CLASSIC CARTOON

Cartoon first published in the 'Daily Star' of 26.11.1956
Reproduced with article in 'Classic Car Africa', August 1996.

The cartoon by famed Durban cartoonist Jock Leyden depicts the National League speedway match between Durban Hornets and Johannesburg team Wembley Lions at Alan Ford Stadium, Hoy Park, Durban on 24 November I956.

Alan Ford Stadium, named for the Natal Regional Manager of the then SAR & H who had been extremely helpful in its construction, opened on 8 December 1951 with a challenge match between Wembley Lions skippered by Buddy Fuller and Boksburg Bees, led by Fred Wills. It was Wills who set the initial track record of 59.6 seconds in a heat of the Natal Scratch race, going on to win the final. (A track record is the race time over four laps).

At the time of the meeting depicted above the track record stood at 55.3 seconds, set by the popular Birmingham Brummies and Durban Hornets captain, Alan Hunt, in the course of winning the Natal Open Championship on 2 January 1956 with an unbeaten 15-point maximum. Hunt who had ridden in two World Individual Speedway Championship finals, had also been a regular England International and frequent England captain since making history in 1950 (while with Cradley Heath) in being the first Second Division rider to be selected for the full England team.

His popularity rested on a number of factors. He had a tigerish, determined style that spelt RACING. He was also a very loyal team man. Soon after his arrival in 1955, Wembley Lions applied to have him transferred to the Golden City after Norwegian star Basse Hveem had insisted on riding for the Hornets, as he had done on a previous visit, instead of the Lions as he had been reallocated to do.

Hunt firmly rejected this, insisting he had come to South Africa for the express purpose of captaining the Hornets at the request of twice-world champion Freddie Williams, their previous skipper who was unable to come out. He endeared himself to Durban Hornets supporters by saying he was more than happy with the Durban club and welcomed Hveem's insistence on riding for the same team. "Hveem's attitude is a tribute to Durban riders, officials and speedway supporters," he told the Natal Mercury in November 1955.

As it happened, both Hunt and Hveem ended up with the Hornets, and Swedish world finalist Rune Sormander. who had ridden for the Hornets initially, joined the Lions. There was the occasion early in 1956 when the Hornets and the Lions met in a league match in Durban, with Hunt watching from the pits because of a heavily bandaged knee that had been severely banged in a fall. When the Lions went ahead, he donned leathers and scored a vital seven points.

In the above-depicted match, Hunt again led from the front, being joint top-scorer with Roy "The White Ghost" Browning for Hornets on 11 points. Vern McWilliams (10 points) and Graham White (7 points) made solid contributions as the Hornets scored five heat maximum wins. Henry Long with 9 points was the best of the Lions. Incidentally, the Duncan depicted was Arthur Duncan.

Hunt lowered his new record to 54,7 seconds on 5 January 1957 in leading the Hornets to a 47-33 win over Vereeniging Aces. Durban Hornets clinched the National League that year, their third such victory in the League's five-year existence.

Hunt was killed at Wembley, Johannesburg, on 1 February 1957, and South African Doug Davies, Hunt's Brummies team-mate, won an emotion-packed Alan Hunt Memorial Trophy meeting in Durban soon afterwards. However, Hunt's time certainly was a very LONG-playing record, standing for I8 years, 11 months three days before it was broken by Great Dane and three-time world champion Ole Olsen on 8 November 1975 during the World Super Six Champion of Champions meeting at 53.0 seconds. The final World Super Six meeting in Durban on 29 November 1975 signalled the end of racing at Hoy Park.

Ken MacLeod. 'Classic Car Africa', August 1996.

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"Hoy Fl," Daily News, 26 November 1956. Reproduced courtesy of Jock Leyden.

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