

SPEEDWAY SUPERHEROES

John Chaplin and John Somerville

This book is by way of a summit meeting between JOHN CHAPLIN, a career Fleet Street journalist and the world's best speedway writer; and JOHN SOMERVILLE, an enthusiast *par excellence*, who has amassed the world's biggest and best speedway image bank.

The dynamic duo, who have long wanted to work together; have now teamed up to bring you the greatest stories about the greatest personalities from the world's most exciting sport, illustrated with the greatest photographs. In 37 chapters they cover subjects as diverse as John Mills and Dirk Bogarde as speedway stars on celluloid; Peter Craven's Pyjamas; Hail to the Leg-trailers; the Duggan Phenomenon; Alice Hart's Flying Circus; the Low-down on Rocket Bikes, and much, much more.

All the drama, the romance, the triumphs and the tragedies of speedway's 84-year rollercoaster existence are here ... in Chaplin's inimitable words and Somerville's fabulous pictures.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John Chaplin is generally acknowledged throughout the speedway world to be the leading authority on the history of the sport. An author and broadcaster; his pedigree goes back almost 60 years, and this book is based on his writings during that time, including his acclaimed regular contributions to *Speedway Star* magazine and his own hugely successful *Vintage Speedway* magazine.

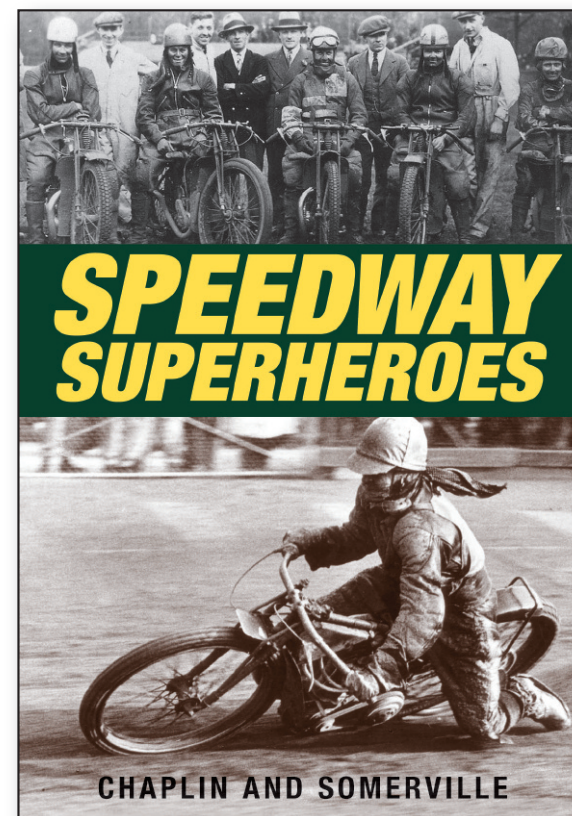
John Somerville has spent a fortune acquiring from the world's top speedway photographers their best and most vivid pictures. They appear in publications throughout the world. He is dedicated to preserving the sport's most iconic images.

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Halsgrove Publishing
Halsgrove House,
Ryelands Business Park,
Bagley Road, Wellington,
Somerset TA21 9PZ
Tel: 01823 653777
Fax: 01823 216796
www.halsgrove.com
e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

HALSGROVE TITLE INFORMATION



Format: Hardback, 160 pages, 297x210mm, profusely illustrated in black & white
Price: £19.99
ISBN: 978 0 85704 175 3
Imprint: Halsgrove
Published: October 2012



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Make do and mend: workshop facilities were primitive and basic. Here Phil 'Tiger' Hart works on his bike, with Norman Parker and helpers just behind.

Left: Two smoking speedway superstars: Lloyd 'Sprouts' Elder (left) and 'Broadside' Vic Huxley.



In the beginning ... an early push-starting line at Harringay before the invention of the taped starting gate.

Jack Biggs at his magnificent best: leading in a league match during the Wembley revival in the 1970s, with Hackney team mate Bengt Jansson taking avoiding action as Des Lukehurst goes down.



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supporting role to the star names he can be seen with preparing for a meeting at New Cross.

Seated far left is his only old skipper Norman Parker who is imparting his wisdom to Mike Enkine. Next to him is Ron Mason, then Dick who is being offered a set of goggles by the brilliant Alec Statham.

Dick rode in every match for the Dons in the first two post-war seasons. Selected for the England touring side to visit Australia in 1947-48, he rode in five of that winter's Tests. After five seasons with Wimbledon his form dropped to little more than reserve value, almost certainly because speedway was changing and the time of the leg-trailers was coming to an end.

Dick moved from First Division Wimbledon to Third Division Wolverhampton in 1953 then, after a time with non-league Wigan, he joined Southern League St Austell in 1952 before retiring.

Had he thought about it at the time, Dick Harris could have got in decades before Coventry's modern Grand Prix who's-kid Chris Harris and styled himself as the sport's original 'Bomber' Harris.

They don't make speedway riders like Dick Harris any more.

Chapter 2
A MOMENT OF INSPIRATION

WHEN speedway was at the commercial fork in the road, wondering which direction to take, which was the correct path that would lead to it being accepted by the sporting public as legitimate mass entertainment, it so happened that someone had a moment of inspiration.

The date: Saturday, 28 June, 1930, the first day of a Test match between England and Australia at Lord's Cricket Ground. While the headquarters of the game resounded in flannelled boots thudding leather on willow, outside a bunch of men were parading with sandwich boards proclaiming that two days later, at Wimbledon, England was to meet Australia again ... at speedway.

There had been attempts to hold matches of this type before but the idea had not gone beyond a few Homland v Overseas contests. There was so much jealous rivalry between speedway managements (sound familiar?) that the very idea of a proper Test match involving all the major stars, which would benefit another promoter's bank balance, would have been turned down flat. So the company controlling Wimbledon, which had a monopoly of most of the best Australians, decided to use the other tracks by attracting their top names to a 'championship meeting' on Monday, 30 June.

Tricky moment: Dick performing wheelie for handlers (here came off).

They don't look very tight, do they? Which is not surprising really, because they were literally thrown together. The lads looking good apparently being rather underwhelmed by the very grand occasion and the England team. From the left: Jack Parker (Coventry), Wal Phillips (Stamford Bridge), Frank Verry (Belle Vue), Jack Ormston (Wolverley), Nigel Probyn (Crystal Palace) and captain Sammie Jim Kempton (Wimbledon). Unseen is reserve Gus Kuhn (Stamford Bridge).

Running winners, Australia, from the left: Billy Lamont (Wimbledon), Max Greenacre (Belle Vue), Ben Johnson (Crystal Palace), Frank Arthur (Stamford Bridge), Dick Cunn (Wimbledon), Vic Huxley (Harringay). Unseen reserve, Arne Hansson (Swalvington).

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