

Can Speedway Afford to Continue?

This article has been submitted by a contributor who wishes to remain anonymous.



With the news of Oxford's closure still ringing in my ears it started me thinking. Can speedway afford to continue? Some clubs have rich owners, but should they have to stand on their own feet so to speak?

Colin Horton has given his reasons for his decision to close Oxford and they are perfectly valid. He can no longer afford to fund the speedway from his own pocket. By doing so he would be putting his family's future security at risk and that is something he is not willing to do. "Several thousand pounds each week" he is quoted as saying, could any business afford to lose that amount of money every week? "Low attendances and a general lack of interest in the area" are cited as being the causes for such large losses.

My sympathy goes to Colin Horton as it cannot have been an easy decision to make. Not only does he have the fans up in arms about it but he has had to effectively sack all of the stadium staff. But even worse he had to inform the Oxford riders that they are out of jobs. The riders have done nothing wrong but are being sacked. Who is to blame for this?

Colin Horton?

Aaron Lanney?

Mick Horton?

Or is it the fans of Oxford speedway?

It is basic maths that if you pay out more than you get in then you are going to have problems. Colin Horton says that the average home attendance is 400-500 and double that is needed to just break even. How has this happened to a club steeped in so much wonderful history?

It also begs the question - Is there really a future for speedway in England? I am often told of the 'good old days' when stadiums had attendances of ten thousand and even more but what has happened recently?

How long can the sport survive with the dwindling number of supporters coming through the turnstiles?

The main issues I can see are:

Price - For a family of 4 (2 adults and 2 children) to go to a home speedway meeting at most tracks costs in the region of £40. That is before the children want a drink and something to eat. The total bill could well be in excess of £50. That is an awful lot of money to find when you take into account that most teams have around 25 home meetings in a season (including a couple of cup fixtures).

Race Night - Once my son starts school I will be less willing for him to attend mid week or Monday night meetings as he will have to be up for school early the next morning.

Promotion - Too many people still do not even know what speedway is.

Sky Sports have done a wonderful job of spreading the message that Speedway is here and just how exciting it is but what else can clubs do to try and increase the attendances? For me there is only one answer - Get more children involved as they are the future paying adults. Various initiatives have been tried and have fallen by the wayside, deemed a failure because the stadiums were not packed on the first night of the trial. Other ideas include:

A family ticket - (Assuming that an adult ticket costs £15) A family ticket costing £30 can be purchased admitting 2 adults and 2 children. The children are effectively free of charge but would almost certainly want a drink and something to eat whilst at the meeting, thus the stadium would not lose that much money overall.

Kids for a 'quid' has been tried by a few and forgotten by most.

Free entrance for under 11's has been tried and was successful, but once the promotion stopped the number of children decreased.

A more radical idea would be to only have 2 nights of the week where British Racing is staged, and for those nights to be Friday and Saturday. This way parents do not have to consider what time their children must be up for school the next day as it will be irrelevant. Yes this would have serious implications on the Grand Prix series but something must be done to ensure that the wonderful, exciting sport of Speedway is financially viable in the future.

Adults are the here and now, but children are the future of the sport.

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