

Part 6: SIX AFRICAN TRACKS IN 1953/54 FOUR IN THE UNION – TWO IN RHODESIA

IN spite of the wettest summer for a decade – there were many washouts – speedway increased in popularity in the Union. As weeks rolled by more and more cities clamoured for tracks, suitable venues being the only obstacle to a wild-fire spread of the sport.

Supporters clubs, on British lines, grew apace and hero worship reached an all-time high. The knights of the cinder circuits were quite as well known in the Transvaal as the players of any of the other major spectator sports. In fact in the mid-1950's only inter-provincial and international rugby had a larger and more ardent following than speedway racing. Club rugby, soccer and cricket had been relegated to the ranks of the "also-rans" where numbers are concerned.

An event which was to have a profound effect on Transvaal racing was the arrival of restless, ambitious Trevor Redmond in September. He went to work with a will and carved a track out of the virgin veldt at Springs on the Far East Rand. Meetings went with a swing. Red-hot racing, unexpected novelty turns plus managerial drive brought the customers in and by mid-season Redmond had hit the jackpot.

Bob Quick, once a star rider, staged a come-back, this time as a promoter, and his snappy little stadium at Randfontein proved highly popular on the West Rand.

Rain – and how it came down on Friday nights – was the spoil-sport at Wembley, Johannesburg.

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Main domestic competition was the National League won by Springs Stars from Wembley Lions. The line-up as in January of 1954 was:

Springs Stars : Trevor Redmond, Harry du Toit, Bill Kitchen, Reg Duval, Fred van Zyl, Toy Edwards.

Durban Hornets : Dick Campbell, Bill Dalton, Roy Browning, Arend Hartman, Vern McWilliams, Peter Dykes, Gerald Hussey.

Pretoria Eagles : Fred Williams, Ian Williams, Bob Raw, Sonny James, Doug Davies, Harry Serrurier.

Randfontein Aces : Fred Wills, Alec Blankfield, Joe Blankfield, Brian Crutcher, Roy Bester, Dave Naudé.

Wembley Lions : Henry Long, Don Perry, Fred Lang, Howdy Byford, Toby Boshof, Doug Lang.

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From the off there was never real doubt about the all-round superiority of world champion Fred Williams, skipper of the 1953/54 Pretoria Eagles and the British Lions touring team. Behind him came Brian Crutcher and Trevor Redmond, who were head and shoulders above other regular performers.

Stock of homester Henry Long slumped. For weeks his riding seemed rusty and it may have been a mistake not to return to his British League club Belle Vue in 1953.

Roy Bester, although badly hurt at the campaign's start, was still one of the most dashing and exciting riders, while Fred Lang was a major new Springbok star discovery. Harry du Toit, spurred on by the burning enthusiasm of Redmond, rode better than ever, though Fred Wills might have ousted him had he found form earlier in the season. Doug Lang deserves a mention, as do the Blankfield brothers, Joe and Alec. Bob Raw had a fine opening spell before a crash put him out. Toby Boshoff, Fred van Zyl and Sonny James made it tough for all but the very best.

Exciting newcomers, who graduated from the very popular Cycle Speedway scene that year were Doug Davies and Neil Mortimer.

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AFRICAN SPEEDWAY spread its wings in the early 1950's. So far the Transvaal had been the seat of the sport, with Natal a very poor second, but now the promoters were looking to the Rhodesians in the North, and it was expected to see speedway catch on in the Cape. There, however, the move could not be encouraged from the Rand because of the vast distance involved. The Jo'burg lads did give the Capetonians a taste of the sport when speedway was featured as an attraction during the Van Riebeck Festival in 1953. (1952)

In Rhodesia lack of equipment and experienced riders were the two brakes on speedway racing. South African teams and the British tourists, however, put on, between them, several shows north of the Limpopo

river.

Spectator enthusiasm was staggering and it seemed only a question of time before the sport would become as firmly entrenched as it already was in the Transvaal. First meeting at the Bulawayo Showgrounds drew the largest crowd ever to attend a sporting function in the city!

Best prospects among the local Rhodesian speedway riders were Bertie Hall, Tommy Lemon, Bertie Clark, Johnny Love and Bundu Bovett. With Bob Serrurier, a former S.A. champion, then resident in Rhodesia, also helping to train the local riders, the scene was set for a quick progress.

Speedway was making ground in Northern Rhodesia, too. Meetings had been supported by Transvaal riders at Kitwe, about 1,500 miles north of Jo'burg.

Fred Williams drove the 550 miles from Jo'burg to Bulawayo in one day, the scored 15 points when his team beat the Dominions 58-50. Cheered every time he went to the starting line, Fred Williams also won the Golden Helmet, from Redmond.

For the record, here are the scoring details of that Test Match:

BRITAIN 58 F.Williams 15, I.Williams 14, B.Kitchen 12, R.Duval 9, D.Campbell 5, H.Byford 3.

DOMINIONS 50 R.Bester 13, F.Lang 13, H.Serrurier 9, T.Redmond 9, Bertie Clark 2, Bertie Hall 2, Derek Manford 2.

A second major meeting held at Bulawayo Showgrounds was the Commonwealth Best Pairs Championship, won by the New Zealand duo of Trevor Redmond and Dick Campbell on 20 points, from Englishmen Bill Kitchen and Reg Duval 17, and the combined pair of Welshman Fred Williams and Northern Rhodesia's Bertie Clark 15.

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TRACK DETAILS 1953/54

Wembley, Johannesburg: Length: 430y.

Records: 1-lap flying: 18.20s Fred Williams. 3-laps clutch: 56.90s Fred Lang. 4-laps: 75.60s Fred Williams.

Olympia Park, Springs: Length: 320y.

1-lap flying: 14.80s Fred Wills. 3-laps clutch: 46.60 Fred Williams. 4-laps: 62.20 Fred Williams.

Randfontein, West Rand: Length: 320y.

1-lap flying: 16.50s Fred Lang, Henry Long. 3-laps clutch: 47.30s Fred Williams. 4-laps: 62.00s Trevor Redmond, Fred Williams.

Hoy Park, Durban: Length: 280y.

1-lap flying: 12.80s Ronnie Moore. 3-laps clutch: 42.90 Ronnie Moore. 4-laps: 55.90 Ronnie Moore.

Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia: Length: 470y.

1-lap flying: 23.40s Joe Blankfield, Bob Serrurier. 3-laps clutch: 72.30s Doug Lang.

Kitwe, Northern Rhodesia: Length: 340y.

1-lap flying: 16.80s Doug Lang, Fred van Zyl, Toby Boshof. 4-laps: 68.90s Bob Serrurier.

Part 7: THE STARS OF THE FIFTIES ON THEIR TRAVELS

THE 1950's were undoubtedly the Golden Era of Speedway in South Africa. The S.R.A. (Speedway Riders Association) under the presidency of Buddy Fuller organised the sport and brought top class foreign riders and touring teams to the Union. The National League and International Test Matches provided the enthusiastic public with first class sport and entertainment. The sport spread across from Rhodesia in the North to Durban in the South, and with the vast distances involved, the riders of that era had to spend a lot of time travelling from one place to another. Therefore it may be interesting to recall some of the incidents that happened to the speedway stars while they were on the road.

The leading tracks like Wembley in Johannesburg ran their meetings on a weekly basis. At Wembley the traditional race-night was (and still is) Friday, while Durban occupied most of the Saturday nights! And this raised problems when riders had to get from one to the other. The cities are some 700km apart and in those days air travel was too expensive to use regularly. The railways were narrow gauge (0.98m instead of the standard 1.44m), and so trains were slow, and there was no train leaving after a Friday night meeting in Johannesburg that could have got to Durban in time for the Saturday night. So that left travelling by road.

However, there were no autobahns in those days, like there are nowadays, so that you can motor from Jo'burg to Durban in 6 hours. In the early 1950's there was only single carriage roadway all the way! It passed through every possible town or village on the way – like Standerton, which had notorious roadworks, and where there was always a traffic hold-up – and through mountain passes with hairpin bends. As a lot of the journey was through areas reserved for the black rural population, there was always the possibility of stray animals on the roads. The distance was probably nearer 750km on those roads. Journey time was more like 12 hours, and to do it even in that time you had to drive pretty fast where you could.

So riders would often ride Friday night at Wembley, then immediately strap their bike to the back of the car and set off for Durban. From what I wrote in the previous paragraph you will have seen that it was quite a dangerous drive. Jack Serrurier, the oldest of the five Serrurier speedway brothers, often did the journey by motorcycle. One night he hit a horse on the road and was killed instantly.

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Trevor Redmond, originally a New Zealander, who later became a naturalised South African and has done more than anyone else to build South Africa into an internationally respected force in speedway circles, experienced several close escapes and hair-raising incidents during his countless drives between Jo'burg and Durban. During the 1951/52 season, Redmond was engaged, whenever he did not ride, to do the announcing at Wembley and the newly opened track at Hoy Park in Durban. He was the one who taught the South African crowds the war cries, and before long the fans were exercising their lungs at Wembley, Springs and Durban, shouting for their teams.

Of his many drives to and from Durban, Redmond could tell a story. Let's recall one incident on the road, when travelling back from Durban to Johannesburg in December of 1951. Redmond told a newspaper reporter the following story: "I was driving and I'd got about halfway without incident and was just beginning to encounter some mountains. For a change, the rain had been teeming down and as we drove into the mountains down came the fog, thick and heavy!

Visibility was round about nil and to add to the troubles dusk was just coming down. Still it wasn't too bad as I had the white line in the centre of the road to follow. Then, without warning, there it was gone!

I'd swung around a bend in the road only to find out, too late, that the road went straight ahead. We came to a halt with a screech of brakes, just as the front bumper clumped against a tree. I have never been so happy to see a tree in my life, and I'm no dog either! It was the only thing that stopped us running completely off the road and down the side of a mountain.

When prayers were over we set about getting the car back on to the highway, but it wouldn't budge. So we hung around, literally, and waited for a passing motorist. But when one did arrive he didn't have a tow-rope, so it was a case of staying put. Which we did. All night.

I had Geoff Mardon, Buddy Fuller, Mrs. Fuller, and their two kids with me, and by a masterpiece of management we all managed to bed down in the car for the night. None of us got a wink of sleep though. Even the kids knew that this particular area was infested with poisonous snakes – and some of the native tribes aren't exactly what you would term friendly either. The most beautiful sight we saw in hours was dawn breaking.

By then the fog had completely lifted and a passing traveller gave Buddy a lift along to the nearest garage, seven miles down the road. Back came Buddy with a breakdown lorry to tow us from the edge of peril and allow us to get on our way to Jo'burg. That's one drive I won't forget in a hurry."

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On another occasion also in the 1951/52 season Trevor Redmond was again involved in a car crash, as a result of which a South African rider, Fred Goodrum, unfortunately had to have one arm amputated. Redmond was in the same car, but he escaped serious injury. The following night at Wembley, a collection was taken for Fred Goodrum with the riders going round on the terraces and stands, shaking a collection box.

Accidents on the road claimed the life of at least two other speedway riders in the 1950's. One was Maurice Fenton, who was British born, but took on SA citizenship. He started riding at the end of the 1949-50 season and improved enough during 1950-51 to be selected for Buddy Fuller's 1951 S.A. touring team to Europe. A

year or two later he was killed in a motorcycle road crash.

The other fatality occurred to Terry Courtneil, an English rider who lost his life in a car crash on the way home from a meeting at Randfontein in November 1956.

Several more stories could be told, for example about the car crash at Balla Balla, that prevented South African riders Harry Serrurier, Aubrey Long and Johnny Gander, together with Englishman Eric Boothroyd to take part in the 1956 Rhodesian Open Championship at Bulawayo. Non of the riders were injured, but they were unable to complete the journey to the track.

Another trip up to Rhodesia and back that wasn't without incident saw the South African Test team travel in a speedway bus to Bulawayo for the Second Test Match between South Africa and Europe in February of 1958. Heavy storms on the way North delayed the bus in many parts and on the return trip the bus skidded in the thick mud and all but overturned, having to be pulled out of the mire by a native driver of a great Mercedes truck. At another stage the bus ran into a herd of impala which suddenly crossed the road resulting in one buck being killed.

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Part 8: LONG AND DAVIES – SOUTH AFRICA'S GREATEST

The years of the **mid-50's** were a period of unprecedented success for South African Speedway. Never before and never ever after had the game been bigger or on such a high level. In those years South African speedway was on a par with Australia and New Zealand, and possibly only slightly behind Britain, who experienced a difficult time with many clubs folding around that period of time.

LONG TIME IN ENGLAND

Several South African riders had joined teams in the British National League during the European season. The star was Henry Long of the Belle Vue 'Aces' at Manchester. He had come to England in 1949, when he made his first appearance for the Aces in the National League Division 1. His scoring steadily improved and for the record I will list his total scores of league racing during the four seasons he raced for the Manchester club. 1949 (6 points from just a couple of matches), 1950 (111 pts), 1951 (197 pts) and 1952 (155 pts). In his last season in England, 1952, he made history as the first South African to qualify and ride in the World Final, scoring 7 points from his five starts, which gave him joint 8th place in the World Championships. The winner that year was Australian Jack Young ahead of Welshman Freddie Williams.

Long continued to ride in South Africa and beat all of the world stars who toured his home country in the next years, but he never returned to the U.K., despite many attempts by British promoters to lure him back. Most experts of the time were convinced that if he would have made a serious attempt, Henry Long had what it takes to become world champion.

He has won the South African Championship for at least six times between 1950 and 1954, and again in 1957 and 1958 (Could be seven depending on the source of information). He holds the record in Test match appearances for South Africa and is the Springboks' all-time highest scorer.

HERE COMES DAVIES

At the time of Long's return to his Transvaal home, a new South African sensation by the name of Doug Davies was signed by First Division club Birmingham. Born on the 6th of August 1936 at Potchefstroom, he is an ex-cycle speedway rider who took up speedway racing "just for the fun of it". He came to England in 1954 with less than a full season's racing experience behind him. Within a year or two Doug had improved so much that he not only became a heat leader for the Birmingham 'Brummies', but he, too, was seen as a potential world champion by many experts of the game. For the record, his British League scores for the season of 1955 totalled 138 points, which made him third highest for his club. Captain Alan Hunt was the number one with 244, with Ron Mountford runner-up on 225 points. But more of a sensation was the fact that Davies, at the tender age of 19 and in his first full season in the U.K. qualified for the 1955 World Final! Unfortunately he fell ill and was forced to withdraw with meningitis just a couple of weeks beforehand.

Davies recovered and returned to Birmingham in 1956. This year he already passed Mountford in the club's scoring table, that now read Hunt 226, Davies 181 and Mountford 171. Davies was eager to repeat his world championship run, and indeed for the second year in a row was among the best sixteen riders of the world that qualified for the Championship Final at Wembley's Empire Stadium. And this time the young South African was there and rode before a 65,000 crowd. He didn't do quite as good as some people would have expected, apart from a strong second place in heat five. At the end of the meeting he had got just four points and ended up in 13th place. The World Champion that year was Ove Fundin of Sweden, ahead of New Zealand's Ronnie Moore.

In South Africa, Doug Davies had to wait until 1961 before winning his first National Championship. He repeated this feat in the 1961/62 season, when the Final was staged at Klerksdorp. Davies was a leading scorer for the Springboks in Test Matches between 1954 and 1961, making his International debut against Freddie Williams' British touring team of 1953/54.

OTHERS TOO

Encouraged by Davies' success, the Birmingham management signed not one but two more South Africans in 1956. Neil Mortimer and Arthur Duncan both made a lively impact on British speedway.

The only other South African who rode for a British First Division team was youngster Fred Lang, who joined Kiwi-Springbok Trevor Redmond in the London Wembley Lions team of 1954.

Others made their way in Division 2, such as the 1952 South African Junior Champion Roy Bester. He rode for Scottish club Edinburgh Monarchs in 1953 and 1954, before being transferred to the Leicester Lions in England, but did not return to the UK in the following year. In 1954 Bester had a successful run in the World Championship qualifying rounds. He went on to reach the last stage before the World Final and just missed out on a Wembley appearance, which would have made him the second South African after Henry Long to reach a World Final.

RECESSION

In 1955 both Bester and Lang opted out on a return to the United Kingdom, possibly disenchanted with the diminishing financial terms. It was a worrying time for riders in England as they chased fewer jobs and more and more clubs announcing their closure. Since the end of the 1953 season the big London clubs, that once were the proud flagships of the sport in the pre-war and early post-war years, closed up one after another. New Cross fell at the end of 1953, Harringay after 1954. The next year saw the end of West Ham and after the closure of the mighty Wembley (London) Lions at the end of the 1956 season, speedway in the UK had hit rock-bottom with just 7 tracks remaining in Division One, and Wimbledon as the lone survivor in London. It was not until the early Sixties that the sport began to grow again and eventually blossomed when in 1965 the new British League was founded. By then, however, for various reasons, South African riders were no longer part of the game.



This is Alan Hunt, captain of the Durban Hornets and the 1956 South African champion wearing his British Test Match colours (right) and in action for the Birmingham 'Brummies' in the U.K. National League of 1956.

ON THE HOME FRONT

The following year it was Hunt, who took the S.A. title in a thrilling final on his South African League home track at Hoy Park in Durban. It was the first time that the Final of the South African Championship was held outside the Transvaal. Hunt said later: "Hornets did not manage to retain the league title this year so I made

certain that the Championship trophy would come to Durban!"

Durban Hornets had lost the final national league match of the 1955/56 season by a score of 36-48 to the Wembley Lions of Johannesburg. The captain of the Lions was Henry Long.

AND THEN CAME THE SPLIT

During 1956 a rift had opened among those who ran South African speedway. A rival group to the South African Speedway Riders' Association formed in the shape of the South African Speedway Control Board, with its headquarter up in Pretoria. Up to that year, the S.R.A. under their president Buddy Fuller, had been in control of the sport. Now a group of rival promoters up at Pretoria and at Randfontein forced a split up and decided they could be just as successful without Fuller's organization. It was a struggle for power that eventually nearly killed the sport, but more about this in the next part of this series.

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Part 9: THREAT OF VIOLENCE THE 1956/57 SEASON

PRIOR to the **1956/57** speedway season, in Johannesburg, Mr. Raymond Dempsey, the honorary secretary of the newly constituted South African Speedway Control Board, received two telephone calls from unidentified speakers. These calls threatened Mr. Dempsey with violence if he continues to "meddle in speedway matters"!

The police was informed of the incidents, which indicate how bad the relations were between the two rival parties, who attempted to promote the sport of speedway racing in South Africa. What could have been the greatest season in South African speedway history was spoilt by friction between the South African Speedway Riders' Association and the S.A. Control Board.

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Two British teams were invited to tour South Africa in the 1956/57 season. One team, led by Alan Hunt was put under contract to Buddy Fuller, representing the Speedway Riders' Association, and the other team with Peter Craven, Barry Briggs, Ronnie Genz, Howdy Byford etc. joined the Trevor Redmond combination at the Pretoria and Randfontein tracks, sanctioned by the Speedway Control Board.

When the teams left the U.K. it was thought both sets of riders would ride on each other's circuits, but it appears the Riders' Association would not recognise the Control Board's ruling, with the result the riders attached to Buddy Fuller were eventually suspended and fined by the Board for riding on unlicensed tracks.

Commenting on the state of affairs, the chairman of the S.R.A., Buddy Fuller said: "This Association has had the responsibility of bringing overseas riders to the Union for the past ten years. Now what amounts to a rival has imported an overseas team which includes several men who have ridden previously in this country.

"The S.R.A. have decided by an unanimous decision that they cannot find room for them to compete in meetings on their tracks. Alan Hunt has brought an England team out to the Union which includes riders new to the South African public. The S.R.A. are attempting to expand speedway. Thus for the first time a touring team will race at Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth.

"The English riders have been allocated to teams in the National League which is under S.R.A. guidance. For the first time since the National League was formed some four years ago, Klerksdorp and Vereeniging will field teams in the five circuit league. These tracks replace Randfontein and Pretoria who no longer have members in the Speedway Riders' Association."

Full composition of the teams for the 1956/57 National League season was as follows:

Wembley Lions: Henry Long, P.Williams, A.Duncan, Aubrey Long, P.McKenzie, T.Boshoff, J.Meade, T.Nel, S.Hopf and R.Long.

Durban Hornets: A.Hunt, J.Gooch, R.Browning, G.Hickson, G.White, V.McWilliams, H.Bremner, D.Motley, O.Watson and M.Jones.

Springs Stars: D.Davies, N.Nicholls, R.Bester, T.Edwards, D.Naudé, B.Messer, E.Blignaut, F.Fotheringham, B.Main and C.Rennie.

Klerksdorp Hawks: R.Mountford, F.Wills, N.Mortimer, J.Bekker, J.Pinto, B.Madden, R.Leach, H.Pretorius, W.Robertson and E.Loveland.

Vereeniging Aces: E.Boothroyd, J.Lightfoot, D.Collins, P.Maschke, J.Gander, C.Warne, K.Long, R.Bantjes, J.Ackerman and O.Edwards.

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Let's take a look at the racing with a quick run through the season's major events, starting with the meetings staged by the S.R.A.:

As a warm-up before the England team arrived, a South African select travelled into Southern Rhodesia and beat the local Bulawayo Lions. Speedway at the Bulawayo Showground was a very popular attraction with local residents. Their team, led by South African Fred Wills, had never lost a match until they were beaten 42.5 to 28.5 by South Africa in this challenge match. Henry Long rode unbeaten to score a 12 point maximum and received good support from Roy Bester, Toy Edwards and Pat McKenzie.

The English tourists made their first appearance at Hoy Park in Durban, where Alan Hunt, the former captain of the Durban Hornets made a triumphant return to his old hunting ground, improving the four lap record on two occasions and winning the Silver Helmet Individual Championship with a fifteen points maximum.

Veteran South African Fred Wills, who was Buddy Fuller's brother-in-law, fractured an ankle in a meeting in Cape Town and decided to retire from the sport for good. Wills had already announced his retirement half way through the previous season, but stated a determination to ride in as many league matches as possible, but the crash at Cape Town's Goodwood Raceway put an end to his speedway career. Wills had started speedway racing in 1938. He did so well that he was runner-up to Buddy Fuller in the 1940 South African Championships, and eventually became the champion in the 1948/49 season. Wills was an automatic choice for South Africa, making his debut for the Springboks in the 1948/49 Test Series against England. He went with the English riders and joined Liverpool for the 1949 season in Britain.

THE TESTS

The 1956/57 Test series started at the end of November with a match at Bloemfontein, where Doug Davies, Henry Long and Neil Mortimer led South Africa to a convincing 57-51 win over England.

The Second Test took place on December 7 at Johannesburg's Wembley Stadium. South Africa won this match 58-49 despite Henry Long having one of the most disappointing meetings in his speedway career. Reason for Long's failure was magneto trouble in two outings. He borrowed machines for his next two but was not happy on them and pulled out of the rest of the meeting. It was also an unlucky night for Doug Davies, who would have been South Africa's top scorer but for a broken chain in his last race when leading on the run in. So, the Star man for South Africa was Roy Bester, heading the Springbok score chart on 15 points. Neil Mortimer and debutant Pat McKenzie formed a successful new test pairing, scoring 22 out of a possible 28 points. South Africa showed all-round superiority, with their second string men taking the honours in the battle for the minor placings.

On January 19, both teams clashed at the Showground track in Bulawayo, So.Rhodesia, where England beat South Africa 56-49 in front of an excellent crowd. Ron Mountford, Eric Boothroyd and Alan Hunt were into double figure scores, while non of the South Africans was in that category. Surprise top scorer on his international debut for the Springboks was Bev Bird, the pick of the local Southern Rhodesian riders. He got nine points, Bester got 8 and Long got 7, while Davies failed to score after pulling out of the meeting, retiring to the centre green in his only start in heat 2.

After the test match, the two captains, Henry Long and Alan Hunt, lined up for the "Golden Helmet" match race. It was neck and neck until Hunt's engine failed to leave Long the only finisher. A grand climax to the meeting was the presentation of the trophies by Mayor Phillips of Bulawayo.

HUNT KILLED IN LEAGUE MATCH

It was a tragic loss to speedway when England & Durban Hornets captain Alan Hunt lost his life in a fatal track accident at Wembley on February 1, 1957. It was in the second half of a double header of league matches. In the first match Wembley Lions had beaten Durban Hornets 46-32, with Hunt scoring 8 points. Then came the second match, raced between the Hornets and the Klerksdorp Hawks. Alan Hunt who had scored six points up to that point in the match, was again out in the lead when his motor stopped and he was thrown. He was taken to hospital with a fracture to the base of his skull and died between 2 and 2.30 a.m. on Saturday, February 2, 1957.

Up to the fatal accident to Alan Hunt racing was very keen and exciting. The match result stood, with Durban winning 38-32, and the scorers were as follows:

Durban Hornets (38): *Johnny Gander 10, Jimmy Gooch 8, Alan Hunt 6, Vern McWilliams 5, Graham White 3, Hooky Bremner 3, Dennis Motley 3, C.Slater 0.*

Klerksdorp Hawks (32): *Eric Boothroyd 10, Neil Mortimer 9, Johnny Bekker 5, Johnny Ackerman 5, B.Maddern 2, Harry Pretorius 1, Peter Maschke 0, Johnny Pinto 0.*

TEST MATCHES RESUME

On Friday, February 15, the Test Series was taken up again with South Africa beating England 57-51 in the fourth match at Wembley Stadium, Johannesburg. Henry Long and Doug Davis were the stars, both remaining unbeaten all night and respectively scoring an 18-point maximum for the Springboks.

With this win South Africa also made sure of the overall victory in the series, going 3-1 up with only one match left.

This fifth and final Test was held at Hoy Park, Durban, where the English presented themselves in fine form, taking a 59-49 win. The entire match was a delight to watch, one of the best ever at Hoy Park, and though the South Africans tried hard, they were simply not good enough and were out-riden.

For all this, the rider of the night was a South African – top points scorer Doug Davies, who, with an injured ankle, rode brilliantly. Only once he was beaten by the British team riding, and even then he managed to gain second place. Henry Long, too, rode hard and well and provided his share of thrills for the spectators. The racing was fast and close with England just the more solid team.

Overall points scorers of the 1956/57 South Africa v England Test Series:

South Africa – Doug Davies 66 (17 14 0 18 17), Henry Long 54 (15 0 7 18 14), Roy Bester 50 (5 15 8 13 9), Neil Mortimer 39 (14 14 6 5 -), Arthur Duncan 16 (1 5 6 0 4), Pat McKenzie 11 (2 7 – 2 0), Bev Bird 9 (- - 9 - -), Toy Edwards 5 (2 3 - - -), Roy Browning 5 (- - - - 5), Claude Warne 3 (- - 3 - -), Johnnie Gander 1 (- - - 1 -), Vern McWilliams 0 (- - - - 0);

England – Eric Boothroyd 58 (12 13 15 11 7), Ron Mountford 56 (14 4 16 11 11), Alan Hunt 38 (12 15 11 - -), Peter Williams 37 (7 12 5 5 8), Jimmy Gooch 34 (2 0 6 12 14), Jim Lightfoot 29 (4 4 3 5 13), Nick Nicholls 34 (0 1 0 7 5), Vic Ridgeon 1 (- - - - 1), Dave Collins 0 (- - - 0 -);

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Several more challenge matches between England and South African Select teams were staged at a variety of tracks. Over the Christmas period the teams went to Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, with England winning both encounters. Roy Bester, however, was the individual star of that tour to the Cape Province scoring an 18 point maximum in the match at Cape Town's Goodwood Stadium, and also stealing the honours in a second meeting held at P.E. on a stop over when travelling back to the Transvaal. On this occasion Bester won the East Province Championship, riding unbeaten to carry off the trophy.

Another match on February 20 at Springs was won by the Springbok Select by 39-33, again Bester (10), Davies (10) and Long (9) top scored for the winners. And Klerksdorp, too, saw International action, with South Africa beating the English in front of a 7,500 crowd.

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HENRY LONG WINS SOUTH AFRICAN CHAMPIONSHIP

The major individual event of the South African season, the 1957 South African Championship, was staged at Wembley Stadium, Johannesburg, on Friday, February 22.

Henry Long won the event with 15 points, with Ron Mountford runner-up on 14 points. Sharing joint third place were Eric Boothroyd and Doug Davies, who scored 12 points.

Heat 20 was the race of the night. In it were Mountford (12), Davies (12), Long (12) and Boothroyd (11). It was everyman for himself from start to finish. On the third lap Davies fell while duelling with Long. He wasn't hurt, just bruised. Long won the race from Mountford and Boothroyd. After the race the three riders went to the centre and made a brief speech before doing a lap of honour on the tractor.

Scorers: Henry Long (SA) 15, Ron Mountford (England) 14, Eric Boothroyd (Eng) 12, Doug Davies (SA) 12, Roy Bester (SA) 10, Jimmy Gooch (Eng) 10, Peter Williams (Eng) 9, Nick Nicholls (Eng) 8, Pat McKenzie (SA) 7, Jimmy Meade (SA) 5, Claude Warne (SA) 5, Arthur Duncan (SA) 3, Toy Edwards (SA) 3, Ernie Loveland (SA) 3, Jim Lightfoot (Eng) 2, Toby Boshoff (SA) 2, Theo Nel (SA, res.) 0;

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The touring riders under Speedway Control Board guidance meanwhile ran their own season at the Pretoria and Randfontein tracks.

Organising manager Trevor Redmond had brought out a troupe including riders of the highest calibre, such as Englishman Peter Craven, New Zealander Barry Briggs and Swedish ace Olle Nygren. But without the South African star riders, who were still with Buddy Fuller's S.R.A., it was always tough going for the S.C.B. events.

They tried to set up some kind of team competition, but with only two tracks under their banner, this wasn't easy and the fans would soon get tired of seeing the same riders and teams each week.

Nevertheless three club teams were composed for the 1956/57 season, that included the following names:

Pretoria Eagles: Olle Nygren, Barry Briggs, Howdy Cornell, Charly Branders, Jimmy Scott, Percy Binder, Kevin Robertson;

West Rand Rockets: Peter Craven, Trevor Blokdyk, Howdy Byford, Ray Cresp, Trevor Bond, Peter Greyling, Dick Hardman;

East Rand Stars: Trevor Redmond, Fred van Zyl, Terry Courtnell, Dennis Newton, Ronnie Genz, Dick Scott, Fred Armstrong;

The competition wasn't worth much since riders permanently guested for other teams, and matches in general had little meaning since they were just challenges with a friendly character, compared to the S.R.A.'s much more competitive National League matches.

*

An attempt was made even to stage their own Test Series. With the top South African riders unavailable, the two teams represented Europe and the British Commonwealth. The English riders plus Sweden's Olle Nygren represented Europe, while the Australasians plus South Africans were put together under the Commonwealth tag.

The first such Test match took place at Randfontein on January 31, 1957. The Commonwealth team made no mistakes to win by 56-50. The star for Europe was tiny Peter Craven, who was to win two World Championships in his speedway career, before losing his life in a fatal track accident in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1963.

At Randfontein he clocked a new track record of 60.5 seconds and but for a fall in heat four, might have well scored another of his customary maximums, for he won all his remaining races. In the fall Peter hurt his leg and damaged his bike after Howdy Cornell ran into him. Barry Briggs, himself a future four-times world champion, topped the Commonwealth score chart with fifteen points.

Here is the full scorers list:

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH 56: Barry Briggs (N.Z.) 15, Trevor Redmond (N.Z.) 14, Ray Cresp (Australia) 14, Fred van Zyl (S.A.) 5, Trevor Blokdyk (S.A.) 5, Howdy Cornell (S.A.) 5;

EUROPE 50: Peter Craven (Eng) 15, Olle Nygren (Sweden) 9, Howdy Byford (Eng) 9, Frank Johnson (Eng) 7, Dennis Newton (Eng) 5, Ronnie Genz (Eng) 4;

*

The second Test went ahead at Pretoria on Friday, February 8, but had to be run under terrible conditions due to a heavy downfall of rain during the afternoon. Throughout the meeting riders battled against terrible odds and the result of 54-53 in Europe's favour was, to quote one correspondent, "rather meaningless".

Peter Craven crashed in his second race and damaged some ligaments in his left leg. He caught his leg under his bike when he spilled, was rushed to hospital and had the complete leg placed in plaster.

This was definitely a match in which courage played a very prominent part. Veteran Fred van Zyl of the Commonwealth team only scored one point ... and to score it he had to push his bike home.

Olle Nygren and Barry Briggs scored seventeen points each and each spoilt the other's maximum chances. Actually Nygren scored another three points when pressed in as a replacement for the injured Craven in one race. Byford and Newton also had seven rides.

Scorers of the Second Test:

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH 53

Barry Briggs 17, Ray Cresp 15, Trevor Redmond 13, Trevor Blokdyk 3, Howdy Cornell 3, Fred van Zyl 1, Jimmy Scott (reserve) 1.

EUROPE 54

Olle Nygren 20, Dennis Newton 11, Frank Johnson 10, Howdy Byford 6, Ronnie Genz 4, Peter Craven 3.

*

One of the tourists, Terry Courtnell, lost his life in a car crash in November when returning from a meeting with Trevor Redmond, Dennis Newton, Ronnie Genz and Howdy Byford. The car turned over a number of

times and Courtnell was killed. The other riders were taken to hospital with minor injuries.

*

Other events on the S.C.B. calendar were a repeat of meaningless individual, pairs and team matches between the three S.C.B club teams. As this was put on each Friday night at Pretoria and Saturday night at Randfontein from November till the end of February, people soon got tired of the same stuff and the same faces. Thus it was hardly surprising that after their first season into speedway promotion, the S.C.B. and with it the Pretoria and Randfontein tracks did not make a profit of it. Still, they did not concede that failure could be their own fault, but instead were adamant to get rid of the rival and put a ban on the Buddy Fuller organisation and all their riders. They could do so, since the S.C.B. was the official body affiliated with the British A.C.U. and through them the International Governing Body, the F.I.M..

In the past this had little or no meaning for domestic racing in South Africa, but when the South African S.C.B. reported all of the English riders of Alan Hunt's touring team to the British A.C.U. for riding on tracks not recognized by the S.A. Speedway Control Board, they had to act and most of the English riders were suspended upon their return to the U.K., while a sine die ban was also placed upon the South African riders by their own board. This caused trouble in the extreme since a number of South Africans had been riding successfully in Britain's National League, but were now all of a sudden not allowed to return there in 1957. If they wanted their suspensions to be lifted, they would have to join the ranks of the S.C.B. – which at first none of them did, showing their loyalty towards Buddy Fuller, the man who had done more than anyone else to establish the sport of speedway racing in South Africa.

However, his loyalists had to pay the price and Doug Davies, Neil Mortimer and Arthur Duncan, all members of the Birmingham team in England were refused permission to ride there in 1957. Since the late Alan Hunt was also lost to the Birmingham club, this famous British Speedway Club was suddenly put in deep trouble, which eventually led to its closure, forced upon them by the "South African crisis".

Part 10: 1957 – The Control Board takes over.

In August of 1957 the week-end papers featured the resignation of Buddy Fuller as chairman of the South African Speedway Riders Association, after he had held this position for eleven years.

Many people were very upset about the fact that the person to whom South African speedway owed so much, was virtually forced out of the sport by the Speedway Control Board. It was the S.C.B. ban of Fuller's tracks and riders, that forced him to resign from the South African speedway scene, much to the regret of followers of the sport, who have always looked upon him as the person who established speedway in South Africa and has done more than anyone else, South African or otherwise, for the sport. Veteran rider Toby Boshoff took over the chairmanship of the S.R.A. and was expected to co-operate with the Speedway Control Board and join in the National Speedway Union.

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At the start of the 1957/58 speedway season, which commenced in November after an eight week stock car season, there were 31 active riders in the National Speedway Union. During the winter there had been much activity in Pretoria, where the biggest and most enthusiastic speedway training school in the country operated every Saturday afternoon with experienced Trevor Blokdyk as coach-in-chief. Over twenty would-be speedway stars had presented themselves for lessons and some of them looked very promising.

Finest prospect was Peter Hearne, who seemed quite on par with last season's discovery Howard Cornell, who, in his first season had been capable of giving many of the experienced overseas boys a real hard ride.

Henry Long, Roy Bester and Toy Edwards were the most prominent riders among others to resign from the S.R.A. and join the Pretoria Association. Together with the overseas boys, there were now sufficient men available for the N.S.U. to form several teams and take over the running of the National Speedway League from the S.R.A..

Trevor Redmond, originally a New Zealander but by now a naturalized South African, returned to Pretoria from his British League duties at the end of October, after the stock car season and in time to shake things up for the new speedway campaign. For the many new riders, there could be no better coach than Redmond, whose expert tuition was vital to them to make the grade in the hurly-burly of a league.

*

On November 8, the Northern Transvaal Championship kicked off the new speedway season in Pretoria. Not surprisingly, the former S.R.A. star rider Henry Long continued his winning ways on his debut under the N.S.U. banner, taking the title with a 15 points maximum. Trevor Redmond on 14 points was second and Roy

Bester (13) third. Surprise of the meeting was Peter Hearne, who scored 8 points in his first full scale speedway meeting.

Meanwhile it was announced that Pretoria had signed a contract to stage speedway meetings in Durban. They were already in charge of the Randfontein Speedway Stadium, whose managership had been offered to Dennis Newton, one of the touring English riders, who was to settle down in South Africa.

Durban's first meeting under the N.S.U. regime was the Natal Open Championship, won by Trevor Redmond. In this event Trevor was a little lucky to take the title, for speedy Henry Long only dropped his points when he had to withdraw from one race because of a broken foot rest.

Points scorers were: Trevor Redmond 13, Henry Long 12, Roy Bester 11, Trevor Blokdyk 11, Howdy Cornell 10, Gerry Hickson 7, Toy Edwards 7, Charlie Branders 6, Vern McWilliams 6, Graham White 6, Nic Dormehl 5, Peter Hearne 4, Des Haswell 3, Ken Goussard 2, Jimmy Scott 0.

*

The S.R.A. under Toby Boshoff's leadership had a hard time with too few riders still on their books. They formed a team, the Springs Stars, and appeared in the opening meeting at Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, in a match against the local team. For the record and to give an indication of who was still with the S.R.A. at the beginning of the 57/58 season, here is the scorechart of this meeting:

Bulawayo Lions 33

Claude Warne 10, Bev Bird 9, Toby Boshoff 5, Cliff Raats 4, Ron Bantjes 4, Aubrey Long 1.

Springs Stars 39

Doug Davies 12, Johnny Gander 10, Jimmy Meade 7, Johnny Bekker 6, Neil Neilsen 3, Basil Motley 1.

For the rest of the season, the S.R.A. were no longer able to run meetings on their own and had to join in with the stock cars to fill the programmes. As that's what was presented at the major tracks such as Wembley and Springs, it sure helped the cars soon to become more popular than the speedway bikes.

*

For the National Speedway Union in Pretoria the prospects at the same time were still great. Trevor Redmond had been elected chairman of the N.S.U., Henry Long became the vice-chairman and Pretoria promoter John Bunton was the secretary.

During November most of the overseas riders had arrived. From England came Bobby Andrews, Roy Bowers, Des Haswell and Dennis Newton, the latter two eventually stayed on in the country and applied for South African citizenship. Two Swedish riders completed the touring team, Olle Nygren and the great Ove Fundin, who was destined to become a five-times world champion in his further speedway career. Fundin, though, only arrived in mid-December, while Nygren and the English lads were here a month earlier.

Bobby Andrews made his debut at the Pretoria track on November 22, scoring 12 points in a Best Pairs contest. However, with his partner Peter Hearne failing to contribute to their combined points total, this pair ended in last place overall. The trophies were won by Trevor Redmond, who was unbeaten in five rides, and his partner Howdy Cornell.

*

A final test before the start of the League matches was staged on November 30 at Pretoria, where the Transvaal team was beaten by a London Select, including all four of the touring English riders. Newton and Bowers made their first appearances at Pretoria. Henry Long, the Transvaal captain, set a new track record of 60.8 seconds.

The point scorers were:

TRANSVAAL 47

Henry Long 17, Roy Bester 10, Howdy Cornell 9, Toy Edwards 7, Charlie Branders 2, Nic Dormehl 1, Johnny Ackerman 1.

LONDON 59

Dennis Newton 15, Trevor Redmond 15, Bobby Andrews 10, Roy Bowers 7, Des Haswell 6, Arthur Duncan 5, Jimmy Scott 1.

*

By now the teams for the South African National League had been selected and approved by the Speedway Control Board. Initially only four instead of the traditional five teams were formed, but there was still negotiations going on with the promoters in Johannesburg to include the famous Wembley Lions team. Henry Long was destined to again captain the Lions, for whom he was such a stalwart for many years in the

S.R.A. controlled National League days.

The line-up of the four club teams to start the 1957/58 National League were as follows:

DURBAN Hornets: Ove Fundin, Gerry Hickson, Vern McWilliams, Roy Bowers, Graham White, Hookie Bremner, Ken Goussard.

EAST RAND Stars: Bobby Andrews, Roy Bester, Toy Edwards, Des Haswell, Nic Dormehl, Johnny Ackerman, Dick Scott.

PRETORIA Eagles: Olle Nygren, Trevor Redmond, Howdy Cornell, Charlie Branders, Jimmy Scott, Peter Hearne, Kev Robertson.

RANDFONTEIN Rockets: Trevor Blokdyk, Dennis Newton, Arthur Duncan, George Glen, Stan Coch, Paul Deglon.

*

The first league match, raced off on December 7, was won by the Eagles 57-45. Trevor Redmond was on top form, scoring 16 points. Stars started strongly but, as the meeting progressed despite some hard riding from Roy Bester, dropped behind and had no answer to the determined riding of the Eagles.

Scores:

Pretoria Eagles 57

Trevor Redmond 16, Olle Nygren 11, Howdy Cornell 11, Charlie Branders 7, Jimmy Scott 7, Peter Hearne 3, Kev Robertson 2.

East Rand Stars 45

Roy Bester 15, Bobby Andrews 12, Roy Bowers 6, Toy Edwards 5, Nic Dormehl 5, Dick Scott 2, Johnny Ackerman 0.

*

Henry Long, still without a team, stepped into the Randfontein line-up for the National League match against the Pretoria Eagles. Despite the fact that he recorded a 17 points score, being beaten only by Trevor Redmond, his team lost by 46 to 55 points.

Scorers:

Randfontein Rockets 46

Henry Long 17, Dennis Newton 14, Trevor Blokdyk 10, Arthur Duncan 4, Stanley Coch 1, George Glen 0, Paul Deglon 0.

Pretoria Eagles 55

Trevor Redmond 13, Howdy Cornell 12, Olle Nygren 10, Charlie Branders 6, Jimmy Scott 6, Peter Hearne 5, Kevin Robertson 3.



The Randfontein Rockets team with Henry Long (on bike) as their captain

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Before the end of the year, on December 21, a new track was opened at Standerton Park. Ove Fundin made a terrific impression with the crowd, scoring maximum points and helping partner Kev Robertson to second place in a Best Pairs contest.

Winning combination was that of Roy Bester and Jimmy Scott, who blended well. Scott set up a track record of 61 seconds for the quarter mile oval. This time was later broken by Henry Long (60.5) and, finally, by Olle Nygren (59.9).

*

Early in the new Year (1958) the long awaited return of the Wembley Lions team to the National League would indeed happen. The team included the remnants of the S.R.A., among them Toby Boshoff and Doug Davies. It wasn't for long though.

There was also a Test Match series between South Africa and Europe, due to commence at Pretoria on January 17. For this first encounter, the Springboks had selected Trevor Redmond as their captain, plus Howdy Cornell, Roy Bester, Toy Edwards, Trevor Blokdyk, Nick Dormehl and Southern Rhodesian ace Bev Bird.

Europe would be captained by Ove Fundin and include fellow Swede Olle Nygren, plus Englishmen Roy Bowers, Des Haswell, Dennis Newton and Bobby Andrews.

But more about the events of the second half of the 1957-58 season in the next part of this series.

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