

Speedway League Racing in South Africa 1947 - 1959

The Transvaal League.

The accompanying table is a summary of collated South African speedway league campaigns over the 12 years of team racing competition in the Union during the heyday of speedway in S.A. following WW2. At that time speedway was thriving and the set-up emulated the UK scene as much as possible as British and Scandinavian riders, as well as New Zealanders migrated to the Southern hemisphere after the closure of their European season. Initially, for the 1947/48 season, the 4 assembled teams raced all matches at the Wembley Stadium in Johannesburg and although bases were found for the following year these were short lived and it was back to Wembley for 1949/50. Another local venture was found to the East of the city at Boksburg and it and Wembley served as base for all 4 teams for the next few years.

The National League, - “South African National Speedway League”.

When Durban's Hoy Park in Natal opened in 1952, and being outwith Transvaal's boundaries, the speedway league became the S.African Speedway *National* League, though still numbering just 4 teams but now with 3 tracks. The Germiston Stars continued as nomads, using mainly Boksburg as a shared home base, (though, as in many previous and subsequent years, the riding of 'home' meetings at other stadia would continue not to be an exceptional occurrence for any team.) In the following '53/'54 season, with the opening of Olympia Park in Springs the Germiston Stars team became the Springs Stars and the league expanded to 5 members with the addition of Randfontein Aces and its own home base, that complement continuing for the season starts at least, in each of the following seasons to the end of the decade and the end of league racing..

The Wembley, Durban and Springs tracks would continue as the mainstay sites of league racing but though Pretoria re-opened at its own base in '54/'55 the Randfontein track was declared not raceable the following season and the 4 away matches the Aces had ridden were expunged from the league records of 1955/56. In 1956/57 there were 2 rival organisations, the SRA and the SA.SCB, and ostensibly 2 league campaigns, the consequences of which would prove disastrous for speedway both in the Union and, to a lesser extent but nonetheless disruptive, in the UK, (- the details of which could not be given justice here.) The Pretoria and Randfontein tracks were operated by visiting tourists under Trevor Redmond and the SCB banner, tracking 3 teams, whilst Buddy Fuller and the Riders Association tracked 5 teams at the 3 mainstay sites plus Klerksdorp and its Hawks at a new fourth base. Without any established domestic riders the SCB league struggled to field teams without widespread guesting, such that the competition turned into little more than a series of challenge matches and the league was abandoned uncompleted. All parties suffered financial failures.

With Buddy Fuller's SRA tracks banned by the SA Control Board he resigned as the riders' chairman in August '57 and the two organisations seemed reconciled with the formation of the National Speedway Union for the forthcoming campaign. Many riders switched to the London-ACU sanctioned official national body and the '57/58 league was to comprise Durban Hornets, Springs Stars, Pretoria Eagles and Randfontein Rockets. It was January '58 before the Wembley Lions started their season as the last SRA stragglers came across, but having undertaken only 2 matches their results were expunged from the records and Pretoria took what was to be the last championship title for the second time in the life of the SA League. Their previous win had been in '55/'56 under the captaincy of Doug Serrurier while Durban Hornets had secured the title on 3 occasions in the course of just 5 years. Though Wembley was considered the Mecca of South African speedway, only once, in the initial season of the Transvaal league, is its team, riding as the Johannesburg Pirates, known to have taken a league championship title. Despite winning the league the Pretoria promoters reckoned to have been close to bankruptcy: neither Fuller nor Redmond could afford to subsidise solo racing, the latter declaring he wouldn't be returning to the Union for '58/'59. A plan was therefore formulated to reduce costs by running 4-man teams without visiting foreigners, in shorter 8-heat double-header matches, - team A v. team B, followed by team C v. team D - , but when, after initial challenge matches further losses were incurred, Springs closed and the Durban organisation also changed, the project was doomed to failure. The Pretoria meeting of Jan.30th 1959, - a handicap team challenge match - , was to be the last stand-alone solo speedway meeting in the capital, and with Buddy Fuller running 'Cavalcade of Speed' meetings at Wembley, riders drifted back to their speedway figurehead as the NSU fell apart and league racing in South Africa had finished.

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SOUTH AFRICAN SPEEDWAY LEAGUE RACING – 1947–'59

SEASON	TEAMS	RESULT	TRACKS	Skipper	Notes
“Transvaal League”					
1947/48	Jo'burg Tigers Pretoria Buffaloes East Rand Eagles West Rand Lions	1 st 2 nd 4 th 3 rd	Wembley } all matches @ Wembley	Buddy Fuller Alan Serrurier Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Jo'burg/Wembley's only League Championship win. ◆ Composite 4TT format; 10 hts incl'g clutch & rolling starts.
1948/49	Jo'burg Pirates Pretoria Tigers Germiston Eagles Benoni Lions	2 nd 4 th 1 st 3 rd	Wembley Pretoria Malvern (> Wembley) Dunswart	Buddy Fuller Bob Quick Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts. ↪ Malvern closed mid-season.
1949/50	Jo'burg Pirates Pretoria Tigers East Rand Eagles West Rand Dakotas	2 nd 4 th 3 rd 1 st	Wembley } all matches @ Wembley	(Henry Long) Alan Chambers Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ HL replaced BF, injured in UK. ◆ Handicap Racing ! (-the only year.) ◆ 8-man teams,(6+2res.);14 hts, (red'd to 13 hts after 2 mtgs.)
1950/51	Jo'burg Pirates Pretoria Tigers Germiston Eagles Boksburg Lions	2 nd 3 rd 1 st 4 th	Wembley @ Wembley @ Boksburg Boksburg	Buddy Fuller Toby Boshoff Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts.
1951/52	Wembley Lions Pretoria Tigers Gemiston Stars Boksburg Bees	2 nd 3 rd 4 th 1 st	Wembley @ Wembley @ Boksburg Boksburg	Buddy Fuller Bob Raw/ H.Long Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts. HL capt. on return from UK
“National League.”					
1952/53	Wembley Lions Durban Hornets Boksburg Bees Germiston Stars	4 th 1 st 2 nd 3 rd	Wembley Durban Boksburg (nomads)	Buddy Fuller Bill Dalton/B.Hveem Fred Wills Doug Serrurier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts.
1953/54	Wembley Lions Durban Hornets Springs Stars Pretoria Eagles Rand'fntn Aces	3 rd 5 th 1 st 4 th 2 nd	Wembley Durban Springs (nomads) Randfontein	Henry Long B.Dalton > B.Crutcher Trevor Redmond Freddie Williams Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts. ↪ Spring Stars = former Germiston team.
1954/55	Wembley Lions Durban Hornets Springs Stars Pretoria Eagles Randfontein Aces	4 th 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 5 th	Wembley Durban Springs (Rndfntn) Pretoria Randfontein	Henry Long Freddie Williams Trevor Redmond Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts. ↪ Winners after H&A Run-Off. ↪ (Tied on pts with Durban.) ↪ Pretoria track opened end of 1954: - early matches at Randfontein.
1955/56	Wembley Lions Durban Hornets Springs Stars Pretoria Eagles Randfontein Aces	2 nd 3 rd 4 th 1 st exp'd	Wembley Durban Springs Pretoria (Randfntn track not ready.)	Henry Long Alan Hunt Trevor Redmond Doug Serrurier Fred Wills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts. ↪ Rode only 4 away matches, Results expunged.
1956/57	Wembley Lions Durban Hornets Springs Stars Klerksdorp Hawks Vereeniging Aces	2 nd 1 st 3 rd 5 th 4 th	Wembley Durban Springs Klerksdorp @ Springs	Henry Long Alan Hunt Doug Davies Ron Mountford Eric Boothroyd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 8-man teams, 14 hts.
'56/'57	SCB Lge. (+T.Redmond)	p6, 8pts p8, 9pts p2, 5pts	Pretoria } Randfontein	Olle Nygren Peter Craven Trevor Redmond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 7-man teams, 16 hts. ◆ Last pos'n, Lge not completed. Pretoria awarded title. ◆ Little more than challenge matches, - guesting and swapping of riders.
Formation of NSU (National Speedway Union)					
1957/58	NSU Wembley/Joburg Lions Durban Hornets East Rand Stars Pretoria Eagles West Rand Rockets	exp'd 2 nd 3 rd 1 st 4 th	Wembley Durban Springs Pretoria Randfontein	Doug Davies Henry Long Roy Bester Trevor Redmond Ove Fundin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↪ W.Lions joined late, then only completed 2 matches, - expunged. ◆ 7-man teams, 17 hts. ◆ SRA, as Springs Stars, ran once at Bulawayo then only composite mtgs at Wembley, Springs, and other auto stadia.
1958/59	NSU Lge. plans aband'd.	Abandoned	Wembley Durban Springs Pretoria	- *Roy Browning *Roy Bester *Henry Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Plan for 4 teams, and D'ble-header mtgs, 4-man teams over 8 hts. ◆ After initial Challenge matches Springs closed, plan abandoned. ◆ By Jan.'59 NSU had collapsed, all riders were back at Wembley with Buddy Fuller in composite 'Cavalcade'-type mtgs.

(* skipped initial Challenge Matches)