

## **THE HENRY LONG COLLECTION**

### **Part 8 – 1953/'54 Season**

The off-season prior to the new campaign heralded the long awaited beginning of speedway in the Rhodesias. In a somewhat surprising development the first meeting in July was not staged in any of the major cities of Southern Rhodesia as anticipated but further north beyond the Zambesi River at Kitwe on Northern Rhodesia's Copperbelt. The first meeting in Southern Rhodesia was held at Bulawayo's Agricultural Showgrounds in September when the hosts met South Africa in an international challenge match with the visitors emerging victorious by 37 points to 34.

In late August and with the 1953/54 season fast approaching, the main talking point was the news released by Gilbert Brown, the Wembley general manager, that an eight-man English team would tour the Union and be captained by the 1950 World Champion Freddie Williams. Little did anyone suspect that by the time he arrived in late October Williams would have been crowned World Champion for a second time after his triumph the previous month at Wembley Stadium, London.

Besides the current World Champion, the tourists fielded a combination of experience and youth including veteran Bill Kitchen and budding star Brian Crutcher that ultimately proved too strong for the Springboks. The South African team went into the 5<sup>th</sup> and final Test in the knowledge that a win would square the series and they seemed to have luck with them as both Kitchen and Freddie Williams were unavailable for the touring team. However, England drafted in Gerry Hussey who was free-lancing in the Union and against the odds secured a 57-51 victory to deny the locals.

Two further Test series were held – the Springboks beating an Overseas team 2-1 and a Dominions side comprising South Africans and New Zealanders Trevor Redmond and Dick Campbell defeating England 3-0 although the series score belies the closeness of the individual matches. A further international took place at Bulawayo in December when a British team beat the Dominions 58-50.

Individually four riders were prominent, Brian Crutcher, Freddie Williams, Henry Long and Fred Lang. With Fred Wills, Crutcher formed the backbone of the Randfontein Aces league team. His league performances were immense, - 9 maximums from 13 matches and with only five points dropped, his total of 151 points made him the league's leading scorer. Crutcher also unsuccessfully challenged Williams for the National Match Race Championship Golden Helmet in February and he capped his season by winning the Natal Championship. Williams, having won the Golden Helmet from Henry Long in December, held it until the season's end whilst he scored prolifically for the Pretoria Eagles. Long was not as prominent as in previous seasons but was still considered favourite for the SA National Championship scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> March at Wembley until it was postponed to the beginning of the 1954/55 season. Fred Lang came of age and began to produce the scores previously predicted of him. He was South Africa's second highest scorer in the Tests against England and also contributed significantly to the series win against Overseas. His form was such that his signature was eagerly sought by several clubs for the 1954 British season. Ultimately he turned down overtures from Edinburgh and Ipswich to sign for first division giants, the London Wembley Lions.

Of the teams who competed in the 1952/53 National League programme, only the Durban Hornets and Wembley Lions once again came to the tapes. The former Germiston team moved to a newly built track at Olympia Park adjoining the Pam Brink Stadium and re-branded themselves as 'Springs Stars' whilst Boksburg closed their doors for good. A new team, the Aces, entered the competition and operated out of the Randfontein Showgrounds. Captained by Trevor Redmond, the Springs Stars were comfortable winners of the league finishing 6 points clear of second placed Randfontein.

After a successful defence of the Wembley Match Race Championship by holder Henry Long in October, the Golden Helmet was given a revamp and became the National Match Race Championship thereafter. Instead of a single leg, best-of-three races contest at Wembley, a home and away leg was instituted with a deciding leg at a neutral track if required, with all legs being on a best-of-three races format. The first Golden Helmet challenge under the new system saw Freddie Williams pitted against Long and the World Champion comfortably won both legs at Wembley and Randfontein by 2 races to nil. Subsequently, Williams retained a vice-like grip on the Golden Helmet although in his last defence of the season both he and challenger Brian Crutcher fell in the first race of the second leg at Wembley with the holder sustaining a broken collar-bone. However, Williams retained the title by virtue of his 2-0 win in the opening leg at Randfontein.

**SPEED TRACK**  
*Sunday July 26 1953.*  
**BACK** from a speedway trip to Northern Rhodesia, where he managed the team of South African riders which lost 40-36 to the local boys, **BUDDY FULLER** says the track at N'kana is every bit as good as that at Wembley Stadium.

And Fuller added: "When I was in N'kana three months ago, there was nothing but bush on the proposed site of the track. Now there is a granite-surface track with direct over-head lighting.

"The Rhodesian boys are good. I saw two meetings without one rider crashing into the safety-fence as novices usually do. The local star is **BERT CLARK**, a road-racer from England. A great prospect, he scored 10 points at his first competitive meeting."

**TEST PLAN**

**THERE** was nothing easy about the Rhodesian victory over a South African team. Going against the home riders were **TOBY BOSHOFF**, **HARRY SERRURIER** and **FRED VAN ZYL**, three Test Spring-boys.

"Speedway in Rhodesia will begin to boom once the tracks under construction at Salisbury and Bulawayo are completed," says Buddy Fuller, now well over the Durban crash that forced the doctors to tell him to end his active track-riding career.

South African teams will probably be flown to Rhodesia for Test matches not long after Salisbury and Bulawayo are ready to present full-scale meetings.

No, there will be no clash with the South African programme. Rhodesian speedway is run in the Union's off-or winter-season.



Soon after the Rhodesian and South African speedway teams arrived in Bulawayo yesterday they started tuning their machines at a local shop. From left to right (standing) they are **Sonny James (S.A.)**, **Doe Luyendyk (S.A.)**, **Toby Boshoff (Rhod.)**, **Joe Blankfield (Rhod.)**, **Bud Messer (S.A.)**, **Harry du Toit (S.A.)**, **Godfrey Rabie (S.A., manager)** and **Bob Raw (Rhodesian captain)**. Seated is **Doug Serrurier (S.A. captain)** and kneeling are **John Bekker (Rhod.)** and **Dave Naude (Rhod.)**.



Four riders get away to a good start in Saturday's speedway Test. Left to right they are **Dave Naude**, **Stan Paulsen**, **Bert Clark** and **Sonny James**.

**Rhodesia Unlucky in Speedway Test**

*Monday Sept. 7 1953.*  
**IN** Southern Rhodesia's first speedway Test at Bulawayo on Saturday, South Africa beat Rhodesia by 37 points to 34—but it could also quite easily have been a Rhodesian victory.

**Bob Raw**, the Rhodesian captain, was unlucky in coming off in the last lap of the first heat when he was in a good position. When he led the field round the last bend of the seventh heat, **Toby Boshoff's** engine cut out and he glided into third position.

**Doug Serrurier**, the South African captain, was the first to make an attempt on a lap record. His time was 23.5 seconds.

**NAUDE BEST**

The crowd cheered the announcement that **Bob Serrurier**, riding for South Africa on Saturday but who will captain the Kitans stars team in their match against South Africa at Kitwe on Friday, and **Joe Blankfield** of Rhodesia had both clocked 23.4 secs.

Most successful rider of the evening was Rhodesia's **Dave Naude** who scored 10 points out of a possible 12.

The last heat in the Test produced some thrilling team riding by Rhodesia. When the tapes went up **Joe Blankfield** swung to the front on the first bend with **Raw** close behind. Although **Bob Serrurier** could not catch the speedy **Blankfield** he managed to overhaul **Raw** in the second

lap, only for the Rhodesian captain to cut in on the inside of the last bend and race past the finish with a wheel to spare.

**CAPTAIN'S DUEL**

Another thrilling race was the duel between the two captains, **Raw** and **Doug Serrurier**, for the premier prize of the evening, the Golden Helmet.

The lead changed hands several times but finally **Raw** shot past **Serrurier** to win.

Despite a 30 yard start in the final of the Royal Show Handicap, **Bertie Hall** was no match for the other three finalists, **Dave Naude** was an easy winner followed by **Sonny James** and **Bert Clark**.

There were three spills. **Raw** coming off twice and **Bekker** once. All three occurred at the same bend, the second from the starting gate.

Both were uninjured and were able to resume riding.

**Long opens speedway with maximum points win**

*Saturday Oct. 3 1953.*  
**HENRY LONG** gave an effective answer to those critics who maintain that he cannot come from the back to win a speedway race when he completed his maximum point-scoring effort and won the Supporters Trophy at Wembley last night.

In the final heat **Long** was beaten out of the gate by **Joe Blankfield** and **Bob Raw**, both of whom could have finished with a higher score than **Long** had the South African champion failed. But **Long** waited until his opponents bunched together on the inside of the track and passed them both with a brilliant burst on the outside and went on to score another personal triumph.

The fact that **Joe Blankfield's** chain snapped just as **Long** was passing him made no difference to the ultimate result but it did lose **Blankfield** second place in the final score.

**Fred Lang** started well by winning two heats but once again showed a lack of experience when forced to ride from the back. His brother, **Doug**, fell in the first heat, but then rode well to score nine points.

**Harry du Toit** had a chance until he met **Long**, and **Dave Naude** scored more points than ever before in a similar event.

**TWO ACCIDENTS**

Two accidents marred this meeting of the new season. **Alec Blankfield** dislocated his shoulder when he was dragged into the fence by his machine, and **Doug Serrurier** fractured his arm just above the wrist when he could not correct a wobble on a bend.

The meeting proved once again

the great superiority of **Long** over other local riders, and he showed form good enough to improve the hopes that he will provide more than a match for **Freddy Williams**, the world champion, next month.

**HEAT WINNERS**

The heat winners were: **H. du Toit** 79.4sec., **A. Blankfield** 78.9sec., **F. Lang** 78.3sec., **H. Long** 78.7sec., **F. Lang** 79.9sec., **H. Long** 77.2sec., **H. du Toit** 78.6sec., **J. Blankfield** 78.6sec., **D. Serrurier** 79.9sec., **B. Raw** 79.7sec., **H. Long** 77.6sec., **J. Blankfield** 79.8sec., **H. Long** 77.6sec., **F. Lang** 77.9sec., **B. Raw** 80.8sec., **J. Blankfield** 80.2sec., **H. du Toit** 80.3sec., **D. Lang** 79.8sec., **T. Boshoff** 80.7sec., **H. Long** 78.2sec.

The individual point scoring was: **H. Long** 15, **H. du Toit** 13, **B. Raw** 12, **J. Blankfield** 11, **F. Lang** 10, **D. Lang** 9, **D. Naude** 7, **T. Boshoff** 7, **D. Serrurier** 7, **A. Blankfield** 6, **S. James** 6, **H. Serrurier** 4, **F. van Zyl** 4, **P. McKenzie** 2, **A. Duncan** 2, **N. Mortimer** 2, **G. Matthews** 1, **J. Bekker** 1.



**H. Long**

**12,000 SAW CITY SPEEDWAY**

More than a quarter of Bulawayo's population packed into the showground stadium on Saturday for Rhodesia's first speedway test.

The 12,000 crowd was a Bulawayo sporting record. The gate takings amounted to just over £1,300 but it is believed that due to the rush and inadequate gate facilities for such a huge crowd several hundred did not pay.

**Champion for speedway Friday Sept. 19 1953. tour of S.A.**

**LONDON, Friday.**  
**SOUTH AFRICANS** are to see a world speedway champion in action, writes **Bert Fellows**. Riding before a crowd of 99,000 at the Empire Stadium, Wembley, last night **Freddy Williams** of Port Talbot, South Wales, won the title for the second time in four years. Next month he leaves for Johannesburg where he will lead a British team in test matches against South Africa.