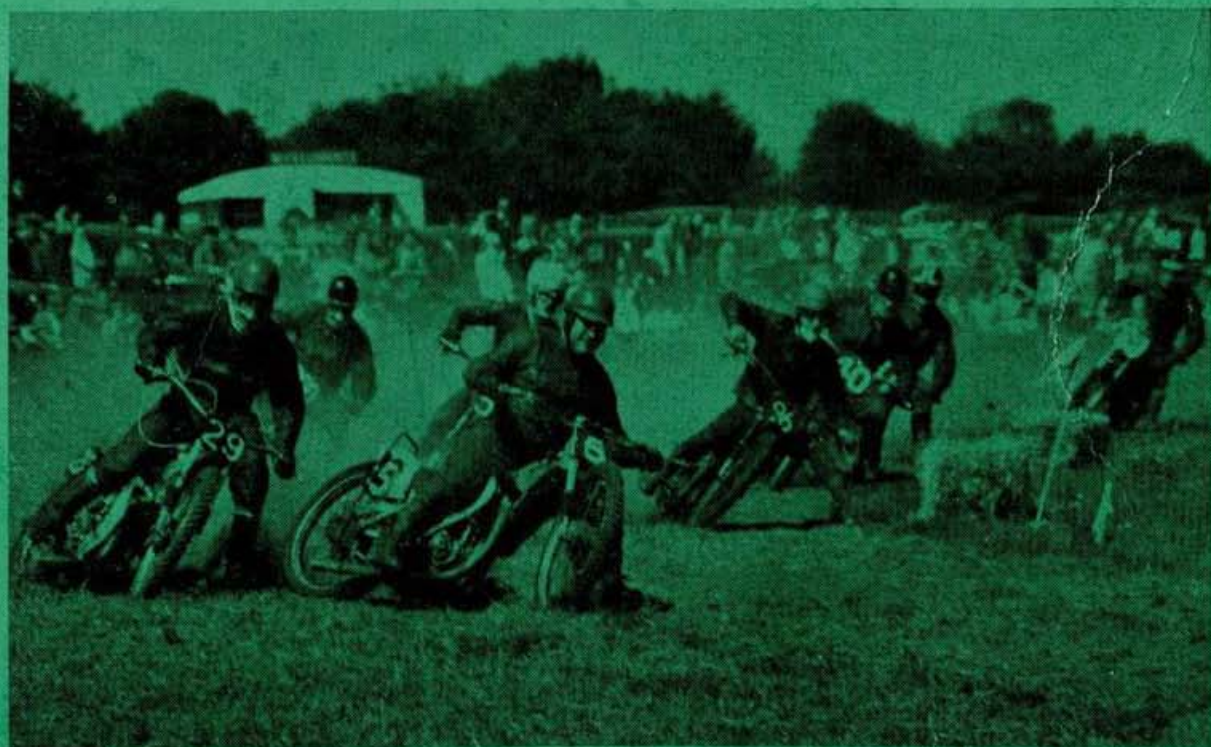


GRASS-TRACK

★ RACING ★

THROUGH THE

★ YEARS ★



2/6

By CYRIL MAY

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Grass-Track Racing through the years

by Cyril May

TODAY, the majority of the thousands of spectators thronging the tracks to watch the thrilling display of daring riders are not aware how Grass-Track Racing actually started and how desperate at one time was the struggle to keep it going, how grim were the trials which the Clubs underwent all of which had faith in it and who were determined that this spectacular sport should swell to greater proportions.

The story of Grass-Track Racing's rise from primitive beginnings to its present day popularity is a fascinating one, and an exciting tale of triumph over prejudice and criticism.

This, then is the story . . .

THE EARLY DAYS

In the years after the first world war there were many young men with a zest for speed, who naturally turned to motorcycles and furthermore wanted to see how fast their machines would go.

The method in those far off days was for a band of enthusiasts to get together, have a stretch of country road closed, and then to put the model through its paces. This however, came to an abrupt end. Owing to several accidents involving spectators, the governing body, the Auto-Cycle-Union produced a new and more comprehensive code of rules and with dramatic suddenness, early in April, 1925, immediately banned all speed events held on public roads.

It is not perhaps realised that herein lay the real origin of grass-track racing. The boys still wanted to test their machines and as the roads were banned the next best place was the nearest field. Some farmers frowned on the motorcycling fraternity and the ones that were more friendly offered some of the roughest land they possessed.

Although there had been one isolated grass-track event in August, 1923, at the Cambridge Mammoth Show, when 20,000 people witnessed the racing, and which presumably was the first in England, reliability trials, speed trials, hill-climbs and motorcycle football, provided the main absorbing tonic during the summer months until 1927. On Whit Sunday the Whitgift Club staged the first properly organised meeting on a disused golf course near Croydon. This open-to-Centre event was rather an experiment in order that the Club might gain definite knowledge

Cover Picture: A GALAXY OF STARS AT LONG NEWNTON IN 1960! RAY HARRIS (5) leads in an exciting final from (29) DON GODDEN, (96) GEORGE BEWLEY, (40) JOHN GOULD, (57) DENNIS GOODACRE, and (200) AUSTIN CRESSWELL.

BRITAIN'S FIRST-EVER OPEN GRASS-TRACK MEETING!



WHEN SIDECAR RACING WAS *SIDECAR RACING!*
N. BUCKLEY (Scott) at the Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester, on February 25th, 1928.

of what to expect under actual race conditions. The track was marked with flags without any trip-fence or outer roping to keep the spectators back, indeed at several points, they crossed and re-crossed the course during actual racing, and more than one rider found it necessary to shout at the crowd and even to apply his brakes in order to avoid an accident!

The oval course, set upon the side of a hill, measured one mile and fifty yards, with an average gradient of 1-in-7, but in spite of this the faster men averaged well over 40 m.p.h. and to do this they attained speeds in the region of 60 m.p.h. on the faster stretches. The events comprised of a 175 c.c. race, 350 c.c., unlimited c.c., a club members' race, a sidecar race, and a Grand Prix of 20 laps. Alf Foulds (493 c.c. Sunbeam) won the latter and also the unlimited c.c. event.

Following this meeting the Hampton Court Club promoted its first-ever fixture on June 18th, over a $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile egg shaped circuit in the paddock of Hurst Park. Space for spectators was roped off, and this time the nearest on-lookers were 30 yards away from the actual course. Five events were staged and machines such as New Imperial, Levis, Cotton, Calthorpe, Rex Acme, Ariel, Triumph and others took part including a Harley Davidson and a Zenith in the sidecar class. Les Blakeborough (348 c.c. Cotton) won the 4-lap, 500 c.c. race and the

sidecar race was won by Alan Kilfoyle (989 c.c. Harley Davidson).

The next big meeting organised by the North Manchester Club took place in July, and 6,000 watched a Grand Prix on the outskirts of the town. Here the racing was a knock-out affair and Scotts carried off the premier honours by Oliver Langton and Wilf McClure. E. O. Spence, later to become the promoter of Belle Vue Speedway, won the sidecar race—also Scott mounted.

For the South Downs Club event in September a rather long course was chosen. It was $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles round!

October 1st saw the North Manchester Club staging a further meeting at the Belle Vue Sports Ground, although the course was waterlogged by incessant rain even before use. Whilst the most weird and wonderful devices for obtaining wheel grip were going to prove effective, the riders had not anticipated the amount of water, and that magneto, plug and carburettor trouble would be quite common.

Ginger Lees on a 499 c.c. Rudge Whitworth, Oliver Langton with his usual 498 c.c. Scott, and Frank Varey, also on a Scott were the stars of the day. These three were later to become famous riders on the "dirt" although at this time dirt-track racing in England had not yet begun.

Grass-track racing came back south, when, as late as November 12th the Bournemouth Gypsy Club organised its initial Closed-to-Club meeting on the local racecourse at Ensbury Park. This proved ideal from every point of view, the track providing a circuit of $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles, the whole of which, being level, was visible from all points. Over 70 m.p.h. was obtained on certain sections. The late Eric Fernihough won the 175 c.c. event at 32 m.p.h. Cecil Barrow (Royal Enfield) took the 250 c.c. honours at 39 m.p.h. and also the 350 c.c. event at 41.9 m.p.h.; he completed the "hat-trick" by winning the 500 c.c. event at 44.1 m.p.h. In both sidecar events L. Pellat (344 c.c. O.K. Supreme) scored a victory.

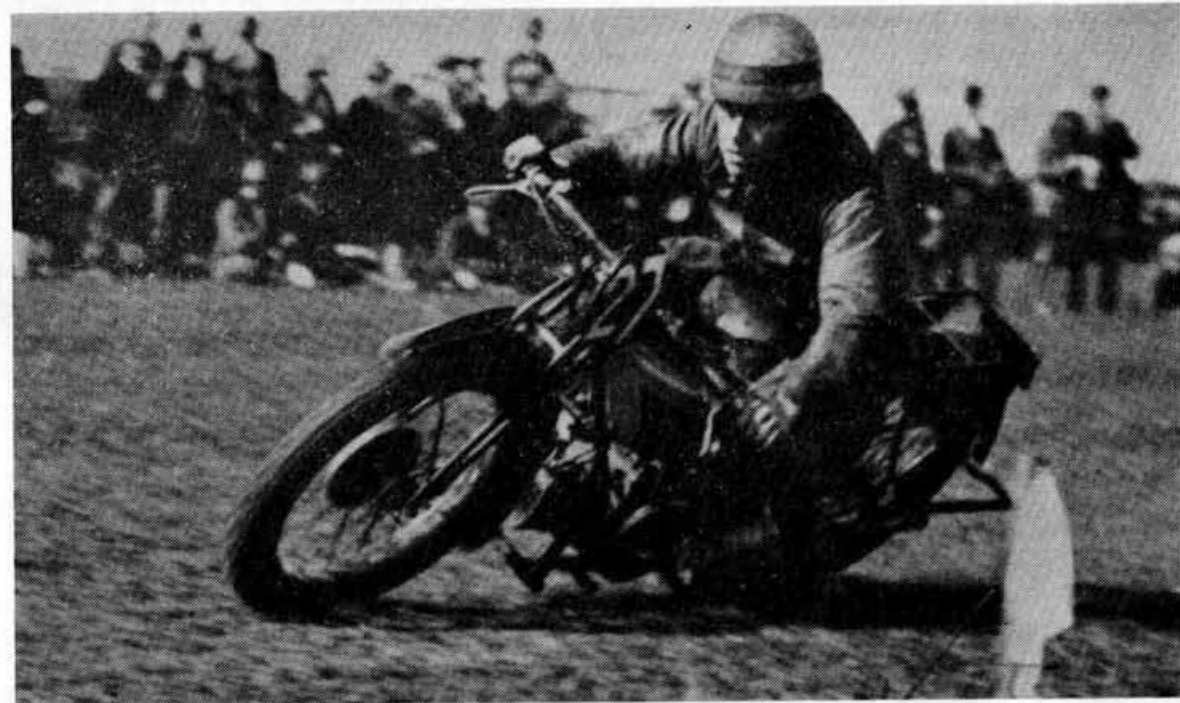
The North Manchester Club gave itself the subsidiary title of the British Grass-Track Racing Club and grass-track racing was to be one of its greatest features in its 1928 programme. Until now the riders who had participated in events had been rather limited in number, but they had gained valuable experience.

At earlier meetings there had been no previous experience for the guidance of competitors, and ordinary tyres, or at the best, competition tyres, were relied upon exclusively for wheel grip. It was soon discovered that on the smaller circuits high speeds were out of the question, except only at considerable risk to the rider. Several riders then began using ordinary non-skid chains and they enjoyed a fair amount of success.

Considerable objection was raised to the use of such supplementary wheel fittings, but it was soon realised that a non-skid device was really a necessity if good racing was to be achieved, and all manner of devices were seen at various meetings in the Manchester area.

Many competitors used short lengths of ordinary driving chain fixed around the rim and tyre and up to a dozen of these "bracelets" were used. But although considerably eliminating wheel-spin to a certain degree they were not altogether ideal, as they offered no security to side-slip.

GRASS-TRACK RACING IN 1927!



Twice Grass-Track Champion of the Wessex Centre, LEN PARKER (Douglas) speeds on to yet another victory.

There were other contraptions too, straps and pieces of thick rope were used in the same manner. Rope was also wound round the tyre in one continuous length. Again, to a certain degree, the rope method proved satisfactory, although its life was comparatively short, under the stress of a powerful machine.

These experiments had previously been applied chiefly to the rear wheel, but it was evident that the front wheel must also be given a safer grip of the track's surface and similar devices were attached.

Until someone had the brain-wave of fitting a series of spikes in the front tyre nothing was found to be really efficient. A large number of coach bolts were threaded, from the inside of the cover, through holes drilled in the tread, and, with the ends protruding about an inch from the tyre, a nut and washer held each bolt firmly in place. Fifty to seventy bolts were used for one tyre and they were usually fixed in two or three rows, with a good number inclined at an angle to the centre of the cover. The idea certainly proved most effective in controlling the machine's front wheel and skids were almost entirely eliminated. It was then found that the spiked tyre was equally effective on the rear wheel and it took the place of the former mentioned devices.

Arguments were put forward against the use of such tyres prepared in this way as potentially dangerous if they came into contact with a rider

on the ground and may inflict severe injury should a rider be run over. But the opposite school of thought said that if all riders had their machines so fitted the likelihood of falling was fairly remote.

Instead of fitting spikes directly into the tyres several competitors fitted them into short leather straps which were clipped around the tyre at short intervals. The method enabled the rider to ride his machine to and from the event on its own normal road tyres.

One of the first attempts to adapt a sidecar machine specifically for grass-track racing was made by W. Howarth of Leeds, which consisted the fitting of an additional drive to the sidecar wheel. Wilf McClure's 498 c.c. Scott won many events and the machine had a flexible sidecar chassis.

But grass-track racing had not yet come into its own and the sport had so far not attained the footing of road racing and hill-climbing.

BRITAIN'S FIRST-EVER OPEN GRASS-TRACK MEETING

February is not the best month in the year to choose for an open-air meeting of any sort, but on the 25th of this month, 1928, the first British Open Grass-Track Meeting was staged at Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester, promoted by the North Manchester Club. It consisted of a six-hour programme. The track was a smooth grass circuit of one-third of a mile, and all events were run over 10 laps. After keen frost early in the morning, the sun came out at noon-day, and then suddenly ground fog. Such were the conditions the officials were working against before the scheduled start at 2 p.m. The entry comprised of 51 competitors amongst which were 21 different makes of machines. Riders had their mounts really armed for the fray—every idea to aid wheel grip was seen. Bolts and wing nuts through the tyres, straps, spikes, studs and chains.

Racing started with the sidecar events and Wilf McClure's special 498 c.c. Scott outfit with its banking sidecar and sidecar wheel drive created tremendous interest. Vic Brittain, later to become one of the most famous of trial and scramble riders, was there with a Sunbeam combination.

After four events came a one-hour interval during which the great Allen-Liversidge acetylene flares were put into action. Forty of these had been placed around the track plus one searchlight. Fortunately the fog had cleared by now and the second half—the evening programme was successfully completed. The results are interesting:

Unlimited c.c. Sidecars	1st I. Williamson	596 c.c. Scott
	2nd W. McClure ...	498 c.c. Scott
500 c.c. Sidecars	... 1st W. McClure ...	498 c.c. Scott
	2nd L. Flowers ...	490 c.c. Norton
250 c.c. Solo	... 1st L. Higgs ...	246 c.c. Montgomery
	2nd F. Fearnley ...	172 c.c. F. Barnett
Unlimited c.c. Solo	... 1st F. Sissons ...	497 c.c. Ariel
	2nd S. Jackson ...	348 c.c. A.J.S.
	3rd E. Langton ...	498 c.c. Scott
500 c.c. Solo	... 1st O. Langton ...	498 c.c. Scott
350 c.c. Solo	... 1st S. Jackson ...	348 c.c. A.J.S.

So much for the first Open Meeting. It was a beginning, and the experienced gained from it stood the sport in very good stead in the years to follow.

The Devizes Club in Wiltshire was one of the first in the grass-track game in the Wessex Centre. A meeting was staged on Roundway Hill of this same year, and my early recollections of the event were that the leg-trailers and the Douglasses provided the highlights. Late entries had been accepted at double fees!

Another fixture took place at Belle Vue early in May, and the programme consisted of six 10-lap events. It was an exclusive "Trophy" meeting, for no less than eight trophies, six silver cups, and six silver plaques constituted the awards. Syd Jackson starred as the most successful competitor and gained the Lancashire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire Trophies, plus three silver cups! In later years Syd took to speedway, now remembered as a member of the Wimbledon team and previous to that the skipper of Leicester and Coventry.

It now seemed that grass-track racing was on the verge of its initial boom, but the boom went over to the opposition—dirt-track racing had already started in England with its first meeting at King's Oak, Loughton, in Essex, on February 19th, organised by the Ilford Club.

The Bath and West of England Club held three fixtures in 1928 at their Lansdown track, near Bath, and seven other meetings had taken place on the half-mile course at Woodford Motodrome. Events were now being promoted in many parts of England; they were on the increase.

BRANDS HATCH GRASS CIRCUIT IN 1935



JACK SURTEES gets acrobatic help from his passenger on their 596 c.c. Norton.

Stanley Woods performed the opening ceremony at Ashford, venue for the Kent Club's Bank Holiday meeting when an attendance of 6,000 saw an entry of 99 race over two distinct courses; a half-mile oval circuit and a "T.T." course of five-eighths of a mile.

One of the very first Championship Races was included in the Tadcaster Club's fixture in August. The award—a Championship Belt—was won by Oliver Langton and in the same month George Wilks, riding a Dot, took the honours in three main events on the Watford Club's track.

By 1929 many Clubs were running separate events for side-valve and overhead-valve models. 2,000 attended the Southampton Ace Club's venue at Swaythling on Good Friday when, amongst a 12-event programme, Vic Collins (Velocette) won the open 350 c.c. o.h.v. race and F. Forbes (Baker) gained victories in the 200 and 300 c.c. side-valve machine races.

Cyril England (A.J.S.) won the Croft Silver Medal at the Yeovil Club's meeting on July 25th; A. Titt on a Douglas reigned supreme at the Blackmore Vale Club's event, whilst, also in the same month, T. Webb won four events and clocked the fastest time of day at the Bath Club's fixture at Lansdown. Denis Winslow starred at the North Wilts. event and Roger Frogley took a first in the unlimited c.c. event at the Lantillar Club's track. "Amateur" and "Expert" classes were now appearing in many programmes.

The enormous popularity of a well-organised meeting was proved at Langridge when the Austin and South Birmingham Club's event attracted a crowd of nearly 8,000. Graham Goodman—so soon to become a famous name in the trials and scrambles sphere—rode a 490 c.c. Norton and in winning the 600 c.c. event made the fastest time for six laps of the half-mile course.

Early 1930 saw some of the star trials riders at the York Club's venue at Acomb on Good Friday to try if their prowess was as good on the grass as on the "rough-stuff." A six-lap Golden Gauntlet race developed into a terrific struggle between Sam Marsland (Rudge) and Geoff Milnes (Scott) and Sam eventually proved the winner.

The Portsmouth Club were handing over the profits from their race meetings to charity and £500 had been amassed. On August 13th, the Blackmore Club held a Championship meeting and events in the same month were held by the Ringwood, Bath and Devizes Clubs.

Ulster's first-ever grass-track meeting under the auspices of the Lisburn Club was staged at the end of August, the principal events being the 20-mile Championships of Ulster for 250, 350 and 500 c.c. classes. Stanley Woods (490 c.c. Norton) was the star performer and made the fastest lap at 62.75 m.p.h.

Tink Bryant, aged six, claimed as England's youngest rider, gave an exhibition at the Barnet Grass Speedway—run by the North London Club—on a September Saturday afternoon in 1930. This young speedman was the mascot of the Ringwood Club, who were sending a team of riders to compete in a match contest against the Barnet riders.



One of the finest and fastest tracks in Southern England, the Cannfield circuit at Shaftesbury. JACK LEONARD (3) forges ahead in a hotly contested event.

Several decades have passed since a certain young man, chiefly characterized by a particularly pleasant smile and the absence of a left leg, started to carve for himself a niche in motorcycle sport. I am referring, of course, to Harold Taylor who is still connected with the sport. Sidecar racing first attracted his attention during 1927; he later became interested in speedway and his exploits at Greenford, Stamford Bridge and the Crystal Palace are well remembered. Driving a Norton combination, Harold became a great favourite at the Sydenham Club's track, the Layhams Farm "Mountain Mile" circuit where, in 1933, he won the Silver Wings, and a sidecar had beaten all solo times. Harold had a tremendous passenger named Rastus Worth, a 13-stone giant whose other hobbies were weight-lifting and all-in wrestling!

The entry list at Layhams, situated at West Wickham in Kent, usually contained the names of Harold Daniel, Jock West, S. H. Blacklocks, John Gilbert, Les Schweiso and a host of other famous soloists; Harold Taylor, Kim Collett, Claude Sewell, Les Chapman and Gordon Norchi were the aces of the "chair" brigade.

Excitement and speculation struck a new pitch when 1931 came around and the number of events had grown tremendously. It was a boom year at last for the clubs, but with new rules being introduced, racing was obviously becoming more efficient and less fun. "Chains or other non-skid devices are not permitted" was a typical new rule.

The following year the Sidcup, Owls and Bermondsey Clubs launched



FARLEIGH CASTLE: 1947. Flat out through the cutting! It was at this spot that STAN LANFEAR went wide, took off from an earth bank, and leapt 15 feet into the air!



ERIC DAVIS



GRAHAM PARRY



DICK BRADLEY



DINK PHILPOTTS

the famous Brands Hatch Combine and for nearly a dozen years it was a flourishing concern.

Originally formed in 1922 the Blackmore Vale Club has been a great adherent to grass-track racing since 1929. The Cannfield course, at Shaftesbury in Dorset, was opened in 1932 and remained one of the most famous of all Southern circuits for eight years. One post-war meeting took place in 1951.

Stan Hailwood, Mike's father, was a great favourite on the grass particularly at Cannfield, where he held the sidecar record. His most cherished Trophy is the one he won at Biggin Hill in 1935. Dressed in immaculate white overalls his spectacular and thrilling efforts on a 500 c.c. Cotton were always a source of delight to the crowds.

The Salisbury Club, still today actively concerned with racing, ran its first meeting on July 18th, 1931, which attracted 1,500 spectators. Top man of the day was Paddy Cash—later killed in a flying accident—who carried off five Trophies and several cash prizes. The Club promoted the High Post meetings during 1933 when, without any sidecar events, solo entries totalled no more than 20. Well known riders such as Les Jones, George Butcher, W. Shearing, Bert Morris, Ivor Lock, Ivor Webb and Ron Evemy were competing.

A well-known performer in Wessex Centre racing in 1934 was Miss Hunking on a 250 c.c. Velocette; she competed in the Knowle Club's event on July 28th.

The Ringwood Club was "in the game" right from the start; they hold the unique record of having retained the same track for almost forty years and "The Mount" still attracts exceptionally large crowds.

Eric Oliver had the distinction in 1937 of being the only one to hold a Brands Hatch Silver Star for both solo and sidecar classes—an achievement that was never equalled.



VIC WARLOCK famed for his spectacular riding had a style of his own. Shirt sleeves rolled up; left leg almost straight; and he really gets motoring at the Gloucester Club's "Holidays-at-Home" meeting in 1944.

* * *

Today he is still conducting his building business at Bristol.

Some great team clashes took place in the late 'thirties, Blackmore Vale v. West Wilts, Brands Hatch v. Cannfield, Wroughton v. Lilleshall—to name but a few and they all found public favour.

The Wroughton "Mountain" course near Swindon, made a deviation from the ordinary flat circuits and, run by the Swindon Works Motor Club, provided racing of a very high standard and different degree. Wilmot Evans, Jack Williams, John Humphries, George Buck, Charlie Bower, Jack Booker and Roger Wise were among the top-notch men who regularly competed. The Golden Helmet event created added interest. Reg Wise and his publicity car certainly proved a magnet to many; huge crowds flocked to Wroughton. Two tremendously large posters adorned the whole of both sides of his van, on the top of which stood a life-size image of his brother in action; two coloured streamers from the mudguards to the windscreen top put the finishing touches to a colourful and attractive publicity effort, an effort belonging to grass-track's great and glorious past. While it lasted the Wroughton track was a favourite attraction, but its two years of life came to an end at the conclusion of the 1938 season with the Air Ministry permanently taking over the land. The following year the Club found a new venue at Avebury and its famous "stones" had at last, after 3,739 years, found a place in grass-track advertisements!

The famous Farleigh Castle circuit on the Wiltshire-Somerset border, near Trowbridge, sprang into life on Whit-Monday, 1938, and



WALLY LOCK was one of the greatest of all grass-trackers and a great favourite at Brands Hatch and other tracks with o.h.c. A.J.S. machines.

Roy Zeal, Colin Mead and Roger Wise took major honours. Mike Erskine played his part in designing the course where he rode one of his own products, a Miller-Rudge, and the late Reg Stainer—unfortunately killed in a “black-out” motoring accident in 1940—made many great performances on one of these machines.

Mike would arrive at Farleigh with a large and dirty car which contrasted sharply to the pair of beautifully prepared machines on tow. His models were the fastest and best of the period and when he felt so inclined he would prove it in no uncertain manner against the stiffest opposition with the crowds yelling their heads off. Colin Mead, prominent grass-tracker of that time, had this to say, “Mike Erskine was without doubt the best engineer riding at that time.”

Team racing featured in many programmes and the circuits at Taunton, Corfe Mullen, Salisbury, Rushmere, Lilleshall to name but a few, were well established.

The late Les Graham won the 100-guinea Matchless Trophy in the 20-mile Championship event at Layhams; he was a member of the O.K. Supreme Team with Andy McKay and John Humphries.

After 12 years of trial and endeavour the sport, in 1939, stood on the threshold of a great future. It had definitely come to stay, but World War Two broke out and that was that . . . for the time being.

THE WAR YEARS

For a Club to stage a grass-track meeting while World War Two was being fought presented almost unsurmountable difficulties, but many such meetings did take place.

Despite prevailing circumstances, the West Wilts. Club decided to go ahead with its fixture at Farleigh Castle, in May, 1940, although their problems were nothing so great as compared to those that faced the Clubs in subsequent years. A crowd of some 4,000 witnessed some superb racing mainly between Roger Wise, Colin Mead, Stan Lanfear, Vic Warlock and Wilf Sleightholme.

Now came two complete blank years for grass-track racing generally, until the Chard Club, in Somerset, held an event in 1942, which was followed by two further ones in the following year. Held in aid of the town’s “Holidays-at-Home” effort the meetings drew reasonable crowds.

One would have thought that war-time conditions would have produced a shortage of riders. It did in the sidecar category and drivers were non-existent, but in the solo class entries were refused. For the August 7th meeting at Chard 70 entries had been received but only 33 were accepted. Although most machines were of the speedway-type there was a fair sprinkling of ordinary competition models complete with four-inch back tyres. Ted Wilmot’s teledraulic A.J.S., several Velocettes and Ridges made interesting racing.

The sound of open exhausts and the familiar smell of Castrol “R” made the meetings a replica of old times for enthusiasts, who, in many cases, had travelled considerable distances by “public inconvenience” to get there.

In September, 1943, over 1,500 turned up at the Worcester Club’s event on the local sports ground and again many entries were refused. Several came from Bristol, three from South Wales, two from the Home Counties and others from the East Midlands. In many cases the journey meant hours of uncomfortable travelling. Groups of spectators were seen wending their way out of Worcester station all the morning.

1944 saw the most meetings since 1939, and one that proved the best of the war years.



VIC WARLOCK



FRED WILLIAMS



BONNY GOOD



JACK SURTEES

THE BRISTOL BULLDOGS 1948



DIVISION TWO LEAGUE CHAMPIONS: grass tracks provided their training ground. *Top row:* R. WITCOMBE (Director), FRED TUCK, BILL HOLE (Capt.), CYRIL QUICK, ERIC SALMON. *Bottom row:* JOHN HOLE, MIKE BEDDOE, JACK MOUNTFORD and ROGER WISE.

First fixture was at Filton on Easter Monday, run by the West Bristol Club in spite of manifold transport trouble. Remember, there was no pleasure petrol and even the meagre "basic ration" had now been cancelled. However, 37 entries came from points as diverse as Maidstone, Leamington and Newport, etc. Neither did the transport problem daunt the spectators who turned up to the tune of several thousand. How everyone arrived there remained a mystery!

Fortunately the track was near the railway and Filton Station did a brisk trade in the morning. As I helped unload a mass of machines from the goods compartment of the passenger train I thought that this was perhaps unique in grass-track history. The railway really held a monopoly!

It seemed just like old times in one respect, but in others it was quite different. A complete absence of car and motorcycles on the roads leading to the course, the sight of riders pushing their machines from the station, together with the lack of many pre-war stars in the programme made one realise that this was a war-time effort, and a very big one too, staged under the greatest of difficulties and only made possible by that unquenchable enthusiasm in the motorcycling sport. Petrol was strictly barred and wood alcohol was the fuel in use; every competitors' tank was tested.

Best man of the day was Freddie Brown who won three main events and clocked the fastest time. Later in the year the same Club held three further meetings on the same circuit, the final one—a Championship event—on September 16th, when an attractive programme was enjoyed by about 3,000 spectators. Tommy Wood (Velocette) won the 350 c.c. Championship and Freddie Brown the unlimited c.c. Championship. Broncho Slade took the Searle Trophy.

This meeting brought to an end a financially successful and a spectacular series of charity meetings by means of which the Club had raised £1,200 for overseas servicemen.

The same year the Pontypool Club in their local park, in Wales, staged a meeting for the War Comforts Committee and Roy Zeal, Reg Lambourne and Colin Mead were the stars of the day.

At the Spa Ground, Gloucester, on July 8th, the Cheltenham Club's event attracted over 60 riders and in a special Match Race, Roy Zeal beat Reg Lambourne. The Gloucester Grand Prix turned out to be a

SPEEDWAY

RIDERS ON THE GRASS



SPLIT WATERMAN and FRED WILLIAMS all ready for a match-race tussle at Kingsdown in 1949.

battle of the giants with Vic Warlock, the victor, and the track record to his credit. It was a first-class meeting, providing entertainment for over 4,000 and a handsome donation to the war effort.

July 29th saw the Derby Club promoting an event at Chaddesden as a result of which the Red Cross P.O.W. Fund benefited to the extent of £120.

Then came several Bank Holiday fixtures. One at Abbey Park, Leicester, when Don Houghton and Flying Officer Spain provided the highlights. Maurice Cann raced his 248 c.c. Moto-Guzzi, and this was probably the only time such a machine has ever appeared on the grass.

The Grimsby Club's first war-time meeting took place at the Hardy Recreation Ground and the crowd of 3,000 substantially swelled the balance of the Red Cross, as also did the profits from the Rochester and Chatham Club events.

The proceeds of the East Midland's Club fixture at Radcliffe-on-Trent went to the Troops Fund. This was a two-part affair with grass-track racing and a scramble, the latter being won by Alf Briggs.

Spending the week-end with that famous all-rounder Bob Foster, 1936 Lightweight T.T. winner and later European Road Race Champion, I was fortunately amongst the 2,000 that attended the Hawks Club's meeting at Cheltenham on August 26th. Bob was mounted on that immaculate and beautifully prepared Levis; he was one of the few to harass the flying "Japs" and moreover to beat them.

The Neath Club organised two charity meetings, the final one on September 23rd and again Vic Warlock was the star man. A week later at Egbaston, Birmingham, several Home Guard Dispatch Riders distinguished themselves by their remarkably high standard of riding.

Last event of the year took place on the Hereford Racecourse on October 21st with Louis Lawson making a breath-taking final ride by beating Reg Lambourne and Vic Warlock and snatching the track record at the same time.

Despite all circumstances, 1944 was an outstanding year for grass-track racing and one that went down in history. The magnificent efforts of many Clubs had provided large sums of money towards the war effort and moreover every event had either been run on a Saturday or a Bank Holiday.

THE POST-WAR YEARS

Grass-track racing was resumed on a national scale in April, 1946, for the first time since 1939, and once again the roads to the tracks became packed with thousands of enthusiastic fans. The memories of those wailing sirens, those bombers with their deadly cargoes were now a thing of the past, drowned by the cheering crowds that sounded a reveille for a newly awakened sport.

The year was a preliminary to grass-track's biggest boom in a modern sport which had, at last, attained a position of first-class importance in the English sporting calendar. It was obviously in for a vast expansion. Those pre-war giants of Brands Hatch, Les Schweiso, Angus Herbert,

Eric Oliver, Jack Surtees, Wally Lock and Co., were racing and breaking records again; they seemed better than ever.

1946 also saw the West Wilts. Club with a different track—but still at Farleigh Castle—not far from the old one. Situated on the side of a hill in a forty-acre field it provided a super course and once again the roar of exhausts echoed in the valley below, where the quiet waters of the Frome meandered along. The old double bridge over the river with the Castle ruins perched high above provided a final touch to a unique and indeed, a picturesque setting.

The growth of grass-track racing and with it the more general use of the speedway-type of machine aroused furious controversy in many areas, but the riders of these very machines became the ones that enticed the huge crowds to the tracks and place the sport on a firmer foundation.

During the season Brands Hatch was honoured by the visit of a team of riders from Northern Ireland for a match contest. Among their number was Ernie Lyons on a Triumph-Twin, who later made such a phenomenal win in the Senior Manx Grand Prix. Ernie left his mark at "Brands" by beating the existing track record and covering a lap at over 58 m.p.h. Among other outstanding performances was that of Cyril Clisby who, on an Ariel, gained the "250" class record at 52.29 m.p.h. Eric Oliver raised the sidecar record to 49.98 m.p.h.

In Wales, at the Neath Club's Open Championship meeting, Bristol's Pat Waterman, riding a 350 c.c. Rudge, tuned by himself, created a sensation by winning all three Championship events.

A newcomer, a youngster with a lock of wavy hair, was now appearing in Novice events, namely Lew Coffin, destined eventually to rise to grass-track's greatest heights.

THE NEWNTON LAURELS WINNERS 1960



(40) JOHN GOULD (for the second year in succession), second (57) DENNIS GOODACRE, and third (41) GEORGE GOULD.

"THESE MAGNIFICENT MEN & THEIR FLYING MACHINES!"



This remarkable picture was taken by photographer, CECIL BAILEY, former Southampton Speedway rider. VIC and FRED COLLINS escaped injury except for a severe shake-up.

Sidecar competitors were still very few, they could almost be counted on one hand, but in early 1947, Ted Summers, later the Wessex Centre Champion, livened up this section of the sport by producing and riding the one and only ever—a combination powered by a motorboat engine! This was a watercooled 4-cylinder two stroke, with a rotary induction valve and fly-wheel magneto. In later years he had a fair measure of success with his unique machine.

That great Farleigh Castle team comprising of Graham Parry, Vic Warlock, Pat Waterman, Bonny Good, Jack Leonard, Dink Philpotts, Bob Jones, Jack Difazio and Dick Bradley really reigned supreme. The big gates cheered appreciation when the sidecar men roared into action; Eric Oliver, John Browne, Tommy Bounds, Jack Surtees, Archie Appleby, Reg Lewis, Cliff Hazell—all were great names of the day.

I like to remember Graham Parry who completely fooled the crowd in his "strip-tease" motorcycle act; of the Trowbridge Fire Brigade who were called out to deal with the dust problem, much to the annoyance of Jack Surtees; of Stan Lanfear's terrific leap into the air complete with machine, after "taking-off" from an earth bank to make, by mistake, what must have been the longest of long jumps and the highest of high

jumps; of the milk bucket containing over £138 which had been collected in aid of Bingley Cree who was on the injured list with a broken leg, received in a racing crash; of "Chace-Water-Charlie" the interval entertainer and of the Club's grass-track Supporters Club. Everything was part and parcel of the halcyon days of grass-track racing and West Wilts. certainly possessed enterprise.

I like to recall too, the established tracks at Doultling, Bristol, Bere Regis, Frome, Swindon, Ashton, to name but a few. They were not only great days but happy days. There was such a host of the aces of the game who had a certain character about them; they created atmosphere so sadly lacking in these modern times; they made sure the public knew they were top men in a dangerous sport; they were clever and their names had a personality ring around them; they were true showmen of spectacular and daring riding.

Through the unique and untiring efforts of Reg Wise, Roger's brother, the Kingsdown speedway-type track, on the outskirts of Swindon, thrived and thrived and remained a top-notch circuit from 1947-51. Prior to '47 the Highworth Club's home was at South Marston, where the late Les Graham—then serving in the RAF at Lyneham—rode a Rudge in the Club's June meeting.

Splitting the total entry into Junior, Intermediate and Senior categories was Reg's original idea which certainly gave fair shares and an equal number of rides for all competitors. It was his idea too—and one that paid handsome dividends—of providing seating accommodation for 1,000 spectators! Those great challenge match clashes: Jack Parker versus Roger Wise; Split Waterman v. Fred Williams and George Wilks v. Bill Kitchen, all had the crowd on their toes from start to finish. These famous speedway riders were giving grass-track racing one of its biggest boosts and bringing huge crowds to Kingsdown to the tune of an 8,000 average. There was team-racing too: Highworth v. Farleigh Castle; Highworth v. Southern Centre Champions; Roger Wise's team v. Jack Parker's team, the latter consisting of such notable riders as Bruce Semmens, Bill Pitcher, Ron Mason and Louis Lawson. They were all superb attractions. The Battle of Britain Trophy Match Race created additional interest as also did the end-of-season Championships.

In spite of severe criticism regarding professional speedway riders riding on the grass, the fact, nevertheless, remained that Reg Wise and his Club had, for many years, provided spectacular entertainment with near-perfect and exceptionally slick organisation and, moreover, several events had been staged for the benefit of others which included donations to the A.C.U. Benevolent Fund, the British Red Cross Society, and the Eric Evans Memorial Fund.

Grass-tracks, as they had always been, were useful training grounds for would-be speedway riders and they produced such distinguished stars as Dick Bradley, Roger Wise, Billy Hole, Jack Mountford, Cyril Quick, Eric Salmon, Bert Croucher, Broncho Slade, Frank Evans and a host of others.

Brands Hatch was now attracting crowds of up to 13,000 and average attendances all over England ranged between five and eight thousand. The twelfth meeting of the season at "Brands" on September 4th, 1947.

was televised by the B.B.C. and thus a grass-track fixture became the first ever motorcycle event to be screened.

Later, on December 1st, all motorcycle sport became illegal and Britain entered an even sterner stage of post-war austerity; that meagre basic petrol ration was cancelled. Brands Hatch then became the scene of a huge mass demonstration demanding a return of the "basic" but it was not until the spring of the following year that a "standard" ration was introduced, a restriction that lasted a further two years.

Grass-track's biggest boom continued throughout 1948 and into 1949, when 10,000 at Farleigh Castle's first meeting proved a Centre record and also one for the organising Club.

The entertainment tax—later abolished—was still very high and 1/1d. out of the usual 2/6d. admission fee went to the Chancellor. Clubs, indeed everyone connected with the sport, regarded it as a crippling injustice and many letters went to local M.P.'s.

On October 10th, 1948, there came the riders' strike at Brands Hatch, and within a week, with an initial membership of 60, the South Eastern Centre Riders Association was formed, a most enthusiastic body which today is as strong as ever.

1949 was probably the greatest and most successful of all grass-track years. The established tracks were well supported and many new ones opened. On top of this we were favoured with one of the finest summers in living memory.

By the spring of this year the grass had gone from "Brands" and the famous track became just a memory. Road-racing preparations were being carried out.

The following year proved a real "terror" for most Clubs as regards the weather. Combined with the fact that there was generally a shortage of money and with the cost of living skyrocketing, attendances came down with a bump. The fans had at last been surfeited with too many meetings. The boom was over, and racing headed towards its lowest ebb. Thus terminated a fantastic golden era in grass-track racing's history; they were the halcyon days the like of which will never recur.

However, a minority of clubs were determined to keep "the flag flying" until losses were reported—some of which ran into three figures, and from then on for several years few clubs were prepared to gamble with the heavy financial responsibilities incurred in the promotion of a meeting.

1950 saw Bert Croucher win the Individual Southern Centre Championship title for the second time and when Southampton Speedway opened two years later he skippered the team.

The resurgence of the popularity of the sport coincided with the institution of the "Inter-Centre and Individual National Championships" and the formation of an A.C.U. sub-committee charged with the duty of organising that event annually. But it still took many years to convince a majority of the members of the General Competitions Committee that grass-track racing was a bona-fide branch of the sport which should be afforded the same status as the rest. At long last "National Status" was granted and the "Star Competition"—known now as the British Championships—was set up. Incidentally, the A.C.U. Grass-Track

UNCONVENTIONAL VERSUS CONVENTIONAL!



ARNE HENDRICKSEN and GEORGE SMITH (111) demonstrate "The Hinge's" winning ways at an Astra Club's meeting. Number 77 is Bert Brett.

Sub-Committee remains the most democratically constituted of all A.C.U. sub-committees, being composed generally of members nominated by any Centre interested in the National Competition. Pioneer motorcyclist, George Allan, was its first, and to date, only chairman.

On September 20th, 1952, on behalf of the Devizes Club I had the pleasure to organise a meeting at Pewsey in Wiltshire, and the over 4,000 crowd which, incidentally, still remains as an all-British record for a Saturday grass-track event, proved that a meeting—greatly publicised, containing a collection of stars—could be run with success on a Saturday.

After a round of several different circuits, including the Cann and Eastbury Park ones, Willoughby Hedge, near Mere, became the Blackmore Vale Club's permanent home for some twelve years and the fine hill-top venue provided many historical events which, of course, included several National Meetings.

By 1955 nearly all the former tracks had vanished, but the Minety Vale Club had, the previous year, enjoyed a measure of success at its new circuit at Long Newton.

During the years to follow, sidecar competitors grew steadily and by 1962 their number was highly remarkable. No less than 41 took part in the Andover Club's April event.

Unfortunately today, there is no Morgan to give them a run! Remember the 990 c.c. model 31 years ago, when Tom Bryant and E. P. Huxham took it in turns to drive and passenger?

Grass-track "come-backs" are rare indeed, but at the beginning of the 1963 season, Bert Croucher made one of the most gallant and heroic efforts of all time to make such a "come-back." Having reached star status once again an unfortunate crash became a primary factor in Bert's decision to retire from the sport for good.

The end of 1963 saw the formation of the Southern Centre Riders' Association, a body fortunately thrown into the wheels of success right from its inception and one that still continues to grow in fast proportions.

In October, 1964, there came a sidecar sensation. Former speedway rider Arne Hendricksen made a victorious debut with his new "Hinge" combination, a design based on the West German sand-track outfits.

Powered by a 500 c.c. JAP engine both Arne and his passenger, George Smith (also a solist) rode the machine with their left legs on the sidecar platform, thereby controlling the amount of "lean." They lapped faster than any of the more powerful conventional outfits; they "walked away" with the sidecar event at the Astra Club's meeting and later won two main events at Orsett. The combination had proved an immediate success and "The Hinge" had brought a complete contrast to the usual style of sidecar racing. But its life was short-lived. The A.C.U. at its meeting in February, 1965, introduced a new rule . . . "All sidecars must have a three-point rigid fixing to the motorcycle." Arne argued—and not without justification—that hinging and banking devices were not banned at Continental grass meetings so why should they be excluded in Britain. The fact that he had raced the model only twice made him request that it be given a fair trial over one season. But Arne's efforts were all in vain, and so "The Hinge"—an unconventional folding sidecar—automatically became barred from the tracks, at least as far as direct competition with the conventional outfits were concerned. Clubs could, however, if they so wished, include in their meetings, events exclusive to models such as Arne's. Here was, of course, a unique opportunity to give the sport a tremendous boost; several "hinged" machines racing at any meeting would have certainly given sidecar racing a strong "shot in the arm." But the opportunity was missed. No one else felt inclined to build a simple "hinged" model and "The Hinge" drifted into obscurity now only remembered as a brave inventive attempt to introduce ingenuity into the sport . . . by the very gallant one-legged market gardener of Ewell.

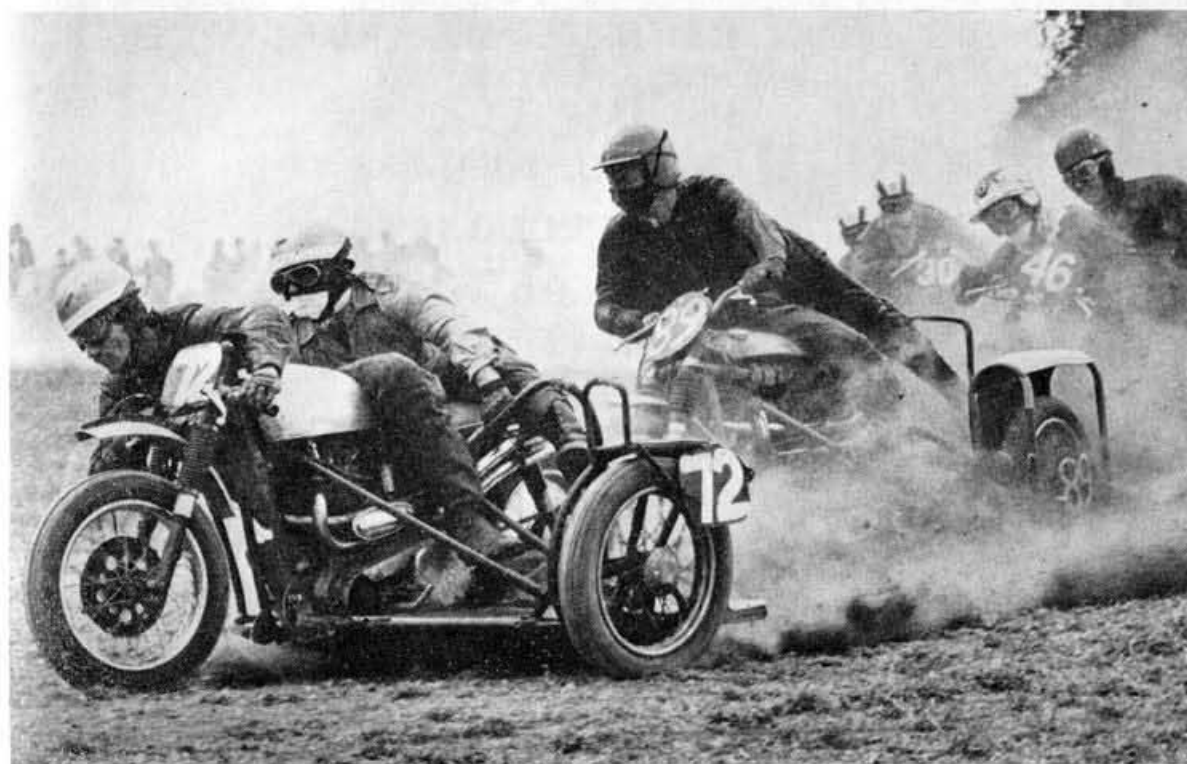
The Show Grounds of the Western Centre have undoubtedly played their part in keeping the sport alive in this area and the smaller speedway-type circuits still provide keen racing of the highest standard.

Today, you younger folk who flock to the various tracks are well catered for; you see the racing at its best and slickly organised too, and you enjoy the fruits of what the Clubs and the riders battled for in the early days.

Riding styles are now almost exclusively "foot-forward" which is safer, steadier and reduces the possibility of a competitor going wide on the bends. But in some quarters there will always be feelings of regret that the "foot-trailing" days are gone. Lloyd Goffe and the Australian, Bert Jones, were just two of the greatest exponents of this type of racing.

One of the few devotees of this ancient cult remaining, is Eric Haskins, who figures prominently in vintage events on a speedway Douglas of

FOUR SOUTHERN TOP-NOTCHERS



KEN NORCUTT (72), PHIL BALL (89), TERRY PITMAN (46) and VIVIAN DEBBEN (30).

1929 origin. For sheer, heart-in-the-mouth thrills there is nothing more gripping than to watch this sparkling Bristolian go blasting flat-out into a corner as he wrestles with a writhing, snarling machine.

* * * *

During its forty years of life, great strides have been made and grass-track's followers are the families of Britain who appreciate courage and daring of the men who ride the tracks, several of whom have given their lives in providing a great sporting spectacle.

Grass-track racing is a busy life which involves many riders in a great deal of travel; it isn't an easy game and only the very toughest survive.

And so the great game goes on . . . a game unsurpassed for good sportsmanship, grandeur and mighty endeavour. To the riders who gamely risk life and limb to provide our entertainment, may the very best of good luck remain ALWAYS ON YOUR SIDE.

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