

Paul Smart - 740 Triumph on his way to the first under 60 sec. lap - 59.2 secs. (84.53 mph).

Smart (Curley Norton), the first of a new generation of emerging stars, fractionally raised it to 80.45. From the mid 60s onwards many names familiar to racegoers around the country like Ray Pickrell, Peter Williams, Charles Mortimer, Pat Mahoney, Barry Ditchburn and Dave Potter to name but a few, began to appear on the Palace programmes. In 1970 Smart incredibly established six new lap and race records in one meeting, a feat reminiscent of the Surtees' era, and of course at last September's meeting he pushed his 750 Triumph to a new lap record of 84.53.

The period covered has seen many changes in racing: the introduction of streamlining for solos in the 50s making it difficult to tell the various makes of machine apart; the development of ultra-low machines and full streamlining for the sidecars of the three-wheelers; the emergence of the Japanese challenge in the 60s to name a few. The crowds have been smaller in recent years but the circuit still retained its reputation for

cosiness, good viewing and a fair test of rider and machine.

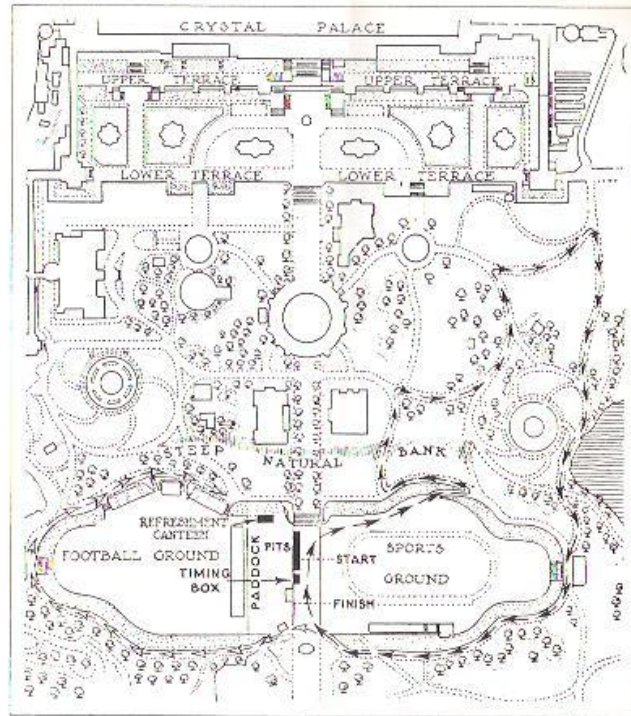
In May this year the Greater London Council's Arts and Recreation Committee decided to close the circuit to racing at the end of the season. The desire of the National Sports Centre to expand, noise pollution and the cost of improving spectator facilities as well as bringing the circuit up to new high international standards were among the factors which had forced this decision. And so the Palace story concludes but not without a special word of thanks and a tribute to those sporting crowds, riders and particularly officials who have striven to ensure the success of the circuit. Some of those officials who help out today turned out at that first meeting in 1953 - Dennis Bates, H. W. Shuttleworth and Dr Gordon Hadfield - and it is largely due to their efforts and many others that we have a story to tell at all. *Greater London Council would like to thank Mr H. Louis, Editor-in-Chief, Motor Cycle, for his assistance in the production of this booklet.*

## Crystal Palace Motor Cycle Racing 1927-1972





Path racing back in 1932.



Reproduced for 'Motor Cycle' 20/1/1927

The Crystal Palace Circuit





*Path racing at its height on 6 August 1927. Those were the days when you rode the bike to the races, competed and rode it home again. (Photo courtesy of Eric Thompson.)*

#### Opening Introduction

This story begins in 1926 when a group of enthusiasts led by F. E. Mockford and L. C. Smith approached the Crystal Palace trustees in the name of the London Motor Sports Ltd, to see if the grounds of the Palace could provide a venue for motor cycle racing in London. Their dream was realised and the first meeting was held on 21 May 1927. A crowd of over 10,000 turned out in glorious weather to watch seven solo and three sidecar events over a one mile circuit.

The two main races were the Crystal Palace solo Grand Prix, won by L. Bellamy (344 Coventry Eagle) in 22 min. 8.0 secs. and the Crystal Palace sidecar Grand Prix, won by G. A. Norchi (344 Coventry Eagle) in 22 min. 12.4 secs., each over 10 laps. At the end of the day it turned out that the sidecar race record was 6.6 secs. faster than the solo record. F. E. Parnacott (348 AJS) put up the fastest lap of the day in 2 min. 7.4 secs. a blistering speed of 28.2 mph,

Motor cycle sport in those days was obviously less hectic than today. The report of the meeting in 'Motor Cycle' relates '..... P. R. Bradbrook (490 Coventry Eagle sidecar) realising that there was nobody to dispute second place with him and that he had no chance of winning unless Norchi blew up, lit a cigarette and took matters easy. Norchi did not blow up'. Another report notes that Gus Kuhn's cigarette blew out and that he did not bother to relight it until the end of the race.

Two further meetings were held in 1927, on 6 August before a crowd of 15,000 and on 17 September with over 17,000 people present, both in perfect weather. The outright lap record at the end of the 1927 season was held by Gus Kuhn in 1 min 56.0 secs. Gus set up the record on only the second lap of a race on 6 August meeting and then thinking he had no more to do promptly turned the bike into the paddock to the amazement of the spectators.



*Speedway at the time of the England v. Australia test (1931).*

There were two meetings in 1928 before crowds of 17,000 and 14,000 respectively. The large crowds were probably in no small measure due to the admission price which in those days amounted to the princely sum of 1/2d of which 2d was for tax. Although Gus Kuhn's solo record held out, the sidecar record was lowered at both meetings.

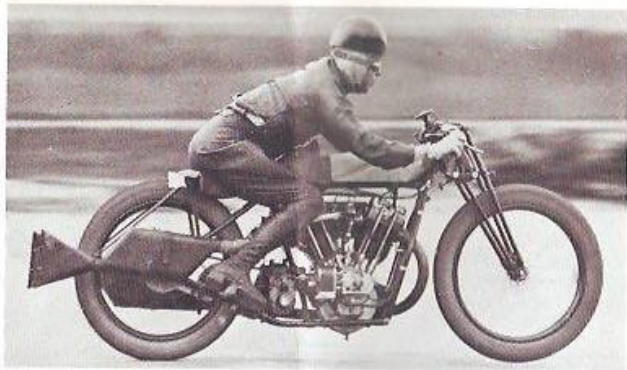
There was only one meeting in 1929. It was reported that it rained throughout but even so L. H. Daniell recorded a new solo lap record of 1 min. 50.6 secs. nearly 33 mph. and Freddie Brackwood lowered the sidecar record to 1 min. 56.8 secs. Motor cycle racing then ceased for a period probably due to the increasing popularity of the nearby speedway circuit which had opened up in 1928, on a site now roughly occupied by the National Sports Centre athletics track.

Speedway, on an oval, cinder surfaced track, had been imported from Australia where it was very successful. Although it started at Crystal Palace in a small way it reached its peak of popularity in the years 1930-32

and in fact, a 'Test Match' between England and Australia took place on 27 June 1931. This was won by England. The Crystal Palace Speedway team was entered in Division 2 of the Southern League and had moderate successes. However, motor cycle speedway ceased at the end of 1933 and motor car speedway took over in 1934.

In the meantime, an attempt was made to bring back racing over the existing paths and roads. The Streatham and District M.C.C. organised a revival meeting on 28 October 1933. Harold Daniell, who had won the 1933 Manx Grand Prix, took part in a match against Doug. Pirie, while other competitors included H. E. Newman and Jack Surtees. Three further meetings were held in 1934.

In 1936 a two mile 30 ft. wide road was constructed by the Road Racing Club. The first motor cycle meeting, the Coronation Grand Prix, was held on 15 May 1937. In the three seasons before the war, many of



Styles of yesterday.

the country's leading riders raced at the Palace, including Harold Daniell, Jock West, Stanley Woods, Ted Meilers, N. B. Pope, H. C. Lomacraft and Jack Surtess.

#### Hair Raising

All racing has its moments and Crystal Palace has had its share.

Many years ago before the sleeper barricades at North Tower Crescent it was possible to leave the track, run up the bank and crash into a tree. Except one man on a Norton, who rode 50 yards weaving through the trees, took one off at the base before falling off. The tree took the efforts of six marshals to remove it from the track. The Rider? He broke his false teeth but the bike was OK to be ridden later that day.

Once large lakes dotted the ground. Two adjoined the straight past the present start line. One Saturday afternoon during practice a rider did not return. A search was made. No B

sign of man or machine. So a walking search was instituted and by chance a marshal looked into a lake — fortunately dried up — and there, barely discernible was a Triumph motor cycle and the rider fast asleep beside it. None the worse for being knocked out cold after a spectacular flying leap into the lake.

Then there was the sidecar driver who took off too quickly for his passenger to get aboard. Standard drill applied — we went to the first right hand corner!!

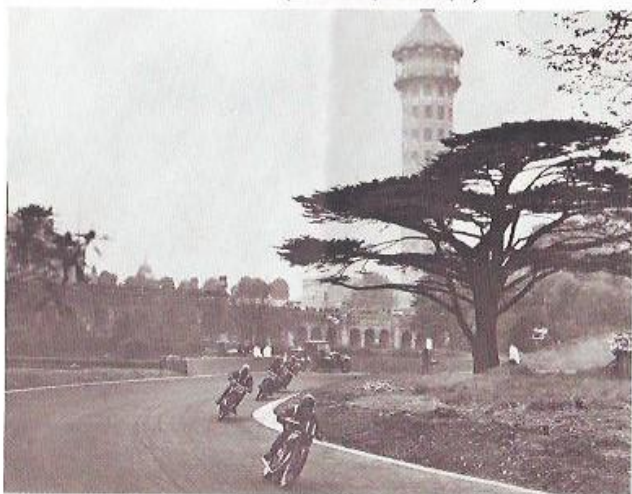
At the first postwar meeting in 1953 the very first race was over ten laps. So, excited was the Starter that he flagged everybody off at nine laps. A few races later he forgot to give the chequered flag to the winner of the sidecar event. The crews did another lap whereupon the second man overtook the actual winner, Pip Harris (Norton), was mistakenly given the chequered flag and hailed as the victor, until harassed officials stepped in to correct the error.



Above: Styles of today

Below: Harold Daniell of Sydenham and L. E. Tooth battle round the old inner loop during a 1937 meeting. In the background the old North Tower, demolished in 1941.

(Photos courtesy of Motor Cycle)







Above: (1937) George Rowley hides behind David Whitworth on Terrace (Top) Straight. The bridge was removed when the present paddock was constructed.

Below: Racing round South Tower corner in 1937.



Above: John Surtees aboard the 1956 250 MV Agusta (2.4.56): he won the race at a 250cc lap record of 69.4 sec. Surtees and the Parice were synonymous. He rode MV, Norton and REG here as well as the fabulous NSU Sportmax 250. (Copyright Keystone Press.)

Below: Riders stream up Maxim Rise during a race at Easter 1956.





First 80 mph lap by local Sydenham lad Joe Dunphy (500 Norton). A record which was to stand for over 6 years.

The last chapter of the Palace story begins in 1953 when the London County Council, which had become responsible for Crystal Palace in 1951, had almost immediately decided to restart racing. The Crystal Palace Motor Sport Committee, representing the various motor and motor cycling bodies and clubs, was formed to advise the Council. It was decided that the existing two mile circuit with its many twists and turns was rather slow and so a new link was constructed between the glade and the bottom straight, cutting out the inner loop. This had the effect of shortening the circuit to the present 1.39 miles.

probably not cause a flicker of recognition on the faces of many of today's young enthusiasts. Names like Rudge, Moto Guzzi and Excelsior were common with only Nortons and Triumphs still around and battling it out with those Japanese and hybrid 'jobs' which so dominate racing today.

Names like Maurice Cann, 'Pip' Harris and Bob Geeson caught the imagination of those early Palace crowds but that very first season also saw the emergence of a new local hero, Al Forest Hill, within an engine roar of the circuit, sidecar veteran Jack Surtees and his son John lived. By the end of the second season John held all the major lap and race records and his superb riding ability and meteoric starts saw him well on the way to his 31 Palace wins — a feat which has not been bettered. At the Easter meeting in 1955 he equalled Reg Parnell's (Ferrari) outright lap record for the circuit at 75.82 on his Norton but this joint record held only a few months when the late Mike Hawthorn (Maserati) set up a



Team Challenge Racing started at the Palace in 1970. Here, the first test line up reading left to right — Dave Nixon, Martin Carney, Charlie Sanby, Jim Harvey and Peter Gibson. Now in its third season the final round takes place today.

new record of 77.38. John was back again at the Easter meeting in 1966 and although the crowds may not have realised at the time they were previewing the 1966 World 500 cc Champion.

Surtees, however, was not the only big name around for at a later meeting in 1966 the Manx T.T. winner Bob McIntyre gave the crowds something to cheer about and a new 350 cc lap record into the bargain. Talking of crowds 15,000 plus was not uncommon at 'London's Own' in the 50s and nearly 30,000 packed the circuit for the Easter meeting in 1955. An admission charge of only 3/- may of course have helped.

Jack Brabham had meanwhile pushed the lap record up to 80.19 in his Cooper Climax and it was Surtees who yet again came within an ace of equalling it on his Norton in 1957 at 79.43. At this time 80 mph on two wheels seemed just around the corner but in fact it was nearly seven years before Joe Dunphy finally bettered it and became the first man to break the '80' barrier on a motor cycle.

1958 produced a vintage crop of budding stars with Derek Minter, Joe Dunphy and Phil Read all making their 'Palace debuts' together with a certain S. M. B. Hailwood whom the programme notes described as a young up and coming rider — somewhat of an understatement. Young Mike duly proceeded to sweep the board at the Palace that year but could only manage to take the 125 cc lap record on his Ducati. As current holder of the outright lap record at the Palace set up this year at 103.39 he is certain to remain the only competitor to have held both a car and bike record.

With the new decade work begun on the construction of the National Sports Centre and as a consequence the paddock, start and finish were moved from along the bottom straight to their present site in 1960. The removal of the controversial ramp bend bridge improved the safety margin for riders but did not lead to an overall improvement in the standard of racing which didn't quite match that of the 50s. Joe Dunphy's lap record held out until 1968 when Paul