



This is Old Meadowbank's "hellfire corner" where Peter Craven crashed. Riding for Belle Vue Aces of Manchester against an Edinburgh Select on Friday night, he raced into this bend and came off his bike, hurtling into the safety fence.

Peerless Peter was everybody's friend

By JOHN GIBSON

Everybody liked Peter Craven. And that's saying something, because professionally he was the Denis Law of Speedway. He skippered Belle Vue Aces, the Rangers of Speedway. Someone so successful usually has his antagonists. Not the chunky, cheery, 29-year-old redhead. He was, in the words of Edinburgh

Monarchs' promoter Ian Hoskins:—

"... A gentleman. He would help anyone. Some riders of his standing—and there are few—are reputedly ruthless, but Peter, though he always rode to win, never roared round a track regardless of the opposition. No one spoke badly of him."

WON EVERYTHING

Craven, who leaves a six-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, won everything speedway had to offer... the world championship last year and in 1955... the Golden Helmet for the British Match Race Championship... the Silver Sash.

At Wembley a week past Saturday, a 50,000 crowd saw him fall off his bike twice without a serious injury in a typically wholehearted attempt to hold on to the world crown.

Craven was a speedway ambassador for Britain. He rode all over Europe, including Russia and Poland. He was highly respected in Australia, too.

For the past decade he was Britain's No. 1 rider, staying in the world class. His big time career began with his home town team, Liverpool, in 1951.

UNTIMELY END

At the end of that season, the team went defunct and the following year he joined Manchester's Belle Vue Aces, staying with them to the untimely end of a brilliant career that could have lasted another ten years or more.

I spoke to Craven in the Meadowbank pits before his final fateful race. He talked of opening his own motor-cycle business in Lancashire and denied the rumours that he was thinking of retiring from speedway next year at the age of 30.

I asked if he would follow his normal practice—in National

League matches and start off a 20-yard handicap in his next race with Monarchs' George Hunter and Willie Templeton.

"The way these boys have been going tonight," he said, "I honestly doubt if I could start 20 yards behind and have any chance of beating them. But if the fans want it that way it suits me..."

The fans didn't want it that way, so the seemingly unbeatable Craven was off scratch with the other three riders and the drama-packed duel ensued.

The race, which normally takes just under 70 seconds, was cut short before it was half over and resulted in the first speedway fatality in Scotland since the war.

But it was an accident... just one of those things in a scrupulously clean race.

TRAGIC

Said Craven's 31-year-old brother, Brian, who captained the Newcastle Diamonds' side against Belle Vue Aces in a similar challenge match in Newcastle on Monday night:—

"George Hunter can't, and shouldn't, have the slightest feeling of guilt in this case. Every rider—and that includes George himself—has at one time had to take violent evasive action to avoid a fallen rider on his bike. Only this time the consequences were more tragic. It was a thousand to one chance."

Promoter Hoskins wouldn't hear of claims that Old Meadowbank, post-war home of the Monarchs, is a "killer track."

"This is a positively ridiculous accusation. There's nothing of the killer about our circuit and never has been. Indeed, we've been remarkably clear of serious injuries over the years here."

Mrs Brenda Craven, who maintained a constant vigil at her husband's bedside along with his parents, also insisted that the crash was purely accidental.



"Dispatch" speedway reporter John Gibson, who was standing only 40 yards from the crash, examines the shattered safety fence.