

## Circuits in Wessex

# Thruxton and Castle Combe

**S**ITUATED in the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, Thruxton and Castle Combe have another feature in common—both are airfield circuits. This results in more or less level going and wide open spaces, with fast bends on broad perimeter tracks and occasionally runways—and considerable exposure to the wind. A windy location, however desirable for an airfield, comes as a mixed blessing to road racing, for whilst it means that the heat of a summer's day is often tempered for spectators by a welcome breeze, it also makes hard going for riders when the wind is stronger, and the assessment of correct gearing for the conditions becomes tricky.

Both circuits are accessible from much of southern England, and even the Midlands, for those travelling by road; in particular, Londoners have fine roads to Thruxton in the form of A30 and A303 and to Castle Combe via A4 and A420.

Towards the end of 1949, the Wiltshire Flying Club, who were the tenants of Thruxton Aerodrome, near Andover, Hants, sent a circular letter to clubs in the Southern Centre of the A.-C.U., to which the Southampton and D. M.C.C. responded by securing exclusive rights to hold motorcycle races there. By Easter Monday, 1950, the Southampton and Bishops Waltham clubs had banded together as the Ashton Combine and promoted a "national" meeting. Racing was held over a 1.89-mile course laid out both on runways and perimeter track, machines lapping around the 77 m.p.h. mark.



Alastair King, fastest of the "500s" at Castle Combe.

In 1951, Thruxton was chosen as the venue for the Auto-Cycle Union's second International Road Race Meeting, which was followed in September of the same year by the Ashton Combine's own "International" promotion. The latter was noteworthy in that it produced the first appearance of an M.V. four-cylinder "fire engine" on the British mainland; in the hands of the late Les Graham, it won the British Aerodrome Invitation race.

The same circuit continued in use until track alterations for a 1953 car meeting made it possible to include a much larger section of the perimeter and to increase the lap to 2.75 miles; it was first used by motorcycles at Whitsun, 1954.



Bill Lomas, absolute record holder on the old Thruxton course.

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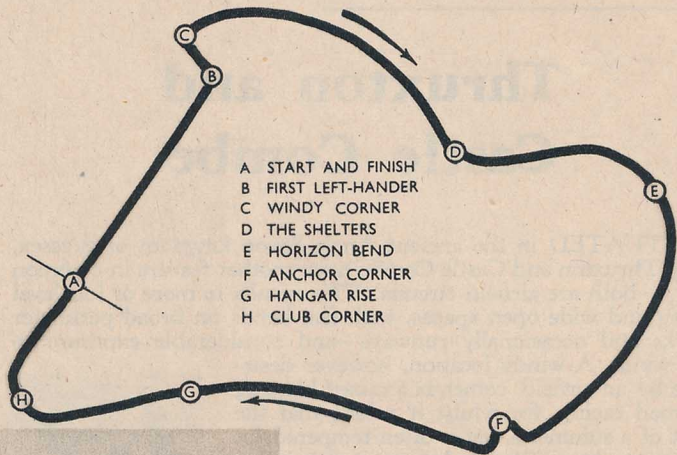
MOTOR CYCLING

CIRCUIT SOUVENIR

No. 2

Pull away from staples, slit edge and re-fold to pocket size

## The Course, Corner by Corner



### THRUXTON

THE Mark III version of the Thruxton circuit will be brought into operation for the first time this year, the lap measuring 2.275 miles. Apart from the 90-ft.-wide starting area, it will be of a uniform 50-ft. width, and tackled clockwise. Spectators are to be admitted to the outside of the entire course, but the inside is not open to the general public.

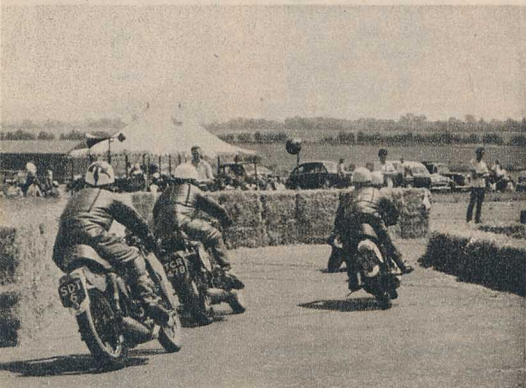
The starting line, A, is situated midway along the 800-yard long Home Straight, the whole of which provides good spectator accommodation backed by a car park. This straight is, without doubt, one of the fastest stretches of the course and is also the scene of pit activity in the "Nine Hour" races.

The first bend, B, is a 90-degree left-hander, followed in about 80 yards by the very sharp right-hander at Windy Corner. The two together constitute a major hazard and should be an excellent spot to watch the solos and, especially, the chairs when the passengers scramble from one side of the outfit to the other.

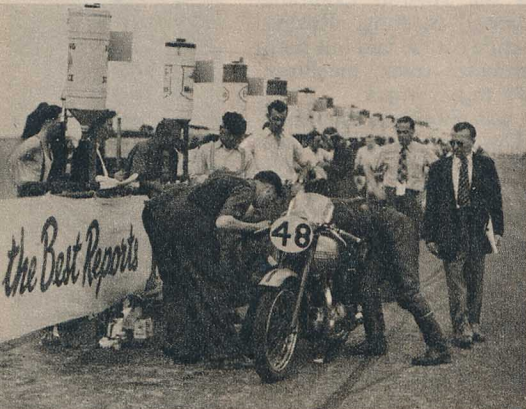
After the exit from Windy Corner, C, there is the notorious Thruxton bump, but this will not be so spectacular for 1958 owing to the slower speeds at this point. Spectators have been catered for at this spot, although they will be encouraged to move on to leave room for newcomers.

The Shelters, D, take their name from some disused relics of the war years which now form natural grandstands for early arrivals. Riders are seen sweeping round

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At Thruxton's "Nine Hours" race: (above) follow-my-leader through the chicane and (below) pit activity.



two curves at three-figure speeds before rolling it off slightly to settle down into the long, ever-turning right-hander of Horizon Bend, E.

Speeds round Horizon Bend can be extremely high, in spite of the fact that the bend goes on and on and that machines are cranked over to the limit. For the chairs, it represents one long, controlled drift needing considerable ability to cope with at present-day speeds. The track, still curving slightly, now drops downhill to Anchor Corner, F, the first braking point since Windy.

After reducing speed as quickly as possible at Anchor so as to engage bottom cog, competitors will be taken right-handed into a straw-baled chicane comprising an acute hairpin to the left; immediately after negotiating this, they will have to crank over to the right again to regain the true direction of the perimeter. First-class watching

facilities are available for students of slow-speed cornering technique and again there are air-raid shelters in the vicinity that form natural grandstands.

Riders then accelerate hard through the gears over an entirely new part of the Thrupton circuit, Hangar Rise, G. This curves gently to the left and, after passing the black hangar, begins to climb on a gradient of 1 in 30. Cultivation close to the safety fence at this point means that spectators will have to keep on the move within their rather narrow enclosed area.

Club Corner, H, which takes its name from the nearby Clubhouse, is the final corner of the new circuit; machines swing to the right, in second gear, for the rush down the Home Straight towards the finishing line situated about half-way along it—or slow down for a pit stop, of which there are many in a "Nine-Hour" race.

## LAP RECORDS

As this is a new circuit none has, as yet, been established. Absolute record for the old circuit, held by W. A. Lomas (Guzzi), was 1 min. 52.2 sec. = 88.47 m.p.h.

## MEETING DATES

(with times of first races)

### Road Races

Monday, April 7—12 noon. (National permit.)

Monday, August 4—1 p.m. (British Championships and International meeting.)

Sunday, September 28—1 p.m. (National permit.)

### Nine-Hour Race

Saturday, June 21—12 noon. (Restricted permit.)

**Admission charges (Easter only):** Adults, 3s.; children under 14, 1s.

**Car Park Charges:** Cars, 4s.; motorcycles, 2s.; coaches free.

*Promoters: Southampton and D. M.C.C. Secretary, N. E. Goss, 60 Bursledon Road, Bitterne, Southampton (So'ton 49356).*

## THRUPTON'S HAMPSHIRE

THRUPTON is not far from Andover, the largest marketing town in an extensive agricultural area. The district is, on the whole, inclined towards uniform undulations, though unexpected rifts in the general topography produce pleasant valleys through which flow many streams and small rivers. The rider who spends his time exploring these valleys is probably the one who will see the greatest beauty in the district. The quiet by-roads which run along them twist and turn between tree-lined banks and cross over quaint little bridges.

It is not a long run to Savernake Forest and Marlborough, to the north; the forest, though not extensive, is full of fine upstanding trees, especially the beech. Avebury is nearby, whilst ancient Stonehenge, with its neighbouring Woodhenge, lies due south from it.

Winchester, to the south-east of Thrupton, is a cathedral city and is surrounded by its seven hills. As a place of historic interest, full of mature buildings, the county capital of Hampshire is rightly renowned.

For those who like to see ships, the largest in the world come to Southampton or ride at anchor out in the Solent. Twenty-six miles separate the seaport of the south from Andover, whilst a score of miles suffice to take one into the heart of the New Forest,

with its open heathland and shady wooded glades.

Not many miles away, towards Beaulieu and the seaplane base of Calshot, burns the ever-lit flame of Fawley Refinery. Esso's forest of pipes and retorts, tanks and cat-crackers could almost be called a plantation of steelwork, some of which can be seen from the road. The same little corner of Hampshire also has unspoilt beauty around the coast towards Hengistbury Head, the latter having an enormous inland lagoon, with soft sand dunes on the seaward side and much motorized boating.

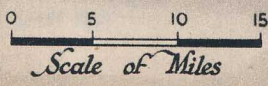
It will be deduced, therefore, and rightly so, that Hampshire, in the north of which lies Thrupton, is a county of interest, whilst the fringes of its neighbours also hold much to attract the day and weekend tourist. The remarks on the Castle Combe country (page seven), which lies to the west, also apply in some measure.

## WHERE TO STAY

THE White Hart Hotel (Tel. 2266), Andover, 6 miles distant; The Avon Hotel (2112), The Fairlawn Hotel (2103), and The George Hotel (2108), Amesbury, 8 miles; The Carbery Hotel (44) and The Grosvenor Hotel (106), Stockbridge, 13 miles.

# MOTOR CYCLING

Circuit Souvenir No. 2



# How to get there

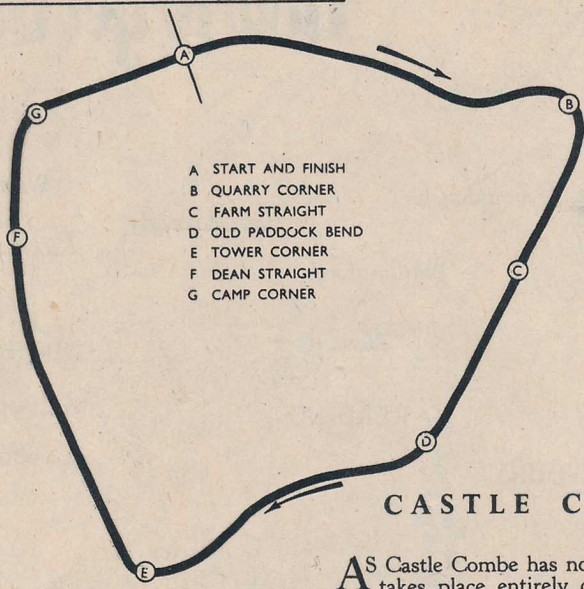


TABLE OF MILEAGES

	Castle Combe	Thruxton
Andover ... ..	44	6
Bath ... ..	9	45
Bristol ... ..	17	58
Chepstow ... ..	24*	70*
Chippenham ... ..	6	38
Dorchester ... ..	70	56
Gloucester ... ..	40	64
Guildford ... ..	88	50
London ... ..	98	71
Oxford ... ..	55	50
Reading ... ..	71	40
Salisbury ... ..	42	16
Southampton ... ..	65	28
Taunton ... ..	71	73

\* Via Aust Ferry.

## The Course, Corner by Corner



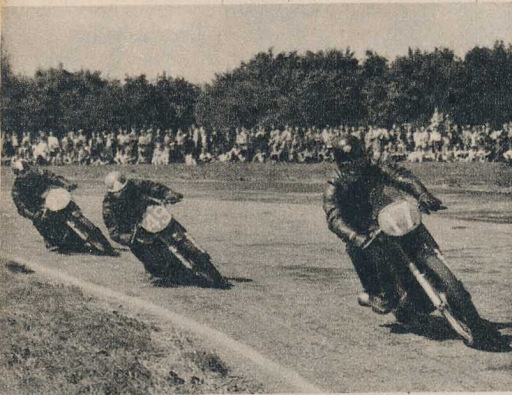
## CASTLE COMBE

AS Castle Combe has no runways, racing takes place entirely on the encircling service road, the start A, being sited on a slight down-gradient in front of the main spectator enclosure and paddock. Almost immediately after the line, in a clockwise direction, the course bends quite sharply to the right and, owing to this and to the bumps, here is a good spot to watch riders and machines come through at a high knotage once the standing lap of 1.84 miles has been completed.

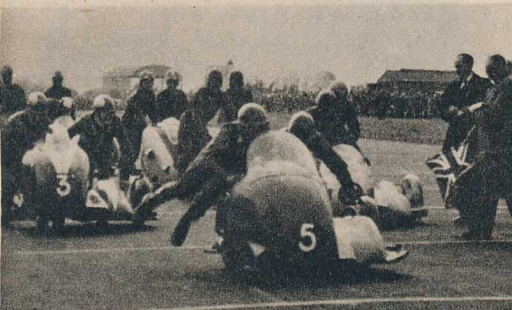
From the spectators enclosure in front of the pits, it is possible to see the machines sweeping round to the left, braking as they do so for the approach to the distant Quarry Corner, B. Quarry is a hairpin of rather larger radius than usual and is right-handed. It is a good place at which to watch and the organizers cater for this by providing entrances from the main road, nearby. As elsewhere around Castle Combe, the inside of the course is banned to the general public, as it is an agricultural area and also houses the race control.

Machines are then accelerated, at full bore, along Farm Straight, C, the passengers in the sidcar outfits tucking themselves well into the trays to cut down on air drag. The straight terminates in the fast right-hander of Old Paddock Bend, D, a change of direction of some 40 degrees.

On clearing Old Paddock Bend, competitors have to turn gently to the left to line up for the acute Tower Corner, E, braking



(Above) "350s" heeled well over at Camp Corner.  
 (Below) "Chairs" get off the mark in a handicap event.



as they approach. Tower Corner, another good vantage point, is one of those awkward bends that seem to go on and on and riders crank their machines over to the limit as they pass the apex of the turn. Sidecar outfits, with the crews hanging out to the right, drift round spectacularly with a splendid sound of tortured rubber, leaving black tyre streaks.

Machines are then aimed into the longest straight of the circuit, Dean Straight, F, the pilots running up through the gears as they leave Tower Corner. As the straight only has one gentle kink, about halfway

along, speeds are very high. Riders pass through open country towards the race control area at the start, but have first to negotiate Camp Corner, G.

Camp is fairly sharp and calls for considerable skill if speed is to be maintained so as to make good time along the part of the course in front of the paddock and past the finishing line. In a handicap event, limit men have to keep well over to the outside of the track so as to avoid the scratch starters waiting on the line for the time-keeper to send them off.

### LAP RECORDS

**125 c.c. Solo:** 1 min. 34 sec.=70.48 m.p.h. J. Baughn (M.V.), 13.7.1957.

**250 c.c. Solo:** 1 min. 24.8 sec.=78.11 m.p.h. J. Surtees (NSU), 9.7.1955.

**350 c.c. Solo:** 1 min. 20.2 sec.=82.59 m.p.h. J. Surtees (Norton), 9.7.1955.

**500 c.c. Solo:** 1 min. 17.2 sec.=85.79 m.p.h. A. King (Norton), 13.7.1957.

**1,200 c.c. Three-wheelers:** 1 min. 24.2 sec.=78.66 m.p.h. R. Robinson (Vincent-Norton), 27.4.1957.

**Absolute Lap Record:** Shared by R. Flockhart (B.R.M.) and R. Gerard (Cooper-Bristol), 1 min. 15 sec.=88.32 m.p.h. May 29, 1954.

### MEETING DATES (with times of first races)

#### Road Races

Saturday, April 26—1 p.m. (National permit.)

Saturday, July 12—1 p.m. (National permit.)

**Circuit Admission Charges:** Adults, 2s. 6d.; children under 14, 1s. All-in ticket for car and passengers, 10s. All-in motorcycle, sidecar, or three-wheeler ticket for vehicle and passengers, 5s. Pedal cycles, free.

**Organizers:** Wessex Centre, A.-C.U. *Secretary of meetings,* V. C. Anstice, Westgate Buildings, Bath (Bath 60373).

### AROUND CASTLE COMBE

THE race circuit takes its name from the nearby beauty spot of Castle Combe. Within 35 miles is a whole host of interesting places—the mysterious Stonehenge on the rolling grassland of Salisbury Plain, the stone circle of Avebury Ring between Calne and Marlborough, the beechwoods of Savernake Forest, and the Severn Estuary to the north-west of the track.

The Marlborough district is, in itself, well worth a visit, the ancient town being sited at the foot of several steep hills and close to Savernake Forest. Just off A4 to the south is an imposing column competing with the forest trees in the quest for the sky above. Between Castle Combe and Gloucester to the north, there is much fascinating country for the tourist. The Cotswold Hills have a beauty of their own, especially where they terminate so abruptly at Birdlip. The spot is renowned for its view—and for the steepness of the hillside roads.

The Severn Estuary, as it extends down towards Somerset, is worth visiting; the kiddies will love the expanse of golden sand at Weston-super-Mare, a popular holiday resort. Not many miles inland,

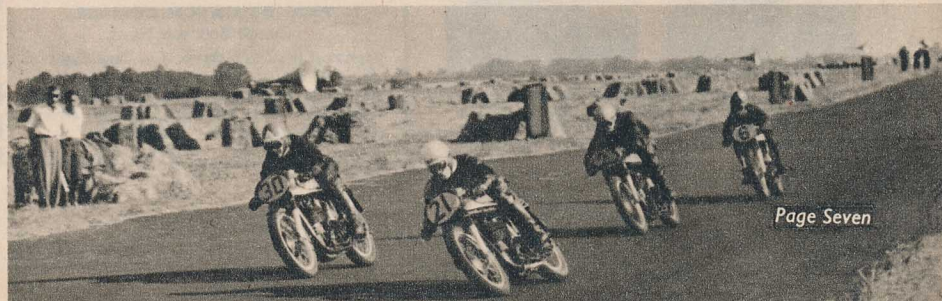
between Axridge and Wells, are the awe-inspiring natural caves at Wookey and Cheddar; the latter has two caves in the limestone hills and, of course, its enormous gorge, the journey through which is well worth while.

For those who study architecture, there is a wealth of variety, from the magnificence of Bath to the quiet and peaceful thatched cottages that abound in this part of England and for which Somerset is well known. The county is also famed for its dairy produce—of which cream teas are such tasty examples.

### WHERE TO STAY

THE Angel Hotel (Tel. 2615) and The Bear Hotel (240811), Chippenham, 6 miles distant; The Angel Hotel, The Cliff View Hotel (3925), The County Hotel (3753), The Fernley Hotel (61024), The Francis Hotel (5295), The Hope Cote Hotel (3235), The Lansdown Grove Hotel (5891), Pratt's Hotel (60441), The Royal Hotel (61517), The Royal York House Hotel (61541), and The Southbourne Hotel (60277), Bath, 9 miles.

Against a background of straw bales, "Seniors" fly full bore down Dean Straight.



### CONTINUED

In addition to the many successful conventional meetings that the Southampton and District club have staged, the circuit is also known as the venue for the annual "Nine Hours" races for standard machines, first held on June 25, 1955. These races, in which teams of two riders per machine take part, have been acknowledged for their technical interest and have become established in the British sporting motorcycle calendar. The first one was organized by the Ashton Combine.

The organizers immediately hit on a successful formula for the "Nine Hours"—machines should be ridden as far as possible until the flag dropped at the end of the ninth hour, the one covering the greatest mileage being adjudged the overall winner; in addition, there were individual capacity classes within the main framework. Each machine was ridden by one of a team of two for a maximum period of two hours at a time. Excessively long pit stops entailed exclusion.

Since the beginning of 1956, the Southampton and District club has been operating racing on its own, and as a result of impending changes in ownership of the land it has recently been possible to negotiate a long-term contract permitting the inclusion of a better course, 2.275 miles in length. Lap speeds are expected to be about the same as with the previous circuit, the absolute track record for which is held by Bill Lomas (Guzzi) at 88.47 m.p.h., set up in 1955.

**T**HE Castle Combe circuit, situated on the side of B4039 north-west of Chippenham, is within the Wessex Centre of the



(Left) Syd Lawton, travelling marshal at Thruxton and ex-Norton works rider. (Right) Jimmy Baughn, current 125 c.c. lap record holder at Castle Combe.

Auto-Cycle Union and first became available for motorcycle use on May 12, 1951; it had been used for a car race meeting the previous October. Racing was organized by the Bristol M.C. and L.C.C.

The circuit, of approximately rectangular shape, with a "kink" in each side, is formed by the service road running round a grass airfield. During the last war, Castle Combe was a fighter base, with neither runways nor perimeter track, aircraft operating solely on the grass. This part of the land is, today, principally given over to cultivation; racing is on the surrounding road and spectators and their vehicles are restricted to the outside of the track. Liberal parking arrangements are made for each meeting.

In July, 1951, the first full-scale meeting was held, sidecars being included in the programme. Racing was very keen and well supported and set the seal of success on the new circuit.

It then continued to be used each year and became popular with riders who regarded it as an "interesting" course in spite of its fundamentally flat topography. Some heavy financial responsibilities have had to be faced from time to time, the chief of these, in 1956, being the cost of resurfacing the track and improving the safety facilities. However, all have been taken in Castle Combe's stride and the first of the 1958 meetings, to be held on Saturday, April 26, by the Wessex Centre, should be as successful a "national" promotion as any that have preceded it.



(Left) Vic Anstice, secretary of the meetings at Castle Combe and member of the A.-C.U.'s management committee. (Right) Neville Goss, secretary of the meetings and clerk of the course at Thruxton.

#### BRANDS HATCH COURSE

Circuit Souvenir No. 1

**General practice days.** On Page Eight of Souvenir No. 1 it was stated that open-exhaust practising at Brands Hatch is permitted on Thursdays and Saturdays; please amend "Thursdays" to "Wednesdays."