

London's Own Circuits

Crystal Palace and Brands Hatch

ALTHOUGH the names of London's very own circuit at the Crystal Palace and the nearby Kentish venue of Brands Hatch have become so familiar to the sporting motorcyclist that they seem like old friends, both tracks are, in fact, comparatively modern. Road racing at "The Palace" restarted as recently as 1953 after the hiatus of the war years, whilst the hard surface at Brands did not come into use until 1950. Yet in these few years both short circuits, each with a lap of under 1½ miles, have achieved a popularity all their own—and not only with nearby Londoners, at that, for many enthusiasts will ride a hundred miles or more to see racing on these wide, well-surfaced tracks, which demand the utmost in rider concentration and machine handling owing to their complexity and the frequency of the twists and turns.

The older of the two circuits is Crystal Palace, which was opened for its first meeting, a car event, on April 24, 1937; motorcycles raced there soon after on May 15. In those days, the lap was more complex than it is now, being somewhat longer (exactly 2 miles) through the inclusion of an inner, square-shaped extension within the current fundamentally-rectangular course familiar to the 30,000 spectators who regularly come to watch racing at the site of the old Crystal Palace—now better known for its dominating television mast than as the site of the 1854 exhibition hall destroyed by fire in November, 1936. One of the twin towers remained standing until recently.

The war, naturally, brought racing to a close and a resumption was not planned until the London County Council took over the grounds on January 1, 1952. It was immediately apparent to them that the old circuit was none too safe for modern speeds and the New Link was completed in time for a car meeting on Whit-Monday, 1953, and a motorcycle event on June 27 of the same year.

The New Link cut out the old inner circuit by joining Park Curve with the home straight and reduced the lap length to 1.39 miles. Parts of the old track are still visible on the North Tower side of the starting area.

The modern course brought an immediate increase in lap speeds of some 10 m.p.h. over the pre-war figures, which were just under 60 m.p.h. A further increase, of some 5 m.p.h., occurred in the 1956 season after the track had been re-surfaced with Resmat cold-rolled asphalt.



Crystal Palace lap record holder John Surtees.



Fastest man at Brands, Derek Minter, with the track's Aggregate Shield.

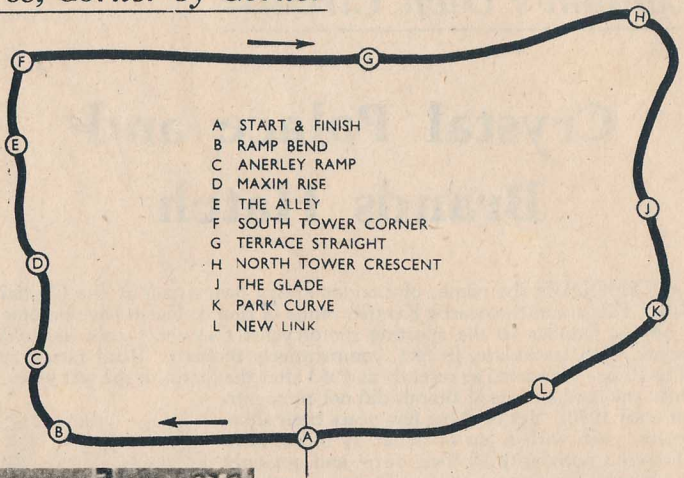
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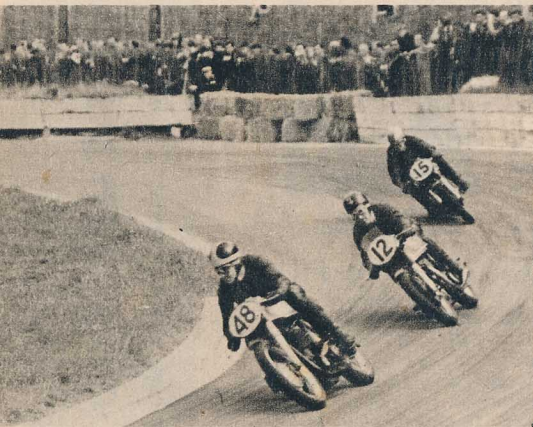
MOTOR CYCLING

CIRCUIT SOUVENIR No. 1
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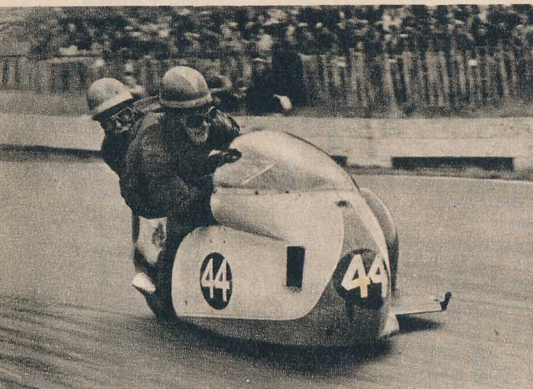
The Course, Corner by Corner



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(Above) Solos sweep round South Tower Corner.
 (Below) A "chair" in a fast drift through The Alley.



CRYSTAL PALACE

THE start at the Crystal Palace course, A, is situated on the Penge side, mid-way along the straight and in front of the open stands and paddock; in accordance with normal practice, it is combined with the finishing line. It is located just short of the braking point for Ramp Bend, B, and machines cross it at near-maximum speed.

Ramp Bend, taken in second gear by many machines, is rather faster than some novices think and takes the rider under one of the two bridges over the track. This bridge is reserved for entrance to the paddock.

Immediately after negotiating the main portion of the bend, the machines climb up Anerley Ramp, C, still in full view of spectators on the outside of the course, though here, for the first time, they are also visible to the public on the inside.

Maxim Rise, D, represents the peak of the climb up on to a sort of general plateau; it also embodies some tricky swerve and is one of the few spots where the sidcar passenger has to get out of the tray for a left-hand sweep.

This sweep terminates in the wriggles through The Alley, E, by which time the rider has started to roll it back to brake for the acute right-handed South Tower Corner, F. This spot, which has public enclosures (one of them a stand) on the outside only, is a favourite one for students of cornering form, it being one of those awkward bends that is neither second nor bottom for the average "500." It is an inspiring spot to stand, hear the chairs start off the grid, come

sweeping up from Maxim and then jockey their way round South Tower Corner, the surface becoming speedily blackened by the passage of tortured tyres.

From this corner it is also possible to get a good view of competitors fleeing down the Terrace Straight, G, under the terrace bridge towards North Tower Crescent. They are in full view of the spectators on the terrace.

Like its more southern neighbour, North Tower Crescent, H, takes its name from the location of the now-demolished tower. The bend is not an easy one, tightening as it progresses. Moreover, it is approached through a left-hander that is disconcerting in the wet when a rider is trying to line up for the main bend. In such weather, the trees on the outside of the crescent constitute useful shelter for those watching.

The Glade, J, out of bounds to the public, forms a mystery part of the course. Riders go into it in one order and emerge in another! It is dim under the trees, can be slippery with fallen leaves and drips of water and has kinks acute enough to call for much agility on the part of sidecar crews.

Riders next appear to the sight of those at the starting area as they emerge from Park Curve, K, and start to wind it all on for the rush down the descent to the New Link, L, and the chequered flag. The New Link marks the fringe of the public's area and is popular in that one can see two riders emerge from the Glade on equal terms and then see which has the quicker accelerating machine as they blast off, on full noise, down the hill to the lower ground of the starting and paddock areas.

LAP RECORDS

- 50 c.c. Solo:** 1 min. 36.6 sec. = 51.8 m.p.h. F. W. J. Launchbury (Itom), 17.8.1957
125 c.c. Solo: 1 min. 13.4 sec. = 68.17 m.p.h. D. V. Chadwick (M.V.), 17.8.1957.
250 c.c. Solo: 1 min. 7.4 sec. = 74.24 m.p.h. J. Surtees (NSU), 17.8.1957.
350 c.c. Solo: 1 min. 5.4 sec. = 76.51 m.p.h. J. Surtees (Norton), 17.8.1957.
1,000 c.c. Solo: 1 min. 3 sec. = 79.43 m.p.h. J. Surtees (Norton), 17.8.1957.
1,200 c.c. Three-wheelers: 1 min. 8.8 sec. = 72.73 m.p.h. P. V. Harris (Norton), 6.10.1956.
Absolute Track Record: 1 min. 2.4 sec. = 80.19 m.p.h. J. Brabham (Formula 2, Cooper-Climax), 10.6.1957.

MEETING DATES

(with times of first races)

Road Races

Easter Monday, April 7—12 noon. (National permit.) S.E. Centre, A.-C.U.
 Bank Holiday Monday, August 4—1.30 p.m. (National permit.) B.M.C.R.C.

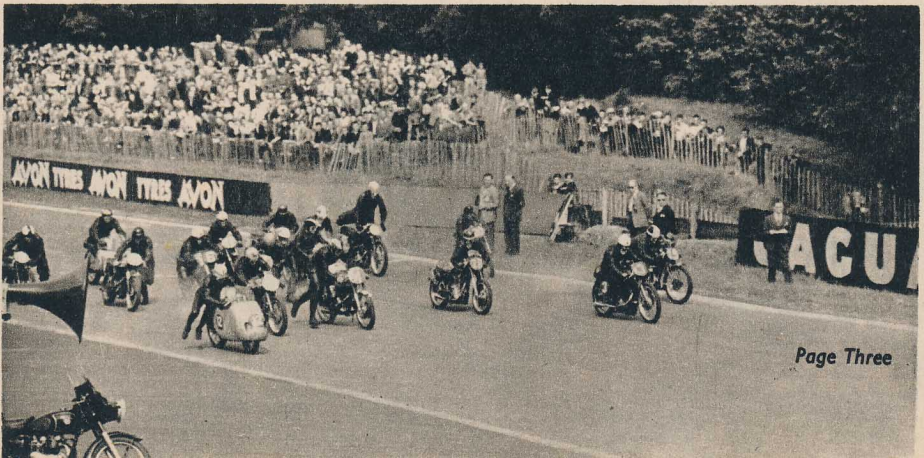
Circuit Admission Charges: Adults, 3s.; children under 14, 1s. 6d. Admittance to open stands, 2s. 6d. per seat.

Car Park Charges: Motorcycles and three-wheelers, 2s. 6d.; cars, 5s.; all-in charge for car and up to five occupants, £1.

Proprietors: Parks Dept., London County Council, Spring Gdns., London S.W.1. (WHItchall 3121).

Getting away from the start, with its packed open stands, at the "Palace."

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How to get there



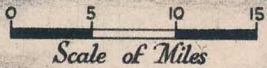
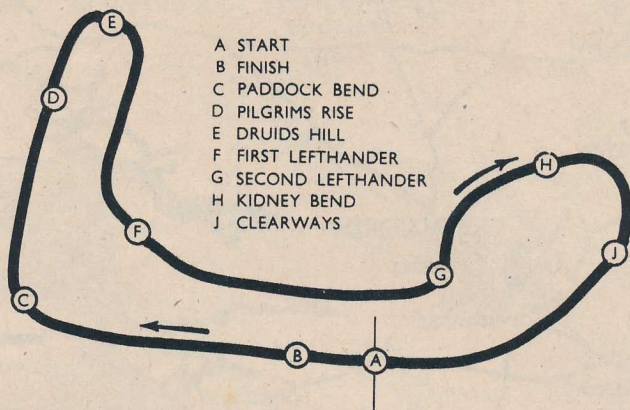


TABLE OF MILEAGES

	Brands Hatch	Crystal Palace
Ashford	32½	51
Aylesbury	66	48½
Cambridge	73½	67½
Chelmsford	33½*	39
Farningham	2½	15½
Gravesend	8½	25
Guildford	46½	29½
Hertford	42½	30½
High Wycombe	54½	37½
Hyde Park Corner	22½	7½
Ipswich	73½*	78½
Maidstone	14½	32½
Oxford	80½	63
Sevenoaks	10½	19
Southend	29½*	45½
Staines	39½	22
Tunbridge Wells	19	31

* Via Gravesend Ferry.

The Course, Corner by Corner



BRANDS HATCH

THE lie of the land dictates a peculiar feature of Brands Hatch. Owing to the rise on each side of the mid-way point on the Home Straight, it has been necessary to move back the start, A, so that riders do not have to bump-start uphill. They then have but a short distance to sort themselves out for the onslaught on Paddock Bend, C, known locally as "The Star Tamer"—and not without reason.

Paddock Bend—at which is sited the exit from the competitors' enclosure, hence the name—is a very awkward right-handed curve that drops steeply downhill. It is notorious for the frequency with which people take a tumble and slide out towards the protective earth banking that separates the spectators from the track. On a normal lap, riders have to brake hard from about 110 m.p.h. on a bumpy surface as they approach the bend.

Immediately after the bottom of the steep dip is Pilgrims Rise, D, a straight uphill climb with a gradient of some 1 in 5 which is taken on full noise after the shut-off round Paddock. Brakes are used heavily at the top of Pilgrims Rise to bring the speed down ready to engage bottom cog for the right-handed Druids Hill Bend.

This hairpin, E, on the extension part of the circuit, is quite acute, though it does not call for clutch-slipping, and is extremely slippery in the wet when the water drains from the high ground above. It is a favourite vantage point for students of slow-speed cornering technique.

A first-class pilot can take the downhill



(Above) Pushing-off at "Brands" with Paddock Bend ahead. (Below) The "chairs" breast Pilgrims Rise.



approach, to the first left-hander, *F*, flat in second, only easing off a shade with a "500" to make the actual turn. The bend is favourably cambered but nevertheless represents a real hazard for the charioteers, their passengers leaning right out so that the approach may be made as fast as possible to take advantage of the drop down from Druids Hill Bend.

It is a misnomer to call the Bottom Straight anything other than a curve, for the fastest boys never get a solo off bank as they line themselves up for the second left-hander at *G*. This is a very interesting bend indeed at which to watch the "chairs," for a slight misjudgment may mean the outstretched passenger grounding on the chequered kerbstones. Again a close-up can be had from the outside of the track, from the hill opposite the main grandstand.

Kidney Bend, *H*, holds the key to Clearways Bend, *J*, for one follows the other so quickly that they become a single evolution.

The riders' plot is complicated in that the two bends are of differing radii and there are changes both of surface and of camber.

Many sidecars have drifted right out on to the grass at Clearways, for it is a bottom-gear bend that is much tighter than it appears. A good solo will accelerate out of it through the three lower gears into the home straight, passing over the starting grid to reach the finishing line at *B*, immediately in front of the main grandstand and level with the time-keepers' box above it and the clerk of the course's H.Q. on the inside of the track.

Brands Hatch is renowned for the length of each lap that can be seen from any one vantage point, though these, from the public's point of view, are all located on the outside of the track. Competitors and their assistants have an excellent paddock at the end of the Home Straight and also their own enclosure from which they can watch when not actually riding; it gives a first-class view.

LAP RECORDS

250 c.c. Solo: 1 min. 4.8 sec. = 68.9 m.p.h. J. Surtees (NSU), 25.4.1957.

350 c.c. Solo: 1 min. = 74.4 m.p.h. D. Minter (Norton), 13.10.1957.

1,000 c.c. Solo: 59.4 sec. = 75.15 m.p.h. D. Minter (Norton), 13.10.1957.

1,200 c.c. Three-wheelers: 1 min. 5.8 sec. = 67.84 m.p.h. W. Boddice (Norton), 23.9.1956.

Absolute Track Record: 58.8 sec. = 75.92 m.p.h. J. Brabham (Formula 1, Cooper-Climax), 26.12.1957.

MEETING DATES (with times of first races)

Scrambles

Sunday, February 23—12 noon.

Sunday, November 16—11 a.m.

Road Races

Good Friday, April 4—12.30 p.m. (National permit.)

Sunday, May 4—1.30 p.m.

Whit-Monday, May 26—12 noon. (National permit.)

Sunday, July 13—1.30 p.m.

Sunday, August 24—1.30 p.m.

Sunday, September 21—12.30 p.m. (National permit.)

Sunday, October 12—12 noon. (National permit.)

Admission, paddock, stand and car park charges: Yet to be arranged and dependent on day of meeting.

Proprietors: Brands Hatch Circuit Ltd., Fawkham, Kent (West Ash 331).

THE "BRANDS" COUNTRY

THE County of Kent, in the western part of which Brands Hatch is located, is famed for its hop gardens and attendant oast-houses and for its fruit orchards. Apart from pleasant valleys, warm and sheltered on a mild, spring day, the district within easy reach of Brands abounds in other natural features that contribute to the verdant beauty of the Garden of England. There are the brooks running through the Gault Valley between the chalk of the North Downs and the characteristic and unusual terrain known so aptly as the Greensand. The hills are often precipitous and rugged, fit challenge for man and machine, rich in foliage and commanding magnificent views from their crests.

The Downs themselves, with their springy turf and bracing air, are a perfect setting for a summer's picnic, while the county is, of course, bounded on two sides by the sea and on a third by the outer estuary of the mighty Thames—all ideal, at many points, for swimming.

And for those whose tastes incline towards in-

dustry rather than agriculture, Kent can provide much of interest. There is quarrying, carried out on the surface, and coal-mining, sand, shingle, chalk and even iron are excavated in many places. The north-western corner of the county contains much heavy industry along the southern shore of the Thames. The river itself, as reach after reach unfolds, reveals a wealth of craft, both large and small.

In fact, the graceful county of Kent must surely contain something which will appeal to the eye or the inclination of every visitor.

WHERE TO STAY

THE Farningham Hotel (Tel. 2175) and The Lion Hotel (2115), Farningham, 2½ miles distant; The Hilltop Hotel, Wrotham, 4 miles; The Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel (3104), Dartford, 7½ miles; The Royal Tlarendon Hotel (5471) and The Tollgate Inn (76'), Gravesend, 8½ miles; The Royal Star Hotel (225'), Maidstone, 14½ miles.

London's Own Circuits

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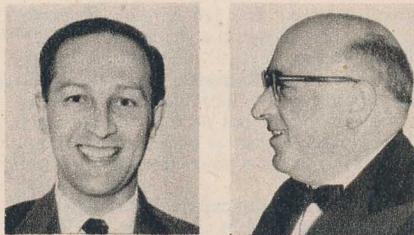
It now has a minimum width of 30 ft. and is considerably less bumpy, especially along the home straight. Before resurfacing, it was a common sight to see solos bounding along at over 100 m.p.h. towards Ramp Bend with daylight showing under their front and rear tyres alternately as they kangaroo-hopped from one bump to the next.

Today, "The Palace" is a well-equipped track with good spectator and competitor facilities, popular with all for the excellence of the organization. Meeting promotion has been in the hands of the British Motor Cycle Racing Club ("Bemsee") and the South-Eastern Centre of the Auto-Cycle Union in co-operation with the London County Council. Meetings are restricted, by a High Court order, to five per year on account of noise.

BRANDS HATCH, near Fawkham, Kent, and on the very side of the A20 London-Maidstone road, is extremely popular because of its excellent spectator facilities. Situated in a natural amphitheatre, it enables people to sit on the grass or in the stands and see almost every yard of the track.

Whilst this track today is 1.24 miles in length and adequately wide at 40 ft. even for sidecar racing, it has not always been so. Long famed as a grass-track venue, Brands had a varied career until 1950, when a hard surface was put down and the bumps along the top straight consequently made less dangerous. The course then was roughly oval in shape and a mile to the lap; it was also substantially level.

In 1954, a $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile loop was added between Paddock Bend and the Bottom Straight. This loop climbs up through the trees at



"Palace" personalities: (left) "Bemsee" chief marshal for 1958, Dennis Bates; (right) judge Harold Daniell, T.T. star of the 'thirties.

Pilgrims Rise and bends round sharply at Druids Hill to come down and meet the Bottom Straight in the form of an awkward left-handed corner. Apart from making the course more difficult than the riders' point of view, it also has made it more interesting for all concerned. The competitors now find they have to contend with a 1 in 5 gradient and additional machine-testing swervery, and the spectators have, of course, more to see.

No-one pretends that Brands Hatch is smooth; it may be that the suspension-testing bumps form one of its hidden attractions for anything that is difficult has flavour for both participant and observer.

In the road racing sphere, the circuit has another claim to fame in that it is one of the very few where extra practice is permissible subject to a small hire-and-insurance fee; open exhausts are allowed on Thursdays and Saturdays. Practice is under the supervision of track manager G. A. Pennington.

The proprietors, Brands Hatch Circuit, Ltd., also use their grounds for scrambling and trials work. Whilst the latter is usually devoted to the small closed-to-club type of event, scrambling is run at a very high level indeed, the International Moto-cross meeting having been held in 1957 over a special course. The normal scrambles lap varies from meeting to meeting, the terrain available permitting considerable variations. The course selected is usually wide and embraces jumps, large flints, and tree-lined tracks, is often quite greasy and even muddy in places when wet.

Organization of racing was originally in the hands of the Bermondsey club, but is now primarily done by Brands Racing Committee, assisted by members of the Gravesend Eagles, Greenwich and Rochester clubs. The very smallest capacity classes are excluded on account of excessive noise; similarly, Sunday practice and race programmes are restricted to avoid interference with local religious services.



Meet them at Brands: (left) chief paddock marshal A. E. Ridley and machine examiner E. Ranshaw.