's two machines.

He took his machines—and the licence number of the van—but Scotland Yard could find no trace of the owner.

Now, McKinlay is 13,000 miles away and has his two motor cycles, but there is still no sign of his car or his trailer.

Source: newspaper article, name and date unknown but November 1960 (maybe Perth).

## Speedway Adventurers

An edition or so ago we reported on Gus Khun's epic journey. In more recent times Aussie Mark Fiora took an epic journey, with a group of fellow Aussies, across Nepal and Tibet including a visit to the Mount Everest base camp. He travelled over 1,000 kms on a 1940s motorcycle, a Royal Enfield Bullet to be precise. Thanks to **Graeme Frost** for passing on this interesting snippet.

## Prestongrange Training Track

Not exactly an unknown venue or venues but one area where information was sketchy to say the least. Prestongrange is located on the southern side of the Firth of Forth a short way east of Edinburgh between the towns of Musselburgh and Prestonpans. The land was reclaimed from the sea using spoil from the nearby Prestongrange Colliery. The late **George Wells** talked about the featured venue and one he used in the late 1960s / early 1970s. However, nothing other than was known about these venues. However, an article has turned up in an unlikely publication called Coal News and in particular the Scottish Edition for February 1964. This shows a photo of three guys on a track

using stripped down road bikes being watched by Edinburgh Monarchs rider Bill Landels. I recall that at the time of the closure of Old Meadowbank at the end of 1967 the then County Planning Officer of East Lothian County Council suggesting that Prestongrange might provide a replacement venue.

**Jim Henry**

PS Coal News does carry a few more snippets about speedway including items about Dave Kumeta and Terry Turner who both worked in the coal industry and a couple of items about a Newcastle official. There is a brief mention about speedway coming to Ashington and an item about Ole Olsen buying colliery waste in England to build his new track at Vojsen.

## **The History of Preston Speedway – Part 2 – 1930 (continued)**

**Graham Fraser** continues the history of the Lancashire track which flourished for a very few years in the pioneer years.

Readers casting their minds back to Volume 13 No 4 in March 2011 will recall the exploits of Preston Speedway in their second season 1930. That section of the history covered the period from mid- April to mid-May of that year with Preston competing in the Northern League and running midweek open meeting at their Farringdon Park track.

On 15<sup>th</sup> May during an open meeting before 9000 spectators, the track records for both rolling and standing starts were broken Ham Burrell set a new standing start time of 1min 27.4 secs (knocking 1.6 sec of the previous time) which he soon reduced again with a time of 1min 27 secs. Burrell however lost his rolling start track record of 1min 21.2secs in a Match Race with Belle Vue ace, Frank Varey who posted a fastest ever track record of 1min 20.6secs. Also at that time there was speculation that sidecar racing on the dirt track which had taken place when Preston raced at Edinburgh, was unlikely to develop at tracks like Preston and many others due to their narrowness which meant only two sidecars could complete in any race.

Also in May 1930, Preston Speedway were refused an Occasional Liquor Licences for a bar at Farringdon Park, this despite the fact that spectators often brought their own liquor to the dirt track racing. This was a time when religious and abstinence groups held sway in the growth of licensed bars at sporting and other events.

League racing returned to the Preston track when the homesters took on a Barnsley team made up of Arthur Moore, Tommy Thomson, Charlie

Ward and Billie Halstead. The strong home quartet of Ham Burrill; Joe Abbott, Frank Smith and Jack Chiswell (& Reserve Claude Rye) won finished in first place in all six heats, Burrell getting a nine point maximum and the team winning comfortably 25-10, and it would have been greater if reserve Rye's chain had not broken in the final heat. An unusual format was adopted for an "Inter City Challenge Match" two days later when Preston took on teams from Manchester White City and Liverpool in what we might today call a pairs event. Reports are limited about who rode in the three teams: Preston's duo were Ham Burrill and Jack Chiswell, Frank Charles rode for Manchester and Ginger Lees and Larry Boulton for Liverpool. The result was Preston 10; Manchester 7; Liverpool 4.

The League fixtures were now coming up on a more regular basis with Preston travelling to Manchester White City a few days later in a crunch match between two teams favoured to be competing for the league title. White City were represented by: Frank Charles, Fred Strecker, Max Grosskreutz and Walter Hull which must have been a daunting opposition to the Lancashire team of Ham Burrill, Joe Abbott, George Reynard and youngster Jack Tye. Once the action started the scores were always close and despite Preston winning four of the first five heats, White City picked up most of the lesser places so that going into the final heat, the home team were winning 17-13 and all looked up for Preston as George Reynard and young Jack Tye faced home stars Frank Charles and Max Grosskreutz. As is often the case White City had cruel luck with both their riders retiring with engine failures, the Preston riders finishing on a 5-0 and winning the meeting 18-17 – a major scalp for the Lillywhites. To rub salt in the wound Joe Abbott won the Silver Helmet Race and broke the White City track record. The only blot on the horizon was an injury to Ham Burrill that would keep him out of the next meeting.

Returning to Farringdon Park on Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, Liverpool were the league opposition. The teams were:

Preston: Joe Abbott; Jack Tye, George Reynard; Frank Smith with Claude Rye at reserve    Liverpool: Tommy Price; Ginger Lees, Larry Boulton and Smiler Wooton

In a fairly close meeting with three shared heats, the teams swapping 4-2 heats, it was a heat four 5-1 to the Merseysiders that clinched a 20-16 win for the visitors in an unexpected result. The Preston directors

immediately issued a challenge to Liverpool for return challenge meetings home and way with a £100 prize at stake.

Preston's next home meeting on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> June was an Inter-City Challenge match with a "Manchester" team comprised of Eric Langdon; Dusty Haigh & Dick Fletcher from Belle Vue and Wally Hull; Sid Newiss and Buzz Hibberd from White City. Preston's team included: Joe Abbott; Jack Tye; George Reynard; Claude Rye, Frank Chiswell, Frank Smith and young local lad, Jim Carnie. Reports on the meeting are sparse the result being a 32-31 win for Preston.

The week commencing Monday 16<sup>th</sup> June saw a busy schedule for the Preston lads as the team headed off on its travels with five fixtures in successive nights. They started off with a league meeting at the South Yorkshire Sports Stadium home of Yorkshire team Wombwell, which they won comfortably 22-14. The next night saw them facing a Bristol team in a friendly over two heats and a final which was won by Len Parker for the home side. On Wednesday it was a an Inter Team match at Cardiff between a Wales team made up of Ronnie Barker; Ted Bravery; Jack Luke and Jack Wade and a Preston side comprised of Ham Burrill, Joe Abbott; George Reynard and Jack Tye. The result over the four heats was an impressive 15-9 victory to the visitors. Back to Preston the following night a Welsh representative team challenged Preston over nine heats with the homesters running riot for a dominating 48-15 win.

Their busy week came to a close on the Friday night with an important away league fixture against Warrington at the Arpley Motordrome. The home team was George Milton; Norman Dawson; H Soloman; Tommy Hatch and Charlie Hornby at reserve. Preston's squad was Ham Burrill; Joe Abbott; George Reynard; Frank Chiswell and reserve Claude Rye. Preston riders finished first in five of the six heats but three shared heats and two 4-2s to the visitors kept matters interesting. It was a 5-1 to the visitors in the penultimate heat that set Preston up for a 22-14 victory. By that stage in the season Preston has amassed seven league victories and they had 14 points from their nine league meetings.

At this point in the 1930 season the "Speedway Notes" in the Lancashire Daily Post speculated that having seen riders from the north and south of the country at home and away tracks that they believed "the racing in the north generally reaches a much higher standard". The writer commented that he has seen a meeting at a London track recently

and compared with the Preston aces the racing at the southern track was “tame”. I wonder what the southern pundits were saying?

## **The Web Progresses**

The web site is coming along great guns now and the rewards of **Matt Jackson**'s hard work can be seen by those of you who can access the internet either at home or a local library. The development of the site provides a much better picture of all the tracks which have staged the sport. That said, a number of the buttons do not give any access to any further information and there is a lot to do to fill the huge gaps.

On a more positive note we have been given a massive boost by collectors who have sent us scans of material in their collection which has reduced the substantial needs lists. We have also been sent a stack of information on the Irish tracks, Shelbourne Park, Chapelizod and Santry but there are still huge gaps in the files. If you have any programmes from these venues we'd like details please.

Work is well in hand on the 1961 season and **Jim** expects to draw this season to a close before Christmas. It is then on to 1962 on the way to 1964, the era that Jim has made his own work area.

**Bob Ozanne** continues to work away on the Pioneer days and has added the details of a number of the hazy venues to the web site. **Steve Wilkes** continues with the era post 1964.

Thanks to everyone who helped thus far and, if you do have programmes, have a look at our needs and see if you can help complete the task of gathering a complete record of UK speedway since 1928.

**Jim and Graham**

**Deadline for items for next edition is 31st January 2012**

**Web Master: Matt Jackson**

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