

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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Three Men In A Boat – Not Quite

We were sent an interesting cutting which must date from the late 1960s about the writer encountering Frank Shuter, Geoff Mudge and George Hunter deep in conversation in the Poole pits. They were, it seems, considering the merits of travelling in Frank's van from the UK to India where they would sell the van and go on their ways, Frank to Australia and the other two to New Zealand.

Now this made me recall the Seventies when some of the riders from Down Under would roll up in the Powderhall pits with very large German cars. It was strange as a lot of the guys were not the top stars in the League and made me wonder how they could afford the height of luxury compared to me with my 1500 Austin Allegro (OK I know it wasn't exactly the most exciting car so slag me off if you like.)

It turned out that these guys were prepared to invest in the car so they could export it to their home country where it would well repay their outlay, and then some to help supplement their earnings in the UK for that year. Resourceful guys these lads from Down Under. **Jim Henry**

Keith Gurtner - The Original Little Boy Blue

We conclude the article on Keith Gurtner written by **Tony Webb**.

1949 This was the final meeting for Keith as he prepared for the 5 week voyage back to England for the 1949 season. On arrival back in the old dart he found the Johnnie Hoskins had moved the whole Newcastle operation to Ashfield in Scotland. This was the birth of the Little Boy Blue legend. Master showman Hoskins supplied a can of blue paint to Keith and red paint to South Australian Merv Harding with the instructions, paint your leathers boys! Ken le Breton had already gone for the White ghost image, Willie Wilson had a tartan scarf and Ron

Phillips a black and white hooped shirt. The Ashfield Giants were the most colourful mob in the country.

Keith's form took off like a rocket on the well prepared Ashfield raceway, racing in 38 matches he amassed 264 points with an average of 6.94 which placed him as third heat leader.

In the World championship rounds he qualified with 11 points into the second round. He then progressed again with 11 to the third round at Fleetwood on July 6 where his well earned score of 10 left him just outside the cut off. A great performance for a second year rider.

It was now time to make the long sea voyage trip back to Australia for the 1949/50 season, bad weather delayed the start of the Brisbane season until November 22 1949. In his first home meeting on December 16th, Keith came up against visiting UK star Ron Mason from whom he took the scratch final. earlier in the evening Keith had scored 7 points in a scratch match side of Possibles v Probables.

The Christmas break then interrupted the season until January 7th. Aub Lawson was the star visitor and in a thrilling scratch final Keith beat Aub by four bike lengths., this was a great warm up to the Queensland solo titles on the following Saturday. This was a classic meeting with a line up that included Sydney's Graham Warren. Engine troubles halted Warrens progress which left the field open. Keith took out the title, the unlucky Warren had to be satisfied with the third spot. In a meeting of mixed fortunes it should be mentioned that Bert Spencer ran second for the second year in succession, Keith Cox had engine failure in his semi final and that Graham Warren's third spot was aboard Howdy Byford's machine.

A great honour for Keith was his first full cap for Australia in the third test against England in Brisbane. Keith's debut resulted in a score of 9 in the 72-35 trouncing of the tourist. Travelling to Sydney for the next test Keith scored 3 points in Australia's 68-40 win

1950 Prior to setting sail for his third trip to England Keith finished his brief home season with a 5 point score for Queensland in a 20-28 defeat at the hands of NSW. The bigger meetings seemed to bring out the best in Little Boy Blue.it should be mentioned that Keith Cox scored an impressive 9 points in this meeting.

Keith's third season in UK was not a totally successful time, indeed Tom Stenner reports in the Stenners' Annual of 1951 "***That Gurtner was moody, brilliant one night and indifferent the next***". His form at

Ashfield slumped to number six, barely retaining his team spot. It has to be said that the Giants were a powerful team, Keith rode 25 matches to score 141 points with an average of 5.64.

On the individual World championship trail he again made to the third round. Scoring 11 in each the first round, and a creditable 10 at Norwich in the second round which included two heat wins, and placed on an all Australian rostrum alongside winner Jack Young and second place Bob Leverenz. He was then eliminated at Cradley Heath on July 31. His 8 points put him in fourth spot with only the top two going through to round four.

On the International scene he fared much better in three caps for an Overseas team. 7 points at former home track Newcastle, 8 at Sheffield and 2 at Walthamstow again showed his flair for the big meetings.

1950/1951 On his return to Brisbane in November 1950 he ran into what was a turbulent season for Australian speedway. Bad weather had delayed the opening of most tracks. In Brisbane rehabilitation work to the centre oval had halted all events at the EKKAA.. The speedway control board in UK had refused to sanction an official English team to visit Australia. Added to this was a restriction on power to night time sports events in Sydney forcing an unpopular move to daytime racing. The first recorded meeting for Keith was on February 2nd when he was a member of Jack Parkers team v Aub Lawson's team he scored 6 points. He was then called up to represent Australia at Brisbane. Jack Parker had put together an un-official team of English riders to honour his personal obligations to Australian promoters. Keith was joint top scorer on 12 with Aub Lawson in the 60-48 defeat of the Poms.

Strangely Keith did not ride in the Australian solo riders championship the following week in Sydney, indeed there was no representation from Queensland at all.in all it was a subdued season for Keith and not the ideal preparation for his fourth trip to UK in March 1951.

1951 Keith arrived back in Scotland to discover he had been transferred from Ashfield to a new track at Motherwell. He made a dramatic start for the Eagles with a 12 point maximum in his first meeting. He went on to race in 30 matches for the Lanarkshire team to finish with an average of 7.76

His luck in the 1951 World championship round was not so good, going out in the first round with a score of just 1 point.

On the International scene he was called up as reserve for the fifth test at West Ham. Although he did not get a ride his presence must have been noted as this was the club he would later join.

The only International appearance in 1951 was for Scotland v England at Ashfield where he contributed a score of 3 points. At Oxford on August 2 a remarkable feat occurred, in the last race of the night, Keith knocked .2 off the track record, held by Pat Clarke since early 1950. For a record to fall late in a meeting is an unusual event as by that time the track is not at it's best.

After another successful season he sailed back to Australia on the Orian in company with Peter Moore and Alec Hunter.

1951/1952 Australian season. Back in Brisbane the 1951/52 season was delayed by bad weather until November 11. Keith did not ride until December 8th. He was a non starter in the Champion of Champions meeting on January 26 but appeared in the supporting events he won his heat semi and grand final.

The following week he was in superb form riding for Australia in the fourth test in front of a patriotic home crowd he top scored with 15 points in an easy Australian win of 66-41. The selectors woke up, and drafted Keith into the final Test a week later at Sydney Showground. This time he really showed the Sydneysiders what an Interstater was capable of with an 18 point maximum in the Aussies 64-44 win. Strangely he failed to appear in the Queensland state title that year.

1952 Returning to Scotland for the fifth time he again was an important cog in the Motherwell team for the 1952 season. From 30 matches he had an average of 6.7, a tad down on 1951, but still up with the leaders. At the end of the season first division clubs Wimbledon and West Ham were chasing his signature. He opted for the Hammers for the 1953 season

In August the Motherwell management made the surprise move to transfer Keith to the Edinburgh Monarchs who had been making overtures for his signature. It was a move that displeased the Eagles supporters to whom Keith had become a popular rider. On Tuesday September 2 Keith made the long trek down to Yarmouth where he scored 6 points for an Overseas side who could only muster 28 against a Great Britain's 80. The following week he was back at Caister Road, this time in the Edinburgh team where he scored 2 paid 3 in the Monarchs 34-54 defeat, his new team partner was the New Zealand

international Harold Fairhurst who Keith had met in Brisbane when the Kiwi rode there in 1946. Keith scored 77 points from 15 matches in the remaining Edinburgh fixtures of the season

During 1952 his World championship hopes came to an abrupt halt with elimination in the first round after a score of 8 at Exeter, On the international scene he was again called up for a reserve spot for Australia as in the previous season, this time at New Cross but did not get a ride in the Australian's sides 62-44 success. Prior to the Scotland v England first test, he suffered a hand injury, this did not stop him from scoring 5 points in Scotland's victory over the England team.

Keith was called up for three meetings in the Overseas side v Gt Britain. At Oxford he scored 4, at Leicester 4 and finally at Gt. Yarmouth 6 points. Sadly the Overseas side were whitewashed 5-0

Come October it was again time to make the long voyage home this time on the Strathgyle, arriving home he discovered that the 1952/1953 season was one of great promise. The solo ranks were swelled with many fine young prospects. Frank Arthur also had a host of star visitors including double World champion Jack Young from Adelaide for one meeting and New South Wales rider Cliff Watson for several meetings. A lowly score of 8 points in the Queensland championship was not a great start for Keith. Elimination in the Australian solo title, in Sydney in the New Year, was a surprise after his glowing performance on his earlier visit to the harbour city.

Maybe five seasons of travelling, in which he would have travelled 120,000 nautical miles, were beginning to have effect. Not many riders had had such a consecutive number of UK seasons. He now prepared for his elevation to the elite first division club the famous West ham Hammers reunited again with the man who initiated the Boy Blue legend the one and only Johnny S Hoskins.

1952/53 Australian season. Keith rode for Australian the second Test against England at the Sydney Showground scoring 11 points. He was then appointed captain for the third test at the EKKA where he scored 11 points again.

1953 UK Season For Keith's first season in the top league he was based in London, this was Coronation year, therefore it would have been a great time to be based in the capital city. After spending the previous five seasons northern based it must have also been a culture change, There was now less travelling, the furthest team from London was Belle

Vue and with three other teams in London there were many local derbies. He was now a member of a First division side, West Ham, it was a difficult time for the Hammers who were trying to recapture lost glories, this put a lot of pressure on the lower order in the team. Keith rode a total of 16 matches with an average of 2.5 which was a creditable tally considering this was the elite league. There is no record of Keith's part in the world championship rounds of 1953, I can only assume that minor injury may have ruled him out.

In that season he was called up as reserve for the Test matches at Norwich and Wembley.

1953/54 Australian season At the EKKA he already was a legend, said to be over classy by some speedway scribes, there was no doubt he was Mr Speedway as far as the Brisbane fans were concerned. In the opening weeks of the 1953/54 season Keith ruled supreme, but his position was soon to be challenged, by the Mighty Atom from Sydney, Lionel Levy and regular visitors Aub Lawson and Ken McKinlay. The Test match series against England had come to an end, it was now a time of more individual events. More visiting riders were discovering the advantages of riding in Queensland, The Queensland title that year, was won by Sweden's Rune Sormander. There was now more competition in Queensland, Keith would be tested to the limit in future seasons as the international stars finished their Australian seasons in Queensland and interstate riders travelled up for the warmer winters and almost all the year round racing.

1954 This would prove to be the farewell season for Keith in the UK. It was a hard season at West Ham as the Hammers strove to recapture past glories and actually finished just one up from the bottom of the league. Keith scored 72 points in that last season. But it was the end of the road for the Hammers as they closed the doors the following season. In September he set sail for Brisbane for the last time, looking forward to life in Bulimba and a spot of fishing out on Moreton Bay

1955/ 56 On his retirement from overseas racing Keith took up full time employment with PMG where he renewed friendships with Dick Smythe and Keith Cox.

1956/57 The Queensland 4 lap solo title was held in Brisbane Keith ran second to Aub Lawson in both 4 lap and the 3 lap held in Toowoomba. titles

1957/58 Queensland title winner. Suffered an arm injury in May which sidelined him for a few weeks.

1958/59 Called up for three of the five Test matches in the new series against the old enemy, Keith was Australia's top man scoring a 12 point maximum in Brisbane and 10 and 5 in the two Sydney meetings. Surprisingly he was not selected for the Melbourne and Adelaide tests.

On June 28 1958 he ran second to Keith Cox in the state title for 1957/58

1959/60 Appointed as Australian captain, Keith led a four man squad to New Zealand for a three match series that resulted in a 2-1 win for the Kiwis. In the Australian team were Brisbane based Victorian, Ken Cameron, [I state tis fact as Ken advertised in the uk Speedway Star, looking for a contract, stating he was a resident of New farm Brisbane] New South Welshmen Bill Bryden and Mick Simmonds and a surprise inclusion Rockhampton based Kiwi Goog Allan!.

The 1959/60 test series against England was staged over a 5 meetings, Keith scored 6 and 2 in both the Sydney meetings and 5 and 2 in Brisbane's meetings. He was not selected for the final meeting in Melbourne. England were victorious in all matches.

1959/1960 Keith won his third Queensland title on February 13 with a win over the classy Scot Ken McKinlay. Third was New Zealand based Bob Andrews

This was the year that big changes were happening on the mechanical side of speedway. For over 30 years the JAP engine had ruled supreme, albeit in a variety of frames. Now on the scene was a complete machine, the ESO, later to be known as the Jawa. Contemporary reports indicated that Keith played a part in the development of this machine over the next few seasons. There are people close to Keith that say he was 100% JAP devotee and dispute these press reports. Whatever is true the facts remain that Queensland had the ideal conditions to develop the ESO, with all the year racing. Without the pressures of team and championship considerations that existed in Europe. The ESO was brought into Australia by Adelaide dealer Fred Jolly, who made the new machine available to top Australian riders to iron out the problems. Keith along with Ivan Mager, Bob Sharpe [who is reputed to have had the very first ESO in Australia], Chum Taylor, Ken Cameron and Jack Scott were the ones who worked to make the ESO a real force in

speedway racing. Ove Fundin and Barry Briggs were also pioneers in the ESO story but it was Keith and his fellow Australians who were able to advise on the problem solving.

Brisbane resident, Kevin Elliott was a member of Keith's pit crew throughout the fifties and was able to give the author an insight into the mechanical side.

Kevin cannot recall any involvement with the ESO. Kevin, a fitter and turner by trade was able to manufacture valve guides and other engine parts for the Gurtner Japs. He also produced counter shafts from tractor axles which solved an ongoing problem with the Jap /Rotrax set up.. He recalls Keith or Gurtie which was the popular name, as being the fairest of all riders always giving his opponents just enough room to manoeuvre, a true racer.

1961/62 For the only time in his career Keith made it to the rostrum in the Australian titles held on October 7 1961 when he ran third to winner Bob Sharpe and second place Ivan Mauger at Rockhampton.

The 1962 Australian titles were again held at Rockhampton on December 15 1962. Keith finished second behind Englishman Mike Broadbank. Taking third spot was Ivan Mauger.

Queensland Champion for the fourth time at Rockhampton on the 20 May 1961 [1960/61] and then 4 lap Champion at Brisbane on December 16 1961 [1961/62 Title.

1962 The Queensland titles were held again in Rockhampton on 12 May, facing stiff competition from new Zealand riders Ivan Mauger and Goog Allan, Keith was this year relegated to third spot on the rostrum beside winner Ivan Mauger and second place getter Goog Allan

1962/1963 . No titles were held in that Australian season. No Australian titles were held in the years 1955-1960.

1963/64 An off- track accident restricted his start to the 1964 season. This season he ran second in the state title to Scotland's Ken McKinlay. Arthur Payne took third spot a remarkable achievement after several years in retirement.

1964/65 Another state title for Keith as he wins from Bob Sharpe and Jack White

1965/66 No titles held

1966/67 Third in the three lap title at Carina speedway Bundaberg behind Jack and Doug White. Another title win in the 4 lap state title at the EKKa from Jack White and Bryan Loakes.

This was the last championship win for Gurtie, he had ruled the roost for two decades in Queensland with his strongest rival being the former Edinburgh rider Keith Cox. Now the young brigade including Jack White were beginning to flex their muscle and break the Gurtner monopoly.

1967/68 The 1967/68 season opened at the EKKA in September, the first race was an epic battle between Keith the wily veteran, and new gun Peter Ingram, after leading all the way to the flag, age was was beaten by youth on the line. The final of the night was cancelled after double spills in two abortive attempts to get a result. Reported that Keith is to retire to Moreton Island and spend his days dropping a line in the water. On November 18 Keith top scored in a warm up match , Queensland v England, prior to the second test on the following Saturday. A Queensland team went down 24-30 to a fired up English side.

The test match on 25 November was to be, in the memory of hosts of his fans as Keith Gurtner's finest hour. At 44 years of age Keith led the Australian team to a 62-46 victory with a 14 point score. This included 4 heat wins and a second placing, not bad for a veteran of 22 speedway seasons . this was also his third best test score and his last appearance in an Australian race jacket. There had been no finer servant to speedway, in his long career there was "never a will he won't he" saga at the beginning of each season. When the tapes were ready to rise Little Boy Blue was always ready, his equipment in gleaming condition and an attitude of mind to be admired and respected. He was a man respected by fellow riders, promoters and the media and loved by his fans world wide. Keith was to race Three more seasons before retiring to his recreation of fishing.

1968/1969. Former Halifax PRO Max Jessop re-opened Ipswich Speedway in March 1968. Appearing in the first meeting, the Ipswich Trophy, was the evergreen Keith who showed age did not hamper his track craft. Against class opposition that included Jack White, Kev Torpie and Bert Kingston, Keith finished the night in third spot, winning the last heat of the night from White and Kingston.

In April Keith had a serious accident at Ipswich when his ESO collided with the machine of Peter Ingram Keith was flung onto the track with such force his helmet was broken in two, he was hospitalised for several days under observation.[Speedway Racing News 19/5/1969]

1971 Keith raced his final meeting on Saturday June 5th 1971 he was presented with a cheque for \$250 by the promoter Bill Goode. This was the end of a 26 year career. Keith said at the time he should get long service leave from Empire speedways as he had raced for the promotion for so long.

He also received an award from his employers, Australia Post for 18 years accident free service, a contrast from his speedway seasons with 52 broken bones!.

1997 After a long battle with cancer Little Boy Blue passed away in Brisbane's Mount Olive Hospital in April 1997 at the age of 71. His funeral service at Mt Thompson was a Who's Who of speedway racing as a large congregation gathered to farewell a Queensland legend. His long time friend and opponent Keith Cox read a moving tribute to Keith on the day. Keith was survived by his wife Violette and five children Paul, Christina, Wayne, Katrina and Ross. Paul had two seasons as a c grade rider in Brisbane in the 1970's.

Memories of Gurtie

Keith Cox who for so many years was Gurtie's main rival, recalled him as a fair and clever rider with fine mechanical skills. The two Keiths were the top act in Brisbane for ten years. Off track they were the best of friends and actually both had holiday homes on Moreton Island where they enjoyed their great love of fishing. However once the tapes rose at the Ekka the battle for supremacy was on.

Bill Kane former promoter at Archerfield and Townsville and long time Ekka regular remembered Keith as a skilfull and polished performer who always gave 100%., always helpful to the younger riders.

Kevin Elliott former member of the Gurtner pit crew, remembers the riders who all worked at the PMG in central Brisbane. The spectacle of speedway aces Gurtner, Keith Cox, and Dick Smythe setting of on their morning postal deliveries was a feature of Brisbane scene in the 1950's.

Broadsiding as a Business

Cyntrax, writing in the Motor Cycling of 5th March 1930 gives an interesting insight into the financial side of speedway of that era. "I suppose most people whose daily round includes the digestion of of one or more newspaper articles occasionally comes across a work which gives them to wonder if the writer can have had any better reason for

taking up his pen than natural interest in the welfare of the ink-brewing industry. I will even believe that similar thoughts have struck readers of Motor Cycling after a one-sided battle with "Around The Speedways." But the particular eruption in which you are now engrossed (excusable optimism) at least has the merit of possessing an object. And if you are sufficiently interested to pursue the matter further, let me confess that my sole aim in perpetrating all this is to save myself the trouble of writing to the individual answers to the ever-increasing number of letters which I receive from lads who are assailed by the "call of the speedway."

Here is the case for the querist:-

He is earning £2 10s (£2.50) per week as a garage mechanic, possesses a road motor (on which he rides to work) with a selling value of about £25, has a further "tenner" in savings and pays out 15s (£0.75) a week in lodgings. Now unless that man is in a very rare position of being on the kind of terms with an established rider which will enable him to borrow his riding kit and machine for practicing, I say most emphatically, "Forget it!".

What £35 Will Not Do

Next let us consider just *why* the dirt is not a practical proposition for the man in question. His road motor, no matter how fast or whatever lengths he may go towards adapting it, will be useless for speedway. Two seasons ago, mounted thus, he would have stood a good chance of showing up to sufficient advantage to make a start, but the dirt has become such a specialized business nowadays that a machine built for the job is an absolute necessity.

Right. So he must dispose of the faithful hack for what it will fetch and withdraw that long-cherished tenner from the bank. That makes £35.

But what can our hero do with his £35? The answer to that question depends to a great deal extent upon the degree to which he is endowed with what nice people term "commercial instinct"; even so he would be hard pressed to equip himself with the bare necessities of the would-be speedway rider on such a sum. To illustrate the truth of this I will try figures once again.

Bang Goes £10

From the perusal of Sam Lewis's latest list, reading from left to right, I gather that a complete riding outfit of good quality can be bought for £9-£10. Necessity No.2 is a sidecar float outfit for transport of a

machine, which, if you go to the right places, can be picked up for £10-£15. Then there is an ACU speedway rider's licence, costing a further 10s (£0.50), and a kit of tools, which some people pay for, but the vast majority (I imagine) simply acquire. If you are one of the two people in the former category (and I sincerely hope so) you will be at least £2 poorer by the time your kit assumes anything like useful proportions, while it is, of course, possible to go on buying usefully until the proverbial cattle return to their fixed abode. Your share of your insurance premium is 2s (£0.20) per meeting or practice, the track owner paying 5s (£0.25).

Totalling up, we find that at the lowest possible estimate the would-be thriller of thousands must spend more than £22 of his £35 before considering the purchase of a machine, which, *vide* Euclid, is absurd – so much so that but for having been proved to my satisfaction on many occasions that there *are* people who imagine £35 to be suitable capital with which to take up speedway racing, I should be tempted seriously to doubt the usefulness of the last few hundred words.

Having described in some detail what £5 will not do, the determination of what kind of outlay *will* do something is a point obviously deserving of our earliest attention. In my opinion unless it is intended to take the risks which are likely to be involved in the purchase of a “used” machine, *everyone who sets out to make a living on the speedway should have at least £80 in his pocket, and as the definite assurance that, should his efforts prove unsuccessful, he is in the position to discharge any payments on his machine which the total or partial absence of prize money may have left outstanding.* Should he choose a Douglas, as so many people do, he can pay the initial deposit of one quarter of the total cost, i.e. £21 5s (£25.25) (the insurance premium for the deal may also be payable with the deposit); he need not exercise too strict economy in purchasing his racing clothes and float outfit, spending, say, £15 on the former and £20 on the latter; spares and tools to the value of a further tenner will pay their way every time.

This brings the total initial expenditure up to £65 leaving a balance of £15 with which to meet the hundred and one incidentals which any rider of experience will tell you can set you back every penny of that sum – and then some if you are not very careful.

So much of the actual cost of becoming a potential sifter of the cinders, Now for some light upon the question of what your prospects are likely to be.

In the first place it might as well to ponder the how-come-and-why-is of the new rule adopted nationally which does away with free-lances, as we have known them in the past, and also with booking agencies in any shape or form. By this regulation having been chosen the track upon which he intends to learn his business, the rider is required to sign an agreement conferring upon the promoter of that track full option upon his services. In future, all bookings are to be conducted between promoters, and any rider not having a contract with an Association company can be classed as a *very* improbable runner.

A-Z Australians in UK

Tony Webb's Additions / admendments 1/12/2009

Bugeja Arlo	SA	Redcar2007/8/9
Davey Mitchell	QLD	Glasgow 2007/2008
Gathercole Cory	VIC	IOW 2007/8/9 Swindon Somerset
Grojczonek Josh	QLD	Glasgow 2008/9
Herne Jay	NSW	Weymouth 2007/8 Bournemouth 2009
Holder James	NSW	IOW 2008 Newport 2009
James Scott	SA	Mildenhall 2002/3 Wimbledon 2005 Buxton 2006/7./9 Redcar 2008
Ksiezak Robert	VIC	Edinburgh 2007 Glasgow 2008 Birmingham 2009 Stoke 2009
Kurtz Todd	NSW	Newport 2009-
Mackay Mal	SA	Born uk
Morris Nick	QLD	2009 Exhibition rides
North Dakota	VIC	2009 Mildenhall
Poole Taylor	NSW	2009 Mildenhall
Procter Ty	VIC	Redcar 2008/9
Rutherford Shelby	WA	Newport 2009-
Sedgeman Justin	VIC	Somerset 2009-
Sedgeman Ryan	VIC	Newport 2009
Skidmore Hugh	NSW	Sheffield 2009

Smith Kozza	NSW	Kings Lynn 2008/9
Summers Aaron	SA	Buxton 2007. Edinburgh 2008/9
Sweetman Richard	NSW	IOW 2008 Birmingham 2009
Ward Darcy	QLD	Boston 2008 Kings Lynn 2009
Wethers Matthew	SA	Edinburgh 2007-2009

The Most Boring Meeting I Ever Saw

We are used to reading about the best. Here **Alan Bates** nominates the worst he ever saw.

The date was Saturday 4th July 1953 and it was Harringay's 13th meeting of their 13th season. The occasion was the visit of the Lanarkshire Eagles from Motherwell to Green Lanes for the second leg of the 4th round of the National Trophy competition.

The evening before in Scotland the Eagles had won the first leg 63 – 45. The programme notes stated that “Motherwell have been sharpening up their claymores and polishing their dirks in readiness for this great match. They are very hopeful of rendering us the K.O.”

Well, this couldn't have been further from the truth, for it turned out to be the most boring match I ever saw. Harringay won the first five heats 5 – 1 to wipe out the 18 points deficit. Derek Close had been unlucky in Heat 2 when he fell when about to overtake Ken Walsh for second place. Close was out again in Heat 6 and this time he stayed on to clinch second spot to halt the run of maximum heat wins, then followed five more runaway 5 – 1's for the Racers. After Heat 11 the score was 54 – 12.

Ron How and Johnny Gren fell at the first bend in Heat 12 and although How remounted he couldn't catch Gordon McGregor and so it was only a 4 – 2 for Harringay. However the processions returned for four more consecutive 5 – 1's and after Heat 16 it was 78 – 18.

In Heat 17 Derek Close again made a spirited effort and nearly caught the winner, Ron How, as the home side took a 4 – 2.

In the nominated rider's heat, Harringay tracked their reserves, Allan Quinn and Frank Lawrence against Noel Watson, who had 4 points, and Derek Close who had 6 points.

Quinn knocked Close off and was excluded, but the Motherwell rider was injured and couldn't take part in the rerun. Both he and Quinn had been stretchered off. Gordon McGregor was allowed to take Close's place, and, as Harringay had only one rider, the Eagles managed a 3 – 3.

Harringay had won 17 of the 18 Heats and the final score was 85 – 23. What was unusual is that all eight Motherwell riders managed at least one point.

Note: A few weeks earlier I had seen Harringay beat Birmingham 67 – 17 and in the next round of the National Trophy Wimbledon beat Stoke 89 – 19. These were not exactly exciting times for watch speedway in London.

Speedway Lights 1930 Style

Talmage of the Auto Motor Journal (The Auto) penned the following article after a visit to the White City Manchester venue in May 1930. “In addition to the red and green lights all round the track, which means exactly the same to the riders as a railway signal does to an engine driver, there is a very complete starting and control device. Over the track at the starting line is a construction carrying six large coloured lights – red, white, blue, yellow, pink and check – one for each rider in a race. Under each of these are three smaller lights – white, yellow and red.

Information on the Pioneer Days

<http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/speedwayinprint>

This is a new speedway history site which is an off shoot of the established Yahoo group. You need to register to gain access to its files. The current site is dealing with the early part of the 1930 season. The scans of “The Auto” for the site were provided by Jim Henry from information originally provided to him by speedway historian and author **Colin Parker**. There are references to most of the tracks operating in this period.

The Auto operated with two editions, a Northern and Southern version with the split in coverage at Leicester. Whilst the Southern Editions are in captivity in the British Library, the Northern Editions are not so common. Nevertheless Colin managed to locate a fair old pile of Northern Editions and these will appear on this site.

Given the volume of pages it is likely that there will be a number of separate sites to cover the holdings from 1929 through to September 1931.

Credit too must go to **John Hyam**, Moderator of the site, for setting it up and placing the material on this site.

If you don't have access to the web but have a computer and would like access to the material which appears on the site above and on subsequent sites, please contact Jim Henry.

The Autos are only part of other pioneer era information which came in a crate from Colin courtesy of **Ian (John) Somerville** who brought it north from Coventry.

Jim Henry

The Back To Front Engine

You are either interested in bikes or not interested in bikes. However, every now and then an item takes your fancy and the item published in The Motor Cycle for April 14th 1932 engaged me.

The bike in question was a Rudge and by 1932 this make had been overtaken by the JAP motor which dominated the speedway scene until it's own demise following the introduction of the ESO / JAWA.

It wasn't a standard Rudge as the West Ham chief mechanic of the day, one Johnny Leete had worked on it and made what was a mirror image of the conventional speedway bike. That is to say he moved the chain drives and clutch from the left hand side to the right hand side (fence side if you like). The reasoning behind the revised layout was that this arrangement would stop or greatly reduce the dirt landing and gathering on the chains which caused them to break.

In order to do this he had to turn the engine about too, well at least the crankcases – these are bits that hold the fly wheels, crank pin and valve cams at the bottom of the engine. He kept the barrel the same way round with the exhaust pipes coming out of the front of the engine and the carburetor at the back.

Work was required to ensure the valves, which regulate the fuel air entering the engine and spent gases to leave the engine, would open and close at the right time. Further work was needed on the magneto, the bit of the engine that generated the electrics to power the spark plug, to make it work running backwards.

The final refinement was a demountable footrest which was needed to allow access to the clutch and chains to make the necessary gearing changes.

How did it work? Well, since it wasn't much used, it probably was more of a novelty than an earth shattering innovation. However, it did show that Mr Leete was an accomplished engineer and innovator. **Jim Henry**

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