

SPEEDWAY SPRINGBOKS TO TOUR EUROPE

by J. Bunton, April 3rd, 1951.

By the end of the present speedway season in Johannesburg, practically 100,000 fans will have attended the Test matches between South Africa and Holland, and if the league and other special programmes are taken into consideration, about a quarter of a million spectators will have thrilled to the daring deeds of the knights of the cinder circuit before the winter puts an end to the season. Translate this colossal figure into £sd. at between 3s. and 4s. per capita, and it will be realised that speedway racing in the Transvaal is one of the biggest money-spinners in sport today. Indeed, speedway racing in the northern province has hit the bigtime this year as never before, and now comes the thrilling news that a Springbok team is to tour Europe during our winter. The doings of our men will be as carefully and faithfully watched by the cinder-track enthusiasts, - and their number is legion - , as the performances of our cricketers touring England will be. The speedway team will engage in 21 international matches, and these will be run off in Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Denmark and Germany. Six matches will be allotted to Holland and three to Germany, while it is on the cards that the team will also visit Great Britain.

The following riders have already been approached and instructed to apply for the necessary leave in case they are selected for the tour: Fred Will (reigning S.A. champion), Buddy Fuller, Doug and Harry Serrurier, Harry du Toit, Toby Boshoff, Joe Blankfield, Bob Raw and Alec Gould. These boys represent the cream of our talent at the moment, and it is perhaps unfortunate that they all hail from the Transvaal, but speedway racing has not caught on in the other provinces for a variety of reasons. It is not the intention to take all the above 10 riders on the tour, but a team of six, with two reserves, will probably make the grade in the end. It is a great pity that so many promising riders have fallen out of speedway racing in the last couple of years, but the terrific expense, injuries and domestic troubles have all taken their toll. Think for a moment of the names which were hitting the headlines of the daily Press a couple of short years ago: Douggie Holmes, Bob Quick, Dirk Schoombie, Digger Fyler, Buster Blaine, Clarrie Hurst, Laurie Zeeman, Johnny Gander and Ian Scott, to mention just a few of the brighter stars whose names come readily to mind. These riders possessed talent beyond the dreams of the average speedway aspirant, and it may yet be possible to lure some of them back to the fold when more tracks open up next season.

The news that there may be other circuits besides those operating at present in the new term which commences in October, is no secret. Overseas promoters are turning their eyes on this country. Monopoly is not a good thing in any sphere, least of all in sport, and the arrival of an overseas promoter and the return to South Africa of



Fred Wills (sitting) the SA Test captain, was an automatic choice for the team. With him here is another star, Henry Long.

the present manager of the Dutch team after the winter should open up the game. Mr. Len Rehorst, 6 ft. 6 in. rider-manager-promoter of the Hollanders, has fallen in love with our land of sunshine and will be bringing his family to settle in Pretoria before many more months have passed. He hopes to promote on a national scale.

But to return to the Springbok tour of Europe; it has been announced that the chosen riders will leave Johannesburg by air on June 1st, taking with them their machines and Mr. Gilbert Brown of Wembley Stadium as manager. Besides expenses and prize money, the riders will be guaranteed a sum of 5200 each. Enthusiasts may ask why the name of the brilliant Henry Long has been omitted from the list of probables. The answer is that Henry is the one and only South African who has made the first division grade in England. He has become a regular member of the Belle Vue, Manchester, side in the British first division league, and those who know their cinders know what that means! Henry has made speedway racing his profession, and a very lucrative one it is, too. Why, the mighty Australian, Vic Duggan, amassed no less than £5,000 for displaying his magic on two wheels to the sport-loving British public for five short months in 1949. One of the touring Hollanders remarked in Johannesburg recently that Henry Long is the greatest prospect he has ever seen, and with another couple of seasons experience, he should be capable of holding his own with any man on earth. That is no idle talk either.

A few short notes on the type of opposition that our riders are likely to encounter on the Continent may not be out of place. Speedway racing has become a major spectacle sport in the land of windmills, and gates of 60,000 at the larger stadia are not uncommon. Dominating figures in Dutch racing circles last season was Henk Steman, ranked third in all Europe, and at present campaigning in the Union. Other stars were Tinus Metzelaar, who was crowned king of speedway riders in 1949 and who is also riding in S.A. at the moment, Thei Bisschops, Jan Bosman, Ge. Jonker and Co Boef. Of these only Boef did not make the trip to the Union in 1951. Tracks are situated at Rijswijk, Nijmegen, Hengelo, Bergen op Zoom, Amsterdam and Eindhoven, and several other cities.

Belgium has not been quite so fortunate, and although circuits have been built at Antwerp, Ostend, Noordwijk and Bruges, the game has not made any headway and our riders should annihilate the Belgians. Sweden is, of course, a horse of an entirely different colour, and the standard is so high that riders of the calibre of Vic Duggan, Lloyd Goffe, Geoff Pymar and Danny Dunton have been fully extended by Olle Nygren, Stig Pramberg, Linus Eriksson and Eskil Carlsson. Tracks are operated at Stockholm, Norkopping and Folkere, and some of the Swedes have actually taken part in the World Series at Wembley. Brightest stars in the Austrian firmament are Fritz Dirlt, the Killmeyer brothers, Chapula and Kamper, and crowds of from thirty to forty thousand watched last year's international matches in Vienna and elsewhere. The fact that Dirlt has beaten aces like world champion Freddy Williams and dare-devil Split Waterman is proof enough that our boys will have no walkover in Central Europe.

Denmark is not quite up to the standard of the other countries mentioned, but the movement is gaining ground in Copenhagen, where Orla Knudsen is cinder-shifter-in-chief. Twenty thousand fans have been known to attend major matches at the Charlottenlund circuit in Copenhagen, so the Danes must at least be seeing a glimmer of light. The last country to be visited by our tourists will be Germany, and in this country the South Africans will have to ride at the very peak of their form to overcome wizards of the type of Hermann Gunzenhauser, Rudi Munzloher, Reinhold Moeller and Walter Butler. Our speedway Springboks are in for a hard time, for they will be meeting the masters. They will be helping to boost the sport which was considered a circus not so many years ago, but which has stood the test of time and is now firmly established throughout Europe as the biggest drawcard in the kingdom of all sports.

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