

## EVA ASKQUITH — The Speedway Queen by Cyril May

# Female speedway rider in the Union in 1930

the last lap when, unfortunately, the leading rider ran out of fuel and was compelled to retire. The crowd whistled and booed their disapproval!

If a rider fell off he was whistled and was liable to be summoned by the Civil Guard, an accident or a collision on the track, being treated the same as on a public road!

Eva Askquith was riding so very well that she evaded the Civil Guard by not falling off. At her last meeting she defeated all her match-race opponents and won the Carrera Scratch Handicap from Freddy Hore (International Speedway), Bill Morris (England), and J. Lluch (Barcelona), passing all three riders on the straight. What acceleration her "Duggie" had! The crowd then showed her what real Spanish enthusiasm was like.

This was the last appearance during Eva's flying visit to Barcelona, but it was only on the strength of a promise to go back to Spain in November that she was allowed to return home. In the meantime a new track was being opened in Madrid.

## Followed

While she was in Spain some impressionable Spaniards, charmed by her auburn hair and blue eyes, sent her notes, but she never read them. "I just put them on the fire," she said, and, anyway, I couldn't read the writing." The Spanish crowds often followed Eva about, and to escape them she had to jump into a taxicab!

And so, after her very successful Spanish debut, Miss Askquith returned to her home in Yorkshire. But it was not very many months before she was on the move again, for in the second week in February (1930) she was sailing on the "Edinburgh Castle" en route for South Africa. It appears that the contract was made by cable, and Eva packed her bags and was away all in the matter of a week. Some going! She had made arrangements to ride at the Johannesburg third-of-a-mile speedway track.

Old-timer Wally Lloyd was already there and won a match race at the first meeting. He was leading in another race when his back tyre came off and landed him in the fence. His foot was badly injured, but he managed to ride the following week and defeat Baby Scott. Wally broke the one-lap record, and also the three-lap figure at 49 m.p.h.

Miss Eva Askquith, or "The Yorkshire Rose" as she had been billed on the hoardings in South Africa, made her initial appearance at Ellis Park Speedway, Johannesburg, on the last day in February. There was a record crowd of 15,000 to see the 24-year-old Eva ride in two events. She was to race against Joe Sarkis, the South African dirt-track champion and T.T. winner, in a match race, and to take part in an Open Handicap event. Wally Lloyd and Perry Mascall, the Birmingham riders, kindly offered to look after Eva's machine and to make any necessary adjustments, but it wasn't her personal machine.

It was a Douglas that had been loaned by the Ellis Park promoters who, before

she set sail, had asked her not to bring a machine; they were afraid that she might make the mistake of bringing with her a dirt-track machine that would be too slow for the large South African circuits.

Incidentally, the Ellis Park authorities had purchased the machine — a Douglas — that had so long been ridden by Joe Sarkis. It was thought to be the fastest speedway bike in the country, and that is what the experts said, and it was in future to be ridden by Wally Lloyd. Wally had made the mistake of bringing to South Africa a machine that was far too slow for the local conditions; they didn't want Eva to do the same thing!

## Ability

But back to Ellis Park. Eva Askquith certainly showed herself a rider of exceptional ability and proved that her capabilities had by no means been over-rated. But she failed to beat the great Joe Sarkis, although it was far from being a walk-over by the S.A. Champion, and Eva was only beaten in the last few yards by the narrowest of margins. One must remember that Eva was riding a strange machine on a strange circuit, and it appeared that she required a lot more practice. It was thought that neither rider did real justice to their usual riding standards.

Joe rode with courteous restraint, while Eva though travelling on full throttle along the straights, was not really familiar with the course and seemed to hesitate on the corners. In the Open Handicap event Miss Askquith was competing against some of the best riders in the East Rand Speedway.

And so this female cinder-shifter becomes the first-ever girl dirt-track rider in South Africa. And then immediately in some quarters came a complaint — "Why not give South African girls a chance?"

T. E. Duckles, secretary of the Ellis Park Cindrena where Eva had made her debut before the largest dirt-track crowd so far, was asked "Why not?" He replied that up to the present time only one woman had applied for permission to ride on the track. "She is the wife of one of the riders," he added. "She applied some months ago, and her husband was at first inclined to encourage her aspirations. But since then he had a crash and broke his collar-bone. Now he kept his machine locked up because his wife is always attempting to ride it!"

"It is my opinion," concluded Mr. Duckles, "that South African girls are now certain to apply for permission to ride on the dirt-track, but so far the only one to make application was the woman I have mentioned."

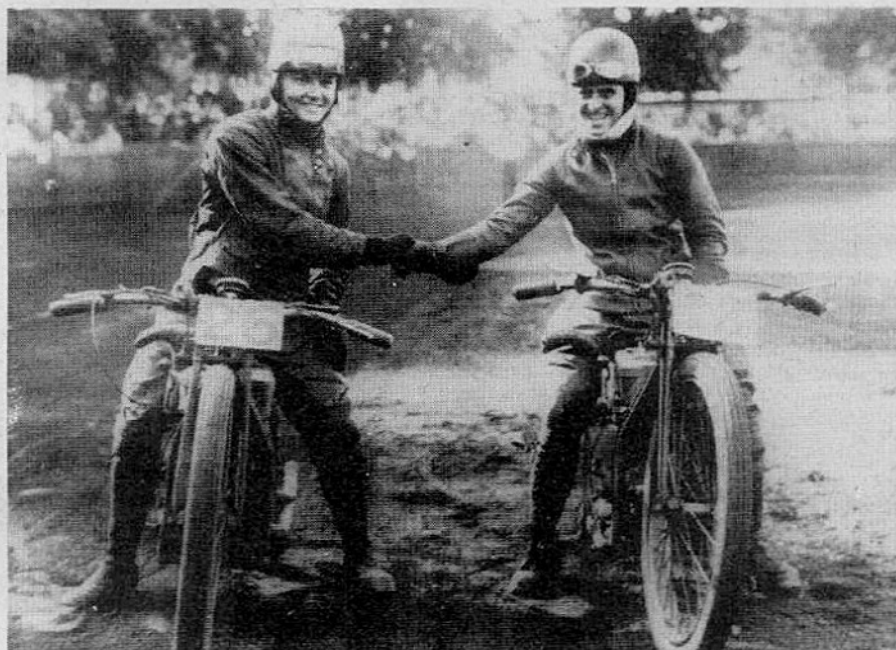
The following week, Eva made her second appearance at Ellis Park. She was matched against the South African and Pretoria sportsman, Alan Reeve.

## Dare-devil

By now Eva Askquith had almost become a changed person, at least as regards her riding. There was no comparison between her riding now with that of her first appearance. She performed as a real dare-devil rider who took the bends with the skill and daring of any male rider. Her broadsiding was wonderful, and she hardly throttled-back at any time during her race with Reeve. Needless to say she won the match and returned a splendid time of 1m. 21s., which compared favourably with riding times clocked by many of the other three-lap winners that evening.

Eva Askquith was a delighted person after her victory over Alan Reeve, a useful rider with plenty of experience; she was certainly enjoying, and very much so, her South African racing tour.

(PART SEVEN NEXT WEEK)



Eva Askquith (right) takes on the local champion, Jack Barnett in a Match Race contest at King's Oak Speedway (Essex) in 1929. They both rode D. T. Douglasses.



## EVA ASKQUITH — The Speedway Queen Part 7 by Cyril May

**EVA ASKQUITH'S** second appearance at the Ellis Park Speedway in Johannesburg in South Africa was again the chief attraction and a crowd in the region of 12,000 turned up. As I have said, here at the Cindrena, the Yorkshire girl was riding on the top of her form and defeated Alan Reeve from Pretoria in a match race—a three-lap duel. But, at the termination of the race, Alan's machine burst into flames!

On the following Sunday, three riders—Eva Askquith, Bert Mascal and Wally Lloyd—were entertained at Vereeniging, and by coincidence it was Eva's birthday. A most enjoyable day was spent on the river, and Miss Askquith proved to be an oarswoman of no mean ability.

On March 12 (1930), Eva Askquith, billed as "The Yorkshire Rose" and "England's Premier Girl Dirt Track Rider", gave a special demonstration of DT riding for the schoolchildren at the Ellis Park Cindrena in a programme that included match races and handicap events. Four days later, Eva took part in a road race! It was an international race meeting at Natal Spruit.

### Capable

Eva had her try-out over the Natal circuit—a five-mile course—during the week and proved to be particularly capable on L. Taylor's little 175 c.c. Royal Enfield. With this machine she lapped consistently at 6 min. 30 sec.

On the day there were two main events. The 100-mile race for the OK Trophy donated by the South African dirt-track champion Joe Sarkis and the five-mile open handicap. And Eva Askquith won the five-mile handicap on the little Royal Enfield! Her time was 7 min. 14 sec. Bert Mascal was victorious in the 100-mile affair, and he was riding a "175" DKW.

In a matter of hours, out came the advertisements: "EVA ASKQUITH demonstrates the speed and ease of handling and superiority of the ROYAL ENFIELD. Only a two-stroke, mounted by a GIRL RIDER, but good enough

# GLORY ON THE ROAD

to score a substantial win against the Rand's Aces mounted on bigger machines."

The evening before the race day, the organising Germiston Club organised a dance in honour of the visiting English riders: Eva, Bert Mascal and Wally Lloyd. The day after, all three riders were broadsiding again on the speedway! This was when they made their first appearance on one of the East Rand speedways at Benoni. Eva gave a demonstration run of two laps, and there were the other favourites: Lind, Sarkis, Mynott and Scott.

Miss Askquith expressed her praise of the Benoni track, as also did the other English riders, which they declared was better than the Wanderers' circuit. It was more "square" than the English tracks, which seemed all to the good, and enabled the riders to put up very high speeds.

### Enjoyed

Eva Askquith's South African tour was fast coming to its end, for on March 28 she was returning to England. But there was one more meeting at Ellis Park.

Many of the experienced male riders envied Eva's skill and judgment. She was always happy and confident; an exceptional girl who was popular with everyone and possessed the average ability of the men. She was certainly a woman in a man's world, but she thoroughly enjoyed every minute. And especially so when she was racing abroad, proudly

displaying the Union Jack on her leathers. Patriotic Eva was immensely proud to be British.

The Ellis Park authorities had played the trump card of the season—Miss Eva Askquith. The first time she appeared, there was hardly any standing room and over £1,000 was taken in gate money. The Ellis Park management knew that Eva would be a big draw and had expected a large crowd, but nothing like the tremendous influx of dirt-track enthusiasts who attended.

Eva Askquith's greatest achievement on her South African racing tour was, perhaps, her win over Jimmy Lind and Joe Sarkis, on the Royal Enfield, in the five-mile Germiston Handicap of the Natal Spruit road races. She commented: "I am pleased to death with the little Enfield and enjoyed the ride immensely. That machine could certainly motor. I never thought that I would win the race and beat the famous South African road-race rider and dirt-track champion—the great Joe Sarkis."

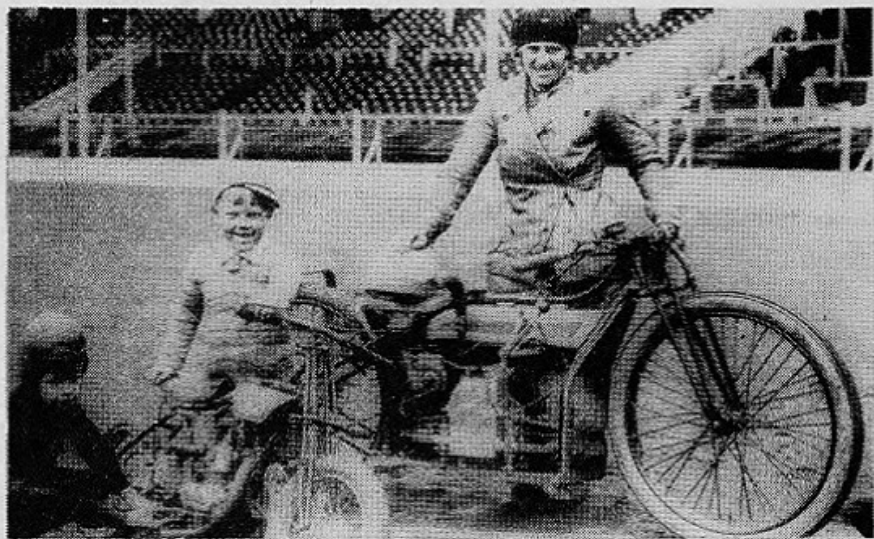
Apart from Eva Askquith's racing activities in South Africa, she was enjoying herself in other diversions, by visiting many of the farms... helping herself to huge bunches of grapes, peaches, etc., and there were motor boat trips up the river. Initially, living at an altitude of 6,000 feet made her feel very short-winded until after a few weeks when she became accustomed to the climate. Eva said: "At first, I felt very rocky!"

### Trying

It was said in Johannesburg that, because of its high altitude above sea level, the speeds of motor cycles were reduced by something like 15½ per cent. Eva also found the heat very trying until she was used to it, but on the tracks she found her greatest difficulty in the huge clouds of dust that were created by the bikes. "We do not get anything like that amount of dust on any of the tracks in England," she said. "In addition to blinding you, it almost choked you. When there had been a heavy shower of rain, the tracks were as dry as ever four or five minutes afterwards."

"The Ellis Park track had four corners, and consequently riding on it was very different from riding on the oval English circuits. Indeed, the track was almost a square, so you can tell how severe the corners were. The other English riders and myself had a talk to the management about it, and explained to them what the British tracks were like, and they decided to make an effort to model theirs on those in Britain."

CONCLUSION NEXT WEEK



Happy days at Wembley Speedway in 1929. Eva Askquith with her D.T. Douglas. The cheeky-looking lad holding the miniature speedway machine is none other than Ian Hoskins who became a famous Scottish promoter. The other boy is Walter Brierley.



# Still a champion today...

**A**FTER HER TRIUMPHANT South African racing tour Eva Askquith arrived back in England on April 14, (1930) and travelling on the same boat was Joe Sarkis, who was to compete in the Isle-of-Man TT races. The South African Speedway Champion made very good company for the English girl.

Eva said that the people of Johannesburg were among the nicest she had ever met. They gave her a wonderful reception. One motor-cycle firm even sent two brand-new motor-cycles round to her hotel for her use, and there was never a day on which someone did not arrange a sight-seeing trip for her.

"We covered hundreds of miles of the country around Johannesburg," she said. "They have only a few good roads and the pot-holes were really terrible. Although I wasn't in South Africa for a great length of time, I was tired of seeing miles and miles of brown, bare land without a patch of green grass."

## Invited

Eva Askquith was invited to make a return visit to the country but she would not commit herself at that stage.

"I had a really wonderful time," Eva continued, "without any bad luck at all. But that doesn't mean the trip was uneventful. There were a few earth tremors when I was in Johannesburg. Another day we were going to the diamond mines when one of the shafts collapsed, and there were many casualties. Then on the homeward journey there were two deaths on the boat, and when we arrived at Southampton there were police officials waiting to arrest one of the passengers!"

## Final ban

Back again in her Yorkshire home, Miss Askquith prepared for the British dirt-track season and she also purchased a road machine—a "500" Sunbeam. But Eva's days in speedway were numbered. Vera Hole, fell from her machine during a grand parade of riders and broke her collar-bone. This seemed sufficient excuse for the ACU to impose a restriction and that fatal ban was implemented. Eva Askquith and Fay Taylour fought in vain against the decision and finally hung up their leathers. Eva's reign, such as



Eva Askquith as she is today. Not a speedway champion, but a horticultural champion!

## CYRIL MAY concludes the EVA ASKQUITH Story

it was, was brief, but nevertheless, distinguished and certainly very remarkable.

## Undeterred

The ban was on in Britain, but Miss Askquith was not deterred; she still yearned for the thrills of speedway. She returned to Spain in 1932, and there was even greater excitement in store for her. She acted as a picador on a motor-cycle with a matador as pillion passenger in the Bull Rings at Barcelona, Madrid and at the Stadium Metropolitano! Other English riders, Charlie Barrett and Cliff Parkinson, also took part.

Returning home to her Yorkshire family in Bedale, Eva went back to work. She also looked after her father's two "Point-to-Point" horses.

## Fire-engines

Then the Second World War began and Eva says: "I joined the National Fire Service (part-time) as a motor-cycle dispatch rider, and also a fire-engine driver. We had plenty of

accidents around Bedale with Leeming Aerodrome only two miles away and many a time I was out all night picking up the bits and pieces."

## Hospital

Eva Askquith, partly by common-sense and partly by good fortune, had avoided the more serious of dirt-track accidents, but in 1959 came a most serious road accident. She was out on one of her meat delivery rounds when a car hit the van. Eva got out to inspect the damage when another car came along and went straight into her. Poor Eva, with two broken legs and other injuries, was taken to hospital where she remained for two years. And for a further two years she had physiotherapy.

## One wish

Over the years Miss Askquith had become very interested in horticulture, so much so that she entered exhibits in various shows, and not without success either. In 1958 she gained 21 firsts and two cups at the Ripon Show, and success has followed to this day. Last year Eva gained further cups, medals and diplomas and a host of first, second and third cards.

So there you have it; the story of the remarkable EVA ASKQUITH. But she has one big wish... "I would love to meet Johnnie Hoskins once again."