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Milton Keynes: The Final Season

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Milton Keynes...The Final Season



Peter Glanz

At the beginning of 1992 the future of the Milton Keynes Knights was looking very bleak indeed. They just had come through a traumatic 1991 season which had seen them temporarily close mid-season due to financial problems, only being able to complete the campaign after an appeal to supporters for interest free loans. Along the way they'd also lost star rider Gordon Kennett in an attempt to stem losses.

The club was operating out of Elfield Park, a purpose built venue that had become their home after being evicted from the town's greyhound stadium in 1988. The stadium was basic in the extreme and the BSPA had issued warnings stressing that immediate and substantial improvements were necessary.

Club owner and promoter Terry Cheney admitted that making those stadium improvements was not going to be easy:

"My sole aim has been to keep Milton Keynes Speedway going, but it has been a difficult job and I have blown all my money."

Against this background - a skint promoter, a side in need of investment and a stadium requiring major works - it seemed unlikely that club would be able to continue.

In early February, help came from a most unlikely source - Exeter.

Exeter promoters Colin Hill and Roger Jones stepped in and agreed a deal with Cheney that would see them run the team, while he retained control of the track and stadium. Jones, who had actually been sacked as Milton Keynes promoter by Cheney a few years earlier, would take control at Milton Keynes while Hill would concentrate on activities at Exeter.

The Exeter promotion had a number of motives for getting involved. The Knights were actually their nearest rivals in the second division and they didn't want to become even more isolated, they also had unused rider assets that were of little value if they weren't employed and it's also fair to say they acted out of concern for the sport as a whole. Another lost track was the last thing that the sport needed - Wimbledon and Hackney had just closed and Peterborough were only saved by the intervention of Peter Oakes and James Easter.

Milton Keynes was not actually the first choice venue for Jones and Hill. Their initial target had been Mildenhall, where speedway had not been staged the previous year. The drawback of the Fens track was that as a new club they'd had to have paid a joining fee to the league, no such payment being necessary at Elfield swung the decision that way.

Jones was optimistic after the takeover was completed:

"Milton Keynes has got an awful history, but I feel that if it's promoted properly, and a cost-effective team is put in then Milton Keynes can support speedway and we can get by there."

In an attempt to boost crowds they applied to switch race night from Tuesday to Saturday, no doubt hoping to make it more family friendly in the process. Their application was refused after Coventry raised an objection that their own crowds might be affected by the increased competition - which seemed unlikely then and just as ludicrous in retrospect.

Within three weeks they had assembled the bulk of the side, which would race once more in red, white and blue - rather than the jade and orange of the previous season. It was a side that certainly didn't lack in experience, consisting of Richard Hellsen, Ian Barney, Peter Glanz, Dave Steen, Lars

Munkedal and (surprisingly) Gordon Kennett who agreed to return despite the abrupt end to his earlier spell as a Knight.

Kennett and Hellsen had both been riding since the early seventies and were now very definitely at the veteran stage. Hellsen, who had not been fully recompensed for his efforts for Peterborough the previous year, shared his thoughts on the eve of the season:

"I'm looking forward to riding at Elfield Park. For a start I know I'll get paid there. The place has potential, if they just put down some grass seed instead of the earth banks it would look good."

The Knights opened their season with a home match against Rospiggarna from Sweden on 31st March. By this time Justin Walker had signed up and Frank Smart, an Exeter asset, had been recruited to replace Ian Barney who'd thought better of signing for Milton Keynes. The Knights lost the match by 56 points to 34 - a youngster called Tony Rickardsson scoring a 14+1 paid maximum for the visitors in the process.

Even in defeat there was cause for celebration - this was the first time in the four years at Elfield Park that the opening meeting had gone ahead as planned.

The following night the team got their official campaign underway at Long Eaton. Gordon Kennett belied his years to notch 15 points from his six rides - though his team-mates only managed another 24 collectively and the home side took the Gold Cup points on offer. The Gold Cup being similar to the current Premier Trophy competition.

An away defeat wasn't an unexpected or unacceptable outcome from the meeting so everyone was in good heart before the first home Gold Cup meeting on April 7th when Rye House were the visitors. The good moods lasted only four heats before the meeting had to be abandoned. The following week's home meeting didn't even get that far, an early postponement preventing Mildenhall (who had been reopened by another promotion) taking to the track.

The team eventually managed to race another meeting the following Monday at sister-track Exeter. The Knights struggled on the notoriously difficult County Ground and no rider managed to score more than five points, the team total

reaching only 27 as against the 63 of the home side.

The Knights got their revenge at Elfield Park the following evening, winning by 46-43.

Another team change was made at this point, Lars Munkedal was replaced with Ian Barney who had eventually been persuaded to join up. The suggestion at the time was that Munkedal was after more money, though the lack of home meetings suggested that a cash-flow problem may be at the root of it.

Gordon Kennett, even at 38, was proving to be the top man in the side, though he was less than happy with track conditions:

"The track is a nice shape, but it's full of holes, has adverse cambers, is badly watered and they use the wrong shale."

Despite his criticism of his home track, it was on his travels that he picked up torn shoulder ligaments. The Knights going down 53-35 at Rye House on the day that Kennett was injured. Ian Barney made his debut in this meeting and demonstrated his legendary inconsistency with a scorecard that read 0-3-0-0.

The home meeting on April 28th was to be another postponement and perhaps the most damaging of all the events to engulf the Knights that season. The meeting was called off at 7pm, heavy rain in the morning leading to damage that couldn't be repaired with the available equipment. Terry Cheney, who was still responsible for track preparation, took the brunt of the blame and tensions between the promoters and stadium owner were becoming clear.

Peter Glanz hit form to score 17+1 when the Knights visited Mildenhall the following Sunday. He was equally impressive when he scored an 18 point maximum in the home league clash with Middlesbrough that followed - the Knights winning 48-42 in a rare home meeting devoid of drama or extreme track conditions.

Away visits to (eventual champions) Peterborough and Glasgow led to predictable defeats. The 30 points the Knights scored at Peterborough being most notable for a 14 point contribution from Ian Barney.

It was to be one of his last meetings for the Knights as he quit the club once again. Kieran McCullagh was promoted from the junior side to replace the former NLRC champion.

An inter-league cup clash with Arena Essex was next on the menu for the Knights' fans. The Division One side convincingly winning the clash by 61 to 28.

After the meeting Colin Hill admitted the club had severe cash-flow problems, mainly the result of paying for eight away meetings from the income from four home ones.

The home clash with Stoke on May 19th was most notable for some controversial refereeing decisions from Stan Green. The visiting Potters won the match despite Gordon Kennett returning to the Knights' side for the first time since his shoulder injury.

In the corridors of power there was increasing unrest about the track and stadium conditions at Elfield and a threat to withdraw the track's licence was issued.

Things were no better on May 26th when the start of the meeting against Peterborough had to be delayed for 60 minutes to allow the track to be adequately watered. The Knights, by now without the injured Peter Glanz, losing the Gold Cup clash by 49 points to 41. Nobody knew it at the time, but this was to be the last ever meeting in Milton Keynes.

The following week's meeting against Long Eaton was postponed at 7pm after a track inspection showed the circuit was unfit for racing.

The Speedway Control Board now had little option and suspended the Elfield Park licence. They issued the following statement:

"The SCB, upon the request of the BSPA, after an investigation of all the circumstances surrounding the events at Milton Keynes this year, have decided that both the promoting and track licences be suspended until such time as the stadium and track meet the requirements of the BSPA".

These required improvements were the installation of lighting in public areas, acceptable toilets and cover for spectators.

As the days passed it began to look less and less likely that the track would reopen. Hill and Jones wouldn't return until the track improvements were made and Cheney refused to start work until the two promoters confirmed they would definitely return. A classic impasse.

In the interim, the Knights raced three away rounds of the Four Team Tournament competition, though there were few signs that they would ever race at home again.

Eventually, Roger Jones confirmed the inevitable:

"Following the recent problems at Milton Keynes Speedway, the promoter Roger Jones regrets to announce the withdrawal of the Milton Keynes speedway team from the Homefire League for the 1992 season having experienced financial losses at the venue due to various operating difficulties."

Hill and Jones pointed the finger squarely at Cheney for the failure of the venture, pointing out that the problems were mainly to do with the track and stadium, which were both under his control. Cheney suggested that some of their problems were self-inflicted and that they had reneged on an agreement to pay certain bills, including the purchase of shale.

There has not been speedway in Milton Keynes since, despite irregular rumours of a new track. Terry Cheney held out hope that the club could be relaunched in a mooted new third division, sadly for the Knights the new league did not get off the ground until 1994, by which time the track and stadium had long since been left to rot.

Retrospectively we can see that Richard Hellsen was the last ever heat winner for Milton Keynes - being their only heat winner in the Rye House round of the 4TT on June 21st 1992.

The last ever race at Elfield Park was won by Mike Howe in the junior match that followed the delayed May 26th meeting against Peterborough. The last race of that main meeting was won by Paul Hurry of the Panthers, but only after his team-mate Jason Crump had fallen.

The Knights competed in nine Gold Cup meetings and collected two match points. They raced in two league matches - a win and a defeat. These results were subsequently expunged from official records.

Gary Peterson

By Tracy Holmes



Gary Peterson

Gary Peterson
June 9th 1946 - October 17th 1975

Gary's introduction to speedway was as a 16 year old at the Waiwakaiho track in his home town of New Plymouth, New Zealand. Midget cars were his first love but too expensive to go for. He was the passenger on a sidecar but soon caught the solo bug.

His first full season was 66/67 riding a JAP he bought from his boss, Ash King. Gary was an apprentice motorcycle mechanic. Everytime he rode, he had the spectators glued because of his full-throttle, fence-scraping antics. The injuries started rolling in but so did his impressive performances and Gary got his first Test Cap on January 20, 68. This was the British Lions V NZ at Western Springs, Auckland. He scored 4 points and at the 2nd Test in Napier 4 days later, got another 2.

In May, Gary made his way to the UK and shared digs with Murray Burt, Paul O'Neil, Terry Shearer and Ole Olsen. Speedway Star reported his debut for Newcastle, 'he went flat out for 3 laps before going straight through the fence, breaking his wrist and ending up in hospital.' Gary became good friends with Ivan Mauger, travelling and working for his fellow Kiwi. But it was on the track Gary wanted to be and by seasons end had done 10 matches for Newcastle for a 3.5 average. At

Nelson, 14 matches returned an average of 8.1, and he was a "Star".

While he copied Ivan's style, he was still reckless and proved a danger to himself and others. Ivan once said, "If a rider is constantly being injured, he is either very unlucky or he is doing something wrong." The latter applied to Gary because every rider I spoke to said the same thing, "he just couldn't be told!" Gary wintered in the North and got himself fit for the 69 season. Rearing to go, literally, he did 4 matches for Nelson, continuing his excellent form and 8 for Newcastle. Entering the World Championship rounds, his first was at Newcastle on May 19 scoring 4 points. Sheffield was next on the 22nd and he got 8. Then came Wolverhampton the following night. His first heat was a disaster, going through the fence and being rushed to hospital with severe head injuries. Dave Gifford and Bernie LaGrosse visited him the next day. They both said what a horrific mess he was. In fact, one of them told me straight, "he should never have been given his licence back!".

Gary returned to NZ and made his comeback in his hometown. Interestingly, he was not selected to ride in the 3 Tests against the Lions. So his only real opportunity to shine was at the 1970 NZ Champs, Western Springs. Well, a first heat engine failure put him out for the rest of the night.

Back to Britain for Nelson/Bradford. Missing a berth in the World Championship rounds, on July 15 he won the Northern Riders Trophy at Bradford unbeaten from Alan Knapkin and Eric Broadbelt. Then came the 2nd Division Tests, Australasia V Britain in August and September. He started with the results of 14 at Middlesbrough, 16 Crewe, 18 Berwick and 11 Canterbury. Back at Bradford on September 9, Gary won The Odsal Trophy after thrilling scraps against Malcolm McKay and Maury Robinson. While he was keeping serious injuries at bay, despite some alarming spills at Crewe, Oxford and Wolverhampton, he was still receiving ongoing treatment for his previous years facial injuries. On September 30, at Bradford, he won The International Club Trophy, unbeaten from Maury Robinson and Doug Wyer. By seasons end, Gary had done 5 matches for Wolverhampton with his best mate Ole Olsen and had topped the 2nd Division averages. He'd done 22 matches for 10.7. Hot favourite for the 2nd Division Riders Championship at Hackney, Gary faltered and finished 3rd with 12 points behind Dave Jessup 14 and Barry Crowson also on 12. Gary was not a happy camper.

It's been suggested to me that the physiological scars of the year before's head injuries were really kicking in. Then another horrific crash at Doncaster saw concussion and right arm injuries. He was tired, nearly broke and announced his retirement saying that 2nd Division Speedway was financially unworkable.

Returning to NZ, he hoped the fresh air and sunshine would be the right tonic to help his decision making. Well, it seemed to work and Gary scored 12 points against the Lions at Western Springs in the 1st Test on February 6. Not so hot in the 2nd Test, just 2! Four nights later in a 'friendly match' at Gisborne, he thrilled the locals with 17 points. Then it was down to Christchurch where he got 8 points in the 3rd and final Test. The following week in Christchurch was the 1971 NZ Champs. Gary wanted this one badly but he couldn't match the locals dropping 3 points to finish 4th behind Frank Shuter 15, Alan Brown 14 and Roger Wright 13.

After getting his head together, Gary returned to Britain, signing for 1st Division Wolverhampton. And what a start, his 1st two matches saw Paid 20 points out of 21! His best mate Ole Olsen, the captain did his best to advise and help but Gary's injury train just kept on rolling. Despite this Gary did 23 matches for a 6.8 average, but missing the World Championship rounds.

The 71/72 NZ season was pretty good. No Lions tour this time but Gary saw Test action against Sweden and the USA. In the 3 Swedish matches, he scored 16 at Western Springs, 14 also at Auckland and 15 in Christchurch. Against the Yanks, 14 points at Western Springs, not riding in the other 2 matches. He also missed the 1972 NZ Champs in Christchurch. Gary was all set to return to Wolverhampton and was driven to Auckland airport by his sister and brother-in-law. As Gary flew out, his family was involved in an accident. Gary's sister was killed. Getting this news at the Australian stop-over, Gary immediately returned home. He did not return to Britain that year.

The 72/73 NZ season saw Gary's return and on January 29, he won the 1973 NZ Champs, unbeaten at Western Springs from Bob Andrews and Graeme Stapleton. In February, he did 2 Tests against the Lions. The 1st at Western Springs, 6 points. His next was the 3rd Test also at Auckland, 8 points. On February 27 at Palmerston North, there was a NZ International Champs. Ivan Mauger won unbeaten, Gary was 2nd with 14. Chris Pusey

3rd. The field also included Barry Briggs, Bob Andrews, Bill Andrew, Roger Wright, Ronnie Moore, Graeme Smith, Frank Shuter, Freddie Timmo, Graeme Stapleton and Mike Fullerton.

All fired-up with renewed confidence, Gary returned to Britain and Wolverhampton. In the World Championship rounds, on May 18 at home, he was 3rd with 11 points. The following night at Belle Vue, 5th with 10 points. Then on the 23rd at Newport, 3rd with 12 points. But at the British Semi-Final at Wimbledon on June 7, 5 points saw his elimination. In July, the now legendary Daily Mirror International Tournament was held all over the UK. The Kiwis 1st match on June 26 against England was rained-off. Then at Wolverhampton on June 29, they went down 37 to Norway/Denmarks 40, Gary scored a disappointing 4. July 2nd at Exeter, they smashed the Poles 53 to 25, Gary scored 7. July 5 at Wimbledon, they did it to the Aussies 50 to 28, Gary astounding his critics with 10. Then on July 9 at Reading, they beat the USSR 43 to 34, Gary just 4. In the Semi-Final at Belle Vue, the Kiwis went down to England 49 to 30 and Gary scored a very sad 1 point.

In the British League, Gary's confidence grew despite another crash at Exeter ending with concussion. He got to ride 34 matches for a 5.9 average. 1974 remains something of a mystery concerning Gary. He didn't ride the 73/74 NZ season and did not return to ride for Wolves.

But return to ride he did, in the 74/75 NZ season. Poland toured and Gary was a revelation. He was unbeaten for an 18 point maximum in the 1st Test at Western Springs. Then at Christchurch, 15 points. It was here that local legend Buck Buchanan made a crash helmet frame for Gary's glasses. After a practice at the Templeton track, Gary came in and said, "I never knew the *** fence came up so fast!!" The 3rd Test was at Te Marua, half an hour north of Wellington. This is where the Poles dealt to the home team, 69 to the Kiwis 39. Gary scored 9. The last Test was back in Auckland and Gary's second 18 point maximum. Also that season, Gary rode in a one-off Test, NZ V The Rest of the World at Invercargill. That's right, Bert Munroe's home town. The Rest, Ole Olsen, John Louis, Tommy Jansson, Scott Autrey, Henny Kroeze and Egon Muller beat the Kiwis, Gary, Ivan Mauger, Briggo, Graeme Stapleton, Graeme Stewart and Larry Ross 60 to 48.

Gary eagerly returned to Britain for the 75 season back at Wolverhampton. Renewed confidence,

fitness and health. He rode with Bruce Cribb in the World Pairs Championship. They scored 20 points at the Semi-Final at Frederica, Denmark. Gary 12, Cribby 10. Not enough to Qualify though, 4th behind Denmark 24, Sweden and Australia 22. Also in Denmark at Ole's track Vojens, Gary scored 11 points to finish 5th in an invitation behind Ole 14, Jim McMillan 13, Billy Sanders 13 and Ivan Mauger also 11. Back in the UK, Gary sadly missed the World Championship rounds but his form with Wolves remained steady enough. By October, he had done 30 matches for a 5.8 average.

October 17 saw Wolverhampton V Oxford in the 2nd leg of The Midland Cup. Gary was 3rd in his first race, heat 4. Then he won heat 7. His next heat was number 11. Chasing the Oxford pair of Dag Lovaas and Alan Grahame, guesting, Gary went hard underneath Grahame, lost control, reared and went head-first into the track-lighting pylon. Gary Peterson was dead.

Riders who knew him well, team mates and flatmates all said the same thing. Here's a few:

"Gary was going to be World Champion or die trying!"

"He was so determined to emulate his mates Ole and Ivan, he lost all sense of reason!"

"Gary's death was only a matter of time."

"No matter who told him, Gary wouldn't listen, you cannot ride in England as you can in NZ."

Despite all this, Gary could be a hugely popular and hell of a nice guy. In the end, a truly tragic guy. From what I understand, his personal life was interesting to say the least. And from the stories I have heard, will say nothing. I have never gotten over Gary's death and his autograph is so precious to me. I loved him but never knew him. Gone but never forgotten.

Track Pix – GRINDSTED – Denmark

Pictures courtesy of Harry Ward



In the Midnight Hour

By Ken Nicholson

I used to avoid going to matches that were televised by Sky. Not because it was cheaper to sit at home in front of the box, but because they used to drag on and on. Two hours was the slot, so two hours they took to allow time for things like interviews and commercials. Then I noticed that all matches seemed to be taking longer. In the end, I found that the proceedings tended to move more promptly in league matches that were shown by Sky - presumably to keep on schedule. But even that has become a problem with a couple of three hour plus matches televised this year. What's more, there seems to have been an increasing number of matches 'abandoned' due to a curfew. This shows the problem with allowing things to drag on.

Speedway has always promoted itself as a family friendly sport. And rightly so. But if things are reaching the point of a curfew, then this means it is probably getting near bedtime for some people. Given that so many meetings are run midweek, there comes a point when kids ought to be in bed when there is school the next day. Now I can't say what time that is, but returning home from a speedway match, after battling out of the car park, at 11.00 or 11.30 pm seems to be on the late side. As it is for the parents who will need to get their offspring to bed, before retiring themselves and then getting up early for work the next day (I am assuming that only working parents can afford speedway these days!).

Sky has slipped a couple of GPs behind the red interactive button recently. The red button means that the benefits of SkyPlus are lost and you can't

even record a match unless you happen to be watching it at the same time. But who can blame Sky for doing this if it is likely that an allocated slot is going to be insufficient for no apparent reason. This should be a warning to the Elite League.

I was once a regular at the Kingsmead Stadium in Canterbury. Johnnie Hoskins was in control then and he had a curfew of 9.00 pm. This was to maintain the tranquility of the city rather than it being a bedtime (there were no nightclubs allowed in Canterbury in those days). Old Johnnie knew that 9.00 pm meant just that. And it would be rigorously enforced, since the track was easily within earshot of the Cathedral and there were plenty of people opposed to speedway on grounds of noise. He never went past that deadline. Thirteen Heats and a second half within two hours every Saturday. Curiously, the second half races were run over three laps only, presumably to save time (although it couldn't have been very much!). If time was tight, then old Johnnie (well into his eighties by then) would be out on the centre green ordering the riders to get a move on. It ran like clockwork - which is only what you would expect from the Maestro.

Somewhere along the line, promoters have lost the plot. Today, speedway seems to be considered a family friendly sport, but it is run at prices that are prohibitive to most families, and at times and paces that are largely unacceptable. Just about sums it up really. What we really need are more people who could take a leaf out of Hoskins' book when it comes to promoting. To know what the public wants and can afford, then give it to them. My main gripe though is that the late finishes are presenting a problem for me and the gaps between races are such that the matches seem to lose momentum - remembering of course that my attention span is not what it once was!



The New IMS - California

Words and Pictures by Cary Cotterman

Twenty-two years after the lights went out for the last time at the original IMS (Inland Motorcycle Speedway) in San Bernardino, California, a new IMS (Inland Motorsport Speedway) has opened in nearly the same spot, only about 200 feet north of the original track site.

Professional hockey player, speedway rider, and speedway promoter Jason Bonsignore has done a brilliant job duplicating the look and atmosphere of the old IMS, which was noted for its well-groomed track and exciting racing.

The tapes went up for the first time on Friday, June 19, 2009 before grandstands filled to capacity, with Eddie Castro winning the first heat. The evening's final was won by Josh Larsen.



May 16, 2009. The dirt base for the track has been shaped, but it appears that the 'shale' (decomposed granite) track surface has not yet been applied.



Little more than a week to go before opening night, but the safety fence and seating are only half finished.



Friday, June 19, 2009. It's seven o'clock, and spectators queue at the ticket booth.



The announcer's platform and the north bend.



The front straightaway, looking toward the north bend.



Riders and mechanics prepare in the pits.



The front straightaway, looking toward the pits bend.



Another view into the pits.



The back straightaway, looking toward the north bend.



The tapes go up for the first time and a new speedway is born! (L to R) Danny Faria, Eddie Castro, Tim Gomez, and Shawn McConnell.

Snapper's Shots of the Season

Glasgow photographer **Ian Adam** shares some of his favourites pictures from the 2009 season and tells us the story behind them. These pictures and thousands more appear on his newly available picture DVD.

Rostrum shot from Terezano



Rostrum shots are really hard if you are not bang in the centre and that place always goes to Mike Patrick. If you are not quick you get stuck in a scrum to get to the front where as Mike takes his time and just walks to the front as the photographer pack moves aside and lets him in where as the for the rest of us it is a free for all. At the GPs you are not allowed to work inside the track and you have to wait until the bikes are parked up before they let you onto the centre green. In this case I was too busy trying to speak to my daughter as she wanted me to sneak her into the press conference, perks of the job, so when I got onto the centre green I was way off to the left.

We need to use flash for these shots and because there are so many guys you get jostled about and even end up with someone's arm covering your flash and also with so many flashes going off you can end up with someone else's flash going off at the same time you can end up with overexposed shots. So it becomes a lottery but I love this shot because Tomas is looking straight at my camera. Hans and Nikki are looking out front but in a way Tomas appears to be posing for me and lapping up the acclaim of winning so for me it works.

Action shot from Terezano



I love this shot because of the colour of the track surface and the effect it gives by bouncing light back to the camera. The most important element when taking photographs is light and the main problem we have at speedway is the lack of it and because most surfaces are dark you do not get any reflections back from it. Cameras act slightly different from your eyes and they tend to see things darker than we do so you have to adjust the camera settings to and get a correctly exposed shot. At Glasgow we always shoot in daylight so when I go to a night time track I have to start to think differently.

The week before I was at Coventry for the GP Qualifier and we were not allowed to shoot with flash from the outside but the lights at Coventry are good so I came away with some good results and when I got to Italy the next week it was just a matter of thinking the same way. The main difference was because the track surface was so light it was bouncing the light from the floodlights back to the camera the light readings were great and it allowed me to take this great shot. I also like this shot as the three riders are almost in the exact same pose.

William Lawson shot



This was just a normal run of the mill shot from a Glasgow v Redcar match at Ashfield. I was working at the fourth bend about the middle of the meeting. The third and fourth bends get some great light during the meetings at Ashfield. I was following William round and as he entered the last bend he started to drift out wide and slow down. It turns out that he had snapped his primary chain, nothing unusual about that, it was only when I looked at the photographs later that night I noticed that this photo was taken just after his chain snapped. If you look in front of his chain guard you can see the chain being spat out, so in a way this became a good shot it is just a pity it is a little bit soft as the focus is just a bit off but sometimes the good shot is not perfect.

Parker and Lyons



This photograph was taken near the end of the Glasgow v Rye House meeting about Heat 13. Jason Lyons was guesting for Rye House in this meeting. The thing I love about this shot is the

symmetry in the shot as if you look at the racing position of the two riders it is almost like synchronised swimming. I also like the fact that it is almost a perfect panning shot. The riders are sharp but there is movement in the spinning back wheel and also some movement in the front wheel that you can see in the spokes. It is also shows how two good speedway riders can have a great race and still give each other space to ride. Jason was in the lead after this shot but it was ok as Shane passed him on the last lap.

Lift Off



When I noticed that the GP Challenge meeting was to be held in Coventry it looked as if it would be a good meeting to see. Then I realised that had to attend a meeting in Burton-on-Trent on the Saturday after the GP Challenge meeting so it was Coventry here we come. They had a rule in place at this meeting that each photographer could only work the inside of the track for 4 heats and as I was the last photographer to arrive, well I had left Glasgow at 2pm, I was given the last 4 heats. So I worked most of the meeting from the outside of the track but given the quality of the lights at Brandon it was a good position as no flash was allowed.

This photo was taken in heat 4 and Adrian Miedzinski had gated in front of Fredrik Lindgren but just as he entered the second bend Adrian lifted right up and I thought he was coming straight for us but he got the bike back down and still ended up taking second place in the heat. The only problem with this photo is what we call noise which makes the photo look grainy. This was because my camera was set a high film speed because I was shooting without flash but I still like it.

Taking Speedway photographs needs an element of luck as you cannot predict where the riders will be when they pass you, it is easier than football, but still needs some luck. It helps that it is impossible to take too many photos as digital memory is reusable but I have to give a big thanks to all the riders out there that perform for us at each meeting.

As I say in my tag line it's all about.

"capturing the action as it happens"

Order Ian's Picture DVD

Titled Ashfield Action 2009 this year's DVD contains approximately 4,000 colour images, yes 4,000, which can be viewed on your Pc or Mac, you can print copies for your own use, you will also be able to view them on your TV if you have a DVD player that can handle picture files.

This year's DVD also includes pictures from the GP Challenge meeting at Coventry and the Italian GP

The price will be £18.50 which includes postage to any UK address

Once again a percentage of all sales will be passed onto a Glasgow rider at the start of the season.

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Track Pix: TERENCEZANO – Italy

Pictures by Ian Adam



Cardiff GP 2009:

A beginner's view from Seat 16, Block M30

By Philip Dalling

After all these years of following and writing about speedway, I finally made it to the sport's big UK night out in Cardiff.

Edward Kennett was not the only Grand Prix debutante on June 27, although he certainly had a closer view of the action than I did from my (nevertheless excellent) seat in Block M30 on the back straight.

The ambitious young English star probably went home wishing he had scored a few more points. My own verdict on the night as I drove home? Well, to paraphrase a recently revived Star Trek character, 'It's speedway Jim, but not as we have known it'.

It's important to say at the outset that I thoroughly enjoyed the 2009 British Speedway Grand Prix as an occasion. The tickets were a birthday present (Brenda - it was great). As a speedway meeting, I have reservations, which I suspect are shared by a good number of fans (at least those of a more mature status).

For a start, I couldn't understand why the meeting was run with the roof of the Millennium Stadium kept firmly closed, except for during an interval when it was opened for about a tenth of its extent. Perhaps some better-informed Cardiff attendee could enlighten me as to the reason.

Had the roof been open, it would have felt like a sporting event in a rather grand stadium. As it was, and given that the whole event lasted for a little over three hours, there were times when the atmosphere was more akin to a pop concert in an indoor arena, with a burst of track action every now and again.

It is ironic that as the years pass and speedway machines get faster and more reliable, the actual amount of racing time for the fan to enjoy decreases. About three minutes, or more than three actual races at the Grand Prix, have been lost on average.

Watching speedway in a modern all-seater stadium loses much of the intimacy of the average club track. Even at Wembley, with its greyhound track, you somehow seemed closer to the action. At most tracks it is possible to get fairly close to the pits and hear (and usually see) the bikes being prepared. At Cardiff, I never heard a single growl before the machines took to the track, and I certainly never caught a whiff of racing fuel.

Perhaps my view of the evening was also coloured by the fact that the result was never in any doubt. The bookies in St Mary Street in the early afternoon had Jason Crump as clear favourite and he certainly did not

let them down. I have rarely seen such absolute mastery of machine and track and, despite being unceremoniously dumped in the dirt on one occasion, he was streets ahead of the opposition.

It took the rare wins by Scott Nicholls and Chris Harris to ignite the crowd and much of the racing was predictable and processional. Oh yes, and a bout of fisticuffs such as I have not seen on track for several years.

Like any event, Cardiff 2009 had its bright spots, and its downsides (the latter already mentioned). On the plus side was the amazing atmosphere on the streets of Cardiff pre-meeting, with national and club colours on display in every pub and bar, and a genuinely friendly, truly speedway atmosphere.

The actual track in the stadium appeared to have been immaculately prepared and the new binding agent used meant it kept in good condition throughout the event.

It was easy to get in and out of the stadium, which is soulless, like all modern arenas, but eminently fit for purpose. My seat was comfortable and the view of the track perfect.

The Grand Prix, for one weekend at least, gives speedway the sort of profile it once enjoyed but has long lost. That raises all sorts of questions. Given the sort of crowd figures that are occasionally reported in the speedway media - an Elite League track spokesperson recently enthused over a best-of-season attendance of 1,700 - then the reported 42,000 crowd for the Grand Prix would, I suspect, represent more than the entire audience for league speedway in Britain on an average week in the year.

Given the number of overseas supporters present at Cardiff, and the fact that by no means **all** supporters from **all** league tracks attend the Grand Prix, it stands to reason that for an awful lot of people this is their only visit to speedway in a year. The overall experience of the event is probably, and sadly, as much a draw for some as the actual racing.

So, to sum up. It was an experience I would not have missed for the world. Will I go again? Well ...

Fear and Loathing at Love Street

By John Callaghan



The Owen Brothers

My most memorable...blah blah blah. We've all read plenty of those, right? Victories, triumphs, trophies, glory?

Not for me (and, I suspect, not for many others, if we're honest).

My most memorable night at speedway sticks so vividly in the mind because it was full of argument, controversy, disputes and bizarre events. Sure, some good racing, too, but that's not what I recall so well about the night the Newcastle Diamonds came to Love Street in Paisley in August 1975...

I was a regular at the home track of the Paisley Lions throughout their two year life-span, having been away from the sport for a few years beforehand and it is fair to say that it wasn't the finest circuit for racing. Built around the outside of the pitch of St Mirren FC, it was necessarily a very long track at 427 yards, but - often the case with football or rugby grounds - not a very wide one. In fact, that's where the events of the evening started to get weird.

Newcastle, under the leadership of Ian Thomas (yes, that Ian Thomas) were a title-challenging side and in particular they had the best one-two punch in the sport. The Owen brothers, Tom and Joe, each sported an average in excess of 11 - in fact, if memory serves, at that stage of the season they were both *well* in excess, Joe with at something like 11.6 and Tom around 11.2. In other words, they were virtually unbeatable, and certainly the rag-tag assembly that the Lions put on the track couldn't expect to live with them.

Headed by a bold 8 point man in Sid Sheldrick (assisted intermittently by his younger brother

Mick), the Lions otherwise relied on Mike Fullerton for points (a lightning trapper, but I swear to god I never saw him pass anything faster than the tractor in two years; he was allergic to traffic) and a selection of Australians from central casting, each madder than the last. Oh, and Chris Roynon (father of Adam) was there as a 6-point man. With this cobbled up side, the Lions generally won at home with a combination of fast gating (very useful on the narrow track) and the Aussies' demented fence-bouncing antics, the only way to pass at Love Street without a subsequent visit to Casualty. However, good sides did come to Paisley and win, five times in all that season (and sometimes by considerable margins), so the Diamonds, with the likes of Robbie Blackadder, Ron Henderson and Brian Havelock in support, and reserves who could compete with other teams' heat leaders, could only have expected a huge away win.

Until Ian Thomas saw how narrow the track was...

Now, this was Paisley's first season and the track's specifications had clearly met the technical requirements at the start of the year, and had become no narrower since, but yes, that first corner in particular did look awfully tight. And so, the start of the meeting was delayed as Mr Thomas produced a tape measure (from where?) and scampered back and forth across the track on that first bend, measuring its width in a frankly camp display, all determined pointing and arms akimbo, like a villain in a panto. The (fairly large) crowd enjoyed this enormously, of course - while pretending not to, as evidenced by the boos and catcalls that Mr Thomas was attracting.

As the delay lengthened, numerous other people joined Thomas in wandering around the first corner and Paisley's promoter Neil Macfarlane began his own show of strutting and posturing on the track, playing to the crowd like an old-school Italian footballer protesting against all the injustices of a non-awarded penalty. More pointing, forehead-slapping and despairing throws of arms to the sky followed. The crowd continued to love it but the delay lengthened further until it was announced that one of the many people milling about on track was the referee and, in fact, he agreed with Ian Thomas's view (and measurement), to the effect that the Love Street track was narrower than the minimum allowed by the league, thereby placing the meeting in severe jeopardy.

Presumably, there would have also been a case that this finding would have invalidated the previous 20 meetings which had taken place on the same track, but that wasn't Macfarlane's concern in the short term - instead, he **picked up a shovel** from somewhere. What the hell's he going to do with that? Surely he's not going to...oh yes, he is! Macfarlane took the shovel and began to dig away at the inside of the track - or, to put it another way, he began to dig up St Mirren's football pitch.

More (much more) debate and posturing followed, but Macfarlane (now with the track crew as accomplices to the vandalism) continue digging away around the corner flag until the track (or, more accurately, the distance between the fence and where the grass now started) was several feet wider. The fact that there was no longer any white line and the inner edge of the "track" was just several feet of subsoil seemed not to bother anybody except Ian Thomas and the referee declared that the meeting could now begin, after a delay of, I don't remember, but maybe 45 minutes? Longer? How long does it take to dig up a corner flag? Whatever the time, the crowd could fairly be described as charged-up by the delay.

And it wasn't the last extraordinary decision the referee would make that night.

So (eventually, after more protests, parading up and down and general peacockery) at last we arrived at Heat 1 and the first appearance of the unbeatable Tom Owen - so unbeatable that Sid Sheldrick felt he had to try and start early and as a result blasted through the tapes, collecting an exclusion and leaving Paisley with his brother Mick and debutant Aussie Geoff Snider to face the mighty Owen. Against all the odds, they both blasted away from the start and led Owen around the (now uniquely wider) first corner. That wasn't going to last and Owen dived into the third corner on the inside of Mick Sheldrick, unaware that there really wasn't any kind of inside line on this track, with the inevitable result that the two clashed heavily on the bend. Owen, typically uncompromising, sought to drive through the gap that wasn't really there and knocked Sheldrick off - more than that, he drove him all the way across the track and into the fence, parting company halfway across the track with his bike, which then bounced inelegantly back into the centre of the circuit.

For inexplicable reasons, the referee did **not** put on the red lights at this point, but instead lit up Owen's white exclusion light, which the rider unsurprisingly did not see as he pursued Snider, still leading. On the same corner of the second lap (by which time the track staff were holding up the black exclusion flag along with Owen's white helmet colour), Owen performed the same hard inside drive on Snider that had demounted Sheldrick. Again, there was a mid-corner collision, but this time Snider did not immediately fall off; instead, the handlebars locked as the riders came out of the fourth corner and it was well into the straight before another nudge from Owen dislodged Snider and sent the Aussie and bike cartwheeling separately down the straight. With body and debris on the track, the referee finally hit the red light and stopped the race, whereupon he then made another extraordinary decision.

Tom Owen was excluded from heat 1 (no surprise to anybody who had seen the exclusion light, or indeed had watched his demonstrably unfair riding) but was **ALSO** excluded from the entire meeting as a disciplinary measure for having failed to respond to the exclusion light! I have never, before or since, heard of anything this bizarre and nor had Ian Thomas, judging by the fresh repertoire of conniptions and fist-waving that followed from the Newcastle manager.

More protests, more delays, more crowd "involvement", more fun. But the referee wasn't to be moved and his bizarre decision stood, so the 11-point Newcastle star would take no further part in the meeting.

Meanwhile, back at Heat 1....the two Lions blasted out of the gate again, only for Snider to haul off his machine and collect an exclusion of his own...bringing about the fourth attempt to run the race, having got down to a match race between the two survivors. This one did eventually produce a result, after Mick Sheldrick yet again steamed away from the gate and led for 3 and three quarter laps before Ron Henderson - hey, it's his first appearance in this article - nipped round the outside to give Newcastle a 3-2 lead, only (and I'm guessing here) about an hour and a half after the scheduled start.

Well, that was most of the drama over for the night - or, at least, most of the absurd, unprecedented drama. Because Newcastle, with their resources, still had a great chance of winning - captain Havelock had been outstanding in an

individual meeting at Paisley on a previous occasion, and hadn't Ron Henderson won his first race from the back? Well, Heat 2 went 5-1 to Paisley, but Joe Owen won heat 3 by the length of a straight in a 4-2 for the away side, so it was 9-8 to the Lions at that point, but the next few heats set the tone for the way the meeting was to proceed.

Heat 4, and the theoretically capable Havelock rode round a distant last, looking uninterested. Why? Was he disgusted with the refereeing, the makeshift extra-wide track, something else? Or had he just become a much crapper rider in the previous half-hour? Then, Henderson joined the ranks of those with F/X next to their name after a Heat 5 crash, before the next race saw Havelock once again ride round a distant last, as if he couldn't wait to get home. Joe Owen won easily again in Heat 7 but that still left Paisley six points in front (strangely, it was 23-17, since one of the Lions had contrived a machine failure after Henderson's exclusion, leading to a second missing point, as if there wasn't enough strangeness going on already).

Still, Joe O was out again as a tactical sub in Heat 8 with the likely-looking Henderson, so an away was still on the cards, especially if Havelock woke up from his slumbers. However, what happened was that Henderson crashed yet again, his exclusion the fifth of the night in total and, worse yet, he was too unfit to carry on. It was then announced that Havelock had withdrawn from the meeting (can't recall the official reason), leaving Newcastle with only four riders to complete the meeting.

The home victory was pretty much assured from that point, and four successive heat victories stretched the lead to an unbelievable 16 points, although not without further incident, as two more exclusions were recorded, one for a fall, one for wiping out an opponent, plus a solo fall for Newcastle reserve Phil Michaelides (an especially unpopular name, given the number of programme changes required that night).

And so, the Lions won 46-30 in the end, but mention must still be made of Sid Sheldrick, who had started the on-track fun with his Heat 1 tape exclusion. Coming out in Heat 10 against the unbeaten Joe Owen, who alone of the Diamonds had lived up to his reputation, few gave him any chance, even when he streaked from the gate, because Owen had won his previous three rides by huge margins in the three fastest times of the

night. But Sid prevailed, after four laps of neck-and-neck battling, inside, outside, up to the fence, across the football pitch (now temporarily part of the track) and everywhere in between. And didn't he go and do exactly the same thing two races later? Eight points on the night for Sid, and six of them from two wins over the unbeatable Owen.

So, maybe the Lions would have won anyway, if the whole team had needed to show the spirit that beat the league's best twice in a row. As it was, it remains a night crammed full of controversy and liberally topped with incident. Quite what was going on in the heads of various people - riders, managers, referee - that night is impossible to guess.

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What my *programme* tells me is that only three Newcastle riders participated in the second half - Joe Owen deciding not to bother, along with the excluded Tom O, the injured Henderson and the mysteriously absent Havelock.

What my *memory* tells me is that Newcastle came second in the league that year and, in Paisley's second and final season, the Diamonds won the equivalent fixture at Love Street by a whopping 53-25.

What *nobody* can tell me is the reaction of St Mirren FC's groundsman on the Monday morning when he discovered that a corner of his pitch had been dug up and dumped in a heap. Maybe he planted some vegetables.

It's All About You...Dudley Jones



The Russians at Wembley

Tell us about your introduction to speedway

My introduction was by accident. In 1962 I would have been about 15. I had been to see a couple of stock car meetings and frankly could not understand what could be interesting about four motorbikes doing only four laps. Two or three of my school mates were going to the Firs to watch Norwich and it was a case of go with them or be left on my own. Well, I was hooked, and after that day tried to see every match at Norwich.

Tell us about your favourite meeting of all time

There have been so many. It's hard to choose just one. The night four Russians took on full strength Norwich must be one of them, the first ever Russian test at Wembley stands out, although the USSR was outclassed except for Igor Plechanov and Boris Samorodov. I could say every match that I saw with Peter Craven, or Ipswich winning the double...

Tell us about your favourite rider of all time

This is hard too. I will have to give a short list. Peter Craven and Ronnie Moore for sure. Terry Betts, Igor, Sandor Levai, Olle Nygren. Choose one from those.

Tell us about your favourite track/stadium

My favorite tracks were Norwich and Rayleigh for the quality of racing, with Ipswich close behind. West Ham was too big and wide. Long Eaton was a grotty stadium, but I liked the racing. Hackney always smelt of paint or chemicals (but racing was good in Len's time). I really like Somerset, good raceway in an age when some are not too good. King's Lynn is another very good track, as is Sheffield. For atmosphere it would have to be

Wembley on World Final Night (good racing too if Len Silver prepared the track). Poole is another favorite, friendly folks down there.

What are the best things about speedway?

The best thing has got to be the fans. Nice people, friendly and well behaved always. I think the sport should be really proud of the nature of its supporters. We are a big family. Going to Wembley on World Final Night was an experience that I doubt GP will ever match. 90,000 fans milling around, all the different team colours, and everyone entirely friendly. I lost my car keys there one night and about a dozen fans from all over the place really tried to help me out. Someone even gave me a key that kind of fitted my ignition, and which he didn't need any more. Thanks mate if you read this, I got back to Norwich about dawn the next day.

What are the worst things about speedway?

Falling crowds, tracks that are too slick and an obsession with covering every inch of the riders and bikes with ads. I feel sure there would be more on the terraces if there were firm rules that every racer had to wear a proper racejacket with the team colours writ bold upon it. The sense of identity is important, and the promoters do not seem to realise this. Look at the boys from the 70's. Bees, Stars, Aces, each with a racejacket you could see across the stadium.

What one thing would you do to improve speedway?

I would really insist upon good racing tracks. Dirt on them, smooth, and with more than one racing line. Starting at Norwich as I did I never realized what some supporters had to put up with, where just staying on seemed to be an achievement. Look at the recent GP from Slovenia. That track was so poor a raceway that I was losing the will to live by halftime when, thankfully, somebody other than from the inside grid got a win. Get the track right, get the atmosphere right, make it belonging, make it fun and the terraces will fill themselves.

Tell us about a rider you wish you'd seen

Well if I really have to choose probably Aub Lawson, but Jack Young, Tom Farndon, Vic Duggan and Split Waterman would all come close.

I'll Never Forgive Kenny McKinna **By James Smith**



Kenny McKinna

Although I watched Belle Vue Aces for more years than I care to remember, I never saw the Aces record the perfect score. It's always fascinated me that teams have sometimes gone right through the card, recording five-ones in every race from beginning to end. It's something I always wanted to see and it very nearly happened on May 19th 1984 - only a lapse from a Scotsman letting me down.

The occasion was the British League match between Belle Vue Aces and Eastbourne Eagles. The Aces were still resident at the fabulous Hyde Road at that point and under the management of Stuart Bamforth the former Stock Car champion.

Bamforth had assembled an impressive side during the winter and the Aces were widely tipped to be league champions. The side was led by the dynamic duo - Peter Collins and Chris Morton. 'Mort' was probably at the peak of his powers around this time and although 'P.C.' was slightly past his very best, they were still a formidable spearhead. Indeed this was the year that the school buddies combined to win the World Pairs in Lonigo.

Backing them up were Larry Ross (Kiwi we signed from Wimbledon for big bucks), Andy Smith (just a pup in those days), Peter Carr (one of a pair of racing brothers), Mark Courtney (talent without

application) and Kenny McKinna (but more about him later!).

The visitors were Eastbourne Eagles who'd joined the big boys of the British League a few years earlier after enjoying tremendous success in the National League. Much of their success had come from developing local youngsters into stars - principally Gordon Kennett who I've always felt was under-rated, when he was on form he was unstoppable. Kennett wasn't in the Eagles side in 1984, instead Bobby Schwartz led the side. Schwartz was one of many flamboyant Yanks to ride over here in the eighties, not the best of them certainly, but an excellent rider who I believe still rides today.

His team mates were Colin Richardson, Steve Lucero, John Eskildsen, Denzil Kent and Paul Bosley. Paul Woods, certainly one of their better performers, was out through injury and the rider replacement facility was in use. The records tell me that borrowed Belle Vue junior Barry Ayres was the nominated number eight.

On paper, both then and now, it looks/looked an obvious mismatch. The likes of Eskildsen and Kent were reasonable performers but no match for any of the Aces lads around their own circuit.

The meeting started normally enough with Larry Ross and Mark Courtney combining for a 5-1 win in the first heat. Ross completed the four laps in 69.7 - wonder what kind of times today's bikes could have managed around the sweeping bends of Hyde Road? Sadly, we'll never know. Bobby Schwartz failed to finish for the Eagles - a bad start for the visitors and things were only going to get worse.

Heat two saw Smith and McKinna easily deal with Lucero and Bosley and in most fans minds the meeting was already as good as over. Heat three was another 5-1 and the maximum heat advantages just keep coming.

At the end of heat six the score read: Belle Vue 30 - Eastbourne 6.

The meetings were only over thirteen heats in those days (a format that I believe has never been bettered despite repeated tinkering over the years), so with only another seven to go thoughts were beginning to turn to a whitewash. Could it happen, it certainly seemed possible. Schwartz was the only genuine threat and he'd only

amassed two points from his first three rides. 'Yes' I decided, it was definitely going to happen. A popular slogan at the time was "Happiness is 40-38", for me it was going to be 65-13.

The riders lined up for heat seven and I surveyed my programme - Chris Morton and Kenny McKinna for the Aces; Colin Richardson and Barry Ayres for the Eagles. The fact that Ayres was thrown in shows just how much the Eagles were struggling and how desperate they were to avoid the ultimate humiliation.

The tapes rose on the race and I settled back in my usual seat to enjoy the inevitable five-one. I'd virtually have put my mortgage on Chris Morton winning the race, him being followed by Kenny Mac with Colin Richardson a close but unthreatening third. My experience of watching the second halves told me that Ayres would be a distant fourth and I got that bit right.

70.9 seconds later and everything had changed. I felt the colour drain from my face as the grim reality hit me - the dream was over, we'd only got a 4-2! Colin Richardson managed to outfox Kenny McKinna and grab second place behind Mort. The Speedway Star report of the meeting I'm referring to (sorry to disillusion any of you who thought I could remember race times from 25 years ago!) describes heat seven as 'a good race'. Well not for me it wasn't, it was a disastrous race, probably the worst of the whole decade at the old stadium.

Richardson was a solid but unspectacular rider who for me had never particularly stood out, but after that night I've never forgotten him! Colin is of course the father of current rider Lee Richardson who was in the Grand Prix series a year or two ago.

I've never known whether to blame him or Kenny McKinna for crushing my dream. On balance, it was probably McKinna's fault and I hold him fully responsible!

Although the meeting still have another six races to go, all interest had now gone out of it. The Aces had won the meeting and there was no longer a maximum score to chase. The meeting continued nonetheless, though I remember watching events with a rather hollow feeling.

Heat eight brought Richardson out again and he popped out the tapes and led the race until a puncture brought his involvement to a premature

end. The Aces picked up the (now rather pointless) 5-1 by leading home the hapless Lucero.

From then on normal service was resumed as the Aces won the last five heats by 25-5. This left the final score as 64-14 to the Aces, close but no cigar.

The scorers on the night were:

Aces 64: Ross 12 (max), Morton 12 (max), Carr 11 (paid max), Courtney 8 (paid max), Collins 8 (paid max), Smith 8 (paid max), McKinna 5 (no maximum)

Eagles 14: Richardson 4, Schwartz 4, Lucero 3, Eskildsen 2, Kent 1, Bosley 0, Ayres 0

To be fair to Kenny McKinna, he did play a part in another massacre later in the season when Wimbledon left Hyde Road with just 17 points. McKinna got a paid maximum that night and so the blame for that one lies elsewhere! He was a very good servant to the Aces and went on to enjoy successful spells for the clubs in his native Scotland later in his career.

Despite the Aces' pre-season tag as favourites, the title didn't come to Hyde Road. Ipswich Witches actually won the league, just pipping the Aces. The Witches team that year included John Cook, Kai Niemi, Billy Sanders, Jeremy Doncaster, Richard Knight and Carl Blackbird. Blackbird joined the Aces the following year and did very well for a short while.

The Witches also won the Knock-Out Cup - beating Aces in both leagues of the final to win convincingly.

Despite their disaster at Hyde Road, the Eastbourne Eagles were not the worst team in the league and finished 11th with a few clubs below them.

I often look back on the meeting and wish that Kenny had managed to get the better of Richardson in that fateful heat seven. Perhaps one day I'll see a team record the perfect score, if that's the Aces and it's televised live on Sky then all the better.

Norman Hunter

By Geoff Langley



Norman Hunter

However long we have been a speedway fan and however many favourite riders we have had there is never anyone quite like our first real speedway hero. "Norm the Storm" was my first.

I first saw Norm when Hackney re-opened in the old Provincial League in 1963. The first match of the season was a challenge match against New Cross (the New Cross team included a young Bob Dugard, now promoter at Eastbourne). I had seen speedway several years earlier before West Ham closed but I was very young couldn't remember much about apart from some memories of the great Jack Young (still etched on my mind to this day). Nevertheless this limited speedway knowledge made me an expert in the eyes of my schoolmates who were seeing speedway for the first time. We watched in anticipation as the gladiators marched out on parade, all clad in black leathers and boots---well nearly all of them were. "Who is the one in the white boots?" my schoolmates asked. "Oh.er.him.ermm." I spluttered, quickly scanning the programme. At last I found the answer in Mike Parkers programme notes which informed me that "We expect young Norman Hunter, riding at No 4 to be the spearhead of our new team". I quickly slipped the programme away as I announced to my pals with an air authority, "Oh, yes, that's Norman

Hunter, a really talented rider. He's the spearhead of the team, the one who is really going places." Well, despite the fact that I had never even heard of Norman Hunter before making that pronouncement Norm proved me to be dead right. My street-cred among my mates soared as he put in a fabulous season, and throughout the whole of that wonderful summer proved to be everything a young fan could wish for in a speedway star.

I later learned that Norman had been a successful cycle speedway rider before taking up the motorised version. He had been through the Rye House Training School but his outstanding talent took him straight into the Leicester Team, where, in his first full season of Provincial League speedway he was Leicester's top scorer with, I think 189 points. Mike Parker then snapped him up for the Hackney team, and, it being only his second season he was started as a second string rider in the Number 4 position but almost immediately was elevated to ride at Number 1 and given the captaincy. He was still only 23.

The 1963 Hackney team included some young and inexperienced riders, and although some, such as the then 17-year old Malcolm Simmons and 20-year old Trevor Hedge, were destined to achieve great things in speedway, that success was still in the future at that time and although they managed a reasonable performance at home, the away fixtures, with young riders riding some tracks for the first time, were pretty poor.

Except for Norm that is. He was everything a fan wants in a captain. Almost never anything less than a double figure score and it seemed more often than not a maximum. He was a true inspiration at home while in the away matches his scores were frequently the difference between an honourable defeat and a complete thrashing. From memory I think there were at least two or possibly three away matches when his 15 point maximums including a tactical substitute ride was a point more than the rest of the team managed between them. There were several home defeats for Hackney but even then Norm gave the fans something to cheer about because none of the great P.L. stars of the day, like Ivan Mauger, Colin Pratt, Pete Jarman and Ivor Brown managed an entire meeting at Hackney without being defeated by Norm at some point.

On an individual level he was unbeaten in the Provincial League World Championship Qualifying Round at Hackney, and when Mike Parker

resurrected the London Riders Championship as a Provincial League event at Hackney, Norm took it on a maximum- his first major individual title.

That brilliant season finished in fairytale style with a home match against Exeter, with the visitors holding a two point lead going in to the last heat. Alan Cowland and (I think) Francis Cann made the gate and held the lead for two laps before Norm came through followed by Trevor Hedge to take a 5-1 to secure the match. What a way to end the season!

When West Ham re-opened in 1964 Norm, together with Malcolm Simmons moved across to further his career in the National League (equivalent to today's Elite League) but at first found the going tough. He wasn't much of a gater at that time and found it more difficult to come from the back at the higher level. He also seemed to suffer a lot of machine failures as his J.A.P. engines struggled against the higher level of competition on the big track at Custom House. He finished his first season in the National League on an average of a little over four points a match, but things were about to change.

The following season saw the National and Provincial Leagues combined into the British League. West Ham started the season as no-hopers with only two heat-leaders- Ken McKinlay and Sverre Harfeldt, but McKinlay was not only one of the greatest ever team captains of British speedway, he was Hunter's old mentor and the influence of the old maestro on his young protege was amazing. Norm's engine failures were now rare and he learned how to gate. In a single season he more than doubled his points average to over 9 and established himself as third heat-leader. It was this astonishing progress that was major factor in the Hammers historic triple of League Champions and winners of the Knockout Cup and London Cup that year.

The next couple of years saw Norm's true potential starting to be realised. A test match against Sweden saw Norm defeat the great Ove Fundin for the first time, and he collected an 18-point maximum against Russia at West Ham. On an individual level he won the National League version of the London Riders Championship (at West Ham), the Jack Unstead Memorial Trophy (at Exeter), and the Midland Riders Championship (which I think from memory was at

Wolverhampton). In 1968 he reached what was to be the high point of his career when he was selected for the Great Britain team that won the Speedway World Cup. A successful career at West Ham came to an end when the powers that be decided that his consistent 8/9 point average was too high for a side that included Ken McKinlay's 11+ point average and Sverre Harfeldt regaining form after injury, so he was transferred to Wolverhampton in 1969 where he immediately stepped out of McKinlay's shadow and became a 10point man.

However just as he seemed to be on the point of breaking through into true world class tragedy struck in a non-speedway accident.

He was riding in an experimental event at a pony-trotting track at Prestatyn, which was a sort of cross between speedway, grass-track and American-style flat-track racing when he crashed and suffered a serious hand injury. After an extensive lay-off he eventually returned to speedway but it seems his grip was never as strong and he was never quite the same rider. The international career which had beckoned had now sadly gone.

By that stage I was riding in trials and moto-cross myself and I never found time to see him ride again. His career finished as competent rider with Swindon (and I think Oxford) but the hand injury had stopped him from progressing beyond a reasonable League rider.

How far could he have gone if it had not been for the hand injury? Difficult to say. I never felt he was quite in the same class as Ivan Mauger but on the other hand he always seemed to have the edge on his Hackney and West Ham team-mate Malcolm Simmons and we all know how far "Super Simmo" went when he eventually put his mind to it !

But in speedway memories are as important as championships, and for me, even after all these years I find whenever I go to speedway on a warm summer evening, and the engines fall silent after warm-up with the smell of methanol drifting across the track I can't help my thoughts drifting back to that wonderful summer of 1963 and in my mind I still hear the announcers magic words; "Result of Heat1...the winner...riding in red.....NORMAN HUNTER !"

It's All About You...Arnie Gibbons



Tell us about your introduction to speedway

My best friend's mother was a St John's Ambulance volunteer at Tilehurst Stadium and she took him to meetings. He told me it was really exciting, and I persuaded my father to take me. My first meeting was Reading v Eastbourne (on 5 October 1970). In the opening heat Reading riders Mike Vernam and John Hammond both failed to finish and the Eagles got a 5-nil with future Racer Dave Jessup winning the race. The Racers fought back and thanks to a maximum from my first track idol Richard May went on to win the match.

Tell us about your favourite meeting of all time

I'm tempted to say this year's World Cup round at Peterborough, but in the interests of nostalgia I'll nominate the 1980 knock out cup match between Cradley and Reading. The Heathens won the first leg 55-53 at Smallmead, but the Racers really went for it at Dudley Wood. Bobby Schwartz recorded a seven-ride 21 point maximum, and even Ashley Pullen played his part by beating Erik Gundersen. It all came down to the last bend of the last race with Jiri Stancl leading Penhall and the Racers heading for a 55-53 win to tie the tie. But he was pipped on the line by Bruce Penhall and the Heathens went through 109-107.

Tell us about your favourite rider of all time

My father's family comes from Suffolk, so I always had a soft spot for Ipswich. In addition I thought John Berry stood head and shoulders above other promoters. When he let Billy Sanders go and brought in Dennis Sigalos and, as a make-weight, John Cook I was as surprised as everyone else. While I admired the superbly stylish Sigalos it was John Cook that sent shivers down my spine when I saw him on track. He was a 100% entertainment and while he could be difficult his presence at a meeting was a virtual guarantee that something

interesting would happen - either on or off track - at that meeting.

Tell us about your favourite track/stadium

Worldwide it has to be Pardubice. A fantastic racing track and one of the few where six man races are viable. The Golden Helmet weekend is the highlight of the year. In Britain I'd go for Powderhall, a track I didn't visit often. In fact my first trip to Edinburgh was a 24 hour round trip by train for a rain-off. Five of us walked from Waverley Station to Powderhall just to find the back straight underwater when we arrived! Subsequent visits produced some of the most enjoyable meetings I've witnessed with a very friendly crowd too.

What are the best things about speedway?

That's a difficult one! Let's try the build up of excitement as a meeting climaxes in a last heat decider, the sudden rush of adrenalin as your favourite executes a stylish passing manoeuvre, the noise and the smell on entering the stadium, reminiscing about the days when stadiums were packed, journeying to new tracks in distant places, gossiping with friends old and new on the terraces about the latest happenings in our beloved sport.

What are the worst things about speedway?

Rain - a four hour round trip completely wasted. Half way there you suspect the meeting may be off but plough on anyway. You arrive to find the turnstiles open and having been reassured that "there's been hardly any rain here" you enter the stadium. Half the white line is under water and a single tractor is circling to no apparent purpose. Groups of riders in their civvies are looking suspiciously at the track, and you know that 45 minutes after the advertised start-time it will end with the postponement of the fixture.

What one thing would you do to improve speedway?

Speedway needs to be run for the benefit of speedway, not to serve the interests of those promoters who have the influence. This year has been worse than most, but the problem has been apparent for years. The failure to appoint John Berry to oversee the sport (nearly 20 years ago) was a great lost opportunity. Look to America where baseball is a sport that has revenue sharing and control of team strengths through the player

draft. However it is in the hands of an independent Commissioner (Bud Selig). It is not rider control/points limit that is the problem, it is the way we allow them to be administered by those with a vested interest in the decisions. I would give the 'Commissioner' the basic brief of ensuring a level playing field that allows for the economic survival of the maximum number of tracks.

Tell us about a rider you wish you'd seen

I just caught the end of Ronnie Moore's second career - and I've never seen a more gifted team rider, but Barry Briggs was the only other member of the big five I caught. Peter Craven has to be the one I'd really like to have seen, and Brian Crutcher sounds like another in the same mould who would have been a joy to watch. In the days of the iron curtain Russians were genuinely foreign and mysterious creatures. The first ever GB v USSR test match in 1964 at Wembley featuring Igor Plechanov must have been something special.

What does the future hold for speedway?

I'm not optimistic. The UK is a densely populated country with land use at a premium. There seems to be no realistic prospect of the sort of crowds that would generate sufficient money to make a speedway stadium economically viable. Recently the biggest barrier to new tracks has not been planning permission, but finding the financial resources. Exeter and Reading got planning consent but still no speedway. We must pull together to ensure the survival of those tracks we have, because once closed they are unlikely to reopen; and we must attempt to find a model that works for the 21st century. The Chapman's at King's Lynn and the plans for Leicester seem to be the best hope at the moment. As a former Leicester season-ticket holder I fervently hope to be attending their opening meeting... soon.

The Very Last of the Leg Trailers

By Tony Webb

A young man who thrilled the patrons of Rye House, Ipswich, Weymouth and West Ham in the early sixties can truly lay claim to being the very last of the leg trailers. The name of South Ruislip born, Ray Cousins, is one that will remind fans of that period of some action-filled second-halves when-ever Ray took to the track.

Ray commenced his shale career in 1961 as a sixteen-year old under the wing of his father Sam, and his Rye House mentor Mike Broadbank. His first machine was a very heavy Norton, which the youngster handled with great skill.

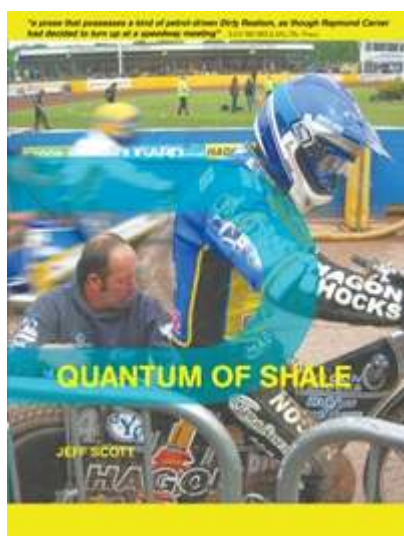
Rides were hard to come by in the early sixties, competition was fierce at Rye with the Jackson brothers, Tyburn Gallows, Geoff Hughes, Pete Gay and Ian Champion all learning their trade at the time. Ray took off to France where he broadened his experiences on some very basic and rough circuits. Ray resumed training at Rye House, now mounted on a JAP ready for the 1963 season, second-halves followed at Rye, Rayleigh New Cross and West Ham.

The demise of the leg trailers was attributed to the slick tracks, but Ray learnt to perform the art on the present day tracks. Of course the track-side experts forecast that unless he went leg forward he would never make the grade. But he provided entertainment with a capital E in an era that was light on crowd pleasers, his match races with the King of Crash, Phil Bishop, was classic speedway at its best.

With the formation of the Metropolitan league in 1964 he established a berth in the Ipswich team. A booking in the London riders Championship at West Ham was also to his credit.

Ray continued to be a regular at West Ham and Rye House up until the late sixties. Never destined to achieve stardom, he did, however, provide thrilling racing and I am sure will be remembered for that quality alone.

Book Extract: Quantum of Shale By Jeff Scott



"Where are all the rakers?"

Redcar v Workington - 24th July

The first leg of my own mini Northern Tour involves a 300+ mile drive from Brighton through the outskirts of Middlesbrough to the South Tees Motorsports Park (STMP), the relatively recently built home of the Redcar Bears. Most speedway riders lead a peripatetic existence and those who ply their trade in the Premier League find themselves perpetually driving the motorways, dual carriageways and 'A' roads of the British road network during the season. It's a tiring business and, when the riders arrive, they have to work rather than enjoy my good fortune of the chance to savour the ambience and atmosphere. It's a boiling hot day on the Costa del Teesside, so much so that I find Brian - a volunteer member of the track staff - sunning himself in the seat of his car ("we don't get much here so you have to take advantage"). There's a distinctive aroma in the air that I can't quite place but imagine has something to do with the industrial area that surrounds the home of Redcar speedway. On the distant horizon is the Riverside Stadium the home of Middlesbrough football club, the proud centrepiece of an area they're gradually regenerating with newly built (but often unoccupied) office blocks and apartments. It would be fair to say that the speedway club finds itself at the outer reaches of this regeneration area and isn't essential to its progress or success. A

rust-covered metal hulk of a structure dominates the not-so-distant skyline and, judged by its sheer size, could (to the untutored eye) be either a bridge or an impressive piece of industrial lifting equipment. Brian has worked at the track all morning and, after he's soaked up a further few lunchtime rays of sunshine, will go home to Thornaby for some food before he returns to the STMP later. Things have changed and continue to change in and around Middlesbrough. Brian has noticed that the modernisation of the area ensures posh pronunciations are much more prevalent than they used to be. "People don't come from Yarm any more, they come from East Yarm!" He clearly relishes his work at the track and praises Bears promoter, Glyn Taylor, who's recently endured a rapid transformation from hero to villain amongst some supporters of the club: "Glyn is the hardest working man I know."

Apart from Redcar's assistant track curator Ian 'Jacko' Jackson who relentlessly circles the track on his tractor and Brian topping up his nonexistent tan, the stadium appears completely deserted. In the baking early afternoon heat, the rough rock that forms the surface of much of the stadium's grounds makes it appear almost volcanic. It would be safe to say that since the Middlesbrough Evening Gazette dropped the bombshell (on 12th June) of the news that Redcar Bears owner Glyn Taylor had put the Redcar TLS Bears up for sale that aftershocks have reverberated around the town and throughout speedway generally. Glyn was understood to have completed his buy-out of the club from Chris Van Straaten earlier in the year and was widely believed to have paid a fee somewhere in the region of £169,000. By the time the purchase was completed, many Bears fans had already purchased their season tickets and the revenues this generated were allegedly retained by the previous owners. It was a situation that effectively left Glyn Taylor with many season-ticket holders he'd have to let into the stadium every week without any payment. Clearly, given the price allegedly achieved, Chris Van Straaten is a shrewd negotiator (or, conversely, Glyn a poor one), particularly given the metaphorical clouds that were already on the general economic horizon, let alone the speedway one. Even at the time of the sale, things didn't exactly look rosy and, since then, events had further clouded the situation.

They say that it costs around £16,500 to stage an Elite League meeting and that the cost of staging at Premier League has gradually crept up over the

years to somewhere in the region of under £11,000 per meeting. You don't have to be a forensic accountant to quickly realise that, given average speedway attendance levels, that some clubs could face financial difficulty without the help of sponsorship or, in the Elite League, Sky contract payments. Even these would only defray the cost of a small number of meetings so - even at the highest levels of the sport in this country - there are potential significant financial shortfalls without further cost control or greater sponsorship. Though the football clubs of the Northeast region might be blessed with loyal fans and bumper attendance figures, the same definitely cannot be said of the speedway clubs from the area.

In this context, you can easily realise how the Redcar speedway business plan wouldn't have been robust at the outset, never mind after the weather intervened to cause some early-season postponements. Speaking honestly to the Evening Gazette, Glyn Taylor confessed, "I am not cut out for the job. It's far more difficult than I ever expected it to be so I'm done. I'm not dealing with the financial pressures. By that I mean I'm working 80 hours a week and I'm not sleeping at night. That can't go on. I need someone to buy the club from me or put in a cash injection of around £20,000. I need someone to take full financial control. If that doesn't happen, I'm going to have to close the club down." The club have only been back in the Premier League for a couple of seasons and Glyn Taylor played a hugely significant role in the transformation of a disused rubbish tip (adjacent to a karting site) into a reasonably popular and occasionally packed speedway stadium with a distinctive tightly banked track. Unluckily, a series of postponements at the start of the season meant that Glyn Taylor didn't have any gate revenue to offset running costs of the club, never mind the capital to service the debt taken on through the purchase. The logic of the situation required that the club would have to review all its compulsory and discretionary financial outgoings. The top wage earner at the club was ex world champion and Redcar Bears club captain, Gary 'Havvy' Havelock. Negotiations between Glyn and Gary didn't go well since, quite understandably, Havvy didn't wish to alter the contract he'd already signed for the whole 2008 season midway through the campaign. Consequently, after the home win against Scunthorpe on 3rd July, the club captain was sensationally released by his promoter only to be reinstated 24 hours later after the timely intervention of a hastily organised consortium of concerned supporters.

An already complicated and potentially fractious situation was tangled further by the fact that Gary's father, Brian Havelock, is also the Bears team manager and clearly has a relationship with both parties in dispute. After a quickly convened SOS [Save Our Skipper] meeting held at a local hotel in Middlesbrough, a newly formed consortium announced that Gary Havelock would continue to race for the club under Taylor's newly proposed pay terms with the shortfall in his pay packet made up by the members of said consortium. Brian Havelock explained the mechanics of the deal. "We reached an agreement whereby Gary has accepted what Glyn has offered, i.e. a guarantee per meeting, and I have got a consortium together of 14 people, looking like becoming 18, to foot the bill for the shortfall in his wages throughout July and August. At the end of August, everything reverts back to the original contract being honoured by Glyn ... If Gary scores less than 9 - which is effectively what the guarantee covered - then the consortium is not involved." Glyn Taylor was also keen to put on the record the rationale behind his business decision. "I went to Gary and said that I'd been backed into a corner and that it was purely a financial decision - 'would you please take this pay cut?' Gary came back and said he wasn't able to accept it so I was left with no alternative but to release him because I couldn't afford to pay him his current wage demands. It's no secret that our crowds have been lower this season and everyone is suffering from the 'credit crunch'. It was never ever anything personal to do with me not being happy with Gary, it was purely financial. Both as promoter and as a person I stand by the ethic that if you can't pay for something, you don't have it. I never wanted to get into a situation where we owed anyone money. I spoke to a lot of other promoters and they confirmed that the deal I offered Gary was a very generous one. Full credit to Gary and Brian for going out and finding the sponsorship to make up the shortfall. I was expecting the reaction I got because Gary is an extremely popular personality in the Teesside area - the local, home-ground boy come good".

The affair provoked a flood of column inches locally and nationally and Gary Havelock was equally keen to put his side of the story, "Only last week Glyn telephoned me to ask if I could take a 30-40% pay cut. I asked for time to do my cash flow and I felt I could not afford this to maintain the level of equipment expected of me as a number 1 and I informed Glyn of this. I could have accepted a small cut if it had been for all team members but I had been singled out to bear the

brunt of his financial predicament. Then after our win on Thursday night, Glyn simply told me that he couldn't afford for me to ride any more for Redcar. That was that - so much for having a contract! Oddly, my contract negotiations with Glyn at the start of the year were the shortest I have had in my career, he was extremely happy with my terms. Then, on Friday, Glyn rang me to ask if I could ride for Redcar at Workington because they couldn't get cover for me. Of course, I accepted; I knew we had a coach load of fans going and I couldn't let them or my home town club down." A highly motivated Gary Havelock then seized the opportunity to illustrate his importance at the club when he scored 16 points in the meeting at Derwent Park.

I expected I would bump into the friendly Glyn Taylor but didn't expect to broach this subject with him during my visit. With practically nobody in the stadium (other than 'Jacko' on his tractor), I decide to explore and when I pass the locked trackshop behind it I'm surprised to find a man - crouched by the doorway of the portacabin that serves as the home dressing room - leant forward being violently sick on the floor. The man is dressed in overalls and, rather diligently, projects his sickness towards the side of the building. When he stops and raises from a prone position, the violently ill man turns out to be Redcar owner and promoter, Glyn Taylor. "It must be the stress. I had to leave a meeting with the council to renegotiate the lease!" In the same way that you do if you fall over in public and someone asks 'are you alright?' Glyn claims to be "fine" now that he's finished being sick. That said, his financial problems continue to weigh heavily on his mind. "If I could walk away now, I'd never go to another speedway meeting! When I said the club was up for sale, the amount of abuse I got was phenomenal! I'm just an ordinary bloke. My dad [Chum Taylor] was in speedway, like I've been in speedway all my life - as a rider and, now as a promoter, I just want nothing to do with it! I work 80 hours a week on speedway and I'm just sick of it! I'm also a tuner three days a week and have a queue of 12 engines waiting. I do them when I can and I say to them 'If you're not happy you can go somewhere else'. Neil Machin told me 'look at what comes in and what goes out and, if you're making a loss, pull the plug'. I sort of admired Colin Horton 'cause he got out and paid most people, only the odd one got burned. Whereas Waggy went bankrupt and I got 17p for a £600 bill. He owed Greg Hancock and several other riders a lot of money, but everyone got paid only a fraction of what they were owed - except for the taxman, the VAT man, the banks

and solicitors who all got paid in full! They say the new man at Workington has lost interest and, effectively, got out of speedway as he's handed the thing over to Ian Thomas. He allegedly wishes he'd never got into it - though, it's said he did have a tax bill of about £20 million last year, so his situation is a bit different."

"The thing I like most about the speedway track - it'll sound silly - is the wildlife! We get all sorts here, rabbits, foxes, moles. It's amazing! You should have a look at this place on Google Earth before we started work on it. We cleared 30 tons of debris from the centre green alone. It was a huge job to create this place but, I'd walk away, if I could! We had five weeks of rain-offs at the start of the season and we've never recovered financially but I put my heart and soul into it. In 2007, we used to get 1,200 fans and, in 2008, we get 600 to 650 fans. Last week it was 653 fans. The away fans have dropped off. Last week we had Sheffield and they brought about 30 people max. If we take £6k, I have to give a substantial amount straight to the VAT man. Everything costs. It's unbelievable! The cleaning is £50 a week. It costs 350 quid to empty the septic tank. I have to pay the staff. We spend 350 quid per meeting on shale - we've used 100 tons this year so far. We lose tons of shale over the fence! With the narrow back straight, it means they [the riders] have to go straight whereas, on the home straight, they just drift to the outside and blast the shale over the fence. The rent on the buildings is £2,300. I had to pay a four-figure sum to the BSPA for their services from February to August. It was £4k on the loudspeakers and it's £450 medical cover for each meeting. The tyres are £518 a meeting. I just spent £18,000 for two away and two home meetings. You can say it's £1,800 to £2,000 per meeting to the away team and that's just paying them the away points money of £35, £25 and £20. The worst of the lot are the riders! They just look at the money. Vans cost £150 each per month, there's £70 each in rent, never mind the airfares, signing-on fees, and all the other things! We've even had tractor repairs. I bought a new gearbox last week for 700 quid."

"People say more people would come if we had a grandstand - but who the freak is gonna pay for it? There's a council meeting to discuss a sports grant for the grandstand but that's not gonna happen. The riders shock me! We were supposed to be in the Fours [Final] this weekend but mine say 'I ain't gonna ride' or 'I can't 'cause I've got a wedding!' So we've got to pull out and Scunthorpe are in our

place. Drains were £7,500 and the fencing is £3,000. When I explained the situation to Gary [Havelock] and suggested a pay cut, he told me to 'freak off!' Trying to cut our cloth to our suit was sensible. But, he didn't see it as his problem as he had a contract. It's not much good to you if you're sacked! Neil Machin is a very good friend - I used to room with him when I was a rider - and he says 'you have to make it pay'. I do the engine tuning, that's £100 each and I do some other things. Colin Horton wants me to look at his [Peterborough] track. It's full of clay so, either it binds together when they water it and is unrideable or, else, there's too much dirt and the bikes can't cope. I'm gonna go down on August 1st - they have a meeting on the 7th or the 8th - to look. My recommendation was to scrape off 15 tons and then put down 30 tons of the shale we use here from Bradford. Getting paid £150 plus petrol is nice but it's not gonna solve things! Peter Oakes asked about all the costs here 'cause he might think of taking over the licence. Maybe, I dunno? If it's not the costs, you'd be amazed at everything that goes on! The council have a noise meter here. It's radio signal controlled and takes a reading at every meeting!"

We move over to the small tea area in the pits where assistant track curator (to Glyn), Ian 'Jacko' Jackson, joins us. Glyn asks, "It ain't gonna freakin' rain is it?" 'Jacko' doesn't think that it will but, after he learns Glyn has been sick, anxiously quizzes him about what he's eaten. "I left Manchester at 6 a.m. after me Weetabix and I've had a cup of coffee since, oh, and an apple." They're in agreement that the amount of shale that disappears over the fence each week is criminal. During the season, 'Jacko' has had discussions with the riders about the surface, "I did the track ultra slick and they complained! So the next week, I put more dirt on the track and the freakers were all over the place. They only moaned even more, so I just do what I want now and they'll just have to cope!" Glyn shows me the giant roller that they have at Redcar and he's proud to tell me just how well this bespoke, handmade piece of equipment performs. "The roller is my best invention! It's a steel drum surrounded with tyres. It weighs two to three tons. There's 100 gallons of oil inside the drums and remember that one gallon weighs 10 lbs." Talk of track preparation skill and expertise is a subject close to Glyn's heart. "The track at Cardiff needs some serious attention. The money BSI make from Cardiff is amazing and none of it comes back to help the sport! I know the bloke in Australia who fills the stadiums for all sorts of events in Oz - he

just did it with horses - and he wanted to take over the GP there. But they wanted 17 flown in first-class and put up in the Hilton. That was a minimum of £50k for starters, though it was never gonna happen." Talk of stadium income returns us to problems closer to home, "I sometimes wish we just rented the stadium. George English [at Newcastle] pays a good value rent per week and that's it - no cleaning, no nothing! Oh well, the show must go on!"

While hugely concerned at the endless litany of costs you have to bear to run a Premier League speedway track, something that definitely still excites Glyn is working with his hands (and brain) to build things to solve specific and seemingly intractable problems. Later he proudly shows me a prototype of a "revolutionary silencer" that he's developed. "I'm gonna make them slimmer and quieter. The present one is supposed to be 102 decibels but really it's 112 decibels! Graham Reeve acknowledges that. My one is gonna be a lot quieter and slimmer and won't cost as much. The bikes will go just as well, if not better!" Tonight's visitors are Workington and Glyn remains hopeful that they might travel with a reasonable number of fans to the South Tees Motorsports Park, "An extra 50 people tonight wouldn't solve things but it would help!"

I can place my display table wherever I like within the stadium grounds, so choose next to the hospitality portacabin with its raised balcony that overlooks the first corner but also provides a panoramic view of the track. On the other side of this temporary building, Richard McGlade works in his burger van and we chat about the need for a proper book on the exploits of the hooligans - known as the "Casual Firm" - that used to follow Middlesbrough football club in the 1970s. He doesn't feel that Paul Debrick's book *The Brick* really captures the full essence or glory of their activities. "He wasn't as important as he claims he was!" Before the turnstiles open there's a good-sized queue of fans and the car park beyond fills up remarkably quickly. One of the first fans to stop for a chat by my table takes an optimistic view of the likely attendance levels tonight, "I come at the same time every week and I had to park two rows further back in the car park than usual. Still, Workington often bring a few with them!" Eastbourne uber-fan, Sid Greatley, has travelled up for the meeting and even talks about going to Edinburgh the next day (although he doesn't do so). He has always travelled widely to watch his speedway and, as ever, sports his shiny fluorescent

blue Eagles anorak. He's just retired ("they can't do without me"), and optimistically believes that Eastbourne still might gain some silverware, "I reckon we're going to make the play-offs!" Sheffield supporter Philip Brown has come along with his dad, Paul. Philip soon questions a recent blog posting where I take BSI/IMG to task for the usuriously low level of pay rates given to riders in the Grand Prix. It's not a perspective he agrees with, "The FIM set the pay rates for the riders which has nothing to do with IMG or BSI! BSI are just good businessmen - so, if they maximise their revenues, it's nothing to be criticised or be ashamed of! Speedway needs better stadiums to attract the fans!" I confirm to Philip that I still don't buy the self-justifying argument put forward by BSI that erroneously claims quality of stadiums and stadium infrastructure will somehow automatically professionalize the sport, increase attendances or, even, automatically necessarily enhance the spectacle on the track. I note that the facilities at the Cardiff Millennium Stadium are excellent but, nonetheless, Cardiff remains a consistently poor track. Philip denies any relationship between track quality and the racing produced by indoor stadia, "Whilst at Gelsenkirchen, the riders said it was a good track but the racing was awful!" To my mind this confirms that temporary tracks built in deluxe stadia will, almost without exception, provide neither high quality or entertaining races. Philip's dad, Paul, believes that speedway can learn some valuable lessons from basketball, "Promoters need to promote speedway to new people with discount offers and the like rather than one extra free meeting - like they had at Lakeside - which won't bring them back to pay £15 each week. Basketball has been innovative and used discount vouchers to get people going regularly and hooked on the sport."

Because of the tight confines of the 271-metre banked STMP circuit, the racing often looks excitingly close. However, some sensitivity exists about this perception. Recently the club and local newspaper have been quick to strenuously defend their reputation against comments by George English that though the riders race close together there is "little or no passing". There's precious little evidence of neck-and-neck racing in the rerun of the first heat, which sees Daniel Nermark win comfortably ahead of local fans' favourite, Gary Havelock, in a time of 53.2 seconds to equal the track record held by Ricky Ashworth. From the centre green, Redcar Director of Operations, Gareth Rogers, studiously talks up Benji Compton's latent talent while the rider makes his way out

onto the track for the second race of the night. "Well Benji got stuck in last night at Birmingham and his performance was appreciated by the 20 of so travelling fans stood in a little cluster there." This evening the fans take the chance to cheer Arlo Bugeja when he wins the second race. Keith McGhie (Jon Cook sound-alike, club announcer and dead ringer for my dentist) relays the race results enthusiastically and gives Bugeja the expansive moniker of the 'Adelaide Arrow'. Arlo often almost has more nicknames than points to his name. Keith also tells us, "The referee Jim Lawrence would like to commend John Branney for picking up so promptly on the pits bend!" Before the third race starts, Gareth returns to his overview of the previous night's meeting at Birmingham and alludes to mechanical problems for James Grieves as a potential explanation for the Bears narrow single-point defeat at Perry Barr Stadium. The third race of the night (finally) features a passing manoeuvre from Joe Haines who blasts past Chris Kerr on the opening corner of the last lap. It's a sight that exasperates the man in front of me, ("Ha'way Kerr!"). Redcar have two Australians in the fourth heat, the rider with the grandiose nickname (Arlo 'Adelaide Arrow' Bugeja) along with Ty Proctor, whom Keith McGhie introduces as "The Thunder from Down Under" apparently unaware that Rod Stewart's ex-wife Rachel Hunter used this very phrase to describe her orgasms. Ty does indeed thunder from the gate only to find himself soon passed by the experienced Carl Stonehewer on the back straight of the first lap. Ty returns the favour and regains the lead with a blast round the steep banking of the last bend at the end of the second lap. On the final lap John Branney suffers what Keith McGhie terms a "water to the eyes moment". Just as he cranks up his speed to pass Arlo Bugeja round the outside of the last bend, his progress is suddenly cut short when his chain suddenly snaps just at the moment he exits the bend to race towards the finish line. Branney does extremely well just to stay on his machine but gets, what my dad would euphemistically describe, as 'badly winded'. The first four races have seen the teams alternate 4-2s and this prompts Keith to observe, "So that pendulum swings once again!" Over the tannoy, we learn that stock clearance has been dressed up as a generous discount offer by the track shop management: "Dave Rattenberry tells me that Bears T-shirts that usually retail at £9 are on special offer tonight at £5!"

A couple of surprising 5-1 race results then follow. Given his imperious form in the first race, you'd expect Daniel Nermark to comfortably win the

fifth but, instead, he falls and, thereby, effectively gifts Grieves and Kerr their maximum heat advantage. In the next race, you'd be equally confident beforehand that local track expert and fans' favourite Gary Havelock would triumph. But, instead, he trails home a surprising third behind the Comets combination of Carl Stonehewer and hardworking reserve Charles Wright. It appears that no sooner does one team establish a narrow lead than the other team immediately takes it back again. This pattern continues unabated in heats 7 and 8 when Workington briefly burst back into the lead (for the third time in the meeting) only to find themselves pegged back after the subsequent race. Understandably heat 8 starts without John Branney, and Keith McGhie confirms, somewhat euphemistically, "We understand 'winded' John Branney won't be coming out in the next heat after he hurt himself nearly dismounting from his bike and is seeking medical attention!" Charles Wright replaces him but finishes last (his only fourth place of the night) watched by his mum Lynn, stood among the start-line crowd. You could almost set your watch by Lynn Wright's attendance at any speedway meeting that features either of her sons (James or Charles). Before this race, Master of Ceremonies, Gareth Rogers, dutifully talked up the delicately poised nature of the meeting, "It's all getting very intriguing and exciting, as I said earlier!" Josh Auty wins ahead of Joe Haines after a very hard-fought corner that prompts Gareth to note, "There's a great rivalry and competitive rivalry between these good friends!" No sooner have these words left his mouth than - as they reach the third and fourth bend of the warm-down 'celebration' lap (lap 5) - Josh Auty dramatically decides to mete out his own justice to perceived aggressors. This takes the form of a sudden head butt for the yellow-helmeted Charles Wright. With bonhomie in short supply, this outburst of violent retribution forces a heartfelt but slightly schoolmasterly "Oh dear" from Gareth.

Workington have arrived at the STMP with a six-strong side and they run with rider replacement for Tony Reima (whom I've never seen ride and suspect could be a figment of Ian Thomas's imagination). The experienced Comets trio of Nermark, Nieminen and Stonehewer all look extremely impressive around the banked circuit and they're given good support by both Joe Haines and Charles Wright, though John 'winded' Branney has (obviously enough) looked slightly out of sorts. Still first impressions often count for naught and, so this proves in heat 9, when the Bears Grieves/Kerr combination ram home their second

successive maximum heat win to ease Redcar into their first lead of the night at 29-25. Personally, I would have expected ex World Champion Gary Havelock to then consolidate their lead in the next race but, instead, he's well beaten by Kauko Nieminen, who rides with noticeable speed and grace. Wittily Gareth tells us, "Certainly Koko's no clown!" Keith McGhie disapproves of Nieminen's prompt return to the pits after his easy victory, "Opting again not to take your applause and congratulations!" Gareth decides to labour Keith's earlier clichéd metaphor, "That old pendulum swings again" while, perched in the referee's box, Keith obsesses about the "Hard but physical Kauko Nieminen".

It's easy to wander round the STMP circuit and watch the meeting from different vantage points along the home straight or round the first corner. I find myself stood next to the friendly and knowledgeable speedway couple, Mandy and Keith Mason. Mandy has followed speedway in the Teesside area for many years and used to go to Cleveland Park. "I watched in the late '70s and early '80s. I was 14 when I first went in 1972 and we used to get the bus. I don't think there was any one rider who was my favourite, maybe Steve Wilcox, but really all of them were my favourites! I tried to scrounge a lift off friends to away meetings and, ever since it reopened here, we've been coming back." If life is full of mysteries, then Keith Mason might not have all the answers but he's keen to search them out. He definitely has the most incisive question of the night, namely: "Where are all the rakers?" Now that he's pointed this out, it's blindingly obvious that there are no raking skills on display at the South Tees Motorsports Park. Mandy is equally mystified by their absence, "We used to have them at Cleveland Park!" Given my conversation earlier with Glyn Taylor about lost shale, I expect any rakers would have to base themselves 10 yards back into the home-straight crowd to locate the shale that's scattered there off the track during each and every race meeting. If rakers were based on the centre green, they'd be a further unnecessary expense and merely there for decoration rather than any real effect.

The imperious form of Kauko Nieminen and Daniel Nermark in particular suggests that the Workington Comets should be strong contenders for the 2008 Premier League championship. However, the 11th race of the meeting is to provide an immediate and serious dent in their championship ambitions. The race features

Australian prospect Ty Proctor and the fast-riding racer in the distinctive orange kevlar, Daniel Nermark. The 31-year-old Swede has 3 points to his name and could well have more but for his heat 5 fall, when he comes to grief in pursuit of James Grieves of the Bears. For the first three laps of heat 11 we are served up some exciting race action and, as the riders hammer down the back straight of the final lap, Ty Proctor holds a narrow lead by virtue of his speed on the bike. Daniel Nermark is in hot pursuit and, at the point of maximum velocity on the back straight, his bike appears to clip Proctor's back wheel. This causes Nermark's bike to further accelerate and zoom fish-tailing onwards until it smashes into the third-bend fence to fling the luckless Comets rider into the air like the proverbial rag doll. The fence appears to buckle and warp upon impact, though it withstands the blow. Whether Nermark will be so lucky looks unlikely after his mid-air somersault has him land with full impact upon his head/neck. It is one of those genuinely horrific crashes when the quest for speed for our entertainment crosses a line to sharply throw into relief the mortality of the participants. People immediately start to run from the banked pits towards the stricken rider, while the medical staff (in dark clothes rather than fluorescent ones) run from the opposite direction. On the centre green, Gareth Rogers reacts quickly to exclaim, "We've seen what's happened - Keith put some nice music on please!" It's a thoughtful but also simultaneously peculiar request given that "nice" music will be necessarily in the ear of the beholder (and won't distract Daniel Nermark from the pain of his injuries). After a brief delay for a suitable selection, Keith chooses to put on an R&B song. It blasts out over the loudspeakers and features the lyric, "It's been the longest without you". In the stunned crowd, we collectively hold our metaphorical breath while riders, track staff and medical personnel fuss around the stricken Nermark. The ambulance waits ominously on the track. In the toilets two young boys excitedly discuss what they just saw, "He didn't half hit that fence like!" "Yeah, he's probably dead!" Outside a man on a mobile phone breathlessly relays a blow-by-blow account of the crash, "You've never seen anyone go so fast, he was absolutely full pace!" After a short delay, Gareth informs us, "Daniel is in a semi-conscious state. Obviously he has to go to the James Cook Hospital where they will assess him. Of course, he has a history of having broken both femurs but, at the moment, he's not certain of what happened which is probably a good thing!" Redcar speedway fans are knowledgeable about their sport and remain relatively hushed as they patiently wait for further news of his injuries

from the track. Keith McGhie intones a classic example of an informationless information message (that we're usually bombarded with on public transport), "There's a slight delay and we do, of course, appreciate your patience." Shortly afterwards Keith supplies some slightly more specific news, "It seems Daniel just about has movement everywhere but he is drifting in and out of consciousness. But, hopefully, his injuries aren't as serious as we first thought!"

If the huge impact of the crash has knocked the stuffing out of Daniel Nermark then it's also put a giant spanner in the works for Workington and, when the Bears race to a 4-2 in the rerun, it appears to have ended all likelihood of a Comets away win. With Nermark programmed to ride in heat 13 and also pretty certain to participate in heat 15, there's need for an instant reply. Kauko Nieminen immediately provides this in heat 12 when he magnificently passes James Grieves on the back straight to gain the lead and go on to win the race. With John Branney third, Comets have a 4-2 heat advantage that reduces their deficit on the night to just 2 points and rests the score at 37-35. Over the tannoy, Keith McGhie conducts his own master-class in Dadaist slogans, "The phone from the pits does ring!" Mindful of the 10 o'clock curfew at South Tees Motorsports Park, the remainder of the heats are rushed through quickly.

Gary Havelock's first win of the evening comes at a vital time in heat 13 and restores the Redcar lead to 4 points with two races to go. The penultimate heat only features riders aged below 25. It's won by Joe Haines but the excitement is the battle for second place. Charles Wright stalks the multiple nicknamed Arlo Bugeja throughout and waits to chose his moment for a decisive blast round the outside of his rival on the back straight of the last lap. The Comets maximum ties the scores at 42 apiece and brings the meeting to a cliffhanger finale of a last-heat decider. If the fast-starting Daniel Nermark had still been fit enough to ride then, just like heat 13, the outcome would probably have been different. Nonetheless, even without him, the Comets field an impressive combination of Stonehewer and Nieminen but, once Grieves escapes at the start (and Havelock occupies third place) a home win is always going to be the likely outcome. This is duly confirmed when Havelock steals second place on the line from Stonehewer to emphasise that the Bears have seized the last-gasp advantage. The 47-43 scoreline flatters the home team but they have ridden their luck. Their determination over the

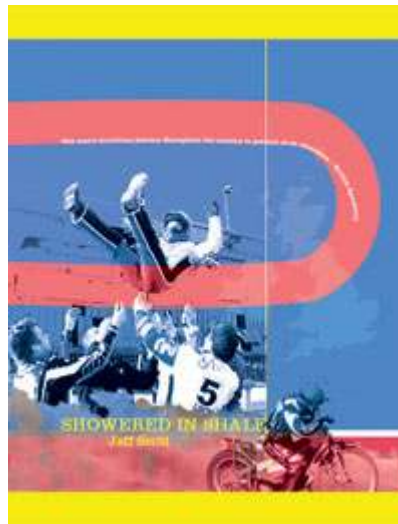
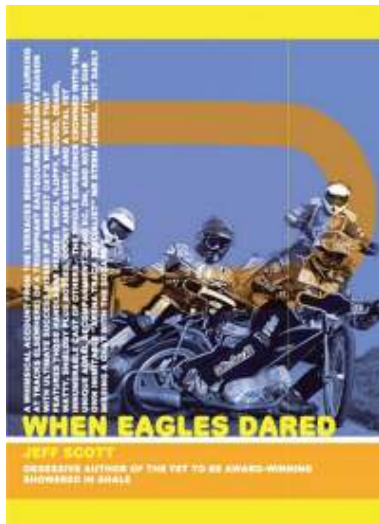
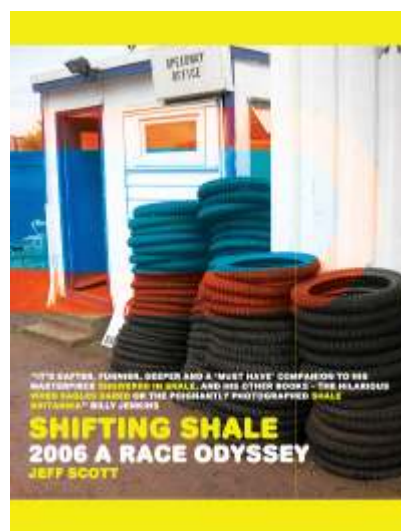
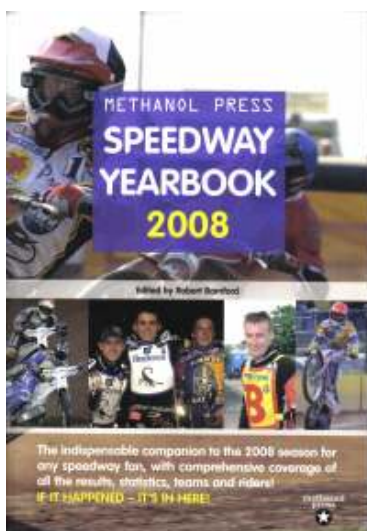
vital closing heats gains a win that consolidates their mid-table position in the Premier League. While some of the crowd sprint for the exit to try and beat the rush from the packed car park, Keith McGhie continues to console us, "We apologise for the unscheduled delay tonight but accidents and injuries are outside of our control!" Sid Greatley marvels at how Nermark escaped without catastrophic consequences: "I thought he was dead, you know!"

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It's All About You...Matt Jackson



The Shay

Tell us about your introduction to speedway

Sheffield, 1974. I was a youngster of just five years old and I have still got the programme from that first meeting against Hull. As soon as Bob Valentine and Bob Paulson scored a 5-1 in the first heat I was totally hooked. I have remained so, mainly on than off, for the past 35 years.

Tell us about your favourite meeting of all time

It's a really boring one but I will have to say the 1981 World Final at Wembley. I was just 13 years old and the atmosphere was fantastic. I can still watch the footage of it nearly 30 years on and it sends a shiver down my spine.

Tell us about your favourite rider of all time

It has to be Shawn Moran. My boyhood heroes were Reg Wilson and Doug Wyer but Shawn had such charisma and was so spectacular that he has to win my vote. It was such a shame when he came back to Sheffield for a second spell in the mid 1990s and was a shadow of his former self.

Tell us about your favourite track/stadium

I have quite a few but I would have to say The Shay at Halifax. The local derbies between Sheffield and the Dukes were always fiercely fought and the rivalry between the two clubs was fantastic. I used to love visiting The Shay and sitting in the main stand where the sound of the bikes would reverberate under the corrugated steel roof.

What are the best things about speedway?

That you can go to a meeting, stand where you want, shout for who you want and not run the risk of getting your head kicked in by rival supporters. When a speedway meeting is a good one there is no better sporting occasion.

What are the worst things about speedway?

The weather. There is nothing worse than travelling miles to a meeting and finding it rained off and coming all the way back again without seeing a race.

What one thing would you do to improve speedway?

Get someone in to run the sport who doesn't hold a financial interest at one particular track. The promoters seem to make up the rules as they go along with no regard for the fans, who are by far the most important elements in the sport. The prime example would have to be the hated tactical double points rule. Madness. If they paid me a decent wage, I'd do it tomorrow.

Tell us about a rider you wish you'd seen

I've been so lucky in that I've seen the greats of the past 35 years like Mauger, Collins, Lee, Penhall, Gundersen, Nielsen etc. I would have loved to have seen Peter Craven and Ove Fundin but more than anything I would have loved to have been at Wembley and West Ham just after the war when the crowds for league matches were in the 80,000 bracket. So, maybe I would have to say Vic Duggan or any major rider from that period.

What does the future hold for speedway?

I think the days of the big stadium league venues are gone. I think the future is tracks like Somerset and Scunthorpe who start with a track in a field and develop facilities around them.

Scotland for the World Cup!

By Bill Elliot



Great Scots

As a Scottish speedway follower of a certain vintage, I can remember the days when luminaries such as Ken McKinlay, Jim McMillan, George Hunter, Bert Harkins and Bobby Beaton performed with distinction for my country and, indeed, for Great Britain (particularly for the Lions in the sunshine of Australia, while we shivered at home in the dark winter months). Indeed, as a Best Pairs force I seem to recall the Scots causing an upset or two over the late 60's/70's, while we were still considered worthy of a spot in these international competitions.

With no disrespect intended to other Scots around at that time, we were usually short of a couple of riders to make up a 6 or 8 man squad (as the formats of the time required), but that never stopped us from granting temporary citizenship to stars such as Australian Charlie Monk and Norwegian Reidar Eide, amongst others, to literally bring us up to speed for the odd tilt at our friends from the wrong side of the border. This practice was no doubt encouraged by the fact that at that time, in spite of there being a plethora of nine point plus English heat leaders at the time such as Terry Betts, Norman Hunter and Ray Wilson, Great Britain could apparently call on the likes of Kiwis Ivan Mauger and Barry Briggs (methinks Aussie Jim Airey maybe even rode in a "British" World Team Cup winning side) to put a pretty formidable 4 man squad on the track. Of course, the Kiwis eventually decided to go it alone and had the cheek to win it for themselves!

The decline of the Scots as a force in world speedway can perhaps be traced back to the time when teams north of the border no longer competed in the highest league in the land, the last of them (Coatbridge) transferring their licence to Hull and, at least until now, there hasn't been a

Scottish team in the premier (with a small 'p') league within the sport. Perhaps with the country's top riders all riding for southern based teams, and with the local Scottish teams riding in the second tier league, the incentive and desire for Scottish riders to make it to the very top diminished as time went on, and whereas the riders mentioned above had at the start of their career replaced stars of the 50's and early 60's, there was no conveyor belt of talent coming through to take over in turn from these top riders as they themselves lost out to Father Time-a few, such as James Grieves and Willie Lawson have flirted with the Elite League, but not with the degree of success (at least to date) to suggest they could successfully compete with the best in arguably one of the best leagues in the world.

By the end of the 70's then, Scotland took its place in the archives of world speedway as other countries such as the USA came to the party with superstars such as Penhall, Autrey, Schwartz and all the rest breaking through big time, and the next generation of riders such as Hancock and Hamill ensured a prolonged stay at the top table, so to speak.

Whether you like the current format for the World Individual Championship or not (I don't), what you can't deny is that it has helped take top class speedway to a variety of venues in new countries. Italy is hardly a hotbed for the sport, yet it gets a Grand Prix round every year. So, my question is, why can't the policy of encouraging and developing the sport not be applied to team events? Even in my wildest dreams (and no, I haven't been sampling one of my country's products while penning these words), I'm not suggesting that Scotland has a team capable of competing on the world stage at the televised rounds right now, or even in the immediate future, but at the moment, it appears that it is denied the opportunity to try, through participation is any form of a preliminary qualifying round.

To further develop speedway I suggest you need to have a system where even the smallest of minnows have the opportunity to go in against the big fish, and a qualifying system is one way of doing it. Such a methodology would certainly allow countries like Scotland to aspire to developing talent capable of moving onwards and upwards, whereas at the minute it's "same old, same old" when you look at the countries performing in speedway's world cup every year. It might take 5 years, it might take 10, the point is, surely, the

platform has to be established and just now it just ain't there-again using the English FA Cup as an example, the wee (translation "small" for those of a non Scottish persuasion) maybe start their qualifying rounds maybe 4 or 5 months before the giants get in, but just occasionally, one of them makes it through to meet the big boys, and when that happens, there is a lot of excitement, a word that these days is perhaps underused in speedway, generated at least for a week or two.

I can remember in the last few years attending a Scotland v England under 21 match at Berwick, (perhaps in itself a reflection of how far Scotland have slipped in world terms), but nevertheless it provided a vehicle for Scotland to be represented at national level, while no doubt allowing their English counterparts to have a look at potential future stars, thereby serving two purposes in one. Surely this is a sample which could be applied across the UK as a starter for 10, not only to serve Scotland's cunning plan to conquer the speedway world in maybe 20 years' time, but also to encourage the growth of developing talent? I have seen details of matches involving England under 21's against Australia under 21's, what is there to stop Scotland's involvement in meetings or series which seek to do something similar? At a time too, when meetings can be ahem, very similar in entertainment value, why not (re) introduce a series of meetings which provide a bit of variation from the standard menu of one home match against most other rivals, a meaningless friendly at the start of the season against your local rivals, a cup run maybe once in a while, and that's about it?

To play the Devil's Advocate again, I know, I know, any Scot has the potential to ride for Great Britain in the World Team Cup, but why don't we just get the façade out of the way by saying the current team racing under the "Great Britain" banner is English, the fans all over the UK regard them in the same light, I doubt if there's anyone out there ever believes the team will ever be any different, so why not just call them "England" and be done with it? (It would also save more than one TV pundit and/or interviewee from getting a red face live on air, when they have referred to the team as "England" when they are still technically "Great Britain"!)

I have read elsewhere that maybe Scottish speedway's greatest ambassador, one Bert Harkins esquire, has been banging on to the FIM about allowing Scotland's re-entry to the World Team

event, only to be met with the response of the country not having an FIM approved venue. Once again, rather than provide criteria to be met before something COULD happen, there is the feeling that a singularly unhelpful response has been issued by a ruling body. OK, what have we not got that we need to gain FIM approval?-Is it an air fence, is it a certain level of off track facility? Is it proximity to airports for international riders/officials. Clear enough? I once more suggest that pre recent Grand Prix series there is every chance that certain tracks were not FIM approved, indeed Cardiff was not FIM approved before the decision was made to move a temporary track in, and I suspect there were others. What I'm saying here is, don't tell us we can't get in because we don't have A, B or C, tell us the criteria which have to be met to allow us to get out to play with the other kids again, even if it means starting in the lowest class and working our way up. It might not be possible, but who's to say, for example, that if the likes of Cardiff and some track in Italy which your average speedway punter had never heard of before the Grand Prix, can get it, then Scotland can't? Speedway was held at Hampden Park, the national football stadium, in my lifetime, and maybe even Murrayfield could provide a venue-maybe that's pie in the sky, maybe not, what I'm saying is if 15 years ago someone had said that the premier speedway event in Britain each year would be held at Cardiff, they would have had been invited to don the regulation white jacket and get assistance to tie the straps. Tell us what we need to do, and then let us get on with it-don't tell a Scotsman that something isn't possible, he'll only take considerable pleasure in proving you totally wrong!

Finally, having written enough of a partly political broadcast on behalf of the Scottish World Cup Party, can I just say that in addition to achieving what no other party could do, in amalgamating Glasgow Tigers and Edinburgh Monarchs fans under the one, united, SCOTTISH banner, we give an absolute guarantee that after overcoming all of the odds and defeating England, Australia and Denmark in the 2029 World Cup Final, we will not rip up the track or dismantle the safety fence in celebration!