

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

Volume 15 No.3 December 2012

Edition No. 59

Paddy Mills

Another of **Keith Farman**'s biopics. Paddy rode under an assumed name, as his real name was Horace Albert Burke. He was born in Leicester 24.7.1913. The reason for this was that in the 1930's, while living in the Spalding area, when he looked on a motor bike as a means of making a noise, and his fists as making a living at the boxing game, he ran up against family opposition.

He worked on the principle that what the ears don't hear the brain won't worry about, so he changed his name, and the name stuck with him when he changed the canvas ring for the cinder circuit.

Paddy, by trade a painter and decorator, always had a craving for adventure and excitement. It was when he was misled into missing an Area boxing final, held at the Corn Hall, Spalding, that he decided to see what was cooking in the speedway world.

On a Sunday he and Stan Williams went to the Nottingham track and persuaded them to give them a trial. Paddy's chain came off and he put in such a poor performance that he never did get another ride at that track.

Next Paddy had a go on the Melton Road track in Leicester, which was the only three-lap track in the country. With him at that time were Geoff Godwin, Don Houghton and Wilf Plant. Paddy had three rides on the track and it was good-bye Leicester. Not bad as he had ridden on two tracks and was slung off both. The Melton Road track was un-licensed and as Paddy was already registered under his pseudonym with ACU, he decided to ride under his birth mane.

The next stop was to ride for Arthur Westwood at Sheffield. This was where Stan Williams made the grade, but Paddy kept falling off and was only getting second half rides.

In 1938 Bluey Wilkinson won the World Championship, he retired at the end of the season to take over running Sheffield in 1939. It was then that Paddy's fortunes started to change.

Bluey must have seen something in Paddy; maybe because they were both red heads, that Bluey took Paddy under his wing. The first thing Bluey did was to condemn the bike and loan him one of his own. It was then that Paddy started to fly. He did so well that he and Aussie Powell were chosen as reserves for the England team against the Dominions in the Second Division Test Match held at Sheffield.

Both the reserves' were brought into the meeting early and did excellent service, with Powell scoring 5 and Paddy 4 points in the 42-65 loss. Unfortunately, Paddy and Hart got mixed up in a horrible crash; happily both got away with just a bad staking.

On the 27th May 1930 Paddy made his debut at Norwich for Sheffield, scoring 6 points in the first leg of the National Trophy, in which Norwich won 60-46. In the return at Sheffield, he upped his score to 12+3, helping his team to a 69-38 win.

In the League match at Norwich going into the last heat the score's were 38-39. Bronco Dixon of Sheffield took the lead at the first bend with Alan Smith of the Stars made a great effort, but could not catch Dixon and with Paddy in third the Stars had lost again to Sheffield. Paddy had only scored 3 points but his contribution had made the difference. Only one more match was held at the Firs in 1939 when the Stars beat Hackney 62-22 before war broke out.

During the war Paddy served in the RAF in the Commando Section. In 1945 he visited Buckingham Palace and came away with the British Empire Medal (Military Division). Paddy was demobilised the same year and met Frank Varey who gave him a big boost by selling him two bikes at half the price that he could have got from anyone else.

With the pooling of riders after the war Dick Wise secured Paddy for Norwich. In 1946 he was the Stars third highest scorer. Paddy did even better in 1947, as he became the Stars top scorer with 210½ points. In 1948 the dashing Paddy, with 262 points was again the Stars top scorer. He was also considered to be the most popular rider in the Second Division that season.

Wilf Jay was the September challenger for the Second Division Match Race Championship. But he broke his leg and it was Paddy who took his place against Graham Warren, who was without doubt, the top rider in the Second Division that year.

In the first leg at Birmingham, Paddy made a gallant attempt to catch the Birmingham flyer. He cut down an early ten lengths lead to three lengths in the first race, and had accomplished roughly the same performance in the second race when engine trouble forced him to give up the struggle on the last lap. At Norwich Warren equalled Paddy's track record of 74-4 as he again won 2-0.

Paddy got on well with his teammate Sid Hipperson, and together with their wives would go out after the meetings at Norwich. Paddy lived in the Midlands, so he would stay the night at Sid's Norwich home on the Saturday night. Paddy returned the hospitality, as Sid would stop over with Paddy when the team rode in the Midlands.

Paddy always wore an old flying jacket with a hole in the elbow. Sid, who was a bit of a sharp dresser, got fed up with his pal, so he decided to give him two nice jackets. Paddy thanked Sid for them and he certainly looked extremely smart in them.

Several weeks later, Sid was at Paddy's and he noticed that Phil Day, who helped Paddy, had a nice jacket and it looked like the one he had given Paddy. Then another of Paddy's mates came along wearing the other jacket. Paddy was back in the flying jacket complete with the hole in the elbow.

Sid gave up trying to get Paddy to look smart after this and accepted that he would have to be seen in smart restaurants with his mate in his beloved old flying jacket.

Paddy had a great influence in the fortunes of Yarmouth Speedway, as in the winter of 1947-48 he, together with Sid Hipperson, and with some help from Paddy Hammond ran the Norwich Speedway Training School. The riders had to practice at the Firs and one night a week was shown how to look after a bike.

It was from these trainees that the bulk of the 1948 Yarmouth team was formed. Billy Bales, Reg Morgan, Bill Carruthers, Bert Rawlinson soon became stars in their own right, thanks to Paddy.

The Stenner's Annual published Ranking list in 1948 Paddy was fourth behind Graham Warren, Frank Hodgson, and Fred Tuck. 1949 he dropped a place with Billy Hole, Ken Le Breton Alan Hunt and his old mate from the early days, Stan Williams above him.

In 1949 Paddy was going like a train, as in the first eight League home matches at the Firs, he did not drop a point. He had never rode so well and his form was recognised by the Test Match sectors, as he was

chosen as reserve, for the Second Test against Australia, at Birmingham.

While riding for Norwich on the eve of the big meeting, at White City Glasgow (15.6.49), he was leading the race when his bike stopped. He was run into by an opponent and flung into the safety fence with such force that he fractured his skull in three places, broke his right leg and injured his face and eardrums. Many thought that it would end his career, but he was back before the end of the season.

Bob Leverenz was his partner in that race and he later told me, "That it was the worse crash he had ever seen and was sure that Paddy had 'bought it', how he survived that I do not know". "But after that Paddy was never so good again"

Norwich had won the Second Division Championship two years in succession 1950-51 were promoted to Division 1 in 1952. They did not fare too well and neither did Paddy, as he was injured during the first League match on the 19th April, resumed racing on the 19th June. Again injured on 28th June, he resumed on the 10th July. These injuries cost reduced his appearances to 17 league matches and this restricted his scoring to just 42 points.

For so long Paddy had been a top scoring stalwart for the Stars but in 1953 he was limited to second half rides. Paddy had been a magnificent servant to Norwich since 1946 and had, on more than one occasion, been riding well before time after a crash, having discharged himself from hospital bed to do so.

He was, however, loaned out to Stoke in 1953 scoring just 10 points from 6 matches.

Paddy did make a short-lived comeback in the early 60's as he had a few second half rides.

One thing that Paddy did was his victory roll. He would not go straight into the pits, as he would turn round, and then come back into the pits.

Breaking New Ground

Keith Farman may not be with us in the flesh but he left a few gems in his archives. This is yet another of them which is well worth publishing.

Early in the 1929 English season, speedway promoter James Baxter and Australian rider Frank Arthur arranged a speedway match at the West

Ham track in London between teams representing England and Australia. This clash, which created immense public interest, resulted in an easy win for the Australian team. Further similar matches, which also proved very popular, were staged on various English tracks that season.

Baxter and Arthur conceived the idea of sending an England team to Australia at the conclusion of the 1929 English season. For a number of reasons the trip didn't take place. The following year in England, Speedway Test Matches, which were officially sanctioned by the country's controlling body, commenced between Australia and England.

Frank Arthur hadn't given up on the idea of organising a tour of Australia by an England team. In this endeavour he found an ally in Johnnie Hoskins. Try as they might, the pair found the merits of financing such a business venture well nigh impossible to sell to the financial heads in England. Only one wealthy Londoner had agreed to provide some backing. It was during the 1932 English season that Hoskins pronounced, "That's enough! The boys and I will put up the rest".

At the end of October 1932, the first England touring team to travel to Australia set sail aboard the P. & O. liner Bendigo. The controlling company, British-Australian Speedways, Ltd., ended up with five directors - J. S. (Johnnie) Hoskins, Frank Arthur, John G. (Jack) Ormston, John (Jack) Parker, and businessman C. Beardmore.

The principals of the company planned the Australian tour around two separate competitions. The first would be a series of international matches between Australia and England. The second would be a number of World Championship meetings.

"The following team of English riders is coming with me on the Bendigo, leaving here on October 28: - Jack Parker will captain and manage the English team. He has captained nearly every test team here and is one of the best riders in the world. Jack Ormston, who visited Australia a few seasons ago and raced at Adelaide, and who is captain of our famous Wembley team, is next. Others are: George Greenwood, one of Wembley's most brilliant riders and recent captain of the Leeds team; Harry Whitfield, winner of three 100 pound championships in one week, and member of the Wembley team since the commencement. He is making this a honeymoon trip. Phil Bishop, captain of the High Beech team, and one of the most reckless of all the riders. He has with

him his teammate, Wally Lloyd, the smallest rider on the tracks, and extremely popular with all crowds. Gordon Byers, the youngest English rider to gain test match honours, is an absolutely fearless Yorkshire boy, and a big point scorer for Wembley. Bill Clibbett, captain of the Plymouth team and a dashing rider, is one of the most consistent riders of the team and a good trier. Norman Evans, of the Wembley team, visited New Zealand a couple of seasons ago, and is noted for his peculiar style of riding and his fast motors.

“Little Ian Hoskins, the well known mascot of the Wembley team, is also coming with his miniature motor. Ian is now eight years old and made his debut at Wembley on his sixth birthday. He is almost as popular as the captain of the team.

“These English lads have been chosen by Jack Parker and myself in preference to others with slightly more experience, as being riders who will give a good account of themselves in Australia. Seven of them are test match riders and, on their recent form, the others are qualified as among the best in the country.

“Each rider will have two of the latest motors, a plentiful supply of spares, and special fuel. One or two are bringing a spare engine as well, so that there should be absolutely neck and neck racing all the way.

“Among the Australian boys are such great internationals as Frank Arthur, who is to captain the Australian side (at least at Perth); Vic Huxley, probably the world’s greatest small-track rider; Lionel Van Praag, the dogged Sydney crack; Jack Chapman, the champion of Adelaide; Stan Catlett, the well-known West Australian; Dicky Smythe, of Brisbane; Steve Langton, the brilliant Toowoomba boy, who has made a great name this year; and Bluey Wilkinson, of Bathurst, than whom there is not a more popular rider on the speedways of England, France and Germany. Dicky Case and Max Grosskreutz may also come. In fact, every Australian and English rider of note, with only about four exceptions in the English side, will be in Australia this season.”

In this communication, Hoskins didn’t mention one other member of the England touring party – “Chun” Moore. On a later occasion in Australia, Hoskins named the four English riders he alluded to in the last sentence of his letter as being Ginger Lees, Eric Langton, Tom Farndon and Colin Watson. On the first Sunday the Bendigo was at sea, the ever-observant Johnnie Hoskins became aware that there wasn’t a Chaplain on board the ship. He noticed that the Sunday Service consisted of just an impromptu gathering of about a dozen worshippers

in the ship's lounge. A week's planning by Hoskins resulted in a more formal arrangement the following Sunday. Here is how Jack Parker remembered the second Sunday at sea: -“ ‘Roarin John’ read the lesson and led the hymn-singing. Before long he had the lounge packed to overflowing, and although I am perfectly certain he was quite sincere in his actions, I am also convinced that the beams of satisfaction with which he gazed around had something to do with the thought that once again he had drawn a record crowd.”

Before the Bendigo arrived at Fremantle in Western Australia, the Auto Cycle Council of Australia received a cable from the Auto Cycle Union in London concerning the upcoming visit to Australia by the English riders. The November 10 missive from the London authorities strictly forbade the staging in Australia that season of official Test matches which involved an England team comprised of riders from Hoskins' party. Not only were the Australian authorities forbidden from using the term “official Test matches” but they were also forbidden from using the term “test match”. Hoskins said that he and the other members of the touring group became aware of this stance taken by the Auto Cycle Union just a few hours prior to the Bendigo's departure from London.

The Bendigo docked at Fremantle on November 28th at 5.40 a.m. Mr. Wal Murphy, secretary of the Auto Cycle Council of Australia, had made the trip to Western Australia from his home in Adelaide to head the welcoming party which was on hand to meet the overseas visitors. Local motorcyclists and speedway fans were also present. Never short of a word for the Press, Hoskins expressed his disappointment at the stance taken by the English authorities in respect to the staging of official Test matches in Australia that season.

“He has designed racing engines and frames, and raced his own designs. At the age of 20 he was on the experimental staff of one of the largest motorcycle-manufacturing firms in the world, and had 20 men under him. He left a 500 pounds a year position to take up speedway racing.”

The feature event of the first meeting of the tour at Claremont on December 3 was a 100 pounds World Championship contest. Hoskins had secured a deal with the company, which had the promotion rights at Claremont that season, Westralian Speedways, Ltd, for use of the track. The format devised for the world championship event was somewhat unusual in that, during the 15 heats, English riders met only their fellow countrymen, as did the Australians. Fields of English riders and Australian riders contested alternate heats. The final was to be a match

race between Australia's highest point scorer in the heats and England's highest scorer. The winner was to receive 75 pounds from the purse and the runner-up 25 pounds. English riders were to contest 8 of the heats and the Australians 7. The Australian riders competing were Frank Arthur, Lionel Van Praag, Bluey Wilkinson, Stan Catlett, Steve Langton, Max Grosskreutz, Jack Chapman, Dick Smythe and Syd Parsons.

An added attraction on the night was a programmed match race between Jack Parker and Frank Arthur. The purse of 25 pounds went to the winner. An additional 25 pounds was on offer for the winning rider should his overall race speed exceed 60 miles per hour.

Not a lot had changed at the Claremont venue since Johnnie Hoskins had last been in control there during the 1927-28 season. The fence surrounding the site was still in a poor state. In order to prevent people from climbing over it during the 1927/28 season, Hoskins had employed ex-prize-fighters to patrol the grounds to deal with anyone who tried to gain admission without paying.

“It (the Claremont track) is big – about 2½ laps to the mile – and the fence happened to be in rather a dilapidated condition. In order to prevent the crowd from climbing over at will it was necessary to employ ten husky stockmen on horseback. As a local youth got halfway over, our stockmen would gallop up and, being artists with their long whips, would belabour the culprits very neatly and pass on for more victims.”

Johnnie Hoskins outdid himself with the presentation of the December 3 programme. Just as he had done when he previously promoted at the venue, he had all the riders wearing variously coloured jackets. The following is from my meeting report: -

“Nineteen riders in coloured leather jackets careering round the Claremont track at great speed formed an unforgettable spectacle on Saturday night as the international riders brought from England by Mr. John S. Hoskins, managing director of British-Australian Speedways, Ltd., made their debut to a crowd of fully 12,000 people.

“Led by little Ian Hoskins, mounted on a miniature dirt track machine, the English and Australian riders circled the track in formation, the two captains carrying silken flags. Then pandemonium broke loose. Spirits pent up by weeks of travel were unleashed in an orgy of speed. The noise rose in a crescendo to a deafening roar. Riding their machines like furies the men flashed round and round the track at break-neck speed.

Two pushers off caught with a stubborn machine in the path of the oncoming riders stood petrified as, whizzing past, the machines brushed their clothes. Un-dreamed of riding skill was shown in that mad stampede. It was a glimpse of the Valhalla of dirt track riders. The astounding spectacle suddenly ended. There was a breath-taking silence and then came a full-throated roar of appreciation from the crowd.

The size of the Claremont circuit proved to be a challenge for most of the English riders. They were more accustomed to riding on the smaller tracks in England. Englishman Harry Whitfield's Australian debut performance was outstanding. The fastest time registered during the first six qualifying heats was 75 seconds to the credit of local rider Syd Parsons who was aboard a Jack Chapman machine. Whitfield recorded 74.80 seconds in the seventh heat, the fastest time of the evening.

"The sheer artistry, skill and perfect understanding between the riders made dare-devil riding of the highest quality look actually easy. The crowd was breathless with suspense sometimes when the machines actually touched as they swept past on the turns, yet there was not the slightest suspicion of their getting out of control."

When the eight heats involving the English riders had been completed, Harry Whitfield and Bill Clibbett remained unbeaten on 9 points. Whitfield had needed to win his final heat to tie with Clibbett who had already completed his qualifying races. The format used meant the pair hadn't met during the heats. Jack Ormston recorded 8 points, having been defeated by Clibbett.

The tenth qualifying heat featured the clash of two Australian stars, Wilkinson and Grosskreutz. From my meeting report: -

"Some of the cleverest riding of the night was seen in the tenth heat.

Wilkinson and Grosskreutz elbowed each other for a complete lap while travelling at a terrific speed. Finally Wilkinson flashed over the line a length ahead."

Grosskreutz was the Australian to progress to the final of the West Australian round of the World Championship. He finished on 8 points, having dropped his only point to Wilkinson in that dramatic heat 10 clash.

The final was programmed to be a race between the winner of the English rider section and the top scoring Australian rider. As Whitfield and Clibbett had each scored maximum points, both joined Grosskreutz for the final. The winner of the West Australian round would gain a

place in the World Championship Final to be staged later in the season at Sydney.

“It provided almost the most exciting riding of the night, Whitfield and Grosskreutz fighting side by side until they passed ‘fowlhouse’ corner for the third time when the Australian skidded out and Whitfield, who rode straight into the turns in the manner of the late Sig Schlam, went ahead to win comfortably.”

“Two of the world’s most foremost dirt track exponents were seen in action when Jack Parker, the English captain, and Frank Arthur, captain of the Australian team, met in a special match race. Arthur had the inside running and for two laps he skimmed round the edge of the grass with the Englishman right on his back wheel. At ‘fowlhouse’ corner on the final lap Parker passed the Australian with a brilliant turn and, taking the lead, continued to win by a few yards in 50 secs. (56 m.p.h.)”

Harry Whitfield 9, Bill Clibbett 9, Jack Ormston 8, George Greenwood 6, Norman Evans 5, Gordon Byers 3, Jack Parker 2, Phil Bishop 2, Wally Lloyd 2, Chun Moore 0. Max Grosskreutz 8, Bluey Wilkinson 7, Frank Arthur 5, Lionel Van Praag 5, Jack Chapman 4, Syd Parsons 3, Dick Smythe 3, Stan Catlett 1, Steve Langton 1. Whitfield, Clibbett, Grosskreutz. Time of 76.60 seconds.

One of the machines brought to Australia by Lionel Van Praag was creating a deal of interest. It was equipped with two spark plugs to the single cylinder. Van Praag was looking forward to testing it out on the larger Australian circuits. The machine was said to possess terrific acceleration, a feature not suited to the smaller English tracks.

What was to prove to be a long and arduous season for organizer Johnnie Hoskins was underway.

The riders spent the following week preparing their machines for the first of the international matches set down for decision at Claremont on Saturday, December 10. The Show Society had placed one of the large pavilions at the ground at the riders’ disposal. Jack Parker made the following comment during the week, “We were rather afraid of these big tracks until we had our first ride, but we are now confident, and all the visitors will ride the track without buttoning once.”

When the Australian team for the first international was announced, it became obvious that the Englishmen would have to perform to the best of their ability to defeat the home side. Frank Arthur, Australia’s captain, would be partnered by South Australian Jack Chapman. Two of

the other Australian pairings were announced in the local press as follows: -

“Another strong Australian pair should be Lionel Van Praag and Max Grosskreutz. Van Praag will race his ‘two-plug’ machine, which should be exceptionally fast. The brilliant Dick Smythe is partnered with Bluey Wilkinson, and the partnership should be a good one for Australia.” Dick Smythe announced he would be riding one of Van Praag’s machines on the night. Australia’s final pairing was Syd Parsons (once again to ride a Jack Chapman machine) and Stan Catlett. Charlie Datson and Steve Langton were named as reserves.

“Jack Parker, who will be using a higher gear for greater speed, has Phil Bishop as a partner. . . . One of the most famous team pairs of the past three seasons in England consists of George Greenwood and Harry Whitfield. Their understanding of each other’s tactics is, according to Mr. J. Hoskins, uncanny, and this pair is looked upon as the one to be most feared on Saturday night.

“Jack Ormston, who captained the victorious Wembley team in England last year, and who rode so well on Saturday night, has been given as his team mate Gordon Byers. . . . Bill Clibbett, the 6 foot 1 inch captain of the Plymouth team, who finished second in the championship final last week, has an excellent team mate in Norman Evans.”

Wally Lloyd and Chun Moore were named as the team’s reserves. Moore, who was still suffering the after effects of a crash on the first night, did not ride in the match.

The first international of the series, conducted over 16 heats, was won by Australia 54-41. From the meeting report: -“Consistency, excellent co-operation, and skilful riding on the part of its three leading pairs, enabled the Australian team of dirt track riders to win the first of a series of five tests against the Englishmen at the Claremont Speedway on Saturday night.”

The highest scorers on the night were Harry Whitfield and Frank Arthur, each scoring 11 points from their four rides. For Australia, the Max Grosskreutz/Lionel Van Praag pairing returned 17 of a possible 20 points, while the Frank Arthur/Jack Chapman duo scored 16. The star pairing for England was the Harry Whitfield/George Greenwood combination with 14 points.

F. Arthur 11, M. Grosskreutz 9+2, L. Van Praag 8+1, A. Wilkinson 7+2, R. Smythe 6, J. Chapman 5+2, S. Parsons 3+1, S. Catlett 2, C. Datson 2, S. Langton 1+1. H. Whitfield 11+1, G. Byers 8, W. Clibbett 7,

J. Parker 6, P. Bishop 4+1, G. Greenwood 3, N. Evans 2+1, J. Ormston 0, W. Lloyd 0.

During his two appearances at Claremont, Harry Whitfield started on 8 occasions for 7 wins and a second placing. The second placing was to his team mate Greenwood in the International match. The following appeared in a Perth newspaper report on the second meeting: -“...he (Whitfield) is just finding his true form, for at the two meetings at Claremont he has distinguished himself. At the first meeting he won the championship, and on Saturday night he was England’s outstanding rider; indeed, he rode with skill and determination equal to any display given on the track.”

Cold weather on the second Saturday evening of their Claremont stay resulted in a very disappointing attendance for the tours’ investors. Jack Parker commented, “... although we were not much out of pocket, we didn’t make any money out of our stay at Perth.”

The touring party sailed from Fremantle for Adelaide on Tuesday December 13 aboard the S.S. Oronsay.

Council Speedway

Graeme Frost from Australia spotted this item in the Broadsider Magazine from way back in July 1948. It would be great if there was universal civic interest in the sport today.

There is a councillor in Kensington who wants to see speedway introduced as a school sport, believing it would be the means of keeping the youngsters out of trouble. Her idea is motor cycles for the bigger boys, bicycles for the others.

The councillor with the right idea is grey haired Mrs. Helen Newhouse, who believes that speedway is the only recreation thrilling enough to keep youngsters from law breaking. This is what Mrs. Newhouse told me.

“What’s the use of telling young daredevils to be good? Give them something to work off their surplus energy. Most lads follow speedway, so I want the Council to provide tracks and even a couple of motor cycles. This would be cheaper than making good the wanton damage which idle hands often do. Of course, the boys would require proper supervision. I am sure speedway would be safer than playing on the roads.”

Well, it's a brave idea. Let the smaller lads graduate on push bikes. Even the Mayor of Kensington thinks his lady councillor's brainwave a good one, but he's a wee bit doubtful about what the rest of the Council will think about it. (Tailpiece – nothing happened.)

Second Half Frustrations

Have a look at the needs list and the same old note TSH2ndmen appears after the vast majority of meeting needs details. This indicates that I am looking for details of the times for the men who finished second in the three heats of the second half event where the heat winners and the fastest second placed rider progressed to the final. I am sure that most of these times were announced but so few spectators appear interested in recording them.

I often wonder who dreamed up this second half format but they gave completists who like to get all the meeting details recorded a massive headache.

Please do have a look at your programmes and the needs lists and send me any details you can that will help fill these gaps. **Jim Henry**

Why Rain It Off?

Keith Corns has sent us a cracker of an article from the Liverpool v Edinburgh programme of 10/9.1951. Gordon Parkins wrote “Last Monday, for the first time in the history of post-war speedway at Liverpool, we were forced to cancel the racing. My sympathy to the many thousands of patrons who stood in the rain for three-quarters of an hour waiting for the gates to open, and whom we had to reluctantly turn away when it became apparent that the electricity services would not be restored in time for the meeting.

In the past we have fought many grim battles against the elements – rain, hail, cold and even snow. The worst that the weather man could provide has never stopped us opening the gates and it had been our boast that Liverpool was one of the very few tracks in the country that had not suffered a cancelled meeting since the war.

Last Monday, the track was in perfect condition, and although the rain was coming down heavily, it would not have prevented the start of the

match. But when the power station authorities informed us at 7.30pm that they could give no indication of when the power was likely to be restored, there was no alternative but cancel the meeting. You will appreciate that the with track lighting, loud-speaker system, starting gate and other controls all dependent on the electricity supply, it was just impossible to do otherwise. As it happened, perhaps it was for the best, the rains increased and by 8.30pm had become a torrential downpour, so the odds are that the match would have been washed out well before the final heat had been reached anyway

How Speedway Began Droylsden the real story.

Nigel Bird has sent in the following item re this pioneer venue. Much has been said about the first attempts to run Speedway in the UK and no doubt the arguments will continue to rage. The first meeting officially sanctioned by the ACU and given a permit for "Dirt track racing" (as speedway was then known) was the Camberley, Surrey event in May 1927. The Motorcycle press must have felt this meeting was of great importance as the reports and results merited several pages and a centre page spread in "The Motor Cycle" magazine. Little of what happened that day would be recognised as speedway by today's fans. The second event came a month later at Dodd's farm in Droylsden, Manchester on 25th June 1927. As with Camberley, this event was given a permit by the ACU for dirt track racing and organised by the South Manchester Motorcycle club headed by club secretary and local motorcycle dealer Fred Fearnley along with Harrison Gill. It is often reported that this event took place on a 600yd horse trotting/harness racing track. Evidence I have uncovered from reports in the more obscure Manchester newspapers suggest otherwise. The track was according to the local press a horse training/exercise facility and as such was very narrow, so narrow that the organisers deemed it unsafe to start a race with the riders abreast. So they were flagged off the start line one by one at timed intervals. It is recorded that the bends were considered wide enough to allow passing. Unlike Camberley the racing was run in the usual anti-clockwise direction. Details of the track surface were not recorded; one can only assume the surface was softish to protect horses' feet but may have been rolled down hard? Little chance there was of any real broadsiding. It was said the club intended to widen the track

for future events. When interviewed, Fearnley is reported to have said, "It was just an experiment as we have no experience in running this type of event". Again, little of what happened that day resembled modern speedway but the seeds of the sport were being sown. Fred Fearnley won the first race, while the winner of the expert's race was Charlie Pashley, later involved with midget car racing and Belle Vue speedway. Fred became good friends with legendary promoter Johnnie Hoskins who was managing the Salford Albion track in Manchester, Whether Fred was involved with the Salford track I have yet to ascertain.(Footnote) At Fred Fearnley's wedding Sept 1928 the guests included Johnnie Hoskins and Aussie riders Charlie Datson and Ron Johnston. Ron Johnston was later to star for the Crystal Palace team. Fred Fearnley had a short lived speedway racing career and was later involved on the promotional side at West Ham.

Dan de Lyon

For various reasons I have held the belief that the nom de plume " Dan de Lyon" was that of Ezra Clarence Deakin. (Warrington). Now evidence given to me by Adrian Pavey suggests it was actually Frank Charles and a recently seen photo of Dan de Lyon at Audenshaw looks strikingly like Frank. Anyone expand on this?

Correction

R.Martin from Cosby, Leicestershire advises that the 1956 National League Division One table should be amended to show points against at home should be 434 and the Belle Vue away record should read won 2, drew 0 and lost 10. Thanks for checking and we will advise of any corrections spotted.

Speedway in Russia Part 2

Alan Bates has sent a bit more about the early days of speedway in Russia.

During 1960 speedway soon caught on among the public. Teams and leagues were organised, tracks built and coaches and mechanics trained. Thanks to the efforts of DOSAAF (Voluntary army and air force organisation), the first purpose built speedway track was built in Rivne (Ukraine). This was the start of the speedway boom.

The first international meetings were held in Rivne, Lviv, and Maykop. Soviet riders travelled to Czechoslovakia for a series of friendly matches raced before packed houses. Some 145,000 attended the first meeting at the Strahov Stadium in Prague, where the USSR team finished runners up and they followed this by winning at Slany and Ceske Budejovicki.

Igor Plechanov was again able to show that he was the top rider in the country by convincingly winning the USSR championship. In addition he became the first soviet rider to win an international competition (in Rivne) on 4th and 5th July 1960.

That year USSR had five Test Matches away against Poland and lost all of them. The closest reverse was a 38 – 39 defeat at Gorzow. Igor Plechanov was by far the most successful rider with scores of 13, 11, 17, 13 and 14 to total 68 points, well ahead of Leonid Drobjjasko and Boris Samorodov who managed 37.

In a four tem tournament in Prague, Russia were second behind Sweden with Plechanov the highest scorer of the meeting.

Igor Plechanov became the first soviet rider to qualify for a World Final and he scored 4 points in the event at Malmo, Sweden in 1961. Igor completed 1961 by retaining his USSR championship.

It All Began on The Wall of Death

Older readers will remember the name Raymond Glendinning. Some may even recall he was a great sports commentator on early television and radio. Andrew Dakers Ltd of London published Raymond Glendinning's Book of Sport for Boys annually for many years and this is a story from what we think is the 1955 annual attributed to **Ronnie Moore**. We hope you find this interesting.

In September 1944 I sat on a motorbike. The saddle was hard. Just sitting on that machine was even harder. I was just twelve years old and Dad was riding the Wall of Death with me as his pillion passenger.

In 1954 I sat on a motorbike. The saddle was still hard. Staying on the machine was even harder than the first venture of mine on the Wall of Death out in Australia. For on this particular occasion I was on the way to winning the speedway championship of the world.

A lot had happened in those ten years. I'd been to many countries, raced on many strange tracks, earned a lot of money and managed to win an equal amount of fame.

Yet, as I raced away on that September 1954 night at Wembley, in Heat 6 of the World Championship, it seemed more like yesterday than ten years ago, that I performed on the Wall.

I don't really know how I came to get into this part of the show business. Dad always had a leaning to do something new. I expect that's why he taught me to drive when I was only seven!

That's no line. We were crossing the desert in Australia at the time.

Don't ask me why. When you're seven years of age you don't ask such questions. You keep your eyes wide open in wide-eyed wonder and take every new town as it comes.

Dad stopped the lorry so we could have some food. I stayed in the cabin and soon as everyone was out switched on the motor again. Then I pulled the first knob I could find, and, as luck would have it it was the starter. That wouldn't have mattered too much, if the lorry hadn't been left in gear.

As I yanked the starter it seemed to jump four feet forward. I was thrown out of the door. Dad jumped farther than a kangaroo and just got clear as the lorry "jumped."

They picked me up and I looked a certainty for the good hiding to end all good hidings. I never got it. Dad said "Reckon it's time we taught him to drive, It'll be far safer if he knows what he's doing. Never tried to teach a kid of seven before."

Without even waiting to brush down the desert dust, to press down an egg-sized bump on my head – collected on my hurried descent from the lorry – or bathe the scratched arm I'd collected at the same time, he shoved me back in the cabin.

"Press that" he said, pointing to one of the pedals on the floor. I did.

Dad shoved the lorry into gear, and off we went. The next half hour would have been interesting if I'd known what I was doing, or could have seen where I was going, or could have seen where I was going.

"Press this...Press that...Press this...Press that." Dad gave the instructions and I, on my hands and knees under the dashboard, did what I was told. That was the only way I could reach the foot controls. I never was a giant, and about that time I looked more like a midget than a miniature pygmy!

We bounced around over the desert and by the time we had finished my knees were sore; and I felt sick from the fumes of the engine. It taught me a bigger lesson than any walloping. I never monkeyed with things I didn't understand after that.

Actually there was never any need. Dad was something of a jack-of-all-trades. If I wanted to know anything or do anything within reason, I had only to ask. Then he'd show me.

He kept on with the driving lessons. But I was promoted to the driving seat to steer, while Dad worked the foot controls. On a desert track it didn't matter much which side of the road you wanted to drive. The desert is a wide place.

One day, about a year later, the lorry broke down in the middle of nowhere. We were about fifty miles from the nearest town. Dad got an old motorbike from the back of the lorry, we left Mum and my sister Val in the truck, and hared off to the nearest garage.

That was the first time I'd ridden pillion. For five minutes it frightened the life out of me. Then I did the same thing to Dad by tapping him on the shoulder and asking if he couldn't go any faster. We were doing eighty miles an hour at the time!

After the pillion riding it was natural that I should learn to ride the bike properly. After all, it could be many years before I could reach the foot controls in the lorry, but the bike only had to be slightly modified.

By the time I was nine I was more at home on a bike than a cowboy on a horse. Naturally I couldn't ride in the towns; but in the wide open spaces between the settlements there was nothing to stop me having fun.

After Australia we tried New Zealand. Dad had ago at gold-mining, then we met up with a mad motor-cyclist who was acting as barker for a rival side-show. It was Trevor Redmond, who now rides for Wembley.

Everything our barker shouted to attract the crowd, Trevor went one better. Dad was going to do a diving act showing how divers salvage stuff from wrecked ships, so Trevor yells that his diver is not only going to do the salvage act – he's going to wreck the ship!

Dad would bring up lead bars from the wreck: so Trevor's bloke will bring up gold bars!

Dad will go down without a suit: so Trevor's bloke will go down with one and take it off on the bottom of the tank!

The crowd had a wonderful time, listening to the two of them, and finished up by drifting away highly amused, of course, convinced that both of them were the biggest story-tellers under the sun.

A couple of days later Trev and Dad tied up together. It seemed the simplest thing. Trev had the gift of the gab. "There's money in gold-mining" he said one day, and talked us into taking the diving gear along to a swiftly-flowing river. Now we knew there was gold on the river bed, but no diver could ever hope to battle against the current: except Trev.

He'd never dived in his life but that didn't stop him. On went the suit and he insisted on going down. Dad showed him some of the tricks of the trade but Trev got things slightly mixed up.

As the water started to close over his helmet he suddenly flooded the suit with air. We'd tied to a strong rope around him because of the current. Just as well we did.

Trev popped to the surface in his blown-out suit and floated there, at the end of the rope, for nearly quarter of an hour while we struggled to get him out. In the end we managed to tie the rope's end to the back of our car and hauled him out that way. It ruined the suit but it didn't stop Trev.

"I've got an idea for making a lot of money" was his first remark when he could breathe properly again.....

His idea was to cash in on the motorcycling craze. Trev knew where he could get a rough track and stage speedway racing.

And that's how speedway started for me. We got a track and we staged racing. Real ride-and-hope stuff it was. You'd keep the throttle wide open and hoped you'd spot the bumps and holes in the track before you hit them and took a dive. We didn't make much money but we did have a lot of fun.

The fun, in my case, finally landed me up in Christchurch....when Norman Parker, who was then captain of England, came to ride. Maybe it was my size – or lack of it – that tickled him. Maybe he really thought I was going to make a top rider. I don't know. All I know is I was going at my rides like a bull at a gate, and not doing a great deal. Then Norman gave me a few hints and racing seemed to get much easier.

"What about bringing back to England?" Norman said to Dad one day. "I'll fix him up at Wimbledon."

I was sixteen at the time. I'd heard about England, never dreamed I would get the chance to visit it – especially as a speedway rider. I must have held my breath for a couple of seconds. It seemed more like a couple of weeks until I heard Dad say, "We'll talk it over with his Mother". For an awful eternity I thought he'd turn the offer down flat.

I arrived in England just after my seventeenth birthday. It was cold, it was raining and London looked a dingy place to me. Like many others before me, I'd taken the first boat back if I'd had a return ticket. Lucky for me I didn't.

In England everything I did seemed to go right. I took a lot of risks in that first season, and I got away with most of them. Inside a couple of months' riding I was not only acclimatised to the new style of racing but also to the hectic new style of life.

The racing was different from any I had known before. You didn't push the throttle to the stop, you played with it on the bends to get the maximum amount of drive out of the turn and the minimum of drift while making it.

The life was totally different. I'd been used to plenty of travelling. But in England all the trips were "short hops" on roads that demanded concentration of a top order from start to stop. And there were so many of these trips.

I was lucky enough to be considered a draw, so I got plenty of bookings. There seemed hardly a night when I wasn't rushing back home from one track or another.

That's how the years went by. I rode in Europe, South Africa, and back home in New Zealand between racing here.

I picked up other hobbies, the top two among which were – and still are – car racing and model aircraft building. But the biggest thing I picked up was determination to win the World Championship.

Not until last year did I make that come true. I won it because I had that little bit of luck on the night – and because I never thought I had a chance.

A couple of months before the final was due I went on the Continent and broke a leg. It was not a bad break, but a broken leg for a speedway rider is not exactly the best kind of preparation for winning a championship!

Thanks to excellent medical care I managed to get fit for my preliminary rounds, and scored enough points to take me to the final. My leg was still strapped up, even though I was riding. It had to be, for it wasn't strong enough to support the train. That is what convinced me that I stood little chance of winning the title that year.

For the first time I went to sleep before the World Final Night and didn't wake up during the night. I won my first race. And then came one of the toughest races of my career – against Jack Young (twice World

Champion) and Brian Crutcher (strongly fancied to win). Just for good measure we had Aub Lawson along with us, and he's one of the cleverest boys in the game.

Suddenly I realised that if I could win that race I stood the best chance of taking the title that I had ever had. I gated ahead of the others, swung the bike into the mad, first bend scramble and came around still in the lead. Behind me I could hear the roaring and whining as the others fought to get on terms. And that was the time when I suddenly remembered the Wall of Death... and how hard I'd found it to balance of the pillion of the machine.

A world title virtually within my grasp; the two biggest dangers to my ambition safely lodged behind me ... and I have to start thinking of Walls of Death!

I thought as I rode, and fortunately it did not slow my reactions or my progress. Crutcher couldn't quite get level with me because he was busy fighting off Jack Young's challenge. Young was no danger to me while Crutcher was in front. And that's the way we finished.

As it happens, after that the meeting went exactly as I thought it might. It was my night: I guessed right every time I had to make a decision. I've never "gated" better: and once I got away I had a machine beneath me which was more than equal of any others on the track – for which my thanks to our chief mechanic at Wimbledon, Bert Dixon.

Five races, five wins. Then the cheque for £5000. Plus nearly another £100 prize money, Plus a magnificent silver cup.

And on top of it all, the greatest sound in the world. The packed Wembley Stadium roaring it's salute to the World Champion. There's no sound in the world quite like it.

Especially when you are the Champ.

Web Wonders

The web continues to grow and Jim is still plodding on with 1964 helped in no small way by **Keith Corns** who has drawn from his archive of programmes and magazines. Keith has also given Liverpool files a good checking over and these, and associated files have been revised to remove minor errors.

Bob Ozanne continues to work away on the pre-war material while **Brian Collins** and **Ian Presslie** have added to the information to hand.

In the era from 1965 onwards **Mark Aspinell** has powered through a few seasons and is now separating the mega year file compiled by **Steve Wilkes** into a track by track section.

Matt Jackson continues to weave his magic as web master and add everything that is thrown at him from every airt and part.

There are still a lot of gaps in the records and if you have a computer and some spare time we encourage **you** to have a go at compiling files on a track by track basis to add to the site.

Almost finally, I make my regular request for any help collectors can offer by way of filling the gaps in the record base for the files that are on site. There are a huge number of meetings, the details of which are not on the site. Whilst I realise many are from the more hazy venues such as Wombwell, Tamworth and Aldershot as well as places like Rye House and Eastbourne when they were open venues. However, there are tracks like Stoke and Oxford where gaps in the information base remain to be filled. Any help is welcome.

Finally, we have to say that the cost of running the site has increased significantly to accommodate the scale of the holdings. We have been given a pile of photographs taken by Wright Wood and programmes from the late 1950s and early 1960s (tho' there is a Wartime Belle Vue amongst them) which we intend to auction off to raise funds to keep the web site running. Details of these items plus how we intend to organise the auction will appear in the next magazine and at the same time we will put them on the web site.

Jim Henry

Deadline for items for next edition is 31st January 2013

We welcome items on any topic related to the history of speedway and would be delighted to publish material about more recent times than those of the pre-war and national league era.

Web Master: Matt Jackson

www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk

Or 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

24 Graham Tel : 01786 471992

Jim Tel : 0131 664 7185