

A Tribute to Igor Plechanov by Dudley Jones



Igor Plechanov

I was saddened to learn of Igor's death in *Speedway Star*. I was fortunate enough to have seen Igor ride during his prime. Here are a few personal memories.

Igor was the first good Russian rider to become known in the west, and arguably their greatest ever.

Those old enough may remember him for his smiling face, almost enough to melt the cold war, and his friendly disposition - here was a great ambassador.

I believe he first became known in 1961. I first saw him at Wembley, in the first ever test match with USSR. The Russians were not that strong, but they were great triers. However, Igor, and Boris Samorodov were genuinely world class. Igor was twice runner up in the World Championship, no mean feat in the one off WC days, when you did not ride regularly in the west.

Igor's style was all action, rather like that of Barry Briggs, and he was **VERY GOOD INDEED**. Almost a veteran in terms of age he was, for five or six years, a true superstar.

I have seen it suggested that he could not come from the back. This was not true, in my experience we was very good at it, and did it most of the time. Igor tried 110%, always and I think there can be no doubt that, had he ridden for a UK team, he would have won the title more than once. In the days of Briggs, Fundin, Knutssen, etc., this man could live with the best.

Perhaps my best memory is when dear old Norwich, ever keen to get one over on the rest, decided upon their own test match, Norwich v USSR. Unfortunately, the 'powers that were' vetoed this at the last minute, and allowed only four Russians to appear.

Offered a best pairs event, the Russians elected to race the test match format, each riding in every other heat throughout the evening. It was great racing. 18 heats, Plechanov, Chekranov, Kurilenko and Kadirov two, then two, with no reserves to call on.

Igor scored 19 points, plus a fall while racing Olle Nygren, in his 9 heats.

Fundin scored an 18 point maximum, Nygren got 17, Hedge 9 and Bales 8.

Kurilenko got 16, Kadirov 9 and Chekranov 9, none had been to Norwich before.

In 1964 not many people beat Nygren around Norwich, but Igor took that point from Olle. The score, USSR 55, Norwich 53.....in what turned out to be Norwich's best ever year in the top flight.

Believe me, this smiling, badge swapping racer was one of the true speedway greats.

Thanks for the memories Igor.

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