

THE HENRY LONG COLLECTION

Part 13 - 1958/59

The 1958/59 South African speedway season opened with the personalities behind the split two years earlier having no involvement in South African speedway, – Buddy Fuller keeping to his retirement and Trevor Redmond leaving the country, never to return in an official capacity. What transpired confirmed the worst fears of many, a decline of colossal proportions and the sport hanging on by its fingertips. The 1957/58 season had lead to promoters suffering unsustainable financial losses and to keep speedway going would require a re-organisation of speedway's 'modus operandi'. Initially it appeared this may happen when it was decided that the NSU could not afford to bring a touring team to South Africa and a revamped league structure involving only local riders was announced. However, the financial issues were too great to overcome and one by one the 'big city' tracks closed their doors to speedway. Wembley had not re-opened after its closure the previous year whilst by early in 1959 Pretoria, Randfontein, Springs and Durban were no longer staging any regular speedway programmes. The NSU collapsed and the SCB, the official body in control of speedway, had nothing to control! Whether by design or accident Fuller was in the right place at the right time to resume his mantle of 'Mr. Speedway'. Despite not having a promoter's or rider's licence he re-opened Wembley on 30th January and most of the riders flocked back to his colours. With Fuller back the SCB went into 'temporary recess' with expectations that he and the PSA would formulate plans to re-establish the sport. If such talks did indeed take place unity was not the outcome! Except at Klerksdorp and Wembley and two meetings promoted by the riders themselves late in the season at Springs there was little other speedway activity, and no major championships were held in 1958/59. .

Roll of Honour

No Championships or Test Matches staged in 1958/59.

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SPEEDWAY STAR & NEWS, February 15, 1958

THERE'S A CRISIS IN S. AFRICA

SOUTH African speedway lovers have been viewing proceedings this season with consternation. Progressively the sport has deteriorated until now the sign upon the wall flashes words of warning: STIMULATE NEW IDEAS INTO THE SPORT OR IT WILL FOLD.

The Primary reason is that there is a level of serious yet unanimous in- tions which have been in the ward about this state of affairs include: Lack of interest by the visiting European riders; lack of drive by the National Speedway Union and too many petty differences between riders.

A lesson to South Africa to learn from is the failure of speedway in New Zealand a few years ago. National League racing folded and the sport is virtually extinct there. The same state of affairs is creeping into Springbok racing.

Several theories have been expressed as to the best way to rectify the situation.

The soundest of the lot is the move to reinstate Buddy Fuller. Once known as 'the man who built our speedway' to South Africans, he can, given the chance and support, become 'the man who saved our speedway'.

I was right — and I admit it!

writes
27.12.58 SS&N, UK
Farley Spencer
(from Johannesburg, S.A.)

THE recent articles by John Hyam (December 13) and John Bunton (December 6) regarding the decline of South African speedway caused me no surprise. Although not among the South African personalities invited to pass opinion on the present state of the sport in the Union I am going to make a few comments on conditions as I see them.

Earlier this year, an article of mine "There's a Crisis in South Africa" was published (issue

dated February 15, 1958). In it I discussed the decline of the sport, pointing out that the petty rivalries between the two groups controlling the sport was causing gates to fall.

Less than a month after my article was printed, John Bunton and Jim Gregor had pieces published criticising my remarks.

Bunton described my comments as "erroneous and hilarious suggestions, statements and remedies."

According to him, I only had

Farley Spencer, a South African with definite views on speedway, has had several articles on the sport in the Union published in recent years. Over a year ago he wrote the piece reproduced left. At the time he was criticized for his comments, but events since then have caused him to think he was right. Like our famous contributor John Bunton, he wants to see South Africa back on top in speedway. It just happens that Spencer has different views on how this can be done.

Johannesburg in mind when I accurately, the lack of unity in said that South African speedway was folding. "By next summer South African speedway politics also has a lot to do with it.

Time has proved that my warning of a South African speedway crisis was accurate. I was right—and I admit it!

Although differing with me in the view that Fuller alone can save South African speedway, Hyam did point out that Fuller can help the sport to re-establish itself in the Union, and suggests a link-up between the two bodies involved would provide the answer to Springbok speedway salvation.

Temporarily it will. If the sport does recapture its old glory, and this can only be done with Fuller's return to the scene, the importation of overseas riders must be reduced.

Too many overseas riders have forced up and coming Springboks out of the game, deprived fans of local interest.

I shall look forward, with interest, to the comments of other South Africans on the present state of Springbok speedway.

Gregor, commenting on my final statement: "The soundest of the lot is the move to reinstate Buddy Fuller. Once known to South Africans as 'the man who built our speedway' he can, given the chance and support, become 'the man who saved our speedway'."

That remark, according to Gregor, was "the most 'out of touch' suggestion of the lot."

The passage of time has proved that my warning of a slump was not without foundation. Bunton said (December 6) "... with Entertainment Tax now having to be paid on speedway racing the future is dark indeed and the great gates and terrific enthusiasm of a few years ago seem to be gone for ever."

Entertainment Tax, undoubtedly, has had a lot to do with the slump in the sport. But, as John Hyam pointed out so

S. A. must plan for future

1959 says FARLEY SPENCER 28.2.59 SS&N, UK

SOUTH African speedway has entered a crucial stage in its fight for survival. Ex-controller **Buddy Fuller** has taken over the reins at Wembley Stadium in an attempt to reintroduce the sport, which was big time in the Union until a split between the Fuller controlled Riders' Association and the Speedway Control Board during the 1956-57 season.

Although Fuller is not registered with the Board as either a rider or promoter these days, most of South Africa's top track talent has rallied to him, and he has plans for reintroducing league racing during 1959-60.

Centres in mind include Wembley (Johannesburg), Klerksdorp, Carltonville, Durban, Pretoria and Springs. Mention has also been made, in the South African press, that a European team will be invited.

The Speedway Control Board is in temporary recess while the various groups, including Fuller and the Pretoria Association, settle down to establish a firm policy for South African speedway's future.

Should an overseas side be invited, careful attention must be paid to the personality appeal of the riders. In the past "names" like **Ove Fundin** have failed to click with South Africans.

With a large Afrikaans population, the inclusion of at least one Dutch rider, say **Tonny Kroeze**, **Nick van Gorcum** or **Gerriit Kops**,

is a must for the team. Another whose fiery brand of trackwork would capture the hearts of South Africans is America's **Don Hawley**.

While the path to a revival in South Africa is still stony, there is nothing like looking to the future and here's an overseas team that would probably go down well: **Olle Nygren** (Sweden), **Antti Pajari** (Finland), **Nick van Gorcum** (Holland), **Aage Hansen** (Norway), **Otto Holoubek** (Austria), **Rune Sormander** (Sweden), **Pö O Söderman** (Sweden), **Chum Taylor** (Australia), **Don Hawley** (U.S.A.).

Fuller reopens Johannesburg

28.2.59 SS&N, UK

Johannesburg, South Africa.

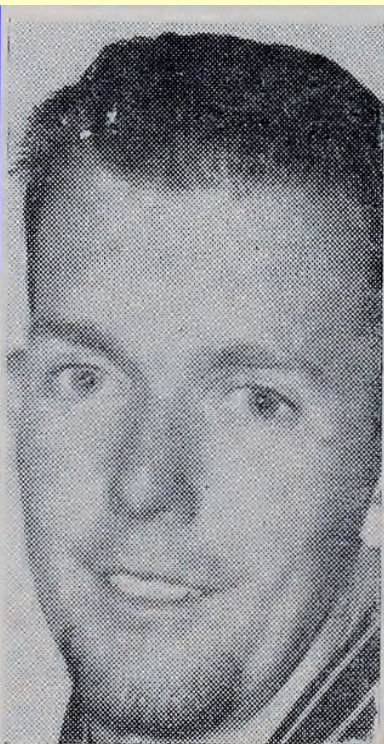
BUDDY Fuller, former chairman of the South African Speedway Riders' Association, made a return to big time promoting when he reopened Wembley Stadium on Friday, January 30. Wembley, scene of many of Fuller's own track triumphs, last operated in 1957.

Proof that there is still a demand for good entertainment in the "Golden City" was instanced by the fact that more than 8,000 Jo'burgers thronged to the meeting.

Fifteen riders, including Doug Davies (ex-Birmingham), Toby Boshoff (ex-Plymouth), Dave Collins and Johnnie Bekker lined up. Races were on a handicap basis, with riders being paid one shilling for each yard conceded.

Man who took the top prize money was Johnnie Bekker, who defeated Boshoff and Collins in the handicap final. Doug Davies experienced engine trouble in his heat of the handicap, but made no mistakes in winning the consolation event.

In an attempt on the one lap track record of 17.8 seconds, Davies failed by .1 of a second.



Davies rides again

Among the South African riders who have linked up with the revived Buddy Fuller promotion at Wembley Stadium, Johannesburg is former Birmingham trackman Doug Davies (photo left). Doug did not have the best of luck in the first meeting, as the report in column two reveals. Davies recently turned down an offer to ride for Coventry.



Trevor Blodyk, a UK Poole Pirate in 1958.

1959

South Africa is still having trials and tribulations

reports JOHN BUNTON

21.3.59 SS&N, UK

Pretoria, South Africa.

SPEEDWAY racing in South Africa. What visions of trials and tribulations, wars and rumours of wars these five innocent little words invariably conjure up. Now I have to report that the two meetings staged at Olympia Park, Springs, "by the riders for the riders" have persuaded one or two well meaning riders that promoting is not quite the profitable venture that everyone has been led to believe.

The first show at Springs pulled in a gate of just over £40 and although some good racing was seen, it is said that the actual staging of the show left just a little to be desired—or is this the under-statement of the season?

Unfortunately it was not possible to pay the riders anything and if there is one thing that speedway riders abhor it is NO PAY even if the meeting is run "by the riders for the riders".

A more ambitious meeting was planned for last Saturday night with a full programme of events and a special challenge race between Henry Long and Roy Bester. Fourteen riders had been asked to ride (and several had NOT been asked) but only nine turned up at the appointed place at the appointed time.

One rider was down with a cold; another had girl friend trouble and yet another lost his way but the main obstacle to their appearance was that all-embracing phrase "by the riders . . ." but you must be getting rather tired of that by now.

Anyway the gate was far better at this second attempt and with several of the wives, notably Mrs. Long and Mrs. Warne, giving a very generous helping hand, there seems every likelihood of there being a small hand-out. But a little bird whispers that it is very unlikely that the riders will make the mistake of going it alone again. However, one can never tell.

Big meeting

A meeting of some magnitude is down for decision at Klerksdorp this week-end and several riders who have only ridden at Pretoria and allied tracks in the past have signified their intention of shaking up the Western Transvaal.

And here is some hot news which has not appeared in print before and that is that the old Pretoria Eagles and Birmingham favourite, Doug Davies, has taken unto himself a wife.

Yes Doug, married Miss

Elizabeth Stander of Pretoria a day or two before his much talked about £200 match race with Henry Long at Wembley Stadium.

He is living in style in one of Pretoria's most modern and luxurious flats, and take it from me the flats in Pretoria are pretty terrific in any language (so, incidentally, are the rents).

Doug, has several irons in the fire these days and now that he has a wife to love, cherish and "obey" he is steadily branching out into the business world.

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There is talk of speedway racing starting in South West Africa at Walvis Bay and Windhoek and there has been quite a rush on machines for sending down there of late. I have no details but it would appear that some grass track types are thinking of trying their hand at speedway.

Nic Dormehl has just returned from Durban where he had decided to settle but he tells me that business in Durban is very slack and that speedway racing is practically at a standstill. Nic is another who has recently entered the bonds of matrimony but he and Mrs. D. are back in Pretoria where Nic is working at Iscor, the big iron and steelworks in the city.

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Jimmy Scott, who recently announced his retirement from speedway racing in order to concentrate on stock car racing, certainly made an auspicious start by winning the big event of the night from a big field of over twenty cars. Jimmy is one of the best, if not the best, stock car drivers in the country and his years of experience on two wheels are standing him in good stead on four.

Pretoria's first stock car meeting of the year was washed out but the re-run the next night was fairly well attended and some excellent racing was seen. There is unlikely to be much more speedway news until Wembley reopens on April 17 as I recently forecast.