

# The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

Volume 13 No.3 December 2010

Edition No.51

## The Last Meeting at Walthamstow

**Alan Bates** recalls the last meeting at the short lived venue which is or is due to be demolished and redeveloped.

Speedway was introduced to Walthamstow on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1934 when the Lea Bridge Promotion was switched from Leyton. Eight meetings were staged at the Chingford Road track that season but the sport did not return then next year. It wasn't until 1949 that the track re-opened and Walthamstow joined the National League Second Division, the only London team operating at that level.

They followed with two more seasons at the same level. Due to many factors, especially runaway home wins which caused attendances to drop and the high entertainment tax, the track closed after the 1951 season.

In all, 96 meetings were staged at Walthamstow and, of the 90 team matches, 71 were won, 2 drawn and 17 lost. There were 6 open meetings (World Championship rounds etc) and during that time only 1 meeting was rained off (v Oxford on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1951).

The final match was a Second Division fixture against Edinburgh on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October 1951. The Wolves could only hope for third place in the final table if Edinburgh lost 2 of their last four matches and if Coventry lost 1 of their last 2 matches.

Jack Young, the recently crowned World Champion, who had notched 4 maximums from his previous 5 League matches, won the first heat with partner Harold Fairhurst second to give the Monarchs a 5 – 1 lead. Reg Reeves and Harry Edwards hit back with a 5 – 1 and with Heat 3 drawn, the scores stood level at 9 – 9. Sid Clark and Harry Edwards put Wolves with a 5 - 1 and with three of the next four heats drawn, Wolves led by 27 – 21 after Heat 8.

Jimmy Grant and Jim Boyd took a 5 - 1 in Heat 9 to make it 32 – 22 and although Jack Young won his last two races to record yet another

maximum, Edinburgh did not manage another Heat win and the final score was Walthamstow 51 Edinburgh 33. Walthamstow scorers were: Reg Reeves 1, Jimmy Grant 8, Jim Boyd 6, Harry Edwards 6, Pete Lansdale 5, Sid Clark (res) 5, Alby Smith (res) 0. Top for Edinburgh were Jack Young 12 and Dick Campbell 7.

Both Edinburgh and Coventry gained enough points from their remaining matches and Wolves ended up fifth.

In the second half Jack Young won the Visitors' Trophy and Reg Reeves won the Wolves' Trophy. The final race at the stadium was the Mechanics Race which was won by Pete Lansdale's mechanic, Ron Annall in 60.8 seconds for 3 laps. The track record for four laps was 60.2 set by Bob Leverenz of Norwich the previous week.

The programme contained a Membership Application to rejoin the Supporter's Club for a fee of 1/6 (£0.07.5p) and Alan wonders if anyone who paid that night got their money back.

It is interesting to note that the admission charges in 1934 were 1/3 (@£0.06p), 2/6 (£0.12.5p) and 5/- (£0.25p) and at the end of 1951 they were 1/6d, and 3/- (£0.15p) with Supporters Club members getting a discounted price of 1/3d and 2/7d (@£0.13p).

(Eds Were there not some ideas of Walthamstow wanting Division One status if they ran in 1952?)

## Keith Gurtner story update

**Tony Webb** sends the following

The two recent stories on Keith Gurtner raised comments from **Vic** (Vanni) and **Ross** (Garrigan) on four points.

**1 1948 Newcastle accident.** This was incorrect the year was 1949 and the accident was at Ashfield but involved a Newcastle rider Ernie Brecknell. Norm Evans received injuries from which he never fully recovered

**2 Ron Phillips** Was not in the Ashfield team at the same time as Ken le Breton and Keith Gurtner. [ My information was that Phillips was signed initially by Ashfield during the 1950 period when the former riders were at Ashfield but of course that does not make him a team member.]

**3 World championship qualification.** Clearly I have misinterperated the difference between meetings and rounds. Therefore it was incorrect

to state that Gurtner failed to qualify from one meeting, as the system gave each rider three meetings to qualify from.

**Consecutive seasons.** The intent here was to illustrate the fact that Keith Gurtner travelled to and from Australia for seven seasons. There may be Australian riders who had longer periods of consecutive seasons but many wintered in England at least once, i.e. Jack Young, Bob Sharp, Bluey Scott, Jack Biggs. In fact the only rider I can think of who returned home each season was Ron Bainbridge.

### **Article Accuracy**

The onus for the correctness of articles lies with the writer, A missing word or a failure to explain a point clearly can lead to the wrong interpretation of what the writer is trying to put over. I now reference all resources, I did not do that when this article was written in 2006 but I do know that items 1 and 2 were gleaned from press reports. One cannot expect the Speedway Researcher to check every article, all they can do is publish articles from writers they consider reliable.

From my point of view I welcome the input from readers like Vic and Ross who take time to point out mistakes in a constructive manner so the writer is not discouraged. That way we can strive for greater accuracy, I think that is what it is all about.

**Tony (Eds Positive corrections plus comments always welcome.)**

## **THE “DIRT TRACK” IN THE FOREST**

**Pete Cook** looks at High Beech in this article first published the Loughton and District Historical Society Newsletter No. 182. Sunday, 19 February 1928 is seemingly a date of no significance in world history. True, it did mark the closing day of the 1928 Winter Olympics, but, on that day, behind the King’s Oak Hotel at High Beach, it heralded the birth of Speedway in the UK with the first organised meeting. The sport in its true form is generally accepted as having originated in Australia, although there have been claims for earlier events on much bigger tracks in America and South Africa. A man named Johnnie Hoskins introduced racing on motorcycles, round a dirt track under lights, as an “added attraction” at the 1923 West Maitland Agricultural Show of which he was then the Secretary. It quickly spread across Australia, with Hoskins as the entrepreneur at the helm, and

before too long he was contemplating promoting the sport further afield and was casting his eyes towards England.

There are of course other UK venues who have laid claim to holding the first meeting in England, including Camberley, where, on 7 May 1927, some races took place on sand – not cinders – and they rode clockwise, although anti-clockwise was the recognised Australian format. On 25 June 1927 a meeting took place at Droylsden near Manchester, this time on cinders courtesy of the local power station, but again it was, apparently, not deemed an “official” event. On 9 November 1927 an attempt to hold a meeting at High Beach – on the old cinder running track behind the King’s Oak – was thwarted by the Auto-Cycle Union as it contravened Lord’s Day Observance Society **regulations** regarding meetings on a Sunday other than purely club events. However, an application by the Ilford Motor Cycle and Light Car Club to hold a meeting on 19 February 1928 finally met with the approval of the ACU. The event was widely advertised, both locally and in the motorcycling press, and riders from around the country were applying for membership in order to take part. The promoter, Jack Hill-Bailey, along with his wife, brother and some willing helpers estimated that with luck they might get some 3000 or so spectators on the day, and so the first officially organised and recognised speedway meeting in England was set to take place. Snow had been falling earlier in the month, but that morning “it could have been a July day” as one account described it, and the roads into and around Epping Forest quickly became jammed with every conceivable form of transport, from cycles and motorcycles, to cars, coaches and even lorries. It soon became apparent that the organiser’s estimate of crowd numbers was woefully adrift. Two large wooden gates adjacent to the King’s Oak were to be the entry point with tickets being sold at 6d. (2.5p) and programmes at 2d. An hour before the start the tickets had gone, the programmes had gone, any further attempt to collect money had been abandoned, the gates had been pushed down, and the rest of the spectators – later estimated at 25 to 30,000 – entered for free.

Once inside it had been instructed by the ruling body that spectators be kept behind a rope barrier inside the track, but it soon became apparent that there was no chance of this being observed. Thus the riders found themselves racing through an avenue of fans, cheered on not only from both sides, but also by those who had climbed to vantage points in the

surrounding trees. What Health and Safety – had it existed then – would have made of all this can only be a matter of conjecture, but subsequently instructions for modifications and new safety regulations were issued, which were to be carried out before another meeting was to be allowed.

Speedway had arrived and in no time leagues had been formed, with a High Beech team riding in the Southern League in the early 30s. Most of the legends of the sport rode here during that time: Aussies like Vic Huxley, Billy Lamont, Ron Johnson, and from the USA the Milne brothers and “Sprouts” Elder, and English stars such as Phil Bishop, “Tiger” Stevenson, Jack Parker and Colin Watson. All this information and more is readily available through other sources, and I have used it only to set the scene of those early days, and that memorable first meeting, in order to take up the story of the postwar period and my personal memories.

Saturday, 18 September 1948 saw the reopening of High Beech Speedway with a crowd of around 2,500 as reported in the local press, a far cry from the attendance at the first meeting. I have used the “Beech” spelling here as that is how it was recorded, both prewar and on the first programme which was priced at 4d and was a single folded sheet advising the event as a Challenge Match between High Beech and Leicester. Although age can often dim the memory, I seem to recall it was a fine day, and, as we lived at the top of Forest Road in Loughton, we set off, my father, a cousin and myself to walk to the track through the forest. Even as we walked we could hear the sound of engines being revved, and on entering the stadium I instantly wanted to go round to the pits where all the action was. We walked round the track outside the safety fence which was, as I remember, fairly solid, either wood or corrugated metal. Beyond the fence and surrounding the track was an earth bank, from which the spectators could view the action and – they discovered when racing started – be liberally sprayed with cinders! In 1949 the programme for the 2 July meeting celebrated the opening of the “new” track, wherein two straights had been introduced into the oval, and the programme notes hoped it would “provide better racing and, at the same time, prevent spectators from collecting the cinders!”. However, it was from running round that bank that I got my first view into the pits where the bikes were being prepared, and smelt for the first time what I later learned was methanol, the “racing dope” that fuelled

them. When the first race started, the sight, smell and noise of these machines – capable of up to 60mph – being broadsided around the track, seemingly steering right while travelling left, was, at that early age, one of the most exciting things I had seen.

The afternoon sped on – race after race – although not without a few false starts, mechanical breakdowns and spills. Autographs were collected on the programme and, in no time it seemed, I was walking back home, hooked on speedway and looking forward to the next meeting. I was unaware then that later, in the summer holidays with a few friends, we would have the chance to push start the bikes! We found out that during the week the riders would often practice and novice training would take place, so we would ride our bikes through the forest to the back of the stadium where the fence was in disrepair and make our entry. Initially we would simply hang over the pit fence and watch until one day a rider wanting a start called out “Give us a push lads”. We needed no second bidding and became unpaid push starters. This happened on several occasions and once again what Health And Safety would have made of it Heaven knows, but the “nanny state” was years in the future and we were boys loving our small part of the action.

It was also easier to get autographs in this situation and, among others, I acquired those of the aforementioned “Tiger” Stevenson and Phil Bishop which took pride of place in the collection. 1948 saw the release of *Once a Jolly Swagman*, one of the very few films to be made about speedway, with a cast that included Dirk Bogarde, Sid James, Bill Owen and Thora Hird. Bill’s riding sequences were performed by a rider named Jack Cooley, and when he signed for me he added “alias Lag Gibbon” the name of Bill’s character. Sadly the autograph book disappeared long ago, but the memory of collecting the signatures still remains.

Many of the riders who featured in those meetings of the late 1940’s were regulars such as Harry Simms, Vic Butcher, George Flower, Ernie Steers, Ted Moore and Allen Briggs. Allen was the son of the then manager of Walthamstow Stadium and subsequently opened a motorcycle shop in Chingford in the 50s – from whence came my first Lambretta scooter – and cars are still sold today under the family name from the same premises. High Beech was an ideal track for riders to learn their trade before being taken up by teams like Rye House,

Rayleigh, Yarmouth etc., and even more senior teams such as West Ham and Harringay. Among those who graduated were Jimmy Grant, Johnny “The Galloping Major” Fry, “Cowboy” Vic Ridgeon and Stan Page, all of whom, along with many others gained rides with League teams. Incidentally, Johnny’s nickname was acquired by the “wheelies” he performed when the race ended, particularly if he’d won. Although High Beech were never to achieve the League status of the prewar team, they rode every fortnight in challenge matches against other nursery teams such as California, Eastbourne and Rainham. I recall that as young lads, when we saw California listed we thought an American team was coming to race, only to find to our dismay that it was another English nursery team from Surrey. Events for Individual Trophies and Best Pairs were also included during the season and were always popular. Unfortunately, although the sport was enjoying huge popularity in the post war 40s and 50s – a meeting at Wembley in 1948 against West Ham, saw 85,000 inside the stadium with apparently another 20,000 locked outside – the revival at High Beech was not destined to last. Crowds were always around the 2,500 mark, possibly due to the lack of public transport coupled with it being a somewhat remote site for a sporting venue. The end of the 1950 season saw the end of competitive racing, and although there was, I believe, some brief use as a practice track for novice riders, High Beech Stadium closed its gates to speedway for almost the last time. I say almost because on Sunday 18 February 1968, an event marking the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of British Speedway was held. At that time the track was still there, albeit with a few examples of the local flora growing through, but those were soon cleared to allow the advertised Grand Cavalcade to take place. Exhibition stalls and tents offered all sorts of speedway memorabilia and an Open-Air Service was conducted at noon by the vicar of High Beach Church. The Cavalcade took place during the afternoon, with personalities from the past and present being introduced, some riding on bikes from the earliest to the latest models. The then current league teams from around the country were represented by their riders and fans who had arrived in all sorts of transport that had been decorated for the trip with flags and banners. They formed a fitting finale to the occasion with a colourful procession around the track to bring the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to a successful conclusion.

A further celebration was held in 1988 – the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – and later, during the 90s, it became the custom for a meeting to be held each year on the nearest Sunday to 19 February around the Kings Oak forecourt and car park. These days were “speedway family affairs” in that riders old and new gathered with the fans, the bikes were brought along and although not ridden, were fired up to add to the atmosphere. There was no charge, it was a get together for lovers of the sport and always well attended. However, whilst I was writing this article, a local newspaper carried the story that this year’s meeting was to be held at the National Speedway Museum situated in the Paradise Wildlife Park at Broxbourne, thus seemingly severing the link to the original home. Having contacted the Park, the owner, Pete Sampson, an ex rider with Swindon and Hackney, assured me that the day would follow much the same format as those held at the King’s Oak, and that it had been suggested that meetings could perhaps, in future, alternate between the two sites.

A little known fact is that during its history, prior to the arrival of speedway, the track was used by Loughton Athletic Club, and, as well as being an early running and cycling track, the stadium was used at various times by High Beach Football Club and Loughton Hockey Club. Both are known to have had pitches inside the oval during their history and to have played League matches there. Today there is no longer anything to be seen of the track, but the bank that a young boy ran excitedly round on that day in 1948 still remains, a last reminder of the day that Speedway arrived in England, not in a big city but at “the dirt track in the Forest”.

Anyone wishing to learn more of the prewar history of the track may obtain a copy of John Chaplin’s well illustrated booklet *A Fistful of Twistgrip* from the Epping Forest Conservation Centre, price £2.00 if there are any left!

## **Feedback**

The renewal slips are your opportunity to give us your thoughts on what you are up to and what the magazine and the contents. Now the web is up and running Jim is always looking for information and how it is helping you. I suspect some of you think we don’t look at them and give them any thought and that is why you don’t bother completing them.

Perhaps we don't give enough feedback these days so here we go. Most of the supportive comments are strong in their praise for what we do so the positives are very positive. It is the negatives we need to look at, (even if some are actually positive) . **Vic Butcher** doesn't like the poetry which is fair enough. In defence the poetry sometimes carries some information or snippets of interest and, in our view, is worth publishing. **M.W.Howes** would like us to go back to the coloured covers. We'd love to too but we cannot source coloured 90 gm/sq m paper now despite trying a range of sources.

Requests for what we might cover are also interesting. **T.R.Hewat** from Penistone, South Yorkshire asks if we can provide information on differences in programmes where dirt track sometimes means speedway and sometimes is really grass track racing. In response we suggest that the excellent **Homes of British Speedway** is worth checking to see what it says about any venue you unearth and want to check. If this doesn't give the answers then the approach is to track down contemporary newspapers to see if the event has been reported and if the venue has any back and forward history in the press. Look for weekly motorcycle columns as they often are very informative and look for photos of the event which are also helpful. The contemporary motorcycling magazine are also worth a look as they often published lists of club activities. Currently these sources are likely to be at Colindale which is the British Library Newspaper Library but change is coming sometime soon and they may not be available until relocated. Newspapers may be available locally to the venue. There are back numbers of the Speedway Researcher which list newspapers and where they are held. Finally – Scrambles, motocross, type events were also called dirt track so that is worth factoring in to your search.

### **Alec Hunter. A Norwich star.**

This story of one of Australia's and Norwich favourite sons, has been compiled by **Tony Webb** with the help of Alec's daughter Jan who has many happy memories of her gypsy childhood travelling the speedways of Britain and Australia.

Alexander Hunter was born in the Sydney suburb of Mosman on August 19 1919 His father also Alick was a pioneer rider racing at Sydney and Newcastle from 1927 on Sunbeam and Indian machines

.Alec purchased his first motorcycle for five pounds, before he was old enough to hold a licence .He began to make a name for himself in road racing until the Second World War intervened. Joining the 2/6<sup>th</sup> Commando Squadron he saw service in the Pacific Islands campaign for five years. A legacy of those days are re occurring bouts of malaria..

It was said that his father he did not want Alec to become a rider. Alec raced sidecars successfully with his cousin Jimmy as swinger in 1946, then made the switch to solos, it was reported that when Frank Arthur gave him his first rides, he fell off every time for his first three races. He eventually made such progress that he won the 1949 NSW junior championship at the Sportsground much to the delight of his father who had by know relented on his opposition and was now always by his side in the pits. On the recommendation of pre war star Dick Wise, who was managing Norwich he travelled to England in March 1949 to join the Norwich Stars in the National League Second Division. He was in familiar company at the Norfolk track with four other Australians, Bob Leverenz (South Australia), Syd Littlewood (Victoria), Bluey Thorpe and Bert Spencer (Queensland) all established riders..

Alec travelled alone to England. His first outing at Norwich was on April 9 1949 as a member of a Northern side v Norwich, he scored one point. He remained in the second half until May 21<sup>st</sup> when he was selected as a member of an Australian select side in an un- official test match. He responded with a paid 7 from three rides. The Norwich team was a solid side for a newcomer to break into, it was just a matter of biding your time and being in the right place at the right time. The chance came for a team berth on the Stars Northern tour, veteran Ted Bravery was un- available and Alec got his big chance. He responded with 2 paid 4 at Newcastle and 3 at Glasgow White City. He was included in the home side at Norwich on June 18 , his 4 paid 6 ensured his future as a team member. A note here a paid point is a bonus point, when you follow your partner home in second or third position. Once he was getting regular rides he could at last put bread on the table.! The highlight of the season came in the match against Hastings at the Sussex track on August 17<sup>th</sup>, Alec recorded a paid maximum of 11 paid 12 from 3 rides. After then came a string of low scores but his future with the Stars had been made.

The first season was a hard one with a total score of 61 points which kept on the fringe of a permanent team place.

Returning to Sydney in November 1949 his first meeting was the Sydney Cup on November 25 when he scored 10 points to finish 6<sup>TH</sup>. His improved form saw him selected for three of the test matches in the seven match series against the visiting English team, although only scoring 3 points from the three matches he was earmarked as a rider with potential.

Alec's second British season in 1950 was a much happier time for him as he gained a place in the team which won the Second Division title, his score of 158 put him as number 5 in the Stars line up and finished the season with 158 points. He was also capped for the Overseas team against Britain at Walthamstow and Halifax returning 2 points from each meeting.

Back home in November 1950 he was selected for Tests against the old enemy in Adelaide, Bathurst and Sydney posting 1, 10 and 7 respectively. In Brisbane on April 7 he won the Brisbane pairs with former Norwich team mate Syd Littlewood before returning to England. The programme ran a feature on Alec under the headline "Knows both ways round," referring to his sidecar days.

The 1951 season was to prove his best one, although he had a late return from Australia, he moved up to number four in the ratings with a seasons total of 191 points. On the international scene for the Overseas team he scored 8 at the tricky Yarmouth track and 12 at the larger Liverpool track.. Alec departed from Tilbury Docks on November 7 on the P&O liner Orian declaring to the Speedway News reporter, to return with his family in 1952. Norwich were elected to the First division in the winter but after three consecutive years away Alec decided to sit the 1952 English season out.

Riding in the 1951/52 season in Australia he had ran seventh in the Australian 4 lap championship at the Showground with 11 points. In January he was invited back to Queensland to contest the Brisbane best pairs which he had won the previous year with Syd Littlewood, this time he was paired with Steve Langton, they finished with 7 points not enough for victory.

Alec did not return to England for the 1952 season, it is possible he failed to agree terms with the Norwich management as he wanted to bring his family with him. Finances at the Norfolk club were tight at that time.

When the 1952/53 season commenced at Sydney's Sports Ground he was the star rider. Winning the coveted Golden Helmet he became the man to beat as he defended it against Aub Lawson, Lionel Levy and Keith Ryan.

He rode one test match in the 1952/53 series with a score of 6 points which was the final meeting of his Test career. Sydney journalist Bill McCarthy wrote in the 1953 Stenner's Annual "*top man at the Sportsground was the improved Alec Hunter,*" considering Lionel van Praag, Dick Seers, Junior Bainbridge, Jack Young and Aub Lawson were frequent starters at the 418 yard track, that was praise indeed. Returning to England after a years gap Alec found that Norwich were now in the elite First Division, Gone were his Australian team mates Syd Littlewood and Bob Leverenz and now under the captaincy of another Sydney rider Aub Lawson. Familiar faces were Phil Clark, Fred Rogers and Fred Pawson. The competition was fierce now in the top flight, it would prove to be a hard season.. The opening meeting on April 11 was the Firs Stadium trophy where he scored a creditable 10 points. The season from then on was one of highs and lows as he suffered a number of niggling injuries, a top score of 9 at New Cross was followed by a string of low scores until he lost his team spot at the beginning of May. Recalled for the match against Bristol he scored 5 points, a tally not to be achieved again for the rest of the season. Alec's last match in his British career was against Wimbledon on September 12., sadly he went out with a pointless meeting. His last race was an inglorious finish to his career as he collected a broken wrist and was excluded after a tangle with Cyril "Salty" Brine, the other riders in that last race were team mate Cyril Roger and Wimbledon's Irishman Dom "McGinty" Perry.

On his retirement from racing , Alec retained his interest by becoming an official at Parramatta. Away from speedway he started an engineering business in Sydney in 1954. Later on he moved to the Sunshine Coast where he kept in touch with former Norwich riders Bluey Thorpe, Bert Spencer and Syd Littlewood.

**Jan Hunter**, one of Alec's two daughters, takes up the story:

Dad retired from speedway after the 1953/54 season to concentrate on building his mechanical workshop business and raising a family. He had 3 children by then (finally got his son after 2 girls). He later sold this business and went into a partnership establishing a successful steel

fabrication factory in Brookvale. During this time he bought land in Forestville, built a home for the family and his interest turned to speedboats. He successfully competed in the "Bridge to Bridge" races a couple of times and our family and friends spent most weekends at Narrabeen Lakes water skiing. In 1958 our family home and all possessions were destroyed by fire. All we were left with was our car and the clothes we were wearing so some hard years followed for Mum and Dad to re-establish our family life.

Mum and Dad always had the gypsy spirit and after many years in the work-a-day world decided they wanted to see some of Australia and started travelling. My sister and I kept the home fires burning and I worked in the family business while Mum and Dad covered many miles over many months. Then one day I received a phone call to say they'd found a place they really liked - Caloundra in Queensland and had bought a block of 2 units, intending to live in one and rent out the other. They returned to Sydney, sold up and moved to Queensland (1969).

First they had a service station and Dad was the local Honda motorcycle dealer so he was often back in the saddle. Caloundra was a small town in those days and the servo was at the edge of town with a lot a vacant land beyond so Dad had plenty of space to 'test run' the bikes.

Periodically the circus came to town and set up on this area of land. One day, shortly after the circus had moved on to the next town, Dad was out for his burn around the paddock when he hit a very large deposit of what the elephant had left behind. Mum had to hose him off though almost helpless with laughter.

In 1973 Mum and Dad bought a sand and gravel yard and established Hunter's Sand & Gravel Pty Ltd. They built and operated this successful business until they sold out in 1981. During the years in between they were both active community members, Dad was President of the Caloundra RSL Services Club and Mum President of the Ladies Auxilliary (not sure of years here - will need to check). They did many more trips in and around Australia making many friends far and wide and once retired, they went further afield to England, Scotland, Europe, Hong Kong and they had a wonderful trip in America where they hired a Winnebago and took to the road for several weeks, travelling from one side of the US to the other. When they returned home Dad built their own Winnebago and they continued their gypsy lifestyle until health issues grounded them.

Dad passed away 6th September, 2002 and Mum 30th January, 2003. They had travelled life together and we reckon Mum couldn't let him go on without her. They had three children, nine grand-children and one great-grandson. One grandson (my eldest son) inherited his Grandfather's love of bikes and had a few good seasons in Motorcross. We had many happy trips following Mal around the circuit and Grandpa was a proud and happy man.

1949	Norwich	Division 2	27-61	
1949	Norwich	National T	5-14	
1950	Norwich	Division 2	28-158	
	Norwich	National T	6-35	
	Norwich	Kemsley cup	12-65	
1951	Norwich	Division 2	29-193	Champions
	Norwich	National T	11-81	
1953	Norwich	Division 1	10-9	
	Norwich	National T	7-34	
	Norwich	Coronation C	7-14	
1951/52	Golden helmet	Sydney SG		
1949/50	Australia	England	3-2	Sydney
1950/51	Australia	England	3-18	S A S
1951/52	Australia	England	1-6	Sydney
1950	Overseas	G B	1-	Walthamstow
1951	Overseas	G B	2-20	YAR LIV

Norwich historian **Bryan Tungate** recalled the first time he saw Alec, My first meeting with Alec was at the Firs Stadium in 1949 when I was just coming up to 10 years old & Alec was first at Norwich to join the "Stars" team

As usual there was about a dozen of us leaning on the safety fence watching Paddy Mills tearing around the track on a bike. Paddy would often do this just wearing a jacket & pair of overalls before getting ready for practice or taking some juniors for a training session. Suddenly we became aware of this chap walking down the pits. He was wearing a big hat and a leather coat with a big belt tied in a knot (not buckled like normally it would have been) He said something like "Jeez fellas, what's happening out there" - just as Paddy Mills came hammering round in a cloud of cinders. Les, the Chief mechanic said "Dont worry about him, that's Paddy warming up a bike for some new bloke who is coming here today for a trial to join the team" The chap

was somewhat taken aback and said "I think I ought to go back home as I don't go that fast when I am racing & he is only warming the bike up" When asked why? he replied "well I am the chap who has come for a trial". Needless to say everyone had a great laugh at this and from that day on Alec was "one of the boys" And I never did see that belt buckled, it was always tied in a big knot. Alec was a great asset to the Stars during his time with us. Although overshadowed by Bob Leverenz it would be fair to say that Alec certainly was well loved by the followers of the Norwich Stars speedway team from 1949 to his final farewell in 1953. I think Alec, like Leverenz & Kiwi Merv Neil all retired too early but they obviously had their reasons for packing in coming over here to ride speedway.

By **Tony Webb** with the valuable help of Jan Hunter, Bryan Tungate Norwich ,Speedway Researcher, the late Keith Farman Yarmouth historian, John Williams, Mike Kemp Norwich author and historian, Trevor Littlewood Barry Lane Historian Queensland Vintage Speedcar Assoc. 20/8/2009.

## Publications

Flush with a pile of birthday money, (How old Jim? – Old Jim fine!) **Jim**, has been “blowing it” on books.

The books by Barry Briggs, Leigh Adams and Ivan Mauger have all been added to the bookshelf after being read at a furious pace. These have been well reviewed elsewhere so we won't cover them here.

Suffice it it to say, they have all been a good read. However, if you do want to add a book to your list for Santa, let me commend the book about Alan Wilkinson titled From Two Wheels to Four. Sadly the four wheels are on a wheelchair rather than on a racing car and the book written by Richard Frost looks at Alan's life before and after the life changing accident. The book is a really good read. Contact

[TheAlanWilkinsonStory@hotmail.com](mailto:TheAlanWilkinsonStory@hotmail.com) for details of how to buy it or, the book is also available for sale by sending a cheque/PO to : The Alan Wilkinson Story, PO Box 1133, Warrington, Cheshire, WA1 9DJ. Cheques/PO payable to : The Alan Wilkinson Story. Cost is £18 (£15+£3P&P). The book is published by **Ian Corcoran** and every penny of the cover price (£15) goes directly to Wilkies' bank account. Ian personally published the book and thanks to forward subscribers and

advertisers plus utilisation of business contacts has meant that Alan gets everything.

**Tony Webb**'s book on Aussie Pioneer venue entitled "Speedway Tonight – The Story of Davies Park Speedway" is the result of some hard research and efforts like this are worthy of support. This traces the history of speedway racing at Davies Park, Brisbane 1927-1932. This well researched book by Tony Webb includes a study of the legendary promoter A.J. Hunting, commentary on the Australian riders corresponding seasons in England, details of company structures, Council decisions and social connections. Many little known facts were uncovered during the author's research which make interesting reading. Advice on the manuscript was received by four well-known speedway historians in the UK and Australia to ensure the book was as historically accurate as possible. Price is \$25. [approx. £12] plus postage \$13 approx[ £6] Available now from the author at 15 Tranquil Street, Sunnybank Hills, QLD 4109 AUSTRALIA phone 61 7 3711 5885 [binbooks@iinet.net.au](mailto:binbooks@iinet.net.au) Or from [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) just go to book search and key in "Speedway Tonight" . So, another for the armchair on a winter's night.

### **The Last Meeting at Harringay**

**Alan Bates** from Folkestone looks at the demise of Green Lanes. Harringay Speedway opened in 1928 and they continued until the early months of 1931 season, but were forced to close due to poor crowds, They returned to the scene in 1934 and operated until the outbreak of War in September 1939.

The track did not reopen straight after the war like the other Division One London tracks but they were back in 1947. This time they ran until 1954 when they finished bottom but one of the League.

There were a few open meetings in 1958 and 1959 and two of importance in 1961. The first 1961 was the Big challenge to the World Final, The Internationale while the second and last was the Provincial League Riders' Championship.

The first heat of this Championship saw three riders fall at the first bend and Tony Lewis excluded from the re-run. This was won by Maurie Mattingley (Plymouth) from Vic Ridgeon (Wolverhampton) and Graham Warren (Wolverhampton). Ivor Brown of Cradley Heath won

heat 2 when Pete Jarman of Stoke fell. Heat 3 had to be re-run when the tapes broke and Reg Reeves of Rayleigh won the re-run.

The next three heats went without mishap but in heat 7 Vic Ridgeon and Pete Jarman (again) fell to leave Trevor Redmond (Wolverhampton) and Len Silver (Exeter) the only finishers. Jack Scott (Plymouth) won heat 8 and Stan Stevens of Rayleigh won heat 9. At this stage Reg Reeves, Ivor Brown and Trevor Redmond had won both their races and Maurie Mattingley had scored 5 points from two races.

Trevor Redmond beat Ivor Brown in heat 10 and Reg Reeves won heat 12. Heat 12 saw Pete Jarman finish a race for the first time on the night but he would fall again in his next outing. Maurie Mattingley won heat 14 to take his total to 9 points after 4 which was level with Reg Reeves and Trevor Redmond who had only taken 3 rides. Ivor Brown (3 rides) and Cradley Heath team mate Harry Bastable (4 rides) both had 8 points.

The clash of the front runners in heat 15 saw Ivor Brown's chances go when he crashed and Reg Reeves took the 3 points. Trevor Redmond won the last of the races in the fourth round taking the flag at the end of heat 16.

The crunch for the unbeaten pair came when they met in heat 17. Trevor Redmond, who was leading the race fell at the last bend of their encounter and he effectively handed the win and the title to Reg who completed the night with an unbeaten 15 point maximum. It could be argued that Reg was lucky that two of the main contenders fell when he had raced against them.

Maurie Mattingley won his last race and, as he and Trevor Redmond had both finished joint second on 12 points, they need to face each other in a run off. This was won by Trevor in what turned out to be the very last race ever run at Harringay Speedway.

The top finishers were Reg Reeves 15, Trevor Redmond 12, Maurie Mattingley 12, Ivor Brown 11, Stan Stevens 11 and Jack Scott 11.

### **Well! Did They Ever Turn Up?**

Recently a programme turned up which was unusual to say the least. It is folded A4 sheet for the Wales and South England versus Poland match of 5<sup>th</sup> August 1966 at Newport. In the programme Ken Sharples advises that the real programme had gone adrift on British Railways and

that they may not have been able to get hold of them in time. A quick email exchange with Brian Collins, who runs the excellent web site with International details, confirms the programmes did turn up and Brian features both covers on his site.

**Jim Henry**

### **Southern Area League**

As well as progressing the 1960 season for the web I have been trying to pull together the details for the Southern Area League which operated in the 1950s. If I haven't been in touch with you and you may have information, please do get in touch if you have any heat detail information you could give me. It is a hazy time and it would be good to record it for posterity. I'm not just looking for the League events but also the many open meetings and such like events. Interestingly, for many years, the races at Rye House were only over three laps. The work is throwing up many interesting names.

**Jim Henry**

### **Bert Perrigo**

**Frank Whitehouse**, from Birmingham, liked this item and adds that Bert was a member of the Birmingham Motor Cycle Club which staged the first meeting at Monmore Green in Wolverhampton on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1928.

The club also opened its own track at Greet in Birmingham in August 1928 and this was located right behind the BSA motorcycle factory. Bert raced in the 500cc event beating Jack Parker to reach the final which was won by Bunny Wilcox who had a faster BSA.

Bert was also solo winner of the British Expert Trials in 1929 and again in 1931. He was also President of the club in 1950.

### **Brighter Largs 1930**

When researching my history of Glasgow's pre war speedway tracks I came across a mention of the possibility of dirt track racing featuring in the above event. At long last I managed visit the local history record office in the area to check out the local press namely the Largs and Millport Gazette.

The newspaper reports that the possibility action at Troon was mooted by the Town Council in May 1930 and they were actively thinking about staging five or six races on a running track at Barrfields in the town in the last week in July. Someone had visited White City and concluded their potential venue was a bit narrow for four bikes but could accommodate three.

For whatever reason, most likely the narrowness of the track, the idea must have been shelved as the Brighter Largs week passed off without any bike action.

Barrfields can be found on Google Maps just south of Brisbane Street and immediately west of Brisbane Road in the town of Largs which is on the Clyde coast between Ayr and Greenock. **Jim Henry**

As a PS I also had wee look at a local paper close to Ayr for 1937. The second meeting had fleeting mention stating the spectators at the track “were protected by a solid wooden safety fence.”

### **My Mike Faria Story**

**Jerry Decius** from California has penned the following item on his role of encouraging one America’s best to take up speedway.

In the late 1950s, as a teenager, I first fell in love with motorcycles. I don’t really know why for certain, I just did! I’ve always wanted to ride from the beginning, never upon the streets or highways. My father built and raced two of his own midget cars from late 1947 until late 1953, both having the famed Ford V-8 60 flathead engine. That’s probably when my interest in engines and how they functioned began. From September of 1959 until September of 1963 I served in Uncle Sam’s military service. Later in 1963 I purchased a 200cc Bultaco and began my amateur racing career. First riding scrambles, then advancing to quarter-mile and half-mile class ‘C’ dirt track racing.

In the Spring of 1974 I was first introduced to the sport of motorcycle speedway. When I saw my first speedway race my jaw almost literally fell to the ground! No brakes? No gearbox? I was immediately ‘hooked’ as they say. I purchased a beautiful 4B J.A.P. from a friend who owned the local motorcycle shop. In the spring of 1975 I had the opportunity to purchase an early model JAWA 890 (2 valve) and began using the JAP for a back up machine. I’ll have to admit I wasn’t all that good but I was surely having the time of my life. God, did I ever have fun! I have

always felt that if a person got too serious with racing, all the fun was taken, out of it. Besides I had a good full time day job driving a city bus, making pretty good money.

It was in early spring of 1975 and I had already been racing speedway for a year. I was working a split shift and had noticed a sign on the front of an old abandoned building one night on the way home that read "opening soon, motorcycle accessory shop". I passed the building every night on my trip home from the bus garage. Later, after the store had opened, I would stop by on my split shift and talk to the young 19 year old manager.

I learned his name was Mike Faria and he was co-manager of the store with his brother Dave. I had heard of Mike as he was already making a name for himself in scrambles and dirt track racing. I also found out later that I drove a bus with his grandmother Dorothy.

Several weeks went by and I would stop at the motorcycle accessory shop from time to time and talk motorcycles in general with Mike. The subject always seemed to turn to racing and I suggested, just as a passing fancy, that one day he should buy a speedway motorcycle and give the sport a try as he would probably like it.

In the early summer of 1975 Mike first tried his hand at speedway racing. By the Summer of 1979 he was proclaimed to be the top rider in Northern California.

I lost contact with Mike in 1982 when I was forced to quit racing because of medical reasons but found out a few years ago that by the mid 1980s he had become the Californian champion and, in the Fall of 1990, he had become the motorcycle speedway champion of the entire United States. I also learned he had ridden for the Belle Vue Aces in England and the Edinburgh Monarchs in Scotland during the 1995 season. (Mike had a year with the Scottish Monarchs at Shawfield in 1996.)

I am very proud of Mike and will never forget the day I suggested to him that he should try motorcycle speedway racing. I might not have started him in speedway racing but I know in my heart that I planted that seed in his mind. I have only talked to him a few times in all these years but he still recognizes me and always says something to the effect of "Hi Jerry, how are you?" That for me is the best part.

Mike is still riding a speedway motorcycle as well as a 20 year old boy. Good luck to you Mike.

## Information Gathering

Our poor old Webmaster **Ron McNeil** has been enjoying the best of health and this has resulted in a bit of a backlog of updates. However, and to his credit, Ron has been struggling along and you should see a few more updates including some Provincial League files for 1960. Over the Winter Jim is going to press on with 1960 and hopefully that season will be up and running before next season. As ever Jim is looking to fill the gaps in the files on the site for the period 1946 – 1964. Jim's needs lists do continue to shrink but there are still loads especially Wombwell, and Aldershot which have massive gaps. **Bob Ozanne**, who is plugging away with the pre-war era, could do with help to pull together the meeting information for that era. If you are interested in this era we can put you in touch with Bob. **Steve Wilkes** has sorted out details for 1965 to 1969 and has helped Jim with details of meetings not reported in the Speedway Star for the period 1960 – 1964. Again, if you want to help for this era, we can put you in touch with Steve.

**Mark Aspinell** and **Joe Wake** both deserve mentions and thanks for chipping in files to swell the ranks and **Robert Bamford** has to be thanked provided his files for Swindon 1960 to 1964 while the group fronted by **Stuart Staite-Aris** must be thanked for their Coventry research which is now appearing on the web.

The gaps close with every file added and we welcome any help.

In addition to the above we now have the late **Keith Farman's** Yarmouth information on CD so if you need to check anything out there – please contact Jim.

Finally, **Barry Stephenson** is working on compiling details of wartime meetings which were not just confined to Belle Vue. Rye House, for example, ran semi-regularly during this era. If you have any meeting details for this era (late 1939 to 1945), please get in touch and we'll put you in contact with Barry. Yet again the fruits of Barry's efforts will appear on the web in due course and will bury a few myths about this era.

As I boringly remind you all, all too often, and quote Rabbin Burns "Facts are cheils that win a ding." With the heat details the facts can be abstracted and arguments sorted.

If you don't have access to the web but would like the information for use on a computer we can burn files to blank CDs so you can look at them on your computer. We can't supply paper copies as most files run to pages and pages and with postage on top it would not be practicable.

**Jim Henry**

## **Who Were They?**

In compiling the 1960 season I've come across a few names which raise what is left of my eyebrows. Here is one for you.

A G Lindsay rode for Liverpool v Cradley Heath on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May. The Speedway Star & News of the day mentioned the aforesaid Mr Lindsay and suggested in no uncertain terms that he was someone else without actually saying who. We probably all know that Ronnie Genz rode for a Provincial side later on using an assumed name so ringers aren't that unusual.

I can't think of any others just as I type but I'll bet there were a fair few more over the period. The late Keith Farman uncovered a fair few in the pre-war East Anglian scene while the pirate or unlicensed ventures in the Greater Manchester area were quite open about it with riders such as Dan De Lyon and the Masked man. In later days we have Igor Barnov and even Kid Bodie who were Johnny Jones and Howard Cole respectively.

While we are there at this meeting, who was G.Whitehouse who turned out for Cradley? [Spot Press Geoff Whitehouse]

**Jim Henry**

**Deadline for items for next edition is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011**

**Web Master: Ron McNeil**

**[www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk](http://www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk)**

**Contact at [info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk](mailto:info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk)**

**Or [jjh1950@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jjh1950@blueyonder.co.uk)**

**The Speedway Researcher is edited and published by:**

**Graham Fraser**

**Jim Henry**

**All mail to Jim at 90 Greenend Gardens,**

**Edinburgh, EH17 7QH please.**

**24 Graham Tel : 01786 471992**

**Jim Tel : 0131 664 7185**