

THE HENRY LONG COLLECTION

Part 2 – 1948/'49 Season

For the first time a touring team arrived on South Africa's shores to contest a Test match series and it was England, who had taken part in the very first international at Ellis Park back in 1930. Whilst the English riders were warmly welcomed it was not a tour without its problems. The biggest was the row it engendered between the local promoters and the English Speedway Riders' Association. Whilst the latter was not against its members coming to South Africa and riding as individuals, it was made clear that they were not to compete as an international team. The South African promoters, however, were realistic enough to know that an English team racing against the Springboks would be a major draw card to local fans and keep the turnstiles merrily clicking over. Their viewpoint won in the end with the tourists ignoring their own Association and riding together as a team. England comfortably won the series 4-1.

The Transvaal League entered its second season with a different format from the previous year. Out went the 10 heat four team tournament matches and a team v team competition was introduced. Instead of all matches being staged at Wembley, the West Rand Lions moved to Dunswart Greyhound Stadium and took on the name Benoni. East Rand Eagles initially operated out of the S.A. Stadium, Malvern but moved back to Wembley before the season finished. The Johannesburg and Pretoria teams continued at Wembley but changed nicknames from Tigers to Pirates and Buffaloes to Tigers respectively. The Pirates of Johannesburg were expected to retain their title but ultimately it was Germiston Eagles who triumphed.

On the individual championship front it was the end of an era as Buddy Fuller who had held the title of South African Champion since 1939 finally relinquished it. In a close contest it was Fred Wills, Buddy's brother-in-law, who won with a score of 14 points. Buddy won his first three races but was then forced to retire from the meeting after falling in his fourth ride. Other individual championships were dominated by touring riders with Alan Chambers winning both the Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal titles and Wilf Plant the Wembley Open.

1948/'49 season's Roll of Honour

Test series:	– S.Africa 1, England 4
SA National Championship:	– Fred Wills @ Wembley
Transvaal Championship:	– Alan Chambers @ Dunswart
Eastern Transvaal Championship:	– Alan Chambers @ Dunswart
Wembley Open Championship:	– Wilf Plant
Transvaal League Champions:	– Germiston Eagles

SOUTH AFRICA'S LUCKY VICTORY

South Africa, thanks to a big slice of luck in the final heat, won the second "unofficial" test match against the English touring side at Dunswart by 42 points to 41.

A record crowd of 8,000 saw a thrilling and exciting match, in which there was never more than four points separating the two sides.

With one heat to go, the tourists looked set for their second victory, leading 41 points to 37, but this final heat proved a disaster to the visitors.

Bob Quick and Doug Serrurier broke in front of Jimmy Dunn (riding in place of Ted Gibson) and Ken Tidbury. Needing only a third place to win the match the two tourists did not offer much opposition.

Dunn was the first to be in trouble losing his chain and causing his retirement. Shortly afterwards Ken Tidbury crashed on the third lap in trying to snatch second place. He was unable to remount and South Africa gained a 5-0 victory and the spoils.

NEW TRACK RECORD

The best race of the night was the meeting between young Ken Middleditch (Hastings) and Buddy Fuller. For the four laps these two had the crowd on their feet

and Middleditch crossed the line inches in front of the South African star to set up an all time four-lap record of 71.6.

Previously, Buddy Fuller had equalled the record of 72.3 and Alan Chambers (Poole) had lowered this to 71.9 in the third heat.

The match was run in a heatwave and Gibson and Tidbury appeared to be badly affected by the intense heat.

Alan Chambers was in brilliant form for the Tourists and returned a maximum. Considering the heat this was no mean achievement.

Wilf Plant was consistent and was next best with 9. Ken Middleditch was again well up in the score chart with 8, followed by Pete Robinson 7, Jeff Bishop 3, Ken Tidbury 2, and Gibson and Dunn failing to register.

For South Africa, Buddy Fuller and Henry Long both rode extremely well to register 10 points. Fred Wills 6, Doug Serrurier 6, Bob Quick 3, Wessman 2, Tony Boshoff 3, Joe Blankfield 1, completed the scoring.

Alan Chambers wins Transvaal title

Alan Chambers, the Poole rider, scored a personal success at Dunswart on Saturday when he won the Transvaal Three-Lap Championship, cables Buddy Fuller.

Twenty seeded riders took part in the event and after the preliminary round Alan Chambers, Peter Robinson, Ken Middleditch, Tony Boshoff, Frank Hodgson, Fred Wills, Henry Long and Ted Gibson entered the semi-finals.

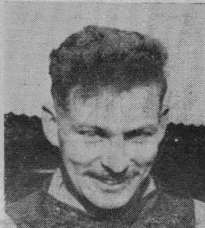
Chambers defeated Robinson in his semi-final and Wills rode brilliantly to take the other from Long and Hodgson.

In the final, Chambers and Wills had a terrific duel before the English rider crossed the line with a length to spare.

NEW RECORD

Wilf Plant, one of the favourites for the title, was eliminated in the heats by Frank Hodgson who set up a new track record of 70.0 seconds.

Ted Gibson showed marked improvement on previous form, and of the South Africans Fred Wills was the pick.



ALAN CHAMBERS (new Transvaal champion)

Wills wants to make the trip to England and I can recommend him to any Third Division promoter as being well up to Third Division standard.

PLANT CAPTURES S. AFRICAN TITLE

Wilf Plant again rode brilliantly to win the Wembley Championship with 15 points at Johannesburg on Saturday, cables Buddy Fuller.

Henry Long and Alan Chambers tied for second place with 13, Middleditch 10, Ted Gibson, Frank Hodgson 8, Doug Serrurier 7½, Jeff Bishop, Joe Blankfield, Bob Quick 7; O. Wessman 6; Tony Boshoff, Pete

Robinson 5, Fred Wills 4½, Van der Vyver 3 were the other scorers. . . Hodgson made his last appearance and again did not produce his real form. Times were slow, due to a slick track.

S.A. SPEEDWAY CHAMP.

AT Johannesburg, on Saturday, March 11, Fred Wills, a South African rider likely to join the newly formed Liverpool club, won the South African Speedway Championship from a class field. He scored 14 of a possible 15 points.

Henry Long was second (13 pts.) and Oscar Wessman (12 pts.) third. Other scorers were: Bob Serrurier 10, Doug Serrurier 9, Buddy Fuller 9 and J. Blankfield 9.

English riders did not compete.

Buddy Fuller held a fine chance of winning the championship. He started well by winning first three heats but fell on his fourth ride and was slightly injured. He retired from the competition.

Henry Long was only rider to beat Wills. He, too, was unlucky. In his first ride he had engine failure but won all his other races.

Above, UK press: 19.1.1949,

16.2.1949,

23.2.1949,

17.3.1949



..... One of several 1947-model JAPs, and the English tourists, (identified below.)



Alan Chambers
1949 Transvaal Champion



Tourists used their UK team race jackets
until national jackets arrived.



Line-ups at the last Test match on 29th January 1949 at Dunswart: -

SA: L>R standing – Toby Boshoff, Doug Serrurier, Syd van der Vyver, Fred Wills, Henry Long; Buddy Fuller on bike; kneeling Harry du Toit and Joe Blankfield.

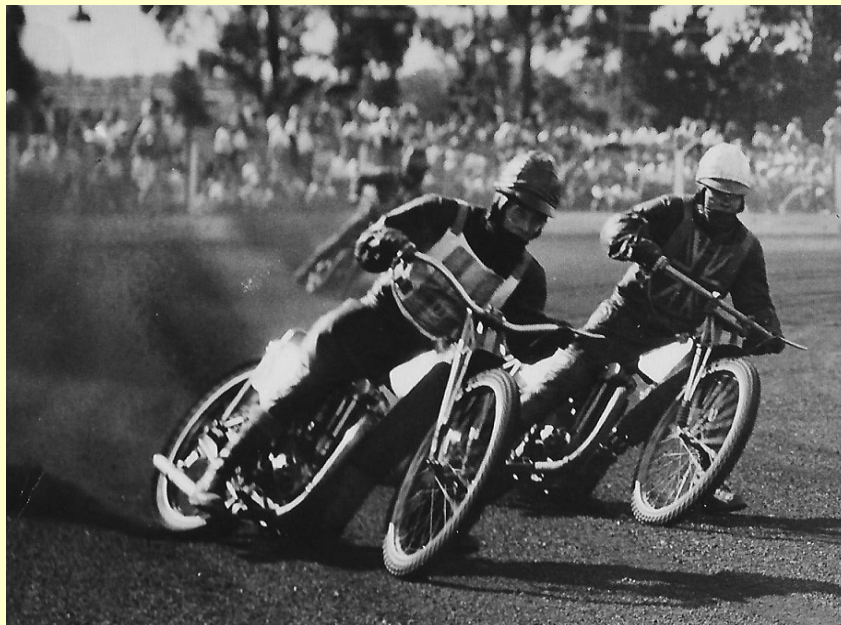
GB: L>R standing – Peter Robinson, Jimmy Dunn, Alan Chambers, Jeff Bishop, Ken Tidbury; Wilf Plant on bike; kneeling Ted Gibson and Ken Middleditch.



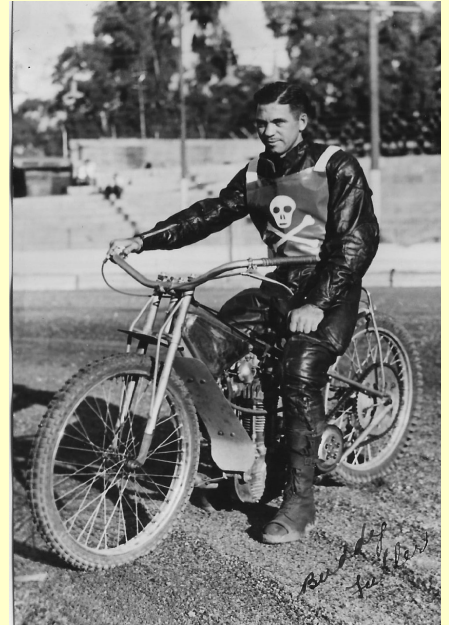
Joburg Pirates v Benoni Lions '48/'49 @ Dunswart;
.(pirate ?) , Jeff Bishop, Buddy Fuller.



Fred Wills, 1949 S.A. Champion.



Henry Long & Peter Robinson.



Buddy Fuller.



Doug Serrurier, of League champions Germiston Eagles.



Henry Long, Pretoria Tigers.