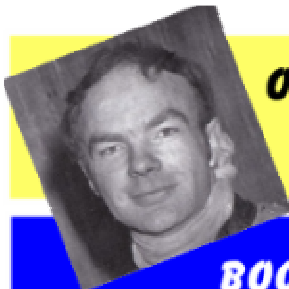


THE FIRST EVER FREE SPEEDWAY MAGAZINE!

THE VERY BEST OF

Speedway Plus

ISSUE 1 – SUMMER 2005



**OUR CLASSIC INTERVIEW WITH
DAVE GIFFORD**

**BOOK EXTRACT FROM
PENHALL BIOGRAPHY**



IVOR BROWN

SKY TV DEAL

NOTTINGHAM

NORMANBY ROAD

ACTION PICTURES

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WELCOME

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first edition of 'The very best of SpeedwayPlus'. This quarterly publication is, as far as we're aware, the first ever free speedway magazine. The catch being that if you want a physical copy then you have to use your own paper and ink!

We hope through this magazine to alert more people to the wide range of articles, features and photographs that are constantly being added to our website at www.speedwayplus.co.uk.

Additionally by making this material available in an easily downloadable and printable form we hope it will still be around long after the site has been forgotten.

Please feel free to redistribute this magazine in either paper or electronic form as widely as you wish. The only caveat is that you shouldn't profit from doing so, after all we're not making any money from it!

In this first edition you'll find a thoroughly entertaining interview with Dave Gifford. This Kiwi has a thousand stories to tell and we're delighted to bring you some of them here. There's also an extract from Bruce Penhall's biography and some up to date comment on the involvement of Sky TV in the sport.

Remember your contributions are essential to keep the site, and in turn this magazine, fresh and interesting. If you'd like to share your thoughts or memories with our thousands of regular visitors then drop us an email at speedwayplus@hotmail.com and we'll get right back to you.

Enjoy the magazine. Issue 2 will follow in October.

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**All correspondence to:
speedwayplus@hotmail.com**

Contributors: Chris Seaward; Colin Poole; Philip Dalling; Richard Hollingsworth; Steve Johnson

Special Thanks to: Dave Gifford

Website photographs courtesy of: Matt Davis; Adam Jennison; Steve Dixon; Ashley Sutton; Ian Adam; Jan Orkisz; Colin Pearson; Richard Hollingsworth; Graham Burrows; Andy Davidson.

SpeedwayPlus always welcomes unsolicited contributions.

“ He said I had indeed ridden for Wolverhampton, funny how the memory can block out certain unpleasant things. ”

Dave Gifford was a solid team man during the sixties and seventies with Newcastle, Wolves, Coatbridge and Berwick. We caught up with him to reflect on his career and to find out what he's done since.

As far as I can tell, you first raced in the UK in 1965. How had your career progressed prior to that?

As a small child, maybe 8 or 9 years old, I had been taken to the local Waiwakaiho Speedway to see the legendary midget car driver Frank 'Satan' Brewer when he made one of his rare visits to this part of the world and from that moment on I knew what I wanted to become. As soon as I turned 15 I began racing scrambles and motocross on an old plunger BSAB31 but I wasn't very good at it, all the braking and gearshifting was a bit too much for my limited mental resources to deal with I think. I still had hopes of racing cars but when I turned 16 and could race at the speedway I was earning about 5 pound a week as an Automotive Machinist apprentice and a midget car was out of the question.

The bike section at the local speedway at that time was made up of stockbikes, just our old scramble bikes with the brakes and left footrest removed, and so I raced these for two seasons before proper speedway bikes were introduced in 1963 and I started to make a bit of headway.

I was fortunate enough to win the local championship three years running and at one time I held track records at Auckland's Western Springs, at Napier and at my home track. The truth was of course that all the tracks in New Zealand were big open quarter milers and you didn't have to be very clever to ride them and as long as you could go fast you could do O.K.

During your spell at Newcastle you progressed from reserve to heat leader. What are your strongest recollections of that time?

My strongest recollections of my time at Newcastle are of the people and the weather and oh yes, I nearly forgot, the track was a bit bumpy in places. Actually I have no negative memories of Newcastle, most of the guys I rode with were a lot of fun and easy to get along with, people like Brian Brett, Mike Watkin, Georgie Hunter, Alfie Wells and Ivan of course, they all made my time at Brough Park a wonderful experience. Of course for most of my time there the promoter was Mike Parker whom I had the utmost respect for, he was always dead straight with me and always called a spade a spade. I know other riders may have an opinion of Mike that differs from mine but they're entitled, you can only judge people as you find them.



Brough Park – Sixties Style

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All good things come to an end, so they say, and so it was with my days on Tyneside. Allied Promotions shafted the greatest speedway fans in Britain by closing Brough and taking the license to some completely forgettable backwater called Reading. The Geordie fans deserved much better!

Your team mates at Newcastle included Mauger, Olsen and Michanek. How did they compare?

The questions get tougher don't they? Well nobody compared with Ivan during my time at Newcastle but there is an aspect of his career that is never mentioned, probably because he achieved so much as an individual rider and that is that he was a very good team man and didn't just ride for himself. I partnered Ivan for a season or two, nobody else wanted to because it was so hard to pick up bonus points but in truth as long as you made a reasonable gate he would take care of things and I always considered myself lucky to ride with him. Another thing about Ivan that most people won't know about is how unselfish he was when it came to the choice of gates, he had enough confidence in himself on many occasions to take the worst gate even when it was his turn to pick.

Where does bring us to, ah, the Dane! Well Ole was pretty good to be with at Newcastle although maybe he thought more about himself than the team, who knows, perhaps that was what we all should have done. It was interesting though, I remember one night at Brough going out to ride in heat twelve or thirteen with Ole and he asked me to let him cross the line first if we were on a five one. Well I couldn't have cared less as long as I got paid for a win but I was curious why he wanted it that way and his reply was that in the newspaper results the next day they wouldn't include the bonus points!

I never got to know Mich that well, he seemed to keep pretty much to himself and didn't have a lot to say but he was a straight up sort of bloke and always gave it 100%. I wouldn't have picked him to win a world championship though. Probably wrong to generalize but by and large I considered the Swedes a bit aloof, maybe it was a language thing, the one exception was Torbjorn Harryson who was a real character and always very good company, it was a pity his career was cut short.

When Newcastle closed it seems that you sat out the 1971 season. What were the circumstances behind that?

At the end of the 1970 season at Newcastle I had called into California on the way back to New Zealand and had ridden in a number of meetings at Costa Mesa, Bakersfield and Indio and I really enjoyed the experience. The lifestyle and money available on the American circuits appealed to me and I decided to race there for the whole 1971 season. Besides, Allied had done their asset stripping hatchet job at Newcastle and there was no way I was going to ride for Fearman at Reading so it wasn't a difficult decision really.

In America I had everything I needed supplied by Norm Reeves Honda, a large outfit even by their standards, and I kept every cent I earned unlike most of the American riders who rode on a percentage system with the bike owner. I lived near Anaheim and rode at Ventura on Tuesdays, Bakersfield on Wednesday, up to Reno in Nevada on Thursday and either Sacramento or Costa Mesa on Friday, a round trip of 1000 miles.

There were some very good American riders at that time, the Bast brothers Steve and Mike were pretty swift and so were Rick Woods and Wild Bill Cody so it wasn't easy racing by any means. To make a living there you had to make sure you got through the heats and semis and into the main events, that is where the money was and as long as you could get into one each night you did okay. The programme was split into a handicap section and a scratch section and they only ever stopped a race if more than half the field fell on the first lap. There were, I believe, one hundred and forty riders in California at that time, all trying just to get on the programme that listed about forty riders and most of them were only sure of one race.

Although it did have an effect on my riding when I returned to Britain I'm still pleased I raced there, the Americans were such warm and generous people and I have nothing but the fondest memories of my time there.

You joined Wolverhampton in 1972 but never seemed to recapture your best form. Tell us about your time with Wolves.

At first I thought this was a trick question so I emailed Rob Adlington and he said I had indeed ridden for Wolverhampton, funny how the memory can block out certain unpleasant things.

Apparently when I decided to race in the States some of the British League promoters had tried to impose a ban on me riding in Britain again but Kiwi Trevor Redmond, who was running Wembley at the time, had fought the issue on

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my behalf and it came to nothing. I think they were scared a whole lot of riders would skip the British League to race in the States and they wanted to use me as an example. Anyway, against my better judgement I let the Dane talk me into riding for the "W" place. I hadn't got on well with Bill Bridget in the past and nothing really changed.

It took me a while to get back into the pace of British Speedway and I'm not sure if my heart was really in it at that particular time. I was involved in a bit of a spill with Dag Lovas' brother, I think his name was Oaf, who forgot to turn left at the end of the main straight at Monmore which resulted in chipped and cracked vertebrae and a whole heap of damaged ligament things in my back. I really should have stopped for a while but I kept racing and never let the injuries heal, it was no wonder my form fell off I suppose.

Anyway things never really improved at Monmore, Bill continued to run about holding Ole's hand and ignoring everyone else in the team. This was the guy who would tell you, when you were going out to ride against Briggo and Martin Ashby in a heat, that "This one's a doddle Daveyboy, you're up against a couple of scrubbers". What a jerk!

The end came when a World Championship qualifying round I had at Coventry was rained off one Saturday night and we were not told of a new date for the meeting. The following Friday we had a home meeting and on the Saturday we had a league match at the Belle Vue and I told my team mates after the meeting on Friday that I'd see them at the zoo. So I'm on my way out of the dressing room when Bill comes in and tells me I'm not to go to Belle Vue because I had to ride at Coventry, he'd been too busy to tell me earlier in the week. Besides that we weren't getting paid at the right time and I'd had a right gutsfull by this time so I gave him both barrels and quit. I think I got a round of applause from everyone in the dressing room!

The one pleasant memory I have of that place is of the team manager Bob Wasley who did his utmost to make things work. He was a really neat guy.

You switched from Wolves to Coatbridge during the 1973 season. Did that turn out to be a good move for you?

One door closes, well it does if you kick it hard enough, and another one opens. Neil McFarlane from Coatbridge contacted me as soon as he heard I had become available and we tossed a

few figures around until we came up with a deal that suited us both and I became a Tiger. Neil was one of a group of directors that were running Coatbridge at the time, the others hadn't wanted to approach me about riding there as I become 'difficult' to deal with!

Speedway in Scotland has always struggled because of its relative isolation and I always felt that the people running Coatbridge were doing it for the love of the sport more than anything else and I was immediately made to feel welcome and appreciated by everyone there.



Cliftonhill - Coatbridge

There were a few advantages in having a home track like Coatbridge. For a start, the referees had a clear understanding of the fact that the home riders never did anything wrong and that the rulebook at best was only used as a rough guideline for running a meeting. We had one ref there who would bring his fox terrier to the meeting and he would go into the ref's box and rummage round until he found a comfortable corner where he would curl up and fall sound asleep. While he slumbered, the faithful foxy would do a superb job of running the meeting, every bit as good as an English referee!

Okay that story might be stretching the truth a wee bit but there were a lot of riders who thought the dog must have been running things, some of the decisions coming out of the box were so weird at times. They also came up with another novel innovation, they removed the bulbs from the red and blue exclusion lights which I thought was a marvellous idea!

My team mates were a good bunch of guys, no primadonnas, and as fellow Kiwi Rob Adlington was there and Neil McFarlane knew a smattering of English I always had someone to talk to during the meetings. Norwegian rider Kjell

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Gimre was there too, there had often been Norwegian riders at Scottish tracks going back to the old White City and Meadowbank days. I think that the affinity between the two countries stems from the fact that they are both situated inside the Arctic Circle and they both share a common language!

Kjell arranged for the team to ride at a couple of meetings in Norway at the end of the season, I have no idea where the tracks were, only what they were like. The first meeting was on a school running track which disintegrated into something resembling the Somme after the first heat and the racing was like watching ping pong balls bouncing across a table. I think I fell off six times and each time all my pleas and begging fell on deaf ears and I was made to start in the reruns. The track for the second meeting was made of boulders about the size of a fist but at least it didn't have too many craters in it but I made sure I either made the start or had engine failure, there was no way I was going to follow anybody! Reg Wilson and Doug Wyer from Sheffield came with us on that trip to strengthen the side a bit, both were fine riders and Reg had a wonderful sense of humour which was an absolute necessity on that particular trip.

Coatbridge elected to compete in the second division the following season and to my surprise as much as anyone's I decided to stay there. It was a case of "an offer you can't refuse" really, although the prospect of new tracks to ride on did appeal to me and I had an enjoyable year in the company of good riders and great fans.

You're probably best remembered for your spell at Berwick from 1975 until 1978. What do you recall of those days?

My departure from Coatbridge was a bit of a surprise, a few days before the opening meeting of the season, I think that would have been 1975 or 76, I got a phonecall from Jim Beaton who informed me that Coatbridge could no longer afford to keep me. Neil McFarlane had pulled out of Coatbridge to open his own track at Paisley and I think the rest of the directors found out for the first time how much I had been getting paid the previous season and decided it was too much. I had actually been on a pretty good deal which had included a three figure guarantee for my home meetings and I was probably one of the better paid riders around at that time so I understood their position and we parted company.

A phonecall to Mrs Taylor at Berwick and I had found a new team in the beautiful Border region of Scotland which in many ways reminded me of

home. At my first home meeting they gave me a race jacket, a helmet colour, a pair of slippers, a senior citizens bus ticket and a booklet entitled "How To Manage On A Pension". It was pretty laid back at Berwick as you would expect in a smaller town and much of their support came from rural areas where people have a better understanding of reality.



Berwick Bandits 1977

There were plenty of Kiwis who rode at Berwick during my stay there including Rob Adlington, Colin 'Biggles' Farquarson, Roger Wright, Mike Fullerton and Wayne Brown who all did their best to lead me astray at one time or another. Graham Jones was also there of course, I always thought he looked like he would be more at home pitchforking hay on to a horsedrawn wagon somewhere in Suffolk but appearances can be deceptive, he had a sharp and ready wit and he was a wonderful team mate both on and off the track.

One of my first meetings for Berwick was back at Coatbridge and I naturally expected a bit of flak from the fans there on my return and my fears weren't misplaced. To get to the pits from the dressing room meant a walk from the grandstand tunnel and down the front straight and even though I was prepared for the worst they still took me by surprise. As soon as I stepped onto the track they began one of those soccer chants - CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, CLAP, "GIFFORD'S A REJECT". It was a priceless moment, done without malice and I just burst out laughing. They were good people and had a great sense of humour.

Actually, when I had ridden there the year before I had never gone off any starting gate except four in the second half, the referee couldn't see me as he was unsighted. When the guy in the pits did the draw for the gates with the dominoes in my races there were only three to choose from when he went to the other

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riders, just a little home track bonus, but when I went back as a Berwick rider the same guy came up to me and said "I suppose you want your usual gate?" So when I said "Yes please" he promptly took the four domino off and then went to the other riders, it was like I hadn't really left at all!

Wayne Brown joined us towards the end of my stay there, he was very shy and very short, I thought he was paying me some sort of misplaced homage by kneeling when I first met him but no, that was as big as he could get! Mind you, he had a wonderful time talking to the pretty Border girls who were all a foot taller than he was! He had a superb meeting at Crayford one time, scored more points than all of us I think, and completely embarrassed us all. Rather than pretend it hadn't happened we decided to treat him like a Rock Star and we would open doors for him, ask him about how we should set our bikes up and fight over who was going to sit next to him in restaurants etc.

Man, he would get so embarrassed, but it served him right for showing us up! I was pleased to hear he went on to great things after I left Britain, I'm sure he would have deserved it.

When Powderhall speedway opened in Edinburgh, promoted by my old 'friend' Bill Bridget, we were invited up there for a challenge match which we won quite comfortably as I recall, but when we went back for a league match I had a spot of bother with Jack Millen who was riding for them at that time. It seemed like Jack was having navigational problems as he kept running in to me. When we got back to the pits I asked him what his problem was and he said "Oh it's not a problem, Bill's promised me a good bonus if I can get rid of you for the night!" Those two deserved each other! Jack died in a fiery car wreck just north of Ayton where I lived, a precursor to his next destination some might have said.

Why did you quit when you did?

I have always been amazed at how small incidents can have such a major influence on the course of history. On one visit to Coatbridge I quite rightly received a hefty fine for doing something that I'm not particularly proud of and the following night at Berwick I asked the announcer Dick Barrie (who bought me a drink once, by the way) to ask if there was anyone who wanted to contribute to a fund to help pay the fine. A rather tough looking individual was let into the pits and he suggested he would like to pay the fine in full for me if that would be okay. I had my doubts, but when he pulled out a

thick wad of notes and started peeling them off, they were dispelled immediately. He wanted to talk about sponsorship and how he could help me and we very soon came to a very satisfactory agreement and that is how Dave Fairbairn was introduced to speedway. He would go on to help many of the riders at Berwick and eventually become the promoter there after I returned to New Zealand.



Dave poses for the camera

He made his money operating his own fishing trawler out of Dunbar and for a couple of years I worked as a fisherman on his boat the 'Highland Queen' and while this was lucrative it did signal the end of speedway for me. I simply didn't have the time or energy that was required to do speedway properly and I quit and went home, one step ahead of the taxman.

Andy Baillie selected you in his 'Dream Team' and described you as a 'nutter' who was always in trouble with referees. Is that a fair description?

So Andy Baillie put me in his Dream Team because I was a 'nutter' did he? I take it this would be the Andy Baillie of 17 Killmuckle Road, Glasgow? Ye see laddie, ye can run but ye cannae hide! And who knows, one dark and stormy night there just might be a tapping on your door...

Actually I was quite flattered to be included, the only other dream team I'm in is my own one which has just me and the Dallas Cowboy's Cheerleaders in it. Of course Andy is entitled to his opinions, it is his team after all, but I was a bit saddened to find that because of one tiny

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indiscretion, alright, two or three tiny indiscretions, certainly not more than ten at the most, I go down in history as a nutter. It seems a bit harsh to me. Perhaps it's time to tell my side of the story and reveal the truth after all these years.

Now it's true that on occasions I did appear to transgress, sometimes at the starting gate for instance, a sudden puff of wind would blow the tapes against my front wheel and it would be obvious that I would be blamed for breaking them. Other times, owing to a manufacturing flaw in the tapes, they would snap, right in front of me, at the precise moment the referee pushed the button to start the race. Now when these things happened, what shall we call them, acts of God, someone had to be accountable and it was often me who unselfishly accepted the exclusion from the race and withdrew to the pits but there were also times when the referee got things dreadfully wrong. I knew it was not easy being a referee, stuck in a glass box all night with nothing more than a cup of tea and a sticky bun and having to make life or death decisions so if I thought the referee was having trouble coming to the right conclusion I was always prepared to help if I could. After all, I would have been much closer to the incident and would have had a much better view of what really transpired which I would relay to the referee so he could make the right decision. If, after all my help, they still came to the wrong conclusion then I would gently chide them for their lack of trust in me. Now it is true that as far as I can remember no referee ever thanked me for my input, an oversight I expect, but at least I always got the warm inner glow that you feel when you've tried to help someone far less fortunate than yourself!

What have you been doing since you retired?

I returned to New Zealand in 1979 and went back to live in New Plymouth where I had grown up and went back in to engineering. Before I left Britain I made sure the temptation to ride again in New Zealand was removed by selling off or giving away all my equipment, all I kept was my helmet. I did build two speedway cars but both were bought off me before I had a chance to race them and by this time the last sort of withdrawal symptoms had gone.

Besides, my Kelso born wife Joyce and I had two sons to bring up and it was time to stop being selfish and care more about my family. Both our sons took up B.M.X racing at an early age and both did very well and won many major titles including national championships and for about ten years I was involved with nothing but B.M.X.

Our local speedway at the Waiwakaiho Showgrounds had closed down in 1970 to make way for industrial development and a few years ago it dawned on me that very little had been done to preserve anything from the old days so I started banging on doors and collecting what material I could and out of these efforts a local Historic Speedway Association was formed and now has over a hundred members. I am currently restoring an old midget car built in 1947 and which won a New Zealand Championship back in 1951. Among our members are ex Glasgow riders Bruce Ovenden and Joe Hicks as well as former Edinburgh promoter Ian Hoskins who now lives twelve miles away at Waitara, the town where his father Johnnie was born over a hundred years ago.

Ian broke an arm a few months ago playing golf and I couldn't let the chance slip by without a bit of a dig. When he explained to me how he'd done it and how much it had hurt I said "Yes Ian, but it is only one arm isn't it, you should still be able to play next week shouldn't you?". A reminder of how much sympathy we used to get off promoters!

This is also the town where Ivan promotes the final round of the World Long Track Grand Prix Series which is great because it brings many old friends to town for the weekend, many of whom I would rarely see otherwise.

Well that's about it, there are some people who suggest I spend too much time in the past and perhaps they're right. But maybe it's a past worth spending time in. It's a past when the airwaves carried the sounds of Buddy, Elvis and the Beatles, a past of travel, freedom and adventure full of wonderful highs and inconsolable lows, of success and failure, but above all it is a past full of people, speedway people, and I wouldn't swap a moment of it for a million tomorrows!!

TRACK HISTORY

NOTTINGHAM

Philip Dalling reminds us of the days when you could take a ferry to the speedway.

The banks of the River Trent in Nottingham host one of the most remarkable close concentrations of sporting activity in the UK, and possibly in the world. The famed Trent Bridge test match cricket ground, the homes of Notts County - the oldest Football League Club - and of double European Cup winners Nottingham Forest, a racecourse, greyhound track, rowing clubs, and Britain's National Water Sports Centre line the banks of the river which marks the cultural divide between north and south.

Most of the tens of thousands of people who flock to modern-day Trentside sporting occasions are probably unaware of the fact that the river bank was also once the home of Nottingham Olympic Speedway, later the White City Stadium, which was home to speedway racing before World War Two.

The river played a part in Nottingham's speedway history. White City was almost certainly the only British speedway track to boast a race night ferry service, with fans being rowed from the south bank of the Trent virtually to the doors of the stadium!

The Nottingham Tornado Motorcycle Club used a circuit at Trent Lane, Colwick, for grass-track racing in 1928, advertising events at the 'Olympic Speedway'. For the following season a dirt-track was laid down, together with safety fence, lighting and a rudimentary grandstand.

New Zealander Stewie St George acted as a consultant to the Nottingham promotion. A long season of open licence and challenge events was staged, and Nottingham also had its first taste of competitive team action - taking part - without much success - in the Northern Dirt Track League's knock-out cup competition, losing to Wombwell over two legs.

The year 1930 brought Nottingham's first taste of league speedway, with the team finishing bottom of the Southern League. Nevertheless, the track came back for more in 1931, until a spate of injuries and poor crowds forced a mid-season withdrawal.

Nottingham joined the National League for 1933, under a new promotion, managed by the experienced W R Keene. By now the basic Olympic Speedway circuit had been rebuilt as a greyhound stadium, with a main grandstand, covered terracing and other facilities. The White

City side were again wooden spoonists and featured in an amazing spat with the Control Board. Nottingham withdrew from the league after claiming that inconsistent decisions over starting procedures, which came to a head in a match with Wembley, were driving crowds away. The track was eventually fined but allowed to resume its season. The promoters pulled out at the end of the season and there were just a few challenge matches in 1934, and nothing in 1935.

The advent of a second division for British speedway in 1936, under the title of the Provincial League, brought Nottingham more success. The initial promotion was replaced quite early in the season by Fred Whitehead of Hackney Wick. Former Wembley star George Greenwood, who had appeared in Nottingham's colours before, boosted the team, and he won the Provincial Riders Championship at Trent Lane towards the end of the season.



George Greenwood in action at Nottingham in 1936

The following year, 1937, with Whitehead still in charge, saw Nottingham enjoy its best season results-wise. The White City men won both the Coronation Cup and the Provincial Trophy, with a side including Greenwood, Ted Bravery, Fred Tuck, Tommy Allott, Tommy Bateman, Sam Marsland, Billy Lamont and local favourites Fred Strecker and George Dykes.

Fred Whitehead pulled out in the winter of 1937-38, and Nottingham was one of former rider Arthur Westwood's four tracks in 1938 - Birmingham Hall Green, Sheffield and Leeds

TRACK HISTORY

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being the others. Westwood spread his rider assets around his three league tracks (Leeds began the year as a non-league side) and Nottingham lost Bravery and Allott to Sheffield. Crowds dwindled alarmingly, despite George Greenwood's continued form, and Westwood transferred the league side to Leeds after completing the English Speedway Trophy fixtures.

In that last season of 1938, Wilf Plant appeared in some matches for Nottingham, thus becoming the only rider to race for both Nottingham and Long Eaton. Louis Lawson, the postwar Belle Vue star who finished third in the 1949 World Final, was a spectator at White City and cut his racing teeth at grasstrack meetings promoted just outside the city by Strecker and Dykes. Another Nottingham grass-track product was Lionel Watling, who rode for Tamworth, Birmingham, Long Eaton and Leicester in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Following World War Two there is evidence that several promoters attempted, at intervals, to bring the sport back to Nottingham, only to find the White City doors barred by the greyhound promoters. In 1947 a planning application was made to the City Council to build a speedway track on land close to the present ring-road, near the Clifton Bridge over the Trent, on a site later to be occupied by Carlton TV Studios.



Nottingham 1937

l to r: Billy Lamont, Frank Hodgson, George Dykes, Fred Tuck, Sam Marsland, Tommy Bateman, and Fred Strecker

White City survived until 1970 as a greyhound stadium, with the 380-yard speedway track concreted over and used to parade the dogs on wet nights. Some years later a new greyhound track was constructed in the car park of the Colwick Park Racecourse. There is a suggestion that at least one promoter approached the greyhound management about the possibility of speedway.

Local fans had to be content in post-war years with racing at Long Eaton, some nine miles west of Colwick. Nottingham raced a challenge match against Leicester Stadium at Station Road in 1930, and the Long Eaton promotion adopted the name Nottingham Outlaws for a couple of seasons in the 1980s.

Philip Dalling is hoping to publish an illustrated history of Nottingham Speedway in the not-too-distant future.

His contact details are as follows:

Address:

2A Chapel Mews
Rupert Street
Ilkeston
Derbyshire
DE7 5LP

Telephone:

0115 930 2217

Email:

philip.dalling@nottingham.ac.uk

Photo Credits:

Picture of George Greenwood was taken by the late Dick Smart.

Picture of the Nottingham side of 1937 is courtesy of the family of Charlie Shelton

ACTION PICTURES

OUCH!

Colin Poole captured this action sequence that depicts George Stancl's crash in the Glasgow v Workington match on June 5th. Thankfully George walked away unharmed.



THE SKY TV DEAL

Chris Seaward considers whether speedway is more important to Sky Television than we could possibly have imagined, and what the consequences for the sport could be.

In a recent edition of the speedway star was, secluded discreetly on the second page, a petite seemingly regular article. The report, whilst tiny in stature must be considered immense in significance. It notified the magazine's faithful that our treasured sport is now Sky Sports third most watched activity. Further explaining that armchair viewers have boosted the sport from a lowly eighth, to an especially impressive third position in the all important rating figures. Speedway now finds itself neatly situated behind football and cricket, all in all refreshingly rapid progress within just five years.

The information has been brought to attention and subsequently discussed by the dashing Poole Pirates promoter Matt Ford who seems continually involved and innovative in the Sky Sports era of club promotion. This isn't the first time optimistic viewing figure information has been strewn amid our shale community. The news first became apparent when it was fed into the volatile, rumour generating machine that is the often detrimental British Speedway Internet Forum. Like a majority of the keyboard cowboys contributing their personal opinions I really tried and sought to believe this bold ratings revelation, but simply couldn't and subsequently remained highly sceptical.

It appears from the size and minimalist presentation of the aforementioned article that the good people at the Speedway Star share this scepticism. After all a subject that is so pivotal in British speedway's future progression, immediate survival and continuing drive for rejuvenation surely deserved heaps more detailed analysis than the magazine chose to provide.

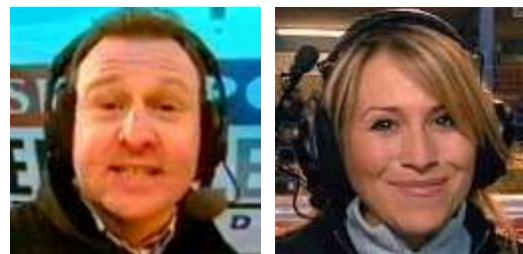
Was this article so small in size and somewhat nonchalant in tone because for fans of British speedway it has never completely felt, or been made vividly apparent, that our sport is a prominent and significant element of Sky's sporting collection? Are we simply gate crashing Sky's squeaky clean, grotesquely vain party and spraying our wealthier sporting relations with a roost of sacred shale?



However, from a viewer's perspective, Sky doesn't seem whole heartedly interested or entirely engulfed by speedway. During the drab winter months there is little to keep the hardened fan sufficiently entertained, the premier league receives extremely limited coverage and the conference league sadly not even a mention.

Quite how highly the sport is regarded and what position it holds amongst Sky's extensive range often seems ambiguous. Furthermore the budget for speedway appears to be minimal, usually limited camera angles, a basic studio and the lack of an interactive menu (selection of pictures, match highlights, fanzone) leaves the sport lagging in terms of presentation when compared with other activities. In their glossy, star studded monthly magazine, Sky allocated a measly one page to previewing the approaching season and the editors felt the necessity to occupy half this space with the opinions of Premiership footballers. A cheap and unimaginative attempt to strike a comprehensive bond between the two sports.

Salt was rubbed further into to wound when a picture of Nicki Pedersen was accompanied by a caption naming him Bjarne, small mistakes such as these may seem insignificant but provide insight into Sky's attitude of occasional apathy.



The faces of speedway on Sky

If the latest ratings revelation is correct then Sky Sports cannot claim extensive advertising and heavy investment is the catalyst of success, instead they must recognise the power of Speedway's pure entertainment value.

The questions must be posed, do the bigwigs at Sky understand, but more importantly, respect speedway? Is there a lack of understanding between the two sides which is simply bridged,

OPINION

THE SKY TV DEAL

translated and resolved by hard cash? Speedway's entertainment value is being manipulated and exploited in return for a minimal sum of money, because the initial television deal was struck at a time when British speedway was hunting for a lifeline and Sky Sports searching for the old cliché of a minority sport to bolster and add diversity to their treasured collection.

It is certainly true that Sky Sports are getting a tremendously cheap deal out of speedway, quite simply a bargain. Second in the channels most viewed list is Cricket, a game which the BSKYB Corporation paid an incredible 220 million pounds in order to obtain the broadcasting rights. In terms of viewing figures we are told speedway sits directly behind cricket. With the speedway contract up for renewal at the end of 2005 the sport must push for a significant increase on the 1.1 million pounds received when the television contract was initially negotiated. Controversial chief Terry Russell must seek to drive a harder bargain whilst avoiding the tendency to adhere to the organisations every command. Quite simply the sport must gain some control, display dignity and not be held ransom.

Let's just assume Mr Russell is able to grab a healthy eight million pounds from Sky Sports bulging kitty. This money should be distributed throughout every aspect British speedway, defiantly filtered down to the conference league so the production of grass roots can continue to prosper. If the cash is circulated solely amongst the elite league then the inevitable widening gap of divisions will occur. Elite league stars will demand grotesque sums of money whilst young prospects struggle to buy machinery. If and when the deal is renewed a constructive and realistic financial plan must be utilized that allows British speedway as a unit to move forward and thrive. To keep the cash within the elite league would be detrimental; the speedway family must help one another and avoid the tendency to regard the elite league as a separate entity.

Maybe I've been a little hard and unfair on Sky, after all it takes around fifteen people to cover a live meeting and many sports would kill for the coverage speedway receives. Yet it is crucial that the sport doesn't stagnate, the building blocks have been laid for stability, further progression and an exciting new era. British speedway must push forward and Sky has to be a part of this, both parties must avoid the tendency to dwell on these encouraging ratings, instead exploit this opportunity to its full potential.

It is a fair assumption that speedway's real glory days of the 1950's were eventually halted by the introduction of additional entertainment, primarily television sets. However after half a century of highs and extreme lows the influence of television is slowly, but firmly, placing speedway back where it belongs, amongst the most popular sports in the country. The irony speedway fans is colossal and it proves you just can't keep a good sport down.

WEB NEWS

BEST OF THE NEW SITES

The Veteran Speedway Riders Association have a new website that will aim to keep their members informed of their functions, campaigns and news. The address is <http://www.vusra-web.co.uk>.

Newport's promising Aussie Karlis Ezergailis now has a very impressive personal website. It's been designed by the prolific Black Diamonds Web Design company. It features the usual gallery, news and profile. The address is simply <http://www.karlis.co.uk>.

Hastings Saxons only competed in two seasons of league speedway, 1948 and 1949. Now, more than 50 years since their closure, they have a website! It's a fascinating site that includes many press clippings taken from contemporary newspapers and some modern pictures of the stadium - where the track is still very much in evidence. You can find it at <http://www.hastingspeedway.co.uk>.

Testimonial man Carl Stonehewer has launched a new website to tie in with his big day. The website can be found at <http://www.carlstonehewer.com> and "Carl's Big Special" will be held at Derwent Park on Saturday 24th September, with a 7pm start.

Barry Burchatt of the Rye House Raiders is one of the latest riders to join the information super-highway (as we used to call it). His site has been designed by Colin Pearson who's also responsible for the excellent Rye House site. Barry's site can be found at <http://barryburchatt.co.uk>

Edinburgh skipper Theo Pijper's new website is now officially available. It concentrates mainly on his overseas activities in grasstrack and longtrack. If you're at all squeamish then you should probably avoid the pictures of his horrendous crash at Cloppenburg. The website address is <http://www.theopijper.com>.

TRIBUTE

IVOR BROWN

Cradley legend Ivor Brown sadly passed away earlier this year. **Philip Dalling** shares his memories of the man.

I guess there were a great many Ivor Browns, depending upon where you were coming from.

There was the star speedway rider - easily the biggest name in the Provincial League until Ivan Mauger arrived on the scene. Idolised by Cradley fans, booed (and worse) by the rest.

The classy Jaguar and neat trailer, the immaculate bike, the spotless white shirt and gloves, shining leathers, socks neatly tucked over the top of his polished riding boots.

Not forgetting the fact that he won most of the races he started...

Everything about Ivor was a provocation, unless you were a committed fan.

Then there was the off-track Ivor who spent his entire life as one of the mainstays of a picture postcard village on the borders of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Proprietor of a haulage firm and of the post office and general stores, cricketer and family man. A man who seemed just as proud of the fact that his home-cooked ham was the mainstay of the teas at every cricket ground in the area as he was of his distinguished speedway career!

I first experienced Ivor as a fan, watching him collect the points at Station Road, Long Eaton, when the Heathens arrived on Provincial League business, or in individual meetings.



Ivor Brown

When, in 1969, he took over the promotion at Long Eaton, in partnership with former Dudley Wood team-mate Vic White, I had graduated from the terraces to the press box. Speedway Star ordered a profile of Ivor for the 1970 'Parade' annual, and I was happy to earn the couple of guineas that was the going rate for a two-page spread in those far-off days.

Ivor revealed that his first experience of a speedway track was at Long Eaton, which was quite close to his Wymeswold home. Former Norwich star Paddy Mills ran training sessions after the Archers had pulled out of Southern League racing, and Ivor was one of the regulars.

I remember standing with him at a 1969 vintage Rangers training session, when he looked wistfully at the novices and remarked that it didn't seem five minutes since he had been in their position himself.

As a speedway rider, Ivor was far from being an overnight sensation. As the sport shrank in the mid-1950s rides were hard to come by and there was plenty of junior competition at Blackbird Road, Leicester. A handful of team rides and endless second half appearances were all that came his way, until Yarmouth, the Southern Area League and, eventually, the advent of the Provincial League gave him regular competition.

The rest is history, well captured by the recent VSM picture of Ivor leading Nigel Boocock into the first bend at Brandon in the first-ever British League match. It was somehow fitting that the PL's greatest star should symbolise how the once-despised lower grade riders could match their former National League colleagues wheel for wheel in the big league that gave British Speedway a new golden era.

My career took me far away from Station Road and speedway for many years. It was good to make contact again with Ivor in 2004 and to chat about his career. Not that it was necessarily easy going. The man who cared so much about his on-track image was, in private life, quite diffident about his achievements.

Quietly proud of his career, is probably the best way to put it. A great many people in speedway were honoured to have seen the man in track action, and proud to have had contact with a true legend of the sport.

TRACK PHOTOGRAPHS

NORMANBY ROAD

Scunthorpe's new home at Normanby Road has drawn praise from virtually everyone who's had the pleasure of racing or spectating there. **Richard Hollingsworth** takes us on a pictorial tour of the new circuit.



BOOK EXTRACT

PENHALL BIOGRAPHY

Steve Johnson has allowed us reproduce an extract from his book – '**Penhall: World Speedway Champion**'. We pick the story up in the build up to the 1981 World Final.

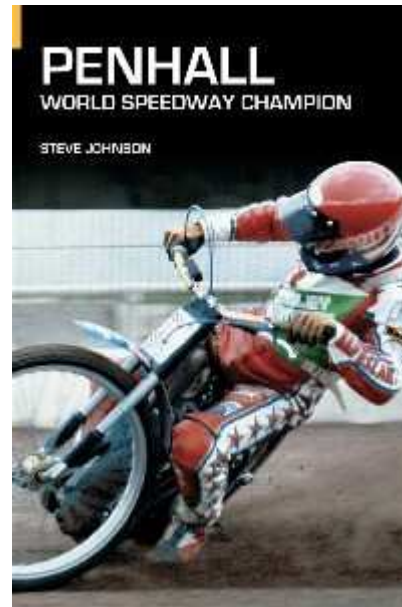
Sandwiched between the USA's team and pairs championship events was the most important qualifier of all - the first step on the road to Bruce's goal of becoming 1981 World Champion. Meticulous planning seemed to have left nothing to chance, with confidence high following the superb domestic form and mechanic Mikey was sent out to California two weeks in advance with a pair of bikes to set up. Disaster very nearly struck at the last minute though as the van carrying the race machinery and equipment broke down en route to the final at the LA Coliseum.

'That's the sort of thing that can play with your mind and mentally break you down. I was pretty calm though because I was full of confidence at that time. I was already having an unbelievable year, I was just in that state of mind; I felt that I just couldn't get beaten that season. I think Mikey and Jurgen were in the van and we were in contact with them. They said they would be a little late, but after I spoke to them I was OK, I knew they would be there.' The bikes and mechanics eventually arrived at the track just 30 minutes before the first race but Bruce settled quickly into the journey towards the 1981 World Final.

He had barely put a wheel wrong during the entire season before the 5th September 1981, but past form counted for nothing when the tapes went up on a world final. Sixteen riders qualified through their own merits and had five rides for their shot at becoming champion. One hiccup and any hopes were probably out of the window for another year.

Bruce travelled to London with Peter Adams and such was the enormous buzz about the showpiece meeting that even the official practice was covered by both BBC and ATV news. They featured racing sequences and interviews with Bruce, by then the bookmakers' favourite at 7-2. He was in constant demand for newspaper and television interviews, and conducted himself as admirably as ever while under the unrelenting media surveillance. He re-iterated his commitment to the promise he had made to his parents; confident that he had what it took, but modest at the same time, publicly rating his own chances 'as good as anyone else's'. The rest of the speedway world had no reason to hold back. He was outstanding favourite amongst all punters, none more so than the thousands of

Cradley fans who had booked their tickets for the Empire Stadium.



When the big day came, expectancy levels simply soared sky high. A group of around 30 family and friends flew from California, which brought about the first signs of any nerves as Bruce flapped and flustered, trying to allocate everyone their seats in the stands. His American girlfriend at the time, Jodi - a Tennis scholarship student from Texas University, joined his big brother Jerry and his wife. There was sister Connie and her husband Mark, who accompanied Bruce to England in 1978, his aunt and uncle who had taken the family under their wing after the death of the childrens' mother and father, plus Bruce's cousins and other friends including US mechanic, Spike. In charge of the bikes for the event would be both Jurgen and Mikey, along with Steady Eddie Bull. Pete Adams would be at Bruce's side for the entirety and had his own ideas about how to prepare for the meeting. Adams had noticed that his rider always performed better when he was tired, arriving back in England for example after a busy weekend racing on the continent and late night flights, only to score an inspired maximum at Birmingham on a Monday evening. So, after breakfast on the morning of the final, he packed Bruce and Jodi into a taxi and led them into the city. The three of them toured London under a

BOOK EXTRACT

PENHALL BIOGRAPHY

blazing hot sun, as speedway fans from across the country gradually poured into the capital. After being kept at the dinner table until 10:30pm the previous night, and being indulged in a rare bottle of wine, Bruce and his girlfriend found themselves being marched around Piccadilly Circus, the Houses of Parliament and all the major tourist attractions. In one of few moments for reflection during the whirlwind day, he nervously nibbled through his lunch in a West End restaurant, with his mind clearly elsewhere. By the afternoon he admits to being completely shattered and severely cursing his manager, but it was just as Adams had planned.

'Its true, I will always remember coming home from the Continent on the Monday completely shattered, and always having a good night at either Birmingham or Reading. If I had a little time off, I would always get so worked up that I would be trying too hard in the first couple of heats.'

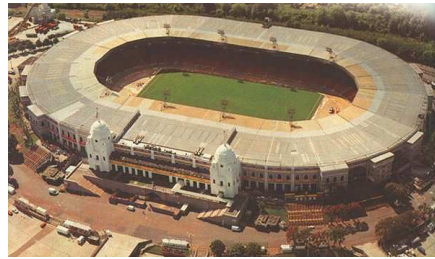


Bruce and author Steve Johnson

By the time Bruce reached the stadium again late in the afternoon, he was focused and ready. He was the first rider changed and set about his sequence of warm-up exercises, while the frenzy of the world final began to build. Adams was never far away, meticulously marking out the programme and always cleverly aware of every possible pitfall and permutation. The mechanical team quietly and efficiently went about their business, and critically, Bruce knew he could place complete faith in his entire back-up team.

Although no-one knew it at the time, the meeting would be the last ever World Final at Wembley, often considered speedway's spiritual home. Bruce had some idea what to expect from the atmosphere, having been to the last three

finals in London, but still took Adams' early advice to take a walk down the famous tunnel towards the track, and acclimatise to the surroundings with a reported 92,000 people cramming in behind the twin towers. Some reports suggested that there were in the region of a staggering 10,000 Cradley fans present, and it was quite easy to believe it whenever Bruce, or fellow Heathen Erik Gundersen, emerged into view. Any sight of Penhall in particular at the end of the tunnel, either before or during the meeting itself, would trigger a huge wave of camera flashes and by the time the riders were brought out on parade, the noise of the cheers and air horns was positively deafening.



Wembley

The heat of the balmy day was increased another notch when the television crews from both Britain and the USA set up their high-power lights along the pits tunnel, and there was no let up from either group in shoving a microphone under the nose of any rider. Australian referee, Sam Bass, briefed the riders beforehand and assured them that his day job as a senior police detective was ample preparation to deal with any protesting riders, or anyone delaying the start after a single warning. The time had finally arrived for racing.

How to order your copy of 'Penhall: World Speedway Champion'

The book can be purchased by sending a cheque or postal order for £14.99 (including free p&p) to:

Steve Johnson
42 Saville Road
Whiston
Rotherham
S60 4DX

Copies can be signed by the author on request.

A website which accompanies the book can be found at www.brucepenhall.co.uk