

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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Hello Volume 10

We handle in Volume 10 with a smug satisfaction that Tempus chose to put a quote from a review in the magazine on the front page of the 2007 Yearbook attributed our modest publication. We hope you find this volume as interesting as the others and we welcome you to send us in you articles, or complaints, ideas or whatever. Get it off your chest – within reason – we'll set discussion going.

Graham and Jim

Max Grosskreutz

Keith Farman, keeper of The Bloater Pond and long term Ipswich fan who will attend his 1,000th meeting at Foxhall Heath this season, has put together this interesting item about the Aussie star turned promoter.

Max was the man who brought speedway to Norwich in 1937 and he managed the Stars until the outbreak of the war. This is a well know and recognized fact of the history of the Firs, and that Max also rode for the Stars in 1938. But one thing that I have recently found out is that Max rode in the very first team meeting, held at the Firs on Sunday 13th September 1931.

The match was against a team labelled Staines (Middlesex). The captain of the Staines team was advertised as Jack Stansell. But the rider who was programmed as captain was not Stansell, but Karl Nickowitz. In the next meeting held at the Firs a photo appeared, in the programme of both team's. Don Hannent was the promoter of this meeting and his daughter allowed me to copy his album of photos. In Don's book he had cut the number 7 rider out, and put it with other riders in action, who I believe were the riders of the Norwich team.

I could not understand why he had done this until it dawned on me that Karl and Max were German names, or was it just a play on Karl Marx. Plus the surname of both Grosskreutz and Nickowitz ends in tz. The rider (Karl) in the photo has his helmet on, but using a magnifying glass he looks very much like

Max. So much so that I asked six people, "is this the same person?" all agreed that it could well be.

The report of the meeting noted that Karl fell rather heavily and injured his shoulder. I noticed that he missed his next meeting for Belle Vue, so I checked with Terry James to find out if he knew the reason that Max missed the Belle Vue meeting, and below is his answer.

"I suspect that Max missed this meeting for one reason only. He was a member of the Belle Vue Southern team and therefore did not ride for the Northern team, except in early season meetings. However, in the Cup matches, there was no limit on who could ride in that competition. Max was a regular throughout. But that evening was a double header, with the Northern League match with Leeds also taking place. Rather than have to make changes after the cup match for ineligible riders in the Northern League match, it was decided to use riders who could ride in both events."

"Had Indian Allen not lost his life, he too could have ridden in the cup match, but not the league match. This is my theory only and as there is nothing to be found in writing, it's as good an excuse as any. Belle Vue won in the cup match 27-26, but lost in the league by the identical score line."

Its up to **YOU**, am I correct? Personally I am certain that Karl was in fact Max and that his injury at the Firs stopped him riding for Belle Vue.

Max was advertised to ride in the first meeting held at the Firs with an A.C.U. permit. This meeting was held on Sunday 2nd July 1933 and was advertised as Case's Team V The Rest. Max was down to ride for Case's Team, but E. Cooper and Jack Sharp, replaced both him and Ernie Evans. For the Rest Fred Wilkinson replaced Ivor Hills.

I believe that Max missed this meeting because of injuries, as in Peter Jackson's excellent statistical Review of the 1933 season, Max missed Belle Vue's meetings on the 4th and 8th.

The reason that Cases team was made up of the Australian riders was that they were taking any meetings as they had returned from racing in Germany where they had lost money and to try and recoup their losses from this disastrous trip, they were taking all the bookings that they could get.

What was also interesting was that Dick Wise scored 4 points for Case's team, as both Max and Dick would become managers of the Norwich team.

Scorers for the meeting

Case's Team; - Case 8, Jack Sharp 4, Tiger Lewis 1, Dick Wise 4, Sid Row 5, D, Boswell 4 Reserve R, Cooper 0.

The Rest; - Fred Leavis 7, Reg Thorne 7, Tiger Hart 6, Fred Pickering 4, Wally Banner 1, Reg Stanley 3, Reserve Jim Milward 0

Helmet Covers

Bob Ozanne, Mr Pre-War Speedway as he is pleased to be dubbed, has pulled together this item.

I can help John Dixon with some info on changes to helmet colours I have picked up over the years. (Researcher vol 9 no.4 pg. 16). As usual I have only looked at pre-war so far but that was the time of greatest change.

The most interesting and varied period is 1929 – 1931 when although red, blue, white, yellow were certainly in use many tracks had their own individual approach to which team wore which colours and sometimes other colours were used.

How it Started

In 1929 helmet covers were a great innovation. For the first time the referee (Steward back then) and spectators could identify riders on the other side of the track on a gloomy evening. Before the helmet covers there had been numbers on the bikes. These rapidly became covered in cinders or worse still, mud. Coloured shirts were tried next but suffered the same fate, often reduced to muddy rags and at their best did not show up as brightly as the great new helmet covers.

Initially team pairs wore the same colour so you had both home riders red, both away riders blue. At Wembley both home riders wore a halved red and white helmet cover. Plymouth matched their race jackets as well for a time with a halved orange and white cover. To tell the boys apart with this set up you still had to look for a number. The solution was inspired by the coloured “shirts” used in individual events and it was decided to have 4 different basic helmet colours: red, blue, white and yellow. However as we shall see the colours did not always appear in that order in the programme. This was way back in 1929. There were additional colours and patterns for handicaps etc with more than 4 riders. The additional colours at ISL tracks were green and pink.

The track lights of those days gave quite a strong coloured glow. This made it difficult to distinguish white from yellow at some tracks. To help with this some used an orange helmet colour instead of yellow, Wembley in 1930 and Rotherham for example. Some tracks used black instead of yellow e.g. High Beech and Preston.

The free for all era

By 1931 all league teams were using red, blue, white and yellow but the home and away pairings helmet colours were not the same as we are all used to. Let's call the set up we had for so long the “RBWY code”. In 1931 in London only Lea Bridge used that set up. Most other London tracks (Harringay,

Stamford Bridge, Wembley, West Ham and Wimbledon) used RWBY. The exception was Crystal Palace where it was BYRW. This came in at The Palace from mid June 1930. Earlier in 1930 Palace employed a different set up each week and matched the away team's helmet colours to their race jackets. The first visitors were Stamford Bridge and the Bridge riders wore the blue and white covers with the Palace lads in red and yellow. The next league match was against Perry Barr with their pink and blue race jackets. Yes the Birmingham riders wore a pink cover for the heat leader whilst his partner was in blue. The Palace riders were in red and yellow so the white cover was discarded. Along came Harringay and the set up was RBWY but this was reversed for West Ham WYRB. After that Palace settled for BYRW until RBWY arrived as a standard set up at most tracks towards the end of the 1931 season.

How standardisation began

From 1931 London evening newspapers gave detailed heat line ups complete with helmet colours for that night's matches. The speedway correspondents asked for standardisation of the colours to make their job easier. This was approved by the NSA on 4th September 1931. The standard code agreed was the familiar RBWY. This was a surprising choice when 4 of the 6 remaining London tracks used RWBY. At the time Harringay had closed and speedway did not return until 1934. The new code soon came into use at all London tracks. However this wasn't the end of non standard codes. The agreement wasn't actually a rule and Belle Vue for one did not usually agree that what was good for London was necessarily good for the rest of the country!! In 1933 and 34 the code at Belle Vue was RWBY and from 1935 to 1938 BYRW. It was not until 1939 that they eventually adopted the standard RBWY.

Oddments

There have been many one offs such as the 1931 England v. Australia Test Match at Crystal Palace where the code YWBR was used. The yellow and black helmet cover was not actually a post war invention. It appeared pre-war, at Wembley and West Ham in 1932. Again this may have been due to the lighting at those tracks at the time. From 1933 both tracks reverted back to the plain yellow cover.

Some more Pre-war helmet cover examples

1929 White City London – RBWY

1931 (Before Standardisation)

Exeter – RWBY

High Beech – RWBY and RBW Black

Preston – BWR Black

Glasgow – RYBW
Sheffield - RBWY
Coventry – RWBY
Southampton – RBWY
Leicester Super – YBRW
1932 Coventry – WYRB
Plymouth – WRBY

NOBBY CLARKE “THE WORLDS BEST TRAINER”

Tomas Henry Clarke

Keith Farman lets us in on a side of speedway we probably know little about.

In most of the Wimbledon team photos of the 1930's, now going brown with age, Nobby Clarke can be seen with the great stars of the Dons. He is the fellow in a white coat and is listed as trainer. Sometimes his name is left out and in a few the photo's are reproduced with Nobby cut off. Nevertheless he was an important part of the pre-war Dons set up.

So why was Nobby so important to the pre-war Dons and held in great esteem? The word trainer gives the impression that he trained the riders to race but that was not the case. Nobby's job was really what we would now call the physio, as it was his job to keep the team fit to race.

Nobby was certainly one of the foremost sports trainers in the British Isle before the Second World War. Such was his fame in the sporting world that he was rightly called “the miracle healer.” The Canadian Ice Hockey players went further as they called Nobby “the best trainer in the world.” This was because Nobby cured injuries that they played on with in their homeland.

For over 30 years he trained athletes of all kinds – jockeys, tennis stars, track runners, swimmers, boxers, wrestlers, footballers, ice hockey, ice skating and of course speedway riders -in fact all sportsmen and women.

He was a gruff voiced cockney, as he was born within the sound of Bow Bells, well built with iron-grey hair. When he barked it would sound like a declaration of war; but this was just his gruff but friendly way, for everyone said, “that he had a heart of gold.” Like all cockneys he had a great sense of fun and would do his best to keep everyone smiling.

Outside of his work Nobby would be dressed smart but while working he would always wore sandals and a white sweater. He never wore a coat, well that is until in 1937, when his kind-hearted ice hockey players whom he trained with such blunt efficiency decided to interfere. They felt sorry for him when he trudged out into the rain dressed in only his Harris Tweed suit. They

pleaded that if Nobby got laid up with 'flu' what would they do. So Nobby purchased a coat, and for the first time in two years promptly got a cold.

Nobby had worked at the London Hospital and was a staff member of the St John Ambulance Brigade, and it was in that capacity that he was sent to High Beech to attend the meetings and practice in that first season of 1928. At the end of 1929, following a number of serious crashes at Lea Bridge, he moved there, and a year later went to Stamford Bridge. Frank Arthur introduced him to International Speedways Limited, and he became their permanent trainer in 1931. Nobby was therefore the first person to be attached to speedway in this capacity and he then played an important part in the physical condition of the riders. Nobby believed that a fit body meant a sound and quick mind, which was essential not only for winning races but also for steering clear of accidents on the track.

Nobby was given his own dressings room at Wimbledon which was a replica of the Arsenal Football Club's. He was justifiably proud of his impressive array of equipment, that included the new electrical massage gadget. In all £600 worth of apparatus was installed (a fortune before the war) that also included, infra-red rays for inflammations, radiant heat lamps and bath. Faradaic coils and foam baths. One of his most valuable parts of his first aid equipment was an inexpensive child's paintbrush, and this was used to get the cinders out of the rider's eyes.

Nobby had his own embrocation for rubbing muscles. It was made up of equal parts of oil of wintergreen and olive oil and when he had rubbed the muscles sufficiently, he would wipe the surplus off with wadding or cotton tissue. That was important, because the winter green could burn painfully if left on the skin.

He had a great passion for the health effect of oranges and would buy them in cases. He also would have a bottle of strong, sweet lemonade that his charges could take a mouthful from time to time as a stimulant-sugar and lemon juices are concentrated food-full of vitamins,

On the away trips, Nobby never believed in taking risks as he had a deep-rooted fear of being unable to procure what he regarded as necessary utensils at away tracks. He always included among his equipment an extremely large bucket and a watering can to match. Just what he did with the watering can no one ever found out.

The very nature of speedway involves risks and of course there will be crashes. One day in his early days Nobby found seven riders in the same ward of the Ducane Road Hospital. The riders were Ted Bravery with a spinal injury, Dick Case had a more serious injury to his spine, Ivor Hill had a fractured wrist and Jack Chapman a broken right arm, Claude Rye had a

broken leg, Jack Jackson a collar bone and George Greenwood was there suffering from concussion.

Obviously these riders had been hurt too badly for Nobby to keep them out of hospital. But he did believe that many riders repeatedly went onto the track in an unfit condition. They were not able to look after their own safety, let alone that of others and were a constant source of danger to themselves and every one else on the track. Hence many terrible crashes, which need never have happened.

With Nobby looking after the Wimbledon riders they all knew that if they “had a go” and it resulted in a crash they would receive expert treatment at once and, moreover, that Nobby would stay with them for hours on end and gave them individual attention for which no doctor, however good-hearted, could afford the time.

The great Vic Huxley had so much faith in Nobby that he would never ride if he could help it, unless Nobby was in the pits, even if it was for a single booking at tracks outside London.

Once, in a Test Match at New Cross, Vic hit the fence, came down and caught his foot in the back wheel. The machine had to be cut away from him and it was found that two small bones in his foot had been broken. He submitted patiently to an X-ray examination, but after that he would not once see a doctor. He refused point blank to let anyone but Nobby touch him.

The very shrewd businessman Mr. W. J. Cearnis who ran Wimbledon decided to give Vic, who was his star man complete rest and he sent Vic down to Cornwall. He then arranged for Nobby to go down, while Vic’s foot was still encased in plaster, and treat him for about three weeks to ensure that the bones should knit perfectly. Each visit entailed a journey of about 500 miles.

Nobby also helped Huxley when he injured his ankle when the score was one-all in the British Open Championship. This was when it was the big individual event, and each contest consisted of the best of two-of-three match races on the home and away tracks.

The deciding race was put back about half an hour, while Nobby worked on “Hux” in the dressing room and administered radiant heat and massage. Vic then went out and won the deciding race.

It was because of Huxley’s faith in Nobby that following an application from the Australian selectors that the Wimbledon management agreed to Nobby’s appointment as trainer to Huxley’s Australia team in 1931. Max Grosskreutz’s rapid improvement was due to Nobby’s treatment.

Nobby kept the Aussies in good shape and with that difference to their mental outlook which fitness makes. There was no “lost before its ridden”

attitude about them. Although they lost the series they certainly put up a grand show.

At the end of the series the Australians presented Nobby with a lovely plaque, which has a golden leg tailing rider and the national flags of the two countries. It was inscribed :-

AUTO CYCLE UNION
Presented to T. H. Clarke
In appreciation of his services as
TRAINER
To the
AUSTRALIAN SPEEDWAY TEAM 1931

the

During
1932
season,

together with Jack Chapman, Dick Smythe, Dick Case and Frank Arthur, Vic Huxley formed a scratch team of Australian riders all of whom were attached to Stamford Bridge and Wimbledon teams. They called themselves “Thee Kangaroos and rode a total of 20 second half challenge matches at various other league teams tracks, winning nineteen and drawing one and of course Vic had Nobby as their trainer.

In 1933 Bluey Wilkinson had damaged his shoulder in a heavy fall, and on the way to Belle Vue he was worked on by Nobby for practically the whole journey. Nobby had again done his job as Bluey was in good shape to go out and race and practically won the match for his side.

Wimbledon would also let any rider be treated by Nobby. Once seven West Ham riders were lined up awaiting attention! That year Nobby did a lot of work for the Hammers, and at the end of the season Johnny Hoskins, always quick to acknowledge a benefit, presented Nobby with a clock for the help he had been able to give his team.

This clock was presented at the last meeting of the Hammers season. Nobby was told to leave it behind, as Johnny had not found the time to get it engraved. Believing that it might spoil the clock by being engraved Nobby’s wife decided not to leave it and so Nobby took it home as it was.

It was certainly a fine clock and some 60 years later, it still keeps the correct time. But it is now far away from the roar and noise of the Speedway track sitting proudly on the mantel place at Nobby’s daughter’s bungalow in a peaceful part of the world near the cliff tops at Gorleston.

There was the time when Nobby was on the train going to a meeting at Plymouth with Frank Arthur. Frank used to suffer badly with his hand and on this occasion he was in a lot of pain and had definitely decided not to ride. However during the trip Nobby worked his magic on the star, and on arrival at

Plymouth he had agreed to ride. Not only did he ride but he also set a new track record, which stood unbeaten for some years.

As the pre-war tracks had deep cinders surfaces and with riders leg tailing the riders absorbed a lot of punishment. There were enlarged joints through accidental blows, and damaged ankles through dragging the foot in the deep dirt. These, and the deeper-seated bruises, were dealt with by means of the infra-red lamp.

Then there was the common injury to the abductor muscle, in which case a tendon was torn away from the pelvis through the general jolting and strain as the foot is trailing in the cinders. For this Nobby applied heat and the faradic electric battery, a device of negative and positive electrodes which he applied to the affected part, and contracts and built up the damaged muscle.

Wal Phillips had painful memories of this injury. He had taken the place of another Wimbledon rider who was unable to fulfil a booking at Plymouth, one night in 1933. As luck would have it, he was sandwiched between another rider and the fence. He tore the tendon completely away, and Nobby was sent down to fetch him from hospital by train and ambulance.

It was a bad injury and when he was later allowed to ride, he was advised to take no necessary risks for a time. After each race he had to submit to a thorough examination by Nobby.

In 1934, the quietly spoken, rather shy young Suffolk lad, Geoff Pymar joined the Dons. He soon became one of Nobby's most ardent admirers as he adopted a lot of what Nobby told him to the end of his days. Geoff suffered from chronic constipation and Nobby advised Geoff on his eating and drinking habits. It was through Nobby that he would drink cider vinegar and Geoff also believed in using a lot of malaises.

Nobby's advice must certainly have worked on Geoff, as he was still racing when in his 50's and he lived to the great age of 90. He was still riding a pushbike to his local Golf course at Diss in his eighties and then playing two rounds of golf before setting back home on the bike.

Most of the riders were not keen on the physical exercise but Geoff was one of the exceptions. In fact he kept it up his entire life. A few years before he died he did have an accident while working out. This exercise was hanging by his neck to a door and then doing 12 press ups. He fell and was taken to hospital and on returning home he was given some advice, that at his age, he should pack that exercise up. But he would not even consider doing less.

During the winters Nobby became involved in Ice Hockey, working for two years with the Richmond Hawks and the Brighton Tigers. Then when Harringay open for the 1936-37 season he worked with Percy Nicklen with the two Harringay teams, the Greyhounds and Racers.

Harringay of course had excellent training rooms for the Harringay players. Nobby was proud that he had over £200's worth of medical apparatus with which to cure the players who got injured.

Nobby was spending about 16 hours a day at the Harringay Stadium as he worked on the new venture.

In 1936 Great Britain Ice Hockey team, for the only time, won the World Championship in Prague and it was Nobby who was their trainer.

He also helped Cecilia College who became the British, European and World Ice Dancing champion.

On top of all this he was also involved with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer who had a dancing school, at which large numbers of really delightful young ladies learnt the dancing acts which entranced theatre and cinema audiences up and down the country. Now several of his ice hockey and speedway boys would have willingly done that job without accepting the fee.

In the winter of 1936-37 Wal Phillips rode in Australia and he sustained a badly broken leg at the Sydney Showground and he then retired from racing and would take over as the non-riding captain of Wimbledon for the 1939 season. He then resolved to become a qualified trainer, so his friend Nobby, took him under his wing during the winter, as his assistant at Harringay. Wal, who was eager to learn the tricks of the trade that Nobby allowed him to work with him on the ice hockey stars.

Nobby and Wal worked a lot on Joe Beaton who was one of the very top ice hockey players. Joe had been the star of the Richmond Hawks until he received a serious groin injury in the 1936-37 season.

It then seemed that Joe's magnificent career was over as he returned back to his Canadian home.

With the 1937-38 season in its infancy, Percy Nicklin drew Nobby to one side and mention Joe to him. Shall we bring him back? Nobby was all for it and the gamble paid off as Joe once more became a leading scorer.

With Nobby's helping hands Joe never complained about his old injury.

Nobby always kept the hockey boys fit and at one time several of them volunteered to help Nobby with his garden, which he was getting ready for spring and digging his garden was an excellent exercise.

In his garden Nobby had the most unusual collection of sticks, for supporting his dahlias and other precious plants, which you could find. They were the staffs of broken ice hockey sticks and each was prominently lettered with the player's name.

Those dahlias were really something as they grew to the size of a dinner plate. Nobby, like all gardeners had problems with earwigs eating the dahlias and the way to stop this was to put flowerpots filled with straw on top of the

sticks. As he did not have a lot of spare time he would give his daughter and her friend extra pocket money to get rid of the pots full of earwigs.

At times the riders were given breaks and trips were arranged to various seaside towns and there was even a trip to Calais that everyone enjoyed.

The trips to Belle Vue Manchester always resulted in a hard meeting but afterwards the fans and some of the riders would then enjoy the rides on the famous funfair. The riders liked to try their luck on the various stalls and would win Teddy Bears.

Now a speedway rider would not have a lot of use for such an item but they knew that apart from enjoying his garden Nobby worshiped his blonde haired daughter, Doris and from an early age her Speedway "Uncles" would come round to see Nobby and drop the bears that they had won at the fairground for her.

Because of his connection with the Canadian Ice Hockey players and Percy Nicklin, when the Second World War started in 1939, Nobby was attached the Canadian Army at Perley.

During those dark days leave was very infrequently and when he did get time off he had to get several trains to get to his home.

On one such trip, during an air raid there were no trains from Waterloo. Nobby was going home and the German air raid was not going to stop him. So he set off on foot to get to his North London home.

Unfortunately the trip did not go to plan, as he was injured in the raid and received kidney damage which was to cause his death. The family received condolence letters from all around the world, which just proved how much the sporting world thought of the World's Best Trainer.

Zamalek, Cairo

Charles McKay from Bradford recalls the item about Zamalek Speedway in Cairo. In the last edition of The Speedway Researcher Jim Henry mentioned reading an article somewhere about the Zamalek track in Cairo.

I believe he was thinking about an article, which appeared in the 1979 book Speedway Panorama by Ron Hoare. In this the early rider Ivor Creek recalled how he and Billy Galloway were sent to Egypt by the Egyptian Greyhound Racing Association in the winter of 1928 – 1929 to construct a track at Zamalek.

Cinders from the local generating station were used to form the track surface and early attempts to form these cinders into a hard surface with the use of a cricket pitch roller pulled by a car proved less than successful. They then used a 12-ton roller, which proved even worse than the cricket roller when it sank

National League Division One 1948

Away Team Home Team	Belle Vue	Bradford	Harringay	New Cross	Wembley	West Ham	Wimbledon
Belle Vue	xxxxxx	43 – 41	48 – 36	53 - 31	42 – 42	43 – 41	59 - 25
	xxxxxx	47 – 37	50 – 34	35 - 51	48 – 36	52 – 31	52 - 32
Bradford	46 – 35	xxxxxx	41 – 43	40 – 42	38 – 46	43 – 40	41 - 41
	38 – 45	xxxxxx	40 – 44	53 – 29	37 – 47	51 – 32	54 - 30
Harringay	47 – 37	54 – 29	xxxxxx	37 – 47	39 – 45	44 – 40	49 - 35
	45 – 37	58 – 26	xxxxxx	44 – 40	53 – 28	59 – 24	54 - 30
New Cross	61 – 23	55 – 28	41 – 43	xxxxxx	56 – 27	58 – 26	49 - 35
	57 – 27	54 – 30	55 – 29	xxxxxx	46 – 38	66 – 18	58 - 25
Wembley	52 – 31	51 – 33	31 – 50	40.5-43.5	xxxxxx	40 – 44	44 - 39
	59 – 25	57 – 27	35 – 49	41 – 43	xxxxxx	39 – 45	60 - 24
West Ham	61 – 23	60 – 22	58 – 26	49 – 25	54 – 30	xxxxxx	47 - 37
	49 – 35	48 – 36	48 – 36	49 – 35	38 – 46	xxxxxx	64 - 20
Wimbledon	50 – 33	56 – 27	45 – 38	40 – 44	27 – 57	40 – 43	xxxxxx
	35 – 47	58 – 26	35 – 49	46 – 38	35 – 49	41 – 41	xxxxxx

National League Division One 1948

Team	R	Home					Away					MatchPts
		W	D	L	PtsF	PtsA	W	D	L	PtsF	PtsA	
New Cross	24	11	0	1	656	349	6	0	6	478.5	525.5	34
Harringay	24	10	0	2	583	418	6	0	6	477	527	32
West Ham	24	11	0	1	625	381	3	1	8	425	576	29
Wembley	24	6	0	6	549.5	453.5	6	1	5	491	513	25
Belle Vue	24	10	1	1	570	437	2	0	10	398	600	25
Wimbledon	24	5	1	6	508	492	0	1	11	373	631	12
Bradford	24	5	1	6	522	474	0	0	12	362	641	11

Heat details for most of the meetings on www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk

up to its firebox. Once the roller was manhandled out and the hole filled in, the task of forming the track was quickly completed by the time the other 16 riders arrived in Cairo at the end of the month.

One major difference with the racing in Egypt was that a totalisator was set up which as Ivor recalled “resulted in some peculiar outcomes” which may suggest that certain riders were using the tote as an additional source of income. Speedway never really took off and the venture folded within some two months with the riders returning to England apart from Ivor and Billy who remained in Egypt, working for the Austin Morris, and Jowett companies respectively, until they returned to England for the 1929 season.

Judging by the photograph of the Zamalek track which accompanied the article the stadium was quite impressive, on par with many modern British speedway stadiums, but I believe the SCB would object to the track lights situated along the inner kerb and no doubt the referees, or in 2007 if it's a Sky meeting the referee, meeting co-ordinator and meeting steward, would complain about the palm tree in the middle of the infield spoiling their view of the racing.

This was the end of speedway in Egypt until after the Second World War when the British military opened a number of tracks in the Canal Zone for national servicemen, the most famous rider associated with these tracks being Billy Bales.

I don't know if the person who bought the Zamalek programme on eBay is a subscriber to *The Researcher* but it would be interesting to know which other pioneer riders' rode at Zamalek and if the programme contained a fixture list.

Nigel's Natters 3

Nigel Bird throws a few items into the ring for our edification.

W.J. Pomroy

Kerry Pomroy was asking for details of W.J.Pomroy (*Vol. 8 No.4*)

William James Pomroy was an Australian promoter who came to England in April 1928, helped to form Dirt Track Speedways Ltd, was a director along with Keith McKay, Geoff Meredith, Sprouts Elder and of course Jimmy Baxter. To the best of my knowledge he never raced in the British Isles.

Jimmy Baxter

Incidentally while on the subject of Jimmy Baxter (*Researcher Vol. 8 No. 2 & 3. The Baxter story from the Liverpool handbook 1949*). I would like to point out in this somewhat inaccurate story, that Baxter and the Metropolis Club had nothing to do with the February 1928 High Beech meeting, except for Baxter allowing Billy Galloway and Keith McKay to appear as a favour to his old friend Jack Hill-Bailey. The confusion arises from the Baxter and Metropolis

clubs joint effort with Hill-Bailey and the Ilford club to run a meeting at High Beech in **November 1927** and as we know the ACU refused to sanction the event. The February 1928 H/B meeting was organised jointly by the Ilford and Colchester Clubs only.

In Ron Hoare's book 'Speedway Panorama' Ivor Creek repeats this incorrect story and also connects Glanfield & Sparks around the world trip by motorcycle & sidecar with Baxter, when it should be Malins & Olliver who left Baxter's and C F Temple's show room in Nov.1926 to start their world tour which of course included Australia.

The first Australian Speedway riders to arrive in England were Billy Galloway and Keith McKay who was little more than a novice, they arrived 18th January 1928.

The Provincial League 1936

For reasons known only to themselves the motor cycle press virtually ignored the Provincial League in 1936. The Speedway News barely acknowledged its existence, hardly a report, certainly no heat details. I've no doubt our wonderful statisticians will come up with all the heat details, but what of the meetings, riders, stories etc, for too long this part of our history has for the most part gone un-researched. We need to put flesh on the bones (*my apologies for using this dreadful piece of management speak*), but I've got to get every one up to speed! (ouch! sorry)

The SUNBAC club and early oval racing

From the day the first motorised bi-cycles appeared men wanted to race them. The first recorded motorcycle race in the USA took place on a 1 mile horse racing track in Los Angeles 1901. In Great Britain or should I say Wales? Racing took place as early as 1903 on the banked, concrete Carmarthen Park velodrome. Motorcycle racing on oval tracks was popular before the first world war; It was not just a case of time trials or pacing cycles. Racing was taking place on the banked concrete and hard rolled cinder cycle and athletic tracks which surrounded many football and cricket pitches. There were many cycle racing tracks known as velodromes, London had six, one of which had banked concrete bends with wooden boarded straights.

The Aston Villa football pitch was surrounded by a hard rolled cinder track and a banked concrete cycle track. In 1910 a crowd of 5,000 watched Brooklands record holder Henry Martin win the handicap final. These meetings were organised by the Rover Racing cycling club. Another perhaps more familiar club the Sutton Coldfield & North Birmingham Auto Club 'SUNBAC' founded 1908, ran many closed meetings on the Villa cinder track, this go ahead club can claim many firsts for it was the first to open a Speedway track in Perry Barr Birmingham July 1928. The opening night

marked the first appearance of Sprouts Elder in Birmingham. The opening night newspaper advert proclaimed 'the worlds first ever team event, the Sunbac Club v Ilford club'

Gus Kuhn

The Granddaughter of the pioneer rider Gus Khun, **Valerie Davey**, penned the following (which has been published on a road racing web site but because of the interest to speedway historians it is reproduced below.):

Gus was born in 1898 in Birmingham, though his grandfather had come from Germany. During the First World War he served in the RNVR and RFC. As a Levis rider he won the first Victory Trial to be staged by the Birmingham MCC in 1919 and the following year finished second in the 250cc class of the Junior TT. In 1922 he rode a Sun in the 250cc Lightweight class but over-lightening of engine components gave rise to excessive vibration, which caused the fuel lines to fracture. Nevertheless Gus and L J Lord finished in 12th and 13th places after wrapping handkerchiefs around the fuel pipes to staunch the leaking. He competed in 1924 and 1925 TT's on Douglas, Omega and Velocette (Did Not Finish every time!) but had better luck in 1926 when he finished 5th in the Junior on a Velocette.

He took part in the first speedway meeting in the UK at High Beech in 1928. As he now had a wife and daughters to support he spotted that this could be a lucrative career move. He joined Stamford Bridge as Captain and they won the first Southern League championship in 1929. When Stamford Bridge closed in 1932 he transferred to Wimbledon where he stayed until 1937. He then did a stint for Wembley and became captain of the Lea Bridge team. He represented England in 1930 at the first International 'Test Match' against Australia and often rode for his country in the thirties.

He seems to have been 'up for anything' on two wheels. He rode the Wall of Death and in a publicity stunt racing against a roller-skater! He was always his own mechanic and was very popular, both with the fans and his fellow riders. In the fifties he was still riding trials.

He started his own motorcycle business in South London in the thirties and in 1948 a young officer recently demobbed from the Paras joined the firm to manage it for Gus, who had little interest in business. He fell for the boss's daughter and went on to take the company to greater success.

When Norton introduced the Commando in 1968, Gus Kuhn Motors decided to take it racing and so started the second phase of Gus Kuhn's association with the TT. Sadly, Gus had died in 1966, ironically while his daughter and

family were on the IoM for the races, and so he did not see this chapter of his story.

Quote from Speedway News May 16th 1936 about Gus stated “A wily master of track-craft, a brilliant mechanic, a darned hard man to get past (and not only because of his portly figure), and above all a thorough sportsman and a jolly good fellow.”

Gus gave an interview that was published in the 29th September 1929 edition of *The Modern Boy*, under the heading of Daredevils of the Speedway.

“...and that reminds me of a very narrow escape I had. It was the 1920 TT and I was careering down the mountain-side at one hundred miles an hour, when a piece of my crankshaft and the flywheel flew twenty feet into the air. As machine and I disappeared into a ditch by the roadside, that flywheel bounced and made a three-inch hole in the road, bounced again and made a hole in the pavement, finally bouncing over the spectators’ heads and finding a resting-place in a field, where two hours later it was found.

“Well, I skidded into the ditch, and but for that lucky skid I would not be alive to tell the tale. The flywheel would have come down right on my head.

Ambulance men came hurrying to the spot with their stretcher all ready, for everyone thought I was finished. When they found my bike in the ditch, but no Gus, they were sure. But when, later, they came into a local inn, and found the missing man standing at the counter drinking lemonade (*sic!*), they were not quite so confident.

Sand Tracks

A family Golden Wedding (not mine yet) provided the opportunity for a trip to The Mitchell Library and a look at *The Motor Cycle* for 1926. It featured reports of a number of sand track events on beaches up and down England, beaches in Wales, from St Andrews in Scotland and Magilligan in Northern Ireland. The reports make interesting reading as they indicate that most were not what we would consider to be a speedway or long track type circuit. Yes they had bends at either end and yes the riders did slide round them on the sand, especially if it was a bit wet. However, the radius of the bends was quite small and the straights were pretty lengthy, some upwards of a couple of miles. The direction of racing was clockwise as evidenced by the photographs, and, these lead me to suggest most venues could not in 1926, be considered to be anything remotely like dirt track or long track racing. When I get the time to get back and read more from the magazines, I’ll see if things change in later years.

Jim Henry

Wonder Web

The information on the Web continues to grow but, as it does, so does the list of meetings where the information is incomplete. As you might expect, the early Third Division days of 1947 and 1948 are proving hard to complete with Wombwell being the biggest headache of them all. I would not expect many of you to have programmes from this hazy Yorkshire venue but the gaps are large and need filled. Work is ongoing on 1949 Division Three and Bryan Tungate is forging ahead with Norwich at a pace.

1950 First Division is coming on well too.

We are not cutting across anyone with a lot of information who is considering publishing a book on their studies so a few tracks have not been included yet. The pre-war data continues apace and once the formal competitions are completed, the task of picking off the other meetings will start and that will be an interesting exercise. The pioneer years with all the short lived venues is likely to be quite a task but we know **Bob Ozanne**'s team are well up to it. Webmaster **Ron McNeil** is pushing on with re-introducing the subscriber to subscriber section on the web site which give the opportunity to swap information with fellow researchers. If you are working on compiling data which you want to see placed on the site, please contact Ron as early in the process as possible so you can start of using programmes which are compatible with the system Ron uses.

EDITORS

Wombwell Needs

Full meeting details: 1947 – 23.5. BRC QR; 26.5 v The Rest; 30.5 Best Pairs; 6.6.v Plymouth; 13.6 v Tamworth; 25.7. v Tamworth; 4.8. Colliers' Cup. 1948 – 16.4. v Stoke; 23.4. v Southampton; 30.4. Best Pairs; 7.5. v Coventry; 14.5. v Tamworth; 28.5. British Riders' Championship; 4.6. v Sheffield; 18.6. Sheffield v Middlesbrough; 30.7. v Plymouth; 27.8 v Stoke; 3.9. v Coventry; 17.9. v Plymouth; 24.9. v Southampton; 8.10 v Stoke. Second Half details: 1947 29.8. v Stoke; 5.9. v Southampton. 1948 21.5. v Hull; 2.7. v Poole; 9.7. v Southampton; 20.8 v Exeter; 23.8. v Yarmouth; 1.10 v Hastings; 22.10 v Yarmouth. Other meetings – let me know if you have marked programme please. 1947 9.5 v Tamworth; 16.5 v Exeter; 20.6 v Cradley; 27.6 v Eastbourne; 4.7 v Cradley; 11.7. v Southampton; 18.7 v Stoke; 1.8 v Exeter; 8.8. v Plymouth; 15.8 v Eastbourne; 22.8 v Cradley; 12.9 v Stoke; 3.10 v Stoke. 1948 – 9.4 v Cradley; 16.7. v Hull; 23.7 v Exeter; 15.10 v Cradley.

Jim Henry

Can You Help?

Keith Farman wonders if anyone has come across any references that might confirm that the rider who rode as Johnny Bull in the pre-war era was one Eric Spencer? keith.farman@rjt.co.uk (RJT)

Pete Ross, 75 Hennings Park Road, Oakdale, Poole, BH15 3QX 01202 241086 email ross49@ntlworld.com is looking for the thoughts on the effects of pre-war and early post war grass tracks had on the make up of Poole and other West Of England speedway teams. Has anyone a record of speedway riders who started out on grass tracks before transferring over to the shale.

Colin Parker, from Keniworth is looking for information from very early U.S and Australian / New Zealand speedway. [Magazines such as The Motor Cycle and Motorcyclist are worth a look and the book on Australian speedway history is a good start. Graeme Frost and Mike Batt are good contacts for Aussie and Kiwi history respectively and some of Brian Darby's web sites are worth a look for Aussie data. Use a search engine like Yahoo or Google and the words Speedway History and Vintage Speedway for a start and you should get an array of interesting sites. Jim Henry]

Peter Jackson, 41 Riversfield Road, Enfield, EN1 3DH 0208 366 3295 pjackson41@hotmail.co.uk is looking for copies of marked Rye House programmes 1945 to 1959.

Roger Hulbert, the Hull history man who we hope will be writing new chapters in the future, is looking for updates of details where information can be obtained. {This prompted me (JH) to suggest trying to list details of libraries in existing and former speedway locations. Using this list the libraries could be contacted in a systematic manner to find out what, if any speedway material they hold. This could be extended to local museum services as I suspect there are a fair few places holding speedway programmes which are likely to be a mine of information.} (Some "Can you help" requests held over to next edition.)

Suggestions

T.R.Hewat from Pennistone, South Yorkshire suggests we should do items on tracks which ran open licence seasons. [Not a bad idea as these tend to be missing from main line publications. If you are interested in identifying these open venue tracks and years, you can look at "Homes of British Speedway" by John Jarvis and Robert Bamford – Tempus. Eds]

S.Saunders, from Ipswich suggests we provide information on the National Trophy and the Britannia Shield on a round by round basis. [Again, not a bad

idea if anyone fancies this task. Some back numbers have carried information in the centrepages and the web site is fleshing out the data as we progress through the years.

Howard Jones, publisher of a cornucopia of interesting magazines suggests we consider a wants section for collectors. [We have never been a collector orientated magazine and don't want to cut across others interested in this sector. We will carry wants lists submitted by subscribers provided they do not nudge the postage costs into the next bracket.]

Welcome Back Brummies

It is always a pleasure to see speedway open in a new venue and the return of the Brummies to Birmingham is a boost for the sport. I managed to get down to see the action early in April and admit to wimping out and watching from the plush, warm stand. It was quieter than I am used to but you could still hear the sound of the bikes. The stand features large television screens and the quality of the picture is excellent. I admit to being surprised about the concerns over the noise which delayed the start of action for a year as the stadium has roads, all of which seemed busy for the duration of the meeting, on three sides and what looks like an industrial estate on the other.

At first the flattish track looked to favour those riding the white line but that turned out to be a wrong opinion as Jason Lyons, in particular, proved there are a few more racing lines. Welcome back Brummies after such a long time, I hope your return might just spark off a return in a few more big cities such as London, Bristol, Southampton, Liverpool, Nottingham, Norwich, Exeter, to name but a few.

Jim Henry

Nothing New in Speedway Engineering,

Tony Webb from Brisbane is a new contact with an interest in Bikes. This is Tony's interesting item on speedway bikes.

I have recently completed an A-Z database of speedway machines, which I plan to place in the archives at the new speedway museum. To date I have found a total of 76 machines manufactured 1926-1980, however this is an open document which I can add to at any time. I am sure there are many more machines of which I am unaware, and no doubt my omissions will be noted in due course. I would like to share an overview of my work with our readers, some of it from an Australian perspective.

We all know that the very origins of speedway came from the meeting together of motorcyclists on a Sunday outing or bush picnic where the Harleys,

Dougies, Ariels etc would then be stripped of accessories ready for racing, followed by a series of races around a paddock or show-ground. Grasstrack quickly became dirt tracks and when astute promoters realised the potential, speedway was born. There was, therefore, an interest by the general motorcycling public in speedway from the early days, debating the merits of the various makes. It is my contention that we lost the support of that section of the public when speedway became dominated by first the Rudge and then the Jap, to the exclusion of the popular makes known to the average motor cyclist. Instead of the machines, Teams and individuals became the draw-card.

In Australia it appears that the mechanical aspect was always more an interest to the fans than in the UK. Meeting reports by Australian reporters would often remark on the machine with quotes such as "*Bob Sharpe on the Fred Jolley sponsored ESO*" etc. Seldom was there any reference to the machine by UK journalists in their match reporting. The dedicated and comprehensive writings of Cyril May, Ron Hoare and Jeff Clew are the exception to this generalisation.

In the beginning nearly every major motorcycle manufacturer produced a dirt track model. The 1928 Olympia Motorcycle Show had a total of 17 models on display. Over the next two years many of these fell by the wayside leaving the Rudge, Jap/Comerford and Douglas as the main contenders. By 1934 the Jap remained supreme with Victor Martin and Excelsior now cornering the larger market share.

With the Jap engine now standing alone as the competitive power plan, thoughts turned to the design and geometry of frames. Leaders in this field were Australians Max Grosskreutz and Vic Duggan. In the years leading up to World War Two, Lionel Van Praag 1936, and Bluey Wilkinson 1938 had both won their World crowns on Grosskreutz machines. The details of these frames were a closely guarded secret. Sandwiched between those wins was American Jack Milne's crown on the Excelsior in 1937

With the resumption of speedway in 1946 the Australian frames, Maxi, Duggan and Hynes, as they became known, were available in England but in limited numbers. The speedway press at the time made a rare reference to the popularity of the Australian frames. With no apparent patents recorded, with individual refinements, soon similar frames were on the market from UK manufacturers. Due to the simple nature of a speedway frame it was difficult to veer far from the original geometry. From my understanding Excelsior and Langtons both produced Maxi models. I have not been able to establish which one had the contractual rights, or indeed if ever this was an issue. There is no suggestion by the author of plagiarism. The facts are that, traditionally, in

speedway demand has always outstripped supply when a frame became popular, but the expert can always pick up the subtle differences.

Two companies were to stand tall in the 1947-1956 period. Mike Erskine's Staride and Jackson Rotrax, both had organisations that could provide a comprehensive backup and spares service. Jacksons in particular with their impeccable World track racing service was second to none at the time. The Jackson Rotrax took out 7 consecutive World titles, and the Staride 4 titles.

South Australian, Jack Young, gave the long established Victor Martin company its just rewards with back to back title wins on the Martin/ Jap in 1951 and 1952.

Other machines on the market at this time, in smaller quantities, were Arthur Payne's Easy Ride, Bill Kitchen's Utensil, Alec Mosely's Super frame, Les Wottans LWS, Bill Lovell's Sloper, AJW, Chipchase Brine Special, Llyod Diamond and Langton Five Tuber.

The Australian connection arose again in the 1950s with Snowy Rogers and Huck Fynn producing popular frames. The Fynn was ridden by Ken MacKinlay, Jimmy Gooch and many other top riders and had the very distinctive trombone forks. Competition then came from Maury Mattingley's Maur - Matt which was ridden to World final success by Barry Briggs and Ronnie Moore.

The UK reign on speedway machines was soon to be challenged from the most unlikely of places - from behind the iron curtain, with the Czechslovakian ESO later to be known as the Jawa. Australia had been the testing ground for the ESO since 1961 with Bob Sharpe on the Eastern seaboard and Chum Taylor in the West both persevering with the machine under the generous sponsorship of Adelaide importer Fred Jolley.

In 1965 the first ESO was brought to England by Halifax rider Dennis Gavros [*Speedway Star* 21/5/1965]. In 1966, Australians Chum Taylor and Jack Scott, carried the ESO flag into the British League. The astute Barry Briggs quickly realised the ESO potential and secured the UK distribution rights. Availability soon became the age-old problem, which fostered the growth of Jawa pattern frames. North, KSS, Barber, Hagon, and PJ, all produced frames that were interchangeable with Jawa components. Further developments came with the introduction of the centre port engine. Comet, JLR, Luckhurst, PJ, Godden and Hagon came out with designs to allow the positioning of a central carb and aircleaner. The designs included twin down tubes on the Comet and the extension of the engine plates upwards to dispense with the seat tube as on the Hagon BHS and Lucky.

In Australia, Adelaide's Fred Jolley, pioneered his Southern Racer SR60, a complete machine. Bert Kingston and Ernie Sue developed the Dirtracker in

Brisbane in the 1966-1970 period. Several engine prototypes were produced in Australia including the Clarrie Meirs engine The Maxim, or MSM. The combined work of Neil Street and Ivan Tighe heralded the four-valve revolution via the SR4 and Phil Crump.

The Jawa domination commenced with Briggo's 1966 World title win. Ove Fundin turned the tables in 1967 riding a Jap in a Jawa frame to win his 5th world crown. It was then Jawa all the way. Come the 1970 final, Trevor Hedge was the lone Jap rider amongst the might of the Jawas. The exception to the continuous success of the Jawa was in 1976 when Peter Collins took the title aboard the Weslake raising the Union Jack proudly.

I terminated my research at 1980 as machines became more sophisticated with a greater choice of engines and components but I may look at this in the future.

Over the years Honda, Husqvarna, Greeves, AJS, Matchless, and Yamaha have nosed around the speedway scene with the help of Bengt Jansson, Lief Encrona, Nigel and Eric Boocock, Ken Maely, Ken Williams and Don Smith, with no apparent long term success. One wonders if it was ever possible to bring that third dimension of interest back into speedway. Greater support then may be gained from the general motorcycle public, back to the origins again!

Remember there is nothing new. Laydowns were around in 1928, revived again by Aussie Powell in 1948 and Wal Phillips in 1950 and again by the illustrious Briggo in 1970. "It will never catch on" they said. 4 valves were around in 1928, then reappeared 55 years later. Tyres have always been an issue and even dirt deflectors were mooted by Alec Mosely in 1949!!

I am sure there are many more frames out there of which I am unaware, and I welcome input on binbooks@inet.net.au

[At one time loads of riders either built their own fames or modified the ones they bought according to their own whim. It would be difficult to catalogue all theses one-offs but if you've seen them mentioned in the contemporary magazines, let Tony know. **JH**]

Slick Operators

How often do you hear folks moaning about slick tracks? How often do folks say that a slick track spoils speedway? You know what we mean, the surface looks very smooth and hard. Well – here is one for the Barrack Room lawyers to chew over and give us a few thoughts on.

Splash out a tenner and you can have a copy of the Speedway Bureau Rule Book. The section on Nomenclature at page 7 defines a track as: "A course

utilised for Meetings, continuous in circuit, approximately level, having a surface of approved loose material, equipped in accordance with these Regulations, and measured on a line 1 metre from the inner edge.”

The rules do not define the approved loose material so there is scope to use a range of materials ranging from shale to granite dust and even, as used at West Ham and Crayford at times, silver sand. However, no matter the material, the key word is loose.

The question begged is how loose must material be to satisfy the definition of loose in the rule book? Does a track surface which has been rolled firm and won't break up when raced on fits the description of being loose? Or does loose mean loose enough to be dislodged by a spinning speedway wheel during a race?

Now if you have latched on to my drift by now you should be thinking the same question as I am. That is - Is a slick track a speedway if it so slick it does not meet the nomenclature or is the word loose linked to the material used i.e the track is made of loose material like shale which can then be compacted to form a slick track.?

Rodin's Statue

Leeds?

John Wall from Leeds phoned to say he had heard a new stadium was to be built on the site of the greyhound stadium in Elland Road, the home of the pre-war speedway track. Now would we be lucky enough for a shale circuit again?

The Speedway Community Has A Voice

If you are at all interested in planning it might be worthwhile looking at the latest guidance on Community Planning. In Scotland we have PAN81 which can be found on www.scotland.gov.uk. PAN81 not only identifies communities on the basis of a locational grouping but also as people with a common interest. Not sure what the situation is south of the Border. **Jim H**

Deadline for items for next edition is 31st July 2007

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