

Speedway-SA.com Speedway in Egypt

1.0 Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt

1.1 - Extract from 'THE AUTO' Motor Journal 1928, (Anon reporter.)

“I had an interesting chat last week with Mr Hewitt about the plans for the coming Egyptian campaign. About twenty riders have gone, including Ivor Creek, Billy Galloway, Les Blakebrough, Jack Adams, Les Barker, Ted Bradley, Colin Ford, Heather Hayes, Tommy Croombs, Alan Kilfoyle, Dud Froy, Clem Cort, Wink Rice, Bern Hieatt, Dell Forster and Taffy Williams. Ivor Creek and Billy Galloway, who arrived in Egypt on October 16th, are superintending the laying of the track, which is adjacent to the Heliopolis Racecourse at Cairo and will be laid inside the existing greyhound course.

The size is on a par with Harringay and holds about the same number of people. Racing will be held on three evenings a week including Sunday. Mr Hewitt, who is in charge of the riders, is very enthusiastic about the whole venture and has promised the AUTO news items from time to time. What a sight to see a crowd of natives going mad at one of the meetings, yelling themselves hoarse with their “Yallah” “Imshee” and other words in the native tongue urging on the riders; and shall we hear of the tombs opening in the Valley of the Kings when the speed boys start doing the knots with open exhausts? Amidst the rain of paper streamers and the cheers of the multitude I saw the departure of the boys and there were friends, brothers, sisters, wives, uncles and aunts all present and correct wishing the travellers „Bon Voyage“ and good luck. They sailed on the „California“ and while you are reading these lines they will be sunbathing in the land of the Pharaohs. Consternation was on Ron Hewitt’s face at the non-appearance of Colin Ford but I hear that he followed the day after. Heather Hayes was „sweating on the top line“ as his passport had not arrived. Teddy Bradley, a comparatively newcomer to speedway racing was there complete with CAP. Some cap! If it hasn’t been thrown overboard before they leave the St. George’s Channel, I’m a Dutchman! “

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1.2 - “BUILDING A DIRT TRACK BY THE NILE”

By Les Blakebrough. From 'THE AUTO' Motor Journal, January 1929

“The lot of the pioneer in any sort of adventure is truly a hard one. In company with a band of 18 other dirt-track race riders, I have been lured to Egypt on an educational mission. That is to say, the primary object of our party’s trip to the land of the Pharaohs is to initiate the natives in the art of skilful „broad-siding“ while going at full speed on a motor-cycle race track. Incidentally it answers the question “Where do dirt-track riders go in winter-time?”

Dirt-tracking on the banks of mysterious Nile may sound somewhat alluring at this time of the year to fog and snow-bound people of England. But as far as we are concerned it presents considerable difficulties. In the first place, the site chosen for the first dirt-tack ever to be laid in this country is hardly suitable for the purpose. It is situated in Zamalek, Cairo, hard by the swift-flowing waters of the Nile.

The soil in these parts is largely made up of Nile silt. To surmount the initial difficulty, a foundation of white stone, eight inches in depth was laid. After three race meetings on the track, the surface was practically unrideable, owing to the foundations sinking in places. The powers that be then decided that another layer of stone was necessary, and after the entire top surface

had been removed, another nine inches of stone was laid and rolled. Even the steam rollers which were employed in levelling the surface sank at times in places. In fact, one steam roller sank three times in one day and was only removed eventually with great difficulty.

It would be interesting to know what English track builders would say if they were called on to re-lay a track completely within six weeks of starting a contract! The Zamalek track was begun on October 1st of last year (1928), and had to be re-laid by the beginning of November! Bumps and holes may provide added thrills for the secure spectators, but from our point of view, they are, to say the least, unpleasant.

Then there is the problem of the most suitable time of day to hold the meetings. Egyptians at this period of the year are somewhat loath to stand out in the cold at night and the late diners would be unable to attend evening meetings. Therefore, only one evening meeting a week is held on Friday. Afternoon meetings are arranged for Saturday and Sunday.

The Egyptians so far have been rather mystified by such „stunts“ as broad-siding and rolling starts, and have not yet learned fully to appreciate the sport as it is known in England. Crowds have been on the small side up to the present, but it is confidently expected that they will improve. Their greatest source of amusement seems to be a crash or a fall. Perhaps the advent of a few native star riders will add to their natural excitability. At all events, we are endeavouring to arrange races solely for native riders.

The Egyptian track stewards and starters have been quick to learn their business. At first they were decidedly timid of the racing machines but they are now quite accustomed to their duties and the language used on the track and in the paddocks by the riders

Unfortunately, betting has been introduced into the sport in Egypt. As is generally known, this aspect of dirt-track racing has always been forbidden in England. In this country, however, the Pari-Mutuel, installed in connection with greyhound racing, is also in operation for some of the dirt-track events. Complications in this connection having arisen over heats, it has been decided to hold nine or ten events in each programme in future without heats.

The venture, apart from providing the riders with useful employment during their English „close“ season, has its amusing and instructive aspects, while it will be interesting to see to what extent their pioneer work will be successful.”

Les Blakebrough, 1929.