

From Behind the Iron Curtain

By Robert J. Rogers



The Russians at Wembley in 1964

There had been rumours that the mysterious riders from behind the Iron Curtain, with their strange JAWA Racing Bikes were going to visit England.

The rumour was confirmed; the USSR would be racing a three test series against Great Britain.

The first test was to be at Wembley.

West Ham's supporters club had been issued some tickets and were going to run a coach to the event.

The day finally came and a very excited, speedway mad 10 year old, was off to see his first international match at Wembley, the old home of the legendary Wembley Lions.

The first thing we had to look for was the famous Wembley Towers. (What FOOL decided to knock them down when the new Wembley was built?)

We were soon at the Stadium, what an atmosphere, I though West Ham was great, but this was even better, something special, the crowds were massive with fans from all over the country sporting their team colours, as well as the Red, White & Blue of Great Britain.

Amongst the British squad was our own Ray Cresp.

The two teams lined up, Great Britain with Union Flag race jackets, and the Russian (USSR) team with Red colours with yellow crossed Hammer and Sickles. But even more interesting was the strange looking JAWA (ESO) racing machines.

The strangest of all was the look of the Russian, after all we had heard about them, they looked like us, one even looked like a member of the Beatles, and the girls soon fell in love with him.

His name was Gabbrackhman Kadirov (soon christened Gabby by the fans), plus two legends of Russian Speedway, Igor Plechanov and Boris Samorodov (in fact a lot of the Russian team seemed to end with OV!)

The match was a victory to Great Britain, by 73-35, sadly marred by a heat 11 crash when Russia's Vilyaty Shilo was seriously injured.

The Russian team had begun to put their bikes away, and head for the baths, but what was happening? Instead of the crowds leaving, they stood there and began to clap and chant "We Want the Russians!"

Now the Russian management were confused by this, and it had to be quickly explained to them that the Sporting British Public wanted to show their appreciation of these Sons of the Soviet Republic.

The Riders were soon stopped from leaving the pits, and to loud Cheering, the Russian captain, Igor Plechanov, mounted on his bike and proudly flying the Russian flag, entered the Wembley Track followed by the rest of the team, mounted two to a Bike.

I do not think that the British Fans ever got the recognised for the work they did that night to help to remove the Iron Curtain.

My lasting memories of Russian teams in the 1960`s, Coffee Tins!

It would seem that our sort of Coffee was hard to come by, so the biggest prize for the riders to take home was large commercial size tins of Coffee (Like cafes have). Their lorries used to be packed out with them!

Even today I cannot see a large tin of nescafe without thinking of those riders.

The things we remember from our childhood!

I think the reason I was so keen on the Russians was the fact we both had Hammers on our race jackets.

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