

THE FIRST EVER FREE SPEEDWAY MAGAZINE!

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SpeedwayPlus

ISSUE 3 – WINTER 2006



Matt Davis

**2005: A SEASON IN SUMMARY
THE KEY EVENTS OF LAST YEAR**

THE MIKE BENNETT COLUMN

BOOK EXTRACT: WIGGY!

TRACK HISTORY: SUNDERLAND

TRELAWNY
TRACK PIX

SHEFFIELD
ANGELZ

RUNNING
FOR COVER

THE
HAMMERS
OF '65

TOGETHER
IN ELECTRIC
DREAMS

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The excellent response to the first two editions of the magazine has encouraged us to continue with the project. As before, please feel free to redistribute the magazine, in either printed or electronic form, to anyone you feel would appreciate it.

In this January edition we look back at the winners of 2005, delve into the history of Sunderland and recall how West Ham dramatically clinched the 1965 British League title. Thanks to Bob Ferry and Robert J Rogers for putting these historical pieces together.

Thanks to Tony McDonald of Retro-Speedway we are also able to bring you extracts from two of their recent publications – Sliding into Hell and Wiggy!. Sliding into Hell is the debut novel of former Ipswich boss John Berry. Wiggy is the emotion packed tribute to the late Simon Wigg, the book is partly auto-biographical and also includes contributions from all the sport's big names.

Our regular columnists Mike Bennett, Chris Seaward and Dave Green are back with more of their wit and wisdom and we include more of our popular track photographs.

We simply couldn't produce the website or magazine without the efforts of our regular contributors and photographers, we owe them all a great debt. Drop us an email if you'd like to contribute to the site, articles and photographs are always welcome.

The next edition will be out in April, by which time the tapes will have risen on season 2006 and we'll no doubt have a whole new set of controversies to discuss.

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SpeedwayPlus always welcomes unsolicited contributions.

2005: A SEASON IN SUMMARY

There's no need to read detailed reviews of the season, all you need to know is here!

The Grand Prix

The story of the 2005 World Championship is wholly dominated by one man - Tony Rickardsson.

Tony started the season with five titles under his belt and hoping to clinch one more to equal Ivan Mauger's record haul. He started off in the right way by storming to seven consecutive race wins in the series opener at Wroclaw. The new formula saw each rider take part in five qualifying heats, then the best progress to the semi-finals and final. Tony won the lot and established himself as the man to beat.



World Champion – Tony Rickardsson
(pic: Matt Davis)

Defending champion Jason Crump stepped up his campaign by winning the second round at Eskilstuna. His victory required a bit of good fortune as Rickardsson was leading the final only for a rerun to be called.

From then on in, it was Rickardsson all the way. He triumphed at Krsko, Cardiff, Copenhagen and Marketa and looked like he would have the series in the bag with two rounds to spare. The Cardiff round was notable for a disastrous meeting from Jason Crump, the Aussie being excluded in three of his five races.

The expectation was that Tony Rickardsson would clinch his title on home soil at Malilla. For once things didn't go to plan as Crump won his

second GP of the season but in doing so only delayed the inevitable.

Rickardsson eventually clinched the title at Bydgoszcz in Poland, despite his eight point haul - his poorest return of the season. Local hero Tomasz Gollob once again proved too good for the rest around the Polish circuit.

Tony bounced back in style at Lonigo and won his sixth Grand Prix of the season. A quite remarkable seasonal record that will take some beating. Crump finished the season in second place with Leigh Adams, Nicki Pedersen and Greg Hancock completing the top five.

The Elite League

Coventry Bees overcame a terrible start to the season to end the year as Elite League champions. The Bees were rock bottom of the league at the end of May and were hit hard when they lost Rory Schlein to a fractured vertebrae. Somehow they managed to turn their year around and finished the league section of the competition in second place.



Elite League Champions – Coventry Bees
(pic: Matt Davis)

The only team above them was the revitalised Belle Vue Aces. The Manchester side were now under the control of Tony Mole and Ian Thomas and were a much more professional outfit than they had been in recent years. Jason Crump led the way for the Aces and they topped the league from early in the season until its conclusion.

2005 - A SEASON IN SUMMARY

Coventry and Belle Vue were therefore given home advantage in the play-off semi finals and they both progressed, disposing of Peterborough and Eastbourne respectively. Eastbourne were missing David Norris for their clash with the Aces, although this was balanced out by Kenneth Bjerre's absence in the Belle Vue side.

Coventry clinched the title in style by winning both legs of the play-off final. The first leg at Brandon saw them triumph by 54 points to 41. Jason Crump's 21 point maximum (from 6 rides) will be the abiding memory of that meeting. Coventry completed the job by winning the return by 47 to 42.

Belle Vue took some consolation from winning the Knockout Cup for the first time since 1975. Eastbourne Eagles were the defeated finalists.

Oxford and Swindon were also amongst the silverware by winning the Craven Shield and the Pairs respectively. Eastbourne's Nicki Pedersen won the Elite League Riders Championship at Swindon.

One of the major controversies of the summer related to transfer dealings between the Elite clubs. Oxford set it in motion by signing Greg Hancock and Billy Hamill without the permission of parent club Coventry. Coventry demanded transfer fees for both riders but Oxford insisted on loan deals. The knock-on effect was that Coventry refused to pay Ipswich for the full transfer of Scott Nicholls and Swindon refused to pay Coventry for Lee Richardson. The whole mess was resolved after much discussion between all parties, but it has surely hastened the end of the 'asset' system.

The Premier League

Rye House Rockets were pre-season favourites to win this year's league and they didn't disappoint. Their team building followed the familiar pattern of a championship winning side, it featured improving youngsters such as Chris Neath, Daniel King and Edward Kennett, alongside reliable and experienced performers - Stuart Robson and Brent Werner. They led the league throughout and never looked likely to miss out on the big prize.

The also won one of the league's other big competitions when they defeated Workington in the Premier Trophy final. The two sides had battled though the Southern and Northern qualifying groups.



Premier League Champions – Rye House Rockets
(pic: Colin Pearson)

A late season injury to Stuart Robson weakened the Rockets in other competitions. King's Lynn defeated the Rockets in both the KO Cup and Young Shield finals. The success of the Stars was just reward for the hard working Chapman family who have transformed the club in recent years. Sadly their year ended in tragedy when Ashley Jones was killed while racing in his native Australia.

Somerset Rebels won the fours competition, defeating home side Workington by a single point in the final. The Rebels' Magnus Zetterstrom also tasted individual success by winning the Champions Chase at King's Lynn.

Sean Wilson was another celebrating when he defeated fellow veteran Alan Mogridge to win the Premier League Riders Championship. As the meeting was staged at Sheffield the usual arguments about home advantage were trotted out, as they were when Glasgow won the pairs. Shane Parker and George Stancl were the victorious Tigers.

Sadly the league lost two long standing members when Hull and Exeter were kicked out of their rented stadia. Hull seemed to spend the whole season in financial disarray and even failed to complete their fixtures. The league has also now lost Reading to the Elite League, but that is balanced out by Mildenhall's promotion from the Conference League.

2005 - A SEASON IN SUMMARY

The Conference League

Oxford Silver Machine Academy's progressive youth policy was rewarded when they clinched the Conference League title. Thankfully the new Oxford promotion will allow them to defend their title in 2006. Wimbledon and Weymouth finished in second and third place respectively.



Conference League Champions – Oxford Academy
(pic: Chris Baldwin)

Other winners were Armadale (Conference Trophy), Weymouth (Cup and Fours), Wimbledon (Pairs) and Steve Boxall (Riders Championship).

The league welcomed new member Scunthorpe and welcomed back Sittingbourne after a long absence. Many of the member clubs also staged a visit from the USA Dream Team, a fantastically successful tour that will hopefully be repeated in future years.

The World Cup

One of the biggest surprises of the competition occurred before the main event itself. Russia outgunning America in a qualifying round and joining Germany in the competition proper.

Team GB got off to a great start by winning the first semi-final, staged at Swindon, ahead of the highly fancied Danes. The success was achieved despite the absence of big-hitters Mark Loram and David Norris. Lee Richardson led the way with a faultless 15 point maximum, despite him suffering from illness. His team mates were Joe Screen, Scott Nicholls, Chris Harris and Simon Stead. Stead was a late call up and actually had to return from holiday to take part.

The action moved on to Eskilstuna in Sweden for the second semi-final. It was an amazingly tight affair and the home side progressed with 51 points, just ahead of Australia on 50 and Poland on 49. Germany were somewhat out of their depth and managed only five points.

The second and third sides in the semis met up in Poland for the last chance qualifier. Poland, boosted by the inclusion of Rune Holta, won convincingly and moved through to the final. Denmark also qualified comfortably ahead of an Aussie side that was missing Jason Crump. Crump had been floored by a virus.

Hopes were high that the British side would mount a challenge in the final but it never really materialised. Instead the Poles were in a class of their own and racked up 62 points. Sweden finished on 34, Denmark on 31 and GB on 26. The winning side was Walasek, Holta, Protasiewicz, Hampel and Gollob.

The Poles also won the inaugural Under 21 World Cup. They defeated Sweden, Denmark and the Czech Republic in the final at Pardubice.

Other Competitions

Scott Nicholls was crowned British Champion after defeating Chris Harris and Joe Screen in the final. Mark Loram took a tumble in the first staging of the final and was excluded.

Eddie Kennett won the British Under 21 final around his home circuit at Rye House, Daniel King coming to grief in the final.

The World Under 21 final was 'won' by Krzysztof Kasprzak on the toss of a coin. The meeting itself was abandoned and the track was too treacherous for a run off to be staged. Tomas Suchanek was the unlucky man who made the wrong call.



William Lawson
(pic: Jan Orkisz)

Edinburgh's William Lawson was a convincing victor in the British Under 18 final at Wolverhampton. The Scot scored a maximum 15 points.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUNDERLAND

Bob Ferry looks back on the days of the Stars and Gladiators, sharing some personal memories along the way.

It was in 1964 that speedway first came to Boldon, and it was the short lived "Sunderland Saints" who took to the track in what proved to be a disastrous introduction to the sport. Then ten years later it once again saw action as the "Sunderland Stars" took to the track. This time speedway lasted for four very eventful seasons.

The team that took to the track in 1971 was not a strong team and they were always going to struggle to survive. But survive they did, thanks mainly to skipper Russ Dent and George Barclay, without them the "Stars" would have gone under.

Boldon Stadium was a very friendly track, it had a sort of homely feel to it. Some say the track was a little on the small side, but at 310 yards long it certainly provided some close meetings. Last heat deciders were quite common, real nail-biters.

Speedway was all new to us supporters, it was thrilling to watch. Even the build up to the racing was all exciting, like watching the riders arrive in a cloud of dust across the dusty car park. Phil Crump and his mates, Crump was a big name during that season for Crewe, one of the top riders in the league!

I remember that meeting with Crewe very well. We started the meeting with a surprise first heat defeat as Crump and Millen took the honours for Crewe, 1-5....not good! After 8 heats Sunderland were still behind 21-27. Then Sunderland turned it around with two 5-1's in heats 9 and 10. First it was George Barclay and John Lynch and then Russ Dent and Alan Mackie who put the "Stars" in the lead for the first time.

Nail-biting time in the very next heat as Crewe hit back with a 4-2 to level the scores once again thanks to the Crump/Millen combination. Dent/Lynch put Sunderland back in the lead with the last heat still to come, and what a great cheer when George Barclay and Pete Wrathall held on to take a share of the points, 3-3. Sunderland won the meeting 40-38.

Phil Crump went through the card that day with a 12 point maximum, then to round things off he also won the Rider of the Night Final.

Russ Dent posted the fastest time of the season, 65.8, on the 9th of May v Rayleigh.

In 1972 the "Stars" were strengthened when Jack Millen and Graeme Smith came to give much needed respite to a side that had relied heavily on Dent/Barclay the previous season. Sunderland also won the annual Four team Tournament in 1972, with Berwick, Teesside and Workington taking part.



Sunderland Stars 1972

Millen rode again for Sunderland in 1973 along with the fast emerging Jim Wells and Dave Gatenby. This was the season that Berwick promoter Liz Taylor took over at Boldon after two seasons with Len Silver in charge. It was in those two seasons (72/73) that Sunderland saw what I believe to be Millen at his best. He took hold of speedway and gave it a kick up the backside! The atmosphere in the stadium when "Crazy Jack" was around was just electric. Russ Dent won the Northern Star Championship that year, after Dave Baugh had won it in 71 and 72.

1974 was a disaster from the very start. Under new promoters the team was very weak. A string of defeats both home and away saw Sunderland (now known as the Gladiators) lurking at the bottom of the league. Dent and Barclay were still there, but this time their magic was not enough. Brian Havelock was "coming on a ton" as was Jim Wells, but that disastrous start had sealed their fate. The second half of the season saw a big improvement as Andy Meldrum and Tim Swales were drafted in.

Dave Baugh, Dave Gifford and Jim Wells all claimed the track record, and just when Wells looked like holding on to it with a time of 63.4, Birmingham's John Hart stole it from him by scorching around in 63.2, and on the same day

TRACK HISTORY - SUNDERLAND

he also took the 3 lap record with a time of 48 sec. These records stand today!

Another memorable meeting was against Boston in July 74. Sunderland had started to pull themselves together when Liz Taylor came to their rescue after the previous promoters had pulled out in mid season. The Boston meeting was a hard fought battle with Sunderland emerging with a lot of credit from it. Tim Swales was the hero for the "Gladiators", riding at no 6 he produced a match winning performance by scoring 14pts from five rides, only losing out to Carl Glover in the last heat. He also went on to win the Rider of the Night Final to send the fans home happy. Sunderland 42 Boston 36.



Jack Millen

The Stars/Gladiators only ran for four seasons, but what memories! Like the time Barry Wallace, the track announcer, wrote in his programme column, it was concerning an incident in the previous weeks meeting with Berwick, it goes like this....."Only 'Iron Man' Millen could have survived such a fearsome pile-up in the tenth heat and then come bouncing back like a rubber ball to win the twelfth heat some five minutes later.

"The thought of it would have frightened most riders off for weeks! Here is a replay.....

"Jack and Willie Templeton were both on a maximum when they lined up in heat ten, Willie got the drop on Jack at the gate and led for three quarters of a lap before Jack drove hard

inside the Bandit on the fourth bend to take the lead, but Jack had over cooked it a bit, clouting the fence, bouncing back off again and clinging on to the bucking bike for a few yards, clouting the fence again before parting company with his bike, which just beat Jack over the finishing line as it sailed through the air. The starting marshall hastily looked for a white flag to hold up in surrender! The stretcher went back to the pits unused as the skipper, still with his leg in plaster from a previous misfortune, hobbled away to the cheers of admiration from the fans. What a man, and what an inspiration to a team as he gamely turned out with Russ Dent against the still unbeaten Willie Templeton and Andy Meldrum two heats later. It was a vital heat as the Stars led by just 34-31 pts There was no need to worry though as our boys overtook Willie to clinch the match with a 5-1 heat win".

Yes, those were the days!

There was a strange atmosphere in the stadium when Sunderland entertained Stoke on 13th September 1974, the fans sensed that this was to be the last time that they would see speedway at Boldon. Sadly it turned out to be just that, so as Brian Havelock won the last ever race (in the Rider of the Night Final) Sunderland did at least go out with a win.

It was all over.

So all we are left with are memories, of Russ Dent's records...Most meetings, most rides, most points, most maximums and winner of the most Rider of the Night Finals.

Dent/Barclay's heroics, (the only riders to compete in all four seasons)

Jack Millen on the rampage! His highest average for a Sunderland rider, 9.74

The silky smooth Graeme Smith.

Mr team men, Peter Wrathall and John Robson.

From novice to heat leaders...Brian Havelock, Dave Gatenby and Jim Wells

The promising Terry Barclay

That "Lovely lad" Vic Harding, he would go on to become a really good rider before tragedy struck him down.



NOT BENNETT?... NOT BENNETT?... **IT'S BENNETT!!!**

WHAT AN END TO THE SEASON

Let's face it, you couldn't have scripted it any better. Not one end of season competition for the Kings Lynn Money Centre Stars but two with the KO Cup Final and the Young shield. On both occasions it was Rye House, the league champions who provided the opposition and, despite all the odds, the Stars went on to win both the competitions.

I can honestly say that the atmosphere at those meetings was as good as anything I've ever been involved in and when we came out on the parade for the home leg of the cup final, the riders and Lynn manager Rob Lyon were all completely blown away by the noise.

I had my usual share of abuse from the visiting fans but it all added to a sensational night and the show travelled to Rye on the Saturday where over 800 Stars fans took over the first and second bend. The celebrations after the meeting were second to none and when the team paraded the trophy before the first leg of the Young Shield, the noise must have been heard as far away as Norwich – it was deafening!

As you can imagine, the end of season dinner and dance was lively despite the fact that the team had to race the following night at Hoddesdon. The speeches were great fun and one of the many highlights of the night surrounded the young Australians on the dance floor.

Nobody in that room could have guessed that just a couple of weeks later, we were going to be hit with the tragic news of Ashley Jones who's life ended in a crash on his home track in Australia. To say it hit like a bolt of lightning would have been an understatement. I was told on the Sunday morning by Steve Hone who had seen a line on the speedway forum and like everyone else, my initial reaction was that a mistake had been made and it wasn't true.

As the day continued, more news filtered through and a call to Jonathan Chapman confirmed the worst. Even now, in January 2006, it's hard to believe that Ash won't be in his rightful place at Kings Lynn.

Elsewhere on this site, our 5 minute tribute to Ash is available to download. It was the hardest thing I've ever had to produce but if it was bad for me, what about his girlfriend Shelley, or his Mum, Dad and the rest of his family?

We all know how dangerous this sport can be but, thankfully, fatalities are rare and perhaps that's why it came as such a shock to everyone at the club.



The late Ashley Jones

Keith and Jonathan arranged a memorial service at the stadium a week after his funeral in Australia and to see Shelley and Buck amongst the crowd was heartbreaking. Words were said in tribute and for everyone who attended, there was some comfort in the knowledge that this young man was so well loved by everyone who knew him. There are plans for a permanent memorial for Ash and I'll tell you more about that in the next column.

BRIGHTON BONANZA ON MOTORS TV

The phone call went something like this...

"Hello Mike, It's Ken Burnett"
"I'm not doing indoor speedway Ken"
"But Motors TV will give us a half hour slot"
"Really? What's the budget Ken?"

" Em, well, sort of, - it would make a good pilot?"
"You mean there's no money?"
"Well, yes – but if they like it we might get proper speedway on in 2006"
"I'm interested in that, what's the budget?"
"Same as the indoor really"
"No"
"But"
"No"
"Yeh, but no but yeh but no but"
"This sounds like a Little Britain sketch now, just so I've got this right, You want us to help film, present and produce a pilot for Motors TV for nothing in the hope that they'll like it and then put on monthly highlights programme based on the Premier League – for nothing?"
"If you put it that way? It sounds worse than it is, I mean... look at the advantages???"
"name me one Ken"
"Well, it would wind up the Rye House fans seeing you on TV on New Years day!"
"I'll do it!"

And that's how it happened really. As expected, we had a mixed reaction to the programme. Some sound problems beyond our control didn't help but we gave Motors TV exactly what they asked for and they were happy with it. Most of the feedback was positive and once people realized that we were prepared to take on board the comments about the sound and the duration, it seemed to go OK.



24 minutes was nowhere near enough time to do the day justice and the strongest lesson we learned was don't attempt to cover both meetings in one programme. We needed a one hour slot which translates to 48 minutes in transmission time for each meeting and perhaps we'll look at that for the next one – if we're daft enough to do it again!

We did manage to concentrate on Bobby Schwartz and Lewis Bridger as the oldest and youngest riders in the field and we tended to focus on the tumbles as we were trying to interest a European non speedway audience and that's the kind of thing that works for them.

The real aim is to have a monthly magazine programme on Motors TV based on Premier and Conference league racing. We are talking to several promoters about this but our main priority is to find a sponsor for each programme. It costs around £8000 to do this properly and Brighton was a one off. If we don't get the costs covered, we don't do it.

When you consider the exposure that could be gained from such a programme that would include highlights from a featured meeting plus fixtures, league tables, interviews and racing from most of the tracks in the Premier League, it's not that much of an outlay for one of the multi national companies so, as they say, watch this space!

STILL UP FOR CARDIFF?

I did mention in the last issue that I quite fancy the idea of being involved in the Grand Prix presentation but not as an announcer. I'm much happier with the roving mic and there are plenty of opportunities to bring some info from the pits, talk to the fans and generally keep things going during the track grading breaks. Some of the comments on the various internet sites have been very encouraging so who knows, if not this year maybe in seasons to come?

I suppose if I promised to retire from Speedway presentation straight afterwards that just might swing it?

Catch you next time!

Mike Bennett

COSTA MESA (USA)

Pictures by Wayne Newton



WIGGY!

Wiggy! is the new biography of the late, great Simon Wigg. Gareth Rogers' book is based partly on recorded conversations with Simon and is therefore the semi auto-biographical story of Wiggy's life.

The following extract consists entirely of Simon's words and covers the 1987 season he spent with Hackney.

CAPITAL LOSSES

I'd had no problems whatsoever at Oxford for three years and then one day, Kevin Hedderley, one of the financial management team of owners Northern Sports, confronted me with a proposed pay cut for the 1987 season. Having been a World Champion, and brought a lot of profile to Oxford and its stadium, which I felt they never exploited at all, I felt quite bitter about being asked to race for less money.

A move to Hackney was mooted after Oxford told me that they couldn't afford to pay me what they had in 1986, so what I did that winter was go out and find a good sponsor. In Australia I met John Old, who was coming to Britain to start the Trueseal business here and had been looking for a way of marketing his product in the UK. When I told him that I was struggling to do a deal at Oxford, he asked me what I could do for him if he put money up on the sponsorship front. I told him that there was a new team entering the British League and that Oxford might be looking at letting me out on loan. The track was in London and they wanted me as their number one.

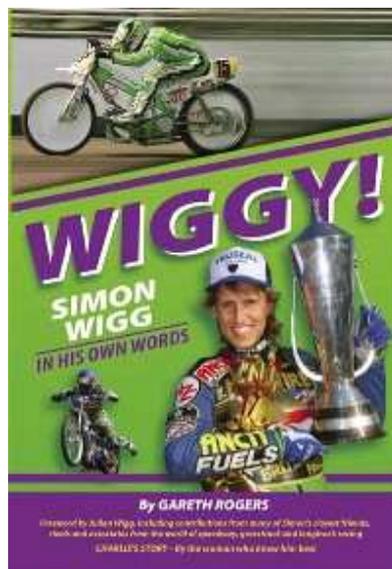
John stated that if I moved to Hackney he would make up the difference between what they could afford to pay me and my 1986 deal I had at Oxford. It was a good solution for all concerned and I was happy knowing I was going to earn my normal rate, even though it meant a little extra work for me in promoting the Trueseal name and products.

The whole business frustrated me, though, as I didn't think that Oxford were doing enough to put bums on seats. They were relying on the team's success as their only way of attracting crowds but there was so much more that could've been done on the promotion and marketing side. I thought that if more effort went in to increase attendances in the first place, I wouldn't have been asked to take a pay cut.

In the three previous seasons I had agreed a deal with Bernard Crapper and John Payne and had always been able to talk to them. Then

Kevin Hedderley came along and he couldn't understand my way of thinking. I couldn't understand his, so there was a big breakdown in communication there really. I would have much rather continued at Oxford on the same deal in 1987 but it didn't happen.

It is very hard to drop your standards when you have set your budget and you are an organised professional. If your planning is all set to a certain standard and someone asks you to do the same job for less money, it becomes very hard. Whatever business you are in, it's difficult to suddenly find ways of cutting your costs. At the same time as trying to win races and score points for your team, you are also expected to look good and turn out professionally, to have clean and tidy mechanics, to drive reliable, quality vehicles - in fact all the trappings you would imagine that a speedway organiser would want you to have.



That was a very difficult situation for me to accept but, luckily, it was solved through John Old and the Trueseal Group, whom I'd met at the Mister Melbourne event, which they sponsored and I managed to win. Seeing me as

BOOK EXTRACT - WIGGY!

an interesting way to help put across their message in Europe, they made up the shortfall on what Hackney could afford and I signed for the east London club, who were returning to the top flight after having spent three previous successful seasons in the National League.

It could have been a good career move but the one issue that always made it very difficult for me to immerse myself into the Hackney scene was the fact that I was only there on loan from Oxford. I was still owned by Oxford and I really hated that. Although a situation like that probably doesn't bother a lot of riders, I like to feel part of the furniture, as if I truly belong somewhere. But if you think that you may only be spending just a year at a club, which is the basis of every loan agreement, it is difficult to become totally involved with that team. This also applied in 1990 when I went to Bradford. In both situations, I wanted to be bought from Oxford.

The other problem to me was that the Hackney track changed. It had been a fabulous track but they decided to bring the fence in - as I recall, for safety reasons to keep the Control Board happy. The trouble was that bringing the fence in drastically reduced the racing line and restricted a rider's ability to get alongside other riders entering the corners. This made it particularly frustrating if you were at the back, so it was very hard to ride the track fast unless you were in front. It was very difficult to get past anybody on the reshaped track.



Wiggy in Hackney Kestrels colours

The Hackney track was also very slick, much slicker than I had imagined it would be on a

regular basis. When they did try and put any dirt down, it always became very patchy. I found that very hard to understand having been at Oxford, where Barry and John had spoilt the home riders rotten. Oxford was the best track in the country at the time, prepared by the two very best track guys, using the most expensive material that they could get their hands on. That's how it should be. When I ride in a motorcycle meeting, I'm expected to turn out with the best bikes and the best equipment possible, so by the same token, I expect track preparation to be done the same way. The paying public are the ones who pay the biggest price if the product is not right. They always vote with their feet. If you are trying to get bums on seats, one would automatically think that the most important issue, first and foremost, would be good track preparation.

But after what I'd been used to at Oxford, I found it difficult adapting to the Hackney circuit. Also, the alterations they'd made that winter, by reducing the width and bringing the fence in two metres all the way around, only added to my dissatisfaction. I'm not trying to make excuses for any performances but it was very difficult to become excited about going there towards the end of the season.

It was also a pity that their season back in the British League was to prove a one-off, with the promotion unable to sustain the financial realities of life in the top flight. The potential of racing in London was enormous and I know that everyone involved in the management - John Louis, Dave Pavitt and Mike Western - all tried very hard to make it work. I must also accept that there may have been a number of circumstances, of which I am unaware, that made it difficult for them to do what they set out to in the British League. The Kestrels team was certainly full of exciting potential. Mark Loram was a young reserve at the age of 16 and nothing made me happier than leading such a youthful Hackney team to Oxford towards the end of the season - and winning!

There was a view put forward from some quarters that Hackney returned to the National League in 1988 because I was an expense they simply couldn't afford. I know what I rode for and I know, too, that my main sponsor, Trueseal, paid a lot of it. It's a load of old rubbish for anyone to say that I was too expensive for Hackney, for Trueseal were subsidising my deal quite considerably. In fact, I probably rode for 20 per cent less at Waterden Road that season than I've ever done elsewhere.

It was true that Hackney's crowds weren't particularly healthy, although I didn't see how attendances there could be sufficient when the

racing wasn't as good as it needed to be to maintain the public's interest.

It's difficult to point the finger. It just didn't quite work well enough for John, Dave and Mike to want to go again in the British League in 1988. Instead, they dropped a division and won the National League that season - and no wonder. Riders like Loram and Andy Galvin, who had ridden very well when I had been there in the senior league, were absolutely flying at NL level.

ORDERING DETAILS

Wiggy! By Gareth Rogers
Edited by Tony McDonald

Published November 2005

£15.99 in softback

272 pages, including 16 in glossy full colour

Order your copy by calling the Retro-Speedway order hotline number -
01708 734 502

www.retro-speedway.com



HULL – CRAVEN PARK

Martin Mauger captures the removal of the speedway track.



LESZNO (POLAND)

Pictures by Paul ten Hoeve





ELECTRIC DREAMS

Dave Green wonders whether a move away from the combustion engine could prove the saviour of speedway.

After a few seasons of relative stability the sport of Speedway seems to be edging towards something of a crisis point this winter. The most recent blow is the revelation that Glasgow Tigers may be forced out of Ashfield on environmental grounds. It seems that residents of some newly constructed homes are unhappy with the sound levels emitting from Saracen Park each summer Sunday.

Noise has always been the number one bug-bear when planning applications for speedway tracks are made. Numerous stadia have been discounted immediately as it was clear that permission would never be granted, many other applications have been rejected out of hand by local councillors who were all too aware of the complaints local residents would make as soon as the first engine fires up. So can anything be done to reduce noise levels?

Some things have undoubtedly already been done, adding ever more effective silencers to bikes has been one initiative that has resulted in a reduction of volumes. Some tracks have also attempted to contain the sound by adding banking or acoustic boards to the periphery of their stadium. But is it time to look for a more effective long term solution?

I wonder if technological advances could entirely eliminate the noise nuisance that so many presently object to? This radical solution would require a complete move away from the methanol based engines we presently see on our tracks, these engines becoming worthless in the process. Our heroes of the dirt tracks would instead throw their leg over bikes running on electric motors.

Such a scenario will seem rather futuristic, and to an extent it is, but advances in electrically driven motors have been made in recent years and these will undoubtedly continue as the world looks for cleaner, more efficient ways to power vehicles. The Electric Motor Corp already offers an electric Moto-X bike that retails at around \$7,500. The bike's top speed is only 40mph, not enough for speedway at present but not too far away from the top-end speeds we would require. The acceleration rate of 0-30 in 4 seconds isn't sufficient for our needs either, so clearly further development will be required

before we could seriously expect to see Crumpy tearing round the track on a completely silent machine.

Speedway would undoubtedly suit electric motors more than most other motor sports. We need to power a light-weight machine, for short periods of time and at relatively low speeds. It would certainly be much more difficult to imagine the Superbikes series ever switching technologies.

I should also make it clear that I'm not a tree-hugger or an environmentalist with a personal agenda here. For many years I've owned, and continue to own, gas-guzzling performance cars that I drive at high-speed with little regard for the effect on the environment - I know that's wrong but I don't believe I'm any worse than the majority of the population. My only reason for advocating all-electric speedway is that I genuinely believe it could be a way forward for the sport.

So, what benefits would we see from swapping methanol for batteries? Well, firstly the noise elimination, as long as we keep the P.A. system low and don't cheer too loudly then no local council could ever block planning applications on the grounds of noise. Suddenly numerous new venues would become realistic prospects for aspiring promoters - we'd certainly be seeing the Birmingham Brummies back in action!

Secondly, we'd no longer be producing the fumes that limit the kinds of indoor venues we can currently use. New tracks could be built inside something akin to the light industrial units we see throughout the country, no sophisticated extractor fans would be required.

We're still years away from being able to consider a switch to electric motors, but if that point ever arrives, should we make the change? I'd certainly miss the roar of the engines that contributes a huge part to the speedway atmosphere, would it be the same without it? Probably not, would it be a worthwhile sacrifice if it meant we were seeing competitive racing in city centre venues? I'll leave that for others to decide.

TRELAWNY – CLAY COUNTRY MOTO PARC

Neil Lowe took these pictures of the Moto Parc shortly before it closed. The venue was home to St. Austell Gulls and Trelawny Tigers.



CALLING ALL ANGELZ

Speedway may be a male dominated world, but there's plenty of room for the fairer sex as well.

Sheffield Angelz are the world's only all-female speedway club. The girls are making their way at the Sheffield training track but have ambitions to progress onto much bigger stages.

The Angelz are Jemma Smith (16 years old); Leanne Fletcher (16); Samantha Fletcher (13); Cheryl Gregory (23); Charlotte Hoskins (8) and Bethany Stewart (14).

Samantha, Jemma and Leanne have all featured in second half races, racing against each other, after Sheffield Tigers meetings. They also appeared, alongside Cheryl, in demonstration races at Scunthorpe's opening meeting. During the 2006 season the hope is that the girls will race against the boys in the Owlerton second half programme, giving them the experience they need to progress.

Observers feel that Samantha, Jemma and Leanne have the potential to push for Conference League places in the medium term, they have developed tidy styles but need to build up to competitive racing speeds. The other girls are at an earlier stage of their careers but all demonstrate some potential. Certainly Charlotte in particular has plenty of time on her side!

Despite the unique nature of the club, the Angelz are not the first women to take up the sport. Pioneer racer Fay Taylour rode successfully at home and abroad in the sport's early days and remains the best known lady rider. For many years females were actually forbidden from riding at all, a ruling that was only lifted as recently as 1988. Shortly afterwards Lisa Whibberley and Maxine Hill appeared in junior racing but neither progressed to professional status. In more recent years both Charly Kirtland and Jessica Lamb have made odd appearances at Conference and Premier League levels. Sabrina Bogh and Jackie Mauger, niece of Ivan, have also competed successfully in World Championship rounds overseas.

So how have the lads taken to the Angelz muscling in on this usually male preserve? We asked one of their leading lights, Samatha Fletcher:

"A lot of the Sheffield riders are backing us, James Birkinshaw was our teacher and he

taught us like we were lads, which helped us a lot. The lads at the training track have reacted very well giving us advice and we are great friends with most of them. A lot of lads on forums online have said we won't succeed, that we won't last long and we won't be able to win anything. Some lads like the competition from girls, so all around it's a pretty good reaction from them."



The Sheffield Angelz

Samantha acknowledges that it's more difficult for a girl to make it than a boy -

"Strength is obviously quite an issue but once you build up that strength and fitness then it's fine. Some clubs might not want a girl on their team and there is obviously a lot of negative publicity. It is more difficult, but it can be done. Off track the girls may be very different but once that helmet goes on and the riders are at the tapes or on the track each rider is just the same as another! We all try to ignore all those comments and if every girl who has a go can do that then we can probably succeed in the sport."

So how ambitious are Samantha and the girls?

"We want to make a mark on the sport with this team and we all set out to get a lot further and hopefully get into the professional league. I think women can compete in the professional league it's just a case of them sticking at it and not giving up after a bit of negative publicity."

Find out more at:

<http://www.freewebs.com/sheffieldangelz>



RUNNING FOR COVER

Chris Seaward turns his attention to the dreaded weather, are there simple measures that could be taken to ensure fewer meetings fall foul of the elements?

Promoters continually conjure elaborate excuses that attempt to explain why track covers aren't a financially viable option. Intrigued and frustrated by this recurrent reluctance to invest in such a simple, yet highly effective piece of apparatus, I conducted some of my own research. Refreshingly, but not surprisingly, my enquiries reveal that a set of tarpaulin covers wouldn't actually cost a frightening lump of money.

Idly watching the news over the festive period I noticed that Newbury Racecourse had used covers to shelter the turf from frost. So if a 2 mile long horse track and hundreds of cricket venues around the Country are able to realise the value of covers it makes no sense that speedway continually shrugs off their worth.

Arriving at a speedway track in full expectation of a night's entertainment with glorious sunshine drenching the evening is a fantastic feeling. However, being told the meeting has been abandoned because of a rogue shower an hour earlier is incredibly frustrating and induces a bitter taste on the premature journey home.

This farcical scenario could potentially obliterate the enthusiasm of a speedway virgin before they have even cast their beady eyes on the track. An uninformed newcomer is unsympathetic to the safety of the riders and apathetic about a freak cloud burst, instead they want to be suitably entertained with a beverage in hand.

In a nation grotesquely swamped by varying forms of immaculately presented entertainment, speedway must offer continuity by seeking to radically reduce rain offs.

Only hardcore supporters will endure recurrent disruption, we are aware of speedway's entertainment value, the floating band of support desires regularity and will forever remember a controversial cancellation.

Track covers would shelter the sensitive racing surface from heavy daytime downpours and, providing the rain had stopped by the scheduled start time, leave the shale in perfect racing condition. A majority of supporters understand that a meeting cannot be run while rain is falling

and this is generally deemed perfectly acceptable. It is however more difficult to fathom a cancellation when the dirty grey clouds have dried up and the puddles are disappearing.

Speedway cannot continue to take the damaging effects of the weather hard on the chin, the sport must find constructive methods that allow meetings to be staged in adverse weather conditions. Promoters must grab the bull by the horns and demonstrate that difficult circumstances can be overcome; our wonderful sport needs to stop blaming it on the proverbial weather man.

It is surprising that John Postlethwaite hasn't introduced track covers to the Grand Prix series. The World Championship rounds are held in the predominately dry summer months, however rain can still cause havoc as proven at Malilla last season and Prague '04.

The covers could be pulled over the track after Friday's practice session to protect the surface overnight and then packed away when necessary on Saturday. Sponsor's logos could be printed on the canvas to enhance exposure and it would undoubtedly add another degree of professionalism to the Benfield product.

The company that inspired this article specialises in providing a range of covers for sensitive sporting surfaces. They estimated supplying enough material to cover a track the size of Swindon - one of the largest in the Elite League would cost around £8,000. When Jon Perrin left Belle Vue he publicly stated that each rain off cost him around £3,000. (programmes, travel costs, stadium rental e.t.c) let's assume this figure applies to most Elite League clubs. Surely then it makes perfect sense to purchase covers right away, if they salvage three meetings a year then the investment has been made worthwhile.

If speedway is to be dragged into the C21st then track covers are a definite necessity, their inclusion amongst the British speedway scene, especially the Elite League must be made an immediate priority.

THE HAMMERS OF '65

Robert J. Rogers looks back on the dramatic end to the inaugural British League championship.

40 years ago, West Ham became the first British League Champions. The Hammers history had started in 1928 when the new Australian sport of Dirt track racing came to the newly built Custom House stadium.

West Ham become established as one of the country's top teams, and in the 1930`s had enough good riders to have a team in both the 1st and 2nd Division. In fact during the 30`s both teams had won their respective leagues.

The sport returned after the war and carried on into the mid 50`s. But the sport began a downturn, and West Ham, like many clubs, closed their doors to Speedway.

In 1964 the sport returned, managed by England's first ever World Champion, the Wembley Ace, Tommy Price.

In 1965 the sport for the first time had all teams in one League, and clubs from both Scotland & Wales, National & Provincial joined the English Clubs to ride as BRITISH League Teams.

West Ham had a bad start when one of their young riders, Dave Wills, was killed in a track crash.

By mid season the Hammers were in the top group and by the end of the season it was only between them and close London rivals Wimbledon.

It all hung on the last Saturday of the season, Saturday 23rd October 1965 and the Hammers were away to the Cradley Heath Heathens, one of the midlands' top clubs, meanwhile the Dons were also in the midlands, riding against another top club, the Coventry Bees.

I was a 12 year old Speedway mad kid, and like Max Boyce used to say, `I was there!'

The day started badly, when most of the 30 plus coaches carrying the fans got lost in the fog in Birmingham. We ended up with a Police Escort leading a parade of coaches into the Stadium.

The match started slightly late to allow all the fans time to get in, because as well as the home & away fans, there was also coaches from both

Wembley (Lions) and Harringay (Racers) supporters, who no longer had a team to follow.

The first race! The tapes went up, and West Ham Captain, Robert `Ken` McKinley was disqualified for an incident at the start. He promptly protested by laying his bike across the track to stop the race. We then knew we were in for a night of high drama, as Wimbledon were also racing that night, and both teams needed to win to become champions.

If both teams won then the championship would be decided on points difference for that night's racing.

The racing was both exciting and nervous as first Cradley, then West Ham, took the lead.

With three heats to go, the news came over the stadium public address system, `the Dons` had won at Coventry, this meant we needed to win to become the Champions.

The Hammers did us proud that night by winning the match by 47 points to 31.

Scorers on the night were as follows:

Cradley Heath 31 : Eric Hockady 5; Goog Allen 6; John Hart 5; Chris Julian 4; George Major 0; Leo McAuliffe 5; Ivor Hughes 6

West Ham 47 : Ken McKinlay 9; Reg Trott 2; Sverre Harrfeldt 12; Brian Leonard 5; Norman Hunter 8; Malcolm Simmons 9; Tony Clarke 2



West Ham Hammers 1965

WEST HAM – THE HAMMERS OF '65

Ironically this grandstand finish happened purely by chance. The original meeting between the Hammers and the Heathens was scheduled for August but the meeting was switched to a challenge fixture due to a rain affected circuit. It would have made little difference to the eventual outcome in any case, the Hammers won the challenge by 31-47.

The Hammers also won the KO Cup by defeating Exeter in the two-legged final. The meetings were run over a 16 heat format, 13 heats being the norm for league matches in those days, and West Ham won the home leg by 63-33 and lost by only 6 points in the return match. The Exeter side contained Colin Goody, Des Lukehurst, Jack Geran, Chris Blewett, Alan Cowland and Jimmy Squibb.

The Hammers completed a historic 'treble' by defeating Wimbledon Dons to clinch the London cup. The Dons tracked former Hammers favourites Bobby Dugard and Reg Luckhurst alongside Olle Nygren who would go on to skipper the Hammers. Dugard had actually started the season with West Ham but was forced to move to Wimbledon by the rider control authorities, a decision that still baffles some of us today!

Hammers riders also enjoyed success on an individual basis. Ken McKinlay won the prestigious Brandonapolis meeting at Coventry, Sverre Harrfeldt was London Riders Champion and we even have a cheeky claim to the world championship that year! Bjorn Knutsson of Sweden won it, but as his last English Club was the 1964 Hammers, where he was captain, and he never rode for any British team after that, he was technically, still a Hammer!

Although the regular seven received most of the plaudits there were other riders that also made a contribution to the success. Ted Ede was our regular number eight, I spoke to him recently and he is now 60 years old and still riding as one of the "Men in Black". Also Geoff Hughes, Ray Wickett, Terry Stone and Neville Slee. Neville was a good friend of the late Dave Wills.

There was no civic reception for the all conquering Hammers, a sad oversight when you consider their considerable achievements that year.

Speedway continued during the 1960`s, with the Hammers remaining one of the top clubs.

The start of the 70`s saw the beginning of the end for the Hammers. In a horrific road crash in July 1970, four members of the team, plus the manager were killed. The team struggled through 1971, but had to give up owing to lack

of support, both through the gates and from external sources.

In 1972, the now homeless Romford Bombers arrived as the 2nd Division, West Ham Bombers, but it was short lived. By May 1972 it was all over, the Stadium was closed, and in October it was knocked down and turned into a Housing Estate.

The streets in the area were given names of some of the older West Ham riders, but none of the greatest ever team, the 1965 Hammers, were remembered.



Custom House Stadium – Home of the Hammers

I note with some sadness that this season is the last for both Exeter and Wimbledon. We had many a fantastic matches with both teams, and with the Dons going, (GRA you need your heads examining!) means that from next year, there will be NO speedway teams in the capital of Speedway's greatest nation, London.

Let us hope that both teams can find a local home track before too long. As well as the racing, we had some fun time and some sadness with the Dons. I can remember Reg Luckhurst doing a 'rain dance' on the centre green at Wimbledon, cannot now quite remember why, or for that matter if he was riding for us or the Dons, as we did seem to pinch each others riders at times.

There was also sadness such as the loss of Gary Everett who we had 'borrowed' to give him some experience of Continental racing, amongst those killed at Lokeren in 1970.

SLIDING INTO HELL

The multi-talented former Ipswich promoter **John Berry** has now turned his hand to novel writing. His first published fiction work is 'Sliding into Hell' and we're delighted to bring you an extract from it.

This fast-moving story takes us into the world of high finance, bitter vengeance, greed, deception, betrayal and romantic twists, set against a speedway background.

Shelford won again the following week, this time against the Byford Racers, in front of another bumper crowd, leaving them unbeaten at home in the league so far. Jeff Harding continued his unbeaten run but the team-riding skills of Bryce Penrith continued to steal the show.

Belle Vue was the next away trip. Molly's parents lived in Cheshire, so Bryce took his family up in the Mercedes. They would spend a few days with Molly's parents.

Vincent and Lurch went up to Manchester together in the motor home. Just before the meeting, Vincent and Bryce pulled the team together. 'This is not an easy track to come and win at,' said Vincent, 'but it is a wonderful track to ride. If we win, great, but the main thing is for everyone to enjoy their racing tonight. For those of you unfamiliar with the place, believe me, you will think you are going as fast as it is possible to go, and the home boys will still cruise past if you are not paying attention.'

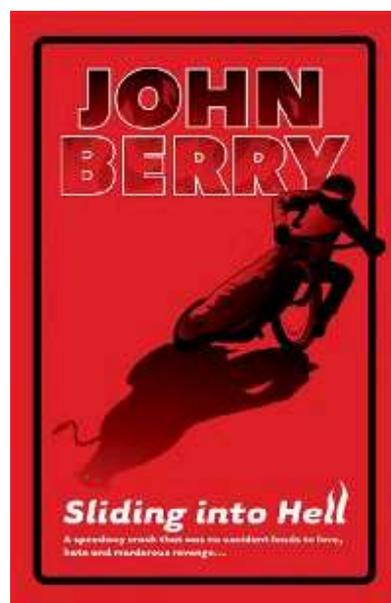
Belle Vue was not Jeff Harding's favourite track. You had to stick your neck out to take on and beat the best of the locals, and that was not something he relished. Nevertheless, he got away well from the start in heat one and hung on to win the race.

The reserves predictably lost out in heat two but Bryce just loved the place and easily headed the local star, Peter Cullen, to win heat three. Reece Sullivan was in heat four. He was trying desperately hard to take the lead when he clipped a back wheel, went over the bars, somersaulted in the air and landed part on his head, part on his back. Vincent sent Lurch out on the track to help. 'Damn these fucking useless legs,' he heard himself saying, before pulling himself back together.

Sullivan was taken to the hospital, unconscious. The rest of the team battled hard but succumbed by four points. It had been a mammoth match in front of yet another huge crowd.

Bryce had glided through the meeting unbeaten without getting a speck of shale on his leathers. Jeff Harding had battled uncharacteristically hard, as had the other riders. Vincent was mighty proud of them. As soon as the match was over, he and Lurch were off to the Manchester Royal Infirmary. The staff at the hospital were unhelpful, but Vincent was having none of that. He and Lurch quickly located Sullivan, who was in a cubicle in casualty and still unconscious.

'Where is the Senior Registrar?' Vincent demanded, and despite efforts of the staff to fob him off, he was soon facing the man. 'Get this man to ICU,' he ordered. 'Now!'. The doctor was not used to being spoken to like this and his hackles started rising. He got as far as 'Now look here...' before Vincent held up his hand. 'A word,' he said pointing. 'In there.'



As soon as they were out of earshot of the others, Vincent said very quietly, but with clear menace:

BOOK EXTRACT – SLIDING INTO HELL

'If you don't get him up there now, I promise you I shall break you as a doctor. And if the boy does not fully recover, I shall break you as a person. Don't mess with me, you are dealing with the wrong man here.' The doctor was clearly spooked. He was not prepared for such mental intimidation and took the easy way out. He arranged for Reece to be admitted into ICU immediately.

Once the lad had been settled in and wired up, Vincent sent Lurch back down to the motor home to get some sleep. He would bleep if he needed anything. Vincent then settled in by the bedside for a night-long vigil. The night duty nurse started chatting to Vincent as she checked all of Reece's vital signs.

'Younger brother?' she asked. 'I don't know him that well. I am just responsible for his welfare.' 'Oh, I see,' she said. She didn't see at all really but, clearly, the man in the wheelchair cared deeply. 'Can I do anything for you?' she offered. 'You can tell me where I can drain this bag off,' he said lightly, glancing down. She pointed out the disabled toilet and asked if he needed any help. He told her he thought not, but smiled and said: 'If I do, I'll press the panic button!' When he got back to the bedside, there was a cup of tea and some sandwiches waiting for him.

Reece Sullivan regained consciousness just after four in the morning. Even before the medical staff had come to check on him, Vincent had got the lad to wriggle his appendages. All seemed to be functioning normally. He was soon out cold again but this time he was just sleeping rather than comatose. Vincent allowed himself some catnaps from then on but stayed on. The consultant in charge of the unit finally came along to check all was in order in the morning. Reece had a king-sized headache, and there was always a danger of the swollen and bruised brain creating pressure in the skull, but the signs were promising. By nine o'clock, Reece's parents had arrived. Lurch had been hovering outside for some time. He took the parents up to the room and then he and Vincent left.

As the motor home swung out of the car park, Vincent took out his dictating machine.

'Memo: make an appointment with the local BUPA rep for tomorrow.' He couldn't believe he had been so remiss. He had organised extra injury insurance for his riders as soon as he had taken over but he hadn't thought about private health cover.

Given that most speedway injuries happened in the evening, he did not want his boys left to the whims of junior hospital registrars. He wanted consultants involved straight away. He put it a bit more basically to Lurch. 'Why the hell leave my lads in the hands of monkeys because the organ grinder can't be bothered to get out of bed?'

ORDERING DETAILS

Sliding Into Hell by John Berry

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