

'Skid Kids' Not Kidding—They Have

FEELING worried about the youths skidding on their bicycles round that bombed-site up the road? Don't give it another thought, Mrs. Jones. For the "Skid Kids," who created a new sport out of the aftermath of war, are doing very nicely, thank you. What's more, they are providing a safety-valve for the irrepressible spirits of Young England.

Soon after the war ended adventuresome youths, moving in

Come to Stay

**By DUDLEY SMITH,
Our Speedway Correspondent**

National Amateur Cycle Speedway Association, which encourages the boys to take the lead in the sport's organisation, gives them advice and provides the means for big competitions.

To-day, if you go to the more devastated areas of London or any of the other big towns on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon you are quite likely to see a youth, complete with crash helmet, coloured jersey and specially adapted bike,

are 350 recognised teams in existence and a Festival of Britain match in the West of England last Whit-Monday drew 3,210 spectators.

Detractors of the sport say it stops children going to Sunday school; Essex police warned riders not to use their machines on the roads, as they are stripped of all brakes and safety appliances; and many councils have been opposed to the use of bombed sites for the new sport, claiming it is "noisy, undignified and unnecessary."

But the "Skid Kids" themselves have many influential supporters and their tracks are flourishing.

One was included in plans for a new £17,700 park planned at Bermondsey, London; Mrs. Freda



In the pits off a bomb-site at Larnaca-street, Bermondsey, London, C. Dale, aged 18, and D. Morbin, 19, prepare their machines for racing, watched by two girl supporters, 16-year-old Irene Blyth and Betty Sparks, aged 18.

on cleared bombed-sites at a hundred different centres, set up their tracks.

It wasn't long before they were arranging matches and forming small leagues.

Now, most of the clubs have been taken under the wing of the

making his way to a bombed-site track just around the corner.

With him, probably, will be his young girl friend, one of the many fans who hang over the rails and cheer on the juvenile heroes of the backyard arenas.

Many of them are the same girls who watch the senior sport of speedway racing on which cycle speedway is modelled. And the youngsters who skid round the cycle track are spurred on by the picture of themselves as future speedway stars. It is no fanciful picture. For several of them have graduated to the real thing.

Billy Bales, the brilliant young Yarmouth rider, was a "Skid Kid," and so was Buster Brown, a promising young man Wembley have lent to Swindon.

Yesterday provided the highlight of the cycle speedway year. The national team final and the national individual championship final were held at Hayes, Middlesex, where one of the finest tracks in the country has been completed with the aid of the local authority. The meeting drew a large crowd.

The "Skid Kids"—incidentally, they don't like that name, for their average age is around 18—do not see themselves as a passing phase. Where possible they have made their tracks permanent and put organisation and management on a business footing. Gem Pirates, of Poole, Dorset, the former national champions, have kept the same team together for several years.

Some idea of the grip the sport has on the youth of the country can be gauged from the fact that there

Corbet, as M.P. for Peckham, opened the Verney Lions' track at Rotherhithe, London.

Recently the Clapham Panthers were not meeting with much success in their efforts to obtain a new track. One of their officials, who served with the Duke of Edinburgh, wrote to him requesting help, and since then the National Playing Fields Association, of which the Duke is president, has taken an active interest in the sport.

This was cycle speedway's biggest boost—to obtain Royal recognition.

The Central Council of Physical Recreation and other bodies have helped to obtain tracks and tackled councils where high rates are charged for the bombed sites and open spaces, often mere rubble heaps until the boys themselves cleared them.

The riders provide their own kit and machines. Many have their own workshops and have become skilled mechanics where bicycles are concerned. The tracks are made of cinders and range between 75 yards and 125 yards in length.

The "Skid Kids" have come a long way since they took their coats off and got to work in 1945. This year's national championship was contested by 278 clubs.

Let Mr. Bertram Duffield, the national chairman, have the last word. "Cycle speedway," he says, "brings young people together in a healthy atmosphere and keeps them off the street corners. The racing is valuable as a toughening-up course for pre-Service training, too."

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