

**THE FIRST EVER FREE SPEEDWAY MAGAZINE!**

**THE VERY BEST OF**

# SpeedwayPlus

**ISSUE 2 – AUTUMN 2005**



## **BACK TO THE BELLE VUE!**

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BEST SPEEDWAY TRACK IN THE WORLD...EVER!**



**IT'S BENNETT!**

**NEW COLUMN BY MIKE THE MIC  
MAGAZINE EXCLUSIVE!**

**UNTIL THE CAN RAN OUT**  
BOOK EXTRACT FROM CHRIS  
MORTON'S NEW AUTOBIOGRAPHY



**A HOME FROM  
HOME**

**REG FEARMAN**

**SHELBOURNE**

**ARENA PIX**

**THE POLISH  
PERSPECTIVE**

**HERE TO HELP**

**WWW.SPEEDWAYPLUS.CO.UK**

**Welcome to the second edition of 'The very best of SpeedwayPlus'. Our first issue proved to be a tremendous success with several thousand copies being downloaded. Hopefully there are now a fair number of paper copies sitting on shelves just waiting to be rediscovered in the years ahead.**

We're delighted to be joined this time around by legendary motormouth Mike Bennett. Mike returned to the sport in 2004 after we featured an interview with him on the website. When the interview was published he was invited along as a guest to King's Lynn and ended up presenting that night's meeting. So I'm afraid it's, at least partly, our fault that he's back!

Reg Fearman and Chris Morton MBE are other 'names' that we must thank for their contributions. Reg was kind enough to consent to an interview with Steve Harland and he talked freely about his time as rider and promoter. Chris has allowed us to publish a lengthy extract from his new autobiography. If you enjoy it then get in touch with Chris and he'll be happy to sell you a copy of the full thing. He may even be willing to sign it!

We've got an extra three pages in issue 2 so we've also managed to squeeze in columns by Chris Seaward and Dave Green, an article on clubs that raced away from their usual stomping ground and an interesting account of promoting speedway in Ireland. Add in pictures of Arena Essex and Hyde Road and there's hopefully something for everyone.

Next issue will be out in January 2006 – all offers of help and contributions of articles, photographs, anything at all really, are welcome. Drop us an email at [speedwayplus@hotmail.com](mailto:speedwayplus@hotmail.com).

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**Special Thanks to:** Chris Morton; Reg Fearman

**Photographs courtesy of:** Dave Payne; Ian Adam; Graham Burrows; The VSRA and others unknown but acknowledged.

**SpeedwayPlus always welcomes unsolicited contributions.**

“I guess it’s like the theatre, a great atmosphere with a full house but dead when only a quarter full.”

**Reg Fearman** was a respected promoter in the sixties and seventies and along with Mike Parker was largely responsible for the formation of the Provincial League. **Steve Harland** caught up with him to reflect on his long association with speedway.

**You raced in the same West Ham team as former Boro Bears rider Fred ‘Kid’ Curtis didn’t you?**

Yes, I raced with him in 1949, 50 and 51. He was married with a son Alan and owned a sweet shop in North London. He raced before the War, a very nice bloke but knew I was after ‘his job’ in the team and was very protective of it.

**What inspired you to form a pirate league set-up?**

The idea behind the Provincial League was to re-introduce speedway to lapsed venues and form a strong League and Promoters Association. Re-opening a number of speedways as a multi-track promoter was not with total financial gain in mind but it was the excitement, the thrill, the adrenalin and the entrepreneurial skills of taking speedway to the people of different towns and cities. Not all tracks made money. Many including Liverpool lost money.

Leicester also lost a lot of money, it had run for many years in the National League. It closed in 1961 with average crowds of around 3,000 people. It was offered to Parker and myself for the Provincial League in 1962. It opened with 2,000 plus people and fell quickly to 1300/1400 and often below the 1,000 mark. We ‘lost our shirt’ there - it ran just the one season in the PL.

In 1961, it was decided by Mike Parker and me to re-introduce speedway to Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Wolverhampton, which we did. We hoped all three would be good venues. Newcastle and Wolverhampton certainly were. Attendances were very good. Middlesbrough was always below par. Despite what may have been written or said, the largest single attendance I had at Middlesbrough in the 1961/2/3/4 seasons

was just over 5,000 people (Speedway Star match reports claim 9,000 for the opening meeting). Around 3,000 people was the norm. I read somewhere, I believe it was on the web, that there was a pre-War crowd, or immediate post-War, of 18,000. I honestly do not believe that Cleveland Park could hold that number of spectators.

**You reopened Middlesbrough in 1961 - how did that come about and what are your memories?**

Middlesbrough was an independently owned greyhound stadium and our dealings were with the Chairman, Mr Varley, who was also the Chairman of Middlesbrough Football Club. He was a gentleman as were his staff. The track was already in place from a bygone era and after some maintenance was ready. The greyhound company had stored the starting gate and some other equipment but we had to put in some of the specialised speedway equipment. The opening meetings from memory went very well.



Reg with the Middlesbrough side of 1962

**It was said that you ran a 'tight ship' - would you agree?**

I don't think I particularly ran a tight ship. I was always ready to spend money on advertising, promotion or on the team.

**Was there a reason that attendances were not as good as other tracks you ran?**

Middlesbrough and Stockton were industrial towns and were not blessed with a one hundred per-cent employment record. There always seemed to be many people unemployed. The North East historically has had its very hard times.

**I've heard you refer to 'chimney pots', what did you mean?**

What I meant was that one needs a lot of houses, a large population to 'pull on' for the entertainment business. I also think a lot of people were reluctant to cross the River Tees to Middlesbrough for the speedway. That was why when Allied Presentations Ltd re-opened it in 1968 we called it Teesside following the re-naming of the whole area.

**Where did you get the riders from who signed for Middlesbrough in 1961?**

Some were retired riders, some on loan from the higher division and some grass track riders. There were always riders who wanted to have a go at after-meeting practice.

Speedway was back - but I think we had a disappointing overall attendance compared with other tracks but we offered great thrill and excitement with the team on track.

**You were always renowned for holding interval attractions, do you recall the time the Sabrina trophy was held at Middlesbrough in 1964 against Newport?**

Sabrina - (now there was a girl who had a couple of good things going for her). The idea was to have a personality visit the speedway either to open the season or appear during the season as a guest. It's called Promotion, Publicity and Presentation. Among those who came were Elsie Tanner (Pat Phoenix) and Jed Stone (Ken Cope) from Coronation Street. The interval attractions starred such people as Stan Lindbergh, on fire, through fire, into fire. He dived into a six foot deep pool from a 50 foot tower, setting himself on fire at the top and an assistant setting fire to petrol that had been poured on top of the water. Marcello on the swaying pole were just that - interval attractions

and also they drew extra people through the turnstiles and one hoped to keep a few of those as regulars.

**Why did you pull out of Middlesbrough at the end of the 1964 season and relocate to Halifax?**

Yes, I transferred the Middlesbrough team and licence to Halifax. I made the decision purely on a business basis. After four seasons at Cleveland Park, the attendance was gradually falling each year and it was hard to entice people out on a Thursday night. As I have said previously, Teesside always had the threat of unemployment. I had looked at Halifax over probably a two year period and negotiated eventually with the Football Club Chairman to re-introduce speedway to The Shay.

In the winter of 1964/65, I transferred the team to Halifax into the British League for 1965 season and was lucky (you always need some luck) to nominate and get Saturday night racing. With all Saturday tracks equal in this new League, no one had a preference over the other regarding home fixtures. The same went for same race night, midweek tracks. Halifax was a very good venue, lots of 'chimney pots' with the close proximity of Bradford, Huddersfield, Wakefield and many more towns. The opening attendance exceeded 10,000 and Halifax ran successfully for 21 years.



With the Halifax Dukes in 1969

**Tell us about the mysterious 'Igor Baranov'**

Igor Baranov (John Jones), a Scot, was his own publicist. He invented the name and his immediate past. Did he really 'jump ship from a fishing trawler' off Scotland? He did it all to get second half rides wherever he could. It was good, harmless publicity and made a good press talking point, with this 'Russian' having trials in the second half of the programme. He played the part well, never speaking, only some gobby-gook to his girl friend who was his 'interpreter'. He would arrive at a speedway in a black 1950's Austin Sheerline with his copper and chrome

racing machine strapped on the back. He never made the grade and turned his skills to the wrestling arenas of Britain and the continent. Of course, it was many years later that I learned the truth as described above.

### **Former Middlesbrough team manager Henry Atkinson speaks fondly of his time you were in charge at Cleveland Park?**

Henry Atkinson - a reliable and tireless worker for speedway. I appreciated his loyalty as I did that of Nigel Furniss who looked after the speedway office and indeed all the staff who worked at Middlesbrough Speedway at that time.

### **Why did you only do three meetings at Middlesbrough on 'open licence' in 1965?**

The public just didn't turn up and that's why I pulled the plug. Eric Boothroyd who was my Captain at Halifax applied for a Promoter's Licence at Middlesbrough, I believe the following year and after a few meetings, he too pulled the plug.

### **How did Allied Presentations come about?**

Allied Presentations Ltd was a company formed in the winter 1967/68 after the British League promoters discussed starting a second division to breed British talent. APL directors were myself, who promoted at Halifax and Long Eaton in the BL, Danny Dunton who had Oxford BL, Len Silver at Hackney BL, Ron Wilson co-promoter with me at Long Eaton BL and Maury Littlechild Kings Lynn BL, a big company that we thought could shoulder any losses (and we did).

For the 1968 season, we opened Teesside, Rayleigh, a new venue, an old greyhound stadium at Reading which had a former stock car track inside the greyhound track, we built Crewe at the cricket ground and Peterborough at the East of England Showground, two new venues that opened in 1969? We re-opened Sunderland at one stage and burnt our fingers. When Rayleigh was sold by the owners for development, we transferred the riders and licence to Rye House.

Maury Littlechild died in 1974, Ron Wilson a few years ago. Len Silver who left speedway for many years to concentrate on his ski business in France recently returned and bought the whole of Rye House Stadium and once again promotes speedway. Danny Dunton, like me, has been out of speedway since about 1986.

### **How did the formation of the Provincial League begin and what was the issue regarding blacklisting?**

The Provincial League was formed in the winter of 1959/60. Mike Parker had run some pirate meetings at Liverpool and Trevor Redmond set one up at Cradley Heath in the summer of 1959. Interest was aroused by many people and a meeting was called in Manchester for like-minded people. A number of former riders and promoters met and the Provincial League was formed under the rules of the Speedway Control Board and Auto Cycle Union.

Blacklisting was threatened and activated by the SCB and ACU in March 1964 when in the winter of 1963/64 the SCB wanted to elevate Wolverhampton and one other track, never named, to the National League which only had six teams. The Provincial League objected and went black for that season 1964, racing under their own rules and arbitrator, appointing their own officials, referees, etc. An enquiry was held that year set up by the Royal Automobile Club and chaired by Lord Shawcross who decided that, in truth, speedway racing was a business, and that in short the SCB was out of order. He recommended and it happened that the SCB be re-formed with a new Secretary/Manager and a new Chairman from the RAC who was Nelson Mills-Baldwin. During the winter of 1964/65, meetings were held between the promoters of the two leagues and the SCB out of which the British League was formed with 18 teams for the 1965 season. With this reorganisation and the forming of the British Speedway Promoters Association, speedway racing had a more effective and efficient structure in place than at any other time in the past.



The first meeting of the BSPA in 1965

### **If you could turn the clock back would you still be involved with the sport?**

Yes, I would do it all over again. I started racing speedway at 15 years of age in 1948 and started promoting in 1960. Speedway has been my whole working life and I have been fortunate in doing something (although extremely

## INTERVIEW – REG FEARMAN

stressful) most enjoyable and always looking forward to tomorrow's challenge. I am still involved with speedway through the Veteran Speedway Riders' Association of which we have about 600 members and there are similar Associations in Australia and New Zealand. I am in touch all the time with riders I raced with or who raced for me. It is a wonderful speedway world.

### **We had an e-mail from a gentleman called Frank Saunders who recollects you riding for Liverpool in 1951?**

Liverpool - yes, I remember racing there, not in 1951 as Frank Saunders says but I am sure in 1952 when I was on loan from West Ham to Stoke and doing my National Service in the Royal Artillery at Rhyl, North Wales. Gordon Parkins, Liverpool Manager, wanted me to go on loan from West Ham in 1952 but Liverpool was the same size and shape as West Ham, 440 yards, and I thought Stoke's small track would be a better learning curve for me at the time.



Reg the Rider – West Ham 1949

### **What happened to Allied Presentations?**

Allied Presentation Ltd Directors went their separate ways amicably in June/July 1974, each Director taking with him the track he was responsible for running, in the case of Middlesbrough it was Ron Wilson. APL is still the promoting company at Reading.

### **If you were a promoter now how would you operate?**

Historically speedway has declined over a period of time at most venues. Only some impetus in some cases has brought the crowd back. The most successful common cause for a track's revival has been for a track/stadium lying fallow for several years.

It costs the same amount of money, time and effort to put on an event for 1,000 people as it does for 10,000 and to have just the 1,000 spectators can be soul destroying. I think a point to take on board is that in the 1930's, 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's, the promoters in the majority were those who had to make it pay without sponsorship. In the past 15 years or so, promoters have come in as 'supporters' who have a major outside business interest to support their love of speedway. Me, I couldn't go out on to centre stage to entertain a speedway crowd of today's accepted attendances in most cases of 500/600/700 people and even some Elite League teams are only playing to between 1,000/2,500 people. Not even at £8 and £10 per head admission fees could I be tempted. I understand that at the World Team Cup Final at Peterborough it cost £20 to stand on the Terrace. As an option, I would prefer to have twice as many people paying half the price.

### **Former Middlesbrough promoter Ron Wilson worked for you at Leicester?**

He was an ex-rider of the late 40's/50's who went in to the motor trade in Leicester when he retired from racing. I took him in to Long Eaton (I opened in 1963) about 1965 as a co-Promoter. Another example of transferring a team and licence - Long Eaton 1963-67 struggled for attendance figures. Built up from 2,500 to 3,300 or so, we transferred it to Leicester in the British League (the same Leicester that failed in 1962 in the PL) in 1968 and opened it with over 8,000 people. It is a great thrill to promote meetings to a large crowd but most disheartening when people don't turn out - I guess it's like the theatre, a great atmosphere with a full house but dead when only a quarter full. Leicester ran continuously until it was sold by the owners for housing development in I believe 1982?



# NOT BENNETT?... NOT BENNETT?.. IT'S BENNETT!!!

## CAMPAIGN FOR CARDIFF 2006?

Well, what a difference a year makes eh? About this time in 2004 I had just finished a very short stint on the 'presenter comeback trail at Kings Lynn and, although I had enjoyed the experience, there was no plan to extend the guest appearances to the 2005 season.

Fast Forward to October 2005 and there's a thread on the National Speedway Forum dedicated to "Votes for Bennett to present at Cardiff in 2006". Just in case you missed it by the way, it's on the general speedway page under the thread "taking the mic!!" Add to that, the scrolling banners on the brilliant unofficial Kings Lynn site that read "Bennett for Cardiff" and all of a sudden, MB is back!

An earlier interview on this superb website gave all the reasons why my love affair with this fine sport ended, suffice to say I had no intentions of standing on the centre green ever again but that's life I guess? Never say never!

What's made the difference this time round I hear you ask? (O.K. I didn't hear you ask but I'm going to tell you anyway....) Three elements really, firstly there is no pressure at Kings Lynn from Buster and the management. They just let me get on with it and that suits me just fine. If Keith wants me to stir things up a bit, I only need to point the mic in his direction and we're off!

Secondly, this team are just the best bunch of riders to work with. Tom Topinka has a wicked sense of humour and is a joy to interview. We now compete for the biggest conversation stopper of the night – and he usually wins. Having said that, my better half Tracey did silence him completely by grabbing his bum in the pits one night at the end of a meeting. He did still have his leathers on at the time or I may not have been so understanding about that move by TJ!

The other lads are just great to interview although English is a second language to a few of them, (and that's just the Aussies!) we always manage to chat to most of them during the evening.

Finally, corny as it sounds, it really is down to the fans. They have welcomed me back with open arms and we really have had the Norfolk Arena buzzing this year. The noise from the air horns is deafening (Sorry Berwick fans!) and we have generated a really fantastic atmosphere.



Tomas Topinka

We have regular speedway chats on my Saturday morning radio show on North Norfolk Radio (96.2 FM or [www.northernorfolkradio.com](http://www.northernorfolkradio.com)) with Keith Chapman and the reaction from the listeners is brilliant. We held a speedway special earlier in the season and had more emails and text messages for that than any other show on the station so far. Only presenting at one track helps too as I live just under an hour away from Kings Lynn so traveling is no longer an issue.

So, would I be up for Cardiff? You bet! It would be an honour to represent Kings Lynn and indeed the Premier League. In a career that started way back in 1986 I have been involved in every big event you could imagine either as a presenter, interviewer or cameraman including British, Commonwealth and Overseas Finals, the 1991 World Final and countless domestic and International meetings. The only meeting I have not been involved in is a Grand Prix and, boy,

would I relish the chance. What would I bring to the party that hasn't been done before? If I tell you that then they'll all have a go but, suffice to say, we would have the joint rocking even more than it did this year.

I thought that Kevin in the box this year was one of the best announcers I have ever heard but I would be happier on the centre and hovering around the pits bringing the gossip to the fans. For me, that's what was missing this year. I know that live mid meeting interviews with the riders are a no no during the Grand Prix but there is so much going on that the public don't see. There are gaps after heats 4,8,12,16 and 20 so where's the harm in having a word with riders who are watching from the pits?

I also felt that there needed to be more interaction with the fans – and that's where I reckon I could do a decent job! The reality is however, that the powers that be don't even know I'm out there and despite my best efforts to date, that elusive telephone call or email has yet to materialize so I don't hold out too much hope. Maybe a bit of people power might help? I guess that's the advantage of the internet but rest assured, I'll be ready if that call ever comes but in the meantime, It's business as usual at the Norfolk Arena!

### **THANKS FOR THE MEMORY.....**

When Berwick came to Kings Lynn for the KO Cup Semi Final, I mentioned in the programme the old end of season races that I used to take part in during the mid 80s and early 90s. The first time I ever rode in front of a crowd was at Wimbledon in 1986 on the final night of the season. Bearing in mind the last time I had even sat on a speedway bike was at a Hackney training school in 1975 (with a certain Norrie Allan also taking part!) where my day ended in the back of an ambulance and me saying to the ambulance man – yes, my (broken) wrist does bloody hurt when you squeeze it! Actually, the wrist didn't hurt as much as the tetanus jab but that's another story...

Anyway Ian Hunter, a young lad who was sadly killed at Iwade a season or so later, lent me a bike and after stalling a couple of times on the way round to the tapes, I finally made it to the start line to meet my oppo. They didn't tell me who it was but he looked very confident and had a very smart looking bike. I had two priorities that night... one was to stay on for the four laps and the other was to finish before the 10pm curfew. As the race started at 9.31 it was always going to be touch and go!

We both dug for potatoes at the starting gate, I looked for the green light (it matched the colour of my face by this time!) and once the magnets

moved, I dropped the clutch and went hurtling towards the first bend at around..... 15 miles per hour. All I saw of the other rider was a back wheel for about two laps and then nothing again until we were back in the pits. I think the lap of honour was faster than the race itself but I was just relieved to have stayed on the bike and it was a great thrill to have had four laps round Plough Lane. Both of the fans who stayed to watch clapped as we left the track and I went up to say "Well done mate" to my opponent who proceeded to remove the crash helmet to reveal a smile that only a girl could wear!!

Yep, Bennett was tanked out of site by a young lady called Lisa Berry and that was the start of a run of novelty races that included rides at Long Eaton, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, Kings Lynn and even Berwick to race my old sparring partner Dick Barrie. One night we wobbled round the Groveway in Milton Keynes and they gave the time out in calendar months!



The Groveway – Milton Keynes

My favourite memory was being invited up to Berwick at the end of the 1988 or 89 season (They paid me 50 quid for travel too!) and after a double header with Rye House and Middlesbrough we were on.

A bit of gardening at the gate, a big play about looking for the green light, find the magnet at the gate and we were off. For 3 laps (and about 20 minutes) I was in front only to see Mr Barrie cut straight across the centre green and almost take my front wheel away. The trouble is, he grabbed such a handful of throttle that he completely misjudged the next turn and missed the corner completely! I guess I won that night then?

Sadly, we had to call it a day for these races when Warwick Mead (Warwick the wonderboy who used to film for me in the MBI Video days) had a horrendous spill at Wolverhampton one night. He broke his arm and his wrist and was off work for months. He didn't mention the fact he had never ridden a motorcycle of ANY description before that night!!!



Funny thing is, it never affected his filming – or at least, we could never tell the difference!

Another great day was during a big daytime event at Kings Lynn in 1988. Lining up at the gate alongside a chap from Hackney called Dave Whitta, someone else (I forget his name – sorry!) and world famous photographer Mike Patrick who was wearing his trademark checked trousers. It was a little confusing however to see another pair of checked trousers on the centre green and the one on the track looking pretty determined for a photographer....

After the usual mucking about at the start, including Bernard Crapper holding on to my bike so the back wheel was just off the ground, we headed up towards the first turn. I thought my luck was in that day as I saw nothing in front of me until..... WHOOSH! Patrick with the front wheel up in the air, heading down the back straight at 70 miles an hour.

By now the only one in the stadium who didn't know it wasn't really Mike Patrick was me. The actual culprit was none other than the World Champion at the time, Hans Nielsen who had cooked up the whole thing at Oxford with Mike the week before. The crowd loved it and I am proud to say that I beat the Great Dane out of the gate at Kings Lynn – even if he did let me!



The Main Dane

I met Mike at Kings Lynn this year and he remembered the day well. Trust me, it's one day I'll never forget!

## VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR?

Not quite, but in the Hey Day of MBI Video, we were filming six or seven meetings every week. Everywhere from Wimbledon to Newcastle, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Rye House, Kings Lynn, Wolverhampton, Sheffield, Bradford.... The list goes on.

In those days, long before the computer editing age, we used to film the meeting, do the interviews live but put the commentary on after the edit was finished. Effectively meaning that some weeks I was actually watching 12 or 14 meetings. No wonder I got fed up with it!

We had some great helpers though including Ian Holmes who was our first cameraman, Warwick (The wonderboy) Mead, Andy and Steve Taylor, Stuart Sargeant, Mike (Moses) Mosely, Keith Charlton, Kevin Goodacre (Goodybags) and my old Mate Ken Burnett who still turns out a fine product these days at the Isle of Wight and several other tracks. If I've forgotten anyone, I'm truly sorry but two things go when you pass 40. The first thing is the memory and ..... I've forgotten the second.

We are constantly asked about meetings we have filmed over the years and the plan is to release the old "anything can happen on the night" series on DVDs along with The 1991 World Final from Bradford, The Sam Ermolenko Championship story, the best of Gary Havelock the year he won his world crown and a few others before the end of this year.

We now have a speedway page on our corporate website [www.mbicmedia.com/Speedway.htm](http://www.mbicmedia.com/Speedway.htm) and the list of available DVDs will be on there along with some interviews that have been broadcast on North Norfolk Radio during the past year.

I just wish that the technology we use now had been available back then as we really could have produced some great videos but that's progress for you.

It's still good to see the likes of Hans Nielsen, Erik Gundersen, Per Jonsson, Bobby Ott, The Moran Brothers, Rick Miller, Lance King, John Davis and Marvyn Cox to name but a few. If nothing else, it's worth checking out the "Anything" series just to ask the question.....

*What was that hair style all about?????*

Catch you next time!

*Mike Bennett*

## **NON-ESSENTIAL GUIDE: THE WORKINGTON TIGERS**

All you'll ever need to know about one of speedway's most farcical episodes, when the Tigers of Glasgow decamped 130 miles down the M74!

**Tigers? I thought that Workington had always been called the Comets?**  
They pretty much have, but during the 1987 season the Workington Tigers were members of the National League – although the circumstances were unusual to say the least.

### **Unusual?**

Glasgow Tigers raced at Craighead Park in Blantyre from 1982 until 1986 but were evicted at the end of that season. The circuit, once described as "the worst venue to ever stage professional speedway", was built around a tiny football pitch that seemed to gradually encroach onto the track over the years – by 1986 the track was almost rectangular. The arguments between the football club and the speedway club over this issue led to a falling out and the Tigers were kicked out.

### **I thought we were talking about Workington, why do you keep mentioning Glasgow?**

I'm getting to that! After the eviction the Tigers needed to find a new venue and concentrated their efforts on Rosberry Park in Glasgow. It was another small football ground and appeared in many ways to be an ideal venue for the sport. Unfortunately the planning application was rejected as no provision had been made for car parking. This left the Tigers in something of a spot and without a home. The local authorities approached the other local venues that had staged the sport in the past (Coatbridge, Paisley and Hampden) and the response was unanimous – "We don't touch speedway with a bargepole!". With no local alternative available the Tigers promotion had to cast the net wider and looked around the country for a new home. They identified Workington's Derwent Park as their only option, despite it being 130 miles from Glasgow, and swiftly concluded a deal with Workington Rugby League Club to become their new tenants. The intention being to stay for a few weeks until the planning application for Roseberry Park was approved.

### **Wasn't there already a speedway team using the stadium at Workington?**

No, the last action had been in 1985 when Dave Younghusband staged a season of open licence meetings. Prior to that the track had last been used in 1981. Despite 18 months of inactivity the track wasn't in too bad a shape and a few working parties – mainly consisting of people travelling down from Glasgow – managed to get

the track back into a raceable condition. Temporary lighting was also installed on the bends, although this proved to be inadequate when it was actually used in anger.

### **So the Workington Tigers were born?**

Not initially. For the first few months of the season the team was officially still the Glasgow Tigers. However in all promotion in the Workington area they were simply labelled the 'Kishorn Windows Tigers' – neither Glasgow or Workington was actually mentioned. As the year progressed the prospects of a return to Glasgow diminished, the crowds dropped off and it was felt that the Workington fans were unable to identify with the team. As a result the club was renamed the Workington Tigers and the colours were changed from red and white to blue and white.



Kishorn Windows Tigers 1987

### **What kind of crowds did they race in front of?**

The first meeting staged attracted a crowd of over 1000. This included quite a number of fans who travelled down from Glasgow on subsidised coaches. The meeting the following week was cancelled due to a pre-booked motor show and when the action resumed a week later the crowd had fallen away. The coaches from Glasgow continued to travel but often arrived late due to roadworks on the M74. As some of the riders also travelled on the coach this wasn't an ideal situation!

### **How did the team fare on the track?**

Badly. The team simply wasn't strong enough to compete and even home wins proved few and far between. The side was led by Steve Lawson and also included Bobby Beaton, Gordon Whitaker, Martin McKinna, Derek Cooper, Geoff

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Powell and Jacko Irving. Beaton was by now at the veteran stage and a back injury forced him onto the sidelines after a few meetings and effectively ended his career. Whitaker was one of the few bright spots in a disastrous campaign and proved to be virtually unbeatable around Derwent Park. In subsequent seasons he suffered from a recurring shoulder injury and never recaptured this 1987 form. Interestingly the side featured three men who lived in the Workington area in Lawson, Powell and Irving. Lawson had actually joined Glasgow from Workington ten years previously and 1987 was supposed to be his testimonial year.



Stevie Lawson

### So where did they finish in the league?

They didn't finish the campaign at all. The team were falling behind in their home fixtures and the BSPA became frustrated at the numerous problems surrounding the club. They took decisive action in September and expelled the club from the league with all their results being expunged from official records.

### Wasn't that a little bit harsh of the BSPA?

Not really, the club was in a mess. The promotion were based 130 miles away from the circuit so everything had to be done on raceday, this led to a poor racing circuit and the fixture list was all over the place. At the time of expulsion the fixture list showed scheduled home meetings at weird and wonderful times – 5.00pm on a Saturday and 12.00pm on Sunday being examples. This was principally because the ineffective lighting made it essential to stage racing in daylight. Some other unfortunate incidents didn't help the promotion either.

### What kind of unfortunate incidents?

A meeting against Peterborough was called off because of dust! There was no water cart at the stadium on that hot summer's night and the clouds of dust made it impossible for the spectators, referee or the riders to see what was going on. On another occasion there was a water cart available but it hadn't been cleaned

out since spreading slurry on a nearby field. When the circuit was watered it left an unmistakable stench around the stadium and Steve Lawson, who ironically hardly ever hit the deck in his long career, chose that afternoon to slide off the bike. He was guaranteed plenty of elbow room in the pits on his return!

### Is there a happy ending to this story?

Yes and no. Glasgow reopened the following spring at the magnificent Shawfield Stadium in their home city. They raced in front of large crowds – nearly 8000 attended the opener – and Steve Lawson enjoyed a bumper pay day when his testimonial was eventually staged. Things weren't so good in Workington where the reputation of the sport had been badly damaged by the shambolic season that had unfolded. Speedway didn't return to the town until 1999.

*Thanks to Dave Payne for the photographs used in this feature. Check out Dave's work at <http://www.dave-payne.co.uk>*

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

Glasgow are far from being the only team to move away from their traditional heartland. Here's a quick summary of some of the other clubs that have been forced onto the road.

### Berwick Nomads

Berwick Bandits endured a nomadic season in 1981 after leaving Shielfield Park. They started the year at Park Road in Barrow but crowds were poor and they moved on to Blantyre Greyhound Stadium, home of the Glasgow Tigers. Glasgow raced their home meetings on Friday nights and Berwick raced theirs the following evening. It seemed to work quite well but Mike Parker, promoting at Edinburgh at that time, complained on grounds that remain unclear even now and Berwick were blocked from continuing their tenancy. They withdrew from the league but remained in the cup and actually reached the final against Edinburgh of all teams. The Bandits staged their leg of the cup final at Brough Park in Newcastle. The Bandits moved into a new home at Berrington

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Lough in 1982 and eventually returned to Shielfield Park in 1996.

### Cradley & Stoke Heathens

Cradley Heathens lost their Dudley Wood home at the end of the 1995 season, the land was sold to Barratt Homes as a brownfield development site. The Heathens switched their operation to Loomer Road in Stoke in 1996 and operated as the 'Cradley and Stoke Heathens'. Despite the twin spearhead of Hancock and Hamill the locals didn't turn out in huge numbers, probably because they knew it wasn't really 'their' team. A good number of Cradley fans made the near 100 mile return journey each week to keep the club going. A second year at Stoke was never going to make financial sense and when it became clear that Dudley Wood was gone the club folded. A team labelled 'Club Cradley Heath' later raced some challenge matches at Conference League tracks.

### The Scottish Monarchs

Scottish speedway was in something of a crisis at the start of 1996. Glasgow had closed down, leaving a trail of debt behind them and Edinburgh had been kicked out of Powderhall. Edinburgh were hopeful of moving into Armadale Greyhound Stadium but their planning application was blocked late in the day. This left their promotion with little option but to move the team to the now empty Shawfield Stadium in Glasgow. The team was renamed the Scottish Monarchs and some red and white was incorporated into the racejackets in the hope that Glasgow based punters would back the side. Crowds were poor throughout the year, not helped by a hastily arranged fixture list that lacked consistency. The promotion later admitted they should simply have shut up shop for a year. Edinburgh moved to Armadale in 1997, after a change of personnel at the local council, meanwhile Glasgow Tigers were reborn at Shawfield.

### Boston at King's Lynn

The name Boston has appeared on the league tables in the last few years but speedway has not been staged in the Lincolnshire town since 1987. The Barracuda-Braves have ridden in exile at King's Lynn while the search for a new home has continued. That situation seems set to continue for the foreseeable future.

### Roaming Rockets

A consortium of Rye House fans decided to bring back their favourite club in time for the 1999 season. The Rockets had last been in action in 1992 and their former track had long since been covered in tarmac for the benefit of stockcars. The team lined up in the Conference League and staged their home meetings at Mildenhall and Eastbourne, often as the second part of a double header. The long term objective was to return the team to Rye House stadium - although there didn't seem to be a plan as to how that would be achieved. They received a major boost when Len Silver, a former promoter of the Rockets, took an interest and began to play a part behind the scenes. He managed to negotiate a return to their former home on the proviso that the track was built each week on top of the tarmac circuit! This happened throughout the 2000 season, the track was raceable but it was a back-breaking effort to lay it each week. Silver took decisive action, bought the stadium and laid a proper track. The Rockets are now the Premier League champions and Silver operates in the role of a traditional promoter - from small acorns and all that!

### The Bears are Back

Die-hard Middlesbrough fan Steve Harland revived the Bears in 2003 and has spent the last three seasons organising junior challenge matches for his side. All of these have been away from home, initially mainly at Hull but now more commonly at Newcastle. The Bears may return home in 2006 if plans for a new track come to fruition.



Middlesbrough Bears 2005



## ***I'M HERE TO HELP!***

**Dave Green** suggests we're not paying enough attention to first-time visitors and comes up with a low-cost scheme that could lead to lasting benefits.

One of speedway's perennial conundrums is how to attract more people through the turnstiles. Clubs frequently launch marketing drives that involve the distribution of leaflets in shopping centres, visits to local schools and appearances at local fetes and shows. All of these are worthwhile and cost-effective exercises and I do believe they attract new people to speedway meetings. However, attracting them to a single meeting is the easy bit, getting them to return is where the problem lies.

Over the last few years I've spoken to a number of people who were attending their first meeting - at least twenty. In most cases they engaged me in conversation and asked a question about the rules or the general goings on. Surprisingly often, particularly if they're accompanied by youngsters, they ask about a particular rider - often not one of the star names. Some gentle probing reveals that they've already met said rider at a promotional event and have come to see that individual ride. These people often have no idea that they're watching a team event, that the home team are wearing red and blue helmets and that points are awarded in each race that build to a cumulative total.

That's where our problem lies, if people can't put the racing into context then they're simply watching motorbikes go round in circles. When you've seen that once there's little incentive to return the following week.

So how do we help contextualise the racing for newcomers? The matchday programme often includes some insight into the rules, but not everybody buys a programme, particularly newcomers who've already spent a large sum of money on gaining entry to something they know little about. I've also heard meeting presenters recite a brief outline of what's going on and that must help, although I still feel it's insufficient.

My own recommendation would be for clubs to appoint an 'ambassador' who would mix with the crowd and speak to the spectators. The person could wear distinctive clothing - perhaps a bright blazer or a luminous jacket - and be introduced to the crowd during the parade, making it clear that this person's sole remit is to ensure that everyone understands what's going on and enjoys themselves. Some light-hearted 'banter'

between the ambassador and the meeting presenter would help establish his or her credentials as an approachable character.

During the meeting the ambassador would mingle with the crowd, fielding any questions asked of them and approaching any unfamiliar faces. Approaching people would be an important part of the job, not everyone will initiate a conversation with a stranger to ask for help, but most will have questions to ask if someone speaks to them.

Finding the right kind of people to fill these ambassadorial roles would be critical. The person selected would have to be approachable, articulate, amusing and have a good knowledge of the sport. They must also be able to judge the correct level of detail to impart, newcomers don't need to know about the points limit or the workings of the bikes, however our ambassador should be able to answer those questions if asked.

The ambassador should also be someone who is willing to take part in the club's promotional events. Wouldn't newcomers feel at home if the person who spoke to them in the shopping centre was also able to guide them through their first meeting?

I won't pretend that appointing ambassadors will immediately lead to significant increases in attendances. The main benefit is that newcomers will be more appreciative of what they're watching, will feel welcome and are more likely to enjoy their trip to the track. If you enjoy something then you're more likely to do it again!

One neat suggestion I saw elsewhere was to provide all fans with a free 'Frequently Asked Questions' card as they passed through the turnstiles. That strikes me as being a brilliantly simple idea that could be implemented without any serious financial cost.

And how about a big scoreboard that shows the progressive scores as the meeting progresses? It needn't be electronic or cost a lot of money - a few pieces of painted chipboard would suffice.

## ***ARENA ESSEX - PURFLEET RACEWAY***

**Richard Hollingsworth** shares his pictures of a circuit that has just staged its 22<sup>nd</sup> consecutive season of speedway racing.



# PROMOTING IN SHELBOURNE

**Stuart Cosgrave** is one of the few that can claim to have promoted speedway on the emerald isle.

At the age of 11 I was bitten by the speedway bug having being brought to a meeting in Santry, Dublin. A year later, in 1950, Shelbourne Speedway opened in Dublin. Promoted by Ronnie Greene he basically ran his Wimbledon Dons team every Sunday afternoon at 3.30pm as the Shelbourne Tigers.

The team included Ronnie Moore and father Les, Cyril Brine and the late Ernie Roccio amongst others. A couple of years later they were replaced by an all American team captained by Nick Nicholades.

Trevor Redmond also promoted speedway at Chapelizod (The Eagles) on Wednesday nights with Freddie and Eric Williams and Split Waterman on the team, all these meetings at both venues were open challenge matches. Unfortunately, attendances dipped and speedway was lost to Dublin, however I kept up my interest by attending the World final at Wembley over many years, and I get to at least six meetings a year in the UK and two or three grand prix rounds each year.

In 1970 I was approached by some novice riders who had ridden in second half races, formed a "Speedway Club" and, with some grasstrack riders, wanted to revive speedway in Dublin. Because I was a director of Ireland's only motor racing track and my interest in speedway was known I was approached to be backer/promoter. Having negotiated a 10 meeting deal with Shelbourne Park, I got contractors in to find the track! It had been grassed over. I got Mike Broadbanks of Swindon over to oversee the track preparation and arranged challenge matches with the Swindon junior team through Mike and Martin Ashby and with the Sheffield juniors through Ian Thomas and Graham Drury. It would be so easy and enjoyable, or so I thought!

The riders and bikes were collected from the Ferry at DunLaoghaire by lorry and brought to Shelbourne, the late arrival of the ferry for the first meeting meant the riders only arrived at the track some twenty minutes before the start time. The Shelbourne team consisted of 8 riders who had been practising on the strand at Dollymount but had never ridden on a speedway track! It became evident after heat one when the Irish captain landed on his back at the tapes when his bike reared that we were not up to the

job, especially as the junior riders from Swindon looked to be a cross between Tony Rickardson and Jason Crump! After race one we were 5 -1 down!



Mike Broadbanks



Martin Ashby

Something drastic was called for, we had over 4,500 spectators looking for a home win and we faced a hammering. I called the English riders together and explained that for speedway to succeed we needed close racing, and I agreed to pay all of them points for a win regardless of where they finished and asked them to pass and re-pass in order to make it look exciting!

This worked quite well for a few races with a few 3-3 and 4-2 results until the scores were virtually level, however in about heat 8, both of the Shelbourne riders fell, and everytime the Swindon riders passed me on the centre green they were looking at me for guidance - I think they were prepared to fall if I wanted them to!

After the first meeting I met with the Shelbourne team and suggested that we get some guest riders from the UK to strengthen the team and feed in the Irish riders as they improved, they flatly refused on the basis of their good showing in the first meeting, obviously I had not told them of my little arrangement!

It became uneconomical to run and the speedway club became like a union demanding to pick the team and, as a result of their poor displays, attendances dropped and I stepped down. I handed the promotion over to the club who obtained a new backer but this only lasted a few meetings and I went back to enjoying speedway as a spectator!



## ***THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE***

**Chris Seaward** detects something of a changing of the guard in Poland. Has the 'Dark Dog' had his day and who's next in line to replace him?

Tomasz Gollob has been an integral and highly entertaining element of the Grand Prix series since its humble beginnings back in 1995. He has enjoyed top spot on the rostrum nine times and raced in twenty four different venues around the world since the introduction of the GP format.

It only seems like yesterday he felt the force of Craig Boyce's left fist at the Hackney stadium after controversially dumping the Aussie in the fence on that sodden Saturday night.

Fast forward ten years and his influence on world championship speedway is beginning to slowly but surely loosen. His once trademark bad boy image has been overshadowed and partially forgotten since Nicki Pedersen stormed on to the scene and took hard riding to a whole new level.

Most disappointing from a spectators perspective is that Gollob's rear wheel, which has in the past so regularly graced the widest racing line available, nowadays seems content with just the occasional visit to the darker shale and no longer holds such a close and comfortable relationship with the fence.

The thirty four year old seems to have lost all identity amongst the Grand Prix circuit and has subsequently become one of the series less talked about characters.

Gollob, like so many other riders, can comprehensively beat the worlds best on his day. Yet it seems that the Pole easily becomes disheartened if he finds himself at the back during a race. On numerous occasions I have watched in confusion as the Pole seemingly loses interest and languishes at the rear. He seems to doubt his own ability especially on temporary circuits and furthermore never appears content with his machinery. During a race in the Slovenian GP he rode a GM engine when he is a Jawa works rider, who knows what the Jawa factory thought of that!

Looking at the wider picture, for world speedway to continue its progression it requires a contingent of successful Polish riders amongst the Grand prix series.

The rounds held at Wroclaw and Bydgoszcz, whilst not providing the most glamour in comparison to swanky venues like Cardiff or Copenhagen, still play a crucial role in providing the foundation and backbone of the series. Benfield sports are able fill these venues to capacity with relative ease chiefly because the passionate Polish fans attend with high expectations of success from their riders. Gollob is a sporting legend, a national hero, and a symbol of success to the Poles. It is therefore a concern that his ten year love affair with the GP series may be reaching its natural conclusion.

However this concern looks like being eradicated by twenty three year old Jarek Hampel, who seems to be spearheading an exciting new era of Polish speedway. Mix in names like Kasparzak, Miskowiak, Hilb, Rempala and the future of world speedway could be turning red and white in the not too distant future.

If any nation deserves a world champion then it is Poland. They have been waiting patiently for over thirty years since Jerzy Szczakiel gained number one status at Katowice in 1973 and have patiently watched Gollob come close on many occasions.

Hampel is fast, determined, brave and a quick gater. Hopefully a few injury free campaigns will allow Jarek to demonstrate his true potential and provide the Polish fans with just reward for their tremendous support. It is always a pleasure to see them at Cardiff and anyone who has attended a Polish GP knows how passionate they are about speedway.

And finally, in 2004 Gollob was sponsored by an energy drink named 'Dark Dog'. For me this captured the Pole's persona wonderfully and could quite easily be the phrase that summarises his GP career. Hopefully the 'Dark Dog' hangs in that top eight for a few more years to come.



## ***BELLE VUE – HYDE ROAD***

Has there ever been a better speedway circuit in the world than Belle Vue's Hyde Road? This 'theatre of dreams' was demolished in 1987.

**Kathy Hitchen** captured these photographs shortly before it was.

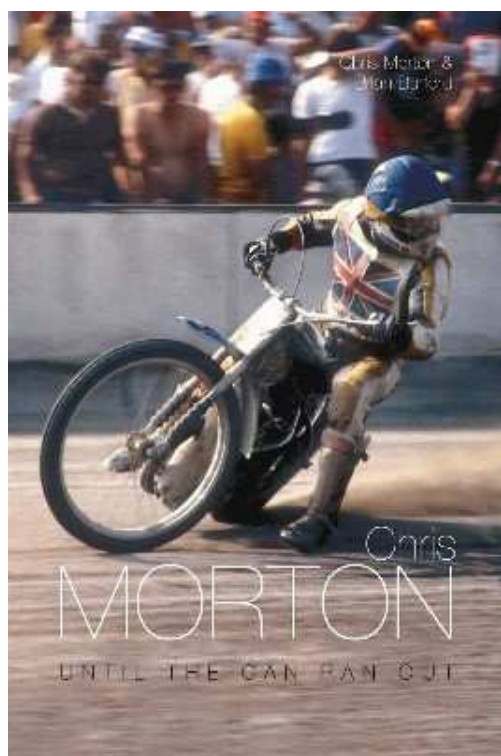


### ***WANT TO SEE MORE?***

Further pictures of Hyde Road and of over 80 other tracks can be found in the 'Stadia Pix' section of the website at [www.speedwayplus.co.uk](http://www.speedwayplus.co.uk)

**Chris Morton** was, in his own words, a rough-arsed lad from Partington, but he went on to win gold in the World Pairs and be awarded the M.B.E by the queen. The following is an extract from his new autobiography.

I came back from Australia in late January 1975; the Australian experience had lived up to all my expectations. I went over there as a young 18 year old lad, still wet behind the ears, and it turned out to be an incredibly valuable three months of learning about racing, preparing machines and life. When you are part of a touring team you see how other people set up their equipment and you learn new ideas. After all, at 18, you really know bugger all in the great scheme of things. That type of tour, or any experience that makes you look closely at yourself over a few months, does help you to grow up. Any self-respecting 18 year old thinks he knows it all; well the Aussie trip checked that pretence! I knew I had learned a bit more about many things, but most importantly I knew I had a lot more to learn. Therefore, I was keen to get on with the new UK season.



My equipment for the new season had not yet been finalised, I had completed all my 1974 racing on the short stroke JAP's. Although they had given me some credible success, their reliability was in question. I was getting advised by a number of people to move over to Jawas. I had competed in Australia on a Jawa and I was

starting to think this way myself, but Jim Rawlinson still had great enthusiasm for the JAP. I was willing to start the season with them and see if their reliability had been improved. However a rather heart-rending set of occurrences decided the way I should go.

While I had been away in Australia, Jim had a technical idea he wanted to try out. He acquired a blank cylinder head casting for a short stroke JAP in order to create a special cylinder head with the valve angle in a more upright position. The engineering work on this head also had innovative ideas applied to it: most engines are production models that only allow you to modify what has already been done, but this was a blank canvas and Jim was able to form this cylinder head into something special. While I was increasing my knowledge Down Under, Jim was spending all his available time building this prototype engine that he had high hopes for.

On my return to the UK I went along to see Jim and tell him of my experiences over the past few months. During my visit he unveiled his pride and joy: a brand spanking new short stroke JAP with his special priceless cylinder head. It was arranged that I was to give it a run out at the Belle Vue Training School.

I was excited about testing this brand new engine with this unique cylinder head and special angled valves. It also had an improved con rod to overcome the devastation caused by them breaking - weak con rods were the JAP's Achilles heel. It felt good as I warmed the machine up in the pits, and I was told to take it easy for a few laps. I managed to avoid the temptation of seeing what it could do during its first run and did what I was told: 'take it easy, just run the engine in.' It felt great - definitely something special. Next time out I would put it through its paces; and that was what I did. I was part way through the second four lap test when it happened. For anyone with an ear for a sweet sounding engine, the noise that an engine makes when the con rod breaks is like a kick in the head, it sounds and feels really painful. It's like a sound effect from a science fiction movie, metal against metal, steel on steel, it's an engineers' and mechanics' nightmare.

When a con rod breaks the flywheels are doing about eight thousand revs per minute, generating about 45 plus break horse power. The con rod that connects the piston to the flywheels, while they are happily joined

together, the flywheels go round and the piston goes up and down in the barrel and the valves on the cylinder head all work how they should...then BANG! The con rod breaks, usually near the top where the piston joins it - the weakest point - in an absolute split second the piston with nothing to stop it goes straight up the barrel and smashes into the top of the cylinder head while the con rod now without the piston to guide it and 45 plus BHP of energy to show off wants to get out - and it usually does!

I was horrified when it blew; it was brand new I could not believe it. I had a sickening feeling in my belly, that was about to get worse. I knew straight away it was the con rod failing again - so much for the new improved type. As I surveyed the damage the devastation was predictable, the con rod had smashed through the front of the barrel smashed the front crank cases then carried on round smashing the back of the crank cases and buried itself in the magneto at the back of the engine. Fairly standard sort of damage, but on further inspection I could see a crack in the cylinder head - the special unique cylinder head. The force of the piston had split the cylinder head right through the inlet and exhaust port. It had taken Jim months to engineer this special head and in split second all his hard work was in ruins. When I took the engine back, Jim was his usual philosophical self, a kind of 'Oh! Another one gone,' until I pointed out the damage to the cylinder head, then the blood drained from his face. His disappointment was clearly evident and I had never seen him so deflated. That was really the end of the Short Stroke JAP, that con rod breaking caused far more damage than wrecking one engine. Not long after that, the JAP was out of production and I rode a Jawa during the 1975 British season.

As I embarked on a new season I felt that my experienced gained in Australia had boosted my progress in becoming a more complete International Speedway Rider. My target as a club rider was to achieve an average of over nine points per meeting, which was likely to put me in the top 10-15 British League Riders in the country -which at that time really put you in the top 20 riders in the world. Qualifying for the World Speedway Final at Wembley was also a target, but to be fair I realised I had a bit more to learn for it to be something I could genuinely influence.

Everything that I learnt from my first full season and my trip Down Under I put into practice during '75. Belle Vue had a great team that year, but our local hero Chris Pusey left the Aces and joined the Halifax Flukes, sorry, Dukes. His brother, Geoff, who had doubled-up with the Aces from Stoke, joined us and Russ Hodgson also became a full-time Ace after impressing at Middlesbrough. The departure of Chris 'Polka

Dot' Pusey left a bit of a hole in the team and it was clear to most people that the Belle Vue management expected Wilkie, Paul Tyrer and myself to step up to the mark and support PC and Soren. It was time for us young guns to come of age.

Racing for Belle Vue was really going well, with the Peter Collins and Chris Morton partnership really starting to develop into something formidable. Team riding on the Hyde Road speedway track provided both Peter and myself with some of the most enjoyable and creative racing throughout both of our careers. It was great fun to do and at the risk of sounding conceited, if it looked half as good as it felt, it must have been a great spectacle to watch.

I got off to a good start scoring double figures on a regular basis and in a league match at home to Coventry on June 7, I scored my first full maximum with a 12 pointer as we defeated the Bees, 49-29. I had already scored some paid maximums in 1974, but to go through the card unbeaten really meant that I had, in my eyes, come of age. As it turned out, our next fixture was at Swindon who eventually finished bottom of the table, but we lost 40-38 and I scored 6 points. In the final analysis this surprise defeat probably cost us the championship.



Ray Wilson



Chris Pusey

Another ambition started to bloom in 1975 when I became a regular in the England side, riding with stars that I used to watch at Belle Vue when I was a kid. Riders like Martin Ashby, Ray Wilson, Terry Betts, Malcolm Simmons, and now friend but childhood hero, Chris Pusey. A test series was arranged with Sweden with five matches in the UK and five matches in Sweden. My Brother Dave was also a regular for England, riding at the time for Hackney, and at one point in 1975 topping the British League averages with an average of over 10 points per meeting.

At this point in our careers, Dave had the edge on me, helped by his prolific gating ability, or was it his cheating ability? Probably both. An England team with three rough-arsed lads from Partington still seemed like a dream to us, but it was happening.

This series proved to be a bridge too far for the weakening Swedish Speedway nation who did not have the strength in depth that the England side now possessed. England won the series in England 5-0, and also the matches in Sweden 5-0. That aside, the experience for me was invaluable scoring 11 points for England at Belle Vue, and going over to Sweden to ride in three of the matches over there scoring 3 at Kumla, 6 at Stockholm, with my best score being 7 at Eskilstuna.

Dave also rode in three meetings in Sweden and was second top scorer to Martin Ashby at Vetlanda. Ashby was by this time an old campaigner, and an obvious choice of captain being the steady, straight-laced chap to keep us young whippersnappers in line.

Young enthusiastic sportsmen can be a bit boisterous at times; and an element of practical jokes or pranks, had developed between Peter Collins and Chris Pusey. One of Chris Pusey's favourite tricks when you were in the shower was to take a handful of tooth paste or radium B, the muscle liniment, and slap it on your balls! The effect is quite devastating, and it really is 'Great balls of fire!'

Of course this behaviour was strictly between the younger ends of the team, and looked on with some distain by Martin Ashby. On one occasion after a one of the test matches in Sweden we were all arriving back in the changing rooms in dribs and drabs. At one time there was Peter Collins, Malcolm Simmons, Dave Morton and myself, while PC was on a mission to get back at Chris Pusey for his Radium B antics....

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## **TALL TALES FROM THE SHALE**

### **Seaside Special**

Indoor meetings like the Brighton Bonanza are nothing new. Back in 1957 a four team tournament was staged in the ballroom within Blackpool Tower. 'The Blackpool Seaside Special' saw teams representing Fleetwood, Preston, Leeds and Newcastle race a 16 heat meeting in front of 1200 holidaymakers.

The Blackpool Tourist Board were concerned about damage to their famous dancefloor and insisted on modifications to the tyres of the bike. Six hundred pairs of tap shoes were located and the metal 'taps' removed and glued onto the tyres of the bikes. The floor therefore took no more punishment than it would during a marathon tapping contest.

Top scorer on the night was Wilf Charles who notched a 12 point maximum for the Fleetwood side. Wilf later recalled: "It was a real hard shift as the pits were at the base of the tower, round the back beside the bins. They wouldn't let us use the lift to bring the bikes up so we had to carry them up the stairs for each race. It was tough for the boys who had to do two on the trot - they were knackered by the time they got to the tapes."

### **When in Rome**

Housewife Mary Howard, 54, was astonished when a session of regression therapy revealed she used to be a speedway rider in Roman times. The shock revelation came to light when she paid her weekly visit to local spiritualist Annabel Defreitas.

Mary takes up the story: "I'm a great believer in re-incarnation and have always believed I've had previous lives. Annabel placed me into a relaxed state and I could vividly recall the time I spent as a speedway rider in the era of the Roman empire. Of course things were very different back then, in fact it was barely recognisable as the speedway we know today. For instance we all rode 350cc upright engines, some riders wore white helmet colours and you could use a tactical ride in the knockout cup if you were more than VIII points behind."