

# English Riders Sweep to Popularity in South Africa

From Our Own Correspondents  
Ted Gibson and Buddy Fuller

A  
Speedway  
Echo  
Special

SOUTH Africa has gone speedway crazy. They've had occasional tastes of the game in the past but the visit of a party of English riders has whipped up enthusiasm the like of which has never been seen before. South Africa is not a motor-cycle minded part of the world and organised speedway racing in any shape or form is no more than a year old but already the handful of Union riders are becoming as famous as Springbok cricketers, rugby players and boxing champions.

The party of British riders, although not regarded as a representative side, are acquitting themselves well on this first unofficial visit and South Africa regards the trip as the initial move in a regular series of official fixtures. The Transvaal Speedway Control Board is affiliated to the Motor Cycle Union of South Africa and is now seeking affiliation to the British Speedway Control Board so that everything can be placed on a proper footing.

The British riders originally intended to ride more or less as individuals but

when they saw the set-up they decided that it would better serve the interests of South African speedway racing generally if they rode as a team. That was a difficult decision to make for it was realised that the English boys were leaving themselves open to a nasty rap from the Control Board and the Riders' Association back home especially as a series of five "Tests" were arranged against South Africa. However, everybody realises that those Tests are not regarded as official and there is no question of trying to give them a false importance.

But however important or not they may be to the authorities the speedway starved South African public regard them in an entirely different light and everywhere the Englishmen ride they are attracting enthusiastic capacity crowds. The side has been labelled the British Touring Team and they won their first four matches comfortably. They defeated Eastern Transvaal 49-32, Johannesburg Pirates 51-28, Germiston Eagles 55-26 and the first "Test" against South Africa by 53-31.

Wilf Plant, the captain, is extremely popular, and he and Alan Chambers dropped only one point each against the Germiston side. Despite the fact that he has experienced more than a fair share of motor trouble, Wilf lowered the track records at both Wembley and Dunswaart.

Jeff Bishop and Jimmy Dunn have improved out of all knowledge, but Ken Tidbury seems to be suffering from the heat,



Buddy Fuller, seen over here with Hastings last season, wearing his Johannesburg Pirates colours in South Africa.

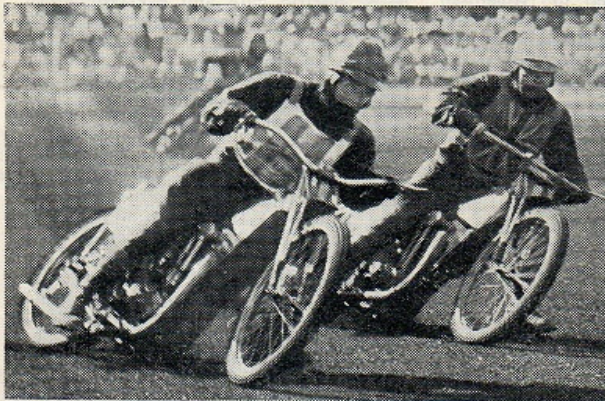
though he, too, pulled his weight in the first "Test."

That first "Test" which took place on New Year's Day was held in a storm at Wembley Stadium and the mud-covered track had the South African riders nonplussed. Even so the Union riders won three of the first five heats and the home country was leading by four points when the rain came down in buckets-full swamping the bends three inches under water.

That immediately put a curb on adventurous riding. It became a case of first out of the gate and to attempt to pass a man on the bends was little short of suicide.

The conditions gave the advantage to the fast starters and Ted Gibson and Peter Robinson were in their element. The only man who gave the Englishmen any serious trouble was Henry Long who in heat 8 was beaten for the first time for many weeks by Peter Robinson who went out on Buddy Fuller's machine.

Bob Serrurier, the South African reserve had an awkward spill right at the end of the match which resulted in a broken collar bone. His place for the second "Test" was taken by Oscar Wessman.



Peter Robinson drives inside the South African, Henry Long, at Dunswaart during the second "Test." Peter went on to win.



Bob is the baby of the South African speedways. One of five brothers, Bob is 19 years of age and only started riding at the end of 1947. Wally Lloyd, who has been to South Africa many times, knows all about Bob and awarded him a trophy for being the best novice of the season. Wally still thinks that Bob will eventually become South African champion a title which at the moment rests in the capable hands of Buddy Fuller.

Brother Doug Serrurier is 27 years of age and more experienced. He commenced riding at the Old Barn speedway back in 1940 and has been consistent all through. Last season he was captain of East Rand and this year is skipping the Germiston Eagles whose riding colours are not unlike those of Exeter.

But the South African who is making everybody sit up and take notice is Henry Long who has had a bit of experience in England with Sheffield. Born in Johannesburg 22 years ago Henry is the son of the famous Alf Long who twice won the Durban-Johannesburg motor cycle race. Henry made his first appearance as a speedway rider at the Old Barn track in 1946 and last season he finished third in the South African championship.

### The Big Sensation

Greatest sensation of the South African season is the sudden rise to the top of Toby Boshoff who won only one race throughout the whole of last season. He's a different Toby this time and his rapid elevation to the front rank is not solely due to the fact that he is riding the machine Buddy Fuller used last year. Anyway, Toby is showing signs of going places and with a little more experience there's no telling where he'll stop.

The second "Test," at Dunswaart was a thriller. The British team lost simply because they did not have a finisher in the last race! They were five points up with one heat to go but Doug Serrurier and Bob Quick came home without opposition from Ken Tidbury and Jimmy Dunn who went out in place of Ted Gibson. Alan



Introducing the Johannesburg Pirates. Standing, left to right: Boshoff, Blaine, Van der Vyher, Gould and Lerman. Buddy Fuller is on the bike, while either side of him are A. Blankfield and J. Blankfield.

Chambers went through the match undefeated for his third maximum and he is easily the highest point scorer of the party. Incidentally, Alan is not returning to England; he has decided to settle in Pretoria where he has been offered a good position.

Harking back to that second "Test," Buddy Fuller equalled the track record in the opening heat; Chambers set up new figures with 71.9 in the third only for Ken Middleditch to face through the fourth in 71 dead.

Both the Dunswaart and Wembley Stadium tracks are near Johannesburg, Wembley being opened in November, 1947 by Messrs. Reg Haswell and Gilbert Brown. Mr. Haswell, by the way, happened to be a spectator at that first ever speedway meeting at High

Beech in England back in 1928. Mr. Brown was on the staff of Wimbledon before moving to South Africa in 1936.

Both these joint managers had been trying to install a speedway in Johannesburg for twelve years but the Transvaal Rugby Union, owners of the ground, refused permission. Three years ago, however, the ground was purchased by the Union Greyhound Racing Association and work went ahead for a speedway which opened on November 27th, 1937.

Dunswaart on the East Rand opened up last November and like Wembley, has a first class cinder circuit, tarmac base, electric gate and everything else necessary for a modern meeting. These two tracks lead the way in South African speedway and there are hopes that similar stadiums will come into being at Durban and Cape Town.

Track records at Wembley, which by the way will be the scene of the fight between Bruce Woodcock and Johnny Ralph are: one lap rolling start, Ken Middleditch 17.6 secs.; three laps rolling start, Joe Blankfield and Buster Blaine 57.6 secs.; four laps clutch start, Wilf Plant 74.3 secs. Until Wilf came along the clutch start record was jointly held by Buddy Fuller and Toby Boshoff. The Wembley track is 368 yards, while that at Dunswaart is 350. The one-lap rolling start figure there stands to Buddy Fuller at 17.4 secs., while Henry Long and Wilf Plant held the four laps clutch start record until Middleditch broke it.

## "Test" Scoreboard in South Africa

### FIRST MATCH (Jan. 1)

British Team				South Africa							
Plant	1	0	1	3	5	Fuller	3	0	1	1	5
Tidbury	0	2	3	2	7	Serrurier, D.	2	0	0	0	2
Robinson	2	3	3	3	11	Long	3	3	2	3	11
Middleditch	0	3	2	2	7	Boshoff	1	1	2	1	5
Chambers	2	2	1	3	8	Wills	0	1	2	X	3
Gibson	3	3	F	3	9	Quick	1	0	0	1	2
Dunn	1	2			3	Blankfield	2	1	0	0	3
Bishop	1	2			3	Serrurier, B.	0	F			0

### SECOND MATCH (Jan. 8)

Plant	2	2	3	2	9	Fuller	3	2	2	3	10
Tidbury	0	1	1	0	2	Serrurier, D.	1	1	1	3	6
Robinson	0	2	3	0	7	Long	3	3	2	2	10
Middleditch	2	3	3	0	8	Boshoff	1	0	1	1	3
Chambers	3	3	3	3	12	Wills	2	1	2	1	6
Gibson	0	0	0	X	0	Quick	1	0	0	2	3
Dunn	0	0	0		0	Blankfield	1	0			1
Bishop	1	2			3	Wessman	0	3			3