

## GLASGOW NELSON SPEEDWAY

### THE PIONEER SCOTTISH VENUE : OLYMPIC STADIUM, GLASGOW

The birth of speedway in Scotland is often the subject of debate and, if you demand that the track be of the cinder variety in a proper stadium, then Celtic Park is the one you should support.

If you want the proto-speedway venue then I must direct you to a stadium which lay to the north of Celtic Park, separated from it by a railway embankment, and marked on the Ordnance Survey maps of the day as The Olympic Stadium. A somewhat pretentious name for a trotting and greyhound track which was, to describe it best, somewhat egg-shaped. The straights were straight, but the bends were of different radii. The distance round one lap measured at 486 yards. Vertical railway sleepers served as an outside fence and a post and rail fence marked the inner boundary.

From contemporary maps of the track the stadium was orientated with the long axis NNE - SSW and appeared to have some form of covered accommodation at the northern end, adjacent to the bend with the greater radius. The southern bend was adjacent to a railway embankment which in turn was adjacent to the north western terracing (the Celtic End) of Celtic Park. The site is now occupied by the houses of Dalsersf Street.

This venue which had the postal address of Porter Street, Camlachie was owned by a Mr Nelson and the venue is much better known as Glasgow Nelson. The events staged there were organised by the Glasgow Nelson Motor Cycle Dirt-Track Club, the first such club to be established in Britain.

Activity started in early March 1928, including one on a snow covered track, when the club members took to the track to practice. Jimmy Valente is featured on the front page of the contemporary *Sunday Post* repairing an inner tube before returning to the track.

Further practice sessions were staged and recorded in the contemporary press before the Glasgow lads felt prepared to charge the public to watch what they were up to. The event of 25 March was recorded thus. 'Thrills in plenty were given by the members of the recently formed Motor Cycle Dirt-Track racing company at Nelson Grounds, Camlachie, Glasgow yesterday afternoon, when both solo and combination machines took part in a number of displays. The attendance must have been most gratifying to the promoters, over 2,000 being present. Exhaustive alterations which are being made are rapidly nearing completion.'

On Easter Monday, 9 April 1928, the doors were opened to the public and the first event staged. Yet again the press were there to record the action in photographic form. Most newspapers carried action photographs which show the riders cornering with feet on the 'pegs'. The written coverage elsewhere is sketchy to say the least and most meetings seem devoid of much incident.

All of 2,000 turned up to watch the heats and finals of 5 events. John Allan, a road racer from Prestwick is recorded as the first winner of a heat. John won the 350cc heat of the 5 lap event in 2 minutes 37 seconds and by a distance of 40 yards from an A. Dick. John went on to win the final from Andy Marr and George Wilson and win £3. Tom Shearer won the 250cc 10 lap event by a lap to collect a gold medal and £1 taking 5 minutes 46.6 seconds in beating Jimmy Reid .

The 600cc event went to another road racer, Manx Grand Prix competitor Harry Potts who defeated George Biagi, a relation of track doctor Carlo, covering 5 laps in 2 minutes 27.5 to win £4. James Edward defeated Graham Morrison and Harry Potts to win the Unlimited event in 2 minutes 20.6 seconds and collect a gold medal plus £3 while Peter Coia had a walk over in the sidecar event after Frank Alexander crashed, gifting Peter the gold medal and £2.

According to Norrie Isbister, Nelson was not really dirt track racing as the track was board hard and it was ridden feet up on the pegs. The contemporary photographs fit Norrie's description of the event but what he did not mention was that the bikes were in road going trim. No bits taken off here.

The following Saturday but one, 21 April the new sport attracted 1,500 fans. This time Scotty Cumming won the 350cc, Graham Morrison, from Ayr, the Invitation (for the best from the opener), James Edward again won the unlimited as did Peter Coia in the sidecars. The 250cc event was cancelled due to lack of entrants.

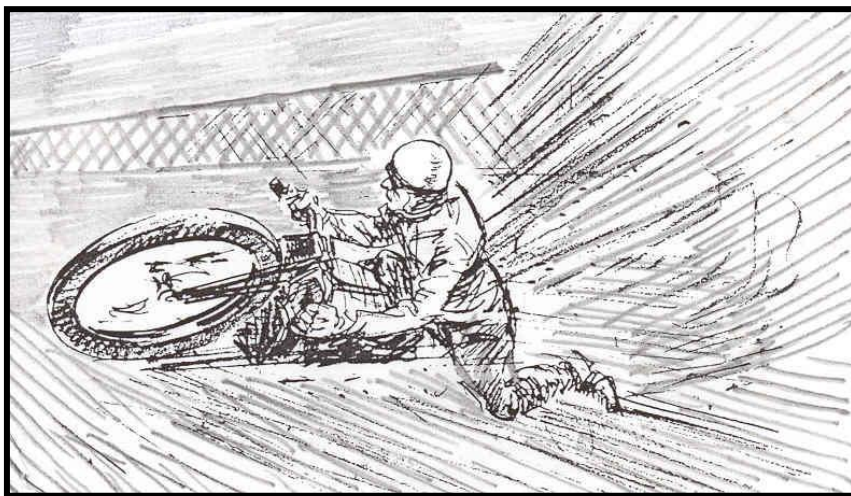
The night before Celtic Park opened on 27 April, the event winners were 350cc George Wilson, 600cc Peter James, 250cc Tom Shearer while James Edward retained his Unlimited crown and Peter Coia surrendered his sidecar mantle. The report of this meeting is quite sketchy but a certain Norrie Isbister appears in the published results taking second place in the heats of the 350cc.

Friday 4 May 1928 and meeting four gave victories to the same guys as the week before in both the 350cc and 600cc events. The unlimited event was won by Andy Marr, who was a pioneer who had raced sand tracks. The sidecar fell victim of a paucity of entrants.

The 1928 finale for Nelson took place the following Friday and it was a Jimmie Pinkerton benefit night. He raced unbeaten through all his races to win the 350cc, 600cc and the unlimited event. Jimmie was a regular attender at Nelson and would go on to appear at White City's only meting in 1928 which was the swan song of the Glasgow Nelson Dirt-Track Club.

OK the track may not have provided true speedway, but it was a pioneer venture and it helped bring a few riders into the speedway fold. Today the site is covered by houses which are dwarfed by the stands of Celtic Park. There has been talk of demolishing some of these houses, and, if they do this, there may be the chance to erect some form of memorial to Glasgow Nelson and the pioneers of Scottish Speedway.

The track flickered into life in 1932 when at least one meeting was staged there on Tuesday 17 May. A meeting was staged by the riders known as the 'Blantyre Crowd' who were running a track at Motherwell under the Lanarkshire Speedway Club banner. A meeting to be staged on 24 May was advertised in the *Daily Record and Mail* that day. It advised that 20 riders would take part and that admission was 7d. (approximately 3p). Whether this or any other meetings were held is not known.



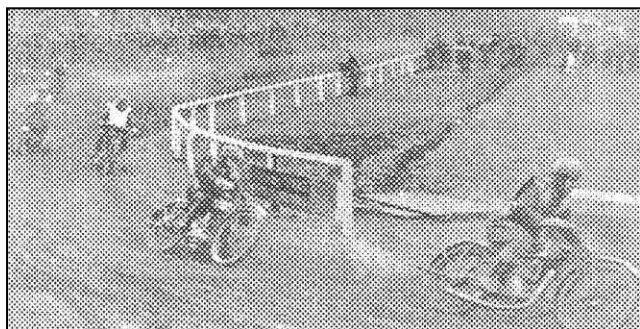
**1928 GLASGOW NELSON DETAILS**

Demonstration	Sun	11.03.1928		
Demonstration	Sun	18.03.1928		
Demonstration	Sun	25.03.1928		
Practice	Sun	01.04.1928		
Meeting No.1	Mon	09.04.1928	350cc	John C. Allan
			250cc	Tom Shearer
			600cc	Harry Potts
			Unlimited	James Edward
			Sidecars	Peter Coia
Meeting No.2	Sat	21.04.1928	350cc	George Cumming
			Unlimited	James Edward
			Invitation	Graham Morrison
			Sidecars	Peter Coia
Meeting No.3	Fri	27.04.1928	350cc	George Wilson
			250cc	Tom Shearer
			600cc	Peter James
			Unlimited	John C. Allan
Meeting No.4	Fri	04.05.1928	350cc	George Wilson
			600cc	Peter James
			Unlimited	Andy Marr
Meeting No.5	Fri	11.05.1928	350cc	Jimmie Pinkerton
			600cc	Jimmie Pinkerton
			Unlimited	Jimmie Pinkerton

**Monday 9 April 1928**

**Crowd: 2,000**

Glasgow's first attempt at dirt-track racing opened its doors to the public on Easter Monday and a crowd of 2,000 turned up to watch the new sport. Riders did not throw up much of a cinder cloud, as it



could be seen from contemporary photographs that the track surface was quite hard. This is verified by Norrie Isbister (Norman Magnus McLeod Isbister), who recalled that skids had to be induced using the rear brakes.

Photographs also show the bikes in street going condition. No stripping down of the machines used here, as shown in the picture taken at the opening meeting on the left.

The contemporary press also recorded a few spills but no injuries. The prang of the day was suffered by sidecar driver Frank Alexander

and his unnamed passenger, who went right through the wooden fence on the third lap whilst trying to retain their lead. The report does not say if it was the inside track fence or the outside track fence. However, it is likely it was the post and rail inside fence, as the outer fence was constructed using vertical railway sleepers.

A number of names which would feature in the pioneer years are recorded in the records of this meeting. These included George Cumming, who would go on to build Sheffield and the 1930 Carntyne track; Norrie Isbister and Arthur Moser, who became White City regulars until it closed in 1931; Bill Dickie, Andy Marr and Allan Campbell, who all appeared at Marine Gardens in Edinburgh and White City.

John C. Allen, who enters the records as the first man to win a race in Scotland, did not live long to celebrate his early dirt-track victories. John was fatally injured at the Ulster Grand Prix on 1st September 1928. Other riders appeared briefly at Nelson but moved on to other things. Best known was Harry Potts who was a very well known road racer of his day. Many of the names featuring in this first meeting at Glasgow Nelson appear in a number of motorcycle event reports, such as sand track events at Prestwick and Ayr and at various club events in the West of Scotland.

#### 350cc (5 laps) Prize Money £3

Ht 1: John C. Allan, Alan Dick, [ Alec Bower, Arthur Moser, George Cumming, 2min 37.0

Ht 2: Andy Marr, John Anderson, [ Allan Campbell, Bill Dickie, Chris Hughes, 2min 31.0

Ht 3: W. Mathieson, Charles Glen, William F. Kennedy, Norrie Isbister (Not staged)

Final: John C. Allan, Andy Marr, George Wilson, Alan Dick, 2min 24.6

#### 250cc (10 laps) Prize Money £1 plus Gold Medal

Tom Shearer, Jimmy Reid, Alec B. Stewart, 5min 46.6

#### 600cc (5 laps) Prize Money £4

Ht 1: William C. Law, Jimmie Pinkerton, [ John C. Allan, Arthur Moser, Jack Hart, 2min 43.2

Ht 2: Graham Morrison, James Edward, [ John Thompson, Allan Campbell, 2min 23.4

Ht 3: Harry Potts, Jim Middleton, 2min 28.8

Ht 4: George Biagi, William Mathieson, 2min 31.6

Final: Harry Potts, George Biagi, Graham Morrison, William C. Law, 2min 27.5

#### Sidecars Prize Money £2 plus Gold Medal

Peter Coia, Frank Alexander (crashed), No time

#### Unlimited Capacity (5 laps) Prize Money £3 plus Gold Medal

Ht 1: William C. Law, Chris Hughes, [ Allan C. Tagg, Alan Hart, T. Gardiner, 2min 37.7

Ht 2: Graham Morrison, Andy Marr, [ John C. Allan, George McLusky, Charles Glen, 2min 22.5

Ht 3: Fred Mort, George Wilson, [ Jim Thompson, Jim Middleton, Wm.F.Kennedy, 2min 29.0

Ht 4: James Edward, Tom Shearer, [ M.Ross, Norrie Isbister, 2min 27.4

Ht 5: Harry Potts, W. Mathieson, [ George Cumming, Arthur Moser, Bill Dickie, 2min 25.2

Final: James Edward, Graham Morrison, Harry Potts, 2min 20.6

### Saturday 21 April 1928

Crowd: 1,500

The numbers taking part bears testimony to the increasing popularity. Most interesting was the Invitation Race, which was for the riders who had done well on the opening meeting. John Allan made a promising start but soon fell behind due to engine trouble. Graham Morrison from Ayr took the lead and worked away to gain a winning margin of 25 yards.

The sidecars drew some attention: 'Another important feature of the evening was the skilful manoeuvring of the passengers in the sidecar race when negotiating the corners. The lad who accompanied Peter Coia gave an exceptionally able display when trailing the ground.' Unfortunately, they never named any of the passengers in the sidecar events for posterity. Maybe the club should have thought about the power of advertising, as their small adverts did little to inform and encourage the public to come along.

#### 350cc (5 laps) Prize Money £4

Ht 1: George Cumming, Jimmy Valente, [ Peter James, George Wilson (No information)

Ht 2: Andy Marr, Chris Hughes, [ John C.Allan, Norrie Isbister (No information)

Final: George Cumming, Andy Marr, 2min 30.6

#### Invitation (10 laps) Prize Money £5

Graham Morrison, James Edward, John C Allan (ef), [ Andy Marr, Harry Potts, 4min 44.4

#### Unlimitedcc (5 laps) Prize Money £5

Ht 1: George Wilson, [ Steve Bogie, William C. Law, Robert Sloan, Norrie Isbister (No information)

Ht 2: Tom Shearer, [ Chris Hughes, Eric A. Harvey, Jack Hart, John C. Allan (No information)

Ht 3: James Edward, [ Jimmy Valente, John Thompson, Peter James (No information)

Ht 4: George Cumming, [ J.S. Devlin, Fred Mort, Harry Potts (No information)

Ht 5: Jim Middleton, [ NI (No information)

Final: James Edward, George Wilson, [ Tom Shearer, George Cumming, 2min 24.6

#### Sidecars (5 laps) Prize Money £3

Ht 1: Peter Coia, [ NI, 2min 45.5

Ht 2: Alex McColl, [ NI, (No information)

Final: Peter Coia, [ NI, 2min 51.4

#### 250cc (5 laps) Prize Money £3

Event not staged due to lack of entries.

### Friday 27 April 1928

Crowd: Not recorded

Apart from very brief reports of the results, no details of this meeting have survived in the contemporary press. It was staged on the eve of the Celtic Park opener and more interest was being attracted to this event. Even the meeting reports are very sketchy but at least the race win times have been recorded for posterity.

A quick calculation suggests that the riders were averaging about 34 miles per hour. Whilst in modern terms it isn't too fast, equipment of the day wasn't so speedy.

350cc (5 laps)

Ht 1: George Wilson, George Cumming, [ NI, 2min 25.4

Ht 2: John C. Allan, Norrie Isbister, [ NI, 2min 26.2

Final: George Wilson, George Cumming, [ John C. Allan, Norrie Isbister, 2min 25.6

600cc (5 laps)

Ht 1: George Wilson, [ NI, 2min 25.4

Ht 2: Eric G. Baird, [ NI, 2min 35.0

Ht 3: Harry Potts, [ NI, 2min 31.2

Ht 4: Peter James, [ NI, 2min 31.8

Ht 5: John C. Allan, [ NI, 2min 24.0

Final: Peter James, George Wilson, [ Eric G. Baird, Harry Potts, John C. Allan, 2min 22.8

250cc (5 laps)

Tom Shearer, Jim M. Baxter, [ NI, 2min 46.6

Unlimitedcc (5 laps)

Ht 1: John C. Allan, [ NI, 2min 30.6

Ht 2: George Wilson, [ NI, 2min 23.2

Ht 3: Graham Morrison, [ NI, 2min 30.6

Ht 4: Harry Potts, [ NI, 2min 35.0

Ht 5: James Edward, [ NI, 2min 25.4

Final: James Edward, George Wilson, [ John C. Allan, Graham Morrison, Harry Potts, 2min 21.2

Sidecars (5 laps)

Frank Alexander, Peter Coia, [ NI, 2min 51.2

Friday 4 May 1928

Crowd: Not recorded

Another event at Nelson which was devoid of press coverage except for the results.

It is interesting to note that the 250cc and sidecar events had to be cancelled due to lack of entries. Sidecars never really attracted a big entry and 250cc did not seem to be a popular machine size at the time either .

350cc (5 laps) Prize Money £5

Ht 1: George Wilson, Andy Marr, Jimmie Valente, 2min 32.2

Ht 2: Peter James, Joe Dickie, Chris Hughes, 2min 37.4

Final: George Wilson, Andy Marr, [ Peter James, Joe Dickie, 2min 22.2

600cc (5 laps) Prize Money £3

Ht 1: William Japp, Jimmy Valente, [ Jim Middleton, Eric A. Harvey, Joe Dickie, 2min 35.2

Ht 2: Peter James, Fred Mort, [ Harry Potts, Jack Hart, Eric G. Baird, 2min 32.6

Ht 3: James Edward, Chris Hughes, [ George Wilson, Tom Shearer, Andy Marr, John Roberts,

2min 26.8

Final: Peter James, James Edward, William Japp, 2min 26.8

Unlimitedcc (5 laps) Prize Money £4

Ht 1: Eric A. Harvey, Jimmy Valente, [ William Japp, Eric G. Baird, 2min 29.6  
Ht 2: Andy Marr, Chris Hughes, [ Jim Middleton, 2min 36.6  
Ht 3: Fred Mort, Joe Dickie, [ Jack Hart, John Roberts, 2min 33.6  
Final: Andy Marr, Fred Mort, Joe Dickie, Eric A. Harvey, 2min 27.6

#### Sidecars and 250 cc

Cancelled due to lack of entrants.

#### Friday 11 May 1928

Crowd: Not recorded

A short report featured in the *Scotsman*. The writer said: 'An interesting evening's sport was witnessed at the Nelson Athletic Grounds, Glasgow yesterday when the Glasgow Nelson Dirt-Track Motor Cycle Club held their fifth meeting. Instead of the customary 5 laps the distance was increased to 10 laps. The longer distance gave an opportunity for recovery and the racing was interesting and up to a high standard.' It was noted that engine failures played their part and robbed the 350cc event of a good deal of interest.

It always appears strange to an outsider that engine failures should be a plague of speedway, right from its infancy.

#### 350 cc (10 laps)

Ht 1: Jimmie Pinkerton, George Wilson, Alec Bower, 2min 43.8  
Ht 2: Houston Anderson (wo), George Cumming (ns), George Pinkerton (ns), (No information)  
Final: Jimmie Pinkerton, [George Wilson (nf), Houston Anderson (nf), George Cumming (nf), 5min 08.2

#### 600 cc (10 laps)

Ht 1: Harry Potts, Jim Middleton, [ R.G.Kennedy (ns), James Edward (ns), George Cumming (ns),  
5min 05.6  
Ht 2: Jimmie Pinkerton, George Wilson, Houston Anderson, John Allan (ns), George Pinkerton (ns),  
(No information)  
Final: Jimmie Pinkerton, Jim Middleton, [ Harry Potts, George Wilson, 4min 58.0

#### Unlimited cc (10 laps)

Ht 1: Jimmie Pinkerton, Jim Middleton, [George Wilson, James Edward, George Cumming, 4min 42.8  
Ht 2: Harry Potts, R.G. Kennedy, [ Houston Anderson, John Allan (ns), George Pinkerton (ns),  
5min 03.6  
Final: Jimmie Pinkerton, George Wilson, [ Jim Middleton, R.G. Kennedy, 4min 44.0

#### GLASGOW NELSON SPEEDWAY 1928 RIDERS A - Z

Frank ALEXANDER	Houston ANDERSON
James ANDERSON	John C. ALLAN
Eric G. BAIRD	Jim M. BAXTER
George BIAGI	Steve BOGIE
Alec D. BOWER	Allan CAMPBELL (Also rode as Allan Tagg)
Peter COIA	George CUMMING

**J.S. DEVLIN**

**Joe DICKIE**

**James EDWARD**

**Charles GLENN**

**Jack HART**

**Chris HUGHES**

**Peter JAMES**

**R.G. KENNEDY**

**William C. LAW**

**George McLUSKY**

**William MATHIESON**

**Fred MORT**

**Jimmie PINKERTON**

**Jimmy REID**

**M. ROSS**

**Robert SLOAN**

**John THOMPSON**

**George WILSON**

**Alan DICK**

**Bill DICKIE**

**T. GARDINER**

**Alistair HART**

**Eric. A. HARVEY**

**Norrie ISBISTER**

**William JAPP**

**William F. KENNEDY**

**Alex McCOLL**

**Andy MARR**

**Jim MIDDLETON**

**Graham MORRISON**

**Harry POTTS**

**John ROBERTS**

**Tom SHEARER**

**Alec B. STEWART**

**Jimmy VALENTE**

**To the best of the Author's knowledge all of the riders named above were Scots.**