

Part 11: 1957- 58 SEASON

The 1957/58 South African speedway league season turned out to be a two-horse-race between Pretoria Eagles and Durban Hornets, with the former eventually clinching the championship on race-points difference, after both finished with an identical record of five wins and one loss from their six official matches.

The highlights were the two direct encounters between the Eagles and the Hornets, which both ended in a home win. On January 12, Durban won a thriller of a match by 51.5 points to 50.5 at their own Hoy Park circuit. Henry Long (14) and Roy Bowers (11) top scored for the Hornets, while Pretoria's Swedish ace Olle Nygren recorded an 18 points maximum.

Just three days later, on January 15, both teams met for the return match at Pretoria's Speedway Stadium. This time the Eagles beat the Hornets in another close match, keeping the title chase still undecided. For the record and to give an idea of the line-up's of that year's top two teams.

Here are the points score details of the Pretoria match:

PRETORIA Eagles (52):

Olle Nygren 18, Trevor Redmond 15, Howdy Cornell 8, Claude Warne 6, Jimmy Scott 3, Charlie Branders 2.

DURBAN Hornets (49):

Henry Long 13, Neil Mortimer 11, Roy Bowers 11, Gerry Hickson 5, Aubrey Long 4, Vern McWilliams 3, Graham White 2.

By the end of February, all but one of the league matches had been completed and Pretoria sat on top of the league table. Durban Hornets, with one match in hand, needed to beat the East Rand Stars by a margin of 8 or more to put themselves on top, but only managed a tight 50-48 win against the men from Springs, which kept Hornets in second place to the Eagles in the league's final standings.

The National League table of 1957/58 was as follows:

<i>Pos.</i>	<i>Team</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Pts</i>
1 st	Pretoria Eagles	6	5	0	1	214.5	191.5	10
2 nd	Durban Hornets	6	5	0	1	215	197	10
3 rd	East Rand Stars	6	2	0	4	196	207	4
4 th	Randfontein Rockets	6	0	0	6	191.5	221.5	0

Note: Johannesburg (Wembley) Lions rode just 2 matches and were expunged from the league for failing to complete their fixtures.

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THE 1958 TEST MATCH SERIES

Highlights of the season were the International Test Matches between Europe and South Africa. For one of those, the Second Test, both teams even made the long journey north to meet in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. This happened to be on Saturday evening, February 1, 1958, and the match was convincingly won by Europe, before one of the biggest crowds ever to attend a sporting function in Rhodesia.

The 500 yard track was smooth as a billiard table and the racing was keen and hard throughout the evening. South Africa put up a great fight, but without Henry Long and Roy Bester, who were unable to travel for business reasons and Neil Mortimer who was not selected for this test, the substitutes found the going tough.

Trevor Redmond was top scorer for South Africa with 10-and-a-half points. His half point resulted from a dead heat with Dennis Newton. The rapidly improving Trevor Blokdyk was once again amongst the points with 10, and the surprise of the evening was the return to form of Toy Edwards who scored a fine 9 points.

Jimmy Scott, always a fine rider on the longer circuits, did well to notch five, while Howdy Cornell scored four, which was disappointing for a rider of his ability. Local Rhodesian star Bev Bird only scored two.

For Europe, Ove Fundin scored a maximum of 18 points on his debut in Rhodesia. Fellow Swede Olle Nygren dropped only one point during the meeting to Trevor Blokdyk to finish with 17. Dennis Newton proved his class with a hard earned 13-and-a-half points. Des Haswell scored 7, Bobby Andrews 5 and Roy Bowers 4.

After the show there was a civic reception for both teams in the Bulawayo Town Hall.

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Six days later, on February 7, the third Test Match was staged in Pretoria. This time, the Springboks included Long, Bester and Mortimer, and in what was later described as one of the most exciting

internationals ever seen in South Africa, a large crowd saw South Africa defeat Europe 53-52.

Much of the credit for the Springboks' victory can be attributed to the sparkling displays of Trevor Redmond, Neil Mortimer and Henry Long, and, to a lesser extent, Trevor Blokdyk.

Outstanding for the Europeans were Olle Nygren – who dropped only one point to Mortimer – and Ove Fundin. Only Dennis Newton of the rest of the team reproduced anything like international form.

When Mortimer beat Nygren, the Swede pushed him so hard that new figures of 59.9 seconds were recorded for the four laps.

Scorers:

SOUTH AFRICA (53):

Trevor Redmond 14, Henry Long 13, Neil Mortimer 9, Trevor Blokdyk 8, Roy Bester 7,

Claude Warne 2.

EUROPE (52):

Olle Nygren 17, Ove Fundin 15, Dennis Newton 9, Roy Bowers 4, Des Haswell 4,

Bobby Andrews 3.

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A fourth Test Match, held on March 1 at Springs, ended in an 54-all draw. On a perfect night a bright moon shone from a cloudless sky and so warm was the weather hundreds of people sat in their shirt sleeves and none of the ladies wore coats. Enthusiasm throughout was at fever pitch and there was a delay of 15 minutes at the start as the crowd outside the Olympia Park Stadium threatened to break down the gates if the meeting started before everyone was admitted.

A request record quarter hour and some rock `n` roll numbers later kept everyone happy until the march on of the riders and the formal introduction of the teams to the crowd.

It was soon evident that the South Africans were out for blood although the absence of Neil Mortimer who was badly injured at Pretoria on the previous evening weakened the Springboks somewhat.

Trevor Redmond thrilled the crowd by running round Ove Fundin in the first heat and Cornell easily beat Des Haswell to give the South Africans an early lead of 4-2. Nygren then beat Henry Long who seemed slightly jaded after his terrific efforts in winning the Open Championship the night before.

Scores were level at 18-18 after six heats, and when interval arrived after nine heats the visitors led by 28 to 26. A complete change of heat partners for the second half seemed to give the South Africans the edge. With Howdy Cornell riding in top form, Trevor Redmond being unbeatable and Henry Long going faster and faster as the night wore on, things began to hum.

South Africa had levelled the scores with a 5-1 by Long and Blokdyk in heat 14, when Fundin broke his primary chain at the start and had to receive medical attention. The last four heats were all drawn 3-all and the final result of a draw at 54-54 was a fair reflection of the night's racing.

The crowd left the stadium in good spirits as the war-cry of the Stars, which was used as the Springbok war-cry, reverberated through the track area.

Scorers:

SOUTH AFRICA (54):

Trevor Redmond 18, Henry Long 15, Howdy Cornell 9, Trevor Blokdyk 6, Roy Bester 3,

Johnny Ackerman 2.

EUROPE (54):

Olle Nygren 15, Ove Fundin 14, Dennis Newton 10, Bobby Andrews 8, Roy Bowers 4,

Des Haswell 3.

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HENRY LONG WINS S.A. TITLE

The Final of the 1958 South African Individual Championship went ahead at Pretoria the night before the Test at Springs. The Control Board had allowed the participation of the touring European riders, who had to enter in two qualifying rounds on the previous weekend. The first, at Pretoria on February 21 was won by Ove Fundin with Henry Long second and Bobby Andrews third. On the next day at Springs, Trevor Redmond won the second eliminator ahead of Roy Bester and Olle Nygren.

On Friday night, February 28, 1958, the sixteen best competed for the title of South African Speedway Champion at the Pretoria Speedway Stadium.

The two Durban riders Vern McWilliams and Gerry Hickson, who had been seeded into the final because of the distance involved, refused to ride unless they received return air fares from their hometown to Pretoria and back. The Pretoria Speedway Association, which had taken a hard financial knock during the course of the season, felt it could not foot the bill. This meant that Charlie Branders and Nick Dormehl moved up from reserves to fill the two remaining berths in the championship.

Racing was so fierce that at the halfway stage after 10 heats it was a matter of crooked riders or damaged machinery and very few races saw the full four riders come to the line. This detracted somewhat from the thrills expected of this meeting although it must be admitted that the top four – Long, Fundin, Redmond and Nygren – were in fine fettle.

Trevor Redmond lost points in his first race with a misfiring machine. Dennis Newton went out on the second lap, leaving Nygren with an easy win. In the second heat Johnny Ackerman crashed on the last bend and in the third stanza Jimmy Scott looped at the gate, leaving Henry Long to win easily from Howdy Cornell, who caused a sensation by beating Neil Mortimer.

Event 5 saw a great tussle between the two Swedes, which Fundin managed to win by inches. The sixth heat saw trouble in a big way with Mortimer crashing badly and Newton falling heavily in avoiding him. Bester had in the meantime packed up with a strained arm and this left Blokdyk to collect three easy points.

Henry Long then beat the much-fancied Trevor Redmond and in doing so equalled the track record of 59.9 secs., before a tame heat 9 with only two riders, Nygren beating Dormehl.

Heat 10 was vital with Long and Fundin unbeaten and opposed to another. Fundin touched the tapes and in withdrawing lost the advantage as Long flashed out of the gate, followed by Bobby Andrews, who hindered Fundin to catch Long. A record of 59.5 secs. was credited to the flying and popular Henry Long.

Nygren and Redmond continued to ride excellently but Long was not to be flustered and a time of 59.7 secs. in beating Nygren stamped him as the best rider of the night. Fundin was excluded for dangerous riding by steward/referee Dennis How in heat 15.

When Redmond, overcoming his machine troubles in the last race, decisively and fairly easily beat Ove Fundin, the championship was sealed for another year with Henry Long once again proving his all round ability, excellent machine preparation and unmatched skill on the big occasion.

For eleven years he had now been at the top and at his age of 28 seemed set for another ten years of supremacy on the tracks of Southern Africa.

1958 SOUTH AFRICAN OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

Scorers:

Henry Long 15, Olle Nygren 13, Howdy Cornell 12, Bobby Andrews 12, Trevor Redmond 11, Trevor Blokdyk 10, Ove Fundin 9, Roy Bowers 8, Jim Scott 6, Nick Dormehl 6, Des Haswell 5, Charlie Banders 3, Johnny Ackerman 1, Neil Mortimer 1, Roy Bester 0, Dennis Newton 0.

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The Pretoria speedway season came to an end on March 14, 1958, with a team challenge meeting and a match race between Henry Long and Trevor Redmond for the Transvaal Championship. Honours again went to „Poker-face Hal“, that’s Long, who defeated his rival by 2 - 1.

Long and Redmond also caught the eye in the team match, when the combined Eagles & Lions team defeated the Rockets & Stars by 35-25.

Undoubtedly the 1957-58 season provided Pretoria fans with some top class sport. Full credits going to the organizers Trevor Redmond and John Bunton. The prospects for the next season seemed bright and it was even deemed possible that South Africa could run its own World Championship Qualifying round, and would at long last be recognised as a major power in world speedway.

But anyone with an inside knowledge of the sport could tell that all wasn’t well and reveal the precarious financial situation of the S.A. speedway promoters. John Bunton of Pretoria admitted that the 57/58 speedway season put the promoters close to bankruptcy, as riders such as Ove Fundin just failed to click with the public. The future of the sport was in real danger, as Bunton described the situation: "The only reason we are able to keep going is because Butch Mader and I have other employment and are able to treat this as a hobby. I think this is the reason why Trevor Redmond ceased operations at the end of the season and will not be back in 58/59. He could not afford to keep things going out of his own pocket and for that matter, neither could Fuller."

Part 12: In 1958 Enterprise Is Needed To Keep S.A. Speedway Alive

At the start of the 1958/59 season, black clouds had gathered over South African speedway. The Pretoria promoters, and with them the National Speedway Union, had lost a fortune in the aftermath of the previous year’s disastrous speedway season when riders such as world champion Ove Fundin just failed to click with

the public. The N.S.U. had a battle to keep going at all and decided to postpone the opening speedway meeting in Pretoria for a few weeks in order to enable the stockcars to pull things straight if possible.

One of Pretoria's ex-directors, Steve Naudé, linked up with Buddy Fuller, who had told Pretoria's remaining board of directors, namely John Bunton and Butch Mader, that he was going to make a come-back as a track promoter on the Reef. In any case, and with respect to Fuller, it must be appreciated that the successful enterprise in the Union, whether it be business or sport, has always been the show that is controlled by one man. Without the advantages of a gold mine in full production it is the drive and effort of "The Boss" that keeps things going.

In 1947 Buddy Fuller filled just that role, but in doing so, he made a few "enemies". The more successful speedway became, the more problems he met. The little problems that grew up would hardly be believed but Buddy held on grimly and speedway flourished, reaching its peak early in 1956. Possibly the finest racing in nearly 30 years of speedway in South Africa was to be seen in that season's fourth Test between South Africa and Scandinavia at Pretoria's magnificent speedway stadium.

It cannot be denied that the overseas chaps were needed to make the meetings worthwhile watching and it is to the lasting credit of Fuller that he managed to get "good to watch" riders from overseas, who were prepared to put their enthusiasm as well as their skill into the South African scene.

Fuller's initial reaction when the promotion of the sport went into the hands of those who had other ideas of running the sport, was to pull-out. He must have been bitterly disappointed with the way things were going since then. In fairness to Fuller, even the Pretoria promoters had to say that he never interfered with them until his come-back announcement in October 1958.

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The South African riders would again be caught in the middle. All they ever wanted was a reliable organisation to run speedway. While the local lads liked to see overseas riders coming to the Union, for they learned a lot from them, every ride an overseas man got was one they didn't get.

At the Annual General Meeting of the S.A. Speedway Control Board at the R.A.C. offices in Johannesburg, it was decided to take a very strong line with any riders who ride on unauthorised tracks or similar meetings. Mr. Frank Bennett was elected as chairman of the S.C.B.. It was intended to stage the National League even without the foreign riders, since there would be no money to bring an overseas touring troupe to South Africa this season. The plan was to stage four men teams and run four teams on the same night with team A against B before the interval and C against D after the interval. Each of these double header matches would be over 8 heats.

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The season was supposed to get underway on Saturday Night, November 1, at Durban, with a challenge match between Durban Hornets and Northern Transvaal. The meeting was washed out, though, and had to be restaged on Sunday afternoon. A fair crowd attended and saw the home team win by 46 points to 24. Henry Long rode for the Hornets and reached a 12 points maximum, while on the other hand Roy Bester's two points for the North must have been one of his lowest ever SA-scores.

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The organisation of speedway in Durban had also changed hands in 1958, as the locals had formed the Natal Speedway Association who took over the running of the meetings at Hoy Park. Though they had been assured the approval of the Pretoria group, who needed the Durban team to keep the National League alive, rumour had it that the S.C.B. was concerned about the shadow activities in Natal.

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The first meeting in the Transvaal of the 1958-59 speedway season was staged at Springs on Saturday, November 8, in threatening weather which resulted in a smaller-than-expected crowd. The combined Northern and Eastern Transvaal select, captained by Roy Bester, held off the challenge of Henry Long's Transvaal team.

Scorers:

NORTHERN & EASTERN TRANSVAAL 50: R.Bester 13, T.Blokdyk 11, H.Cornell 11, J.Scott 6, N.Dormehl 4, P.Hearne 3, C.Cilliers 2.

TRANSVAAL 45: H.Long 14, J.Gander 10, D.Haswell 9, C.Warne 4, J.Ackerman 4, S.Hopf 3, D.Scott 1.

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The second speedway at Springs on November 15 took the form of a "Best Pairs" match, disguised as an inter-city affair. Perfect weather and South Africa's top ranking speedway stars, including Dennis Newton after his recent return from England, failed to pull in the spectators and the Pretoria Speedway Association has gone further into the red in their two attempts to revive the game in Springs. Inevitably it was decided to postpone running on the East Rand again this year.

Results:

SPRINGS 18 (Roy Bester 11, Dennis Newton 7), **ALBERTON 18** (Henry Long 18, Toby Boshoff 3),

BOKSBURG 16 (Des Haswell 12, Nic Dormehl 4), **PRETORIA 15** (Howdy Cornell 13, Jimmy Scott 2), **KRUGERSDORP 13** (Trevor Blokdyk 13, Geroge Glen 0), **JOHANNESBURG 10** (Claude Warne 8, Peter Hearne 2).

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December saw the start of the speedway season in Pretoria, and despite the desperate efforts of the promoters to lure the public back, the opening meeting on December 5 was washed out and re-staged on December 12. Empty stands greeted the riders when they came out for the parade. In spite of this, the actual racing was top class by any standards. Henry Long led the Pretoria Eagles in a match against the combined Transvaal team, and the Eagles scraped home by 50 points to 46, with Long getting his usual immaculate max.

Scorers:

PRETORIA Eagles 50: Long 15, Blokdyk 13, Cornell 7, Scott 7, Dormehl 5, Branders 3, Hearne 0.

TRANSVAAL 46: Newton 13, Bester 10, Haswell 8, Warne 6, Glen 5, Gander 3, Cilliers 1.

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On December 19, Pretoria ran its annual Christmas meeting with a full programme of scratch and handicap races, a huge decorated Christmas tree, free gifts for all children entering the stadium, a fireworks display, a "donkey derby" and community carol singing. The meeting was an expensive one, but once again the crowd failed to materialise and when the show started, less than four hundred spectators were perched like miserable sparrows on the embankments.

Trevor Blokdyk won a special invitation race in fine style from Dennis Newton and Claude Warne. Henry Long beat Roy Bester in a match race and then went on to take the trophy in the lap record attempt with a fine time of 14.9 seconds.

The Christmas Cup, run off on a handicap basis, ended with Cornell and Blokdyk sharing the lead with 6 points from two rides. Henry Long proved his class in this event by winning his heat from Newton and Glen after starting 75 yards behind the gate compared to Newton's 25 and Glen at the gate. Long dropped a point to Cornell in his second ride as he was down to give Cornell 60 yards and this proved a little too much, though it was touch and go at the flag. The riders decided to run off the final as a scratch event and this made it a Long benefit with Blokdyk beating the dashing Cornell in great style.

Despite of the poor crowd one or two of the riders were not at all happy about the eventual pay-out. To avoid any such unpleasantness in future, the promoters decided to close down completely and make an early start with the stock cars and to confine speedway to show meetings in the country districts in the New Year.

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In a valiant attempt to keep speedway racing going in South Africa, Henry Long decided to try his hand at promoting and he arranged an ambitious meeting at Vaaldam. Unfortunately the weather turned sour and it was decided to cancel the show rather than run for a handful of spectators.

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Trevor Blokdyk made a similar attempt to run speedway in Krugersdorp, but support from the public on the West Rand did not come forward. Randfontein had already proven that this part of the world just isn't interested in speedway racing.

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On January 30, Pretoria decided to give speedway another chance. For this challenge match between the Pretoria Eagles and the Springs Stars, a new innovation was tried in so far as riders were handicapped at the start. In the first heat after the interval, Eagles skipper Henry Long collided with Peter Hearne. The South African Champion crashed heavily and was rushed to hospital. Fortunately, after treatment, he was allowed to go home. Eagles won the match 45-43.

This was the last stand-alone speedway meeting to be staged at Pretoria. In the years to come, speedway would feature only occasionally when included in the stock car programme.

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With Pretoria finished, the wheel had turned full cycle and in early 1959 all the riders were back at Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg riding for promoter Buddy Fuller, who had introduced "Cavalcade of Speed" meetings to South Africa. Speedway racing, stock cars, hell-driving stunts, sulky racing and moto-polo have been mixed in one dish and served up with lashings of publicity and ballyhoo to set the turnstiles clicking merrily once more.

In spite of repeated warnings by S.C.B. chairman Frank Bennett, the riders have once again hitched their wagons to the Fuller star and are riding on the crest of the wave.

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Part 13: The Return of Buddy Fuller

Speedway racing in South Africa – what visions of trials and tribulations, wars and rumours those five innocent little words conjured up **around 1960**. Buddy Fuller was back in the business, giving the riders a chance to perform at Wembley and several other tracks under his control, while the sport's official body, the Speedway Control Board, could do nothing but threaten all and everyone involved with a ban.

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At Pretoria, which was one of just a couple of tracks still under control of the S.C.B., they made one more attempt to stage speedway in the 1959/60 season. Several speedway events were included in the stock car programme on December 5. Unfortunately throughout the Saturday afternoon, the rain poured down in torrents and as the sun set in the West the clouds banked up for a fresh onslaught. It was a tough decision to start the meeting while a steady drizzle caused the ardent fans to huddle together under raincoats, blankets etc.

The "Christmas Cup" had drawn entries from many riders in the Transvaal but owing to the length of the stock car programme and the cut-up conditions of the track only seven reliable riders were chosen to compete in a series of match races plus a five rider final.

In the first match race Dave Collins defeated Nic Dormehl on the run-in on the last lap in a very fast time of 50.1 seconds. The second match race saw Howdy Cornell make no mistake in beating the stylish Peter Hearne in 50.2 seconds, while the third match race had the crowd on their feet as Charlie Branders and Toby Boshoff fought out a neck and neck duel from start to finish for Branders to get a „home town decision“ by the width of a tyre. Time 50.1 secs.

The final consisted of the three heat winners and Boshof, who was fastest second, and Henry Long, who was seeded into the final. With Toby Boshof and Dave Collins on the gate, Howdy Cornell and Charlie Branders on the five yard line and Long on ten yards, the scene was set for a fierce final.

Surprisingly Long was left standing at the start and it was Howdy Cornell who narrowly took the race with a great display of spirited riding from Charlie Branders and Toby Boshoff. Dave Collins had come unstuck on the top bend. It was later discovered that Henry Long's tank had been filled with paraffin instead of methanol much to the indignant Henry's disgust.

However, a special match-race was organised between Long and Cornell and this proved to be the highlight of the night. Long made the gate but Cornell went round him on the first bend only to have Henry dive under him on the second and so they fought it for the full three laps. Long won the race in the exceptionally hot time of 46 seconds for the three laps and as the riders crossed the line the damp but enthusiastic patrons stood up and cheered the boys to the echo.

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Meanwhile, Buddy Fuller was planning ahead to invite a European touring team for the 1960/61 season. During 1960, he visited Europe to revive the Union's international contacts. His plan was to take a team of Dutch, German and Austrian riders to South Africa. Asked about the difficulties and possible consequences for the riders, Fuller was of the opinion that all the troubles of a few years ago have been settled and the Speedway Control Board is no longer in a position to lead the revival of the sport. Knowing fully where and how in the past the slump occurred, Fuller had taken speedway under the umbrella of the Motors-Cycle Union of South Africa. Backed by such a powerful organisation and in the capable hands of Buddy Fuller, Springbok speedway seemed to be on its way back to grow and prosper again.

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The Speedway Control Board's answer, in the shape of a letter by the S.C.B. chairman Frank Bennett, came immediately and revealed that the situation was far from being settled. Bennett made it clear that the S.A. Board was unaware of negotiations to invite a European touring team and would not approve any such arrangement conducted by a promoter outside their jurisdiction, and that the foreign authorities should be reminded of a Court of Enquiry regarding British riders that toured South Africa and rode on Fuller's tracks in 1956/57.

Bennett was adamant that the S.A. Speedway Control Board, although admittedly in "temporary recess" due to official speedway inactivity, was still the only legitimate body to control speedway throughout the country. The sport of speedway racing would have to be conducted under the jurisdiction of the Royal Automobile Club (S.A.) and under the proper control of the Speedway Control Board. Therefore the Motor-Cycle Union of South Africa has no jurisdiction of Speedway Racing.

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Fuller didn't care and went ahead with his plans. The first meeting of the season at Wembley was won by

24-year old Doug Davies, with Trevor Blokdyk the runner-up. At that time, Davies and Blokdyk both rode in the British National League, Davies for New Cross and Blokdyk for Ipswich. The latter also made various excursions into other forms of motorsport. Early in 1961 Blokdyk won the big road race event of the day at the Roy Hesketh circuit at Pietermartizburg to become the Natal lightweight (250cc) road racing champion. A few years later Blokdyk made the transition to race cars and even drove a Formula One car in the South African GP.

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Several other former speedway stars, such as Jimmy Scott and Nic Dormehl, had taken up stock car racing, and the promising Howdy Cornell almost decided to follow in their footsteps, but finally decided to stick with speedway in the hope of realising his life's ambition to race in England, which he eventually did in 1961. For one season Cornell was a star performer at Neath, a rural second division track in deepest Wales, where the promoter was non other than the perpetual Trevor Redmond.

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Meanwhile in South Africa Buddy Fuller found it hard going trying to revive the sport after five years of comparative inactivity for speedway at the eleven South African centres under his control.

Initially, at the beginning of the 1960/61 season speedway took an upward trend with the opening of a new circuit at Vereeniging. A couple of meetings attracted crowds of 6,000 and 8,000 spectators.

At the first meeting, Vereeniging Aces versus Pretoria Eagles, Roy Bester, the home captain did not ride, his place being taken by Henry Long.

Scorers:

Vereeniging Aces 42: H.Long 11, T.Boshoff 11, T.Blokdyk 8, T.Edwards 6, G.Glen 4, D.Collins 1, T.Nel 1.

Pretoria Eagles 28: H.Cornell 9, D.Davies 7, G.Aldworth 4, C.Branders 3, J.Bekker 3, J.Gander 2, E.Blignaut 0.

Wembley Lions provided the opposition for the second meeting. The Lions won, which was not surprising as they included most of South Africa's leading riders in their ranks.

Scorers:

Vereeniging Aces 31: R.Bester 10, T.Boshoff 8, T.Blokdyk 4, J.Gander 4, C.Branders 3, H.Cornell 2, E.Lubbe 0.

Wembley Lions 38: H.Long 11, N.Mortimer 10, C.Warne 9, J.Meade 4, J.Bekker 3, E.Blignaut 1, B.Motley 0.

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By now everyone in South Africa was eagerly awaiting the arrival of a team of riders from overseas. The European team landed in January of 1961, but it was soon evident that the tourists were too weak for the international matches against the very strong South African side. The Springboks seemed to be stronger than they had ever been. The line-up included Henry Long, Doug Davies, Roy Bester, Neil Mortimer, Trevor Blokdyk, Howdy Cornell, Claude Warne and several up-and-coming youngsters.

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The Test matches at Wembley and Durban were comfortably won by South Africa, with Reg Duval (England) and Erich Luther (Austria) the only real opposition. Duval in particular had been the star in the side and at the Durban match, would have got the lot but for losing a chain and being involved in a nasty looking collision with Neil Mortimer. He broke the track record twice, setting a new time of 56.2. Ronnie Moore did 56.4 in 1952.

Overall the European team was so disappointing that the tour was curtailed and three Dutch riders were sent home early. The rest of the tourists rode the last speedway meeting of the season at Wembley Stadium on Friday, April 21, the South African Championship.

While the Test in Johannesburg between S.A. and Europe had been a great draw, the S.A. championship crowd was far from what the promoters had expected.

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Doug Davies wins South African Title

At long last, Henry Long lost his claim to be the country's unapproachable speedway star, finishing only third in the championship. In fairness to Long it must be mentioned that a loose tappet nut really put him out as he dropped three points in his first ride and was then only beaten by Davies in his other appearances.

Davies had to ride the track spare in his first race and dropped two points. Before the final heat race, Trevor Blokdyk went through the meeting undefeated and lined-up alongside Davies, Long and Durban-resident Englishman Roy Browning. A much smaller crowd than had attended the Test Match saw a fantastic race with Blokdyk making the gate followed by Long, Browning and Davies. On the first turn Davies took Browning and then went after the other two. On the last lap he went round Long and then he and Long dived under Blokdyk on the last bend for Davies to take the three points in this event.

This meant a run-off between Doug and Blokdyk, but Davies had the Krugersdorp flyer well taped and went on to win with plenty to spare to become the new S.A. champion.

Scorers: (see over)

Doug Davies (SA) 13, Trevor Blokdyk (SA) 13, Henry Long (SA) 11, Erich Luther (Austria) 11, Roy Bester (SA) 10, Toby Boshoff (SA) 10, Johnny Gander (SA) 8, Roy Browning (England) 7, Howdy Cornell (SA) 7, Toy Edwards (SA) 6, Jimmy Meade (SA) 6, Kurt Pieper (Germany) 5, George Glen (SA) 3, Gerrit Jonker (Holland) 3, Graham Aldsworth (SA) 2, Otto Holoubek (Austria) 2.

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The almost defunct South African Control Board reared its ugly head again, when reporting the foreign riders to their home authorities for riding on unlicensed tracks. Reg Duval, who ended the season with a broken collar bone, received a letter from the S.C.B. that his name had been reported to the British Speedway Control Board. The two Austrian riders Erich Luther and Otto Holubek were informed by their National Federation that they are in fact suspended for two years.

On the other hand, the K.N.M.V, controlling body in Holland, and like the Austrian Board affiliated to the F.I.M., granted permits for their riders Thei Bischops and Gerrit Jonker to appear at all meetings organised by Buddy Fuller's National Dirt Track Association. Kurt Pieper of Germany had also received permission from his National Federation to ride on all tracks in South Africa.

Fuller claimed that all five Continental riders were in possession of valid international licences, issued by the F.I.M. and that Reg Duval was riding on a licence issued by the Transvaal Motor-Cycle Union. And he was furious about the continuous interferences by the S.C.B. claiming that "the South African Control Board has nothing to control! It only has a Chairman who just will not say die."

"All South African riders and tracks are licensed by the Motor-Cycle Union of South Africa, who are affiliated to the A.C.U. in London, via the R.A.C. in Cape Town." But this farce continued until Buddy Fuller would eventually be given the all clear signal.

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Anyway, the S.C.B. went even further, banning the South African riders too. And since four of the Springbok stars were contracted to ride in the British League in 1961, the whole affair in South Africa was beginning to cause upsets and inconvenience throughout Europe.

The riders Doug Davies, George Glen, Trevor Blokdyk and Howdy Cornell simply and quite rightly ignored their "suspension" and went to England, claiming they had valid racing licences issued by the Transvaal M.C.U. and that the S.A.Control Board could not have given them permission since nobody knew that they were in power when they left the country. British officialdom listened to this complaint and ignored the attempt to have the South Africans banned from riding in the UK. The boys finished the 1961 season in the UK and then went home, uncertain of their sporting future.

Non of them were allowed to return in 1962, tough, since no solution was reached and to further complicate matters, South Africa was declared a Republic and left the British Commonwealth in 1961. This meant that from now on South Africans were no longer considered as British citizens and had to be treated as foreigners by the British authorities. From now on work permissions were needed for any South African speedway rider willing to race in the U.K. - and those were not easily granted.

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Fuller's plan to bring a British touring team to South Africa in 1961/62 was also blocked and there was no perspective for South African riders to race speedway in their own country other than as a hobby. Not surprisingly many decided to finish their career at that time, among them Henry Long and Roy Bester. This meant the end of a whole era and it also very nearly meant the end of speedway racing altogether in South Africa.

Stock car racing continued to prosper and several speedway stars transferred to the four-wheel sport. Fuller gave up on the idea of reviving speedway and only a few enthusiasts keep the sport alive in the following years. During the lean times of the 1960's, Speedway survived as an amateur sport at Country venues such as Klerksdorp.

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Part 14: Quiet Times For Speedway (- early 1960s)

The 1961/62 South African Speedway Championship was held in Klerksdorp. At that time, Bob Maddern, who organised the event, was probably the only one capable of trying to stage a championship. His track and set-up being one of the best in the country, since venues such as Wembley or Pretoria had shut the doors on speedway racing.

The Championship was run on the same night in Klerksdorp as a stock car meeting which meant a poor crowd. Doug Davies was in a class by himself to retain his title of South African Speedway Champion. Both Henry Long and Roy Bester had retired from the sport in 1961, which automatically took a lot of glamour out of the game.

Howdy Cornell was leading Davies in one race when he burst a front tyre and had to retire. Hero of the championship apart from Doug Davies was Graham Aldworth – a highly promising newcomer, who finished third to Davies and runner-up Neil Mortimer in his first S.A. championship appearance.

Scorers: D.Davies 15, N.Mortimer 13, G.Aldworth 11, R.Drysdale 9, T.Viljoen 8, H.Cornell 8, D.Collins 6, T.Boshoff 6, N.Dormehl 5, J.Chapman 5, C.Lincoln 2, J.Pover 0.

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Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg had been tarred for the stock cars, or hotrod racing as they preferred to call it. There was an attempt to present speedway racing on the tar, which might be a good surface for the cars, but was not suitable for the bikes.

Other former speedway venues were lost at the same time, as the stock car fraternity was taking control of the tracks. At Springs for example, the track that Trevor Redmond had built about ten years ago, and where once the famous Springs Stars raced, the stock cars had now taken over under the promotion of Boet Ferreira, a well known road racing motor-cyclist and car driver. Incidentally during his first season in charge at Springs, Ferreira lost a leg while officiating at one of his stock car meetings, and on an other night a spectator was killed when a car went over the fence. This was bad luck indeed.

Pretoria had become the major stock car track in the country, with the promoting club being unwilling to upset the stock car fans by reverting to speedway racing, when there was so little chance of reviving the sport on a national basis.

Durban was used for go-karts for a while, but could have been put back into order for speedway racing, whenever the sport would be ready for a revival.

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It came as a surprise when in 1963 an Englishman by the name of George Buckley arrived in South Africa to try his luck as a speedway promoter. It took him five months to build a stadium, prepare a 440 yards track, graded with pits, etc.. Under Buckley's promotion speedway racing was presented for the first time at Brakpan's Blackwell Stadium. This was on October 12, 1963 - the birthday of Brakpan Speedway!

The opening of the track was preceded by a parade through the streets of Brakpan by a local Scottish bagpipe band. Despite the 2.30 afternoon start time, this comeback bid by Springbok Speedway was attended by a good crowd. The meeting's main event was a team challenge between the local Brakpan Monarchs, led by ex-patriot Englishman Dave Collins, and an International Select, captained by Dennis Newton. In a closely fought match, there was only one nasty looking smash, but no serious injuries, and the local Monarchs were beaten 32-41.

Scorers:

BRAKPAN MONARCHS 32: D.Collins 10, G.Aldworth 7, G.Glenn 6, E.Blignaut 5, J.Serman 4, H.Buitendad 0.

INTERNATIONAL SELECT 41: D.Newton 10, J.Chapman 10, J.Gander 9, D.Haswell 5, G.Smith 5, J.van der Merwe 2.

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Buckley had high hopes of bringing over some English riders for his shows, but already at his next Brakpan meeting a fortnight later, he was forced to introduce micro-midget cars as an interval attraction. Not surprisingly it was soon evident that Brakpan was no exception to the rule that the people were more attracted by the cars racing round the oval tracks, than the bikes. Another venue was lost to the stock cars.

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A couple of years later Buddy Fuller made another bid to revive the sport. In the summer of 1965 he planned a four week season of speedway racing at Johannesburg's Wembley Stadium. To give the riders an acceptable track surface, he put on a macadamised base, covered with a layer of bitumen and sand composition with a half-inch layer of river sand as a top dressing. Leading riders at his meetings were Dennis Newton and Des Haswell, who had been riding during the intervals at hotrod meetings in Pretoria.

At the time Fuller was also running a succesful show with the hotrod stock cars at the Goodwood Showgrounds in Cape Town, and he made major headlines when he staged a South Africa versus England Speedway Match at this track! This wasn't really an International Test Match as in the fifties, but was a great publicity stunt by Fuller, which even made headlines in the U.K., as it was at a time when the outside world had decided to impose an international sports boycott over South Africa because of the Apartheid policy. There was no way, that English riders, never mind an official England team would get the go ahead by their own governing body to race against the South Africans. Fuller simply made use of the vast number of ex-patriot Englishmen then living in South Africa. Among them there was plenty of speedway talent, such as Dennis Newton, Dave Collins, Des Haswell and several others. Fuller invited them as a team to race in Cape Town, unofficially representing England against a team of home bred South Africans. The results are academic now, but the publicity for Fuller's promotion and the sport of speedway racing was immense.

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DENNIS NEWTON

(pictured in the colours of the Wembley Lions)
6-times South African Speedway Champion
(1964, '65, '66, '68, '70 and '73)



Stock Car Racing was the main attraction at the **Pretoria** Speedway Stadium during the 1960's. This is the programme cover of the last ever meeting staged at this track, on April 26, 1968.

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Part 15: Klerksdorp Speedway keeps the sport alive in the late 1960's

At the start of the 1967-68 South African speedway season, Klerksdorp was the only track in the country at which regular meetings took place. Racing at the 420-yard cinder track was staged there about once a month, with the opening meeting taking place on December 2. This was a mixed meeting with 11 speedway heats interspersed with TQ midgets and sidecars.

There was some very good racing from an enthusiastic band of seven senior and two junior riders. With the exception of the top rider of the evening – Graham Aldworth, who came from Johannesburg – all the riders were from Klerksdorp. All of them with speedway very much at heart, as there was very little in the way of prize money. The machines they used were fairly outdated JAP's having been around for well over 10 years in some cases. The equipment problems were great, as it was very difficult to get spares for the bikes.

At the Klerksdorp season opener, Graham Aldworth was in top form and ended the evening with a maximum score of 15 points. It made very little difference whether or not he made the gate, at the end of the race he was the man to get the chequered flag. Also impressive was the number two man of the evening Tommy Viljoen, who ended up with 10 points from five rides. Unlucky rider of the night was young Brian Bishop, who after a very promising first ride, found his engine making expensive noises in his second ride, and continued the meeting on borrowed bikes. He was not feeling happy at the end, with a blown motor and spares almost impossible to get out here.

The other senior riders were Jeff Frost, Louis and Danie Fourie, and Robbie Drysdale, all of who rode well so that at no stage was there any processional racing.

The junior riders were Geoff Dyson and Vic Page, who with a little more experience behind them, should be able to mix it with the senior riders before long.

The referee at the meeting was a former local rider, Bud Messer.

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Aldworth is the Star at Klerksdorp

THE second meeting on February 2, 1968 was once again a mixture of speedway, sidecars and TQ midget cars. There was a greater accent on the sidecars at this meeting and thus the solos were the losers.

Graham Aldworth once again dominated the scene and ended the evening as the top scorer, with a maximum of 12 points from four rides. He also clocked the fastest time of the evening, 84.7 seconds. Brian Bishop was the second highest scorer with 10 points. The other riders at the meeting were Geoff Dyson, Louis Fourie, Jeff Frost, D.Stevens and J.Scott.

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Dave Collins back in action

Sunday, March 2, saw the third meeting at Klerksdorp, with eight solo heats featured in a mixed programme of 19 heats. Everyone was please to see Dave Collins back in the saddle again after a long spell on the sidelines as the result of a motor accident. Although Dave was not on top form, there were glimpses of the old Collins towards the end of the meeting, and he ended up with five points from four rides.

Graham Aldworth was once again in excellent form and rode well until his motor „went ill“ on him at the end of his third ride. He was on a borrowed bike for his fourth ride and although he fought hard to keep in front, he lacked the power and had to be content with third place. This gave him 10 points from four rides, which was half a point less than the evening's top scorer. That was Tommy Viljoen, a real fighter who usually gets his points by coming up from behind. Tommy was involved in a dead heat with Louis Fourie in heat seven. Fourie himself ended up with 7-and- a-half points.

The most unlucky man of the evening was a German newcomer by the name of Manfred Kausch, who hailed from Windhoek in South West Africa. His first time out he oiled a plug and in his second heat his frame began to come to pieces. It was a great pity that the crowd did not see him in action, as he was quite impressive in some pre-meeting practise laps. Manfred Kausch had come over to South Africa two years ago and had also been riding in road racing.

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Dennis Newton wins South African title

DENNIS NEWTON rode superbly to become the 1967-68 South African speedway champion. The largest crowd of the season packed the Klerksdorp Showgrounds. Newton was unbeaten at the end of the meeting to win his fourth South African title after 1964, 65 and 66. And the English-born rider was delighted to have won this championship as a South African, since he had recently become a South African citizen.

An interesting note is that Newton was mounted on borrowed equipment. On a close inspection of the motor, he found his initials on it and realised that it was the motor that he had sold out here when he first came to South Africa in 1956!

The championship was run on an elimination basis over eight heats, two semi-finals and a final. There was a strong field of 16 riders which included Des Haswell, Dave Collins, Dutchman Tony Jongvisser and a former SA champion, Jimmy Chapman.

Des Haswell must rank as the most unfortunate man of the evening. After a thrilling ride in heat 4 in which he fought his way from last to second, he was excluded under the 2-minute rule in his quarter-final heat – his bike had developed carburettor trouble.

The crowd got their share of spills in a spectacular crash between Manfred Kausch and Jeff Frost in heat 8. Fortunately both riders escaped without serious injury, but neither was able to take further part in the meeting.

Line-up in the final was Collins on the inside, Viljoen in second slot, Aldworth in third slot and Newton on the fence. Newton gated superbly and was followed into the first bend by Aldworth, Viljoen and Collins. Newton took the outside line, Aldworth thundering up on the inside. Into the second lap Aldworth just lead Newton, but Dennis turned on everything and rode round him on the straight into the lead once again. Barring mechanical failure nothing could stop Dennis Newton winning the 1967/68 South African Championship. Tommy Viljoen made a gallant effort to take second place, but a very tired Graham Aldworth held on to it.

The result of the 1967/68 SA Final:

1st Dennis Newton, 2nd Graham Aldworth, 3rd, Tommy Viljoen, 4th Dave Collins.

The South African Junior championship was also staged at this meeting. It was won by D.Britz, second was V.Page and third R.Drysdale.

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This meeting brought to an end one of the most important seasons in South African speedway for a long time because in 1968 there was a reawakening of an interest in speedway.

There were sure signs of a very quiet and slow speedway revival in South Africa. Pretoria had staged a few speedway races during the stock car meetings held there. Now there was talk about the possibility of a few other tracks opening up in the following season.

The lack of good equipment was still the chief drawback for the further growth of the sport. Even if there was quite an

impressive number of bikes in the pits at the beginning of the meetings, it was certain that by the end of the meeting only a few of these bikes would be in anything like racing condition. There was always an enormous number of engine failures. If South Africa would ever be likely to see league racing as it was about 10 years ago, then this was to be the chief difficulty to overcome. There would not be a shortage of riders, as there were many young lads just waiting for a chance, but they were not able to get the equipment.

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There were ambitious plans in the pipeline and none other than Buddy Fuller would play a major part once more in the years to come. Fuller was on the verge of joining forces with a British promoter, Maury Littlechild, who came out to South Africa in 1969 to take a look around at several possible venues in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Port Elizabeth, where speedway could be established on the lines of the British League system with club teams operating in a professional National League competition. Ambitious plans, indeed, that were cruelly destroyed when Mr. Littlechild died of a sudden heart attack later that year back home in England. The proposed big revival of league racing in South Africa did not happen after all, but speedway racing was on its way back to re-establish itself as a major sporting attraction in South Africa. The revival had already begun.

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