



GUEST WRITER - FRED WILLS

(South African Team Captain)

says what he likes by invitation of the Sports Editor.

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When, in 1947, Gilbert Brown and company, encouraged by a few motor racing "fanatics," resuscitated, speedway in this country, many of us wondered whether it would die out as in former years. But this time it really seems to have dug its heels in, and when we compete against the Dutch tourists at Wembley these days, as many as 10,000 excited fans come to watch. Len Rehorst, manager of the visitors, goes so far as to say that South Africa is making more strides in the game, comparatively, than Britain, Australia, or the European countries.

Well, take the case of the crack Dutch riders, Stenman and Metzelaar. They have terrific names overseas, yet they have still to beat us in the Tests here. Last year the English press gave Stenman a big show when, without having seen a British track before, he went to Leicester for the first round of the World Championships, won every race and took two seconds off the lap record. In the next round he was unfortunate enough to suffer an accident and he did not go any further in the championship.

It's good to see, too, that we have a number of young riders coming on in the Transvaal league. In my side, Boksburg Lions, Pat Mackenzie was coming on very fast, - too fast, in fact before he broke his leg at practice recently. His exhaust pipe was coming off and, looking down at it, he rode straight into the safety fence. Fred van Zyl, also of Boksburg, has just bought a new frame, which should help him along, and other youngsters who have impressed me are Maurice Fenton (Pretoria Tigers) and Chris Hollenbach (Johannesburg Pirates). Des Wolf, who is really a road racer and whose father was well known in the old days, cannot be termed a youngster, but he is also shaping pretty well.

THOUGHTS WITH LIVERPOOL

The first British meeting of the new season takes place at Easter, and I should like to be there, riding again for Liverpool. But I have a four-month-old daughter now and, if I did go, Liverpool would have to offer three passages, including one for my wife. There isn't much chance of that. But my thoughts will be with Liverpool for many an hour. I was there in 1949 when, with Doug Serrurier, I arrived at half past four in the morning from Paris. There was nobody on Liverpool station to meet us, they didn't expect us so soon, - and after trying in vain to find hotel accommodation, we went back to the station. Luckily, one of the Liverpool riders came to fetch his machine at the station, and he took us back to the track. We slept in the dressing rooms for a couple of hours. That night I was made reserve in the Liverpool side, who were riding against Hanley, the league leaders. The reserve is always given two rides at least per evening and when I managed to win twice, one of the team riders was pulled out and I was included. Then came my biggest thrill in speedway. We were pitted against Lindsay Mitchell, Hanley's crack Australian rider, and we swapped the lead eight times in four laps. The crowd went mad when I managed to pass him on the last corner and beat him by half a wheel. After that Doug and I were "made" at Liverpool.

Many Dominion riders, - Australian particularly - , are breaking into British speedway, and many of the riders in Britain don't like it. In fact, they have forced the promoters to introduce a law under which two Dominion riders only may be included in each team. The promoters don't like this arrangement, of course, because the Dominion boys are a big draw with the British public.

MOST HOSPITABLE TO US

One thing I must say about Liverpool is that the riders and public were most hospitable to us, and it was a great blow to me when, after but four weeks riding, I broke two toes and an arm and was off for six weeks. I was right on top at the time. We met Halifax at Liverpool. One of their riders, Jock Dawson, hit the fence in front of me and his machine rebounded into me. I won my first 'come-back' race six weeks later, but after that I didn't shape at all. Now, taught by experience, I like to try to get out in front at the start and stay there. It is safer.

As in cricket, the Australians have been dominating the speedway world for a long time, and it is particularly gratifying to see that two British riders, Tommy Price and Freddie Williams (both of Wembley Lions) have taken the world championship at Wembley two years running. Mind you, they have an advantage in being able to compete for this coveted title on their own track. I saw the championship at Wembley in 1949, and 98,000 people were there with me.

Our best rider, on results in this country, is Henry Long. He is helped a great deal by the fact that his father, the renowned Alf Long of the good old days, is a super tuner, and in this respect I have an interesting story to tell. In 1949, Henry, who was riding with great success in the Belle Vue first team, came across to Liverpool and in the pits I introduced him to Chris Hornby, a British rider who came out here in 1929. "Henry here is a son of Alf Long, who rode against you in the Union," I told Chris, and he replied: "Oh, Alf, that wizard of the carburettor." Anyway, good luck to South African speedway. We have the talent to rate eventually with Australia and England. It is up to our youngsters, and my advice to them is to combine their "nerve" with good sense and not to forget out on the track what we older riders tell them in the pits.