



*'In the Pits': They Were Once a Methodist Chapel
Before it was bombed they used to come here to Sunday School. Now New Cross youths who have
established a cycle track on the adjacent bomb-site, use it as a dressing-room.*

DEAD END DIRT-TRACK

Photographed by CHARLES HEWITT

IF you talk to George Jackson, starter and steward of the New Cross Rangers Cycling Club, which races every evening on a bomb-site in South-East London, he'll tell you how it all started. Michael Crawley, William Cleary, Tom Davey, Bernard O'Connell and Eddie Francis were messing about on their bikes here one night when it suddenly struck them that they could make a proper track. They picked up all the half-bricks and empty milk tins that were lying about and arranged them in the outline of an oval track around the edges of the site.

"They started racing around. It was rougher then than it is now. We've cleared it up a lot since we started coming here about three months ago. We wanted it rough, and ground in these parts seemed hard enough to give you a bruise if you fell off, so



*The Smile of a Winner
He's the envy of his club mates because he's
one of those with a real live crash helmet.*



The Line-up for the Evening's First Race: The Moment They've Waited for Since Yesterday at Dark

Last night they raced until they could race no more, because of the bad light. All day they've put up with their jobs as errand-boys and apprentices and mechanics. Now the important part of the day begins. They lean on their handlebars and wait for the whistle.



The Excitement of a Spill on the New Cross Bomb-site Race Track Which Draws the Cyclists and the Crowd Every Night
The other cyclists wait their turn to send up the dust. The passers-by look over the fence and watch for longer than they can afford. Even the policeman turns a kindly eye on the races held on a track made out of the odds and ends the blitz left behind.

we stuck to it. Now we have fifty boys coming. They just spring from nowhere. Every night? Yes, it's better than going to the pictures.

"The bombed Methodist Chapel comes in handy as a clubhouse. The boys all overhaul their bikes there. To look at some of them you'd think they were setting out for endurance tests on the tarmac at Herne Hill. They buy their goggles out of army surplus stock and we make the club colours out of

pieces of yellow oil-cloth and paint them with black crosses. And you should see the chaps with crash helmets adjusting their chin-straps and fasteners before coming out to the starting line. Then I've got to make sure their brakes are disconnected. Disconnected brakes are the only qualification of entry.

"Don't I race? No. I think it's much more fun being able to disqualify anybody if I feel like it. Why do so many of the bikes have no mudguards?

They cost 5s. 6d. each, don't they? Mind, I don't say that's the only reason. It's true that some of the bikes have been made out of spare parts. If any member of the club could make a bike you could ride without handlebars, handlebars for us would be a thing of the past. Nobody's managed to do that yet though. So most of them just go for as much speed as they can by stripping off their mudguards. If they had any to start with."



The Superintendent of The Track

He goes round and puts the half-bricks back in line after there's been a spill. Meanwhile his friend, the starter, calls the names for the next race.



The Chief Mechanical Engineer

There isn't a spanner to hand, so he improvises with a stone. He's the best man with a stone in the whole of New Cross.