

Whatever Happened to Tracy Bray?

Twenty-one years ago young Tracy Bray travelled across the world to fulfil his dream of being a speedway rider. In this article he looks back on that great adventure and reflects on the bad luck that hindered his chances of hitting the big time.



Tracy the 'Boro Tiger

I got started in speedway in 1984 at age 21 after my motocross career of 11 years had drawn to an end and a good friend suggested I should "give speedway a go".

I went halves in a second hand Weslake with my employer and sponsor Aidan Higgins, (who was later to supply bikes and equipment to overseas riders such as Ian Barney, David Walsh, Dennis Lofvquist, Tomasz Gollob and Per Johnson), when they visited our shores.

I continued to race during the winter & summer speedway seasons on tracks such as North Arm (Adelaide), Midura, Renmark & Whyalla (where I won the South Australian Best Pairs with my old friend from the mini-bike days, Steve Baker).

In 1985 I visited Steve in the U.K. for 3 months and travelled with him to various tracks at the end of his Sheffield season. It was during this time that I became truly hooked on the idea of racing in the U.K.

During the Australian summer season of 1986, I played host to several riders from the touring "Nigel Boocock Troup", including Gary Havelock, Andrew Silver, Kelvin Tatum & Phil Collins.

Phil had broken his right tibia at North Arm and had a large pin inserted to put things back together, so I helped him thru the rehab process by getting him down to the beach and into the water.

This not only achieved the desired effect of speeding up the healing but gave me an insight into one of the funniest blokes I have ever met!

The next year I decided to take up Phil's offer of "Come over & stay anytime you like". So I packed up everything I needed and sold the rest of my possessions to be able to make the journey to his home in Warrington, Cheshire in February of 1987.

By chance I made the flight to the U.K. with fellow South Australian and Middlesbrough rider Ashley Norton.

When I arrived I spent the first few weeks with Phil at his home and because things were still a little icy, weather wise, I was able to meet up with a lot of his friends before I had a chance to try out for a team.

I remember we drove down to Cradley Heath in Phil's little old Morris Marina to meet up with his long time sponsor and friend Colin Scott, who I later relied upon for digs when Phil ventured to the U.S.

The first time I rode was in fact at Cradley's press & practice day. Unfortunately it was to be a nightmare start to my U.K. season.

I had inadvertently set my bike up the same as for a slick Aussie track and consequently found myself with a ton of traction on the still sodden Dudley Wood shale.

I was just starting to come to terms with this setup when the bike reared suddenly on the exit of turn 4. I hit the fence very heavily whilst still on the back wheel and ended up breaking the tibia and fibula of my right ankle.

It was later that evening when Colin Pratt visited me in the Halesowen hospital that I found out he had "penciled me in at no. 7" before my crash!

For the next 9 weeks I had to recover from the surgery to my now plated ankle. This was a particularly tough time for me as I had to watch while all the clubs put their teams together without me. However I was very fortunate in one way to have met up with the Scott family who took me into their home as one of their own.

I attended every single home match at Cradley and most of the matches at Wolverhampton & Coventry with them and we became very good friends.

During my forced lay off, and whilst living in Dudley in the West Midlands, I spent a lot of my days at Jan O Pedersen's workshop where I made good friends and learnt a lot about bike set up from one of the world's best riders.

When my ankle was strong enough I had a few successful practice runs around Cradley, but their team had been selected for a while.

I was asked by Tim Swales to try out for team spot at Middlesbrough since fellow Aussie Mark Fiora had been forced out through injury. I would have liked to stay

around the Midlands but I was aware by now that all the teams had been well and truly sorted.

The three and three quarter hour drive up the A1 each week was no problem because I really enjoyed the challenging nature of the Cleveland Park track. The staff were excellent and of course my friend Ashley Norton was there so I felt at home. I had competed in only 5 matches for the Tigers, had a couple of great races that resulted in 5-1's with heat leaders and was really starting to get the hang of things before disaster struck again!

It was at a home match against Newcastle later in the season. In my second heat I was off gate four and by the first turn I found myself in a bunched up situation, locking handlebars with the rider off gate 3.

The resulting crash saw me lying on the track with a busted collarbone!

Not long after this point I made the decision to cut my losses and return home to Australia. The season didn't have more than about eleven weeks left to run and with at least seven weeks needed for my collarbone to heal naturally, I decided that my finances were in no fit shape to be sitting around relying on the help of others as had already been the case.

I have some really fond memories of my brief time as a Tiger and owe a debt of gratitude to the fans who made me feel very welcome. My only regret is that I wasn't able to afford to stick around for the rest of the season and repay their kindness with some decent scores.

I feel I could have made a real impression had things been different.

I also faced another setback when my friend and sponsor Colin Scott offered, but failed to send my (GM) engine back to Australia in time for me to compete in the 1988 Australian season. I felt that if I was to sit out my home season I would not have sufficient form to compete in any league racing.

I was able to compete in one meeting on borrowed machinery but have never felt comfortable using someone else's bikes.

The strange thing is that I drifted away from speedway at this point. I don't know why, maybe I was a bit jaded by my experiences... However I know that today I have regrets that I didn't continue on and try and return in '88.

By 1990 my financial position had improved and I started competing in the Production road racing championships on an RGV250 Suzuki against the likes of Troy Corser.

I ended up being ranked in the top 3 in the state and my highest finish in the Australian championships was a third in one round after only two and a half years. The only problem with road racing is the cost and before long I knew I could no longer support my habit.

In 1992 whilst I was mechanic for Per Johnson at a match in Perth Western Australia, I met up with an old friend and racing rival Craig Hodgson. He told he was planning a return to the British league for Bradford the next year and knew that if it was to be successful he would need a full time mechanic. In the past he had taken his wife and family with him and relied on the help of mates in the U.K. who also had jobs. I agreed to travel with him after his Australian sponsor Trevor Harding agreed to pay me a wage to be there for Craig's U.K. season.

I've never seen one single penny to this day! That was hard! It was a real kick in the teeth and it made Craig's efforts so much more difficult!

It was bad enough that he didn't have his family with him for the season, now he had an added financial burden and the real prospect of me heading home early.

We stuck it out for almost all of the season with the financial help of the Ham brothers, the Bradford 100 club and a lovely old supporter who attended every home match even though he was blind!

Craig broke his scaphoid in a match at Wolverhampton and soon after had to travel back to Australia for a family funeral. In the meantime I had been helping other Bradford riders Gary Havelock and Sean Wilson. When Craig returned his heart just wasn't in it. Sadly both he and our mutual employer/ sponsor Aidan Higgins are no longer with us.

Up until the current day, I have been working in the Motorcycle industry in one way or another, whether it be sales or repairs. Most recently I took on the position of Motorcycle Lecturer at Adelaide's college of Tertiary and Further Education, where I train motorcycle mechanics in their chosen trade.

I've had a road bike or a motocross bike in my life now and then, but am currently bikeless!

I am now 44 and have been in a relationship for seven years with my fiance Jess, who is from Aylesbury in the U.K. We plan to visit soon and I cannot wait to catch up with some old friends who saw me through the good times and the bad!

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