

—Africa, here I come!

The 1930 season in England came to an end, and I had the biggest thrill of my young life. I was going to South Africa. This experience created such a vivid impression on my mind that I have never forgotten the tiniest detail about the trip. It was, of course, my first major journey abroad apart from the Continental tour the previous year.

You can tell how excited I was from the fact that I still remember the exact date of my departure for Africa—October 16. I was sailing in the "Carnarvon Castle," was berthed on the port side of the ship and my cabin number was 433! I never made a note of those details they just stick in my mind.

Tough Wally

The South African tour was not an official one. In other words, I had to pay my own fare. Organising the trip was Wally Lloyd, then captain of Perry Barr, and with us went Harry Shepherd and Ivor Hill.

Wally could not have been more than twenty years old at the time, but he was already an experienced rider and had durability and toughness in the small body of his that would have done credit to a man twice his size. He was also great company, a priceless asset on long tours.

Harry Shepherd is the man who in 1934 constructed the starting gate that Fred Mockford invented, and I knew Ivor Hill from my Cardiff days.

We arrived in Johannesburg and made for the Ellis Park track where we were to ride. Several riders whom we already knew were there, before us, including Bunny Wilcox, from H. Green, Birmingham, and decided to get together and put on an unofficial Test match.

Another gripping extract from a famous ex-rider's adventurous

Crowd broke barrier, stopped 'Test' match

AFTER the 1930 English season closed, I went on an unofficial tour of South Africa with Wally Lloyd, then Perry Barr's captain, Harry Shepherd and Ivor Hill.

We arrived in Johannesburg and made for the Ellis Park track, where we were to ride. We decided to get together with some riders already there and put on an unofficial "Test."

If we had known the rumpus this decision was going to cause we might never have attempted it, but innocently we went ahead with our plans.

When the night of the unofficial Test arrived, we were suddenly confronted by a group of South African riders, obviously dissatisfied about something. We discovered that they objected to our match, because it meant that they would not be able to ride that night. If we didn't call it off, or at least give them the second half of the programme in which to ride, there was going to be trouble!

New Zealand days. The speedway gang (left to right) is Cass Goodwin, Nobby Key, Ray Tauser and Nick Sillick. Cass was part owner of the garage.

Second instalment of
NOBBY KEY'S
thrilling memoirs

TEN RIP-ROARING YEARS

To make matters worse, the crowd, realising what was up and, naturally enough, on the side of the local boys, decided to give their favourites some physical support. They jumped the barriers, streamed on to the track, and for a while things looked very ugly indeed.

It wasn't until police arrived and forced the crowd back on to their own side of the fence that the meeting could begin. We staged our Test match, a series of two-lap match races between the English lads, and there was no further trouble that night.

The incident, however, most certainly had its after-effects. It left such a bad taste in the mouths of the public generally that speedway in South Africa



Taxi! Nobby Key and Bunny Wilcox enjoy a rickshaw ride on putting into port during one of their trips abroad.

was doomed for many years. I believe I am right in saying that only now is it really beginning to struggle back on to its feet in that country.

We carried on with further meetings at Ellis Park, Krugersdorp and Pretoria, but it was hard going. Here again, like the ill-fated Paris venture, we were doing our own promotion and it was costing us money. There were no profits from that South African tour, but at least we came away with some very pleasant memories, thanks to a wonderful holiday we spent in Durban.

Five of us, Wally, Harry and his wife, Ivor and myself had a glorious time swimming in the warm African waters and drying out under the blazing sun.

I'm afraid we let that sun get at us too much and I can remember Mrs Shepherd appointing

herself i/c sunburn and ministering to us, like an angel of mercy, armed with cotton wool pad and a large bottle of calamine lotion.

I believe Wally Lloyd is still interested in South African speedway and is watching its progress keenly. I know that he was over there about a year ago, lucky man! I would certainly not say no to another chance of visiting the land of the Springboks.

Looking back to those very early days, it's surprising how many of my rider colleagues have stayed in speedway to become managers and promoters. There is no doubt that speedway gets a hold on you, and few men willingly give it up altogether.

Apart from Wally Lloyd, there are so many of those pioneer riders still actively connected with the sport that I cannot mention them all here.

Among those who spring to my mind are Frank Arthur, who rode for Australia in the first Test and many more after that—he is now promoting successfully in his native land; Arthur Westwood, a member of the Hall Green team in 1929, now promoting on the Continent; Eric Langton, an England stalwart in nearly all the pre-war Tests, now Odsal's team manager; Tiger Stevenson, Frank Valey, the two Dickies—Case and Wise, Wal Phillips, Stan Greatrex, Arthur Atkinson... the list is never ending!

The 1931 season came along and I returned to the Nottingham team, but before half the season was over I made a move that was to affect my speedway career for years to come.

I was transferred to Crystal Palace, thus returning to the track where in 1928 I made my first hopeful attempts on that Sunbeam bike. I was back among old friends. Ron Johnson, Triss Sharp and Roger Frogley were still riding with the team.

