

Paper View

By Philip Dalling

The news that Jon Cook of Arena Essex-Lakeside was to be the first of several speedway personalities to be featured on TalkSport during the summer months made me think about the current (and past) media coverage of speedway.

The attitude of the 'quality' press to the sport varies considerably. As far as the national papers are concerned, the Daily Telegraph usually carries a paragraph or so about the Grand Prix, while The Guardian (more about that one later) and The Independent will usually mention the Cardiff event.

On the downside, The Times even seems to have stopped using results on a regular basis. Regional newspaper coverage appears to me to be still good - fairly recent visits to Coventry and Wolverhampton have both coincided with 'wrap around' special editions of the Evening Telegraph and the Express and Star for matches at Brandon and Monmore respectively, whilst the Plymouth-based Western Morning News has first-class coverage of both the revived Devils and of West Country hero, Cornwall's Chris Harris.

My new book (sorry for the plug) on Nottingham and Long Eaton Speedway 1928-1967 (Tempus) has received excellent coverage from the Nottingham Evening Post and the Derby Evening Telegraph.

Returning to the national press, it is interesting to note that in the 'golden age' of the late 1940s, several men who later became top by-lined Fleet Street sports columnists cut their journalistic teeth at least partly on speedway. Names like Desmond Hackett of the Daily Express (writing at a time when the Express sold four million copies a day), and J L Manning of The Daily Mail feature in the pages of the Stenner annuals of the period.

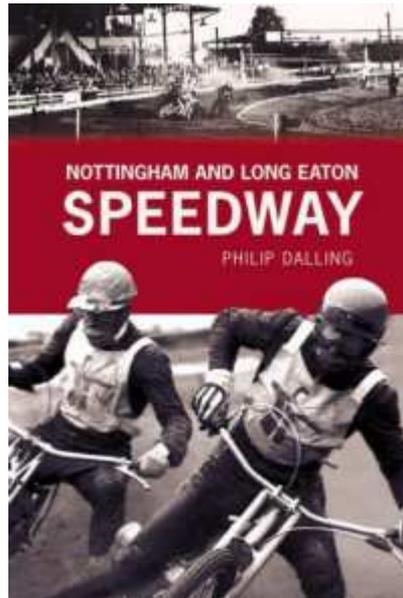
Whether they had a genuine enthusiasm for speedway or were simply using the opportunity to make a few quid is something we will probably never discover. One top 1950s/1960s sports journalist who made no bones about his dislike for speedway was John Macadam. In his biography, *The Macadam Road*, he describes the sport as 'hysterical'.

The Hackett connection is particularly interesting in view of the current Daily Express interest in speedway.

Finally, I was trawling the web recently and found a piece on the sport by the veteran Guardian sportswriter Frank Keating. Usually to be found on the cricket and rugby beat, Keating is an incisive writer with occasionally a very sharp edge to his material.

Assigned to write about the Elite League play-offs last year, Keating summed up speedway as the sports of the 500s - riders mounted on 500cc machines watched by 500 people.

Ouch!



Philip's recent book on the history of Nottingham and Long Eaton speedway is available to purchase from our online shop.

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