

1950 – A snapshot review first published in '50 Years of Cycle Speedway' by The British Cycle Speedway Council in 1996.

1950

Early Celebrations

One of the first, if not the first, match ridden under the auspices of the new national body (NACSA) was the match between Blackbourne Racers and Dagenham Boomerangs at Blackbourne Road, Dagenham. NACSA came into being on the evening of 14 January. The match was ridden at 11.00 am on the following morning, the 15 January. Teams for this historic occasion included for the Racers Bill Storey (captain), Vic Aylward, Harry Talbot and Les Jordan. Boomerangs team included George Taylor (captain), John Andrews (team manager), Rob Pike, Del Cartwright, Johnny Blomfield, Roy Clements, Ronnie Horrigan and Ernie Wilmen.

Cray Tigers in Holland

Kent side Cray Tigers, travelled to Holland in April and won every match. Top rider Joe Abbott, who was in breath-taking form, broke the track record on all the tracks he raced on. Closest match was against West End (The Hague) which Cray won by eight points. All Dutch tracks were floodlit and charged .65 guilders or one shilling (5p) for admission. During their tour the Tigers travelled 1,500 miles. The boss of one of the Cray riders not only let his employee have the time off but actually came on the trip as well.

Holland Pip England

In the test match, the Dutch boys, quicker of the mark at the starting gate, led from start to finish. When, with only two races to go, they were ahead by 45 points to 39, it seemed all over bar the shouting. But the English riders, Bill Slater and Ken Vine, thought otherwise. They shot into the lead at the start of the penultimate race and maintained their advantage to cross the line in first and second place. That pulled England up to 44 points against Holland's 46.

England's pair in the last race had to finish first and second to snatch victory. Ken Cooper left the mark like a bullet and shot into the lead. But the Dutch pair, Map de Haas and Henk de Bruin, the 17 year old who has been Dutch individual champion since 1948, cleverly shut out Dave Clemmit. Try as he would to cut in on the bends, Clemmit could not make up lost ground and although Cooper romped home first for England, the Dutch pair finished second and third to bring victory for their country by 49 points to 47.

NACSA Formed

Saturday 14 January 1950 was a red-letter day in the history of the sport. Delegates from the various area control boards throughout the country gathered at the offices of the News Chronicle in Bouverie Street, London to form the National Amateur Cycle Speedway Association, or NACSA as it came to be known.

During the previous five years more than fifteen bodies had claimed true representation of cycle speedway. None, however, achieved nation-wide popularity as NACSA. It was a properly constituted body of non-paid officers and staff whose primary aim was to protect all riders from any form of professionalism or exploitation and to organise national trophies, competitions and leagues. This was the first time that cycle speedway had operated under the guidance of a major body under a standard set of racing rules.

The principal objectives of the Association were to see the sport organised democratically by the riders for the riders; increase friendship between districts and counties; standardize rules of racing all over the country; see that the domestic affairs of district and county control boards

are not interfered with; encourage good citizenship, reliability and team spirit among its members; organise national competitions; form a Board of stewards to control all important matches; see that riders are not exploited in any way; assist in negotiations for the laying down of permanent tracks at the request of district and county boards and generally to further the advancement of the sport.

The first executive committee was chairman - Bertram J G Duffield, joint secretary (technical) S E Kippin, joint secretary (administration) W (Bill) F Sonnex, treasurer J Bunker, press officer Norman H Guest, auditors E W Sloper and S Holmes, committee members A Athersuch (Devon), D C Dunford (Dorset), S Burton (Sussex).

Affiliated counties included: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, London, Middlesex, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland & Durham, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Yorkshire.

Gem Pirates become first ever National Champions

More than 5,000 people packed into London's Empress Hall on 26 October 1950 to watch two big cycle speedway events. Proudest team in the country were Gem Pirates (Poole) who beat Chorlton Aces (Lancashire) in the final of the News Chronicle national team championship. But in the other event, an international clash between England and Holland, England lost 47 points to 49 after a terrific struggle which went to the final race.

Gem Pirates were always on top in the team final. They were faster off the mark, speedier round the track and their riders worked together as a team. Chorlton Aces, who fought gallantly all the way, began the match well with a 5-1 in the first race. But the championship was practically won and lost in the fourth race when the Pirates riders Vic Cave and Jim Gale scored a brilliant win over Mike Boyle to set up a commanding eight points lead. Aces never made up the leeway.

In heat 13, Brian Moston, the Manchester match race champion, put up a magnificent performance to break the Pirates' run of victories when he won with yards to spare. This gave Chorlton a new lease of life and they put everything into a great effort. But the

heats were running out fast and all too soon, for them, the final was over.

Nineteen year old Jim Gale, Pirates' captain led the way for his team's victory with a fighting twelve points and Pete Bennett ably assisted Gale with 11 points. For the losers, Jack Pennington was quite superb with 13. The only other Ace to notch double figures was Moston with 10 points.

HOW THEY REACHED THE FINAL CHORLTON ACES

First Round beat Lostock Pegasus (Lancashire)
Second Round beat Belle Vue Kangaroos (Lancashire)
Third Round beat Broad Oak Acorns (Lancashire)
Fourth Round beat Cheadle Hulme Rangers (Cheshire)
Quarter Final beat Grange Leopards (Yorkshire)
Semi Final beat Roland Rockets (Warwickshire)

GEM PIRATES

First Round beat Newtown Eagles (Dorset)
Second Round beat Rossmore Tigers (Dorset)
Third Round beat Ringwood Aces (Hampshire)
Fourth Round beat Foulston Eagles (Devon)
Quarter Final beat Drayton Vampires (Oxfordshire)
Semi Final beat Stratford Hammers (Essex)

Empress Hall Boost

London's Empress Hall became a regular venue for cycle speedway in 1950. The Earls Court complex hosted the London Area championships which were held over several weeks. In one of the matches hard riding 17 year old "Buzz" Casey played a crucial part in South London's 50-45 victory over East London. He was their top scorer with 12 points and in addition knocked half a second off the track record with a time of 54.5 seconds. The other match between West London and North London was dependent on the last race which North London won 4-2 to finish victors by 48 points to 46. West London's Ernest Black was top scorer with 13 points.

Memory Lane

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Early in the year clubs north of the border formed the Scottish Cycle Speedway Association.

Age limits were set by Birmingham League to "stop grown-ups taking over our sport". No one over 21 was allowed to ride in Division One and no one over 17 could compete in Division Two.

Cross Road Panthers of Sheer near Halifax had a 'portable' starting gate. Invented by Panthers, manager C Rourke, it could be used anywhere and was put up in a few minutes. Odsal Speedway Promoters Mr and Mrs Booth attended the opening of the Panthers new track which had a loudspeaker system and safety fence.

Sid Thomas of Fairfield Aces won the Liverpool riders championship. In another local championship, 2,000 supporters saw Ted Eaglen of Hethersett Hornets win the Norfolk individual at Earham. Ted scored maximum points.

Tickets for the Earls Court 'double header' (England v Holland and national team final) cost two shillings (10p), three shillings and six pence (17.5p) and five shillings (25p).

More women riders were now appearing with Kent leading the way. Mottingham Cyclones had eleven women riders on their books whilst 'Aussie' Naylor had an all-girls team at Welling. Birmingham had another women's team called Bevington Babes. They had a track at Witton. Manager of Liverpool's Huyton Livers, June Hartles, was also recruiting women riders.

Cycle Speedway was one of nine sports represented at the "Festival of Sport" at Empress Hall, Earls Court. In an exciting match, London beat Home Counties 50-46. Eric Hockaday scored a maximum for the Home Counties and both teams received souvenirs from international racing cyclist Reg Harris.

In May 20,000 spectators at Bristol Speedway stadium saw Colin Gunton of Gilda Lions win the 'Evening World' trophy and a brand new Phillips 'Speedtrack' bike. On 10 May Whipps Cross Comets opened their new track at Eton Manor, Temple Mills Lane, East London. Over 500 people saw Norwich speedway star Bob Leverenz perform the opening ceremony just three hours after landing in England from Australia.

The Birmingham League beat St Albans League 79.5 to 39.5 at Aston.

Claims for smallest track have come from Doncaster (30yds) and from Romford (Essex) where the Hawbush Hurricanes track is 52 yards. More tracks had shale surfaces. One of the latest was Doncaster's Bessacarr Bulldogs whose manager is Miss D Frith. South London's Woolwich (ROF) Vampires track had floodlights, loudspeakers, safety fence, electro magnet starting gate, dressing room and showers.

Cycle speedway was the subject of 'This Modern Age' documentary film showing at local cinemas throughout the country.

Cycle Speedway "Here to Stay"

Mr Frank Waters, assistant managing director of the News Chronicle, summed up the evening's entertainment with the words: "We have seen tonight great skill and great sportsmanship. These boys have taken the knocks and in some cases given them in a grand way."

After Gem Pirates' victory, Mr Waters introduced Geoff Duke, senior TT winner, who presented the winning team with the cup. Mr Duke declared "This has been a great experience. Cycle speedway is here to stay".

A special award for the fastest time of the evening was given by Mr W J Hicks, sports editor of the News Chronicle. It was won by H Portengen of Holland who returned a time of 1 minute 47 seconds (yes the time is correct!). Wally Green, West Ham speedway star, presented a specially designed cycle speedway bike to Jack Pennington of Chorlton Aces. Also in attendance was film actress Peggy Evans.

A new word "freelancing" appeared in the cycle speedway dictionary for the first time. Despite having organised leagues, Firwood Flyers rider Gerald Lock only wanted to race in 'open' championship meetings in Manchester.

PHOTOGRAPH

The first-ever national team champions Gem Pirates from Dorset parade the News Chronicle trophy. Left to right are Alan Davis, Vic Cave, Fred Parkins, Peter Bennett, Jim Stanley, Dick Bunter, John Dunford, Jim Gale (captain), Charlie Dunford (manager).

