

Book Review: Shale Britannia

Shale Britannia - A Sideways Glance at Speedway

By Jeff Scott and Rachael Adams

Published by Methanol Press

£15



Remarkably few speedway photography books have been published over the years, Mike Patrick has certainly been responsible for at least three of those that have reached the bookshelves, though it's difficult recall many others. While an optimist would deduce that a gap therefore exists in the market for another one, a pessimist would perhaps consider that there simply isn't demand for this kind of product.

Jeff Scott has decided to test the market with his new "Shale Britannia: A Sideways Glance at Speedway" book. This is the third offering from Jeff's Methanol Press business. His publications to date, "Showered in Shale" and "When Eagles Dared", have both featured lengthy prose punctuated by a selection of small photographs. Sadly, the publication methods used failed to show the pictures to full advantage, they were small and the clarity was lost in the printing.

One suspects that's part of the reason that Jeff has decided to publish a collection of the thousands of photographs he's accumulated from his trips around the country. This book features 245 of his best, all are produced in full colour on glossy paper and each measures somewhere around 16 by 12 centimetres.

It's immediately obvious from a first flick through the book that this is a very different beast from Mike Patrick's publications. It doesn't feature action or portrait photographs of the sport's big names, instead it looks at the supporters, stadiums and even the track shops of the British speedway scene in the early 21st century.

The other thing that strikes you, and indeed surprises you, is that there are no captions with the photographs. Given that Jeff has been criticised in the past for 'over writing'

this is perhaps the most unexpected thing about the whole book. Presumably the photographs are intended to speak for themselves, either that or Jeff's lengthy captions were in danger of taking over the book! There is an index at the rear that states which track each photograph was taken at, beyond that you're left to draw your own conclusions about what you're seeing. An unintended side-effect for the hardened speedway fan is that you can play 'guess the stadium' as you flick through, for some it's therefore a photography and quiz book all in one!

Interestingly the preface implies that the target audience of this work stretches beyond the speedway community. That's quite unusual and ambitious for a speedway book, certainly any success the book achieves in other fields can only help the sport.

The pictures are grouped together into loose categories, thus all the pictures of people appear in the 'Celebrity and Support' section. Both Sophie Blake and George English feature on those pages, so a wide variety of tastes are catered for! There are also photographs of track staff, supporters and even a few speedway riders, though the pictures are candid rather than posed. Other categories include 'Action', 'Crowds Gather' and 'The Pits'.

The book itself runs to 256 pages and features introductions from photographer Scott and picture editor Rachael Adams. It seems that Adams had the task of selecting and presenting the photographs from Jeff's extensive library, earning her joint-billing on the spine of the book. The plasticky/rubbery cover falls somewhere between paperback and hardback and you almost expect the book would bounce if you dropped it.

'Shale Britannia' is not a book that will appeal to everyone, some will love the documentary style of the photographs, others will simply not see the attraction. It's undoubtedly a quality and well produced publication. Whether it's for you comes down to individual taste.

If in doubt, seek out Jeff on his current promotional tour and he'll no doubt be happy to let you see a copy. You can find him at the following meetings:

- 7 June Swindon v Wolverhampton
- 9 June Rye House v Glasgow
- 10 June Sittingbourne v Buxton
- 11 June Wolverhampton v Reading
- 15 June Arena Essex Lakeside v Eastbourne
- 16 June Eastbourne v Peterborough
- 20 June King's Lynn v Mildenhall
- 21 June Sheffield v Birmingham
- 22 June Edinburgh v Redcar
- 23 June Berwick 40th Anniversary meeting
- 24 June Glasgow v Birmingham
- 25 June Belle Vue v Eastbourne
- 27 June Poole v Coventry
- 28 June Peterborough v Eastbourne
- 30 June Cardiff GP

- 1 July Newport Welsh Open
- 1 July Swindon v Peterborough

If you can't make any of those dates, or simply can't wait to get your hands on a copy, then you can order the book in the following ways:

- **From the <http://www.methanolpress.com> website**
- **By sending a cheque for £18 (to include p&p) made payable to "J.Scott" to Methanol Press, 2 Tidy Street, Brighton BN1 4EL**

We always welcome and value any feedback from our visitors. If you'd like to comment on this article then please fill in our feedback form at <http://www.speedwayplus.com/ShaleBritanniaReview.shtml#feedback>