

The Speedway Researcher

Promoting Research into the History of Speedway and Dirt Track Racing

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Yarmouth Track Record

Keith Farman reviews the “record” of the Caister Road track at Yarmouth.

1948 Cinders 327 yards 73.2 (secs)

Paddy Mills (Norwich) Heat 2 Norwich 51 Cradley Heath 33
Challenge 20 July 1948

1949 Cinders 327 yards 72.2 (secs)

Billy Bales (Yarmouth) Heat 1 Yarmouth 51 Exeter 33 Division 3
27th September 1949

1950 Shale 327 yards 69.8 (secs)

Eddie Rigg (Odsal Bradford) Heat 6 World Championship Third Round
25 July 1950

Ken Le Breton (Ashfield) Second Half Yarmouth 50 Ashfield 34
Division 2 7th September 1950

Phil Clarke (Norwich) Scratch Race Yarmouth 44 Norwich 40
Division 2 3rd October 1950 (Last race of the season)

1951 Cinders 327 yards 70.8 (secs)

Bob Baker (Yarmouth) Heat 1 Yarmouth 46 Walthamstow 38
Diversions 2 4th September 1951

1952 Cinders 327 yards 70.8 (secs) Record not broken

1953 Cinders 325 yards 70.4 (secs)

Billy Bales (Norwich) Second Half Match Race V Johnny
Chamberlain 21st April 1953

Track Reopened

1957 Cinders 325 yards 69.2 (secs)

Peter Moore (Ipswich) Heat 1 The Five Star Annual Trophy
27 August 1957

1958 Cinders 325 yards 68.8 (secs)

Barry Briggs (Wimbledon) Heat 2 Yarmouth Individual Trophy
29th July 1958

1959 Cinders 325 yards 70.8 (secs)

Johnny Fitzpatrick (Yarmouth) Heat 1 Yarmouth 32 Ipswich 30 Southern
Area 28th July 1959

1960 Cinders 325 yards 70.8 (secs) Record not broken

1961 Cinders 325 yards 70.8 (secs) Record not broken

From the Yarmouth programme 16th September 1952

NEWS and VIEWS by Ernie Wedon

A correspondent has asked the speed of the racing at this track. Here I can only give the fact and figures as they stand, The track is 327 yards – measured 3 feet from the inner curb – and the track record stands at 69.8 seconds for shale and 70.8 seconds for cinders for 4 laps, i.e. 1308 yards (plus 3 extra yards for the distance to the winning post past the start line)-a total of 1311 yards. These figures would apply to a “white line” rider—a Terry Courtnell would cover considerably more ground. After a quiet session in a remount corner we decided on 3 speeds one for shale—one for cinders – (both speeds for record holders)-and the third for a good middle-of-the-track rider covering about 1360 yards over 4 laps and clocking a fairish time of 72 seconds on cinders (or shale)

So here comes the answers; –The track record–holder on shale (a good white-liner– 38.42 m.p.h approx. The track record holder on cinders (another good white liner–Bob Baker by name) 37.87 m.p.h. approx. Remarkable this, that the apparently slower rider comes out faster—but that’s how our figures work out. Try them yourself—if we are wrong–don’t all shout us down at once

After Peter Moore broke the track record the following Yarmouth programme did not acknowledge it, as they did not alter the track records.

Briggs’ time was unofficial because there was not an official recorder at the meeting. However the times were checked and as far as I am concerned Briggs’ time stand as the All Time Record.

In 1959 all the old records were deleted from the programme. Johnny Fitzpatrick became the track record holder and his time was to last until the track closed for the last time in 1961. It’s possible that the finishing line did not the additional 3 yards during those seasons.

Barry Briggs was certainly the fastest rider n the eleven seasons that Yarmouth staged Speedway racing at Caister Road. Only seven times did the time under 70 seconds and Barry recorded three of those seven.

The fastest riders at Yarmouth

68.8 Barry Briggs	(Wimbledon)	Heat 2 The Great Yarmouth
Championship	29 th July 1958 (Unofficial)	
69.2 Peter Moore	(Ipswich)	Heat 1 Five Star Annual Trophy
	3 September 1957	
69.8 Eddie Rigg	(Odsal Bradford)	Heat 6 World Championship
Round	25 th July 1950	
69.8 Ken Le Breton	(Ashfield)	Second Half Yarmouth V Ashfield
	7 th September 1950	
69.8 Phil Clarke	(Norwich)	Second Half Final Yarmouth V Norwich
	3 October 1950	

69.8 Barry Briggs	(Wimbledon)	Heat 11	The Great Yarmouth
Championship	29 th July 1958		
69.8 Barry Briggs	(Wimbledon)	Heat 17	The Great
Yarmouth Championship	29 th July 1958		

Any other records of venue track records?

Steve Langton Speedway Pioneer and Gold Prospector

Tony Webb has a look at the career of pioneer Aussie

Steve Langton was one of the pioneer Australians who had a long career from 1928 –1953. He was born in a mining camp between Oakley and Toowoomba Queensland 3-9-1909. First rode Toowoomba 1928/29 where he met up with Phil “Tiger” Hart. He went to UK 1930 with Tiger and raced at Portsmouth.

1931 he joined the interlinked Lea Bridge and Southampton venture and at the end of the season he returned to Australia with the Johnnie Hoskins’ Australian team.

In 1932/33 Steve rode in first test in Perth 10/12/1932 scoring 1 point and he also rode in the 7th test at the Sydney Showground 11/3/1933 scoring 4 points. Thereafter he returned to Brisbane for remainder of the 1933 season.

Steve was back in England in 1934 after missing 1933 season and joined Wathamstow for their short spell at Chingford Road. However, e remained with this promotion until the end of 1935 English season.

There are no record of his riding in Brisbane again until 1935/36.

Steve raced in the UK until the outbreak of war in 1939 and appeared at one of the two meetings staged at Dam Park in Ayr in 1937.

Returning to Australia Steve enlisted in 2/4 Australian Armed Regiment as number nx422650 in New South Wales on August 12 1941, rose to rank of Warrant Officer Class 2. He was discharged on December 21 1945.

Steve returned to England in 1947 and joined Tamworth Hounds.

Steve rode 12 seasons total in England, the best of which was 1949. In that time he had raced for 9 British clubs in a 23 year career.

He continued to ride after he returned to his native Australian and was selected for the Australian team in Brisbane in 1952 at the age of 43.

This made him one of the oldest riders to take part in an International match.

Steve Langton retired 1953 and sold his bike to Keith Blicharski of Toowoomba.

There is a story that he was known to have become a gold prospector, it was said he always carried a gold nugget which he considered to be an insurance against hard times.

The Langton family ran a bus service from Toowoomba to Gympie, on his retirement from racing Steve set up a service station which was a logical location for the buses. at Woombye off the Bruce Highway north of Brisbane. His brother set up a mechanical workshop nearby. Steve prospected and around the Gympie area often going bush for long periods. A creature of habit, he always bought his supplies at the same local store.

Steve moved to Victoria after his first wife Constance passed away. He died in Ballarat Victoria. It is reputed that Constance always carried a briefcase which contained all the programs and press cuttings of Steve's speedway events.

By way of an aside, there is a legend has that Steve's ancestor Stephen Langton was a signatory to the Magna Carta, the famous historical document, in 1215. The Christian name Stephen was carried by the male line to the present day. A nightmare for researchers. However Steve's nephew Bonnie chose to ride under his name of Bonnie, therefore breaking a tradition.

1930 Portsmouth	1931 Lea Bridge
1931 Southampton	1932 Clapton
1934 Walthamstow	1937 Birmingham
1938 Birmingham	
1947 Tamworth	209-6.15
1948 Tamworth	45-277-6.15
1949 Tamworth	22-227-5.97
1950 Southampton	28-162-5.78

Keith Gurtner - The Original Little Boy Blue

We start with Part 1 of another interesting **Tony Webb** penned article about an often unsung Aussie.

The name Keith Gurtner is one that is synonymous with Queensland speedway. Keith had a long successful career from 1946-1971, seven (7) times Queensland champion, he raced for 7 teams in the UK, from the Third to First Division, and represented Australia on 26 occasions. But

like so many stars of the era he was subject to a very imaginative speedway press where often the truth was never allowed to get in the way of a good story!

I have tried to put together a factual biography of a great rider, regarded by some as over classy, he was a rider's rider, in the vein of Ken McKinlay, Ken le Breton and Ivan Mauger. A man with a methodical preparation, a stylish trackstyle, the right elbow high, a pencil throttle grip sitting low in the saddle, a style not unlike Ivan Mauger. Keith was the ultra professional.

His individual career, and his Test match record in England did not achieve the heights his potential promised, but he was regarded as a solid and reliable team man. In Australia it was a different story, for 20 seasons he was Mr Speedway and a legend on his home track at the Ekka in Brisbane always rising to the occasion when the Stars of the day ventured up to Brisbane.

Anyway before I get off track, we will start at the beginning and follow Keith's career, backed up with facts and figures Keith Frank Gurtner was born in 1921 in New South Wales, his parents were Eugene and Maud [nee]Ireland, his father was a masseur who ran sports massage clinic, Keith who broke 52 bones during his career would often say his father repaired bones he broke them. He was educated by the Christian brothers. His childhood was spent in Homebush where first talents were as a skater, he ran a second place in the A Australian speed skating championships twice, and was an amateur boxer. He actually started racing in 1939 on grasstracks, then he was called up for military service until 1944 It was in 1946 that he responded to a "riders wanted poster" placed by Frank Arthur outside Sydney Sportsground that set his career going. He purchased a machine from Ernie Brecknell who he was later to have a spectacular crash with in the UK He married a Brisbane girl Violette Victoria Patterson in 1947 making their home in the suburb of Bulimba.

Frank Arthur then gained the lease on the Exhibition Ground in Brisbane, but was desperately short of riders for the sub tropical city. Keith, with Hugh Geddes, Keith Ryan, Norman Gillepsie and Archie Neill all from New South Wales, and made the long trip to Brisbane in February 1946. In Keith's case it was come for a season, stay for a lifetime. Keith's first outing at the Exhibition ground was on 22 March 1946. In June, on the 15th he was involved in what the papers described as the

most spectacular crash ever seen at the EKKKA. The Truth newspaper on 16/6/1946 reported the accident with the headline.

“Eight injured in speedway smash rider thrown into the crowd”. Keith who was off the back mark was catapulted over the fence while trying to avoid a fallen rider. Keith landed on top of seven spectators who received various injuries from Keith’s boots and helmet. There is no doubt that landing on the spectators and not the concrete terrace saved Keith’s life. He sustained a broken arm, fractured ankle and several broken ribs. This kept him out of action until late 1946. Reference to that accident is recorded in the EKKKA program of June 22 1946.

Another set back was the tragic death in September when his mechanic David Alexander was killed in a road accident. Keith returned from injury for the first meeting of the 1946/47 season, then suffered an ankle injury in the meeting of September 14, Which kept him sidelined until November 11. Then he rose quickly through the ranks to the point, at the opening of the 1947/48 season he was in the A grade. After the last meeting in Brisbane on 21 December Keith returned to Sydney for the Christmas break in the company of Hugh Geddes and Keith Ryan.

Keith commenced the 1947/48 season at the EKKKA on 13/9/1947. On 2 /10/1947 he ran second to veteran rider Dick Smythe in the scratch race final. The next meeting on November 8 saw him off 50 yards to gain his first handicap race win, the man was on his way. Another milestone was his first Queensland team spot in a match versus an Overseas team on November 22. From the reserve berth he managed a third place in a 33-13 thrashing of the homesters by the visitors. In the reserves match race though he downed visiting UK star rider Gil Craven. It was following this meeting that Keith created a feat that put him in the headlines, on the Ekka track, from a flying start he set up a world record of 17 seconds for one lap.

UK promoter Frank “Buster” Buckland, himself an ex rider, came to Brisbane that winter with an open cheque book looking it was reported for 10 Australian riders for English teams. For Exeter he signed the then 24 year old Keith and Hugh Geddes. An aside to this tale is that Buckland was so smitten with Queensland that at the end of the 1948 UK season he sold up and emigrated down under.

Arriving at Tilbury Docks a bleak English spring morning, Keith and Hugh then travelled down to the West country to take up their places in the Falcon’s side in the third division Keith’s first meeting was 29 March 1948, an Exeter supporters club sponsored open meeting for the Tom

Crutcher Memorial Trophy. Starting off with a last place in his first outing, Keith then reeled off two wins and a third. Not a bad start in some illustrious company. The next meeting was an Exeter v Plymouth league match riding as a second string he scored 4 paid 5 partnered with the late Norman Clay in the 68-28 thrashing of the Devils

The return match at the Devils track at Pennycross was not a happy night for Keith who finished the evening with 4 pointless rides. This was the last time he donned a Falcons race jacket as for some unknown reason he was transferred to the Johnnie Hoskins second division promotion at Newcastle, in the far flung north east. The tight Brough park circuit was worlds apart from the racy open spaces of Exeter. Never the less Keith settled quickly into the Geordie team, it was great for him that there were three Australians in the team, the vastly experienced Charlie Spinks, another Queenslander Bonny Waddell and the White Ghost himself Ken le Breton all respected riders from whom he was to learn so much. A report in the Speedway News of 22/7/1948 stated

“Keith Coming Up

Keith Gurtner is yet another of Newcastle’s Dominion strength definitely on the way up. This ex-Exeter lightweight ,reputedly only seven and a half stone, is notable for his lightning starts and speedy first bend dives, and last week recorded his best performance to date, with seven points from three rides in the match, and a grand win from Ken Le Breton in his heat of the scratch race. Keith has yet to fall on the tight turns of Brough Park, no mean feat for a newcomer, and on the strength of his recent showings, moves up in to the team proper.”

In the middle of the UK season Keith was called up for duty in the first division club Bradford Boomerangs. This was home from home for Keith as among his team members were North Queensland rider Max Grosskreutz and Victorian Andy Menzies. The Speedway News reported the move on 26/ August 1948.

Gurtner for Rigg

Johnnie Hoskins has brought 24 year old Keith Gurtner to ride for the Odsal team to replace the injured Eddie Rigg. In his first ride with Odsal against New Cross last week, the young Australian scored 5 points’ Programmed at reserve for a challenge match between the Wallabies and Bradford on 17 July Keith scored two thirds and a zero in his contribution to the Wallabies team. August 19 saw Keith in the Boomerangs team which went down 30-77 in an away match at New Cross, Keith’s score of 2-2-1 was a creditable debut in the top league.

Back in Bradford on 28 August, he only managed 11 points, in his teams 37 points as they went down to the powerful Wembley Lions 41 points. The next home match against New Cross on September 4, resulted in 2 third places and a zero. His last match at Bradford in 1948 was on September 11, but he failed to score from the reserve berth in a match against a Dominion side.

In September Keith finished his season in dramatic style. Colliding with fellow Australian Ernie Brecknell as they crossed the finish line at Newcastle, Keith baled out, his riderless machine mounted the fence and collected several supporters. Norman Evans attempted to avoid the melee and took to the infield mowing down several track staff and colliding with the tractor driver. Evans received a serious leg injury. Meanwhile Gurtie recovered in the ambulance room, despite a badly swollen ankle he took to the track again scoring two wins and winning the scratch race final. Although he rode for another fortnight the pain got too much and his season ended early.

Returning to Brisbane in the Australian spring of 1948 Keith started the season in low key running third to Newcastle teammate Charlie Spinks and Keith Cox in the scratch race final on November 27. Graham Warren was in town for Queensland's 3 lap championship on December 18 which Warren won from Bert Spencer in the final. Keith was eliminated in the second quarter final.

After the Christmas break Keith commenced racing at the first meeting on January 29. This was a Queensland v Newcastle match, Keith's contribution was 5 points in the 25-29 defeat of the home side. Moving on to February 16, the big event for Brisbane was the Australian 4 lap title. Keith showed his flair for the big meetings by running a very creditable fourth place with 10 points. Winner was Aub Lawson from Wild Bill Rodgers and the veteran Queenslander Charlie Spinks. **To Be Continued.**

Paddy Dean Poem

Graeme Frost found this poem pasted inside a copy of a programme from the meeting at which Buzz Hibberd was killed. Graeme advises it was specially written for Sporting Weekly by SCORCHEM

There's a dirt track by the sea Paddy Dean,
Where your sunny face of late we have not seen;
But we hardly miss you now; we applaud like anyhow,

We've a better man than you, he's Drew McQueen.
He can buzz around the track, can Drew McQueen,
No smile upon his face is to be seen;
He can broadside wide and fast,
But we've never seen him last,
He's a champion sure enough is Drew McQueen.

There's another we must speak of Paddy Dean;
And I think you are sure to know who I mean,
For he took away your lead,
Yes! He beat you did Sam Reid:
He's just about as good, as Drew McQueen.

Then there's Eric on his "Rudge," Paddy Dean,
Who can "Burnet" very well as you have seen;
He can lap in twenty two,
Which is more than you can do.
He's a right hot lad is Eric, Paddy Dean!

We've another from the west. Paddy Dean,
He's Italian, but he doesn't sell ice-cream;
He went well for a while
But a fall has cramped his style,
And we call him Val Valente, Paddy Dean!

Then there's our wee Jolly Rodger, Paddy Dean,
Who is quite a little dodger in his mean,
He can put us in a frenzy,
And his name is George McKenzie,
He's a dashing smiling ender, Paddy Dean.

You remember Harry Duncan, Paddy Dean,
Who chased you round the track in his "Sunbeam,"
On his "Zenith' he goes wide,
But when he gets into his stride
He'll > be just as good as you, Paddy Dean.

Though we've battered you and flayed you, Paddy Dean,
You're a master of the track, as we have seen,
And when sunshine follows rain
We expect you back again,
With a new bike in your train, Paddy Dean.

From the names and other things mentioned the poem must date from about 1928 and been written by a fan who watched their speedway at Marine Gardens in Edinburgh.

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

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

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

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

The Christmas break then interrupted the season until January 7th. Aub Lawson was the star visitor and in a thrilling scratch final Keith beat Aub by four bike lengths., this was a great warm up to the Queensland solo titles on the following Saturday. This was a classic meeting with a line up that included Sydney's Graham Warren. Engine troubles halted

Warrens progress which left the field open. Keith took out the title, the unlucky Warren had to be satisfied with the third spot. In a meeting of mixed fortunes it should be mentioned that Bert Spencer ran second for the second year in succession, Keith Cox had engine failure in his semi final and that Graham Warren's third spot was aboard Howdy Byford's machine.

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

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

Keith's third season in UK was not a totally successful time, indeed Tom Stenner reports in the Stenners' Annual of 1951 "***That Gurtner was moody, brilliant one night and indifferent the next***". His form at Ashfield slumped to number six, barely retaining his team spot. It has to be said that the Giants were a powerful team, Keith rode 25 matches to score 141 points with an average of 5.64.

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

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

1950/1951 On his return to Brisbane in November 1950 he ran into what was a turbulent season for Australian speedway. Bad weather had delayed the opening of most tracks. In Brisbane rehabilitation work to the centre oval had halted all events at the EKKA.. The speedway control board in UK had refused to sanction an official English team to visit Australia. Added to this was a restriction on power to night time sports events in Sydney forcing an unpopular move to daytime racing.

The first recorded meeting for Keith was on February 2nd when he was a member of Jack Parkers team v Aub Lawson's team he scored 6 points. He was then called up to represent Australia at Brisbane. Jack Parker had put together an un-official team of English riders to honour his personal obligations to Australian promoters. Keith was joint top scorer on 12 with Aub Lawson in the 60-48 defeat of the Poms. Strangely Keith did not ride in the Australian solo riders championship the following week in Sydney, indeed there was no representation from Queensland at all. In all it was a subdued season for Keith and not the ideal preparation for his fourth trip to UK in March 1951.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following week he was in superb form riding for Australia in the fourth test in front of a patriotic home crowd he top scored with 15 points in an easy Australian win of 66-41. The selectors woke up, and drafted Keith into the final Test a week later at Sydney Showground. This time he really showed the Sydneysiders what an Interstater was capable of

with an 18 point maximum in the Aussies 64-44 win. Strangely he failed to appear in the Queensland state title that year.

1952 Returning to Scotland for the fifth time he again was an important cog in the Motherwell team for the 1952 season. From 30 matches he had an average of 6.7, a tad down on 1951, but still up with the leaders. At the end of the season first division clubs Wimbledon and West Ham were chasing his signature. He opted for the Hammers for the 1953 season In August the Motherwell management made the surprise move to transfer Keith to the Edinburgh Monarchs who had been making overtures for his signature. It was a move that displeased the Eagles supporters to whom Keith had become a popular rider. On Tuesday September 2 Keith made the long trek down to Yarmouth where he scored 6 points for an Overseas side who could only muster 28 against a Great Britain's 80. The following week he was back at Caister Road, this time in the Edinburgh team where he scored 2 paid 3 in the Monarchs 34-54 defeat, his new team partner was the New Zealand international Harold Fairhurst who Keith had met in Brisbane when the Kiwi rode there in 1946. Keith scored 77 points from 15 matches in the remaining Edinburgh fixtures of the season

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

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

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

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

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

1953 UK Season For Keith's first season in the top league he was based in London, this was Coronation year, therefore it would have been a great time to be based in the capital city. After spending the previous five seasons northern based it must have also been a culture change, There was now less travelling, the furthest team from London was Belle Vue and with three other teams in London there were many local derbies. He was now a member of a First division side, West Ham, it was a difficult time for the Hammers who were trying to recapture lost glories, this put a lot of pressure on the lower order in the team.

Keith rode a total of 16 matches with an average of 2.5 which was a creditable tally considering this was the elite league. There is no record of Keith's part in the world championship rounds of 1953, I can only assume that minor injury may have ruled him out.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1959/60 Appointed as Australian captain, Keith led a four man squad to New Zealand for a three match series that resulted in a 2-1 win for the Kiwis. In the Australian team were Brisbane based

Victorian, Ken Cameron, [I state tis fact as Ken advertised in the uk Speedway Star, looking for a contract, stating he was a resident of New farm Brisbane] New South Welshmen Bill Bryden and Mick Simmonds and a surprise inclusion Rockhampton based Kiwi Goog Allan!

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

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

This was the year that big changes were happening on the mechanical side of speedway. For over 30 years the JAP engine had ruled supreme, albeit in a variety of frames. Now on the scene was a complete machine, the ESO, later to be known as the Jawa. Contemporary reports indicated

that Keith played a part in the development of this machine over the next few seasons. There are people close to Keith that say he was 100% JAP devotee and dispute these press reports. Whatever is true the facts remain that Queensland had the ideal conditions to develop the ESO, with all the year racing. Without the pressures of team and championship considerations that existed in Europe. The ESO was brought into Australia by Adelaide dealer Fred Jolly, who made the new machine available to top Australian riders to iron out the problems. Keith along with Ivan Mauger, Bob Sharpe [who is reputed to have had the very first ESO in Australia], Chum Taylor, Ken Cameron and Jack Scott were the ones who worked to make the ESO a real force in speedway racing. Ove Fundin and Barry Briggs were also pioneers in the ESO story but it was Keith and his fellow Australians who were able to advise on the problem solving.

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

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

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

The 1962 Australian titles were again held at Rockhampton on December 15 1962. Keith finished second behind Englishman Mike Broadbank.

Taking third spot was Ivan Mauger.

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

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

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

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

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

1965/66 No titles held

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

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

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

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

1968/1969. Former Halifax PRO Max Jessop re-opened Ipswich Speedway in March 1968. Appearing in the first meeting, the Ipswich

Trophy, was the evergreen Keith who showed age did not hamper his track craft. Against class opposition that included Jack White, Kev Torpie and Bert Kingston, Keith finished the night in third spot, winning the last heat of the night from White and Kingston.

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

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

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

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

Memories of Gurtie

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

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

Kevin Elliott former member of the Gurtner pit crew, remembers the riders who all worked at the PMG in central Brisbane. The spectacle of

speedway aces Gurtner, Keith Cox, and Dick Smythe setting of on their morning postal deliveries was a feature of Brisbane scene in the 1950's

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Web Master: Ron McNeil

www.speedwayresearcher.org.uk

Contact at info@speedwayresearcher.org.uk

Or jjh1950@blueyonder.co.uk

The Speedway Researcher is edited and published by:

Graham Fraser

7b Bruce Street,

Stirling, FK8 1PD

24 Tel : 01786 471992

Jim Henry

90 Greenend Gardens,

Edinburgh, EH17 7QH

Tel : 0131 664 7185