

“Back Page Boys“

A series of short photo-articles by Jill Frances from the UK's
Speedway Star during the 1954/55 British closed season.

DOUG DAVIES of BIRMINGHAM



It was rather curious to watch Doug Davies, the teenage South African, watching his first meeting here in England. Doug had flown into the country with Buddy Fuller, especially to team up with Birmingham midway through the season. He called in at Wimbledon to watch his first English speedway. He wasn't saying much but you could see in his eyes that he was impressed from the moment the track staff marched out until after the last rider had left the track for the last race of the last heat. When it was all over Doug said to Buddy, “We ought to have more show in our meetings back home.” Then he added, after a moments thought, “They go fast, don't they !” That last afterthought was no question. It was a statement. The boys certainly went fast.

And in just a little time Doug was pitching in with them and going just as fast as some and faster than a few others. He might have been over earlier, for the beginning of the season in fact. But he listened to advice from Buddy Fuller, “Wait another year.” and he waited. The ex-cycle speedway kid might still have been seen on our tracks even after that. But he rocked to fame quite suddenly back in his own country. Too suddenly to get in an application to enter him into the World Championship until it was too late.

Then came the late change of ideas. Birmingham needed a rider. Doug Davies was recommended. Brummies boss Les Marshall went after him and, where others had failed, tempted him to England to try his luck in First Division. Through not expecting too much from the lad, the Brummies boss has every reason to feel pleased with the way the youngster has ridden, especially toward the end of the season when he was really motoring. Like most South Africans he's a quiet type. Unlike many of his countrymen I believe this lad can be really great. Let's hope he comes back to show us next season.
JILL FRANCES SS&N (UK) 9.10.1954

ROY BESTER of LEICESTER

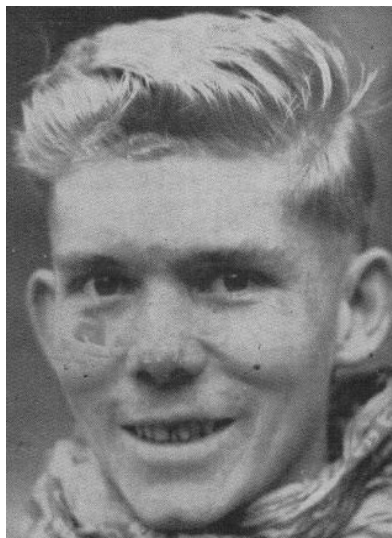


A couple of years ago there was no doubt that but Henry Long was the best rider to come out of South Africa. Now the fans aren't so certain. There are 2 reasons why. Firstly Henry hasn't been around our tracks for quite a spell. Secondly there's a red-headed character who is! Roy Bester of Leicester. It rolls off the tongue, that phrase. In fact it sounds as though it's the first line of a poem. And to watch Roy in action is like seeing poetry in speedway. He's smooth, plenty of polish in his performances, plenty of devil in his riding.

Towards the end of last winter it began to look as though Roy, who had begun to establish himself as one of the kings of the Edinburgh Monarchs, would not return to ride here in 1954. He suffered a nasty crash in his own South Africa when touring around a track without a helmet. He bears the scars of that crash, a vivid blue 'cinder mark' on his forehead to this day. The memory of it he will never forget either, because, as he himself said, “It taught me a lesson never to show off on a speedway bike.”

But Roy did return. He raced for Edinburgh until the Monarchs folded and then Leicester grabbed him for their very own. Although overshadowed by the magnificent McKinlay Roy's performances with the Hunters have been good enough to make him the most outstanding of the South Africans who race in Britain. Maybe before many more meetings have passed into the record books Roy will become the acknowledged best ever to come here from South Africa. And if that does come about you can rest easy that he will still be the same level headed, modest racer that he is today.
JILL FRANCES SS&N (UK) 30.10.1954

FRED LANG of WEMBLEY

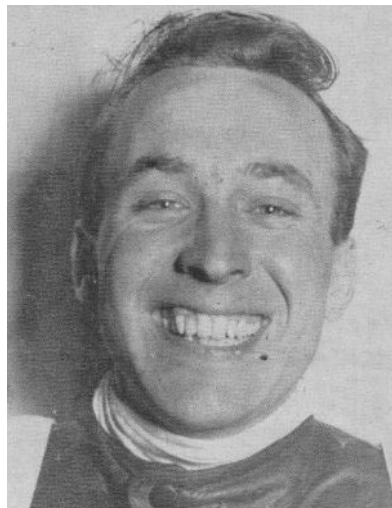


What a to-do! What a fuss! What a commotion! And what a little cause there was. By little I mean that literally for the cause was the wee fellow Fred Lang. And the fuss and what not took place roughly a year ago - when Edinburgh had announced "We have signed Fred Lang, the promising young Springbok." Fred was supposed to be joining the Monarchs in place of fellow countryman Roy Bester, thought not to be returning. Then Roy decided he would be coming back and in quick succession we had several clubs speaking up for Fred, notably Ipswich and Wembley. At times we heard that Fred would definitely ride here: or definitely ride there. We heard that his brother Doug was to be brought over at the same time. Once there was even a report that the two youngsters would ride together. South Africa, being a long way away, and Fred being in South Africa, it was difficult for us here to get a clear picture of what was going on. Finally, however the lad joined up with Wembley on a reported 2-year contract.

Over here he found it difficult, most times impossible to produce the brilliance that had won him so big a reputation, and sent so many teams scurrying after him. Perhaps it might have been better had he, like practically all his other countrymen, decided to start in a lower league.

At times, notably on the big West Ham circuit, Fred made the crowds sit up and take note. Wembley persevered with him in the reserve berth, occasionally he broke into the team, but in the main it was not a season he could look back on with great pride. But it was a season when he put in all the groundwork, learned the elements of British speedway. Those who think all the fuss to sign Lang was just a lot of wind are respectfully warned to watch out ... the lad may show the stuff of greatness in 1955. JILL FRANCES SS&N (UK) 15.1.1955

DENNIS NEWTON of OXFORD



The first time I met Dennis Newton the boy was very annoyed. And it was Johnny Hoskins who had got Dennis's gander up. "I had a good idea," said Den, "I decided I'd become speedway's first 'Golden Boy.' I painted my leathers gold, and that took some doing, because the paint wanted to go everywhere except on the leathers. But I did it in the end and the results looked good. Then do you know what happened? Johnny Hoskins moved into West Ham and had riders in red, white, blue, green, black yellow and all colours of the rainbow - including gold. And because he was Johnny Hoskins he got his riders a lot of publicity, he always does, that man, and everyone thought that Malcolm Craven was the 'Golden Boy'. What a life!"

Dennis at that time was trying hard to break into a regular place in the Swindon team. But with little success - too many injuries for one thing. Next place for Dennis to try his luck was Wembley. In 1953 he became a recognised Junior Leaguer for them. But that didn't lead him anywhere, although he did ride for the Lions' league team on occasions. Maybe I ought to qualify that statement. It did lead him somewhere. Indirectly it lead him to his present club Oxford. John Deeley, in charge of the Cheetahs, noticed that Dennis was a quite a useful lad. He also thought that, with patient perseverance the boy could be trained into a good rider. So he signed him for the 1954 season.

At first it looked as though John had backed a loser. Dennis had a good run in the Oxford side without showing much. But towards the end of the season, when he had another run in the side, he started with good solid point scores. And by the end of the season John Deeley said "The boy can be great and he doesn't need much more time for it either." How does "the boy" feel about the "Golden Boy" episode now? It's almost forgotten for Dennis, instead of going for the show, is now concentrating on the points. And next season he hopes to land them in large quantities.

JILL FRANCES SS&N (UK) 1.1.1955

n.b.: This was before DN's first SA visit and citizenship.

BACK COVER BOY

NEW SERIES—No. 126



DOUG DAVIES of BIRMINGHAM

I was rather curious to watch Doug Davies, the teenage South African, watching his first meeting here in England. Doug had flown into the country with Buddy Fuller, especially to team up with Birmingham midway through the season.

He called to see Wembley to watch his first English speedway. He wasn't saying much but you could see in his eyes that he was impressed from the moment the track had marched out until after the last rider had left the track for the big race of the big meet.

When it was all over Doug said to Buddy, "We ought to have more shows in our meetings back home." Then he added, after a moment's thought, "They go fast, don't they?"

"That had afterthought was no question. It was a statement. The boys certainly would like. And in just a little time Doug was pitching in with them and going just as fast as some of the faster than a few others.

He might have been over earlier, for the beginning of the

season in fact. But he listened to advice from Buddy Fuller, "Wait another year," and he waited. The ex-cyclist speedway had made him have been seen on our tracks ever after that. But he rocketed to fame quite suddenly back in his own country. Two months later there to get in an application to enter him in the World Championship and it was too late.

There came the late change of ideas. Birmingham needed a rider. Doug Davies was recommended. Because Billy Lamb had been after him and, where others had failed, tempted him to England to try his luck in First Division.

Through not expecting too much from the lad, the Birmingham boys have every reason to feel pleased with the way the youngster has ridden. Especially toward the end of the season when he was really meeting. Like most South Africans, he's a quiet type. Unlike many of his countrymen I believe this lad can be really great. Let's hope he comes back to show us, next season. (State Service Photo No. 276.)

JILL FRANCES

BACK COVER BOY

NEW SERIES—No. 129



ROY BESTER of LEICESTER

A COUPLE of years ago there was no doubt but that Henry Lang was the best rider to come out of South Africa. Now the fans aren't quite so certain. There are two reasons why.

First, Henry hasn't been around our tracks for quite a spell. Secondly, there's a red-headed character named Roy Bester who is!

Roy Bester of Leicester. It rolls off the tongue, that phrase. In fact it sounds almost as though it is the first line of a poem. And to watch Roy in action is like seeing poetry in speedway. He's smooth, plenty of polish in his performance, plenty of devil in his riding.

Toward the end of last winter it began to look as though Roy, who had begun to establish himself as one of the kings of the Edinburgh Monarchs, would not return here to ride in 1954. He suffered a nasty crash in his own South Africa when, leaving around a track without a helmet, he

broke the nose of that crash, a vivid blue "clay mark" on his forehead to this day.

The memory of it is he will never forget either because, as he himself said, "It taught me a lesson never to show off on a speedway bike."

Roy did return. He rode for Edinburgh until the Monarchs folded and then Leicester grabbed him for their very own. Although overshadowed by the magnificent McKinlay, Roy's performances with the Hunters have been good enough to make him the most outstanding of the South Africans who race in Britain.

Maybe, before many more British meetings have passed into the record books, Roy will become the acknowledged best ever to come here from South Africa. And if that does come about you can rest easy that he will still be the same level headed, modest racer that he is today.

Jill Frances

BACK COVER BOY

NEW SERIES—No. 139



FRED LANG of WEMBLEY

WHAT a goad! What a fan! What a commotion! And what a little case there was. By little I mean that literally for the cause was the was father Fred Lang. And the fan and what not took place roughly a year ago—after Edinburgh had announced, "We have signed Fred Lang, the promising young Springbok."

Fred was supposed to be joining the Monarchs in place of a fellow countryman, Roy Bester, thought not to be returning. Then Roy decided he would be coming back and in quick succession we had several other clubs speaking up for Fred, notably Ipswich and Wembley.

At once we heard that Fred would definitely ride here as a debatable side show. We heard that his brother Doug was to be brought over at the same time. There there was even a report that the two youngsters would ride together.

South Africa, being a long way away, and Fred being in South Africa, it was difficult for us here to get a clear picture of what was going on. Finally, however, the lad showed up with Wembley on a reported increase contract.

Over here he found it difficult, most times impossible, to produce the brilliance which had won him so big a reputation, and was so many times carrying after him. Perhaps it might have been better had he, like practically all his other countrymen, decided to start in a lower league.

At times, notably on the big West Ham circuit, Fred made the crowd sit up and take note. Wembley persevered with him in the reserve berth, occasionally he broke into the team, but in the main it was not a season he could look back on with great pride.

But it was a season when he put in all the groundwork, learned the elements of British speedway. Those who think all the fans to sign Lang was just a lot of what are respectfully warned to watch out. . . the lad may well show the end of greatness in 1955. (State Service Photo No. 378.)

Jill Frances

BACK COVER BOY

NEW SERIES—No. 137



DENNIS NEWTON of OXFORD

THE first time I met Dennis Newton, the boy was very amused. And it was Johnny Hoskins who had got Dennis' shoulder up.

"I had a good idea," said Den, "I decided I'd become speedway's first 'Golden Boy.' I painted my shoulders gold, and that took some doing because the paint wanted to go everywhere but on the shoulders. Then do you know what and the result looked good. Then do you know what happened? Johnny Hoskins moved in to West Ham and had colors in red, blue, white, green, black, yellow and all colors of the rainbow—including gold. And because he was Johnny Hoskins he got his colors a lot of publicity, he always does that one, and everyone thought that Malcolm Carter was the 'Golden Boy.' What a life!"

Dennis, at that time, was trying hard to break into a regular place with the Swindon team. But he had little success—two shaky starts for one thing.

Next place for Dennis to try his luck was at Wembley. In 1953 he became a recognized Junior League for them. But that didn't lead him anywhere, although he did ride for the Lion League from an occasion.

Maybe I ought to qualify that statement. It did lead him somewhere, indirectly it led him to his present club, Oxford. John Drayley, in charge of the Chertemps, noticed that Dennis was quite a useful lad. He also thought that, with patient perseverance, the boy could be trained into a good rider. So he signed him for the 1954 season.

At first it looked as though John had backed a loser. Dennis had a good run in the Oxford side, without showing much. But toward the end of the season, when he had another run in the side, he started with speed, solid point scores.

And by the end of the season John Drayley said, "The boy can be great and he doesn't need much more time for it either."

How does "the boy" feel about his "Golden Boy" episode now? It's almost forgotten for Dennis, instead of going for the show, is now concentrating on the points. And next season he hopes to lead them in large quantities. (State Service Photo No. 365.)

JILL FRANCES