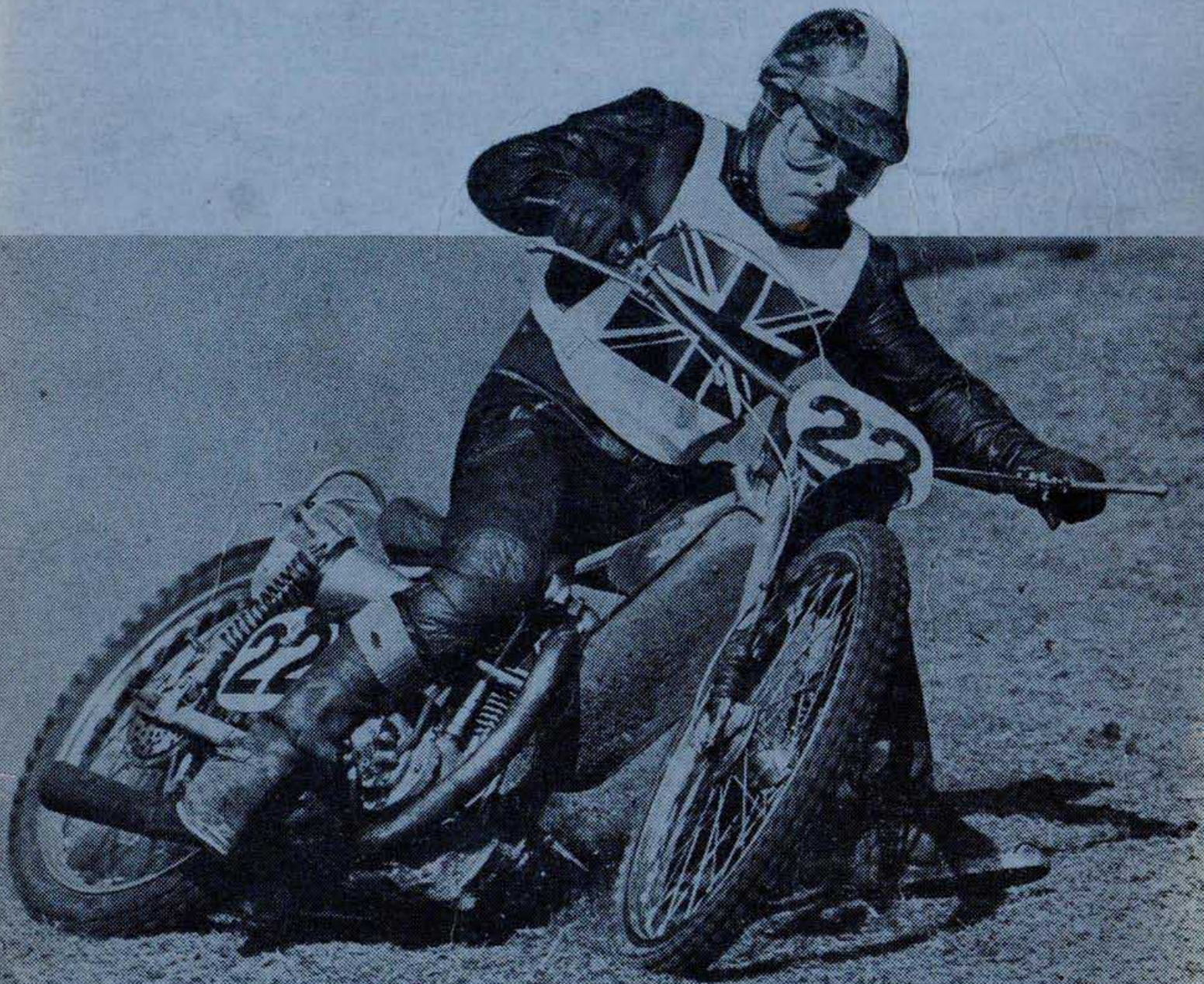


THE  
LEW COFFIN  
STORY

★ ★ ★

His History and His Achievements



2/6

By CYRIL MAY

# Jack Plowright Ltd.

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# The Lew Coffin Story

## His History

## and his Achievements

by

## CYRIL MAY

**B**ETWEEN the parallel roads of Sherborne to Dorchester and Yeovil to Dorchester lies the quiet little village of Leigh, nestling in the middle of a large and picturesque farming area of northern Dorset.

Just by the village shop in the corner of a field stands a comparatively new bungalow called "Creg-ny-Baa" and this is the home of Grass-track Ace, Lew Coffin who is one of the most spectacular, most successful, and certainly one of the greatest of today's top-grade stars.

He has been matched against the best — the very best in fact — and beaten them all including Hagon, Cresswell, Knuttson, Briggs, Tatum, Godden, Hoffmeister, Seidel, Zirk and Klaus to name but a few. Year in and year out his fantastic number of successes at home and abroad proves his remarkable skill and consistency.

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**FRONT COVER:**

The finest action picture ever taken of Lew Coffin. He amply displays his tigerish technique at the Ringwood Club's first meeting of 1966.

In a truly distinguished career he has gained a higher number of wins in German International grass-track meetings than any other English rider and at 44 years of age is still more than holding his own against the present day stars and also the younger potential ones. Lew has actually competed against some of the sons of the fathers with whom he used to race in his earlier years!

I arrived at the "Coffin" headquarters at Leigh. The old maestro was doing a spot of decorating and it was evident he could ride a bike far better than he could paint!

An open garage testified his large number of victories in Germany and more than a dozen of those golden victory laurels with their smooth and colourful silk sashes, all appropriately and delicately inscribed, decorated the walls whilst below stood the immaculate "Lew Coffin Special" or "L.C.S." for short. This was the 500 c.c. International job which has taken Lew to the heights of fame abroad; its "Vic Duggan" handlebars and its own type of springing were obviously two unique features.

"Come with me to my workshop" said Lew. We soon arrived at Hillfield only a few miles away, where, after turning into a valley, came upon his father's farm where he was born. The open surrounding fields was the place where Lew first learnt to ride and a detached building — containing the other "500" and "350" Specials — constituted a fully equipped workshop which included a lathe, welding plant, electric drills, and a mass of other tools and equipment.

Above was an old store room; a strange assortment of engines, forks, frames, wheels, tanks, and all the various parts that go to make a motorcycle lay in a buried mass, in fact it was a treasure trove of forgotten ironmongery that brought back all the characteristic taste of the early days of motorcycle sport.

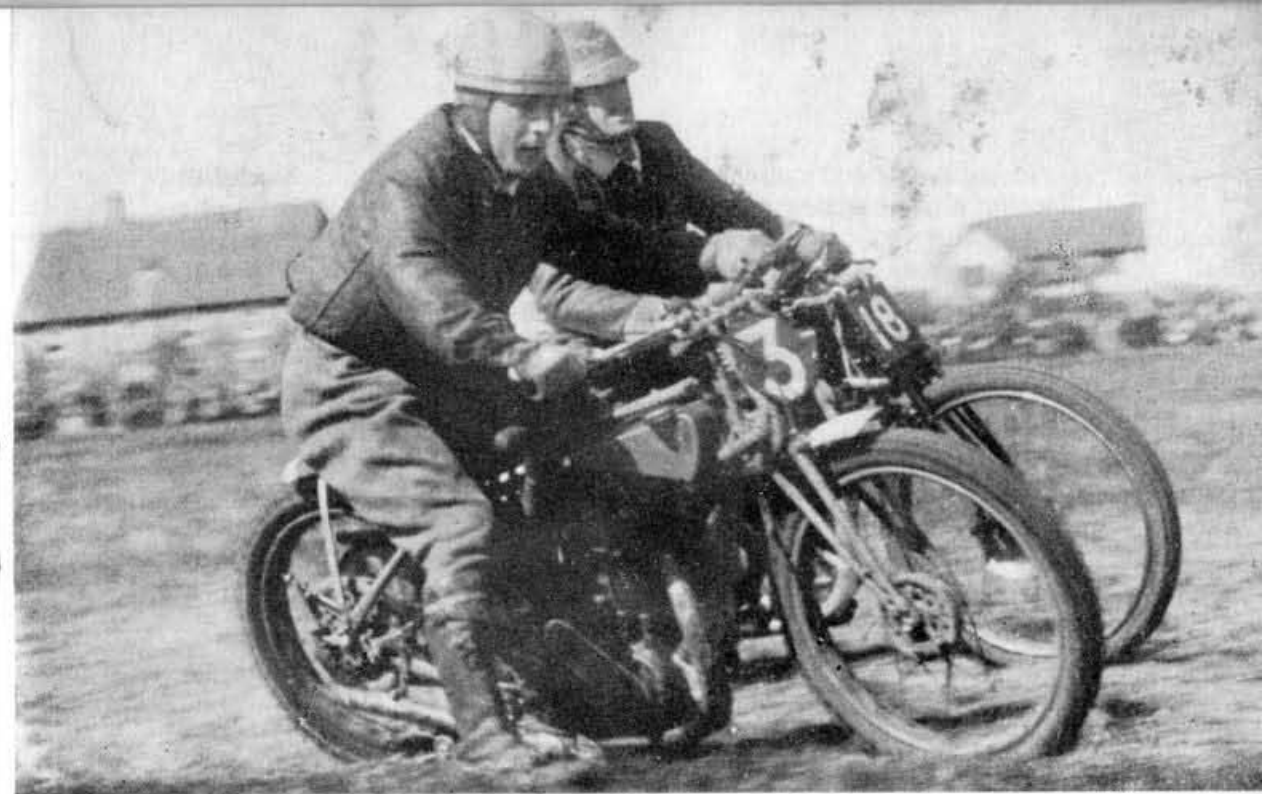
Tucked away in odd corners were fascinating relics of Lew's boyhood days but I was glad to come down from a shaky first storey; its several tons of weight made the old board floor seem none too safe!

Standing on a bench was a frame of a machine that he was in the process of building; against a side wall stood a 197 c.c. scrambler all ready for any of the younger lads to come along and have a go. The fields around the farm were also at their disposal for practising — thanks to the kindness of Mr. Coffin senior.

### THE "TROPHY ROOM"

Leaving Hillfield farm we returned to "Creg-ny-Baa" and made a "bee-line" for the lounge, or perhaps "The Trophy Room" would be a more appropriate title. Everywhere stood a dazzling and amazing array of silverware, the largest and most varied collection I have ever seen.

Two eight feet long pelmet shelves contained rows of tightly packed replicas, whilst displayed on the mantelpiece, throughout



*WHEEL TO WHEEL*—an expression often heard, but this picture shows you what it really means. LEW COFFIN (3) is neck and neck with another competitor, and only a few inches separates those flying front wheels. April 19th, 1947, at the Cann Track, Shaftesbury

its entire length, were shields that had been awarded to Lew for the part he played in the Southern Centre Team in the National Grass-track Championships and as a member for the last eleven years provides a Centre record.

Above the mantelpiece hung a gleaming Bronze Plate with the Osnabruck Crest elaborately engraved on its centre; this had been presented to Lew personally by the Mayor of Osnabruck for winning the 500 c.c. race in Germany five years ago.

Occupying the side wall were two beautifully polished cabinets, on the top of one stood the largest of the trophies that this "wizard of the grass" had won during his twenty years of active racing. The cabinets themselves, which also contained a host of awards, were also awarded to him for successes abroad.

Twelve beautiful German trophies — all of the tall heavy silver type — adorned the cabinet on the right hand side, whilst inside was an array of medals, chiefly won at the Haltern track, the remainder being for achievements in England.

A silver spoon recorded the occasion when Lew won the Three Counties Show award in 1962 and the two Broadhembury Club trophies reminded one when he made the best individual performance over the Club's 1956 season gaining the Championship event the following year.

A shining decorated solid silver Fruit Bowl took its rightful place on a table nearby. This was Lew's award at Lage in 1961 when he won the 500 c.c. event whilst beside it stood a smaller cup, but nevertheless an attractive one, named the "CASTROL CUP" which was also won in Germany.

On the other cabinet were a huge number of Championship trophies and the inside chiefly contained trial and scramble awards.

It is probable that no other rider has amassed anything like this total number of prizes which certainly constitute a permanent record for supreme riding.

And now to the man himself. Lew Coffin is a stocky little figure and although only a few inches over the five foot mark he is a mighty tough fellow and one of the toughest in grass-track today. His strength is great; it has to be to handle his machines the way he does. His vast store of vitality apparently is inexhaustible.

Lew completely mastered the technique of sliding a machine many years ago and his cornering methods are spectacular to say the least. His was no meteoric rise to the top, but a steady methodical ascent.

As a great exponent of the foot-forward speedway style his riding is a perfect combination of skill, judgement and daring which has always provided a spectacle for the public, and how they enjoy it especially on a damp track. On a dry, hard one Lew has a harder task; the track is not so co-operative and non-sliders have perhaps at times a slight advantage. Therefore he really loves the rain and revels on a greasy track.

For the ten years from 1950 to 1960 his main opposition in the south came from his very good pals, the Gould brothers, John and George, and the hundreds of races in which these three riders fought it out to the very last will be remembered by all who ever followed grass-track racing.

### OVAL CIRCUITS

It is not un-natural that Coffin prefers an oval course to one that includes a chicane, although if he has to, he is quite capable of dealing with this situation. He thinks, and I couldn't agree more, that for solos a speedway-type grass circuit makes better, closer and faster racing. As an example he gives the Wilts. Border Club's super course at Derriads Farm, near Chippenham, one which unfortunately has now closed.

Long, rough, bumpy circuits are not suitable to Lew's style — he's essentially a medium size track specialist, and who wouldn't be at 44!

Pre-war the "S" bend course was not universally adopted except in a few minor instances. It was of course primarily used in the immediate post-war year in an unsuccessful endeavour to oust the

"speedway-JAP" from the grass-tracks, but in the end it was riders of those very machines that drew the crowds and placed grass-track racing on such a solid foundation.

Lew Coffin, together with many others, including the notable Bert Croucher, are at a loss to understand why, in many courses, a chicane is still included for solo racing which they contend slows up racing to a considerable degree and with a one-man-line through the bend racing tends to become processional and less competitive.

We talked together on another very controversial subject, that of starting. Lew agreed that an electric gate is ideal and far the best. "The red and green lights come second, the elastic method third and lastly the flag start which rarely gives an entirely fair start especially with a hesitant starter" he concluded.

Lew Coffin has always made his own frames and built his own machines, but for the last ten years or so his engines have been tuned by that "master wizard" of the tuning world, Nelson Harring, of Freshford, near Bath and to him Lew pays the greatest tribute possible.

Victim of some nasty crashes in his earlier days Coffin has been particularly lucky in recent years and none of the few spills he has had have proved serious.

### RIDERS' ASSOCIATION

At present he is a staunch Committee member of the now very firmly established Southern Centre Grass-track 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. The Association has been giving some very useful help to the newer Clubs and those who have just entered the grass-track game.

Racing is definitely in Lew Coffin's blood. Of this there is no doubt, but there's another side to his personality. Many times over the years I have seen him joking, laughing, and playing with a group of children in or around the pits. He has created a great reputation amongst the younger fans and they love him for it; he gives them plenty of his time and nothing seems too much bother.

Lew has achieved great honours, but as the old adage goes . . . "its the little things that count." He's certainly done many of them, all generally unknown. He delights in giving a helping hand; if there's a collection taken at a meeting, either for an injured rider or for a First Aid contingent he is always there, wandering happily amongst the crowd. This master of the track has another virtue too, and that is thoughtfulness. I can recall many instances, but here is one typical example. A rider had been hurt in a crash while racing and after being admitted to hospital was later discharged. Lew was knocking at his door the first thing next morning to enquire how the unfortunate competitor was and to tender his very best wishes for a quick recovery.



At the Shepton Mallet Club's Douling meeting in September, 1948.

Lew changed to number 22 two years later which has been retained ever since.

### HIS EARLY DAYS

I have been one of the fortunate ones to have been able to closely follow Lew Coffin's racing career right from the start. After leaving school at the age of sixteen he began working on his father's farm at Hillfield, near Cerne Abbas in Dorset, and at various week-ends he used to watch such stars as Jack Leonard, George Butcher, Mike Erskine, Ken Goffe, Roger Wise, Jack Difazio, Stan Lanfear and many others performing their high-speed feats on several tracks which, of course, included the Blackmore Vale Club's famous Cannfield circuit at Shaftesbury. Little did Lew think at the time that, twelve years later, in 1951 to be exact, he would on that very same course win the 350 c.c. final, take second place to Dink Philpotts in the 1,000 c.c. event, and in the twelve fastest riders' event force a dead heat with Dink and at the same time create a new track record. This particular race was described by a spectator as one of the finest ever seen at Cannfield. "Lew and Dink gave us the thrill of our lives" he said.

In 1946 Lew Coffin purchased a "big-port" A.J.S. which, after providing him with one 350 c.c. win at Bristol, immediately blew up at its next meeting.

Then came a 500 c.c. JAP machine painted a brilliant red, and I well remember an incident in the hey-days of Farleigh Castle when

Lew came third in his heat of the Unlimited c.c. Novice race and then, when flashing over the finishing line on the last lap in a subsequent heat, his cylinder burst with a terrific bang, the con-rod snapped and the piston broke up in one big shower of hot metal!

Many hearts went out to the little chap with the lock of dark wavy hair.

However, obstacles are made to overcome; as Lew had constructed his own frame he had now to be on the look-out for a suitable engine. A complete machine soon came along, a 344 c.c. Royal Enfield-JAP, and he was highly pleased with the purchase at £3-10-0! This machine was originally acquired in 1928 by Ronald Farquharson, elder son of the late H. W. Farquharson who was one of the pioneers of motorcycling. Ronald raced it in many events at Brooklands, on the grass, and in various scrambles.

The engine was changed into the "home-made" frame and one of the model's first outings was the West Bristol Club's August meeting in 1946, when this promising young novice came second to Ron Jarrett riding a "500" JAP in the novice final and third in the "350" final.

The life of this machine lasted many years during which the name of Lew Coffin featured in the results of several meetings: the bike had earned a fair amount of prize money which was ploughed back into the racing game to purchase new machinery and spare parts.

Scrambling, too, gave Lew the thrill of riding a fast machine and in the Yeo Vale Club's Batten Scramble he became the proud winner of a trophy. The following is an extract from a Club magazine which is typical of his efforts in those early days.

"Lew Coffin has figured in several awards' list for trials, but he still loves to "wind it up" too much, too soon, and for too long, as witness his endeavours in the January trial when he finished up in a bramble bush at the bottom of a deep trench! However, he always manages to give the crowd a very big thrill."

In spite of scrambling and "trailing" this enthusiastic young fellow was still doing his merry round of the grass-tracks. The boom days were not yet over and he regularly competed in many Centres. Nine rides taking nine wins, a match race, the fastest time of the day, plus a trophy at Newbury provided him with a great incentive to keep going although the path to the top seemed rather obscure.

**SPEEDWAY**

Speedway now claimed Lew's attention and after purchasing a motor from grass-track star Bingley Cree and attending practise sessions at Knowle, he became a regular performer at the Bristol track in 1948,



### THE LARGEST-EVER GRASS-TRACK TROPHY!

THE SOMERSET COUNTY  
CHALLENGE CUP

This superb trophy (value £160) was awarded by the Shepton Mallet Club in 1950 to the winner of the Mendip Championship at the Doulting Circuit.

Heading the points list in the first round was Lew Coffin, but mechanical trouble in subsequent rounds robbed him of an almost certain place.

although his riding had earned him the nickname of "The Killer"! Vic Anstice once said, "If you want anything broken up, then give it to Coffin!"

L.C. delighted the crowds with his neck-or-nothing style but the steward was none too pleased with his riding and at one particular meeting in June this daring young fellow was reported to the Speedway Control Board. Here is a copy of the actual letter that Lew received from Major Fearnley, which certainly has its amusing side.

*"The Steward has drawn my attention to your riding at Bristol on June 25th. In event six, in a fit of enthusiasm you bored one rider on the inside of one bend. On the next your riding carried another rider out to the safety fence, and after the steward had switched on your exclusion light you ignored this and carried on, and on the next bend knocked another rider off his machine, again from the inside. I must point out to you that if you are going to ignore the Steward's direction*

*in this manner, then nothing but trouble can come of your behaviour. The Control Board is always glad to recognise enthusiasm in the right place but you must watch your riding carefully in future."*

So daredevil Lew had to curb this reckless riding. Later in the year he was loaned to Exeter where he became a more stable competitor and secured a certain amount of success. He was now good enough to receive an offer to join the Yarmouth team, but this was declined on account of the travelling distances involved.

Trials riding was now providing Lew with an immense amount of fun and he really enjoyed it. Competing in a certain event he charged up a section at speed on his 250 c.c. Ariel and immediately dived into the bushes. A spectator shouted "Come out of it Coffin, that's a motor-bike you've got there, not a bulldozer!"

Meanwhile there were two younger riders who had taken up grass-track racing and by the end of the season had begun to make a name for themselves. I am referring of course to the popular Gould brothers of Bicton, near Fordingbridge, who were two of Lew's most serious rivals, a rivalry which lasted for many years.

### CLIMBING THE LADDER

1952 saw the Stainer Trophy in Coffin's permanent collection after three successive victories. He was then appointed Captain of his Club, the Blackmore Vale, and he retained this honour for twelve years which certainly gave him a very proud record.

Our famous British rider, Eric Fernihough, former holder of the world's motorcycle speed record, had been tragically killed when attacking the German-held record in 1938 near Budapest. Through the kindness of his wife, the Ringwood Club had secured the handsome trophy that Eric won in the 1931 250 c.c. class of the Swedish Grand Prix and this was now being awarded to the rider who clocked the fastest time of the season at the Club's meetings. From 1946 the various holders had been Charlie Hayden, Dink Philpotts, Bingley Cree, Bert Croucher and Fred Parkins, but 1952 saw the trophy in new hands and it became an addition to the now ever-growing Coffin collection.

That same year Alf Hickin entered Lew on a 250 c.c. A.J.S. in the Warminster Road races, organised by the Wylve Valley Club. "It was a very enjoyable ride" he said, "but I could plainly see that I wasn't really cut out for this type of racing."

Grass-track racing seemed now to be a fading sport, but one or two of the staunchest of Clubs just managed to keep the flag flying through those dark and dismal days. In the end it did revive, but nothing like those immediate post-war years.

The 1953 Southern Centre Championship (350 c.c. class) went to Lew Coffin at Willoughby Hedge and the following year the Fernihough Trophy was again in his hands. He rode at Farleigh Castle's



CONCENTRATION: With the pack hard on his heels Lew Coffin leads an exciting but dusty race at The Mount, Ringwood

last meeting in May, 1954, and later in the year gained the 350 c.c. Championship at the Long Newnton circuit, near Tetbury, organised by the Minety Vale Club.

1955 was a big year for Lew in more ways than one. He was married on June 4th, to Miss Betty King at Yetminster Church. As they came from the Church door a surprise had been planned by fellow members of the Blackmore Vale Club and an archway of exhaust pipes complete with two crash helmets greeted Lew and his bride. The organist was one of his racing club-mates, Wally Monckton.

The next day versatile Lew was racing at Dunkeswell in the South Western Centre, securing the 350 c.c. and unlimited c.c. events in two exhilarating rides.

His "500" JAP now had special springing of his own design to give more stability and comfort when the engine developed its 45 brake horse power maximum. Air gun springs were contained in the special telescopic front forks of the "350" model which also had an ingenious rear springing system made up of rubber bands and metal friction dampers.

For the third time the Fernihough Trophy was awarded to Lew who was now journeying further afield to race. At the Newquay Club's meeting after winning the "350" final and a match race he

became the highest point scorer of the meeting and for this he gained the Newquay Trophy. Later in the year he won the Blackmore Vale Speed Trophy.

This "master of the track" was now a star in his own right but even greater achievements were to come. This was in 1956 with successes at Bude in Cornwall in "500" and "1,000" events, plus match race victories. The President's Trophy went to Lew at Bridgwater, and yet again he won the Newquay Trophy as well as the Speed and Fernihough Trophies. Placed third in the 350 c.c. class of the National Championships he captained the victorious Southern Centre Team at the same meeting, which consisted of Dave Lane, John and George Gould, Wally Monckton and Ron Goulding.

Over now to the Wessex Centre when, from a star studded entry, this grass-track stylist won the Battle of Britain Trophy at Long Newnton.

### RAYMOND BEAUMONT

But grass-track racing isn't all happy memories for Lew; far from it. It is not often that real tragedy strikes a meeting but occasionally it does, and it certainly did on Wednesday evening, August 15th, 1956. Thirty year-old Ray Beaumont, one of the west country's leading riders was on holiday and competed in the Newquay Club's meeting. Poor Ray received injuries which proved fatal in a first bend crash during the 500 c.c. final which consisted of eight experienced riders. The whole sport was shattered when they heard the terrible news that he had died shortly after admission to hospital. Lew Coffin, amongst other riders was involved in that fateful crash, and he had the very painful and nerve-racking task of giving evidence at the inquest. He told the Coroner that he was struck from the rear, and was thrown off in the pile-up. "There was no fault of anyone's riding," continued Lew, "all were first class riders and the track was good, which they knew quite well. This was just one of those unfortunate accidents which happens only on very rare occasions."

### SILVER HELMET WINNER

The Bridgewater Club's Championship was again won by Lew Coffin and from South Western he went South Eastern for the last meeting of the Sittingbourne Club at Wrinsted Court, Doddington, in September, where he made his best appearance so far in this area. It rained and rained, but riding in his usual fearless style in appalling conditions he completely dominated the scene by winning both the 350 c.c. event, the coveted Silver Helmet, and the Sittingbourne Championship which carried with it the Redshaw Memorial Trophy. Lew defeated the local favourites Syd Jarvis and Arthur Hood together with Murray Briggs (Barry's brother) and his winning ride produced the fastest time of the day at 42.9 m.p.h.

JUST A FEW OLD-TIMERS . . . They were Lew Coffin's pals but also his rivals



GRAHAM PARRY



BONNY GOOD AND BINGLEY CREE



ROGER WISE, FRANK EVANS AND DICK BRADLEY

Those who have followed the sport since the early years should find these famous names evoking nostalgic memories and bringing back the thrills of the past.

Lew has great memories too, of his younger days when he was struggling up the ladder of fame and racing against these already established stars, all of which have long since retired.



This highly successful year was brought to a fitting conclusion at the Broadhembury Club's fixture where those great battles which had raged throughout the season with Fred Parkins still continued. Lew became the outright master at last and won every event. Fred was second in each case and he also occupied this position in a special challenge race with Coffin, who also collected the Club Trophy and a prize for the fastest time of day which, incidentally, was made on his "350" machine.

Lew was still a true pal to the novices. In his spare time he was teaching them to ride, and these included a sixteen year-old lad by the name of Tony Chant. That particular Broadhembury event happened to be his third meeting and on Lew's "350" Tony gained a fifth place in the "500" experts barred race, second in the final, and sixth in the open 1,000 c.c. event, which proved one of the outstanding performances of the day.

Many of you have probably seen Lew Coffin at the pits entrance his eyes sparkling with admiration and satisfaction as he watches one of his young novices, enlightened by his sage advice, flashing through to a very good placing or even a win.

#### 1957

By 1957 Fred Parkins was an established star and Barry Briggs had started his rapid rise to grass-track fame.

Bill Bridgett, Martin Tatum and Adrian Kessell had all begun to make the sparks fly in their respective Centres — all comparative youngsters to Lew Coffin's 35 years. But nothing daunted, Lew was determined to stay at the top and this he certainly did, in spite of concentrated opposition in many quarters. Few men rode with such genuine zest and enthusiasm, and he started the year with a phenomenal run of successes which has continued until today.

In the Western Centre he came second to Bill Bridgett in the 350 c.c. class of the Worcestershire Championships, and afterwards, gained three final main events and three seconds at Ross-on-Wye.

As the outright winner of the Withington Challenge Trophy he had cleaned up every event forcing Austin Cresswell into second place each time and Austin was a tremendous "flyer" on his Royal Enfield-JAP.

With "old man risk" always at his elbow Lew was not lacking in courage and more victories came at Bere Regis, but previously he had "swept the board" at Wareham with fastest time of day, whilst in the same month renewed tussles with Fred Parkins took place in Cornwall.

After several successes at Bridgewater he again won the Broadhembury Club's Championship.

#### NATIONAL CHAMPION BEATEN

Worthy of inclusion is the Sittingbourne Club's meeting at Doddington. Lew won the 350 c.c. Championship at 58.5 m.p.h. and in gaining the 650 c.c. event besides beating Alf Hagon, the National Champion, and Barry Briggs, he established a new track record of 61.5 m.p.h. He lost the Silver Helmet to Ted Burridge.

John Gould had been outstanding in the Individual Championship of the Southern Centre since 1951. He had won the title four times and his brother twice. Venue for this big event in 1957 was Willoughby Hedge, lying high up on the Wiltshire Hills near Mere. Lew Coffin made a supreme effort to capture the honours, but that elusive 1,000 c.c. Individual title still remained with John Gould who was riding really on top-form. Lew had to be content as runner-up but he played a major part in the Blackmore Vale Club's Team Championship win. At the same meeting positions were reversed in the 350 c.c. Championship and Coffin repeated a previous achievement.

Tim Bungay was grateful to Lew for his tuition; he was a highly delighted boy when he sailed away with the novice event at the first meeting of the season at Willoughby Hedge. Today, of course, Tim is one of grass-track's greatest favourites.

The National Championships were held near High Wycombe and the Southern Centre Team who took second place in the Team Championship event, comprised of John and George Gould, Ron Goulding and Lew Coffin.

In September the annual Willoughby Hedge Championships were staged. Lew won the 1,000 c.c. final and recorded fastest time of day; he rounded off his best-ever season so far, by winning the "350" and "500" Championship of the Broadhembury Club at Willand in Devon, besides the unlimited and the eight fastest riders' events and clocking the fastest time of day. Misfortune overtook Fred Parkins in one of the heats when his frame decided to snap so Lew very sportingly loaned him his "350" machine to enable him to finish off quite a successful days' racing.

Between the various race meetings Lew had been training 16 year-old Bryan Goss of Yeovil, and there is no need for me to mention his tremendous scramble achievements since that time.

Lew Coffin's first meeting in 1958 was the Invicta Club's event in Kent where he won the 500 c.c. final, which triggered off another season containing a huge number of successes the most notable of which included:

Willoughby Hedge Championships	350 c.c. First
	500 c.c. Second
Wye Valley A.C. Championship ...	Second
Long Newnton Championship ...	Second
National Championship ...	Third
East Cornwall Meeting ...	Winner of every event.



AN ALARMING ANGLE: Lew's left handlebar nearly touches the ground as he fights for the lead in a first-bend tussle

At the Sittingbourne track Lew set up another new track record at 63.60 m.p.h. which produced the fastest speed ever recorded.

The new National Champion, Murray Briggs, was twice defeated by Lew in the 350 c.c. class of the Southern Centre Championship meeting organised by the Salisbury Club at Ansty. His fast and highly tuned JAP-engined machines took him to victory in the "350" event and at the same meeting he achieved a long ambition to become the Individual Champion of his Centre for the very first time.

The Ledbury Challenge Trophy and the George Hopkins Trophy, to name but a few, found themselves in that "Trophy Room" and were useful additions to a grand collection.

### HIS FIRST GERMAN INTERNATIONAL

Let me take you back to May 14th, when, in the early hours of the morning, two very tired but very proud motorcyclists reached their homes. Fred Parkins and Lew had just returned from their first International grass-track meeting held at the Hallsburgh track, near Minden in Germany. Their achievements brought honour to their Club and to their Country. Riders from no less than 13 countries took part including the champions of France, Holland, Belgium,

Switzerland, Austria and Germany. An attendance of 40,000 saw Lew Coffin finish second to Joe Hoffmeister in the "350" class with Parkins third. In the big event, the "500" open, Lew gave a spectacular performance in beating the German "cracks" Alfred Mach and Seigfried Klaus to be acclaimed the outright winner of the meeting.

The victory laurels were placed around his neck and the colourful massed bands played the British National Anthem. In describing the scene, Lew told me it was the greatest moment of his life.

Afterwards the English riders were taken on a tour of honour and were entertained at a banquet where many gifts and flowers were showered upon them.

Two days after arriving in England the B.B.C. were after Lew Coffin and he was "on the air" describing his experiences in an interview which lasted for twenty minutes.

In July he made the long trip to Germany again, and competed in the Internationals at Bad Zwischenahn on the sixth, and at Cloppenburg on the thirteenth, but these meetings were not very successful for him. Like all great performers he had his various "ups and downs," and patches of bad luck sometimes came his way.

Back in England he made a quick trip in August to Carmarthen, in South Wales, which paid dividends, and as the season drew to a close Lew was faced with the big task of dismantling and preparing all his machines for the following year.

The "Coffin Stable" now consisted of two 350 c.c. machines and three "500" models all of which had been individually designed for the different types of courses he was now encountering.

1959 was another good typical Coffin season which began at the Lydden track in Kent where he journeyed to match himself against some of the South Eastern Centre "giants." He won the "350" event at 55.21 m.p.h. from Williams and Hagon; Ted Jelf beat him into second place in the eight-lap unlimited c.c. race after which Lew came back into his own to win the twelve-lap Championship race from Jelf and Godden at the very fast average of 59.21 m.p.h.

Over to Germany again for the Porta meeting on May 3rd, where a large crowd in the region of 20,000 witnessed an epic ride to victory by Lew Coffin over the reigning European Champion Joe Hoffmeister. The positions of the previous year had been reversed; Lew had the laurels and Hoffmeister had the flowers.

Back to England again for a few more meetings and then a return to Germany for the Osnabruck and Cloppenburg Internationals. Then came an accident in the home country, no, not on the grass, but on the road. Lew had a near head-on smash which was unavoidable when a car suddenly came round the corner on its wrong side. His car was a complete write-off and Betty was taken to hospital. Lew was not badly hurt and started walking to the Basingstoke meeting for which he was heading when the crash occurred, but no one would give him a lift so he went back to the hospital!



VICTORY SMILES at the Hallsburgh track near Minden in 1959. Lew Coffin had just beaten the German Champion Joe Hoffmeister who seems equally as pleased with second place.

The Bishops Waltham Club ran a meeting the following weekend at Corhampton and Lew chalked up two final wins, a second and a third; not bad achievements with two broken ribs!

In the Southern Centre Championships John Gould took the "350" and Individual titles; Lew came third in the "350" and he was a member of his Club's team which won the Club Championship.

Tim Bungay, now an accepted star, and mounted on one of the "500" L.C. specials gained three thirds in three main events at Wareham.

Highlight of the afternoon at the Long Newnton Championship meeting, was a match race between John Gould and ex-world champion Barry Briggs who was riding Lew's machine.

Throughout the race hardly more than a length separated the two challengers and a very exciting duel terminated when Barry just scraped home by a few yards.

### MORE CHAMPIONSHIP VICTORIES

Lew Coffin's winning ways still continued throughout 1960. With his usual characteristic pluck he won the Bridgewater Championship and also the "350" and Individual titles of his Centre. Then came a complete "wipe-up" at the Willoughby Hedge Championships in the "350" class together with the fastest time of day and this on his "350" machine. He must have had a Tiger in his Tank!

In the National Championships, usually run over large circuits, L.C. has never had the best of luck. This year however, he gained a fourth in the 350 c.c. class — quite a creditable performance.

Seven rides brought seven wins and the fastest time of day at Greenham in Somerset, and exactly the same thing happened at Shapwick.

Successes in Germany too, came again at Osnabruck. In a report of the meeting in "Der Sport" the paper carried a picture of Lew underneath a big headline entitled, "Fliengende Sarg" which meant the "Flying Coffin!"

By the time the season had begun in 1961 John and George Gould had retired after ten racing years of the highest standard. Two accidents, a broken ankle for John and concussion for George were contributing factors in their decisions to "call it a day." Week in and week out with Lew Coffin they had provided a regular highlight.

Jon Erskine, nineteen year-old son of Mike had his first-ever ride at Willoughby on April 16th; he gained two thirds. With father as tuner Jon rapidly rose to the top and Lew found himself with a youngster challenging his supremacy. Unfortunately Jon forsook the grass in preference to the smaller and smoother circuits of the speedway and you all know what an accomplished star he now is in this field.

Throughout the year intrepid Lew remained supreme. With enviable energy and enthusiasm he again took the Bridgewater Championship, two Championships of his Centre and the Southern Centre Star competition. These were, of course, just a few of the season's successes.

But the English crowds were not the only ones to get a kick out of the riding of L.C. and his highly-tuned machines. For the fourth year he went to Germany and duels between him and Fred Parkins were renewed. Meantime Fred had married a German girl and was now a permanent resident in that country.

The illustrious name of Lew Coffin featured in no less than four Internationals where some of the well-known continental stars were forced to take second positions, particularly at Lage where he became the outright winner of the "350" and "500" classes and also a special match race with the German ace, Siegfried Klaus.

### TRIPLE CHAMPION

Previously the "Dorset Flyer" had never given the 250 c.c. class any serious thought, but he decided the time had now come and a "250" special was constructed during the winter, so 1962 saw him racing in every solo class.

The year was really a repetition of previous ones but with additional honours. Lew was riding on the crest of a wave, although with up-and-coming riders such as Dave Palmer, Peter Munday, Don Freemantle and Eric Stroud right hard on his heels, his task was no easy matter.

The brand new "250" immediately produced results with a number of wins. Then came the Centre Championships and the question on everyone's lips was whether Lew Coffin was capable of winning all three titles. It needed the greatest of efforts; it was a tremendous task.

Notwithstanding, Lew accomplished this unique feat and in three magnificent final rides he became the first man ever to hold the 250, 350 and 1,000 c.c. Championship titles of the Southern Centre in one year. This superb record has never been equalled. It was an astonishing and praiseworthy achievement.

Delighted with his good fortune, but quite unaffected by it, Lew afterwards said that he had achieved an ambition and was particularly pleased to have gained the "250" title. His Centre too appreciated his efforts and at their Annual Meeting presented him with an additional Trophy to mark such a memorable occasion.

However, after all these monumental efforts he "swept the board" in meetings organised by the Ringwood, Andover, Yeo Vale, Salisbury, Carmarthen, Minety Vale, Tiverton, Malvern, Bishops Waltham and Taunton Clubs, with fastest times of day in every case together with the Welsh Championship title, and further successes in Germany proved a wonderful year for Lew. It claimed the distinction as being his best-ever.

At Haltern in West Germany the British National Anthem brought 20,000 to their feet on two occasions when Coffin went to the dais to be presented with, firstly, the Golden garland of laurels and secondly the Silver Trophy as the winner of two events in which he was competing against a select company of Europe's top men. At this meeting he also claimed the track record which has never been broken, although many attempts have been made, and a very gallant one by Kurt Petersen of Denmark.

In a victory in the "500" event at Wentlagen Lew accomplished another "hat trick" and was awarded a handsome trophy for the third time in succession!

### SPEEDWAY AGAIN

It was back again to speedway in 1963. The Weymouth track had re-opened and not only was he a member of the team but he was



DETERMINATION PLUS! The Blackmore Vale Club's badge adorns his helmet; the Union Jack his leathers and "TWENTY-TWO" speeds on to yet another victory

appointed captain of the "Royals." In his spare time "Tiger" Coffin was at the track enthusiastically coaching the novices for he always had, and still has, the younger boys at heart.

In spite of various commitments on the "dirt" the grass-tracks were not forgotten, far from it, in fact all over Southern England Lew's victories were being accomplished with clockwork regularity.

Records recall that he won all the events at Andover, Launceston, Iron Acton, Ringwood, Tiverton, Yeovil, Withington and Greenham tracks. At the Willoughby Hedge Championships which had now been established as one of the biggest events in the Southern calendar, Lew was there battling with the "500" giants on his "350" model. The frame of his "500" had snapped while racing at Hereford the

previous evening and a second place in the Star event and third in the 1,000 c.c. final constituted a most meritorious effort.

For weeks on end Lew Coffin was invincible; this lion-hearted fellow had struck his greatest form.

In the National Star meeting, also at Willoughby, Coffin gained 500 c.c. Star honours after an exciting scrap with Don Godden and Jack Sewell, to record the fastest time of day.

He had now built an "L.C. Special" for his protege Colin Henley, and it was of great satisfaction to both, when one of these machines carried twenty year-old Colin to his best performance so far at Ringwood, with three firsts, one second, and the novice award.

A supreme effort was made by Lew to retain his unique "Triple Crown" in the Centre Championships, but it was asking too much; his luck was out, at least as regards the "250" title and he failed to qualify for the final because of mechanical trouble in his heat. Nevertheless, the "350" and Individual Trophies were once again in his possession.

Now came another visit to Germany where Lew won two main events at Lage, the meeting that was attended by a near six-figure crowd and one which was delayed for an hour to get in the several mile queue of cars that had collected along the approach road. Such was German enthusiasm, and it still is!

Three more victories came Lew's way at Osnabruck where the East German Champion, F. Zirk, was beaten by him in every race.

In the evening this artist in skill and speed was guest of honour at a banquet given by the local Mayor when presentations were made.

Speaking of an unforgettable experience Lew remarked: "Champagne flowed like 'Tennyson's Brook'." The person who persisted in him taking that potent "fuel" was no other than the Chief of Police!

With four "500" wins and a Trophy at Oberkirchen Coffin's German successes came to a fitting climax at Stadhagen, the entry of which included Bjorn Knuttson, present world speedway champion, and at that time holder of the European title. Interest remained exceptionally high and over 5,000 paid to watch the practise session on the previous day. A main road had been closed and a large stand erected on it to accommodate the fabulous crowd.

Using his usual tigerish technique Lew emerged from a series of six-lap races as the overall winner, the most exciting of which was the "500" final in which he crossed the line half a wheel ahead of Knuttson.

### FIVE MACHINES

Maintaining five machines created rather a problem for the "King of the Grass" and at the end of the season, with reluctance, the "250" was disregarded. He was now a great favourite with West German

enthusiasts and had ridden in a total of five different Internationals in 1964. At home for the fifth successive time he became Individual Champion of his Centre and the loudspeakers blared "the old man's done it again!"

His "German season" ended in a blaze of glory when Barry Briggs was twice defeated by Lew. At Oberkirchen the crowd went wild as Coffin overtook the world speedway champion (who finished third) and a German rider in the 500 c.c. event to win the title for the third successive time.

Commenting on Barry, Lew had this to say, "He is a tremendous rider on the grass, I like him, I love racing with him, and he certainly makes me go!"

Commenting on 1964 he said, "It was a terrifically good year for me but I think the previous year was better."

### MAIN SUCCESSES FOR 1965

Southern Centre Individual Champion for the seventh and sixth successive time.

Southern Centre 350 c.c. Champion for the fourth time.

Southern Centre Star Competition. 500 c.c. class, third.

South Western Centre Solo Champion.

Bridgewater Club's Trophy winner.

St. Paul Trophy Competition, third place.

Awford Trophy winner for third successive year (B.S.S.A.)

Best Solo performance at the Royal Counties Show.

Best Solo performance, Bishops Waltham Club's meeting.

Best Solo performance, Yeo Vale Club's August meeting.

\* \* \*

I suppose today, that Lew's greatest enemy is "Old Father Time" as racing must get considerably harder for him as the years go by. I recently questioned him as to the future and surprisingly enough he is just as enthusiastic now as he was when I talked to him as a young novice at Farleigh Castle twenty years ago!

"Although I shall be 45 in January, 1967, I shall keep racing as long as I can. I hope I am good for another five years at least" was his reply.

Lew Coffin will long be remembered with affection as one of the greatest exponents of grass-track racing, and one who will leave behind him a magnificent racing record. Surely he can take the title of "the toughest man in grass-track racing" the sport to which he is so deeply dedicated.



THE ONE AND ONLY PICTURE ever taken of Lew complete with his magnificent collection of Trophies. And these were not all of them!

Statistics prove many things. I like them. They prove that, taking the category of the greatest number of wins from 1946 to 1965 inclusive, Lew is way ahead of everyone else and I therefore accordingly place him as England's number one rider for this period.

Temperamental to a degree, and certainly a controversial figure, he is, nevertheless, a very renowned fellow, and what is more astounding is the fact that there is plenty of dynamite still left in him! He has lived life to the full.

His present occupation? He is a motor mechanic at Yeovil where he has been employed by his cousin since 1949.

Well there it is. A fairly, but not wholly, comprehensive study of LEW COFFIN and his achievements over the past twenty years, which makes it the first ever publication on an individual grass-track Star . . . . I hope you like it.

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