

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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The Final Curtain

It is with a fair bit of regret that **Graham** and **I** have to let you all know that we have made the decision to stop publishing The Speedway Researcher. It was 16 years / volumes ago that we set out to boldly go where no speedway publication had gone before. No one else was doing it so we set out our manifesto and went for broke to bring together folks working on speedway history as well as collectors and any others with an interest in our favourite sport. We would like to think we covered a fair few old topics and saw the fruits of few researchers' labours in book form. It was always pleasing to see the magazine or ourselves in load of acknowledgements.

We never set out to make our fortune but subscriber numbers have fallen over the years. A number of subscribers have become very familiar voices on the phone and it is a pity we have never met you face to face. We know of many loyal subscribers who supported us through thick and thin but cash income is now not enough. We don't have enough folks out there researching the base sources and telling us what they have found so we can share it with others.

Over the last few editions we feel that whilst we have had good items we feel we have been struggling to get items and that it does not feel as though we will get much in to give you an interesting read every three months to justify another Volume. We want to deliver value for money and feel that, as we don't think we can achieve that, it is time to stop. We must be one of the few organisations told to increase our prices. The magazine has enough funds to keep the web site ticking over for two or three years and that what is in hand will not be wasted or used for other purposes.

We will close by saying thanks for the support over the years and goodbye.

Graham Fraser and Jim Henry

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A J Hunting arrives in Great Britain 1928. Part 2

From the World wide adventures of AJ Hunting by **Tony Webb** in collaboration with the Hunting family and research at National Archives, London and Queensland Archives, Brisbane, Australia. However to get back to the main story again, an agreement was reached with the National Greyhound Association, who were looking for extra income from their stadiums, to lay cinder tracks within their stadiums.

Three tracks were opened in London at Harringay with a crowd of 4,211, on 29-5-1928, White City, attendance 4,442, on 19-5-1928 and Wimbledon, 3,996 on 28-5-1928 Then one at Kirkmanshulme, Manchester on 28-7-1928 and one in Halls Green, Birmingham 3-8-1928. The dates are the opening dates. Portsmouth was another venue under consideration and with the permission of the Portsmouth Greyhound Club a track was laid at the new stadium at Copnor. However the planned September opening did not eventuate, although the Jimmy Baxter company D.T.S.L. did stage racing there in 1929. These attendances figures were well short of the estimated crowds, the AJ camp had serious concerns. The advertising for the first three meetings had cost 11,000. There was disappointment with the press as the speedway was only getting a few lines, in contrast to the Australian press that would run a whole page on speedway. AJ went on a cost saving mission he fired the PR man and gave complete control to his brother Frank. AJ then issued 60,000 complimentary tickets over three weeks. During that period the paying attendances rose to a point when they were getting 11,000 per meeting. His fellow directors were not happy with the free tickets even though it worked. Their concern was the value of shares on the stock market, whether the speedway promotion made money or not was not an issue with them. AJ could see that the shares would fall, then rise again, he cabled his investors in Australia to sell their shares to cover out of pocket expenses, but retain some as the price would rise again. Only one Australian investor heeded the advice, that man later made 500% profit on his shares

AJ could see that his style of working was not in line with his rather staid directors. He could see the warning signs and wisely looked to new adventures. Company searches reveal that AJ was commissioned by the Arsenal Gunners Football Club to investigate the possibility of 2 speedway at Highbury Football ground in North London. The

company records indicate a fee was paid to AJ for his services. It would appear that this plan did not eventuate.

Back in Brisbane unrest was brewing in the boardroom. This coincided with the announcement from London of the formation of International Speedways Limited. The speedway programme for Davies Park 25/1/1928 had shown a change of management to National Speedways but by March 30 1928 Olympia Motor Speedway [Brisbane] Limited was listed again as the governing body. Possibly the interim change was for the board and management to be restructured. Skip Rees replaced Frank Hunting as Clerk of the Course, Fergus G. Matthews became Secretary, while Maldwyn D. Davies (who was an early director of National Speedway) and J.E. Hudson came in as directors. Following the unrest between AJ. and his former directors in Brisbane, a notice appeared in the Brisbane Courier Mail on July 12 1928. The notice read National Speedways Ltd had issued a writ seeking the sum of four hundred and forty four pounds from AJ. Hunting formerly of Lambert Road Indoorpilly, and now in England. The writ was for funds paid in error to AJ. The out come is unknown and I suspect it was a case of 'sour grapes'.

Stanley Glanfield of Glanfield Lawrence Motors Ltd established a most advanced workshop complex at a fourstorey building in Ridgmont Street, off Tottenham Court Road. The top floor was divided into cubicles where up to twenty individual riders and mechanics could service their machines. The second floor had fully equipped workshops to carry out every facet of speedway tuning and machining. The mechanics were on hand 24 hrs a day, seven days a week. They were employed by Glanfield.and received a bonus based on the success of the riders. Several of the top tuners including, Dick Denty, Alec Mosely, Bert Dixon and Queenslander Jack Harris worked from here and they were able to discuss their ideas with each other in the well appointed conference room. Sometime very heated technical debates took place. *The foregoing was the general consensus of activities as drawn from the general press and information historians have recorded to date, However, letters written by AJ have now surfaced which indicate that the early months in England were far from easy. This eventually led to a parting of the ways with AJ and International Speedways Limited.* The UK Speedway News Magazine devoted the whole of the May 15 issue of the arrival Australian party, complete with photographs and biographies.

From the beginning International Speedways took a strong stand against Sunday meetings, women speedway riders and on track betting. The company was firmly against these issues and always adhered to that position whilst under AJ's control.

AJ came out strongly in the publication "Illustrated Sport" in early September. Under the headline 'Only men on the dirt track', he stated his viewpoint. Lady speedway rider Fay Tylour replied in even stronger terms in the September 13 issue stating the female case. AJ must have been upset when his fellow directors at Davies Park ignored his views and decided to book Tylour when she did her Australian tour the following year!

The first meeting was at London's White City on May 19 opened by Lady Strathspey on a very wet evening. Ben Unwin was the surprise packet with the fastest time of the night. Regular meetings followed at Harringay and Wimbledon but machine failures and the shortage of spares continually hampered them. The new cinder tracks were also causing a lot of falls. Dicky Smythe broke a finger, Vic Huxley, Jack Bishop, Hilary Buchanan and Billy Lamont all had spells on the injured list. Buchanan gained the nickname of 'Whisky.' Buchanans was a popular whisky brand at the time. AJ. was keen to see that his sixteen star riders were not over extended. He had a policy that no more than eight of his riders would be in action on the same night. For the first season the ISL riders were identified by coloured blouses but that was discontinued in 1929, This is a good way of dating a photograph. Another sign of the Australians popularity was the inspiration for the composing of a song "My speedway hero (He's a rider)" As it was a fox trot, it was in demand in dance halls. Featured on the sheet music cover were "Whirlwind" Charlie Spinks, "Dare Devil" Dicky Smythe "Wizard" Frank Arthur "Broadside" Vic Huxley and "Cyclone" Billy Lamont - a collector's item today.

Although living conditions, rain and machinery problems dampened the spirits of the Australians they could do no wrong in the eyes of the British public. Respected British speedway author Tom Stenner wrote in 1934:⁵

"Without a shadow of doubt we have to thank the Australians for putting speedway racing on the map in this country. The brilliant band of riders, who came to England under the banner of Brisbane promoter A.J.Hunting, showed us that even the best Englishman was a raw
4 novice. We did not know what broadsiding was until Huxley,

Arthur and their colleagues dumbfounded the critics and crowd alike by seemingly laying their machines at impossible angles to send the cinders spouting Vesuvius- like from flying wheels over the fence and into the stands. ”

A record crowd of 74,000 was recorded at the White City Stadium for the June 9th meeting, a boost to the coffers of I.S.L.

Drawing again on their ideas from Australia I.S.L introduced the seven popular trophies that were so keenly contested at Davies Park. They were the Golden Helmet and Gauntlet, Silver Armlet, Sash, Wings and Pennant. The Golden helmet history will be covered fully in a later chapter. Another example of the ploys that were used by International Speedways to gain the utmost publicity, was the visit of the I.S.L riders to the Princess Theatre in the West End to see Mae Bacon in the comedy “Lumber Love”. As the party went backstage, Frank Hunting picked up a silk stocking belonging to Mae, the actress, duly autographed it with a flourish and it was put up as the trophy for the next White City meeting, which Frank Arthur duly won.

As the season progressed the shortage of machinery eased, as the manufactures became more accommodating to the Australians needs. By the end of September AJ’s riders had raced all over England, from London to Manchester and Birmingham.

A mention of the Manchester track should be made as it is sometimes referred to as White City, which is the area not the actual track. In fact there were two tracks in the White City area of Manchester. The ISL one was in Kirkmanshulme Lane, a greyhound stadium also known as Belle Vue [now home of the present day Belle Vue team]. The other was earlier at Old Trafford. The first meeting at Kirkmanshulme Lane on July 28 1928 is featured in Norman Jacobs informative publication, “Speedways Classic Meetings” Tempus 2004, to quote,

“The opening meeting was organised by international speedways limited under their dynamic manager, A J Hunting. Hunting had a comparatively long history of promoting in Australia, when the sport opened in Great Britain Hunting and his company were there to make sure they had a large share of the action”

This was AJ initial contact with the Manchester club, it was from this connection that the basis of the riders and officials for his venture into South America the following year were sourced. The Iles family who were the founders of the Belle Vue Zoological Gardens and other 5

Amusement parks became shareholders in other companies formed by A.J.

As the riders prepared to return to Australia their mission was completed. Speedway was well and truly introduced to England. The methods of running speedway meetings, which were developed in Brisbane, were to become the models for the presentation of speedway until the present day. The general impression was that the 1928 season in England was a great experience but not everyone was so happy. This letter from Frank Pearce published in the Davies Park programme of February 29 1929 paints a different picture.

“Two days before I left I had a conversation with A.J. Hunting regarding riders, and while offers were made for me to procure the services of riders, I could not send any boy over to ride under the deplorable conditions which we did, and my advice has been to any boy who was inclined to make the trip to stay here, earn and save sufficient money and go as a tourist, NOT, as we did. Furthermore, I believe all the speedways in London have amalgamated, which makes it very hard for the riders to improve the conditions, as big offers were flying around before I left, although not nearly as big as rumours which have been circulated about certain riders getting certain things.

Frank Hunting wished me well, and I shall never forget the sincerity of him when, looking very blue, he expressed his longing to be coming back with me, as I know he himself was fed up to the neck.

*“Rumour has it that A.J. Hunting has left the concern, but that is not true. A lot of money was involved in the project in England, which dampened the ardour of the directors when money was not forthcoming to start tracks in America and various other countries, as was first intended. As a consequence, A.J. was able to come to arrangements to release himself during the winter period the same as the boys have done, and return when called upon: if not called upon his duties were to commence with International Speedways at some specified time. In the meantime, he intended to make the trip, leaving London on 30th September, to go to South America with the idea of building tracks with foreign capital, or some such thing in the States, as I believe South Americae njoys weather such as we have ourselves. I mention this because many people have asked me what actually became of him. Since my return to Australia I have received communications from him in Buenos Aires, where he has a code cable address in case I should
6 wish to make the trip over to ride for him.*

Although I have made some confessions I would hardly like to tell you the wonderful, if you could call it wonderful, send off the boys gave us on our last night in London. Needless to say, I had a sore head for two days. If you can call it going on the water wagon after being three times drunk in six months, I am on the water wagon since I resumed my duties, as I was before I went away. However, it was all done out of sheer devilment, and it is highly amusing to me when I look back on it. Ben and myself left Tilbury at 12 o'clock on Saturday, 29th September, perhaps the two happiest souls on the ship."

Public opinion in Brisbane had been rife that the departure of the top riders overseas would seriously affect the attendances at Davies Park. This proved not to be the case as several of the junior riders were not slow to step up into the limelight. Added to this was the fact that the six foot South Australian Alby Taylor, New Zealander Harry Mangham and Sydney riders Dick Sulway, Bob Stilley and Arty Wardell all arrived for the next meeting after the mass exodus of the star riders. Another plus for the Brisbane fans was the arrival of the much-improved Lionel Van Praag on March 10th. Lionel rode under the Christian name of Les at that time. He had ridden at the meetings at the Ekka in 1926/27 but he was now a much-improved rider. Lionel became the first rider to hold all four monthly trophies at the same time. His time at Davies Park was a most significant factor in the development career that would lead him to become the first FIM World Champion in 1936. Southern-based historians have largely ignored Lionel's sojourn in Queensland and these facts are also missing from the otherwise excellent DVD, *The Flying Dutchman*, on his life. Several other riders came to prominence at this time including the 17-yr. old Len Percival also billed as Lionel Davey. His progress was so quick that he relieved Van Praag of the Golden Helmet at the last meeting of the season. The legendary American Sprouts Elder also appeared in December 1927.

The formation of the British Speedway Control Board in May 1928 prompted a statement from AJ. that would ring true the following year. "Safety of my riders is my first priority he said. If there is any compromise on safety I will go it alone". Safety fences were an issue with ISL. Hunting had designed a fence to withstand a force of sixty tons at sixty miles per hour. The question of speedway in Paris in 1928 has often become a point of debate, among historians. AJ did make two trips to Paris in June and August 1928. A letter from a Paris hotel confirms his stay there with a Captain Cyril Freyer. .A prospectus for 7

a company named Continental Speedways was released in London on May 30 1928, prior to AJ's first trip to Paris, he flew for the first time, but returned by boat. The company was registered in London on November 11, 1928. The interesting point is Cyril Freyer was a director of Continental Speedways, it is not drawing to long a bow to speculate that AJ had an interest in this company. In a later letter AJ he claims an involvement with a speedway at Port Doree, a Paris suburb. One of his contracted Queensland riders Bert Spencer, was also in Paris at the time. AJ's wife Ethel joined him in London via Liverpool on September 22 1928. They undertook medical examinations, necessary for international travel, on September 24. They then embarked on a European tour, travelling by train through France, Germany Switzerland Malta and Italy. Both Ethel and AJ posted dozens of post cards to family in Brisbane, these are still held by family members and are an excellent record of their travels. They embarked from Genoa to Buenos Aires in October 1928 on the SS Conti Verde. The first post card from Buenos Aires announces their arrival in the Latin American City as November 13 1928. This information is gleaned from an Atlas where AJ drew all his travels up to 1931. AJ and Ethel also sent hundreds of post cards to Nancie and Peggy at home in Brisbane tracing their adventures. AJ always referred to Ethel as "Mother". One cannot help feeling that it would have been wonderful for the children if they joined their parents in this exciting adventure. In almost every post card AJ is asking the children to take care of their mother and one gets the impression he really did not like the separation when he travelled alone. It is clear from the dozens of post cards that AJ did not have plans for an extended stay in the northern hemisphere at that stage. The events of early 1929 were to change those plans.

The Motor Cycle magazine reported in October 1928 that AJ. left England in September 1928 for Buenos Aires where he was exploring the opportunities for speedway in the South American city. This in fact was not completely accurate, as he had departed via his European tour. Back in Brisbane there was activity on the company scene. The Brisbane Courier reported on October 27 1928:

Olympia Motor Speedway (Brisbane) Ltd., capital £100,000, to take over from Albert J. Hunting certain options, and to carry out motor and cycle racing.. Subscribers: A. J. Hunting, managing director; J. T. Walton, public accountant; J. R. Walton, company secretary; F. M. 8 Coxon, consulting engineer and architect; F. A. Wisdom,

company manager; A. G. H. Gardner, solicitor all of Sydney; and D. Bertram, Cheltenham, freeholder

It is clear from this action that AJ may have still had certain lease options in his own name, but it is interesting that he still retained the managing directorship chair although he was domiciled in England. Olympia Speedway Ltd promoted two meetings at Ipswich Showground on October 17 and November 21 1928 and a third on December 18 1930. The last one was of interest as it was titled the Ipswich Grand Prix which was won by Vic Huxley with many Davies Park internationals taking part.

John S. Hoskins the showman and promoter, made an interesting observation regarding the movement of Australian riders to England in 1928. He told UK journalist Richard Bott. in 1974

“In 1928 the top Australian and a few of the Aussie trained Americans came to London and that was the end of speedway in Australia until a few of us got together in 1932 and took two teams of the best Australian and British riders down under.”

Speedway in Australia encountered some difficult times in the 1929-1931 period as it was the lowest point of the depression, but it certainly was not the end of speedway in Australia. Hoskins himself returned to Australia but his stay was short lived, He then moved onto America and back to England again. It was the patriotic AJ who doggedly persevered to re establish the sport in Australia over the next decade.

After the 1928-1929 season at Davies Park another party of riders departed to join AJ in London. A big send off was organised by the supporters, but missing from the event was Max Grosskreutz who had already sailed with Frank Arthur, Vic Huxley and Jack Bishop, in company with Brisbane Douglas motorcycle agent Jack Harris on January 29 1929, on the well appointed steamer the “Nieuw Zeeland”. Harris was to act as tuner and business manager for Huxley. The ill fated Bruce McCallum sailed in May. Smythe, Spinks, Pearce and Unwin decided to stay home in 1929⁷ ensuring that Davies Park fans would continue to see plenty of top class racing for the remainder of the season and the start of the next one.

The Speedway News gave the top Davies Park riders for the season as Dicky Smythe, Jock Binney and Frank Arthur

As the season finished in Brisbane in March 1929, the boys over in England were preparing for their second season. Frank Arthur had taken a leaf out of Hunting’s book forming his own team, Arthur’s Tigers. 9

He signed up Max Grosskreutz, and Dave Kemp on lucrative contracts that would see their every need catered for. Arthur joined up with promoter Jimmy Baxter in mid 1929 to stage two Internationals at Coventry, the pair then started recruiting riders for an Australian venture but this was cancelled when they failed to get official sanctions. It should be stated that AJ had by this time moved on to South America. Arthur had engaged English journalist Sammy Samuel as his representative with instructions to have six new Rudge machines and workshop, transport and living quarters ready for their arrival in London. Sammy would recall those days in a 1951 article in the *Speedway and Ice News*.⁸

“Frank found every man a new machine, which however, remained Frank’s property. These mounts were expertly serviced and delivered to where he was booked to ride. All that was required of the boys was that they should keep themselves fit, and should ride in such a manner that the venture would show a profit. Most of the boys in those days (1929) were earning from £120 to £160 a week!

At the end of the season the cars, which had been used for transport, were driven to Southampton and abandoned on the quayside. I also saw other cars changing ownership for £25 - sometimes to the mechanics that had given good service. These were the days of easy money”.

Former rider George McKenzie stated that Ron Johnson just dumped his car at the Crystal Palace track prior to boarding the boat home. The eleven Queensland riders connected to AJ who racing in England in 1929 were:

Cyril Anderson (Exeter), Frank Arthur [Stamford Bridge], Jack Bishop (Exeter), Hilary Buchanan (Wimbledon), Max Grosskreutz (Lea Bridge), Vic Huxley (Harringay), Noel Johnson [Exeter and Harringay], Dave Kemp (Stamford Bridge), Bruce McCallum [West Ham], Bert Spencer [Exeter] and Harold Stevens [Exeter] After a winter in Buenos Aires AJ and Ethel returned to England for the new season departing from Montivideo on January 29 1929 aboard the “Dunstan Grange” of the Houlder Line. Ethel carried on to Brisbane on the Hobsons Bay, this was reported in the Adelaide newspaper’s “About People” social column. On April 11 1929

Mrs. Hunting wife of Mr. A. J. Hunting who is President of the Dirt Track Motor Cycle Company, Brisbane, was a passenger on the 10 “Hobsons Bay”, which passed through Adelaide yesterday. AJ.

finalised his speedway connections in London returning to Buenos Aires in July 1929.

In his absence his men in London had been busy, they formed and registered South American Speedways on January 18 1929 with WJ Cearns and John William Ormsby Hamilton, the latter was also a director of Continental Speedways Ltd. Three South American business men were shareholders, they were Squires, Durrant and Hastings. It was clear that AJ was making plans for South America at the start of the 1929 UK season.

. Although AJ is reported as being active in England in the early part of the 1929 season. The truth was that he had actually resigned from Speedway Trust Ltd in April, his place had been taken up by the Aviator Sir Allan Cobham on April 21 1929. There are many unanswered questions in AJ's travel movements. On his personal Atlas he indicates in pencil a route to his grandfather's birthplace in Germany with the notation, "July 1929". There are no official travel records between England and Europe to confirm this. It may just have been an idea that never eventuated.

AJ's daughter Betty, in Brisbane, received a post card from AJ on July 24 advising her of his forth coming move to South America. The reason for his departure from England was that he had been at loggerheads for sometime with his fellow directors who considered his free spending approach was not sustainable. It is believed AJ received a golden handshake to the tune of £15,000 which would have the buying power of £600,000 in 2012 values.

After the euphoria of the inaugural season in England, the fans were clamouring for something more than meaningless circus style open meetings. There were now sixty-four tracks throughout the country. It was decided to form a team competition with North and South league. The authorities then made a startling decision to ban the overseas star riders from joining in the league teams to allow the lesser lights more opportunities! This was the beginning of a strange desire by speedway authorities to embrace a policy of equalisation, which survives to this day. To compensate the top riders, elite competitions including a Star Championship and Golden and Silver Helmet tournaments were staged with lucrative prize money. Team racing and test matches would, in the long term, prove to be the lifeline of speedway racing. The season's big event, the Star Championship, was staged with two competitions, **11**

one for English riders and one for overseas men. Frank Arthur won the overseas title from Huxley.

The warning signs of a decline in speedway fortunes came at the start of the season. Speedway did not open at Kirkmanshume Lane, then Hall Green and Harringay closed in June, followed by White City at the end of the season. The bubble had burst.

Much has been written regarding the stuchie between Wembley Speedway and AJ. There was intense rivalry between speedway promotions in that initial season. AJ was a strong and astute operator, protective of ISL's vast investment. He did not react kindly to Arthur Elvin's proposal to open Wembley fearing it would have a detrimental effect on attendances on present ISL promotions is not sustainable. It is believed AJ received a golden handshake to the tune of £15,000 which would have the buying power of £600,000 in 2012 values

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promotions in workings. Another of the reasons for AJ's 1929 departure from UK was that when he arrived in England in February 1928 he only had one official body with whom to negotiate - the Auto Cycle Union. Now there was the infamous Track Licensing Body (TLB) a newly formed National Promoters Association (NPA) and a Dirt Track Riders Association (DTRA) to deal with. Becoming increasingly frustrated with the indecisions of these four bodies, the bickering and the infighting, AJ moved his operations to Buenos Aires in Argentina where he constructed the La Huracan speedway

In the northern winter of 1929 AJ, who was now based in Buenos Aires, invited a team of Australian, American and English riders to the South American city. In the team were Davies Park favourite Max Grosskreutz, New South Wales rider Buzz Hibberd and South Australian Frank Duckett. AJ was on good terms with all his Davies Park riders despite the falling out with ISL. Frank Pearce was offered a contract for South America but eventually declined.

Brother Frank was soon roped in again and travelled out to South America on the "Austurios" with some of the contracted riders, The shipping records do not indicate that AJ ever again returned to England. Frank returned to Melbourne in 1930 via England. AJ was reported to have arrived in Brisbane in May 1931. This appears to be the end of the Hunting brothers world-wide travels

A question often arises over whether Queenslander Bruce McCallum was in the South American party, and this stems from a group photograph that names a "Pug" McCullum. Note the "u" in the spelling. The fact is that Pug was the track mechanic, who was often mistaken for Eric Langton and was completely different in stature to Bruce who never went to South America. This story was reported in the Auto Journal of November 28 1930.

While AJ was pioneering in South America a meeting at Davies Park in Brisbane had great significance for the future of speedway. The Davies Park Grand Prix held on October 13 1929, was another original event that has significance in the history of speedway, Sixty-six years later that exact same formula was applied to a newly vamped World Championship series in Europe, which completely changed the future of speedway racing. This is another point where it can be stated "it started at Davies Park." Sydney rider Lionel Van Praag, won the first ever Grand Prix and also won the consolation final.

Tony Webb 2013 Brisbane

The History of Preston Speedway - 1931

Graham Fraser adds to his rolling history of the short lived Preston Team at the start of the sport.

After the opening two months of the 1931 season which saw home and away league fixtures and weekly Open meetings at Farringdon Park the cup season started for teams. This season saw the inaugural National Knock-Out Competition for the Daily Mail Trophy which finally pitched Northern and Southern League Teams together in competition for the first time.

Round One for Preston saw an early return to White City Glasgow on Tuesday, 26th May to the venue that has seen the Lancashire side lose a league meeting in controversial circumstances a month earlier. The National KO Cup format was different from the league too. Eight riders per team racing over sixteen heats was a move towards the format we see today.

This time, for the First Round First Leg the Preston squad's strength in depth gave them an advantage and after the lead changed hands three times by heat 9, the visitors pulled ahead with four 5-1s and ran out winners 42-53. For Preston, Joe Abbott with four wins (12), Les Wotton 9+1 and five riders scoring 5 or more points carried the day over the Glasgow team whose top scorer was Arthur Moser who dropped only one point (11), Andy Nicholl on 8 (including an engine failure) - Preston riders winning nine races to Glasgow's seven.

Like league fixtures the return leg was scheduled to take place at Farringdon in the same week, on Thursday 29th May but the meeting was cancelled due to threat of wet weather (that never materialised!) - the meeting was re-arranged for the next available mutually free date Thursday, 4th June.

Later that week the Preston fans were stunned to read in the Lancashire Daily Post that star rider, Ham Burrill had decided to retire from the sport. The reason he gave was that he had not found his form in the 1931 season and didn't want to keep letting his team down - to give somebody who can give the side more help - candour that was typical Ham. It was suggested he might be found an official position at the track.

The National KO Cup 2nd Leg fixture against Glasgow took place on 4th June and this time Preston took full advantage of the home track to win **14** 70-26 (122-69 on aggregate). Poor Glasgow didn't know what hit

them – Preston winning ten heats by 5-1 and the Scots only heat advantage was 2-4 in heat 15. Joe Abbott again top scored with 12, closely followed by Eric Airey and Larry Boulton on 11. Glasgow top scorer was Percy Dunn with 6. 7000 were present at Farringdon Park that evening.

A week later on 11th June Preston hosted Leeds in a league encounter. The Leeds team comprised: Frank Charles, Alec Hill, Gordon Byers, Sammy Marsland, Roy Barrowclough and John Scatchard. Preston's sextet was: Joe Abbott, Eric Airey, Smiler Wotton, Eddie Myerscough, Ginger Lees and Larry Boulton. A crowd of 10,000 saw previously pointless Leeds keep Preston at full stretch throughout the match. The local press reported Preston suffering a number of engine failures, their machines seeming sluggish compared with those of their Yorkshire opponents. Crashes also robbed them of points.

Heat 3 saw Larry Boulton and Roy Barrowclough have a dead-heat finish for second place resulting in the highly unusual heat result of 4.5-1.5 to Preston. The key moment in the meeting came in Heat 7 when Preston were leading 20.5-15.5. Joe Abbot had an engine failure in that heat, then Eric Airey fell but remounted to finish third. However Leeds protested to the Stewart that in remounted Airey got push start from a track attendant. The protest was upheld, Airey disqualified, giving Leeds a 0-5 and levelled the score which Leeds held onto with 3-3s over the final two heats to register a draw 26.6-26.5.

The return league fixture took place two days later at Fullerton Park and this is a meeting where there is no information available apart from the result – a Leeds win 30-23

The following week on Wednesday, 17th June Preston travelled the Hyde Road for a Challenge Meeting First Leg raced under League Match Rules against a Belle Vue England Test match Riders team. The meeting was run over nine heats and two rider match races per heat with two points for a match race win and one point for second. Belle Vue's riders were Frank Varey, Eric Langton and Walter Hull (Max Grosskreutz at reserve) – for Preston it was Joe Abbott, Ginger Lees and Smiler Wotton. Surprisingly Preston took an 11-14 victory to their away leg at Farringdon Park the following evening. The same trio of riders were scheduled to race for both teams although Langton who failed to arrive was replaced by Aussie Test Star, Max Grosskreutz – hardly a Belle Vue English Test trio!. Over nine heats Preston riders won six match races to Belle Vue's three and Preston triumphed **15**

14-8 (28-19 on aggregate) although the second leg saw five races with only one rider finishing which was a cause of some disappointment to the home crowd. However, the result over the two challenge meetings gave some credence that Preston riders were as worthy of consideration for the England team as their Belle Vue opponents.

At the halfway stage in the 1931 season Preston had slipped down the table of a small league of only six teams with good home form but patchy away results – not championship winning form.

Their position was not strengthened on a Wednesday evening on 24th June when they faced league leaders Belle Vue Aces at Hyde Road. Two Aces 5-0 wins in heats 2 & 3 set the trend for another disappointing away loss 31-20, despite Joe Abbott's maximum and Ginger Lees contribution of 6 – the remaining quartet only contributing 6 points between them.

The following night the teams met again on league duty at Farringdon Park. Belle Vue's quintet of Frank Varey, Len Woods, Eric & Oliver Langton, Walter Hull and Bob Harrison faced the Preston side made up of: Joe Abbott, Eric Airey, Smiler Wotton, Eddie Myerscough, Ginger Lees and Larry Boulton. The home side started with a narrow margin of two points that by heat four was all square at 12-12 after which the Aces pulled ahead by two points and a penultimate 5-1 heat win for the Aces to secure a final 29-25 win for the visitors. Eric Langton top scored with 9 and Ginger Lees with 7 was leading scorer for Preston. At this stage the cup matches started to take over the fixture list. For the first time there was a National Knock Out Cup that pitted North versus South for the first time in serious competition. A fascinating pairing of Preston and High Beech in the Daily Mail sponsored Trophy competition. The first leg was at Farringdon Park which had eight riders and two reserves competing over 16 heats – quite different to the league format of six riders aside over 9 heats! It must have stretched the squads of competing teams to find 10 competitive riders.

The Preston side was: Joe Abbott, Eric Airey, Smiler Wotton, Jack Tye, Larry Boulton, Jack Rowley, Ginger Lees, Eddie Myerscough; Bill Kelner & Chris Tattersall at Reserve.

High Beech fielded: Syd Edmonds, Frank Pearce, George Bishop (a late replacement for Billie Dallison), Stan Baines, Bobby Blake, Reg Hutchins, Phil Bishop, Tiger Hart; the remaining reserve was Art Fenn. For High Beech it was a matter of hanging on with only one 5-1, two 4-16 2 heat wins and four 3-3s – Preston storming ahead with eight 5-1s

and finishing strongly for a 65-31 home first leg victory. 19 year old Aussie, Bobby Blake & Reg Hutchins top scored for the southerners with six each. Stars of the night for Preston were Jack Tye & Ginger Lees with 12 point maximums. It was a result Preston needed as High Beech had only lost at home once in three years!

A week later it was the first round of the Sunday Chronicle Northern League KO Cup against Leicester Super at Farringdon Park under the normal league format. Preston has beaten the Midlanders 35-19 in their earlier league encounter so were confident of taking a good score to Melton Road. So it proved as the Lancashire team powered to a 38-14 victory. It was the solid scoring of all six Preston riders who all scored between 4 and 8 points, whereas only Arthur Jervis on 6 scored reasonably for the visitors.

It was announced at this point in the season that Preston captain, Joe Abbott, had been selected to ride for England the second Test match against Australia. The rest of the team was Squib Burton (Lea Bridge), Colin Watson (Wembley), Arthur Jervis (Leicester), Wal Phillips (Stamford Bridge), Dusty Haig (Sheffield, Eric Langton (Belle Vue), Jack Parker (Southampton). Reserves: Hal Herbert (Leicester) & Syd Jackson (Coventry). (In the event, the Test went ahead at Leicester with Abbott losing his riding partner Squib Burton to a broken thigh in heat one and Abbott again suffering from a recurring problem with his engines, still picking up two wins. England lost that Test match by two points with the teams going into the third rubber at Belle Vue all square. In the KO Cup return leg two days later the Preston sextet shocked the hosts winning the leg 34-20 – the first time Super had lost at home that season. Again it was Preston's solid scoring throughout the team that took them into the next round with only Arthur Jervis (8) & Hal Herbert (7) scoring heavily for the home side. Preston progressed on aggregate 72-34.

There were still league matches to fulfil and Preston's next fixture was away at Sheffield who were competing strongly the top of the table with Belle Vue for the league title. Sheffield had earlier beaten Preston comfortably in the first away meeting (with so few teams competing in this season's Northern League each team was scheduled to meet twice at home and twice away). The second league meeting at Owlerton before 9,000 fans was much closer and hinged on one heat – Heat 1 when for the first time at Sheffield a rider, Joe Abbott, was excluded through engine trouble and being unable to start the heat. The 5-1 17

advantage Sheffield took in that heat was one of only two they won, the other a 4-2 in heat 7 and Preston's only advantage was a 3-2 in heat 2. All that meant a 29-24 victory for the Tykes, Dusty Haigh top scoring for the home side and Ginger Lees a 9 point maximum for the visitors. Also with so few league encounters in the fixture list there were still opportunities for Open Meetings at Farringdon Park with one on 16th July that saw many fallers and injuries, including Frank Varey who fell sustaining a dislocated shoulder in the Flying Nine. Preston's German rider, Bill Kellner won the Golden Helmet.

At this stage the sport was going through a financial crisis and Preston were not excluded from that situation and a new management took over the running of the club. To try to secure the future of the sport in Preston their first priorities were to improve the surface of the track at Farringdon Park and doing more to encourage young riders to take up the sport with special trails held and two spare track bikes available to be borrowed. Links were also established with motor cycle clubs around Lancashire.

Saturday, 18th July 1931 was a big day for Preston as they face Southern League high flyers, High Beech at their King's Oak track. This was unlike other northern tracks as it was small and circular requiring races over five laps for the quarter mile. The Quarter Final second leg was always going to be an uphill struggle for the Essex team, pulling back a 34 point away leg deficit. So it proved with the homesters scraping in with a 48-42 win, Preston winning 107-79 on aggregate. Ginger Lees and Smiler Wotton won seven of the sixteen heats. In another quarter finals Belle Vue were pitted against Wimbledon and the Aces only won by four points at Hyde Road and were not expected to prevail over the Dons in the second leg.

After a well earned four day break many of the Preston stars appeared in an Open Meeting at Preston which also saw a rare appearance by Joe Abbott's brother, Raymond who crashed badly in the final of the Juniors race and as was taken to hospital. This led to Joe only riding once, being eliminated in a qualifier for the Golden Sash. The Trophies were awarded that night by the Mayor of Morecambe whose son, L.S. Cordingley, on his speedway debut won the Junior Scratch Race Final. Apart from Ray Abbott, a bumpy track also caught out Rol Stobart and Jack Tye who sustained injuries from falls. The Aussie and Lea Bridge Star, Harold Hastings, failed to make the meeting following a **18** breakdown en-route, much to the crowd's disappointment.

Two days later it was the first leg of the Northern League KO Cup Semi Final when Preston face Belle Vue at Hyde Road, in front of a crowd of 30,000. In the course of the match the lead changed four times as Preston upped their game and would have won but for the loss of several points because of machine trouble and neither rider able to finish in heat 2 plus Smiler Wotton having an engine failure in the last heat which could have given Preston the win. As it was they lost 27 to 26, with Max Grosskreutz scoring an Aces maximum and Ginger Lees 8 for Preston.

The second leg at Farringdon Park the following Thursday was eagerly anticipated. A crowd of 8,000 watched as Preston trailed by three points up to heat 8 against Belle Vue's strongest team. Then Tye, Wotton and Langton had an alarming mix-up at the first corner, the only damage being to the machines. A lengthy delay of 9 and a half minutes ensued whilst bikes were fixed and Belle Vue lodged an objection that another rider should have replaced the Preston rider whose bike was taking time to fix within 3 minutes under the dirt track racing rules but that was rejected by the Steward. Eventually, Smiler Wotton and Bill Kellner picked out 4 invaluable points over Frank Varey and Clem Court. So to the final with Belle Vue a point ahead and Ginger Lees and Larry Boulton were faced with securing a win or a draw for Preston against Frank Charles and Walter Hull. Lees rode a brilliant race to beat Charles whilst Boulton blocked Hull to gain a vital third. So a 27-26 win for Preston and all square on aggregate! The rules required a replay home and away.

Onto a home Northern League meeting next and revenge against high flying Sheffield who were narrow victors at Owlerton three weeks earlier. Sheffield were on a high having beaten leaders Belle Vue the previous Thursday. However, this proved a dominant Preston performance as they outclassed their Yorkshire opponents on the night by a score of 38-15 and Sheffield winning only one heat advantage and Preston knocking in 5 x 5-1s. This was only Preston's fifth league win in 14 matches to date.

At this point Ginger Lees was selected for the England squad for the third Test match against Australia at Belle Vue. Ginger rode and England won the fixture to go 2-1 ahead.

It wasn't long before the much anticipated re-run semi final KO Cup meeting against Belle Vue at Hyde Road and on this occasion talisman skipper Joe Abbott was absent as 26,000 Mancunians roared on **19**

their side to a 37-17 drubbing of their opponents. Preston's Larry Boulton only dropped two points from his three rides and Ginger Lees picked up 6, sadly the other four riders only contributed four points between them, including Glasgow's Norrie Isbister who guested for Preston. All but one Belle Vue rider scored between five and eight points in a solid performance. It was a very tall order for Preston to overturn the deficit when the two sides met again two weeks later. First though Preston faced a Leeds team challenging for the league title and in an exciting home finale Preston overturned a three point deficit at heat seven with two home 4-2 heat advantages to clinch the points with a narrow 27-26 home victory. Ginger Lees and Eric Airey top scored for Preston, with Joe Abbott still absent. Gordon Byers with 6 was Leeds highest scorer.

Then the Lancastrians travelled to face Leicester Super at a wet Melton Road track who were looking to avenge an earlier Preston KO Cup drubbing on their home track. Joe Abbot was still out, this time after tearing a leg ligament at Lea Bridge the previous Saturday. His place was filled by German Bill Kellner. There were many fallers on a tricky track mainly Preston riders but Super riders dominated and triumphed 34-29. Leicester, in winning this match, completed an unbeaten home league record.

With a first team fixture break a challenge match between Preston Reserves and Belle Vue Reserves was arranged at Farringdon Park. Many fringe riders and second halfers were enlisted including the Stobart Brothers for Preston. Over nine heats Belle Vue Reserves won 30-24.

Next was a league encounter against Leeds at Fullerton Park where the home side triumphed 34-17 as Preston's poor away form continued. Some good news followed however as Joe Abbott was selected for the fourth Test meeting against Australia. Also Preston riders were prominent the same week at the new Barrow speedway.

Thursday, 27th August saw the second leg of the re-run Sunday Chronicle Northern League KO Cup semi final against Belle Vue at Farringdon Park with a huge 20 point deficit from the first leg to catch up. The tie was effectively over by heat 5 as the Aces knocked in for 4-2 heat wins leaving Preston nowhere to go. The final score of 29-25 to Belle Vue gave then an aggregate victory of 66-42 and place in the **20** final against Leeds.

An Open meeting a week later at Preston was rained off with the track flooded. However two days later Preston riders, Joe Abbott, Ginger Lees with Larry Boulton at Reserve represented England in the fourth Test against Australia at Belle Vue.

With the season moving into autumn, Thursday, 19th September saw Southern League glamour side, Stamford Bridge arrive at Farringdon Park for the 1st Leg of the Daily Mail National Knock Out Trophy Semi Final. The visitor's team was: Frank Arthur, Lees Blakeborough, Gus Kahn, Mick Murphy, Dickie Wise, Bill Stanley, Arthur Warwick and Keith Harvey.

Preston were represented by Joe Abbott, Eddie Myerscough, Smiler Wotton, Eric Airey, Larry Boulton, Jack Tye, Ginger Lees and Bill Kellner. Unfortunately for the Northerners they were somewhat outclassed by their London opponents as the visitors had by far the fastest machines on show. Preston only won four of the 16 heats. Joe Abbott and Ginger Lees were apparently made to appear slow. A new starting system was used but that was sufficiently unfamiliar that there were 13 false starts on the night. Stamford Bridge's superiority was matched by Preston ill luck: two engine failures, a lost rear tyre on the last lap and a sprained ankle for Eddie Myerscough hardly helped the cause. Stamford Bridge triumphed 51-43 on the night with Frank Arthur and Gus Kahn top scoring with 12 point maximums each.

Preston's best were Joe Abbott and Ginger Lees on 8 each.

Before the 2nd Leg Preston hosted a Challenge meeting against Belle Vue with two fairly experience teams racing over 16 heats and an Aces win by 53 to 42. The return Challenge at Belle Vue the following night was again won by Belle Vue 58-37. The meeting also saw a leg of the Northern Riding Match Race Championship where Eric Langton beat Ginger Lees 3-0 in the eliminating qualifier to meet Jack Parker, the Southern Champion to decide the Champion Speedway Rider of Britain.

On Thursday 24th September Preston hosted a North of England v Australia Challenge. Joe Abbott, Dusty Haigh, Frank Varey, Eric Langton, Ginger Lees and Larry Boulton represented the North, Vic Huxley, Billy Lamont, Bluey Wilkinson, Charlie Spinks, Max Grosskreutz and AN Other represented the Antipodeans. A really close match with mainly shared heats came to a last heat decider with the score at 23-23. In heat 9 Ginger Lees won over Charlie Spinks, with Larry Boulton third over Bluey Wilkinson to secure the North a dramatic 27-25 win.

The season came to a close with the National KO Cup Second Leg at Stamford Bridge in late September and not unexpectedly the Londoners triumphed 66-30 on their own track to win on aggregate 117-73. Few details of that fixture have been found and Stamford Bridge met Wembley in the final only to suffer a heavy aggregate defeat. Stamford Bridge finished second behind..... Wembley in the 1931 Southern League, as Preston finished fifth in a six team uncompleted Northern League, won by Belle Vue.

That was the end of the 1931 Season for Preston and although they had a couple of Open Meetings in 1932 the team never continued and that was the last seen of the sport in Preston. The riders moved to other tracks and Farringdon Park continued as Preston Grasshoppers Rugby pitch until some years later it became the housing estate at the site you can see today.

Graham Fraser

Clem Beckett's Suspension

Over the years I have looked in a fair few different newspapers but I never thought to look in the Daily Worker which has a fairly left wing political pedigree.

I was interested to read a newspaper cutting sent to us by **Roger Beaman** from the Daily Worker which was published on 20th May 1931. The article was about Clem Beckett who was blacksmith turned dirt track rider who was also, then, Vice-president of the British Workers' Sports Federation.

It seems that Clem wrote an article which was published in the 14th January 1931 edition of the Daily Worker in which it is claimed he exposed the commercial exploitation of professional motor-cyclists by dirt track promoters. The article was headed "Bleeding The Men Who Risk Their Lives on the Dirt Track".

The article goes on to say that a Mr E.B.Ware, a stipendiary steward of the Auto Cycle Union ACU attempted a reply a few days later. It seems that the Daily Worker considered Mr Ware's response to be feeble and evasive which permitted Clem the opportunity to have two further blasts at the promoters on 17th and 20th February.

The upshot was that three months later the ACU took the unprecedented action of handing out an international suspension to Clem. In the eyes 22 of the Manchester Evening Chronicle this action appeared a bit harsh

to say the least and described the ACU actions as “the most remarkable in the history of speedway racing, for it has nothing whatsoever to do with the rider’s conduct on the track.” However, and somewhat oddly, the Manchester Evening Chronicle went on to suggest that if were to apologise “it would put matters right”.

The Daily Worker went on to say the Comrade Beckett will not apologise. He is a worker-sportsman and as such will continue to fight the tyrannical powers exercised by the governing bodies of the governing bodies of capitalist sport.

It seemed that the loss of dirt track activity did not deter Clem from making a living riding bikes as he took himself off to Germany to ride on the Wall of Death which the Daily Worker described as “a thrilling exhibition of motor-cycling skill and daring”. Clem was also to become a correspondent for the Daily Worker and died fighting for his socialist ideals during the Spanish Civil War.

Ken Kirkman’s Diaries

Ken's Diaries for 1934, have been kindly supplied by his granddaughter, **Karen Longhurst**, and give a remarkable insight to an Australian speedway riders fortunes in England, these are mainly unabridged except for corrections to place names. Ken left on 10th March Saturday 1934 and arrived in the UK on Monday 23rd April 1934.

Monday 23rd April Arrived at South Hampton and is it cold ? not half. We have anchored alongside the Majestic one of the largest ships afloat, she is a beauty. Got through customs all right after a lot of hassling around and in the train now. the carriages are beautiful and the ride as well the scenery is beautiful green fields on either side. When we arrived at Waterloo station and Van Praag, George Greenwood and a couple of the other chaps were there to meet us. I went with Van Praag to Wembley in his M G car and did he give me some thrills. We went to see when the speedway at night

Tuesday, April 24 Saw Mr Elvin today the manager of when the stadium and Alex Jackson the speedway manager they would very nice to us about this project machine they had at the stadium it seems a good machine. At night went to West Ham speedway with Harry Whitfield in his car saw Doug MacLachlan riding he had three falls poor devil.

Thursday 26th April Up at the stadium this morning fixing my bike for racing. Then had a practice starts and my foot got caught in the **23**

back wheel and tore the leg out of my trousers and it happened to be my good suit, then went to town with Wal lyand George Greenwood to buy a car met Langtons and Frank Charles from Belle Vue. Very nice chaps We bought an Essex sedan off a chap this afternoon

Friday 27th April Went into the city with Wally and Charlie to get a license. got fixed up after a while, then drove to Waterloo stadium to get our parts and trunks got back to Wembley about 7.30

Saturday 28th April Went to see the cup final of football at Wembley stadium. was there a crowd, the biggest i have ever seen. the King and Queen were there.

Monday 7th May I had a ride at Wimbledon and a chap of the name of Rodgers one of the Aussies fell in front of me and I went over his bike and fell on my back injuring the lower part of my spine and had a bad bruise on to the muscle of my leg.

Tuesday 8th May Can hardly walk today. Wally drove me up to the stadium and Ted the trainer put me in a hot bath and rubbed my back and leg, feel much better this afternoon

Wednesday 9th May Still feeling pretty sore went through the usual thing getting my back and leg fixed up, nottoo good yet . Wally rode at the Lea Bridge, he had a match race with Steve Langton Steve won he had another ride but was beaten. He rode my bike his own wasn't ready, but my bike not too good.

Thursday 10th May Feeling pretty sore still but rode at Wembley the opening meeting. I got second in the heat and third in the final of the scratch race between some of the new Aussies and the two other Wembley riders. Wally little won his heat and the final

Friday 11th May Friday went up to the stadium did some training feel much better. Then pulled my bike to bits the first time for four meetings

Saturday 12th May Never did anything startling today very quiet. Went to a Speedway Dance, to picture show at Wembley. They held a scooter race for the boys Norman Evans won it and was presented with a nice cup then Praag was in the final with Evans and it nearly ended in a fight after they had pushed one another off several times.

Tuesday 15th May Went to West Ham Speedway at night very good meeting For the individual championship Huxley won the first match. They have to ride three times at different tracks.

Wednesday 16th May Went to New Cross speedway tonight it's the **24** smallest track in England at present. Wembley won the league

match tonight, it is the first time this season that New Cross has been beaten. Wembley has won this six matches they have played so far.

Thursday 17th May Rode at Wembley Wembley played West Ham and beat them I won the Junior scratch race with one second, we were only in one place.

Tuesday 22nd May Went to West Ham with George Greenwood. West Ham played Birmingham, the latter won the match 26 to 27 Bluey rode well Wally Lloyd broke his arm they also had a fireworks display which was very good. Afterwards George and I went to Lyons cafe for supper it is a beautiful place the doors haven't been closed since it was built.

Wednesday 23rd May Up at the stadium did my training and had a sort of a game of football which made me pretty tired going to the pictures tonight.

Thursday 24th May Rode at Wembley tonight in the reserve scratch race got second in the heat and third in the final Wembley won the match game it was a very good meeting and a wonderful crowd.

27th May Beautiful day just like the weather in Sydney there are an awful lot of planes flying about today but that is nothing new, they fly every day and night thousands of them I think they're getting ready for war

28th May Went up to the stadium to do my training after lunch went to town with Wal . Visited Groces and Lewis to buy some goggles. went to Wimbledon at night saw Huxley beat Stevenson for the individual championship. Huxley is riding marvelous but Stevenson rode terrible.

31st May Rode at Wembley - won my heat of the scratch race, in the final was leading and fell, afterwards had supper at the club and then home to bed. Harringay beat Wembley the first time Wembley has been beaten this season

2nd June Rode at Harringay in the qualifying scratch race but never did any good, My first ride there and the track was terribly bare, Dick Wise won with Steve Langton second and Cliff Parkinson third

5th June Went to Birmingham to ride at Halls Green Speedway. I was in the team. Kangaroos V Rest but couldn't get off at the start and the track was terrible, the worst I have been on.

Cominghome from the meeting I got four punctures and did I have some trouble trying to mend them. Great buses with search lights **25**

were buzzing past and putting the breeze up me properly. Arrived home at 6am the next morning feeling rotten

7th June Saw the first test match between England and Australia Australia won by 69 points to 3 it was very good match the Australian team were Vic Huxley captain Lionel van Praag Ron Johnson Arthur Wilkinson Dick Case Max Crosskreutz reserve Frank Arthur Jack Sharp. England Colin Watson, (captain)Les Wotton, Tom Farndon, Frank Charles, HR Lees, Gordon Byers, reserves H Stevenson, Wally Key

5th July Rode at Wembley in the 2nd division team got 2nd in the first heat and 1st in the third heat was leading till the last lap, slid down - got on the bike again to run second. Also won match race with Bill Rodgers, rolled a tyre off in the first laps and finished with the tyre half off.

7th July Went to the stadium in the morning and had a look around in the afternoon went to the baths for a swim at night went to Harringay speedway. Harringay beat Lea Bridge in the league match. Bluey won the scratch race.

19th July Rode at Wembley in 2nd Division League, I am captain of the team now we played Wimbledon won by 10 points won 1st heat and 2nd in the second heat. 1st in the third heat.

1st September Went to Manchester with the Wembley team as reserve, but never had a ride. Wembley were beaten by Belle Vue easy.

3rd September Rode at Wimbledon in the 2nd division team, we lost the match Jerry Williams my team mate fell in the three races, there were only two of us that didn't fall, Jim Millward and myself, I got one 2nd and two thirds

18th October Rode at Wembley tonight it was the last meeting of the season. I was reserve for the team only had one ride and got third place. One supporter gave me a Wembley flag and another a Wembley Lion they were very nice presents so that is the finish of the speedway racing for me this season in old pommy land and I am not sorry as I am longing to get home to my wife.

Last entry 19th October Went to the stadium to pull my bike town and clean it out ready to pack for the boat said goodbye to Mr Elvin the manager of Wembley stadium He asked me to come back next year but I don't think I will be going somehow.

26 This is a biopic of Ken Kirkham

The streets of Bathurst were still lit with Gas lamps when Kenneth William Kirkman was born in August 1910. In 1916 at age 6 Ken went to Howick public School in Bathurst and in 1924 aged 14 he went to Bathurst High school. At some stage probably because of his fathers' Miltons love for motorbikes, Ken, along with one of his cousins, Stan, started riding motorbikes. As Ken was always on the lookout for new technology and the latest gadget I'm sure this led him to try out this new sport of dirt track Speedway riding.

1928 age 18 Ken started as an apprentice Lynotype operator at the Newspaper in Bathurst when he left High School.

By the time Ken was 19 in 1929 and speedway Racing was the new Sport of the era. The New Bathurst Speedway had just opened and together, Ken and his mates became the Boys from Bathurst. A new era in Australia and the boys from Bathurst were eager for some action travelling to different circuits trying their luck racing speedway Ken and his cousin Stan would pack up the Model A Ford, strapped the motorbikes on the side of the car and drove to Sydney after work on Friday night. They would race over the weekend, probably sleeping in the car, then drive back on Sunday nights to start work on Mondays. It was during one of these trips Ken met his future wife to be Dorothy Peplow. Ken then started racing speedway at Blayney NSW with Bluey Wilkinson in 1929. They shared a Douglas belt driven machine but, by the time Bathurst speedway opened in 1930, they had their own Douglas DT bikes He went on to race at Wentworth Park, Parramatta, Liverpool, Cox's Paddock, and the Royal. Ken set the fastest time at the first Wentworth Park meeting. By this time he had come under the mechanical wing of ace tuner Fred Hibberd who had returned from England. Fred had tuned for Vic Huxley, Frank Arthur and many of the stars in England finishing his tour with Belle Vue Aces as their chief mechanic.

In 1931 the Douglas made way for a Rudge. Ken continued to ride for Wentworth Park in the 1932/1933 season. In November 1933 he represented NSW against QLD. Ken's form continued to improve, he then raced in Brisbane, travelling there and back by road with Frank Arthur and Dick Sulway. On his return to Sydney he was appointed captain of the Royals team. Now he was on a 20 yard handicap. He beat Wally Little, Dick Sulway and Jock Hollis in match races. At first Hollis, an experienced rider, refused to meet the up and coming star, but gave in to public pressure.

Ken came second in the Australian Championships for two years running in 1931 and 1932. He was back for the second meeting at the Royale where he was spotted by visiting promoter John S Hoskins when Ken was a member of the NSW side that met the visiting Wembley Lions in 1933. Hoskins recognised Ken's potential and signed him for the Wembley Lions for 1934.

He travelled to England on the SS Jervis Bay, leaving his wife Dorothy at home, with Charlie Ogden, the Wembley chief mechanic, Wally Little and Jim Millward .The trio arrived at Hull on April 23 1934.

He spend some exciting times in Wembley and after the last meeting on 18th September 1934. He arrived home on Tuesday 4th December to see his son Colyn, for the first time. He retired from speedway in 1936.

but surprised everyone by resuming at the Sydney Show Ground in October 1937. He and Wally Little rode unbeaten in a team named the Rest that beat the Mascot. Ken was called up for the crucial third test at the Show ground on January 20 1938 to replace Charlie Spinks but failed to score. The Australians won 30-24. (Note: this information from the Sydney Morning Herald. Other records do not mention Ken.)

In 1938 Ken featured in the Australian Solo Championship scoring 5 points. Bluey Wilkinson won from Jack Milne and Joe Abbott.

Wally Little was involved in the new speedway at Wollongong which opened in June 1939. Ken agreed to ride there, this was his last season.

Ken Kirkman was one of the best speedway riders that came out of Australia in the early thirties. He had a ten year career, although he showed great potential during his 1934 solo trip to Great Britain, he did not get the team chances he deserved. There is no doubt that a second season overseas would have cemented his rise to the top.

Sadly he passed away at Kogarah in 1975 of a heart attack aged a young and active 65.

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