

1953 – A snapshot review first published in '50 Years of Cycle Speedway' by The British Cycle Speedway Council in 1996.

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New Track For Stepney

An extract from the London County Council's press bureau in March 1953 made interesting reading.

"Part of the new open space on the north side of Turner's Road, Stepney and west of Burdett Road is now laid out to serve a dual purpose. There is to be a small sitting-out space fronting Burdett Road and the remainder of the site will, for the time being at least, be devoted to a cycle speedway which local cycle speedway clubs can apply to use. Applications should be sent to Chief Officer of the Parks Department. The layout is estimated to cost £1,910 and it will cost about £675 a year to run."

The national archive does not show whether the track was built or which clubs raced on it.

Pennington Wins Manchester Grand Prix

The first ever Manchester Grand Prix, held at the Carrs Wood track on Sunday 19 July, was won by local rider Alan Pennington. The Chorlton Ace won all his races in convincing style to finish on 15 points. Second was Ian Vintner of Leicester's Kirby Kings on 13 points. Brian Moston of Carrs Wood Hunters was third. The Manchester Grand Prix went on to establish itself as one of the most coveted individual events on the national calendar. It continued to be held annually until the early Nineties.

National Championships Abandoned

Cycle speedway in 1953 received a double body-blow when its two principal backers, the News Chronicle and Mars withdrew their sponsorship.

The News Chronicle, facing stiff opposition in the Fleet Street circulation wars, cut back on their commitments and cycle speedway was one of the many casualties. The Chronicle's decision had an immediate impact on the sport. NACSA suddenly lost its focus. Traditionally it had held its meetings at the newspaper's office in Bouverie Street at the News Chronicle's expense. Suddenly the sport's national administration was in turmoil. In those days telephones were few and far between, at least for working class cycle speedway families, and few people had access to a car. Against this background, the organisation of the sport nationally ground to a halt forcing the abandonment of the national competitions at the county finals stage. The county champions were Bredbury Bees (Cheshire), Southampton Racers (Hampshire), Chorlton Aces (Lancashire), Kirby Kings (Leicestershire), Claydon Greyhounds (Suffolk), Birmingham Lions (Warwickshire).

Without the support of the News Chronicle and the national outlet it provided, Mars also withdrew their sponsorship. The individual county championships which were contested produced the following champions: Alec Hayes - Bredbury (Cheshire), Alan Mowatt - Highfield Cobras (Hampshire), Jack Pennington - Chorlton Aces (Lancashire), E Smith - Claydon Greyhounds (Suffolk), N Thompson - Roland Rockets (Warwickshire)

Coronation Year

1953 saw the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Amid all the pomp and ceremony, cycle speedway clubs and up down the country rejoiced and marked the occasion by holding Coronation Cup matches.

The Coronation Team Championship was organised by London County Council in co-operation with the County of London Cycle Speedway Association. The competition was open to all clubs in the London area and was staged on a knock-out basis. The final was staged at the Wormwood Scrubs track on 29 August but unfortunately the national archive does not record the result!

London's Tulse Hill club staged the Coronation Special Fours event featuring Southall Hammers, Whipps Cross Comets, Edmonton Saints and of course the home team, the Rockets. Top prize was a magnificent Viking Speedway Special cycle kindly donated by Vikings Cycles Limited. Winner's of the trophy were Edmonton Saints. The guest list included some notable dignitaries including their Worships, the Mayor and Mayoress of Lambeth, Alderman W R Knight and Mrs Knight. Also present were Alderman H W Wallace Member of Parliament for Walthamstow East and Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Lipton Member of Parliament for Brixton. Other VIPs included Bertram J G Duffield, chairman of the National Amateur Cycle Speedway Association, Mr Alfred Church from the Bushey Film Studios and representatives of the press.

The sizeable crowd was boosted by some excellent pre-match publicity including a special exhibition the previous week in the Odeon Astoria which featured trophies and a display of the new Viking cycle speedway bike.

Rival Boards Battle for Control in Holland

In 1953 rival organisations were fighting to gain control of the 5,000 or so riders who regularly took part in Dutch cycle speedway. The latest body claiming to speak for riders was the Netherlands Cycle Speedway Control Board run by the Windmills club. The Hilversum Control Board, founded in 1949 and who represented a much larger proportion of riders, failed to recognise the Netherlands Board and blacklisted them.

Hartog de Ronde, president of the Hilversum organisation, said "The Windmill's pirate board will not be recognised. They claim to be the official organisers of international affairs but this is not so. I plan to travel to England this season to discuss a proposed England versus Holland match as well as the problems of international rules".

Meanwhile a Royal Navy team joined the Dutch League in 1953. Racing on a new 75 yards long circuit which was built at a cost of £1,000, the Marines circuit also boasted floodlights and could accommodate 4,000 people.

Tolworth Formed

In September 1953, Ray Wallis and Richard Whitcher formed the Tolworth Tudors. Together they built a track on waste ground in Davis Road, Tolworth. The team consisted entirely of juniors, the average age of which was 16 years. They raced in friendly matches that winter.

Harefield Go Nap

Harefield Pirates won the 1953 North-West Middlesex League - for the fifth successive year - beating Roxeth Rockets into second place. The top ten league averages were Fred Tillyer (Hillingdon) 11.9, Bill Punter (Uxbridge) 11.7, Charlie Ross (Langley) 11.7, Dave Stonex (Harefield) 11.5, John Unsworth (Langley) 10.7, Billy Whyte (Greenford) 10.2, Geoff Pearce (Langley) 9.6, Pete Leckie (Harefield) 9.1, Ian Dunford (Uxbridge) 8.8, Dave Thompson (Harefield) 8.7.

West Essex, Kent and Woolwich and Bexley League

	P	W	D	L	PTS
Welling Wings	8	7	0	1	14
Beckton Panthers	8	6	0	2	12
ROFSA Gunners	8	5	0	3	10
Beckton Stars	8	5	0	3	10
Woolwich Riverhawks	8	4	0	4	8
Welling Aces	8	2	0	6	4
Plumstead Panthers	7	0	1	6	1
Silvertown Stars	7	0	1	6	1

Welling Wings also won the League knock-out cup from Beckton Panthers. Woolwich Riverhawks won the corresponding Consolation Cup from Plumstead Panthers.



Cycle speedway's top officials pictured at the NACSA annual general meeting at the Institute of Journalists in Tudor Street, London on Saturday 17 January 1953

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SHORTS

Miss Valerie Tandy, star of "Ring out the Bells" at the Victoria Palace theatre, presented prizes at the 1953 Surrey Grand Prix, sponsored by Surrey Herald newspaper. The four-a-side match was won by Walthamstow Wolves from the promoting club Walton Swans. Poplar Penguins were third and Stratford Hammers fourth.

On 18 September 1953, BBC Television sent an outside broadcast unit to Leith Links in Edinburgh to cover a representative match between Edinburgh and London which was shown live on children's television.

At the annual general meeting of the Old Woking Jets (Surrey) in April, the 1952 balance sheet showed a profit of £31 13s 11.5d mainly as a result of a coach trip, dances, whist drives etc but the greatest profit came from raffles.

Graham Payne's national cycle speedway magazine "Amateur Cycle Speedway" advertised new speedway cycles at the princely sum of £12 18s 5d from C P Dyne Limited of 213 London Road, Mitcham, Surrey. The company also stocked handle-bars, crash bars, pedals, gears, crash helmets, saddles, Skidway tyres - in fact everything for today's modern speedway cyclist.