

1947

– A snapshot review first published in '50 Years of Cycle Speedway' by The British Cycle Speedway Council in 1996.

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The Start of a Golden Era

The virgin sport of cycle speedway took some giant strides in 1947. Probably the first publication to realise what a vibrant and exciting sport it was and certainly the first to recognise its true potential was the Speedway Gazette. It dealt with the sport firstly through its Junior Gazette feature. When it realised that the sport was growing rapidly, the then editor, Basil Storey, devoted a column to the sport itself. It must be remembered however, that while cycle speedway leagues were appearing with mushroom-like regularity, the main idea of most riders was to emulate the feats of their local motor-speedway heroes.

Capable organisation was still a long way off but the general public were beginning to become cycle speedway conscious. While at first their interest was suppressed, it was in later years to lead to the formation of a national body and a golden era in the sport's fifty year history. In the south, Stratford Hammers were still dominant, but teams like Becton Aces, New Cross Rangers, Albany Aces were going strong, and in Scotland the big team was Craighton Eagles. In Bradford a team called Grange Leopards had two tracks. Other teams were Yeadon Eagles, Lower Lane Lions, and Horton Panthers. Membership fee for riders was three shillings and sixpence per year and six pence a week subscription.

In Norwich, the sport made really rapid progress thanks to Norwich Speedway manager Dicky Wise. Known teams of

this period included Hellesdon Hammers, Harvey Lane Rangers, Rectory Rangers and St Andrews Hearts. Another team who made a brief stay were Mile Cross Motors. Also operating were Waterloo Tigers, Spixworth Crusaders, Hellesdon Lions, Drayton Dragnets, Rectory Racers, Hellesdon Harriers and another team from Mile Cross. Well known speedway rider, Billy Bales was a member of Hellesdon Harriers. Roger Bunn won the riders championship, and Billy Bales and Pete Woodcock took the best pairs.

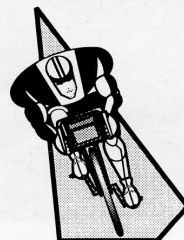
On the topsy-turvy London scene, a team simply known as The Dodgers were operating in the Forest Gate area, very close to the home of Stratford Hammers. Their skipper, "Bronco" Desborough, was an enterprising young man who had ambitious plans to stage the first ever British Cycle Speedway Riders Championship.

Records from the Romford area show that a team, one of many, called Eastbury Eagles were going great guns. New Cross Rangers shared their track with a long forgotten team, New Cross Stars. Aim of the Rangers manager, John Pollard, was the formation of a South East London League for 1948. First concrete progress in London was the formation of the East London Control Board on 31 December 1947. This was the forerunner of all recognised governing bodies. Yes, the year 1947 was a season of disorganisation but one during which rapid strides were made.

Stockport League Flourishes

1947 saw the formation of the Stockport League. The league was the brainchild of Jim MacPherson of the Stockport Defiants club who rode unbeaten all season. The Stockport League consisted of three main teams - the Defiants, Cheadle Hulme Rangers and Adswold Boomerangs. Other teams came and went during the next year or so. They included Heaton Mersey Flyers, Offerton Double Diamonds, Droylesden, Chapel Panthers, Werneth Lions and Salford. The Stockport League continued until 11 November 1948 when the sport's oldest surviving association was formed - the Manchester, Stockport and District Control Board.

During its brief existence the Stockport League arranged two league individual championships. The first was the 1947 final which for some reason was not held until May 1948 and the second was held in October 1948. Brian Moston won both events.



Snippets from 1947

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In October, Fred Mockford, the New Cross Speedway promoter presented a silver cup to the winners of the South East London Best Pairs Championship at Albany Road, Camberwell. Also present was music hall star Jill Manners.

14 teams were in operation in the Bradford area. One of the closest matches of the season saw Harbour Road Cobras beat Lower Lane Lions by 42 points to 41 at Odsal Stadium.

Three teams were in operation at Frome (Somerset), meanwhile in Norwich a league was being organised for 1948.

One of the biggest tracks in the country was Cheadle Hulme (Cheshire) which measured a massive 120 yards.

Beckton Aces were first winners of East London League and Ronnie "Tiger" Genz of Forest Gate Tigers was the first winner East London Riders Championship.

Late in the year, in December, Stratford Hammers beat Acton Acorns 51-33 at Janson Road, Stratford. Roy Garnham scored a maximum 12 points for Hammers.



*One of the earliest cycle speedway photographs.
Ray Willmore of Stratford Hammers pictured in action at Janson Road, Stratford. What a stylish rider he was!
Note that even in those pioneering days the frame was*