

Part 16: THE ROVING SCOTSMAN (1970-'71)

In November of 1967, at the age of twenty-two, Scottish speedway rider Alex Hughson took off by van from his Edinburgh home, heading for Australia and New Zealand to sample some speedway there. He got as far as Bombay in India, where rioting students tarred his van, when he decided to change his plans and head instead for Africa.

Alex had been in and out of the Edinburgh Monarchs team in 1967 and was considered at the time as a good standby rider to have around. In January of 1968 he found himself in Nairobi from where he wrote the following lines: "Imagine my surprise", he said, "when I arrived here and saw a poster advertising a speedway meeting. I went along and though they use the term speedway loosely here in Kenya, it was an intriguing way to spend a Sunday afternoon."

"This was their first meeting in ten years and although it lacked presentation, the small but enthusiastic crowd of about 1,500 got plenty to shout about."

"Ivan Smith, the local motorcycle champion in every class, was on a 500cc JAP in a Hagon frame, the nearest thing to a pukka speedway bike. Smith is 25 and a good all-rounder."

Alex planned to move on through Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Rhodesia to South Africa, where he again hoped to see some speedway.

RHODESIAN SPEEDWAY REVIVAL

Alex Hughson fell in love with Africa and stayed on. He settled in Rhodesia and soon became the driving force behind the attempt to re-introduce speedway in the land!

Speedway wasn't an unknown sport in Rhodesia, as there had been racing in Bulawayo in the 1950's. But for more than a decade now the sport was dead and buried – until the clever Scotsman came along. He talked to the right kind of people, raised a considerable amount of money and eventually convinced even the Government to (unofficially) back the founding of a professional speedway league in Rhodesia.

A major stumbling block for the project was Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. No one really knew what political consequences this could have raised as regarding the status of the riders who travelled out. Since there were no local speedway riders to start with, no less than a dozen riders from the British League were contracted to race in Rhodesia's comeback season of 1970/71.

SETTING UP THE RACE TRACKS

The promotional company, set up by Alex Hughson, had prepared race tracks in three stadiums to present the sport in the republic. Rhodesia's capital, Salisbury, with a population of around 350,000 was to see racing at Glamis Stadium, a luxurious and beautifully proportioned arena owned by the Rhodesian Agricultural Society. The track there was a very fast circuit of around 410 yards with sweeping bends. Speedway had never before been presented to the Salisbury public, although in 1955 enquiries were put forward to stage racing at the city's municipal rugby ground at Milton Park.

The nation's second largest city, Bulawayo, on the other hand, was a stronghold of the sport from 1953 until the closure of the various other speedway promotions throughout the African continent around 1957-58. It was on this Bulawayo Showground track, where all of Rhodesia's previous racing in the 1950's took place. The official record speedway attendance for the arena of some 13,000 souls was set up in December 1953 when New Zealand's Dick Campbell and Trevor Redmond won the Commonwealth Best Pairs Championship.

Alex Hughson and his colleagues had been lucky to obtain the Showground, with its ready-made track and facilities, as this enabled them to reduce their costs of preparation, unlike Salisbury, where the entire racing strip had to be constructed from scratch.

Gwelo was the third track in the set-up. Its situation mid-way between Bulawayo and Salisbury was the main factor for the choice of this location in favour of Umtali, which although a larger town, is not so handily placed in respect of travelling between the tracks. Venue in Gwelo was the Newmarket Stadium, a workmanlike, well appointed sports ground, which only required the erection of a safety fence. At Gwelo it was hoped to draw a big enough following for the sport from surrounding districts, which would boost the potential audience to a figure three times that of the basic population.

The main event of the Rhodesian Speedway season was to be the National League programme. Team names in the league were for Salisbury the Monarchs, for Gwelo the Eagles, and the boys from Bulawayo were dubbed the Warriors.

THE RIDERS

IT was a flying start to Christmas for the Rhodesian-bound riders with a party 35,000 ft up over the equator on board a South African Airways flight. Leaving London on Christmas Eve, the team were heading for Salisbury and a two month tour of Rhodesia. The riders heading for the Sunshine were Australians Geoff Curtis, Garry Moore and Bob Young, Norwegian Oyvind Berg, Scotsmen Bobby Beaton, Bill McMillan and Jim Gallagher, plus the Englishmen Barry Duke, Sean Murtough, Graham Plant, Laurie Etheridge and Dave Jessup.

Trevor Redmond, a man who knew speedway in Southern Africa from his days as a rider and promoter of the sport in the 1950's, joined forces with Alex Hughson and agreed to take over a co-promoters job. He flew in to Rhodesia in December, bringing his family with him for a holiday, and was very impressed by the potential of the speedway set-up.

Now the stage was set to start one the most fascinating enterprises ever in the history of speedway. The season was due to open on Wednesday, December 30, 1970, but had to be postponed to the following week because of rain, with an Individual meeting at Salisbury's Glamis Stadium, where all the tourists were due to take to the track for the first time. Also included were some local riders, all of whom with vast experience in dirt-track and moto-cross events, but for whom this was to be their first public venture into speedway.

SALISBURY

The first speedway meeting for nearly 15 years in Rhodesia and the first ever in Salisbury, the nation's capital, brought over 12,000 folk flooding through the turnstiles of Glamis Stadium.

They were thrilled by the first class racing provided by the 12 British league tourists and five local Rhodesian riders competing for the Silver Helmet trophy. The meeting proved a personal triumph for 27-year old Norwegian star Oyvind Berg, who put together a solid 15-point maximum to carry off the magnificent silver ware. There was some trouble with the carburetion of the bikes, as Rhodesia's altitude of 4,500 feet posed problems not usually experienced at Britain's sea-level atmosphere.

As might be expected, the majority of the available points fell to the touring riders, but the local lads were far from disgraced by their showing on this first night and certainly proved that after further shale-shifting experience they could be pushing the visitors hard before the end of the ten-week season. Particularly impressive was Gwelo's Zak Koekemoer, who provided some very spectacular (and crowd pleasing) racing indeed.

Although the vast majority of the folk who attended this meeting were obviously newcomers to the sport, it was evident that promoter Alex Hughson had done his homework very well, as the large crowd just loved the excitement generated by the racing and were quick to give vocal encouragement to all the riders.

At the conclusion of racing, the winner (Berg) received his awards from Mrs. Lance Bales Smith, the wife of Rhodesia's Minister of Internal Affairs, who, as guest of honour, had declared the meeting open.

The score chart of the 1970/71 Rhodesian Silver Helmet Championship was:

Oyvind Berg 15, Bobby Beaton 14, Dave Jessup 12, Geoff Curtis 11, Bill McMillan 9, Jim Gallagher 9, Graham Plant 9, Barry Duke 8, Garry Moore 8, Bob Young 7, Shawn Murtough 5, Zak Koekemoer 4, Laurie Etheridge 3, Billy Cummings 2, Alan McCormack 2, Alan Harris 1, Dave Harris 1.

This highly successful first meeting in Salisbury was possibly one of the most important for many years for the further development of the sport in the whole of Southern Africa.

There's more about the Rhodesian revival and what was going on in the Republic of South Africa at the same time in the next part of this series.

.....

Part 17: NATIONAL SPEEDWAY LEAGUE IN RHODESIA

IN JANUARY and February of **1971**, speedway racing returned to Rhodesia, and for the first time there a proper league competition was organised. Three teams were formed by recruiting mainly British League riders for a total of 25 race meetings in the 58 days of their trip.

With the dust settling after the excitement of the opening meetings under Rhodesian skies, an objective look at the hard facts surrounding the ambitious venture of Scottish ex-rider Alex Hughson in promoting speedway racing in the republic revealed just how big an impact he had made.

There was tremendous enthusiasm created among the local spectators who took to the sport as if born to it

– five-figure attendances at the first three meetings in Salisbury speak for themselves.

Former SA International rider and promoter Trevor Redmond summed it up by saying: "I have no doubt at all that Alex has got everything in order for a very good long-term prospect here. His foundation of the National League and the presentation of speedway on a team basis instead of individual style handicap events as is done in Australasia should prove to everyone that speedway is indeed great as a team sport."

SALISBURY

It was at Glamis Stadium in Salisbury (today: Harare), in the city which they said would never accept speedway racing that the real success of the sport in Rhodesia can be measured.

After opening on January 6 to the biggest crowd to attend a sporting event in Salisbury for 17 years, the track continued to draw good attendances, although the weather did produce more than its fair share of rain on Wednesday evenings, and local supporters proved quick to pick up some of the finer points of speedway viewing.

The Monarchs found the going tough at the start of the season. They could only manage a single National League victory in their campaign. But as their team became more settled, once their quiet Australian star Garry Moore returned from a shoulder injury early in February, a more balanced points-gathering side emerged.

The Salisbury fans then had the satisfaction of seeing their favourites win the National Trophy, an end-of-season knock-out cup competition in a two-legged final over Gwelo Eagles. Individual honours for winning the Rhodesian Open Championship went to the Monarchs' Scottish star Bobby Beaton. Geoff Curtis also turned in many fine performances during the season. With Bill McMillan also scoring freely throughout it was unfortunate that Garry Moore had both injury and niggling machine troubles to contend with, else a different team might have had their name inscribed on the National League Trophy!

Salisbury's local discovery of the year, Ian McMillan, arrived on the scene late in the season and was overshadowed by the amazing progress made by Bulawayo's young sensation Peter Prinsloo.

BULAWAYO

Unlike Salisbury and Gwelo, Bulawayo had seen speedway before - in the mid-fifties several seasons of success preceded the eventual demise of the sport in 1957, and this made the re-appearance of the game in Rhodesia's second city a different proposition than the other centres of Alex Hughson's 1971 plans. The difference showed too, but in the nicest possible way, for where the other tracks drew on audiences completely alien to the skills of the riders, Bulawayo was alive with knowledgeable enthusiasm from the off. Absolutely devoted to their Warriors team, the fans were well rewarded with their team's victory in the National League campaign.

Although Englishman Graham Plant headed the Warriors' scorers list, it was long-haired Barry Duke who really caught the fans fancy in the Southlands. Every time that "Barry-Baby" stepped out of the pits for a heat, his supporters saluted their "idol" with a chant in his honour! Barry repaid these favours with solid, and at times spectacular scoring, as well as bringing back the Salisbury track record from one northern jaunt. It was a cruel blow of fate that caused Barry to tumble in the very last heat of the season at Bulawayo and break his arm. The other heat leader in the Warriors' "Big Three" was Londoner Laurie Etheridge, and he was in fact the most consistent of the trio.

The real sensation at the Showground was the discovery halfway through the season of Peter Prinsloo, a young man who completely eclipsed the other second-strings in the squad after his arrival. By the end of the season he was giving even opposing heat-leaders a run for their money – this before he had even competed in a dozen full meetings! A natural who was having no trouble to win the inaugural Rhodesian Riders Championship at Glamis Stadium in February.

GWELO

Situated in the midlands of Rhodesia, Gwelo (today: Gweru) had no large white population to draw upon as a ready made speedway audience, and consequently this centre could not hope to rival the other tracks for attendances, but with over half of the population turning out for the opening meeting and a fair percentage for the remainder of the season, the Gwelo Eagles obviously created an interest in the area with the entertainment that they served up to their supporters at the neat, if somewhat spartan raceway on the outskirts of the town.

A smaller track than the others in the country, the strip provided consistently close and exciting racing, which in a more heavily populated area would undoubtedly have had the "House full" signs hanging outside even at the largest venues!

The Gwelo team were runners-up in both the National League and the National Trophy events, albeit to different opponents. The Eagles had their star man in the shape of Norwegian Oyvind Berg, who was truly magnificent throughout the season, and in fact scored a double-figure return in every single Eagles' fixture. His lesser experienced colleagues found him attentive to their every enquiry and always ready to assist them both on and off the track with advice.

It is to Oyvind Berg that Gwelo's local discovery Zak 'Abe' Koekemoer, attributes his rapid progress in the game – as Abe was also Oyvind's landlord throughout the season, he certainly had the opportunity to call upon the tall viking at will!



Rhodesian Speedway Programmes of the 1971 season

Englishman Dave Jessup on the other hand lacked Oyvind's consistency, as he seemed bedevilled by engine troubles for much of the season, but his brilliance in the events in which his machine behaved itself proved his potential.

* * *

SOUTH AFRICANS ON TOUR

On Saturday, February 6th, 1971, a touring team from South Africa rode against the Rhodesian Stars at the Bulawayo Showgrounds in what was the opening match of a three rounds series for the Southern African Team Championship. Big time speedway, as of the Rhodesian standard, had not been held in South Africa for a decade, but it was hoped that this visit would help to raise South African standards in the near future.

The South African Select proudly wore the Green with Gold Springbok racejackets as they re-entered the international stage with this first ever visit of Rhodesia. Former SA star rider Trevor Blokdyk acted as the Springboks' team manager. Blokdyk, from Krugersdorp in the Western Transvaal, was a top class speedway rider in the late 1950's and early 1960's before switching his attention to four wheel action. He was also a very successful Motor Racing driver, having competed all over Europe and finishing third in the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix. And believe it or not, the guy was married to a Swedish princess!

Captain of the Springboks on their tour of Rhodesia was veteran Dennis Newton, a multiple SA speedway champion. Born in the U.K. but married and living permanently in South Africa, he was a key member of South Africa's big speedway revival of the 1970's.

Riding for the SA team was Tony Jonghvisser, who was born in Holland, but then living in Vereeniging, Transvaal. He came to Rhodesia as the reigning South African Speedway Championship of 1971.

Then there was a 24-year old from Bloemfontein, Etienne Olivier, who was one of South Africa's best speedway prospects and had recently won the Orange Free State Championship. Another was Danie Fourie, a lad from the Western Transvaal who was also 24 years of age and rode at reserve for the Springboks.

Other team riders included Vic Pretorius, father of present day rider Wiekus Pretorius, from Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State. Vic, aged 32 at the time, was known to bring biltong for the other riders and as a diamond prospector in his spare time!

Tommy Viljoen from Klerksdorp in the Western Transvaal was of the same age as Pretorius. He was South African champion in 1969.

For Rhodesia, it was indeed a proud moment to welcome Dennis Newton and his South African riders. Abe Koekemoer had the great honour of captaining the Rhodesian Stars in their first ever International match. Wearing the colours of Green with White Zimbabwe Bird, the Rhodesian squad of Koekemoer, Barry Duke, Laurie Etheridge, Alan Harris, Bob Young and Peter Prinsloo had no difficulties to defeat the Springboks at Bulawayo.

On the next day, Sunday, February 7th, both teams met again at Gwelo. Rhodesia made four changes, as only Koekemoer and Prinsloo stayed in the team and were now joined by Bill McMillan, Oyvind Berg, Shawn Murtough and Dave Jessup, the latter top scoring with a 15 point maximum from five rides. South Africa had to borrow Bob Young to replace the injured Tony Jonghvisser. He scored 13 points for the Bokkies and captain Newton got 11. Still South Africa lost this match 35-55.

The third match at the Glamis Stadium in Salisbury on Wednesday, February 10th, saw more changes to the line-ups of both teams. South Africa had lost Etienne Olivier and had to borrow a couple of guest riders in Oyvind Berg and Bill McMillan, to line-up alongside captain Newton, Pretorius, Fourie and Viljoen. Rhodesia tracked Bobby Beaton, Geoff Curtis, Jim Gallagher and Bob Young alongside the home-grown Koekemoer and Prinsloo.

As it was, at half past five, after a torrential thunderstorm, the Glamis track was under six inches of water in places. The fire brigade were called in and pumped some 6,000 gallons of water off the track and the track staff worked flat-out during the mop-up. It was quite something to see Chief Warrior Trevor Redmond wading in the big puddles with his trousers rolled up yelling directions, encouragements and even threats at all and sundry! Thanks to everyone's effort the track was in fantastically good shape by heat 1.

The match itself looked like developing into a battle royal until the rains came again at heat 8. Dennis Newton in particular rode magnificently to keep South Africa in contention for so long and stopped Geoff Curtis attaining a maximum after a brilliant heat 7 defeat of the Aussie in the colours of the Rhodesian Stars.

After the rains started a decision had to be taken whether to continue or not. With so many of the large crowd obviously prepared to brave the rain, the riders agreed to carry on under extremely difficult conditions. Rhodesia won the match and the series ended in a 3-nil whitewash, but the South Africans had learned a lot and put it to good use to start their very own speedway revival south of the Limpopo.

.....

Part 18: SOUTH AFRICA WANTS BRITISH TOURISTS

IT was the success of the 1970/71 speedway revival in Rhodesia which made the South Africans all the keener to get going again. The local riders would not, on their own, draw big crowds, but the influx of a British touring team could well do so. That's what speedway supremo Buddy Fuller and his co-promoter and still active rider Dennis Newton tried to set up in 1971.

Newton went to England where he met with former rider Howdy Byford, who had been a member of an English touring team that rode in South Africa in the 1950's. Their task was to convince the British Speedway Association to give permission for a number of British Division Two riders to race in South Africa early in the **1971-72 season**.

General believe was that it would be a good thing if South African racing could be stimulated in a similar way as in Rhodesia the year before. It would give some of the British riders a chance of all year racing and could well mean a few South African riders coming back into British teams.

Negotiations about the trip went on for some time. The South Africans wanted a British team of seven good Second Division riders, and they wanted them to have an official Young England label.

However, doubts about the safety standards of the South African tracks held up the venture. The British authorities insisted that the South African tracks should come up to scratch before a British touring team would be sent there. It was further argued that a British track inspector should be flown in to check the safety of the South African tracks, before the tour could go ahead.

The hang-up getting an official o.k. meant that time was running out and the tracks reverted to the stock cars to get the season started.

Interviewed by the "Rand Daily Mail" following the report that the BSPA would not sanction a tour of the

country by a "Young England" representative side, promoter Buddy Fuller stated: "I don't see why they have to send someone out from Britain, or even from Cape Town, to learn if our tracks are up to standard. The AA of South Africa is the recognised local controlling body, and they can surely tell if we have proper tracks or not."

And Fuller, clearly disillusioned with the behaviour of the British authorities went on to say: "I, personally, am satisfied that our tracks are safe – in fact they are a lot safer than many of those I have seen in England."

In November, Fuller decided enough was enough and set up an alternative plan to bring over an American touring team, if not for the 1971-72 season, then for the following year.

THE RHODESIANS ARE COMING

While speedway racing in Rhodesia was conducted very much along the British lines with properly organised club teams racing in competition with one another on safely constructed race tracks, a much more casual attitude existed in South Africa at the time.

In September of 1971 an invitation was extended to three of the native Rhodesian riders, Ian McMillan of Salisbury, Gwelo's Chris Prinsloo and Zak Koekemoer, to travel down to Bloemfontein to compete in a couple of International meetings, which were organised there over one weekend. An official cable from the Automobile Association of South Africa confirmed that the Bloemfontein track had been granted permission for these international events and that all was in order for riders holding ACU licenses (as all Rhodesian riders did) to take part. The obstacles of the official drawbacks removed, the three Rhodesians set out on the outward leg of what is a 2,500 miles round trip to take part in the meetings.

On arriving in Bloemfontein, however, the riders were shocked by the state of the track at which they were expected to race. Let Ian McMillan take up the story: "The organisation was somewhat chaotic and the safety precautions virtually non-existent. The safety fence consisted of bare railway lines upended into the perimeter with inch-and-a-half steel cabling strung between! Obviously this fence was built and used for stock car events, not speedway. Although we were careful not to stray too near this death trap of a fence during the events, one or two of the South African riders walloped it hard, with fairly predictable results!"

"There were no red lights for stopping races, and the surface of the track – which must have measured 600yards – was an exceedingly slick mixture of cinders and plain dirt. We travelled down for experience but expected nothing like this", said the bearded Rhodesian in an interview with a Salisbury newspaper.

Commenting on the procedures carried out during the meeting, Chris Prinsloo, brother of Rhodesian Champion Peter Prinsloo (who was unavailable due to his racing in Britain), was critical of the starting procedures, as all too often the Rhodesian riders were ordered up to the tapes while their South African opponents were still sitting in the pits! A long delay would ensue while the locals sorted out who they thought should ride in the heat in question. Then the tapes would be released when the South African riders were coming up to the tapes, allowing them "rollers" of a luxury.

SOUTH AFRICA vs RHODESIA

Billed as the "Rhodesian International Team" the visitors had been allocated a South African to make up the team to four, covering for the absent Rhodesian number one - Peter Prinsloo. The two meetings were called Tests and the local newspapers spoke of the "Test Series". However, the Rhodesian riders were unhappy about the conditions and Zak Koekemoer found time to query the state of the track with some of the local South African riders, only to be told that nearly all their racing took place on stock car circuits, and that in fact the Bloemfontein track was one of the "better" venues in the country!

This information proved more than enough and immediately after returning home the intrepid trio of "Test-team" stars contacted Alex Hughson, their promoter in Rhodesia, to report the outcome of their venture across the Limpopo river. Alex in turn reported the matter to the appropriate authorities in the controlling body for Rhodesian motor-cycle sport, the RMSA (Rhodesian Motor Sports Association), who took the matter up with their opposite numbers in South Africa.

Promoter Hughson's face lapsed into a grin as he added: "It must be taken as a compliment to track conditions here in Rhodesia, when the boys were so shocked by the conditions at Bloemfontein Showgrounds, but I would point out that despite the bad organisation they still won the first "Test". Let that be noted as another triumph for Rhodesian Speedway!"

The results of the two Test Matches were a win for Rhodesia by 29-27 and then a defeat of 25 points to 21.

.....

Part 19: SOUTH AFRICAN SPEEDWAY REVIVAL OF 1972

BUDDY FULLER was the man behind the impressive 1972 revival of speedway racing in South Africa. Spurred on by the tremendous success of the speedway venture in Rhodesia, Fuller was convinced that the time was right to bring the speedway bikes back in a big way at his various South African oval tracks.

In July of 1972, the time had come for speedway to make a roaring comeback into the city of Durban. Officially licensed by the Automobile Association of South Africa, and before a capacity crowd eager to sample speedway again, the stage was set for a Test Match between South Africa and Rhodesia at the Alan Ford Stadium (Hoy Park).

The vastly experienced South African outfit, led by the ageless Dennis Newton and including another veteran of the game in Neil Mortimer, powered their way to a fair win over the pre-match favourites from Rhodesia. The visitors, with the exception of the faultless Peter Prinsloo, were all at sea early on, finding the tiny (260m) Hoy Park circuit very different to the wide open spaces of their own bowl at Salisbury.

Result of the First Test at Durban:

SOUTH AFRICA 21: N.Mortimer 8, D.Newton 7, V.Pretorius 3, D.Fourie 3.

RHODESIA 15: P.Prinsloo 9, P.Harris 4, R.Ferguson 2, S.Harris 0.

A second Test, scheduled for the following week and in which it was planned that Alex Hughson would replace the injured Squack Harris in the Rhodesian team, was most unfortunately washed out by a freak thunderstorm on the evening in question. However, with the obvious success of the First Test at Durban, Fuller was now certain to re-introduce the sport at his other tracks, too.

BACK AT WEMBLEY

IT was obvious that if a speedway revival was going to take place in South Africa, then it was essential that Johannesburg had to have a track operating. The obvious venue was Wembley Stadium, which had been the home of Johannesburg speedway during the boom years of the 1950's. Buddy Fuller was promoting hot-rod racing there – but his heart was still in speedway!

After the meetings held at his track in Durban during July of that year, Buddy felt it was time to try speedway again in Johannesburg. Up went the tar and down went a new shale-type surface for both speedway bikes and hot-rods. It had to be a very tough surface to stand up to the hammering handed out to it by the hot rods. After a number of experiments, Fuller had come up with a surface second to none. All the riders were full of praise for the circuit after the first practise.

After 15 years, speedway was back at Wembley Stadium on September, 15th of 1972. For a start Buddy presented only five heats of speedway, in the form of a team challenge match, which he followed with the usual hot rod races. A very big crowd saw Durban Hornets beat Wembley Lions by 16 points to 14. The Lions, captained by Dennis Newton, appeared to have the stronger team, but Hornets, captained by Neil Mortimer, pulled that little extra to win. The bulk of the crowd was new to speedway and their reactions to the first bend of the evening showed that they would soon be confirmed speedway fans.

DUNSWART

On the following evening, September 16, at the Dunswart Stadium in Benoni, the East Rand Stars and the Wembley Lions were involved in another five-heat challenge match, again followed by the usual hot rod meeting. The large crowd was treated to some very thrilling racing, and they were indeed taking to speedway like ducks to water. The match ended in a 15-15 draw, and there was a run-off between the two captains to decide which would be the winning team. Dennis Newton, the Lions' captain held off a very determined Jimmy Chapman to give the match to the Lions.

PAN-AFRICAN LEAGUE DISCUSSED

All happened very quickly, and with the resurrection of the South African speedway teams the idea of a Pan-African League competition, embracing the Rhodesian and South African circuits, was discussed. After two highly successful seasons in 1970/71 and 1971/72 the Rhodesian League was now sadly finished after the Gwelo team had pulled out due to the loss of their venue, and a league competition with just the two remaining teams at Salisbury and Bulawayo was not possible.

The Rhodesians were eager to get involved in a Pan-African League, which would allow them to use their British-based import stars in the proposed four-man sides to contest the league matches at the very beginning of 1973.

For the South African tracks, too, this was considered of paramount importance in consolidating the position

of the sport in general, for although the Rhodesian tracks had seen team racing since the rebirth of the sport there in 1971, it was all of 16 years since the last South African League had disappeared in a flurry of disputes and arguments.

RHODESIANS WIN SECOND TEST

The Rhodesian national team returned to Johannesburg for the second Test against the Springboks on Friday night of September 29, only to find the track under inches of water, as it was raining all day long. There was no way but to wait until the following week, before the match could go ahead.

South Africa had won the first Test, which was held in Durban in July, but Wembley was a different story. While the Durban track is a small one, Wembley has plenty of wide open spaces and a magnificent surface, providing the type of a track where you can wind it all on and have nothing to worry about at all.

The result was, after six heats of thrilling racing, Rhodesia waltzed home to a very comfortable 22-14 win. Without a doubt the star of the meeting was Peter Prinsloo, who ended the evening with a maximum nine points.

Seen at the Wembley Test were Roy Bester and Doug Serrurier, two famous names of the past.

Result of the Second Test at Wembley:

SOUTH AFRICA 14: D.Newton 6, D.Fourie 4, L.Fourie 2, J.Chapman 2, N.Mortimer 0.

RHODESIA 22: P.Prinsloo 9, A.Hughson 6, R.Ferguson 5, P.Harris 2, R.Barclay 0.

PRINSLOO LEADS RHODESIA TO SERIES WIN

On the next day both teams travelled to Durban where they met for the third and decisive Test on Saturday, October 7. As happened the night before in Jo'burg, the visiting Rhodesians were just too powerful for the home side, but in an eventful meeting, watched by a large and very enthusiastic crowd, there was incident aplenty for supporters of both outfits (the Rhodesians reckon they had three fans there!) to talk about, once the bikes had withdrawn from the arena in favour of the cars.

With Prinsloo completing another effortless maximum, and Hughson again well to the fore (his low score resulting from a first race tumble while in front and a controversial exclusion after he had finished first in heat 5), the Springboks had to fight hard indeed but were never really in a challenging position after the opening races.

In Heat 1, while Prinsloo was rapidly vanishing into the far distance in front, Dennis Newton was doing an excellent cover job behind Vic Pretorius to hold Pip Harris back, when Pretorius fell awkwardly in the home skipper's path, to be saved by a really brilliant lay-down by the experienced Newton. This, and a spill for Louis Fourie in the second race, possibly caused a general lack of resistance from the home side in the later heats.

Result of the Third Test at Durban:

SOUTH AFRICA 15: E.Olivier 6, D.Newton 3, V.Pretorius 3, D.Fourie 2, L.Fourie 1.

RHODESIA 21: P.Prinsloo 9, P.Harris 5, R.Ferguson 4, A.Hughson 3.

YANKS TO VISIT SOUTH AFRICA

Following the visit of the Rhodesian riders, promoter Buddy Fuller had arranged for a four-man American team, led by former U.S. National champion Rick Woods, to visit his arenas on a six week tour that opened on October 20. This news all but eclipsed everything else that had been happening on the South African speedway scene and pointed firmly to the determination of Mr. Fuller to bring the shale game back to his country with a decided explosion!

.....

Part 20: SOUTH AFRICAN TEST TEAM SELECTION

On Friday, October 20, **1972**, following the hot rod races at Wembley Stadium, four speedway heats were staged with the aim to guide the selectors in choosing the South African team for the first Test against the American tourists, scheduled to take place there on the next Friday evening.

Dennis Newton and Neil Mortimer were both certainties for the team and so were not included in the line-up for those four heats, were each rider was doing his utmost to impress the selectors. The rider of the evening

proved to be young Etienne Olivier, who scorched around the track on his ESO to win both of his heats. With a little more experience, he could be one of the top riders in SA.

Des Haswell was once again unlucky. In his first heat he shed a chain as the tapes went up. It looked as though he was going to be out of the race again in Heat 4, but Louis Fourie came to his rescue and lent Des his machine. Haswell then showed the crowd and the selectors just what he can do when he is mounted on reliable equipment. After making a poor gate, he blasted his way through the field to win the race.

Heat results:

Ht. 1: E.Olivier, G.Baynes, D.Fourie, D.Haswell (EF).

Ht. 2: L.Fourie, V.Pretorius, J.Chapman, B.Edwards.

Ht. 3: E.Olivier, V.Pretorius, J.Chapman, L.Fourie.

Ht. 4: D.Haswell, G.Baynes, D.Fourie, B.Edwards.

EASY WIN FOR THE USA

SOUTH AFRICA was well and truly beaten by the USA in the first Test at Wembley Stadium, the score was 22-11 in favour of the visitors. The Americans, captained by Rick Woods, the current U.S. National champion, quickly adapted to the Wembley circuit, which is much larger than their home tracks.

There was never a dull moment during this Test and there were thrills and spills galore during the six heats. Dennis Newton flew round the track to beat Rick Woods and Mike Curoso in heat 1.

Tragedy struck in the second heat. Scott Autrey took the lead from the gate and was never in any danger of losing first place, but behind him a real ding-dong battle was taking place. Etienne Olivier, hanging on to second place, was hotly pursued by Sumner McKnight and Neil Mortimer. On the last lap, Olivier locked-up as he came out of the first bend, McKnight was right behind him and the two of them went down. Mortimer dropped his bike at once but was too close to miss McKnight. Mortimer ended up with a broken leg which unfortunately put an end to his speedway career.

First Test ... Johannesburg ... Friday, 27 October, 1972

SOUTH AFRICA 11 (D.Newton 6, E.Olivier 4, L.Fourie 1, N.Mortimer 0, V.Pretorius (reserve) 0)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 22 (R.Woods 8, S.Autrey 8, M.Curoso 5, S.McKnight 1)

GUEST HELPS AMERICANS

THE SECOND TEST, at Dunswart Stadium in Benoni, went the same way as the first; the USA won by 21 points to 15. Once again the crowd was treated to six action-packed heats. The Americans were without the injured Sumner McKnight, his place being taken by South African guest rider George Baynes, who by the end of the evening was sounding like an American!

Luck does not seem to be smiling on the Americans at the moment. In Heat 3 Mike Curoso hit a slick patch and came off, injuring an ankle that he had sprained rather badly during the American championships. The result was that he missed his last ride, his place being taken by Rick Woods.

Woods really kept the crowd on its toes with some very spectacular riding which included a "wheelie" as he came out of the turn into the last lap in Heat 6.

Dennis Newton was the top South African and the Springboks would have been very badly off without him as he scored almost half of the team's points. With Neil Mortimer out for the rest of the series, South Africa's main problem was a lack of riders with international experience such as Newton.

The Americans, however, also had their problems with two of their riders nursing injured ankles. With a week's rest, both riders would be back in action in the third Test at Wembley on the next Friday.

Second Test ... Benoni ... Saturday, 28 October, 1972

SOUTH AFRICA 15 (D.Newton 7, E.Olivier 4, V.Pretorius 3, L.Fourie 1)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 21 (R.Woods 11, S.Autrey 4, G.Baynes (guest) 4, M.Curoso 2)

USA CLINCH TEST SERIES

THERE was little doubt in the minds of any of the spectators at Wembley that the touring American team, already leading by two Tests to none, had its sights on clinching the series against the Springboks.

By the end of four heats, the Americans were leading 19-5, and the locals were beginning to wonder whether a home rider was going to win a race at all. The Yanks had achieved their 19 points by taking three 5-1's and one 4-2. The most impressive of the 5-1's was the second race of the evening. Hard riding Sumner McKnight, who has a cracked bone in his left ankle, fought his way through from being third out of the gate to take the chequered flag at the end of the race.

Heats 5 and 6 saw South Africa at last come into the picture. Des Haswell, who had trouble with the frame of his bike in his first two races, came out on a borrowed machine and never looked like being caught at any stage. As luck would have it, McKnight experienced some motor trouble on the last bend and so let George Baynes through and South Africa had a 5-1 heat win.

Luck was against the Americans again in the last heat as both Woods and Autrey were having carburettor trouble. Dennis Newton flew home and the 4-2 in South Africa's favour made the final score much more respectable than had seemed possible at the start.

Third Test ... Johannesburg ... Friday, 3 November, 1972

SOUTH AFRICA 14 (D.Newton 6, D.Haswell 3, E.Olivier 3, G.Baynes (reserve) 2, L.Fourie 0)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 22 (S.Autrey 7, R.Woods 6, S.McKnight 5, M.Curoso 4)

WOODS BREAKS TRACK RECORD

WITH the hard-riding visitors from California having already clinched the series, the fourth and final Test at Hoy Park in Durban was of academic interest only in relation to the series. But the capacity crowd that flooded into the Alan Ford Stadium to see the first speedway riders from North America ever to appear in the Republic, were delighted by the racing that developed and applauded the victorious ranks to the echo at the end of the affair.

The USA squad had no weak links, and each rider won at least one race, with Scott Autrey taking a well-deserved paid maximum from his three rides. Captain Rick Woods, who later lowered Rhodesian Peter Prinsloo's track record from 56.2 to 54.8 in a specially arranged attempt, suffered defeat only to a heroic ride from veteran Des Haswell, who experienced machine troubles in his other outings. But with Etienne Olivier taking a tumble in his opening ride and requiring replacement by reserve George Baynes thereafter, it was clear that the visitors were going to pile up their largest points haul of the tour.

The Durban circuit is the smallest in Africa, and the United States men had little difficulty in finding the fastest way round – doubtless due to the similarity of the bowl to their own track at Costa Mesa – and were always in command. Springbok captain Dennis Newton tried everything to get his side back into the match but a minor placing each time out was his only reward.

Haswell's win apart, the locals were never in sight of a race victory, but they never gave up until the last wheel had stopped, and the supporters were not too disappointed with their gallant efforts.

Fourth Test ... Durban ... Saturday, 4 November, 1972

SOUTH AFRICA 8 (D.Newton 4, D.Haswell 3, G.Baynes (reserve) 1, E.Olivier 0, D.Brunton 0)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 27 (S.Autrey 7, R.Woods 7, M.Curoso 7, S.McKnight 6)

CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

Next on the agenda was a five-round Individual "Champion of Champions" series, which figured star riders from Rhodesia, Australia, Britain and the USA, as well as the South Africans.

There was a R 5,000 prize money up for grabs which made this South Africa's richest speedway event. Meetings were staged at Buddy Fuller's tracks at Johannesburg, Benoni and Durban.

At the penultimate round in Durban, Americans Rick Woods and Sumner McKnight were unbeaten in all their heats (Woods setting up another track record – 54.0 in heat 2) and when they met in the final race of the night, there followed a breathtaking struggle between the duo and Australian Bob Young, who had to be content with third place behind the victorious Woods and runner-up McKnight.

The riders returned to Johannesburg for the final round of the series at Wembley, with Rick Woods already in an almost unbeatable lead over the first four meetings with a grand total of 31 points, followed by both Bob Young and Alex Hughson on 22.

At Wembley, Rick Woods made sure that the big money went back to America in his own wallet. Behind him the Rhodesian riders clearly showed that their country remains the top African speedway nation, ahead of South Africa. It was Alex Hughson in second place with 31 points, ahead of Bob Young with 29, and Peter Prinsloo – who on his own admission had a poor trip over the border in this series - was next with 21.

South Africans Dennis Newton (20), Vic Pretorius (17) and Des Haswell (16) were the next highest men over the series.

.....