

Speedway League Racing in South Africa, 1947-'59 1977- 2004

This paper, its tables and appendices, summarizes speedway league team racing in South Africa. The accompanying tables are a collation of the various league campaigns, - over the 12 years of team racing competition in the Union during the heyday of speedway in SA following WW2, and in each decade that followed the hiatus of the 1960s.

In the post-WWII years speedway was thriving, and the set-up in South Africa 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. From the late '70s on, the sport internationally was becoming more and more dependent upon sponsorship, and promoters in S.Africa likewise were finding it necessary to follow a similar route, such that sponsored rider-squads, leagues and teams prevailed. Both the '77/78 and 2001/02 SA speedway leagues took commercial names, the later being one of the few attempts to succeed.

THE TRANSVAAL LEAGUE.

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 bases for all 4 teams for the next few years.

Club names changed over the 5 seasons of the Transvaal League: Johannesburg (as it was to be known for its first 4 years,) took the nick-names Tigers, then Pirates before stabilizing on the icon 'Wembley Lions'. The West Rand/Benoni/Boksburg team worked its way through Lions and Dakotas until becoming the 'Bees' for their final couple of years. **Table 1** details venues, match results and league tables for the 5 years of the league.

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. **Table 2** details venues, club and league tables for the 7 years of the National League.

Various SA LEAGUES of 1977 to 2004.

In the decades that followed the first league speedway era in South Africa other small scale leagues were initiated, though not all ran to conclusion. A short lived league project sponsored by a paint company was started in the early first half of the 1977/78 season, but after just 2 meetings Wembley Stadium closed for redevelopment and no more matches staged. In the early '80s Buddy Fuller proposed a SCB-managed league featuring star riders from USA but although the Yanks where present the proposal was not taken up.

A recently revealed tee-shirt (photo Rt.) has identified a 4TT league competition set up in 1996. Each team was to comprise 2 domestic and 2 visiting European riders, but with no detail of fixtures, match results or of final league positions known it is unclear whether the league got off the ground. The 4 teams were to be - 'LK Tuning' (Brakpan, Gauteng), 'Nelspruit Aces' (Mpumalanga), 'HBC Klerksdorp', (of the Hisbay Co, in North-West Province,) and 'Red Eagles' (of Ndube, - Dundee Dirt Oval, Natal). Named rider allocations are given in the accompanying tables.



There were however successful 4TT leagues in '97/98, '98/99 and 2001/02, the latter not venue- but sponsor-named: only its results are known. Three teams riding at just 2 tracks, Rustenburg and Brakpan, completed an NSA league programme in 2003, though the Play-off 'South African League Final' was victim of the weather. **Table 3** details all known data for five different leagues that operated or were proposed during the course of 4 decades.

LEAGUE STATISTICS, '40s & '50s.

Tables 4-7 of this paper comprehensively list both individual rider statistics and league formats for the Transvaal Lge and the first National Lge of the '50s, plus concluding results, - matches and tables. On more than one occasion league programmes were not concluded, on others a match result remains unknown despite extensive trawling of data recently revealed, (2014) from the Henry Long Collection. What is presented here is considered to be the most complete set of data yet collated, incorporating results and scores both from the newly revealed information and from listings derived from SA sports journalist Ken McLeod. Although minor variations in rider totals may be seen elsewhere, the ranking shown here are given to illustrate relative status rather than absolute value, and to identify riders seasons of activity, e.g. their first year as a racer, their last before retirement from the sport. A number of likely reasons for any difference are listed within the National League riders' scores table.

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APPENDIX I.

The following article relates to the failed 1982 league proposal, and was first published in 'Speedway Scene' , Ed'n No.7, Dec.1981, Jo'burg.

“SPEEDWAY GROWS”

“Two of the most important steps in South African speedway were taken at a meeting in Johannesburg on November 30 with the formation of the 'South African Speedway Control Board' and the revival of the National League. The request for the formation of the Control Board came from Dunswart promoter Buddy Fuller who felt that the sport had reached the stage when it was necessary for the promoters and organisers to liaise on dates and meetings. He pointed out that he had not known about the projected opening meeting at Tarlton on November 21st, - which was washed out by rain - , until he had read about it in the daily press.

The Control Board will be responsible for drawing up a calendar for meetings and for allocating riders to teams for the National League, which will get under way in 1982. It will comprise Buddy Fuller (Dunswart), Nico van der Berg (Pretoria) and Nick van Rensburg (Tarlton) as well as the South African Speedway Association executive. Chairman will be John Louw and Riders Representative will be Arthur Bruins.

Their first decision was the revival of the National League which had flourished in the country in the 1950's. The teams will comprise East Rand Stars (formerly Dunswart Devils), Durban Hornets, Pretoria Eagles and Tarlton Tomahawks. A fifth team Daleside Giants, will contest challenge matches against these teams.

Although there was still no track in Durban, Mr Fuller said that negotiations were still under way and looked very promising, and in view of this he felt that a Durban side should be included in the National League. It will be the second side from the golden past to be revived and both it and Pretoria Eagles were winners of the old National League.

Mr Fuller also announced that four American riders would be competing in South Africa early next year and they would be allocated to the four teams. Their places would be taken by local riders once they had returned home. The teams are as follows, in their riding order:-

Durban Hornets:

1 U.S.A. rider to be nominated.
2 Ernest Blignaut, 3 Noddy Naude
4 James Olivier, 5 A.N. Other,
6 Gary Marsh, 7 Peter Niemandt.

Pretoria Eagles:

1 U.S.A. rider to be nominated,
2 Marcus v.d. Berg, 3 Wayne Coughlan,
4 James Bruins, 5 Arthur Bruins,
6 James Gilson, 7 Kevin Tebbutt.

East Rand Stars:

1 U.S.A. rider to be nominated,
2 Ge Kemp, 3 Denzil Kent,
4 Angie Rippamonte, 5 Rob Lassen,
6 Ashley Meade, 7 Brian Davey.

Tarlton Tomahawks:

1 U.S.A. rider to be nominated,
2 Mike Cothill, 3 Gary Prommel,
4 Martin Cox, 5 Alan Simpson,
6 Mike Marsh, 7 Ronnie Louw.

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APPENDIX II.

SOUTH AFRICAN SPEEDWAY LEAGUE, NSA, 2003

Intro.

Under the guidance of the National Speedway Association, the South African League was to be revived, with an opening match between the Brakpan Rebels and the Walkerville Wizards.

At least four teams were to be formed, each with 5 riders, and league matches run on a 10-heat formula, rider pooling, with guests used to overcome staffing number issues. An interesting feature was the fact that team scores not only included the points actually scored by the riders, but also the riders' bonus points! This may have been an unusual step, but would do much to encourage team riding. (The Brakpan versus Walkerville match was actually decided by the bonus points, otherwise the result would have been a 30-all draw.)

The league was run on a points home-and-away type system, with the eventual winner receiving a major trophy at the year end. The winning team and the riders that helped that team win were to be worked out on the average points a rider had scored for the team that he'd represented at the time.

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Match Reports:-

South African League, Round 1. Saturday, March 29, 2003.

BRAKPAN REBELS 32, WALKERVILLE WIZARDS 33

The opening league match at Brakpan was a great success, except for the absence of Bobby Devine and Alex Lakatos, who experienced motor vehicle problems on their way to the track. This meant that the home team was two riders short, and it was agreed that Byron Bekker, who was originally drafted into the Wizards team had to be moved to the Rebels in order to give them a chance to compete.

With only seven riders around, Martin Bekker was nominated as the team rider of the night, and ended the day suffering from fatigue, since he had to ride no less than eight times in the 10 heat match!

Nevertheless, the rider allocation system worked well. There were always four riders on the line and the crowd loved the battle between the Rebels and the Wizards. The meeting produced some great racing and the team character certainly appealed to the riders and the crowd. Eugene Smith top scored with 16 points for the winning team, while Byron Bekker and Ian Hutchinson each scored 14 plus 1 bonus for the Brakpan Rebels.

In the 'Future Stars' event newcomer Shaun Fish, a 17-year old from Boksburg, recorded a 12 point maximum from his four rides to win. Terrance Capitao was second, and the only female rider in South African speedway, Yolandi Deysel, scored three points from four races on her public debut.

Heat Details:

Ht.1: 1:12.25 Smith 3, B.Bekker 2, M.Bekker 1, K.McGuire 0. 2-4 (2-4)
Ht.2: 1:13.24 Smith 3, Hutchinson 2, Thompson 1, Crock 0. 2-4 (4-8)
Ht.3: 1:16.40 B.Bekker 3, Thompson 2, M.Bekker 1+1, McGuire 0. 3-4 (7-12)
Ht.4: 1:13.14 Hutchinson 3, B.Bekker 2+1, Smith 1, M.Bekker 0+1. 6-2 (13-14)
Ht.5: 1:16.53 B.Bekker 3, Thompson 2, M.Bekker 1+1, Crock 0. 3-4 (16-18)
Ht.6: 1:16.14 Smith 3, Hutchinson 2, Thompson 1, Crock 0. 2-4 (18-22)
Ht.7: 1:14.68 Smith 3, B.Bekker 2, M.Bekker 1, McGuire 0. 2-4 (20-26)
Ht.8: 1:20.61 Hutchinson 3, M.Bekker 2, Crock 1, Thompson 0. 4-2 (24-28)
Ht.9: 1:17.00 Hutchinson 3, M.Bekker 2, Crock 1, Thompson 0. 4-2 (28-30)
Ht.10: 1:14.19 Smith 3, B.Bekker 2, Hutchinson 1+1, M.Bekker 0. 4-3 (32-33)

BRAKPAN 32 (30+2): Byron Bekker 14+1 (from 6 rides), Ian Hutchinson 14+1 (6), Rhett Crock 2 (5), Kagan McGuire 0 (3).
WALKERVILLE 33 (30+3): Eugene Smith 16 (6), Martin Bekker 8+3 (8), Neil Thompson 6 (6).

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South African League Round 2. Saturday, May 31, 2003.

RUSTENBURG RED DEVILS 31, WALKERVILLE WIZARDS 32

The Rustenburg Red Devils gave their debut in the South African League at home versus top of the table Walkerville Wizards. The ten heat league match was completed before the stockcar programme, and what a proud display the bike section performed for the good sized crowd. Both teams were led on the track for the pre-meeting parade by beautiful girl mascots, Lauren Bekker for the Wizards and Cherie Crock for the Devils.

Devils were a rider short for this match, and had to use the Rider Replacement facility, since Warren Meier had to withdraw in preparation for his world championship debut in Belgium the following week.

The Rustenburg track was once again in a superb condition and the racing was great right up until the final heat - well, almost!

Things got off to a shaky start, with a couple of non-finishers in the first heat. Lakatos won from Martin Bekker, but Thompson fell and broke a clutch lever, and Pretorius also fell and was lapped by the other two.

With bonus points in South African League racing counting for the team scores, second and third positions by Ian Hutchinson and Rhett Crock gave the Devils a 4-3 heat advantage over the race winner Byron Bekker in heat 2.

Wizards hit back with a 4-2 as Smith won from Lakatos and Thompson held off the challenge of Pretorius. A 6-1 by Eugene Smith and reserve Deon Swart in heat 4 put Walkerville firmly in the lead before heat 5, which turned out to be the race of the day.

Devils' captain Alex Lakatos took the lead from Swart and Martin Bekker. On the back straight Lakatos had some problems and Bekker took advantage, followed by his team mate Swart. Lakatos tried everything he knew to split the team riding Wizards' pair, and on the line it was Swart who took the lead, with a dead heat finish for second place between Lakatos and Bekker. According to the SA rules, both riders were awarded 2 points, but no bonus point was given to Bekker, thus the result of heat five was a 5-2 win for the Wizards.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Devils came back into the game with a maximum 6-0 win in the next heat by Hutchinson and Pretorius. Initially Byron Bekker had led this race from his team mate Neil Thompson, who crashed out, allowing Hutchinson into second place, before Bekker blew his engine.

Byron was back on the track again in the following heat, riding the Walkerville club's spare, which is an old Grant Baynes Jawa, that now belongs to their team manager Hansie Kleynhans.



It was good enough for him and partner Jonathan van Wyk, who had to overcome an injury from falling in heat 2, to hold off Rhett Crock and secure the team a much needed bonus point, while Lakatos took the win.

Smith was well in the lead for the Wizards in heat 8, when suffering engine failure and handing the win to Hutchison, with Martin Bekker doing a great job in splitting the Red Devils not allowing them the bonus point.

Martin Bekker then won the penultimate heat, with the Devils finishing 2nd and 3rd to take a vital bonus point and tie the overall scores at 29-all, with one heat to go.

Smith gets the gate from Lakatos and Hutchison. Lakatos team rides and holds off Byron Bekker who finds an inside line on turn 4 but Lakatos sees Bekker making a move and cuts right across the race line of Bekker causing one of the most dangerous accidents seen in S. A. for a long time. The race is stopped and Lakatos receives the black flag for instant disqualification. The re-run with only two riders sees Smith take the win for the Wizards.

Heat Details:

- Ht.1: 1:25.95 Lakatos, 3, M.Bekker 2. (Pretorius R, Thompson R) 3-2 (3-2)
- Ht.2: 1:22.81 B.Bekker 3, Hutchinson 2, Crock 1+1. (Van Wyk F) 4-3 (7-5)
- Ht.3: 1:19.83 Smith 3, Lakatos 2, Thompson 1, Pretorius 0. 2-4 (9-9)
- Ht.4: 1:19.54 Smith 3, Swart 2+1, Hutchinson 1, Crock 0. 1-6 (10-15)
- Ht.5: 1:23.65 Swart 3, Lakatos 2 & M.Bekker 2 *dead heat*, Crock 0. 2-5 (12-20)
- Ht.6: 1:20.25 Hutchinson 3, Pretorius 2+1. (B.Bekker R, Thompson F) 6-0 (18-20)
- Ht.7: 1:22.72 Lakatos 3, van Wyk 2, B.Bekker 1+1, Crock 0. 3-4 (21-24)
- Ht.8: 1:24.85 Hutchinson 3, M.Bekker 2, Pretorius 1. (Smith R) 4-2 (25-26)
- Ht.9: 1:24.36 M.Bekker 3, Pretorius 2, Crock 1+1, Thompson 0. 4-3 (29-29)
- Ht.10: 1:27.82 Smith 3, Hutchinson 2. (B.Bekker F/N, Lakatos X) 2-3 (31-32)

RUSTENBURG 31 (28+3): Ian Hutchinson 11 (5), Alex Lakatos 10 (5), Wiekus Pretorius 5+1 (5), Rhett Crock 2+2 (5), Warren Meier R/R.

WALKERVILLE 32 (30+2): Eugene Smith 9 (4), Martin Bekker 9 (4), Deon Swart 5+1 (2), Byron Bekker 4+1 (4), Jonno van Wyk 2 (2), Neil Thompson 1 (4).

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SOUTH AFRICAN LEAGUE Round 3. Saturday, July 12, 2003.

BRAKPAN REBELS 20, RUSTENBURG RED DEVILS 21

The Brakpan Rebels are still win-less in the South African League. They lost their second match of the season, again at home and again by just one point.

Deciding factor was an engine failure suffered by Rebels' captain Ian Hutchinson in heat 4, which produced the only maximum heat advantage of the match, a 6-1 for the Red Devils (Note: under SA League rules bonus points count towards a team's total points!).

Brakpan had an encouraging start to the match, as Martin Bekker beat Rustenburg captain Warren Meier in heat 1 and Ian Hutchinson / Rhett Crock took first and third places in heat 2. Meier was the first Red Devil to win a race (heat 3), before Neil Thompson and Jonno van Wyk took first and second ahead of Brakpan rookie Shaun Fish in that crucial heat 4, when Hutchinson failed to finish. This gave the visiting team the lead by 15 points to 12, with two races left.

Crock and Fish combined for second and third places behind heat 5 winner Van Wyk, which gave Brakpan a 4-3 advantage and reduced the deficit to just two points before the last heat decider. But another 4-3 heat win in that last race was not enough to avoid overall defeat. The Devils' number one Warren Meier took command and kept Bekker and Hutchinson behind, with Neil Thompson in last place.

Heat Details:

- Ht.1: M.Bekker 3, Meier 2, van Wyk 1+1, Fish 0. 3-4 (3-4)
- Ht.2: Hutchinson 3, Thompson 2, Crock 1, McGuire 0. 4-2 (7-6)
- Ht.3: Meier 3, M.Bekker 2, Crock 1+1. (McGuire R) 4-3 (11-9)
- Ht.4: Thompson 3, van Wyk 2+1, Fish 1. (Hutchinson R) 1-6 (12-15)
- Ht.5: Van Wyk 3, Crock 2, Fish 1+1, McGuire 0. 4-3 (16-18)
- Ht.6: Meier 3, M.Bekker 2, Hutchinson 1+1, Thompson 0. 4-3 (20-21)

BRAKPAN 20 (17+3): Martin Bekker 7 (3), Ian Hutchinson 4+1 (3), Rhett Crock 4+1 (3), Shaun Fish 2+1 (3).

RUSTENBURG 21 (19+2): Warren Meier 8 (3), Jonno van Wyk 6+2 (3), Neil Thompson 5 (3), Kagan McGuire 0 (3)

2003 SOUTH AFRICAN LEAGUE TABLE

<i>Pos.</i>	<i>Team M</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>For - Ag.</i>	<i>Pts</i>
1st	WALKERVILLE	2	2	0	65 - 63	4
2nd	RUSTENBURG	2	1	0	52 - 52	2
3rd	BRAKPAN	2	0	0	52 - 54	0

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2003 SOUTH AFRICAN LEAGUE RIDERS' AVERGAGES

		M	R	P	B	TP	CMA
WALKERVILLE WIZARDS							
1	Deon Swart	1	2	5	1	6	12.00
2	Eugene Smith	2	10	25	0	25	10.00
3	Martin Bekker	2	12	17	3	20	6.67 (7.20 incl. Guest rides)
4	Byron Bekker	1	4	4	1	5	5.00 (8.00 incl. Guest rides)
5	Neil Thompson	2	10	7	0	7	2.80
RUSTENBURG RED DEVILS							
1	Warren Meier	1	3	8	0	8	10.67
2	Alex Lakatos	1	5	10	0	10	8.00
3	Jonathan van Wyk	2	5	8	2	10	8.00
4	Wiekus Pretorius	1	5	5	1	6	4.80
<i>also rode (guest riders):</i>							
5	Ian Hutchinson (Brakpan)	1	5	11	0	11	(8.80)
6	Rhett Crock (Brakpan)	1	5	2	2	4	(3.20)
7	Kagan McGuire (Brakpan)	1	3	0	0	0	(0.00)
BRAKPAN REBELS							
1	Ian Hutchinson	2	9	18	2	20	8.88 (8.86 incl. Guest rides)
2	Shaun Fish	1	3	2	1	3	4.00
3	Rhett Crock	2	8	6	1	7	3.50 (3.38 incl. Guest rides)
4	Kagan McGuire	1	3	0	0	0	0.00 (0.00 incl. Guest rides)
<i>also rode (guest riders):</i>							
5	Byron Bekker (Walkerville)	1	6	14	1	15	(10.00)
6	Martin Bekker (Walkerville)	1	3	7	0	7	(9.33)

An early start of the rainy season in November had forced the cancellation of several scheduled race events. While there was no need to re-stage the annual Best Pairs event, every effort was made to re-run the proposed play-off final of the South African League. Top of the table Walkerville was due to host Rustenburg in a one-off final for the "SA Club Champion's Trophy" donated by Hansie Kleynhans.

After being rained-off twice, the N.S.A. was prepared to give it one more try. The plan was to stage the League Cup final between Walkerville and Rustenburg, being held over from the 2003 season, as a curtain raiser for the 2004 season on January 31. But when the meeting again got cancelled in January, this competition was never completed.

Christian Weber. September 26, 2013

Walkerville Wizards

-- 2003 --

Rustenburg Red Devils



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