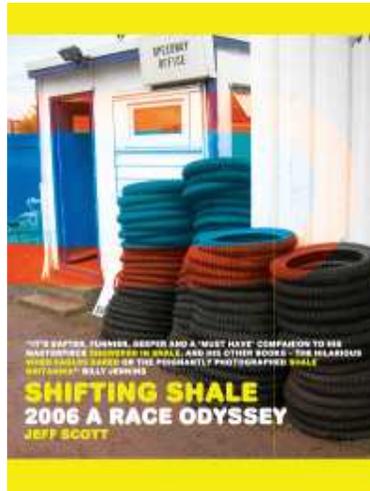


Book Review: Shifting Shale

Shifting Shale

By Jeff Scott

£20, in softback



Regular visitors to the site will hopefully be familiar with the work of author and speedway obsessive Jeff Scott. We've featured excerpts from his work and tried to somehow help him minimise the losses his publications always seem destined to make. He's just published his fourth speedway book in little over a year, a quite incredible rate that hints at an underlying addiction of some kind.

The good news is that the quality of Jeff's work has not been affected by the quantity he's produced. "Shifting Shale" is a return to the format that worked so well in his first book "Showered in Shale". The author travels to every track in the country, meets some interesting (and occasionally odd) characters, sums up what stands out about each meeting and reports it all in an amusing and incisive manner. His first book covered his 2005 adventures, this one is firmly focussed on 2006 – from the New Year Classic to the Brighton Bonanza.

Nobody else writing about speedway at the moment can capture the speedway experience in the way that Scott can. As always, the beauty of his work is in the description of the minutiae - fleeting conversations are recorded in full and the sentiments expressed subjected to analysis. The closure of a toilet block at Reading is discussed at length, it's hard to imagine any other book mentioning it, let alone considering the implications.

There's plenty of comment on the bigger issues affecting the sport also. The chapter on Jeff's first visit to "BSI Reading" makes for fascinating reading, especially given the way that particular project has now turned out. He also covers the tactical ride rule, picking apart the 'pro' arguments advanced by some within the sport. If it happened in British speedway in 2006 then you'll find at least one person's opinion on it within the pages of this book.

Where this book differs from “Showered in Shale” is in the perspective of the writer. First time round he was an outsider, mingling un-noticed with the locals, free to roam and invisible to most. In this second adventure he’s standing behind a pasting table, hoping to sell some copies of the aforementioned tome and no longer just the nice man asking you questions – he’s now the nice man who’s going to remember what has been said and write it all down in a book. This last point does lead to an early sale as a track photographer buys a copy - just so he can send it to his lawyer with a view to taking legal action! Thankfully nothing seems to come from it, but it does highlight one of the dangers in writing a book of this nature.

In many ways, “Shifting Shale” is about more than just speedway and has more layers than “Showered in Shale”. It’s also about Jeff’s struggle to write, publish and sell a book in a small and crowded marketplace. His first night of sales activity sees more books stolen than he actually sells, on another occasion he finds himself with the very worst spot at the less popular of two rival collectors’ fayres being held in the same street. No doubt valuable lessons have been learned from these experiences and these mistakes avoided on his promotional tour for this new book.

Jeff’s increased profile also opens some useful doors, such as those of the SRA rider of the year awards. The chapter on that particular evening makes for hilarious reading – mainly due to the antics of Steve Johnson and the presence of Sophie Blake. One of the aforementioned was polite and demure while the other was very loud indeed – you’ll have to buy the book to find out who did what. Sophie also features in one of the many laugh-out-load passages within the book with the observation that the official attendance at last year’s Lonigo GP must now be considered to have been 4,500+1.

In another stand-out chapter the action moves to Sittingbourne as Jeff joins the referees in a ‘fun’ practice session. There’s no bravado in his account of the day, he admits to being petrified and relieved when he could retreat to the safety of the changing rooms. This chapter more than any other highlights just what a good writer Scott is, his self-doubt and fear come screaming off the page and will strike a chord with anyone who has ever stepped outside their own comfort zones.

In our review of Jeff’s photography book, “Shale Britannia”, we mentioned that the lack of words was a real departure from Jeff’s usual style. We needn’t have worried, normal service has been resumed here and this book contains as many words as one could possibly want (even if we secretly think he make some of them up). It runs to just short of 350 pages and given Jonathan Chapman’s description of the book as “the ideal toilet book”, Jeff may not be far off the mark with his idea to market it as “the ultimate book for the speedway fan with prostrate or constipation issues.”

In summary – you should buy this book, you’ll enjoy it and you might even be in it!

Shifting Shale by Jeff Scott

- **Buy at all good track shops (£20)**
- **Order via paypal on the website at www.methanolpress.com**
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