

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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Yet another Volume End

It seems hardly a year since we were looking forward to this Volume and the milestone of 50 editions. Now we are looking at rolling on to Volume 14. The task of coming up with fresh items doesn't get any easier and we do welcome your contributions to share with fellow subscribers.

Yet again we are sending out the renewal form and we do look for your feedback. We will make a commitment to publishing any requests for information within Issues 1 and 2 of the next volume.

We are still asking a paltry £5.00 per Volume but, due to rising postage costs, this might be the last year before we have to raise the subscription.

Harold's Cross Stadium, Dublin, Ireland

George P. Kearns writes about Dublin's first speedway track.

Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium opened on Easter Tuesday, April 10th 1928 with accommodation for 40,000 patrons and a car park large enough to hold 1,000 cars. Admission prices, of which there were six grades, were as follows; Grand Stand 5/-for a gent and 2/6 for a lady, however the Reserved Grand Stand cost an extra 2/6. The Special Enclosure cost 2s for a gent and 1/- for a lady, while entry to the popular enclosure cost 1/-.

Harold's Cross Stadium was Dublin's second greyhound stadium and Ireland's third. The first to open its doors was "Celtic Park" in Belfast which opened on April 18, 1927 which was closely followed by Ringsend's Shelbourne Park which held its first race on May 14, 1927.

The first race at the track was the “Ulster Plate” for bitches, with a winner’s prize of £10 and from day one Harold’s Cross was a major success.

Harold’s Cross Stadium was also home to some of the greatest greyhounds in Irish history, if not the world and to name but two, I would tell you of “Mick the Miller” who was born in an Irish vicarage, named after the odd-job man that was employed there and bred by the Parish Priest, Father Brophy. The other was of course the Killorglin born “Spanish Battleship” that was bred by the late Tim O’Connor. Having outlined a little of Ireland’s Greyhound history and further to a lot of research on the history of speedway, I found a need to mention the fact that it became very apparent to me that without the dog tracks of this world and quite a number of pony trotting tracks, speedway as we know it today could never have evolved as it did.

To the best of my knowledge there were seven directors on the board of Harold’s Cross Greyhound Stadium, with J.B. Frazer as Chairman and as J.B. was also a director of London’s White City Greyhound Stadium that also featured the sport of speedway it was inevitable that speedway would one day come to Harold’s Cross Stadium.

By September 15, 1928 a suitable track had been laid and dirt track racing came back to Dublin on that day. “Thrills and Spills” were advertised and thrills and spills were served in abundance. In one serious accident, riders C. Scallon and P.T. Kehoe crashed and Kehoe had to be stretchered off the track with a badly dislocated shoulder. It also appeared from reports in the media that nearly every lead rider fell at one time or another. Both Dublin riders T. G. Byrne and T. Jenkinson lost races through falls.

There were thrills galore as the riders with the roaring of their open exhausts skidded around the bends in a sort of sea-saw motion which caused showers of dust to shoot up into the air and then with a mad acceleration of their powerful machines, they sped down the straights at great speed.

One contemporary T.D, who was a much travelled person, was heard to remark that this newest form of motor cycle racing was comparable only to Spanish bull-fights for the thrills it afforded spectators.

The track was 440 yards and in all, twenty one, one mile races were held. The track record was set by Buzz Hibberd at 1min, 43 secs. T. Jenkinson also set a record for the mile standing start at 1 min, 50.45 secs.

Despite numerous opposition fixtures on that particular Saturday, the meeting was quite a success and many thousands turned up for the day. The promoters, Leinster Motor Cycle Club were congratulated on their organisation and efficiency. Most of the leading motor cycling people of Ireland attended as did thousands of others and it was well noted that quite a number of females were in attendance at the meeting.

It should also be noted that this motor cycling event was advertised as "Dirt Track racing, just as was the first meeting in London's High Beech track. However one member of the Irish media was a little ahead of the time when he referred to the event as speedway.

Buzz Hibberd of Australia and Taffy Williams of Wales both gave thrilling demonstrations of broadsiding around the bends as did London Speedway Champions, Jimmy Stevens and Larry Coffey at a later meeting. Larry Coffey of Dublin was a star professional rider and a winner of many international races on the tracks of London.

It is also worth mentioning that Stanley Woods the famous T.T and Continental road race winner made his first appearance on a dirt track by taking part in the Leinster Clubs meeting on Saturday, September 29, 1928 and proved himself as dashing and skilful as one of the most experienced cinder track riders.

While Stanley didn't attempt much broadsiding he did employ all his road racing skills on a real dirt track machine and made his way up from the scratch and managed to win the handicap event from J.J. Byrne by one second.

On Saturday, October 13, 1928 the Leinster Motor Cycle and Light Car Club held their final dirt track race meeting of the season in Harold's Cross and as it turned out, the last dirt track meeting to be held in Dublin for the following twenty years.

Thrills galore were promised and admission prices were reduced and no cross channel riders were invited to participate. This was to be a day for Irish riders only and it soon became obvious that it was one of the most interesting meetings of the three. With fantastic broadsiding, top speeds and neck and neck finishes, the fans had a field day and most certainly got their money's worth.

Stanley Woods on his Douglas was once again the main attraction and won the Leinster handicap against Jenkinson, but failed to beat Jenkinson in the Challenge Race when Jenkinson a young rider with great skills beat Woods by 2.5 seconds.

While the Leinster Motor Cycle and Light Car Club were the promoters of the three events at Harold's Cross, the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland was the ruling body for this sport and the Harold's Cross meetings were licensed by them.

At a meeting of the Leinster Motor Cycle and Light Car Club later in that year of 1928, a most unfortunate decision was made in so far as the onerous work-load involved was prohibitive and that they would not promote anymore dirt-track racing.

Windsor Park, Belfast had also applied for a permit that year, but this request was refused by the Ulster Centre and that put an end to dirt track racing in Ireland for many a long year.

The above is an in-part excerpt from George's book "A History of Speedway: The Dublin Experience" which is available at €20 plus p&p. Please contact the Author at georgemamie@eircon.net }

The History of Preston Speedway - Part 2 - 1930

Graham Fraser continues his history of the Lancashire track.

Regular readers of the Researcher will recall that interspersed in recent editions of the magazine has been a serialised history of dirt track racing in Preston at the Farringdon Park Stadium. That covered the second year of the sport in the UK, 1929, when league speedway started and large crowds were attracted to the new phenomenon that was speedway. 1929 saw Preston as one of the top teams in the country with a solid teams of name riders who not only finished highly placed in a league where fixtures were not completed but more notably triumphed in the English Dirt Track (Northern) League Knock-Out Cup. Finishing on such a high point the expectation of the Preston promotion and fans must have be great for the 1930 season.

However, speedway at this time was not all about leagues and cups. Challenge team matches, as well as open meetings were part of the staple fare of the sport in these early days. A Grand Opening Meeting, as it was billed, started matters at Farringdon Park on Good Friday, 18th April 1930 with an Inter Team Race between the Probables (Ham Burrill; Frank Smith; George Reynard; Frank Chiswell & Claude Rye (Res) vs the Possibles (Joe Abbott; Cliff Whateley; Jack Chiswell; Freddy Williams & Crazy Hutchins (Res) – the Probables come out victorious by 21 points to 13.

An open meeting followed on Easter Monday in which Frank Varey set a new track record (I min 22.2) in a Match Race with Joe Abbott. Then on Saturday 26th April the Northern League season opened for Preston at Rochdale's Athletic Grounds Stadium and in the new four rider, six heat format (& new points scoring of 3/2/1/0) adopted for 1930, the away team triumphed with a comfortable 11-25 win. The Preston team for that opening meeting was: Ham Burrill (Capt); George Reynard; Joe Abbott; Jack Chiswell & Frank Smith (Res).

The first home meeting soon followed on Thursday, 1st May (Thursdays were to become Preston's normal league meeting night) and it featured the return league meeting with Rochdale. After such a comprehensive win at Rochdale expectations were for a comfortable home win and therefore the 27-9 win came as little surprise, as the Lilywhites started their league campaign with strong performances.

In the open meeting that followed two days later the format of match races, often featuring the local and northern speedway aces, and Junior and Senior Handicap or prize races. The first match race that day saw Squib Burton beat Frank Charles 2-0 for the prize in a best of three set of races. The main home riders were thin on the ground that night at Farringdon Park as the league team had an away fixture at a new venue, Edinburgh's Marine Gardens whose team included Scottish stalwarts Drew McQueen; George McKenzie; Len Stewart and Syd Parsons. The Preston quartet, most of whom probably had little or no experience of the Scottish track started well with a 5-1 in heat 1, but Edinburgh hit back to draw level in heat 2. A 3-3 in heat three kept the teams level but a 5-1 to the Scots in heat 5 swung the match in favour of the homesters and a final heat home 4-2 saw Edinburgh beat Preston 21-15 on the night. Top scorers on the night were Parsons 8 (Edinburgh) & Abbott/Reynard 5 (Preston).

1930 Northern League fixtures tended to have home and away fixtures against the same opposition in the same week. So it was that Preston entertained Edinburgh on Thursday 8th May with Preston fielding the same quartet and Drew McQueen absent, replaced in the team by Gordon Spalding. Although Edinburgh kept the heat scores close they were unable to win any heats losing two 5-1s, 3 x 4-2s and a 3-2 to a resurgent Preston team who gained full revenge winning by 25-10. The Lancashire Daily Post reported at the time that the new Northern Speedway League featuring: Edinburgh Marine Gardens; Belle Vue; Warrington; Manchester White City; Glasgow White City; Sheffield;

Liverpool and Preston with Liverpool only starting its league against Warrington on 9th May 1930 – three weeks after most other teams. The local Preston newspaper also reported that a new South Western League was being contemplated to include tracks at Cardiff, Exeter and Bristol. This was a different league to the Southern League which operated in 1930. (Have any readers ever seen anything about this league proposal – the Researcher would be keen to hear from you!). The same paper also reported quite a number of Northern riders from 1929 who had moved to Southern League tracks for 1930 – like Arthur Atkinson (Leeds to Wembley); “Winks” Rice (Preston to Southampton); Geoff Taylor (Halifax to Southampton). Finally, the Post’s Speedway Notes Column of 10 May 1930 reported on northern riders who had successfully ridden in Copenhagen and Hamburg some only returning to ride in Britain in early May 1930. Tommy Price had captained a team of English riders in two international matches with the Danes of which the visitors won both. It was suggested the local Danes had not attained the riding skills of the English or Australians but were enthusiastic and had several promising men. (Does anyone know anything about this 1930 tour of Denmark and Germany?).

Saturday, 10 May saw an open meeting at the Preston track watched by 6,000 fans. Two track records were broken firstly by Joe Abbott who lowered his flying lap time of 20 secs to 19.4 secs, then Ham Burrill reduced Frank Varey’s previous best four rolling laps record to 1min 21.4 secs. This meeting also saw the establishment of the George Formby Cup competition named after the popular variety star of that era.

On Wednesday, 14 May Preston ventured into new territory with a friendly meeting in Cardiff against the local team that was called Wales in some reports. It appeared the Welsh team was predominantly comprised of the Cardiff Southern League side. The teams lined up as follows:

Wales (Cardiff): Ronnie Baker; Tom Lougher; Ted Bravery; Fred Hampson; Jack Luke & Bill Clibbert

Preston: Ham Burrill; Joe Abbott; George Reynard; Jack Chiswell; Frank Smith & Claude Rye

The match was over 9 heats and after taking an 8-3 advantage by heat 2 Preston were steadily reigned in with a home 5-1 in heat 3 and a series of home 3-2 advantages that going into the final heat it was 22-22 and a

Cardiff 3-2 gave the homes side a narrow 25-25 win. Top scorers were: Ronnie Baker (Wales) 7 & Ham Burrill (Preston) 9 (To be continued)

The Mystery Cradley Riders (and More X Files)

Glynn Shailes confirms that the rider at Cradley I thought was Geoff Whitehouse was indeed Geoff. However, Glynn sets another “hare” up and running with a tale about the three Derek Skyners. Derek Skyner was a Belle Vue second halfer who went on to ride for Liverpool in the Provincial League in 1960. According to Glynn there is a tale that the real Derek was injured and his place was taken by a rider who was Derek Skyner for the night but he was under age.

Now the tale doesn't just end there as a third person took the name Derek Skyner and rode and, according to Glynn, the third incarnation went on to become a speedway referee.

So we do have a mystery as to who were Derek Skyner two and three?

Kevin Torpie

Tony Webb has compiled this resume of a popular Aussie of the 1960s. Kevin, who was born in Victoria, started his speedway career at Redcliff Showgrounds Brisbane in 1959 His first ride was in a stockbike event on January 9 . His first solo ride was on February 14 1959. He was a regular at the Ekka and Redcliffe before travelling to Victoria 1961/1962 season . He travelled to UK in 1962 with Dudley McKean where he raced two seasons with the Middlesbrough Bears and then three seasons with Edinburgh Monarchs. He was always a reliable second string in the UK, but his Australian form was a revelation after his retirement from overseas racing winning the Queensland title in 1969, 2nd 1968 and third 1971, He competed in the Australian title in 1970 with third place . Capped for Australia 14 times 1967-1973 with a test match average 7.34

It is said that Kevin's finest hour was on a cold wet night at Edinburgh in 1964, when the Monarchs clinched the Scottish Cup with a one point win over arch rivals Glasgow Tigers and Kevin was the toast of Edinburgh. The story related by Ian Hoskins, who regards it as one of the finest races ever seen in Edinburgh, goes like this.

The Monarchs were up against it, they needed a heat win to put them in front, with two heats to go, Kevin was known to be a very fast gater, but nearly always tired during the four laps. With the Monarch's hopes hinging on a change in fortune, Kev gated like a bat out of hell, for once he kept in front, blocking every move by the Tiger's Kiwi pairing of Trev Redmond and Graham Coombes, Redmond at that moment had won his first three races, the fans went berserk as Kev rode the race of his life to finish in front of Redmond and to add icing to the cake Monarch Bert Harkins edged out Coombes for third place and the Monarchs were home and hosed. Many a dram was sunk that in honour of Kevin Torpie.! A dejected Redmond said afterwards "I would have put my shirt on beating Torpie but he just kept going and going!!"

1962

On his arrival in Britain in 1962 he had a few meetings at Rye House before joining Middlesbrough, his first season with the Bears returned 40 points. His first International booking was for the Overseas team at Middlesbrough.

1962/63 Wintered in uk

1963 a better season scoring 54 points from 24 matches.

Reserve berths for the Overseas team at St.Austell 13/08 0 points
Middlesbrough 11/10 0 point

1964

Transferred was to Edinburgh for a fee of the order of £25 and scored 40 points. Although he appears in a Middlesbrough team photo in 1964 he moved on before the Bears had staged many matches.

1965 Edinburgh 21 matches 67 points 3.90 average

1966

The 1966 British season was not a good one for Kevin. He battled to gain a team place in the strong Monarchs team. When Bengt Jansson was injured he came in to the team on May 14 in the match against Sheffield scoring a win and a second paid 6, but the management opted for the controversial guest replacement for Jansson in future matches which saw him regulated to the second half. A creditable 4 points in the World Championship round at Edinburgh on May 21 was his next meeting. Riding in two open meetings for his former team Middlesboro saw him have a pointless meeting on June 30 and a score of 6 on July 14, but the Cleveland Park revival venture was short lived.

Kevin's final meeting in his UK career was for Edinburgh at West Ham with a score of 2. For the record, his last race was with Brian Leonard, Don Smith and partner Neville Slee.

Edinburgh 2 matches only. 8 Points

Middlesbrough 2 matches 6 points.

1967/1968

Selected for the first test in Sydney on November 11, failed to score .

Returned to Brisbane in November after 2 years in Victoria.

Represented Victoria against England. Rode for Queensland against the English team. Dropped for the second test in Brisbane. Scored 8 in Australian championship on December 9, recalled for the fourth test in Sydney on December 16

Joint third in Queensland titles at Ipswich

Queensland 24 v England 30 Brisbane 18/11/1967 5 points

Queensland 13 v England 34 Brisbane 27/12/1967 4 points

1968/1969

Australia v England January 11 scored 4 point in home loss 51-57 in Brisbane

Queensland 24 v England 30 4/1/1969 6 points

1969/1970

Won Queensland title on January 11 1970 from Doug White and Bert Kingston in dramatic circumstances after 4 restarts. Steve Reinke harshly excluded.

1970/1971 Third in Queensland title at Ipswich. Won Queensland title at Ekka from Bert Kingston and Eric Boocock. Scored 4 points for Australia on 30 January 1971 in Sydney 1970 third in Australian titles..

1971/1972 Scored 7 in Sydney test and 8 and 6 in the two Brisbane tests. 1972/1973 rode in four tests at Sydney recorded 6, Brisbane 11 and 15 and back in Sydney 6 Queensland 67 v Great Britain 41 Ekka 4/12/1971 10 points Rockhampton 66 v England 42 13/12/1971 4 points

1972/1973

Sydney 23/12 6

Sydney 30/12 11

Brisbane 6/01 15

Brisbane 13/01 6

Australian select 77 v England 31 Rockhampton 23/01/1973 16 points

Joint Editor Jim Comments: Kevin was my favourite as he was so unpredictable. He could gate but thereafter it was a bit of suspense as to what he would do for the next four laps. Kevin was living proof that the

first man into the first bend would not necessarily win the race. Right now I'm not sure if it was the historic race with Trevor Redmond but it was in a race with Trevor that Kevin's exhaust pipe came loose from the engine and effectively swung out making overtaking on the outside very dodgy.

Who Were They Or Who Did They Used To Be?

The article a bit earlier on in the magazine was a taster for this longer article by **Glynn Shailes**.

I was very interested in the article, Who Were They by Jim in the last issue of The Speedway Researcher. Changing ones name has been going on now for many years and for various reasons. It's probably the Show Business fraternity where it happens most of all, the reason often being how a name will look on bill boards or cinema screen, and if the given name doesn't suit, then it's changed.

Reading the details of the speedway boys who have undergone a name change, I couldn't help but think of my great friend, (and a friend of The Speedway Researcher too), the late Keith Farman. Keith who is sadly missed had details at his fingertips of riders who rode under different names to those they were born with. Keith once sent me a letter telling me how Dick Wise, the Yarmouth promoter, when talking about his riders often forgot their names so he just gave them new ones. Thus Reginald Charles Derishley became Charlie Smith, Bill Williams appeared in the first ever Poole programme as Dave Williams, and he also gave a brilliant young rider who began his career with Yarmouth , and whose name was Raymond Arthur Bales, the first name of Billy which stuck to him throughout his speedway career.

Perhaps the most famous name change in our country's history didn't happen in speedway, since it was the King of Britain himself, George V who changed his name. It was during the First World War (1914 -1918) when the name of our Royals was Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Very, German, and in those days of war anything German offended, so the Royal Family name was changed to Windsor. Also during those days there was a cricketer, one Stanford Schultz who played for Cambridge University and Lancashire. The poor fellow's name offended so he, like the Monarch, changed his name becoming Stanford Storey.

But to return to speedway, one of the earliest name changes concerned an Australian rider with the perfectly pleasant name of John Glass.

However, Johnnie Hoskins (who else) it was claimed wanted an Irish rider in his side (just why no one seems to know) but John Glass became Mick Murphy and enjoyed a great career with the name. Now to answer Jim's query regarding Barry Lindsay. Barry was in fact Ken Sharples, the Belle Vue and England Star who had retired to become the Belle Vue manager. That was the position he held in 1960 and with the advent of the Provincial League, there were rumours that Ken was going to make a comeback. This in fact Ken did but it was in 1964 for the short lived Provincial League newcomers, Sunderland. This was some four years after his rides for the Liverpool Pirates. Did Ken get into hot water I wonder as there is little in the magazine of the day?

Jim mentioned Ronnie Genz, who, in 1964, at a time when the Provincial League was riding black (outside the sanctions of the Speedway Control Board), rode once for Exeter as Reg Neal. 'Genno' whose National League team was Oxford, was called before the Control Board and fined £5. However, Bob Andrews, who tried to ride for Wolverhampton under his real name, was fined £100 and a High Court Judge, sitting in Chambers, made sure Bob kept riding for Wimbledon. Perhaps Bob would have been less harshly punished if he'd ridden under a pseudonym.

Remember Kid Bodie? This was the name which Howard Cole, a former Wolverhampton mascot, rode in the early days of his career. The 'Bodie' part of the name was taken from a TV Western Series called Cheyenne and the hero was an actor named Clint Walker, a six foot plus man, whose fists and guns did his talking. Another rider who took one of his names from a TV hero was an American who rode for Birmingham and Eastbourne in the British League days. His full name was Stephen Michael Rausa, but here he rode as Steve Columbo, the Columbo part being taken from a dishevelled detective played by the actor Peter Falk.

When Berwick joined the Second Division of the National League in 1969, the Bandits had two riders who rode under assumed names in their squad. There was skipper Mark Hall who was actually a bank official named Walter Elliott. The second was Roy Williams, who had ridden for Glasgow in 1965 under his real name of Bernie Lagrosse. Another Bandit of that era also used an assumed name but on ice. Alan Hartley, who went on to bigger things in accountancy, turned out as Bengt Mudegaarde.

There, was, however, back in 1960, a rider who not only acquired a new name, but, thanks to Reg Fearman, a new Nationality as well.

Remember Igor Baranov, the 'Russian' rider who some say had swum ashore from a fishing boat, claimed Political Asylum, and asked for rides with a view to becoming a speedway rider? Well, as old time Edinburgh supporters and ex-Monarch Gordon Mitchell will tell you, Igor was really a Scottish Novice named Jack Jones.

Gordon remembers meeting Jones at a speedway office parading as Baranov and Jones doing his best to gesture to Gordon not to give the game away. Luckily for Jones, Gordon stayed silent for long enough and Igor breathed again for a while.

Whether Reg really was in on it or not, it made good press in the local Stoke newspaper the "Evening Sentinel". The gimmick / deception might have worked had Igor been a better rider but despite being as keen as mustard he did not cut it and drifted away from the sport to adopt yet another name and profession and as Jock McCoy the British Heavyweight Champion working on the Independent Circuit.

Reg was responsible for another piece of news which hit the headlines in the Sunday newspapers no less.

The other good story is the myth that built up around Ray Humphries who decided that, after a stunt involving Reg Fearman, he wanted to be programmed as Tyburn Gallows. The powers that be of the day took rather a dim view of Ray's adopted name and, it was only after he changed it, via the Deed Poll process which operates in England, to Tyburn Gallows. Officialdom could do nothing to stop him being programmed under his new name.

Whilst there will doubtless be loads more, here is a sample of those men who rode with a nickname different to that with which they were born.

Leonard Edgar (Dick) Geary; George Thomas Nicholas (Mick) Mitchell; Guy Allen (Sam) Ermolenko; Hubert (Goog) Hoskin; Gordon (Goog) Allan; Edwin Vernon (Chum) Taylor; Fredrick James (Oz) Osborne; Ernest Ward (Pedlar) Palmer; George (Huck) Fynn; Ronald Ernest (Pat) Flanagan; Arthur John (Buddy) Fuller; Edwin Dennis (Crusty) Pye; Dennis Gordon (Ticker) James; Terence Ernest (Dick) Shepherd.

Two good examples of others who went a bit further and had a complete change of name include George Snailham who became Tich Read and Horace Albert Burke who became Paddy Mills.

Bus Strike Stopped Play

As I work through the meeting detail files I come across some unusual items and the 1958 at Wimbledon is one which is interesting. The Dons, who had been riding on the crest of a wave, were unceremoniously brought to a halt by a long bus strike in London. The first meeting to fall victim to industrial action was the match versus Swindon on 5th May and 6 meetings were definitely scuppered whilst I suspect a meeting was scheduled for 19th May and it too did not happen.

Wimbledon did race a few away fixtures and on the last date for a postponement in London, Monday 16th May, the Dons raced Poole Pirates at Wimbourne Road as the home team.

This must have been soul destroying for the fans and riders.

This is, maybe, a bit ironic as Wimbledon played hosts to Wembley Lions in 1948 when the good old Empire Stadium was being used for the London Olympics.

Jim Henry

Rain Offs

A few editions ago we published a very interesting bit of work by **Barry Stephenson** on rained off meetings on a season by season basis from 1946. Barry has updated the file and it is an exhaustive record to the end of the 2010 season. Now I too love playing with numbers and based on Barry's stats it appears that of the 56,640 meetings a total of 4088 have been rained off. This is an average of 7.2 per cent per year. The worst season was 2004 with a staggering 14.6 per cent of meetings off while 1993 (14.3%) and 2008 (14.2%) not far behind.

Taking the data down a bit further, the JAP era, which I have attributed to 1946 – 1964, the average was 3.4% while the Jawa 2 valve era of 1965 – 1974 the average was up to 5.1%. Moving on the 4 valve uprights which can be set at 1975 – 1996 the average rises yet again to 8.8% and the laydown era 1997 to date the average is up to 10.7%.

On the face of it it does appear that the faster bikes have become, the greater the number of rainoffs.

I am sure that the percentages cannot be totally attributed to the machines and there must be some statistical correction to take account of the variations in the amount of annual rainfall (global warming ?).

Are there any budding, or fully grown for that matter, weather experts

out there who can tell us if there is a definite link to the faster machines or not? If we had slower bikes would have fewer rain offs? **Jim Henry**

OXLEY MOTOR SPEEDWAY BRISBANE

Tony Webb has sent us this item about the venue he calls **The mystery track.**

Oxley Motor Speedway remains one of the great speedway mysteries of all time as regards to its location and what really took place there. Oxley was the dream of legendary promoter and entrepreneur A.J. Hunting, of Maroubra, Ekka, Davies Park and later International Speedways fame. It is a fair assumption that, had the Oxley Motor track project become a reality, then the whole course of speedway history could well have gone in a different direction.

Following Hunting's departure from Sydney in 1926, his ambition was to develop a Speedway Motor Drome in the outer Brisbane suburb of Oxley. It was due to his plans continually being thwarted that he promoted first at Brisbane Exhibition ground, then at Davies Park, there were also short lived promotions at Ipswich and Toowoomba, all under the umbrella of National Speedways Ltd. However it was Oxley that was the prime focus in his grand plan. The other ventures were really to appease his shareholders who had invested in the company, with Oxley as the jewel in the crown and were looking for financial return.

The facts were that the Oxley site was cheap land in a flood plain where the water had reached a level of 3 metres on at least three occasions over the previous 30 years. The second factor was that Hunting got off on the wrong foot with Brisbane City Council as he never submitted any formal application for the site until he had built the track. He was then turned down. The third factor was the location was some 12 miles from the city centre with poor public transport, but of course this issue was never tested as no official meetings were held, apart from several practise meetings in mid 1927. It was indeed the track that never was. To back track to 1925 and give some background on the company structures that lead up to the Oxley venture we have to start at Maroubra. This one mile concrete motor drome styled on the famous Brooklands track in England, was built by Olympia Speedways Sydney Ltd at a cost of £42,000 opening in December 1925 to a crowd of 74,000. For whatever reasons the Olympia company was wound up in

March 1926, the track was sold for to a shareholder for £10850. It was sold again in 1927 for the sum of £2500, by that time the original shareholders were far from happy.

Hunting, who was actually a Melbourne toy manufacturer, had already registered a company titled Olympic Speedways [Brisbane] Ltd in Sydney in August 1925, prior to the opening of Maroubra. The seven original subscribers were all Sydney based. He had purchased 167 acres at Oxley in Brisbane for the express purpose of building a one mile track for cars and motorcycles. Hunting moved to Brisbane and set up residence at the Regatta hotel in Milton with offices in the CBD.

The prospectus was advertised widely in the Brisbane press.

Work started on laying the Oxley track in 1926, many delays were encountered. Hunting sought approval from the Royal National Society to stage speedway at the exhibition ground opening in October 1926.

Details of progress at Oxley were published in the Speedway News the official organ of the Exhibition track and also stated as official programme for Oxley. In December 1926 the Speedway News stated that advertising for the Oxley programme was at a premium.

Another article claimed twenty men were employed out at Oxley building stands and laying the track, it is open to debate whether this was just a smoke screen to keep the investors at bay or actual fact.

Tragedy struck on January 4 1927 when Oxley Creek peaked at 3 metres washing out all the work carried out. It is amazing that the fact that the creek reached a 5 metre high in 1893 was not taken into consideration. Work resumed again, it is believed that two practice meetings took place before Olympia lodged their application to

Brisbane City council for an entertainment licence. This is where Olympia fell on their own sword. The Exhibition speedway had encountered problems due to the fact that RNA members were granted free admission, the result was the RNA membership soared which was no advantage to Olympia speedway finances. Furthermore the track maintenance by the RNA was not up to standard for good racing.

Olympia withdrew from the exhibition, with Oxley still not ready they were given permission to lease Davies Park, but they requested a clause that there would not be another speedway permitted south of Brisbane. This is the very clause that the Brisbane City Council invoked to refuse permission for Oxley!. With Davies Park becoming a success little more was heard of Oxley until 1946. Another disastrous flood in 1931 would have removed any trace of the speedway.

The actual exact location of the track has always been the subject of debate. as to what side of Oxley creek it was located. In 1946 a track known as Oxley speedtrack or Noel Johnson Park was opened by the Kedron Motorcycle Club. It is claimed by many this was the site of Hunting's original track, although it was only a half mile track.

The complication comes from the fact that an application was made to Brisbane City Council in for a bridge to gain access to the Oxley site from an existing approach road, this in itself is a mystery. If the 1946 site was the original, then there was no need for a bridge as the site was easily approached from the Ipswich or Oxley Roads.

Searches through the Council Archives have failed to reveal the location of this bridge even though the council engineer had provided costings and therefore a plan must have been drawn up. The council rejected the bridge proposal as the cost was estimated at £2500.

The only two official documented references to Oxley Speedway are from the council minutes of 26-6-1926 and 18-10-1927

Enquiries to members of the Chelmer and Corinda Historical Society have failed to shed any light on the 1927 location although there is a view that it was not north-west of the Oxley creek which puts the 1946 location back in the picture.

I can now reveal that it is my opinion the 1946 site was the original. My conclusion comes from extensive search of the area, the road system and interviews with local people.

It is my view that the application for the bridge was for either Lawson road or Kendall road , which were direct links to the Oxley train station, this would have been also the quickest access by road from the populated areas of Chelmer, Corinda and Indooroopilly. There was little housing to the south and east of the site in 1928

Former rider Russell Box recalled going to the track around 1950, he stated the access was from the Ipswich Road and the track had banking on the southern side for spectators, there were no spectator areas on the Western side. A site investigation in June 2010 revealed the banking still there, the area is vacant land directly behind and land locked by Thrifty Rentals and Tyrepower off the Ipswich service road which was the original main road

The Australian Motor Sport magazine of January 15 1969 reports that a TT meeting was held on the 2.2 mile Oxley dirt track , the winner of both classes was Phil Bagnall on an Enfield. The reference to the 2.2

track is interesting as Terry Walker in his book fast tracks 1966 stated the length as half mile.

Victorian all round motorcyclist and former Hastings uk Speedway rider Harold Tapscott raced in a miniature TT at Oxley in 1952 Moving on to 1963, the Kedron Motorcycle Club ran the Australian Scrambles title at Archerfield, could that have been the Oxley track as Archerfield is the next suburb.

The little used name of Noel Johnson Park is interesting, according to family members it commemorates the late Noel Johnson, one of Hunting's riders who was killed in a track accident at Plymouth in England in 1931. Family members state that the Johnson and Pegg families were land owners in the Donaldson Road area which is approx 200 metres east of the 1946 site.

References

Ariel survey 1946; Fast tracks by terry walker 1976; Speedway News; BCC Minutes 18-10-1927 and 26-6-1926; Brisbane Telegraph; Brisbane Courier Mail; Interview with Russell Box; Interview with Keith Cox; Interview with Peter Johnson; Interview with Noel Johnson; Chelmer and Corinda Historical Society; Kedron MCC Records; Cyril Romaine; Barry Forsyth; Brisbane Archives Queensland State Archives; John Oxley Collection; Corinda Library; Australian Motor Sport 15-1-1949

Portsmouth

Ian Arnold from Catford has been digging out information about the two speedway venues in Portsmouth and has compiled a list of the meetings staged at these two pre-war venues on the south coast.

The first venue to emerge was Portsmouth Speedway and Greyhound Raceway at Copnor Gardens, off Milton Road. This venue open its doors on 10th August 1929 and staged three meetings in all (17th, 24th August). A meeting scheduled for 31st August was cancelled for some reason.

The 1930 season started on 21st April and a total of 23 meetings were staged with the last on 23rd October. A mixture of the handicap and scratch race type events and team meetings were staged.

The stadium was purchased by Portsmouth City Corporation for £20,500 and a new stadium was built at Tipnor.

Tipnor Stadium, Target Road, Tipnor staged 2 meetings in 1935 and a further Charity event in 1937.

Attempts to revive the venue in 1946 and in 1975 came to nothing.

Were They Really Banned – Or Was It A Stunt?

Digging back into the pioneer days I came across an article about three American riders Chick Remington, Dab (David A) Boston and Red Murch. According to the article the three were turned away from Britain for some reason and on no account would they ever ride here.

Now, I've recently been scanning bits from the Motor Cycling magazine for 1929 and it carried adverts, on a regular basis, for Stamford Bridge. The adverts carried the names of the three Yanks in a panel listing the notable riders including Bill Bragg, Les Blakeborough, Colin Ford, Reg Nicol, and Wal Phillips.

Did the trio appear anywhere else or were they confined to Stamford Bridge? Was their ban a stunt? Any thoughts on this one? **Jim Henry**

Web Update

Our Webmaster **Ron McNeil** is finding life a bit hard just now and is looking to pass on the torch to keep the website in business. Are you the new webmaster? If you are interested, please get in touch with Jim to discuss the role. Those inputting information are still working away filing new files but things are on hold. In addition there is still a bit of a backlog so we need someone to hit the ground running if that is at all possible. In the interim, if you can't find what you are looking for filed away by track badge, don't despair, there is another location on the site to visit. You can access the most up to date files on the system by selecting the central button, named "Updates and Latest Information" on the opening page and heading for the hyperlink words in Caps and Blue Text "LATEST FILES". Clicking on this opens a series of pages with track name and date buttons which will open the appropriate file. Jim is still working on 1960 and it will probably be a few months before all this information is available on the web.

If you do have programmes, please have a look at the appropriate file for the team and year just in case you have information we are seeking.

Any scrap of additional information is most welcome if it can shrink the needs lists which are currently available for 1946 – 1957.

Bob Ozanne remains the Pre War man whilst **Steve Wilkes** coordinates the era post 1964. We can't close without a special mention of **Mark Aspinell**. **Mark** has been very busy during the winter working on post 1964 material and his efforts are very much appreciated.

Also we'd like to thank all of you who helped with information.

Information from your collections is invaluable and very much appreciated.

Editors

Jim Gregory – An Autobiography

It isn't often we get an autobiography so we are delighted to publish Jim's look over his career. The title Jim submitted seriously underplayed his contribution but, despite it merely reflecting his modesty, we would not use it. Even in his rides with the Men in Black when, as the senior man, he should have been taking it easy, he would only turn the throttle one way – OPEN. Now for someone who can do that despite the words "Take it easy" uttered by Joint Editor Jim's wife Anne just fresh in his ears – well - say no more.

Jim recalls he left school early to take up a job at T.Wall & Sons in the engineering workshop, through a friend of my mother who was chief engineer at the company. He was also a Rudge machine enthusiast and had a Rudge Ulster motorcycle, although I never saw him ride it due to petrol rationing because of the war. I learned quite a bit at Wall & Sons as they had a well equipped machine shop.

I was then called up for National Service. I wanted to join the RAF as I had Air Training Corps experience at school, including a flight in a Tiger Moth, where the instructor asked me to take the controls. I couldn't hear a word above the noise of the engine so no one was flying the plane for a short while. However, I decided to join as a dispatch rider in the army as the next best thing. I was aghast when I ended up at the wireless operations school at Scarborough, so I went to the officer commanding saying there had been a mistake. Fortunately he agreed and sent me to Dispatch Riding School at Catterick.

When I arrived I thought I could ride a motorcycle but they taught me differently. They gave me a very unwieldy BSA M20 to look after. I noticed that the instructors all had lightweight 350cc Matchless bikes with telescopic forks.

We used to be taken out on the Yorkshire Moors over some very rugged terrain. I once fell off the BSA on some very boggy ground and couldn't get up. Fortunately one of the other lads came along otherwise I might still have been there.

Eventually we all passed our course and moved to a transit camp and, after embarkation leave, we took ship for Egypt.

By now the war in Europe had finished and we were the first group to enable the soldiers who had fought to start coming home.

We were stationed just outside Cairo in a camp called Maadi. Our job was to travel into G.H.Q. in Cairo every day and take letters and despatches all around districts of Cairo. The locals didn't like us and took to stringing a rope across the road to bring us off so we rode with our heads well down over the handlebars.

Soon after the Army GHQ moved to the canal zone at Fayid in a large camp. We were at a loose end here so we looked around for something to do.

Someone hit on the idea of sand track racing so we got the R.E.M.E. boys to carve out an oval track out of the desert at the back of the camp. The officers in charge were all for it as it gave us something to keep us occupied.

We found some scrapped bikes, stripped them down and modified them to look like racing bikes. For some reason I was made captain of the Fayid Dicers. We rode against other like minded teams at Tel-El-Kabir and Suez. I remember the championship meeting at Tel-El-Kabir about 1946 when I was top scorer until I fell off in my last race. Happy days! On demob I returned to T.Wall & Son where I blotted my copybook by unscrewing the top of a liquid ammonia gas valve which caused a massive escape of corrosive liquid and cause the main line trains which ran through a low level cutting alongside the factory to be cancelled for some time until the gas had cleared. I wasn't very popular at the time.

Later I received a letter from Tiger Stevenson asking if I wanted a trial as a Speedway Rider as he had been told by one of my Army mates that I could ride. He said if I was interested he would pass my name to the Wembley Manager Alec Jackson. I replied that I was interested and had a call from Wembley asking me to present myself at the stadium and go with the bikes to Rye House, which I did. They loaned me a bike, helmet and leathers. I must have impressed because they signed me up which meant I received a £7 a week retainer fee.

Alec Jackson offered to sell me a new Excelsior machine with a used JAP engine which he said was one of their best and I could pay weekly out of my winnings (if any). I later found out that the Excelsior was obsolete and out of date and the best engine blew to pieces shortly after I joined Rayleigh. However I did get a foothold in Speedway and while I was under contract to Wembley I was approached by a chap who lived near the factory. He wanted me to ride his machine in a Grasstrack meeting under his name. Evidently 2 riders in particular were winning everything and he wanted me to beat them. Like a fool I agreed and took his bike by train to West Drayton. I had to push it about a mile to the track where I proceeded to win my heats and was winning the final until I fell off. Fortunately, as it happened, because my identity would have been discovered and I would have been in trouble with the authorities and Wembley Speedway. Just to rub it in, when I attended the prize giving I was told that the prize money had been halved. I guess that they gave the rest of the prize money to the owner of the bike I used which is what I should have done anyway.

Alec Jackson called me into his palatial office one day and said that a new track was opening in Rayleigh and suggested I try my luck there, which I did. I rode in the first meeting called the Probables v Possibles and I was put in the team. Wembley decided to transfer me for £50 to Rayleigh and also transferred the loan I owed which I could still pay off weekly. At this time I was still working at T.Wall & Son and the chief engineer was transporting me and my bike to various venues. However I decided to leave T.Wall & Son using the excuse that I didn't want to work on Sundays (at short notice) to help my fellow workmates. At this time my friend the chief engineer had started his own machine shop and gave me a job with all the spare time I needed to carry on at Rayleigh. I was very lucky.

My biggest problem at Rayleigh was the fact that Bruce Abernethy also came to Rayleigh from Wembley, although he was only on loan. He was, in my opinion, a complete nutcase, who never knew where to draw the line with his jokes. I enjoyed my time with Rayleigh and gradually got the hang of speedway riding and didn't fall off so many times. High spots, I suppose, when I broke the track record and when I scored my first maximum. The maximum saw the crowd going wild.

One stroke of good fortune was to meet up with Percy Brine who was transferred to Rayleigh. He helped me when my engine blew up. The Brine Brothers, Cyril, Ron, Percy and Ted, ran a speedway workshop in

Borehamwood making frames and complete machines. They fixed me up with a more competitive bike on which I started to go places. At the time I lived in Alperton, Wembley and travelled to Borehamwood on an old Norton motorcycle. I travelled to meetings with Percy Brine. Later on I purchased a Commer / ex-Biscuit Van to carry my bike around.

I stayed at Rayleigh for 2 years and became one of their most consistent scorers. Then, at the end of the 1949 season, a rumour went around that the track was about to close. In fact it was taken over by a new management with Tippy Atkinson (Mrs Arthur Atkinson) as manager. However I did not know this at the time and decided to move to Wimbledon where Ted Brine was the tam manager.

This was the biggest mistake I made in Speedway.

At Wimbledon I had difficulty in holding a team place and even a reserve position. Then Ronnie Greene became the manager of a team in Ireland at Shelbourne Park in Dublin and the lesser lights at Wimbledon became the Shelbourne Tigers. I did quite well there. We used to catch the train at Euston with the bikes on Saturday afternoon and travel to Holyhead, sleeping on the ferry to Dublin. After a slap up breakfast at the Dublin port of Dun Laoghaire, there being no food rationing over there. We rode at Shelbourne on Sunday afternoon then travelled back on Sunday evening to ride at Wimbledon on Monday evening.

I will say the Irish people made us most welcome. I enjoyed my time there except the race when I broke my collarbone and spent a while in hospital. TO BE CONTINUED.

Deadline for items for next edition is 30th April 2011

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