

THE SPEEDWAY RESEARCHER

Edited by Graham Fraser & Jim Henry
Volume No. 1 No.2 September 1998

THANKS FOR THE WELCOME

It would be fair to say that there has been a reasonable response to **The Speedway Researcher** and that we have received a number of cheques for the subscription for this and the other two issues of this volume. We have 53 subscribers so far in this edition which is extended to six pages.

The letters of response have raised a few interesting topics which need to be addressed.

One of the major dilemmas was our need to think out the role of collectors. (We are very grateful to The Speedway Collectors Club for distributing number one and to The Speedway Star for carrying our piece in the Notice Board section.)

We did not consider this as a forum for collectors seeking memorabilia, but, after some thought, we consider that collectors can make a valuable contribution to the work of researchers. After all information held in programmes and speedway magazines are a vital source of information providing heat details and other facts and figures held in these items. Collectors of badges can help compile the list of these interesting pieces of memorabilia by providing information about the badges they hold.

The buzz words are "symbiotic relationship". In other words, we need each other. So, all you collectors out there, you can help we researchers without straying into libraries by making available information from your collections. Researchers will dig out information which will make collectors aware of what might be out there like tracks, programmes, books, magazines etc.

There is general support for undertaking the tasks listed on the back page of Vol.1 No.1.

What we need now is for volunteers to come forward and offer their services to act as the collator of the information to build up data banks. Graham and I are quite happy to continue with the Roll of Honour but there are plenty of other tasks to be claimed.

A major issue to be addressed is the costs incurred by those compiling data banks and the supply of information from these data banks. We cannot expect those volunteering to compile data banks to incur massive outlays. Copying of records is likely to be expensive. While it would be ideal if information could be supplied to anyone who asked for it, this is not really practicable.

Those contributing to a data bank should expect some reward and the thinking is that they could draw information on a quid quo pro basis -- in other words -- you could expect an output equivalent to what you put in. Anyone not contributing, i.e. anyone who is looking for a pile of information, should expect to have to pay for the reproduction/postage costs of the information they seek, be it computer print out or photocopied material. If they can accept information on computer disc, then they should bear the costs of supplying the discs.

There is some support for a history society. However, not everyone has shouted out yes, let's go for broke on it. We are quite happy to float the idea and would welcome (say) a draft constitution and organisational structure to form the basis for discussion to progress matters.

There has been a bit of interest from the statisticians out there. The main gist is that pre war statistics are quite hazy and it would be great if we could remedy this. We would be quite happy to go along with this. Again it would need volunteers to act as coordinators to compile the details for each season. Over to you!!!

Graham Fraser
7 B Bruce Street, Stirling.

Jim Henry
90 Greenend Gardens, Edinburgh.

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

There are a huge number of dedicated speedway publications which carry information on speedway meetings and these are most helpful to those undertaking speedway research. (We will carry an article on these soon.)

However, there are other sources of information held in printed form which are worth examining in your quest for knowledge. We refer to the ubiquitous newspaper and to non dedicated sports and motoring magazines.

It is difficult to generalise about the information content of newspapers as this can be quite variable from track to track and meeting to meeting. Some reports, like those of Marine Gardens in the The Scotsman (Edinburgh) from 1928 to 1931 are absolutely brilliant and provide all the meeting details you are ever likely to need. Some completely ignore the sport and carry absolutely no information at all like one of the Preston papers published while Farringdon Park was in full swing. Ayr 1937 might never have happened if you read one local rag.

In some instances newspapers published some distance from the track, quite unexpectedly, carry very good reports. Examples of this are the paper published in Blackburn which carries Preston reports and the Crewe newspaper which has fairly detailed reports on the activities at Warrington at least in 1930.

For some reason the pre war coverage tends to be better than the post war era. (However, it is often what they did not say that leaves you frustrated.) Post war brevity could be because of the restrictions on newsprint at this time which means that reports are often restricted to a couple of lines.

The newspaper is also a source of photographs. Action from rare tracks like Huddersfield, Thorne, Stainforth, and Whitley Bay have all been captured by photographers and recorded for posterity. The only trouble is that press photographs are often poorly reproduced in the original papers or ruined by the binding process, and, as a result, copies taken from them are also of poor quality. Newspaper photographs are made up of a series of dots and reproduction, even in this computer enhanced era, can cause problems.

They also raise the problem dragon of copyright and reproduction fees, an issue not to be treated lightly. More on that topic in a future edition.

Newspapers are usually held in two forms, hard copy and microfilm. Hard copy is the library speak for the original newspapers and many of the older volumes are starting to show signs of distress. Licking fingers to turn pages is a no-no! This rots the paper as it promotes damaging chemical reactions in the ancient newsprint which often showers out of old newspapers. Be careful as you turn the pages and report any damage you find and report immediately any accidental damage you may do yourself.

In some cases some greedy selfish B*****S have ripped out pages or selectively torn out articles and pinched speedway articles. In defence of speedway historians the article has usually been football related. One exception was the copies of Motor Cycle held in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. Only recently have the speedway pages been restored by way of photocopies of most of the missing pages.

The other format is microfilm. 35mm photographs of the pages. The quality is very very variable and, depending on the viewer available, can range from superb to terrible. Winding on can, in certain circumstances, induce motion sickness. Some are printed in negative form where the black and white has been reversed.

There are now very good directories listing which newspapers remain available and where they can be found. Once you've identified the source, contact the library in advance as viewers may be limited and booking could be necessary. In some libraries the use of viewers is rationed so don't expect to stay all day. (If a library has more than one reading room, do ask if you could look at the material in another section where microfilm readers may be under less pressure.) It also allows you to confirm opening times in this age of cuts. Some places are not open every day. Asking for books to be placed on reserve for the day of your arrival can also help maximise your efforts.

Finally, please be kind and polite to library staff. They are usually very helpful, long suffering people and they will help you where ever possible.

Back copies of newspapers are sometimes held by the publishers. Some are prepared to allow access while others just refuse point blank. Some can be held in pretty inhospitable conditions.

An example of one classic newspaper find is carried on the Back Page.

NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE

Issue No. 1 of The Speedway Researcher drew in quite a number of letters with ideas for the SR project. We will try to cover these in future editions but here are a couple of suggestions/comments. let us know what you think.

There were quite a few people who thought we should try to set some kind of standardised format for information storage eg. meetings/heat results - there are examples from other sporting history bodies like football and cricket which could guide us here. Paper v Computer - this debate even affects speedway research! It has been suggested that information, especially statistics are best stored on computer (discs), which would make information exchange so much easier. However, we know from other letters that much research is held on "old fashioned" paper. We think that both formats are equally valid. However, if any of you are thinking of going down the computer route, we will try to offer the advice and expertise of our members.

A FEW IDEAS

Here are a few new ideas that have occurred to us since issue No. 1.

Race Jackets/Body Colours : have you ever been frustrated by being unable to find out what design &/or colours these were, particularly if you are interested in pre war and obscure teams like Burnley ? Old photos can help with designs but not colours and it would be valuable to catalogue all available information. There are quite a number of collectors of items out there who could perhaps help.

The stated aim of The Speedway Researcher is to encourage research and the exchange of information - but we'd like to think that much of this research might end up published in some format. We would positively encourage researchers to submit extracts of their research for publication in other magazines - The Vintage Speedway magazine is an obvious target, but why not try the Speedway Star or Five One. Another possibility is The Speedway Collectors Club magazine that usually carries history items. Why not give them a try - nothing ventured, nothing gained! If we grow we could publish items too!

As we indicate on page 1, we currently have 53 subscribers to The Speedway Researcher, which is great but we know there are still more researchers out there. You may know of such people or just people with an interest in speedway history (there's still lots of tracks to be discovered and others that have not been researched) - SO PASS THE WORD ABOUT The Speedway Researcher and let's see if we can hit the 100 subscriber mark by Vol. 2 No.1 (June 1999).

Talking of the future - as well as expanding the subscription list, we would also like to think that The Speedway Researcher could grow its number of pages as well as with even more varied contents, pictures etc. It would be good if we could grow to a size where we could perhaps publish or assist in the publication of subscribers research material. However, we must walk before we can run and we are mindful not to price our subscription rates too high, as we want to remain an all-inclusive network.

DATABANK REMINDER

We thought it would be helpful to remind subscribers of our suggestions for databanks from Issue No.1, so that you can see if there are any of these projects that you might like to volunteer to co-ordinate.

1. A record of all speedway tracks in GB & Ireland.
2. A 6" or 1: 10,000 O.S. map record of each track.
3. A record of all speedway meetings.
4. A record of all riders who took part in meetings.
5. A record of photographs of speedway racing and riders published in contemporary newspapers and non-speedway published sources.
6. A record of every programme issued for speedway events.
7. A record of all speedway books handbooks & track magazines published.
8. A record of all speedway badges.
9. A record of all films and videos of speedway racing.
10. A record of machines used for speedway racing.
11. A Roll of Honour with details of riders killed on speedway tracks.

OUR FRIENDS OUT THERE

Here are details of some more colleagues who have advised us of research work they are undertaking. Can you help ?

HUGH VASS111 Arthurview Crescent, Danderhall, Dalkeith, Midlothian, EH22 1QS
Tel : 0131 663 6974

Hugh has varied interests ranging from the Provincial League of 1960 to 1964, the seasons 1939 and 1946, and the pre war era in general.

Hugh has managed to compile a record almost every Provincial League match but is short of just three - Yarmouth v Bradford 16.8.60; Middlesbrough v Stoke 24.8.61 and Wolverhampton v Hackney 13.9.63. He would welcome help to complete his records (from anyone with marked programmes) and help to verify his information.

Hugh is looking for meeting details, in addition to that published in the Speedway News for the 39 and 46 seasons and similar data for the pre war era.

KEITH FARMAN 230 Beccles Road, Gorleston - On - Sea, Great Yarmouth, NR31 8AH
Tel : 01493 668139

Keith is the Yarmouth Speedway Historian and is "Dedicated to keeping the memory of the Bloaters alive. His main interest is Yarmouth. He has match reports and race details of all home meetings and a profile of all the riders who rode for the Bloaters 1948 to 1953.

Keith still needs a photo of Jimmy Golding and more information on Peter Harris, Bill Maddern and Doug Wells. Keith also needs heat details of the away meetings in 1948, especially the first away team meeting at Hull 24.2.1948. High on Keith's current agenda is researching the pre-war meetings in his local area Norwich - Lowestoft - Bradwell - Yarmouth - Fackenham and is also interested in Newmarket. He has spanned 1928 to 1938 so far. He would like any information about Fred Levis (Arthur Reynolds), Jack Sharpe (Jack Smythe) or any one who rode in the 1930 meetings at local tracks. He is seeking information on ACU track permits.

TREVOR JAMES 14 Keats Road, Greenmount, Bury, Lancashire BL8 4EP
Tel : 01204 886959

Trevor's main interest is Belle Vue and he considers that he has 99.9% of the dates for the meetings raced at the famous club's circuits. He is also interested in Belle Vue's away exploits and is compiling a record of the Aces on the road.

Another great research project being undertaken by Trevor is the compilation of an accurate record of the 1929 Dirt Track League and accurate records of the Northern Leagues of 1930 and 1931. The published records for these are by no means accurate and Trevor would welcome details of any meetings from tracks he has not yet researched. The associated cup competitions are on Trevor's research menu. (The 1929 Dirt Track League KO Cup was won by Preston !!)

Finally, if you are looking for information about Salford (Albion Speedway), Warrington, Rachdale and Liverpool (1928 to 1929), Trevor may be able to help you.

Send us details of your research work for inclusion in this section. A quarter A4 in the format above.

CAN YOU HELP ?

We will use half a page to set out the information requirements of researchers. Just let us have the details and we will list them here free of charge to subscribers. Please supply name, address, telephone/fax number and requirements. Keep the list of specific requirements (eg meeting details) to a reasonable length, say 20 meetings maximum at any one time.

Jim Henry (Editor) : requires the heat times for the Fleetwood v Edinburgh match of 5.10.1948.

John Sampford, 2 Fairfield Ave, Grays, Essex : requires heat details and any newspaper reports of the matches ridden by Rayleigh Rockets and Rayleigh Rovers 1956 to 1957.

Carl Croucher, 4 Whitmore St, Maidstone, Kent : is interested in details of speedway meetings 1928 to date, which featured sidecar racing. Also interested in purely sidecar meetings at speedways. (Could be some interesting discoveries as Jim Henry has seen a photograph of sidecar racing at Cowley Stadium, Oxford which was late 1920s - early 1930s.)

Bob Norman, 25 Bampton Avenue, Chard : Is researching Weymouth Speedway 1954 - 1984. Bob is particularly interested in receiving details the activities of Weymouth riders in meetings which did not feature the team (eg open meetings and world championship rounds.)

Vic Bircher, 7 Derwent Close, Tangmere Chichester : is seeking details of a possible Sheffield v Southampton meeting staged sometime in late 1929.

Offers Of Help !!!

This section will be devoted to offers of help. Offers should be as below.

Jim Henry (Editor) is prepared to provide details of Glasgow meetings 1928 - 32 and 1939 - 40 to genuine researchers pursuing track or rider specific studies. (Full meeting details of Marine Gardens, Edinburgh 1928 - 31 and 1938 - 39 have been published by Friends of Edinburgh Speedway.)

Graham Fraser (Editor) can provide details of preston home meetings (1929 - 32), Burnley (1929), Brighton (1928), Portsmouth Copnor (1928 -1929), Swindon Gorse Hill (1928) to genuine reseracher.

Vic Bircher, (address as above) is prepared to seek out meeting details for meetings at Southampton.

!! Who Is Researching What !!

We will try to keep this list going and build it up as a regular feature.

Leicester : Alan Jones : (Details in No.1.No1); Preston : Graham Fraser : (Editor), Chalton : Graham Fraser, Swindon Gorse Hill : Graham Fraser, Bristol : John Jarvis (No1. No.1), Glasgow Nelson : Jim Henry (Editor), Glasgow Carntyne : Jim Henry, Glasgow Celtic Park : Jim Henry, Glasgow White City : Jim Henry, Yarmouth : Keith Farman (This edition), Weymouth : Bob Norman, Rochdale : Trevor James (This edition), Warrington : Trevor James, Salford : Trevor James, Belle Vue : Trevor James. Provincial League 1960 -64 : Hugh Vass (This Edition).

THROB STUFF ON THE DIRT TRACK By A.J.Essman (Glasgow Evening News 24.05.1929. Meeting 21.05.1929)

“Three women to every man....”

The words of the old music hall ditty spring from memory's storehouse each time I see the crowds line up outside Glasgow's dirt track, and when I study the composition of the spectatorate within the stadium. Run right down the list on Britain's sporting calendar and not one can return a more striking degree of popularity among the womenfolk than does this recent importation from Australia. There must be a reason.

Why does Miss 1929 crowd the stands and “bleacher” at lbrox, heedless of the hustings, maybe tired of tennis but pleased to stand for two hours in one place, in the role of spectator ? Those leather coated damsels whose bright

or bizarre modish ensembles catch the eye as they scurry through the turnstiles, surely are not attracted by hero worship of the matinee idol variety, for dirt track riders look anything but Apollo Belvidere with their grime stained features and padded figures.

No, Miss 1929 shares the common craze for spectacle combined with thrill, and she finds these components of dirt track racing provided in greater continuity in a performance which is youth triumphant.

GOOD SPORTS No other sporting programme can raise the tense atmosphere which prevails around the safety fence; none excels it in the manner in which all - riders, officials, and spectators - act up to the high tradition of British sportsmanship. And there is no betting!

In addition, the ladies - as indeed the multitude round the track - need possess no knowledge of mechanics or motor cycle components to follow the racing which is a continuous sequence of exciting incident, spills spelling thrills and vice-versa, every bend and every straight bringing situations which test resource, daring, nerve and skill in the fearless speedmen.

As the officials group round the starting point, the spectators watch the first bunch of riders approach from the "paddock" with their weird machines, which are to the ordinary motor cycle, what the "Golden Arrow" would be to a four seater tourer. Built for the crazy tricks of the track, they are stripped of all ordinary "gadgets" and not even brakes are allowed, as a sudden check would endanger the man behind.

The steel helmets worn by the riders carry a distinctive colour which permits easy recognition throughout the race. As the men get set on the line, ready for the push-off, the crowd is silent.

TELLING A TALE The Announcer tells the tale of the event through the amplifiers, there is a touch on the buzzer... "Alls clear." The pistol points skywards and the noisy signal cracks. The "shovers -off" send their men away from the standing start in their handicap order. There is a bark from the first supertuned mount as it leaps forward on the half straight to the first bend, raising to a crescendo of spluttering and roaring as the backmarker, last of the five tails in.

The flat bend cannot be taken as on a banked course at full throttle. The rider checks his speed by an intentional skid, "broadsiding" and as he enters the slide he shows his expertness in "buttoning" pressing a knob beside his controls to short circuit the engine while the skid is on. Down goes the left foot, its armoured toe of quarter inch steel plate being vigorously operated by the rider now at a precarious angle. Spraying the ashes in a cascade from his rear wheel the speedman "unbuttons" and the machine leaps to life again and so off down the opposite straight.

THE WHITE LINE The crack rider, aiming to keep to the white line around the inside of the track, knows that the kudos comes from cornering and the crowd thrill as they see him tear off again while his less experienced rivals run wide. The split seconds count as the laps are eaten up. A rider finds a bad patch in the cinders, his machine bucks like a broncho, then wobbles, his front wheel goes awry and he is catapulted on to the turf while five yards away his "hogbus" shrieks appallingly.

SO NEAR A few feet behind comes an onrushing competitor and the eager spectators gasp as he dodges the derelict, pulling his machine round and off again on the heels of the leaders. Round on the last lap tear the quartette, so near at the bends that their cornering is obliterated by the cloud of dust. Cheers, perhaps, as the local man just manages to head off his Australian rival and to a salvo of applause Glasgow jumps to the line ahead. Thus through twenty events, each stirring the pulse by their sensational turns. "Rolling starts" where riders take a preliminary coast round the oval to take a flag start abreast with the inside man as line-up, find the pace a cracker.

THE LAST LAP Now comes the final for the big event - the Golden Armlet. First lap, second lap, third lap seem eaten up in record time, when the crowd groan. At the bend two Australian riders touch and crash. There is a cloud of smoke from the machines; the riders scramble away from the flames suddenly bursting out from one machine. Great excitement prevails as mechanics and stewards rush to extinguish the blaze. One machine is cleared to safety as the band commence "beating" at the outbreak.

What might have been tragedy ends in comedy, as one of the plus-foured stewards pulls off his "Fair Isle" sweater and begins thumping at the volcano. The fire flickers out. From the middle of the stand comes sweating another official who has found a fire extinguisher. He wins at least a laughing cheer.

The race is void but the sporting spirit in which unites the entire outfit of riders is shown again as the announcer indicates that a damaged speedman has given his mount to permit the crashed Australian, bereft of his machine, to carry on in the rerun.

LOCAL PATRIOTS A Glasgow boy* and an Australian expert** give the thrills in the last final as the local lad shoots past the post by inches the crowd yells exultantly. You "Aussies" is a true sport and gives his triumphal rival a pat on the back as he gets the golden symbol of track supremacy tied to his arm.

There is money to be made in this pastime for the daredevil speed man and Glasgow riders are rapidly coming to the forefront, but the city will doubtless lose some of their local talent when the lure of the South gets them. An Australian youth of 21 who came from "down under" last year won on the British tracks prizes totalling £1,374 in exactly 83 minutes of actual racing. (*Norrie Isbister : ** Billy Galloway)