

Part 26: IN RHODESIA

AT the beginning of November of **1974**, the Springbok quartet of Arthur Bruins, Brian Stephens, Andy Long and Boet Strydom had been invited to compete in a couple of prestigious meetings in Rhodesia.

First stop was Salisbury, where the annual Coca Cola Championship attracted a handy attendance to the Glamis Stadium. The added attraction of having four South African riders in the field contributed to a marked rise in attendance figures, and although their efforts on the tight little Salisbury racestrip were not always completely successful, their competitive spirit kept them going strongly and added much to the overall entertainment.

Peter Prinsloo was in immaculate form and won each of his three races reasonably easy, and deserved his standing ovation as he made a lap of honour following the presentation of the handsome trophy by an official of the sponsoring organisation.

Mike Ferreira, who was perhaps unlucky to face Prinsloo twice during the evening, and Pip Harris were deserving winners of the minor placings. Of the South Africans, Arthur Bruins was unlucky to fall twice while well placed, and indeed Arthur won the only race in which he was able to finish ! Brian Stephens was also impressive, which indicated the steady improvement of the South African riders.

There was a gap in the standard of the Rhodesian riders that season, with Roni Ferguson lost to the sport because of a badly broken leg, and John Bower having journeyed home to Britain in September to sign for Sunderland. Rhodesia's hopes for the future now rested very much on the improvement of young riders such as Dennis Paulson and Trevor Bezely.

RHODESIAN OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

WITH four South Africans in town to contest the affair with the local Rhodesians, the stage was set for a classic Rhodesian Open Championship at Bulawayo Showgrounds, but as has been so often the case in the past, it was the weather that eventually dominated proceedings to a far greater degree than any rider.

Exceedingly rain just before the racing commenced almost flooded the track and caused a long delay before the opening heat. With a big crowd in attendance the riders were finally informed that racing was to proceed, though none appeared keen to have a go. In fact the three riders from Gwelo, the Prinsloo brothers and Herbie Edwards, had already loaded their machines on the trailers at this point.

Following a prolonged discussion which can have done little to enhance the sport's popularity with an already restive crowd, Peter Prinsloo was adamant that conditions were too dangerous and withdrew from the meeting.

The damp conditions soon made their presence felt by attacking more than one magneto, and it was clear that close racing would be at a premium. But there was little troubling Mike Ferreira – perhaps revelling in the heavy conditions after a season in Britain – and the Salisbury teenager raced smoothly to a maximum to take the title.

Ferreira apart, the man of the meeting was South African Brian Stephens, who was untroubled by the continual machine problems of his countrymen. So bad, in fact, were their troubles that by the close of the meeting, the Springbok quartet had only one machine still operating.

Of the Rhodesians, Pip Harris showed to advantage after a first ride stoppage and the dependable Ray Barclay was a deserving third place man in the overall totals. Chris Prinsloo kept the family flag flying with half a dozen hard-won points, and Chris was also responsible for the evening's best racing in Heat 6, as he first pulled ahead of the gate-crashing Boet Strydom and then fought a race-long duel with Pip Harris before giving best to the Bulawayan on the final turn.

Despite the importance of this meeting, this was not a good evening for speedway – on and off the track.

Scorers:

Mike Ferreira 9, Brian Stephens 8, Ray Barclay 7, Chris Prinsloo 6, Pip Harris 5, Dennis Broadbent 4, Boet Strydom 4, Trevor Bezely 3, Herbie Edwards 2, Andy Long 0, Arthur Bruins 0, Peter Prinsloo NS.

FOLLOWING his disagreement with Allied Speedways management over the wet conditions that had prevailed on the evening of the Rhodesian Open Championship at Bulawayo, four-times Rhodesian National champion Peter Prinsloo announced his retirement from speedway – for the time being, at any rate. Prinsloo, with his 1971 British League experience with Wembley and Ipswich behind him at the time was by far the most accomplished of all speedway riders in Southern Africa. Allied Speedways needed him as their trump card, since at the same time the sudden call-up of the new open champion Ferreira to do his military service came as another blow that the Rhodesian promotion could have done without. In the absence of the "big two", there remained little opposition for the improving Pip Harris at the very top of the Rhodesian tree. Prinsloo soon realised he needed Allied Speedways just as much, though, and both parties made up a few weeks later, so that "the prince" was back in action when the 1975 season began.

SOUTH AFRICAN LULL

WHILE the Rhodesian season was moving steadily to its customary break in activity around the festive season, the sport was having one of its toughest seasons in years in South Africa. Severe petrol restrictions in the republic hampered travelling and caused considerable difficulties for riders hoping to visit other provinces for meetings.

Buddy Fuller's policy of running only a few big-time events in a year was surely good business for his company, but the riders desperately needed more racing in order to improve their techniques and experience. The only other speedway meetings in South Africa at that time were up-country "club" events, paying little if any prize money and attracting tiny attendances.

ACTION IN THE FREESTATE

BLOEMFONTEIN rider/promoter Vic Pretorius continued to keep the speedway flag flying with an Inter-Province team event between the Freestate and Natal, that attracted one of the best attendances in recent years for a Bloemfontein meeting. The spectators had a fair return for their money from a varied programme of car and solo machines.

The visiting Natal riders provided excellent opposition for the home team, and in their captain Tommy Fox had the man of the match, dropping just a single point. The OFS team had strength in depth, however, and the support afforded captain Pretorius by both Ben Rossi and Lionel Botha was enough to see them through. The encouraging attendance figure gave Pretorius and his associates new confidence in their ability to attract paying crowds to solo speedway, and a series of further meetings was planned for the coming months.

Scorers:

ORANGE FREE STATE 19 : Vic Pretorius 7, Ben Rossi 6, Lionel Botha 4, Louis Fourie 2.

NATAL 17 : Tommy Fox 8, George Baynes 5, Glen Butt 2, Ricky Potts 2.

NATAL HOPE

THE closure of the long-established Durban circuit had been a blow that speedway found hard to bear. Durban had always been a speedway area and the continued failure to provide an alternative to the Alan Ford Stadium – a victim of noise complaints – caused a fall in enthusiasm among both rider and spectator alike. Several Natal rider of great promise such as Dennis Brunton sold their equipment in disgust, with the prospect for the sport in Durban looking grim.

Buddy Fuller was full of his plans to bring powered sport to the New Kingsmead football ground at the time he closed the doors at Hoy Park, but work never started at this arena because of the antagonistic attitude of some local opponents to the scheme.

Frustrated by the lack of progress at New Kingsmead, the local four-wheeler men – the Natal Stock Car Club – have approached a group of Durban based speedway riders and other enthusiasts with a suggestion that a circuit to suit both sports be constructed up-country at Ottawa, several miles out of Durban.

MURRAY TO STAY IN S.A.

MEANWHILE, Peter Murray decided to return to South Africa for a further tour. The Wimbledon speedway rider had always been an exceedingly popular figure wherever he has raced in Africa. A winter in Rhodesia during 1972/73 was followed by a South African safari in 1973/74. Now he returned for a third time – and this time he was to stay for good, joining the long list of British speedway men who have found the good life under the sun too hard to resist.

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Part 27: RHODESIANS KEEP GOING

DESPITE the short-lived Ian Hoskins/Malcolm Brown project having folded in early part of **1975**, racing in Rhodesia had pressed on regardless under the promotion of Bulawayo car dealer Colin Underwood, who presented fortnightly meetings at both his hometown Showgrounds and Glamis Stadium in Salisbury.

Underwood, Hoskins and Brown had formed Allied Speedways '75 Ltd. and taken control of the promoting rights for speedway and car racing at both Rhodesian tracks. Their venture did not get off to a good start, when their opening meeting at Bulawayo on Saturday, March 22 was rained-off and had to be re-staged mid-

week on March 26. Speedway formed the first half of the programme, with Peter Prinsloo winning the Rider of the Night Trophy. But a lack in numbers of the stock cars left the public rather disappointed with the show.

Meeting number two on April 5 was again marred by the weather, and on April 12, the inaugural Salisbury meeting of the season went ahead with a similar programme. From now on there would be fortnightly meetings at both tracks on alternate weekends.

On April 26, the Bulawayo Trade Fair weekend, when there was no car racing allowed, an all bike programme was advertised with a proposed International Test match between Rhodesia and South Africa. This was changed at the last minute to become the first round of a four team league series.

The match resulted in a tie for first place between Salisbury and Bulawayo. Gwelo came third and Johannesburg last.

Scorers:

SALISBURY 26 : Dave Hemus 9, Mike Ferreira 8, Ray Barclay 7, Simon Mann 2.

BULAWAYO 26 : Malcolm Brown 10, Pip Harris 9, Eddie Payne 4, Colin Payne 3.

GWELO 24 : Peter Prinsloo 11, Chris Prinsloo 8, Zak Koekemoer 4, Herbie Edwards 1.

JOHANNESBURG 20 : Peter Murray 7, Dennis Newton 6, Danie Fourie 6, George Baynes 1.

Following the inaugural league match at Bulawayo, the second meeting was all set to go at Salisbury on May 10, but had to be postponed when the South African riders were not available.

Instead, an International Test match between Rhodesia and Overseas Select was held, which was won by the home team under their captain Peter Prinsloo.

Scorers:

RHODESIA 34 : Peter Prinsloo 8, Mike Ferreira 7, Zak Koekemoer 6, Pip Harris 6, Ray Barclay 4, Chris Prinsloo 3.

OVERSEAS 20 : Malcom Brown 8, Dave Hemus 7, Russell Pattinson 3, Dennis Paulson 2, Neil Webb 0, Colin Payne 0.

A few weeks earlier, on the Easter Weekend, Rhodesia had ridden two Tests in South Africa. Buddy Fuller had arranged the two meetings at Johannesburg on Easter Saturday and at Stilfontein on Easter Monday. The Rhodesians won both Tests, 25–21 at Wembley and 20–15 at Silfontein, a track where Danie Fourie acted as promoter and rode unbeaten in the Springboks team for a three rides nine points maximum.

Four Rhodesian riders were invited down to Johannesburg by promoter Buddy Fuller for the annual South African Championship event at Johannesburg on May 31. The visitors were most successful with Peter Prinsloo winning his second SA title after 1974. He defeated Dave Hemus, Peter Murray and Danie Fourie in the final. For good measure, Fuller had also staged a mini Test match on the previous day against these four Rhodesians, who defeated South Africa 18–14 over six heats.

With their top riders away in South Africa, the May 31 meeting at Bulawayo turned into a nightmare for the promoters. For the first time in memory, a meeting had to be abandoned because of casualties and lack of bikes. Only eight riders were on the programme, and when Ray Barclay failed to appear from Salisbury, they were down to seven. In the pits, prior to the first race, Vic Rich couldn't get his bike to start, which left them down to six bikes and seven riders.

In Heat 1, Vic Rich, on a borrowed machine fell in front of Colin and Eddie Payne. As Eddie Payne was also riding a borrowed bike from Russell Pattinson, the outcome was that Colin Payne was taken to hospital and Pattinson's bike was written off for the day.

One more race in the mini best pairs competition was attempted. In it, Eddie Payne, riding his brothers' bike, had a clutch failure and pulled out. One last race was tried after this and Pip Harris fell when leading and broke his collar bone. This was the absolute end of speedway for the day.

And not just for the day, it seems the speedway promoters never really recovered from this disaster, going along with many other problems, Hoskins and Brown resigned at the end of June, leaving Allied Speedways under the sole promotion of Colin Underwood. As a former Northern Rhodesian car racing champion, Underwood was mostly interested in the four wheels sport and was from now on helped to run the meetings by the Mashonaland Stock Car Racing Club. The speedway bikes were kept on the programme and Underwood even made big strides to rekindle interest for speedway.

Various formats were experimented with for the solo section of Colin's promotions, and in general it had been team racing that proved most popular with his spectators – especially in Bulawayo, where the Aces, under the captaincy of Pip Harris and featuring Australian Neil Webb, the Payne brothers and on occasions former British League rider Dave Kumeta, grew in favour following a string of successful results.

The Showgrounds at Bulawayo had seen many exciting meetings since the sport was reintroduced to Rhodesia in 1971, but the Rhodesia vs the Cavaliers match on August 23 went down as a classic for all that ! Some excellent racing, a goodly number of spills to keep the spectators on their toes, and a win in the end for the side wearing the country's colours, it was all there.

The Rhodesian side was captained by Peter Prinsloo, who scored a maximum, although he had to go to a couple of re-runs after twice falling in his efforts to get past Dave Kumeta on the outside. Riders were rarely excluded for causing races to be stopped in Rhodesia, and each time Prinsloo was permitted to come back to scratch for a re-start. In the event, even at the third time of asking, Eddie Payne was a faller, but the race this time continued and the Rhodesian captain eventually won the race. Other high scoring for Rhodesia came from Eddie Payne who was in demon form and was unbeaten until his fall in the all-action heat 10. The Cavaliers had several solid scorers, but despite late heat wins by Russell Pattinson, Malcolm Brown and Colin Payne, the home team were always able to pack the minor placings and hold on to their lead to the end.

RHODESIA 38 : Peter Prinsloo 12, Eddie Payne 9, Chris Prinsloo 7, Zak Koekemoer 4, Simon Mann 4, Herbie Edwards 2.

CAVALIERS 33 : Malcolm Brown 8, Colin Payne 7, Neil Webb 6, Dave Kumeta 5, Russell Pattinson 5, Derrick Bird 2.

Spectating at the October 11 meeting at Bulawayo was Buddy Fuller, in town to tie up details for the biggest meetings of the year when the Barry Briggs / Ivan Mauger World Champions Speedway Series would visit Southern Africa in November. Colin Underwood was glad to use the opportunity and joined up with Fuller to bring the world's best speedway riders for a couple of meetings to Bulawayo and Salisbury. Underwood knew that it was an opportunity not to be missed to re-establish the sport in Rhodesia after a season of mostly unsuccessful meetings. Although much of the credit for importing the Superstar circus had been laid at Dennis Newton's door, it remains a fact that Buddy Fuller had been the man responsible for setting up the necessary arrangements for the project. Meetings in South Africa would be staged at Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

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Part 28: WORLD CHAMPIONS SERIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

IN 1974 former world champions Barry Briggs and Ivan Mauger had formed their own touring troupe of speedway world champions, and took them to America, Australia and New Zealand. The possibility of taking a mini-troupe to South Africa came to life late in **1975**. Briggs had ridden in South Africa before – back in 1953 with the touring New Zealand team on one of those special Trevor Redmond package tours. The proposal to do it in 1975 came from Buddy Fuller, who was keen and convinced that the world champions speedway series with half-a-dozen of the world's superstars would not only draw big crowds but help establish interest in the sport again.

A DREAM CAME TRUE

IN November of 1975, the dream became reality and a massive crowd of 11,000 spectators saw the world champions' troupe on their initial S.A. appearance and the return of speedway racing to the Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg. The track, recently laid on the tarmac car strip, was in superb condition and there was plenty of good racing to please one of South Africa's biggest ever speedway crowds. John Louis, a member of the World Cup winning England team of 1973 came out on top to win this first round of the African WCSS. In the final he beat the reigning world champion of 1975, Ole Olsen of Denmark, the four-times world champion Ivan Mauger of New Zealand and the world long-track champion Egon Muller of Germany. The appearance of Briggs had led to a revival of the S.A. Golden Helmet Match Race Championship. This was last staged nearly 20 years ago when Briggs last rode in South Africa and had taken the title with him. Now he was back and was challenged by Olsen in Johannesburg, who won after Briggs had motor problems.

Results: **JOHANNESBURG** (November 7, 1975)

Qualifying heat scores: Mauger 10, Olsen 10, Louis 9, Muller 4, Briggs 3, Autrey 0.

WCSS-Final: Louis, Olsen, Mauger, Muller.
S.A. Match Race Championship: Olsen (challenger) bt. Briggs (holder)

TWENTY-four hours later, on Saturday, the action switched to Durban, where a packed house saw Mauger extract revenge. Only change in the final was that Barry Briggs qualified instead of Muller. But Briggs had motor troubles and followed home Mauger, Olsen and Louis. This left the top three of the first two meetings level on points with eight each after two rounds. Olsen was challenged by American Scott Autrey for the Golden Helmet at Durban and as expected the Dane was a comfortable 2-0 victor.

Results: **DURBAN** (November 8, 1975)
Qualifying heat scores: Olsen 11, Briggs 6, Louis 6, Mauger 5, Autrey 4, Muller 4.
WCSS-Final: Mauger, Olsen, Louis, Briggs.
S.A. Match Race Championship: Olsen (holder) bt. Autrey (challenger)

BEST PAIRS ACTION IN RHODESIA

THE action switched to Rhodesia on the following weekend, with meetings at Salisbury on November 14 and Bulawayo on November 15. The tourists decided to go by road from Jo'burg to Rhodesia, obviously thinking it would be a nice trip for them all, but it turned out to be two days' hard driving. But the journey was quickly forgotten when, after racing, they had two days at a tremendous hotel at the Victoria Falls, including a visit to a crocodile farm and a sunset boat trip up the Zambesi river. Scott Autrey was in dazzling form during the troupe's visit to Rhodesia. He smashed the Salisbury track record three times, scored a maximum and shared the Best Pairs honours with local rider Dave Hemus. Only setback for the troupe was an injury to Egon Muller who broke a small bone in a foot and after a couple of days in hospital was flown back to Johannesburg.

Results: **SALISBURY** (November 14, 1975)
Best Pairs: Scott Autrey (15) and Dave Hemus (3) 18, John Louis (13) and Zak Koekemoer (2) 15, Ivan Mauger (11) and Pip Harris (4) 15, Ole Olsen (14) and Colin Payne (0) 14, Barry Briggs (11) and Mike Ferreira (3) 14, Egon Muller (8) and Peter Prinsloo (6) 14.

At Bulawayo on the following day, Hemus was on the winner's rostrum for a second time, partnered this time by maximum scoring Ivan Mauger. They just pipped John Louis and Peter Prinsloo, a former team mate of Louis at Ipswich, for top position.

Results: **BULAWAYO** (November 15, 1975)
Best Pairs: Ivan Mauger (15) and Dave Hemus (5) 20, John Louis (10) and Peter Prinsloo (9) 19, Ole Olsen (12) and Colin Payne (3) 15, Scott Autrey (10) and Zak Koekemoer (5) 15, Barry Briggs (9) and Pip Harris (4) 13.

OLSEN WINS CAPE TOWN ROUND

NEXT stop on the tour was Cape Town. The troupe had a train journey from Johannesburg which wasn't much fun as it took some 28 hours. And they had a very poor crowd at the Cape Town meeting. The city has a very big population and speedway could do well if publicised in the right way, but this meeting on a changed race-night at the Glenwood Showgrounds was badly promoted. Buddy Fuller, as usual, worked hard, chasing the boys during the meeting, getting on the mike, starting races, and so on. Perhaps, he did too much at times and could have done with some younger help to allow him to do the things he does best. Ole Olsen was the winner at Cape Town and moved one point clear at the top of the WCSS overall points standings. But the current world champion was under strong pressure from England's John Louis and New Zealand's Ivan Mauger in the final at Cape Town. Also featured on the programme was an 8-heats team challenge match between the troupe and a Southern African side, which was easily won by the world champions 38-10.

Results: **CAPE TOWN** (November 21, 1975)
Team Challenge Match: SOUTHERN AFRICA 10: P.Prinsloo 4, P.Murray 3, D.Hemus 2, A.Bruins 1, P.Harris 0, D.Fourie 0, B.Stephens 0, Z.Koekemoer 0.

WORLD SUPER SIX 38: B.Briggs 8, J.Louis 7, I.Mauger 6, O.Olsen 6, S.Autrey 6, E.Muller 5.
WCSS-Final: Olsen, Louis, Mauger, Autrey.
S.A. Match Race Championship: Olsen (holder) bt. Mauger (challenger)

SERIES FINALE

THE troupe flew back to Johannesburg and Briggs and Mauger held a training school there during the week. Interest in the sport had been given a boost by the visit and the time the world champions spent with the local riders will have been of benefit for everyone around. Reigning world champion Ole Olsen made sure of the WCSS African title by winning the last meeting of the series at Durban on November 29. The Dane had been the most consistent of the troupe during their four-week African stay, though he had to be satisfied with the runners-up slot in Friday's meeting in Johannesburg. At the Wembley Stadium Barry Briggs had his best meeting of the series to finish in front of Olsen, John Louis and Egon Muller in the final. In the final at Durban, Olsen headed Ivan Mauger, Louis and Briggs, to leave the overall series scores as: Ole Olsen 22, John Louis 18, Ivan Mauger 15. Mauger had beaten Olsen in the Match Race Championship in Johannesburg, but Olsen had his revenge in Durban the following night. As a curtain raiser in Durban there was a three-heat team match between the troupe and a combined team of South African and Rhodesian riders. The troupe, as expected, won comfortably 14-4.

Results: - **JOHANNESBURG** (November 28, 1975)

WCSS-Final: Briggs, Olsen, Louis, Muller.

Support Feature Final: Hemus, Murray, Prinsloo, A.Bruins.

S.A. Match Race Championship: Mauger (challenger) bt. Olsen (holder)

- **DURBAN** (November 29, 1975)

Team Challenge Match: SOUTHERN AFRICA 4: Prinsloo 2, Murray 1, Pretorius 1, A.Bruins 0, Stephens 0, van Rooyen 0.

WORLD SUPER SIX 14: Olsen 3, Louis 3, Briggs 3, Mauger 2, Muller 2, Autrey 1.

WCSS-Final: Olsen, Mauger, Briggs, Louis.

Support Feature Final: Prinsloo, Murray, van Rooyen, A.Bruins.

S.A. Match Race Championship: Olsen (challenger) bt. Mauger (holder)

The coming – and indeed, going – of the world champions speedway troupe had created a greater stir in South African speedway circles than anything since the troubled “political” battles back in the mid-fifties. The crowds they attracted, despite a distinct lack of imagination in the advertising methods, were startingly good and a lot of the racing, especially the opening Johannesburg and the second Durban meetings, was truly excellent. As a result, with fresh enthusiasm abounding in the pits and workshops, new technique, modern equipment and more spares, all coming from the visitors camp as they passed through South Africa, the standards of racing among the local riders such as Arthur Bruins and Brian Stephens was much improved and speedway in S. A. was back on its feet again.

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Part 29: INTERNATIONAL TOUR 1977/78

SOUTH AFRICA was eagerly awaiting the arrival of a British mini-team of three riders for the international season of 1977/78. Veteran promoter Buddy Fuller had paid a flying visit to Scotland and signed two Scots, Bert Harkins and Benny Rourke, as well as an English rider, Nig Close, together with Rhodesian star Peter Prinsloo, to tour the RSA from December 'til February. The riders would be appearing in a couple of meetings at the Goodwood circuit in Cape Town, a track where Fuller promoted monthly stock-car meetings to large audiences. Other tracks for the tour were Wembley (Johannesburg), Dunswart (Benoni) and Mayhem Stadium in Pretoria, with a possibility of a few meetings at the Vaal Showgrounds, Vereeniging.

Before the arrival of the tourists, the fans had been enjoying the efforts of their local favourites in a series of slickly presented meetings at the Wembley Raceway, in the circuits thirtieth – and sadly, last – term of operation. The traditional home of speedway in Jo'burg was doomed to fall victim of redevelopment early in 1978, when bulldozers moved in to convert a famous stadium into a new bus terminal for the city. Speedway meetings at Wembley were promoted by Jim Macklin and Danie Fourie, with the sure hand of the experienced Rhodesians Alex Hughson and Roni Ferguson fronting the show.

Brothers Arthur and James Bruins had been the dominating SA riders in the past couple of seasons. Along

with Graham Long, Brian Stephens, Boet Strydom and Jantjie Stevens, the Bruins boys represented a squadron of locals who were determined to prevent the tourists wrapping up all the big awards.

Biggest event before the arrival of the touring party was the first monthly challenge for the "Golden Helmet", contested in a match race series, with Arthur Bruins deposing reigning champion James. Arthur had also annexed the Wembley track record with a four-lap time of 78.0 seconds for the 360 metre race-strip.

RAIN GREETSS THE TOURISTS

THUNDERSTORMS washed out the first couple of meetings for the tourists in Johannesburg and forced the postponement of three training sessions before they could make their Wembley Stadium debuts.

A special practise session was held with the overseas riders battling through bad weather to give the local TV men some material. Some of the locals also had a spin and there was none more impressive than a 16-year old lad by the name of Denzil Kent. Unfortunately he had not been given clearance to ride as the South African AA – the ruling body – declared that 18 is the minimum riding age, reckoning that speedway is too dangerous below that age.

After days of prolonged rain race day was sunny, but the ominous clouds were not too far away. The unsettled weather kept the crowd down, despite big efforts from the promotion. The organisation was slick and the show got on with lightning flashing across the horizon. Benny Rourke and Nig Close set the pattern with a battle royal in Heat 1, with South Africans James Bruins and George Baynes out of contention.

In Heat 2 Bert Harkins broke Arthur Bruins' track record, but in the next race Peter Prinsloo shattered the record on his Weslake. Low flying Pete dropped the record from 75.6 to an incredible 73.1.

The meeting featured normal speedway with flat track races with up to 11 riders competing in one race. It was during one of these races that the heavens opened and the rain came pouring down again. By the time the flat track racers had finished, the rain ended and the speedway bikes had no rain for their next series of races. But only until the next flat track event – it was just as if somebody up there had turned a tap for their benefit!

Peter Prinsloo and Bert Harkins had gone undefeated until they met in Heat 10 and their close dice ended with the Scotsman sliding off on the slippery pits turn. The top eight scorers went into two semi-finals and all four of the tourists went through to the final.

The Wembley crowd had been very quiet and unemotional but by the final they were in full voice, when Peter Prinsloo found some extra drive on the outside to beat Harkins on the line.

SCOTTISH SURPRISE IN PRETORIA

SCOTTISH Junior Champion Benny Rourke shocked everyone with a tremendous 12-point maximum and a new four lap track record at the tourists' first meeting at the Mayhem track in Pretoria. He also won his semi-final, but was beaten by Peter Prinsloo in the final of this individual championship meeting. It was the opening meeting of the new Mayhem track, a tidy little dirt oval of 330 metres, situated in the suburbs of Pretoria. Previously the circuit was tarmac and used solely for stock-cars and hot-rods.

Unfortunately the weather wasn't kind and rain started to fall about an hour before the scheduled start time. The pouring rain and accompanying flashes of lightning continued until about ten minutes before start time, when it stopped abruptly and high winds began to dry out the track. Although the track surface was very hard-packed and slippery the riders all agreed to ride.

Peter Prinsloo had a very rough night for after winning his first race, his Weslake gave up the ghost and he had to loan a bike for his remaining rides. South African champion Arthur Bruins crashed awkwardly in one race and was taken to hospital with a suspected broken wrist, but brother James kept the family flag flying by winning his way into the grand final.

The final was exciting with Prinsloo trailing third behind Nigel Close and Benny Rourke for most of the race. He passed Close and then started snapping away at Rourke and a very slight error by the Glasgow rider allowed PP to pip him on the line.

Qualifying scorers: B.Rourke 12, B.Harkins 8, J.Bruins 8, N.Close 7, B.Strydom 6, B.Stephens 6, P.Prinsloo 6, G.Long 6, C.Davies 5, A.Bruins 2, N.Jacobs 2, G.Babry 2.

Semi-Final 1: Prinsloo, J.Bruins, Strydom, Stephens.

Semi-Final 2: Rourke, Close, Harkins, Long.

Final: Prinsloo, Rourke, Close, J.Bruins.

WEMBLEY LIONS

LEAGUE racing returned to South Africa with Wembley Lions beating the Pretoria Eagles by 29-18 in

Johannesburg. The new league was sponsored by Imperial Paint Products.

Wembley had a fairly easy passage against Pretoria, who had skipper Arthur Bruins sidelined through injury. Peter Prinsloo, who tested a new Japanese tyre, top scored for the Lions. Graham Long maintained a family tradition by captaining the Lions – his father, the legendary Henry Long, skippered the team in the 1950's during South African speedway's "Good Old Days".

WEMBLEY 29: P.Prinsloo 10, N.Close 8, G.Long 5, B.Stephens 4, J.Bruins 2.

PRETORIA 18: B.Harkins 11, B.Rourke 5, B.Strydom 1, G.Baynes 1, C.Davies 0.

PRETORIA EAGLES

FOLLOWING Wembley's convincing win over Pretoria in Johannesburg, the Lions found the going much tougher in the return match at the Mayhem Stadium. The rain stayed away for a change, but the heavily watered track caused many problems in the early stages. There was the unusual sight of Peter Prinsloo sliding off on the first turn. Peter remounted but a couple of laps later he was off again, which goes to show how treacherous conditions were.

Wembley were without their skipper, Graham Long, and his replacement Jantjie Stevens could only manage two points. Prinsloo recovered from his first race fall to head the Wembley score chart and along with Nig Close collected a 5-1 against Bert Harkins and George Baynes to go into the final nominated riders heat only two points in arrears. In that deciding race, Harkins and Rourke managed to get a 4-2 over Prinsloo and Close, who slid off on the third lap. Harkins broke the track record in his efforts to keep ahead of Prinsloo and give the Pretoria Eagles a narrow win over the Wembley Lions.

PRETORIA 26: B.Rourke 10, B.Harkins 8, B.Strydom 7, C.Davies 1, G.Baynes 0.

WEMBLEY 22: P.Prinsloo 8, N.Close 6, J.Bruyns 3, B.Stephens 3, J.Stevens 2.

This was the last league match of 1977. The South African season closed down for the Christmas holiday.

A number of former riders were watching at the meetings. Neil Mortimer was spotted along with that "crazy Springbok" Howdy Cornell, who even did a few laps around the Pretoria track on Nig Close's Jawa. True to form, Howdy reckoned the old Jap's were faster ! It's reported that Howdy was already 36 years old when he first rode in the British Provincial League for Trevor Redmond's outfits at Neath and St.Austell in the early 1960's.

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Part 30: 1978 – FROM WEMBLEY TO THE RAINBOW

SOUTH AFRICAN speedway came to a standstill during the Christmas period of 1977/78. The touring riders from the UK went on a sightseeing trip to the Cape. When they returned to the Transvaal, speedway racing had come to an end. The original promoters of the tour, Jimmy Macklin and Danie Fourie had run into severe cash problems. The owners of the Wembley Stadium had made it clear that unless rent arrears would be paid the track was going to be closed and the tour would be in jeopardy.

The famous stadium, which has always been associated with South African speedway was due to be demolished soon after the tour ended in February. Now that the rent arrears had come to light, the owners were anxious to start work on the demolition and the ultimate building of a new bus garage on the site. It was sad to see the destruction of the place that had hosted SA speedway since 1948.

TOURISTS TO TURN PROMOTERS

IN a desperate attempt to revive the sport and continue with the tour, the riders – Benny Rourke, Nig Close, Peter Prinsloo and Bert Harkins, plus Alex Hughson, Roni Ferguson and PRO Dough Willoughby – got together and formed a syndicate in a last ditch effort to save the tour. Alex Hughson, who promoted speedway so successfully in Rhodesia, was one of the best promoters in the business, having learned the trade from Johnny Hoskins and Trevor Redmond. But even with Alex's expertise the project seemed doomed when the track in Pretoria also decided not to run speedway anymore, as they too were in dispute with the former Wembley promoters. With Wembley gone, the only major track still in operation was down in Cape Town, where old time favorite Buddy Fuller was still running a very successful show at Goodwood. In between all the hard work, the riders organised a trip to Cape Town for a couple of meetings there at the end of their tour. But in the Transvaal the task they were facing was enormous, trying to salvage the good name of South African speedway from the ashes.

RAINBOW

Far from being finished, the syndicate – Alex Hughson and his merry men – came up with the perfect alternative, a country track by the colourful name of Rainbow. The circuit was situated in the middle of the Rainbow Pleasure Resort which included a drag racing strip, a horse racing course and a swimming and barbecue complex. The speedway circuit was also known by the name of Xanadu. It was originally constructed as a training track but with some hard work, with a temporary grandstand erected, it would become a tidy little place to host the 1978 Southern African Open Championship. This meeting was to be the first ever in SA to be televised.

THE SCOTS TRIUMPH

WITH heavy rain the week previously there were fears that the expected television exposure might not, after all, come off. But it did, and instead of the previously agreed 25 minutes they allotted them 45 ! It was a good day for the meeting, the publicity was right and it drew a healthy and exceedingly interested crowd. The television people caught all the right incidents and the sport took a great leap forward in South Africa. Twelve riders contested the meeting, with twelve heats preceding a couple of semi-finals for the eight highest scorers and the big “sudden death” run for glory in the final.

After the heats had been staged, it was Scotland's Benny Rourke and Bert Harkins against Boet Strydom and Brian Stephens in the first semi, and Peter Prinsloo, Nig Close, local hero Arthur Bruins and Graham Long in the other. The two Scotsmen managed to get through their race ok, but the drama of the formula surfaced in the other heat when Peter Prinsloo, supported by many ex-patriate Rhodesians and about as red hot a pre-meeting favorite as you could get, went out of the competition with electrical problems on the very first turn.

His exit left the door wide open for the tourists to claim the major trophy. Nig Close made a classy start in the final, but Bert Harkins came screaming over from gate four and just got over into the turn in front. With his experience, he just sat on the white line after that and held on to win the SA Open Championship, with Nig Close in second and Benny Rourke third. Fourth placed Arthur Bruins was declared SA National champion as the highest placed South African in this meeting.

Results: Qualifying points scorers were:

Bert Harkins (Scotland) 10, Nig Close (England) 9, Peter Prinsloo (Rhodesia) 9, Benny Rourke (Scotland) 8, Boet Strydom (SA) 7, Arthur Bruins (SA) 6, Graham Long (SA) 6, Brian Stephens (SA) 6, Denis Brunton (SA) 5, Danie Fourie (SA) 3, Tommy Fox (SA) 3, James Bruins (SA) 0, Chris Davies (SA, reserve) 0.

Semi-final 1: Harkins, Rourke, Stephens, Strydom.

Semi-final 2: Close, Bruins, Long, Prinsloo (ef).

Final: Harkins, Close, Rourke, Bruins.

RAINBOW SPEEDWAY

A keen hard-core of supporters and riders were helping to maintain interest in speedway in South Africa around 1978/79. The main arena was the Rainbow Speedway, some 15 miles out of Johannesburg, where meetings were held at monthly intervals. Winner of the 2 September 1978 Golden Helmet meeting was Denzil Kent. Still a future star at the tender age of 17, Kent already displayed his outstanding speedway skills, worthy of British League opportunities. At this stage, in addition to the very talented Kent, young riders to watch were Wayne Coughlan, Vic Ford, Alan Simpson and Vic Page. They all had the ability, they only needed some good tuition and plenty of experience to bring it out.

BRUINS WINS

The October meeting at the Rainbow track was successfully run on a warm sunny Sunday afternoon with the sponsored trophy being won by Arthur Bruins after 20 good races plus a run-off for the last spot in the final. The top points scorers after five rides each were Arthur Bruins 14, Graham Long (son of the famous Henry Long) 12, Wayne Coughlan 10 and Vic Ford 9. James Bruins was unlucky not to reach the final after two very good races – when he beat Vic Ford and lost to Wayne Coughlan. Denzil Kent also had bad luck with engine trouble while leading the run-off. Tension was evident when the riders lined up for the final with the tapes being broken on two occasions and at the third attempt Wayne Coughlan looped at the gate and so ruined his chances. Arthur Bruins won in easy style with Graham Long second and Vic Ford third.

In addition to speedway, spectators enjoyed eleven flat track races and the whole meeting was completed in less than three hours, an indication of the slick organisation on the part of co-promoter, ex-rider Boet

Strydom and his able assistants.

DENZIL 'DAZZLES'

Brilliant riding from Denzil Kent (unbeaten with 18 points) and some sound support from Alan Simpson (9) gave the youngsters an impressive win in the Rainbow Best Pairs Championship at the beginning of November. Runners-up were Vic Ford (15) and Vic Page (6), with James Bruins (who scored a well earned 16) and Andy Hodgson (3) taking third position.

Riding with great fire and enthusiasm Wayne Coughlan had a good meeting to take 13 points from five completed rides but partner Greg Wilson could only muster three points. Not surprisingly really, for Wilson also contested five of the afternoon's flat track races. Little wonder that his shoulders were sagging somewhat after ten races which did see him secure the flat track award, however.

Old favourite Arthur Bruins – always good to watch – had a very mixed day with two wins, two falls and two engine failures. His second fall came when out against Kent in what promised to be the best race of the day. Arthur escaped injury in a spectacular fall after the pair had raced neck-and-neck for a couple of laps.

WEMBLEY NO MORE

JOHANNESBURG supporters were hoping to see something of the Overseas touring party to South Africa, due to arrive in December 1978, but sadly, not at the famous Wembley Stadium. Wembley was forced to close down after running into financial difficulties at the end of 1977 and had since been demolished.

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Part 31: 1978/79 – CAPE PROVINCE SPEEDWAY TOUR

If the reception at Johannesburg Airport was great (and it was) then the one the touring overseas riders received at Outshoorn was terrific. The 23,000 inhabitants of the ostrich farming district made them very welcome indeed. The touring party of British and Rhodesian riders were wined and dined by the Mayor at the official reception lunch and were then given tours of the local tourist attractions. At the ostrich ranch the riders had to do a race on the back of the giant birds. As it turned out it was more a case of who could stay on the longest rather than who had the fastest bird. Unlike speedway bikes, they do have breaks and a reverse gear. You pull their heads down and back for reverse. This fooled some of the speedway heroes, doing the wrong movement and Mike Ferreira, Derek Harrison and Pete Smith all flew over the "handlebars" as they selected reverse gear instead of stopping. All received trophies, and unique they were, too, a mounted ostrich egg with each rider's name on and a handpainted ostrich racing a speedwaybike.

FIRST TIME SPEEDWAY AT OUTSHOORN

There had never been speedway in Outshoorn and a good crowd turned up. Anyway, as the promoters here quite often say, when there is speedway, rain isn't far off. After temperatures of over 100 it seemed there was no chance of rain, but on race-day it clouded over and things looked grim.

Racing went ahead and it was the two Rhodesians who made the running. Peter Prinsloo took the flying lap record with a time of 18.1 seconds on the 400 metres circuit and he stormed in to win the Golden Helmet match race award from England's Pete Smith. The Outshoorn Motor Club trophy final was won by Mike Ferreira.

ON TO CAPE TOWN

After Outshoorn the troupe moved on to Cape Town where crowds at the 32,000 capacity Goodwood Stadium had dwindled in the past few months. The promoters arranged a Press day which was well supported and after good local coverage the gate for the first meeting was much improved. It was not so good for the riders, however, on the massive 660 yards track. Scotland's Benny Rourke, after fitting a bigger cam for this huge circuit, smashed his Weslake big-end to pieces and had to undertake an expensive re-built the next day. Peter Prinsloo took only one practise spin after seeing what happened to Rourke, while others struggled to get enough steam from their bikes.

On the night it was Denzil Kent, racing far better than the previous week, who set the pace with a good time

of 21.9 for the flying lap. But Prinsloo did better with 20.6 and in the first race Prinsloo and Derek Harrison had a real battle before Harrison just got home with Kent third. In the next race Rourke took the chequered flag from Ferreira and Steve Wilcock. Pete Smith won a consolation race from Kent and Nig Close. In the international match races Rhodesia came out tops with Ferreira beating Rourke and Prinsloo beating Wilcock.

CAPE DONKEY DERBY

The next meeting at Goodwood was primarily the Cape Donkey Derby organised by the Cape Round Table Club with speedway racing taking two slots in the afternoon's programme. At a cocktail party the previous Wednesday, the riders were invited alongside some of South Africa's top celebrities in rugby, cricket and TV, many of whom were destined to be jockeys on the donkey for the Derby charity event.

On the day it was these stars who took the honours and attracted the most attention as they trotted and bucked their way past the finish line, while the speedway stars were left plodding to the end, knowing they were about 59 horsepower down on what they normally ride! It was all good fun and now that they had ostrich and donkey races, the speedway stars were all wondering when they were going to get an elephants race!

ON TO THE SPEEDWAY RACING

The first speedway event on the programme featured a Best Pairs competition over four heats. In heat 1 Prinsloo gated alongside Harrison with Smith tucked inside, but it was Harrison, getting to grips with the huge track, who pipped Prinsloo on the line, with Smith third. Mike Ferreira led all the way from the tapes in heat 2 with Rourke and Wilcock pressuring him, while Nig Close fell off. Their consistency paid off as Ferreira went too wide on the last lap and they both sneaked through to take a maximum five points. After an initial dice with Rourke, Prinsloo made sure to win heat 3 with Kent in third place after Wilcock had retired with half of his rear tyre and tube scattered around the track. In the fourth heat Ferreira made no mistake as he led home the English pair of Smith and Harrison. The points totals saw first place shared by the pairings of Harrison/Smith and Wilcock/Rourke, each had seven points. Prinsloo/Kent were on six and Ferreira/Close on four.

The second speedway event, after promoters Buddy Fuller and Jack Holloway were both ejected from their donkeys in the interval race, was a short individual programme of two heats and a final. In the first heat Prinsloo just avenged his earlier defeat by Harrison after a wide sweep round the last corner, Smith was third and Kent fourth. In the second heat the other Rhodesian, Ferreira, got to the front followed by Wilcock with Rourke third and Close again last. Prinsloo struggled to win the final ahead of Ferreira and Harrison. He wasn't surprised to discover later that his rear subframe had broken clean in half and, as he said, he thought he was riding a donkey again the way it bucked and changed course in the middle of a corner.

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