

## The Cost of Watching Speedway

*Some comments on the cost of watching the sport have been recently received through our feedback column. We decided these points would make more sense as a single article than scattered through many of our weekly updates. Your thoughts on the comments made are, as ever, more than welcome.*



### Dudley Jones

It seems to me that the Elite League is in serious trouble, with Oxford folding, Reading changing hands suddenly and talks about Peterborough seeing the season through. I am sure that speedway will survive, but perhaps it's time for a fundamental re-think?

I cast my mind back to my first interest in the sport, in 1962, are there parallels with today? Then Ipswich folded (the week before I first saw Norwich Stars at the Firs). Then the National League was dying on its feet (with much larger crowds), yet we had a healthy youngster in the form of the 'lower level' (but possibly more exciting), Provincial League. Surely the sport needs to take a long look, at the terraces, at costs, at entertainment. I don't think it's about admission costs, football is often much more per head. Let us have more local riders brought on, less commuting abroad, and much more showmanship.

A radical idea - go 'provincial' again, to the roots. Only have foreigners if they ride only for British teams (same for home grown riders) maybe drop out of SGP and have regular race nights instead, to nurture the 'speedway habit'. Above all make speedway exciting (more basic bikes, closer racing, less costs) and a jolly good night out. Believe me, Ipswich with Louis, Davey, Lanham, etc., a politically incorrect (but very witty and lively) announcer, a great raceway and a sense of belonging and identification with the team, was magic and having to miss a Thursday night a

tragedy. Perhaps time for a fundamental change, Premier League and an enlarged (and name changed) Conference League.

### **Ken Nicholson**

Dudley Jones in his recent feedback compared speedway to football and came up with the conclusion that price is not the important factor in causing the declining numbers on the terraces. Football has always had a much wider appeal than speedway (being taught in schools, etc.) and as such, the number of supporters that have a high disposable income are less common amongst those that follow speedway. Even football is feeling the pinch however, and a recent survey indicated that about 1 in 8 people were not going to renew their season tickets because of cost. And the clubs most affected? The most expensive ones - the Premier League clubs.

Speedway underwent hyper-inflation a few years ago. A lot of people used to visit more than one track a week, but gradually this has become less common. Others have been more selective in the meetings they have attended. While Dudley is right that better shows would mean the supporters would be less critical and selective in their attendance of meetings, even the greatest show on earth won't attract a sell-out crowd unless they can afford it. I wholeheartedly agree with Dudley that costs must be controlled as a priority and the entertainment factor must be increased. If speedway is not both affordable and entertaining, then its days are numbered irrespective of the league structure.

### **Geoff Langley**

I think the point Ken Nicholson has missed is that the best way to keep admission costs down is to increase the number of paying spectators. I think a lesson can be learned from cricket . At a lot of county matches the spectators sometimes consist of little more than a man and his dog at times but the sport keeps afloat financially by one one day games and 20/20 matches which are not exactly noted for seeing great skill but they are hugely entertaining. Could speedway not think of something like that ?

What about more handicapping in challenge matches, what happened to the mechanics races and ladies races of years ago? These sort of novelty events wont replace the serious stuff but they do help to keep the less-enthusatic supporters interested No sport took itself more seriously than cricket years ago but the carnival atmosphere of some of the modern innovations has increased support tremendously.

People have been telling me speedway is doomed for more than 40 years. I dont believe it but I do think the sport is its own worst enemy and could do a lot better. Those in charge need to stop walking with a measured step and start thinking outside the box. Sky has been a great benefit but we need to decide how to go to the next level. Simply cutting admission charges will not ,by itself ,make much difference.

## **N Woods**

I was interested in the comments regarding the cost to get in to speedway meetings. It has got too expensive as a lot of people in this country do not have a high income. Do not get me wrong I love speedway, When I first went it was 40p entry and 5p for a programme or 5p for a seat. That was for 13 races and a 7 race second half. Now we get 15 races with no second half for £15 pounds entry and two pounds for a programme. Yes I know that costs have gone up but it's now too expensive for those on what is classed as low income today. When I first went a lot of the crowd were in this bracket! The support is out there, Lakeside proved this, but with the cost of living in Britain today just cannot afford today's admission prices.

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