

Dennis Jenkins By Philip Dalling



Dennis Jenkins, the subject of a query from a Speedway Plus reader in the United States, was one of a large band of Northern-based speedway riders who had a tough time getting rides in the lean years of the 1950s.

Southern and Midland juniors could race on a fairly regular basis on Sunday afternoons at the Southern Area League tracks like Eastbourne, California and Brafild. It was a long trek in those pre-motorway days from Bolton, where Dennis was based, and it is little wonder that, even after the start of the Provincial League in 1960, so many riders of the era came from the Greater London area.

There was huge competition for second half outings at Belle Vue, for years the only track in the North of England operating on a regular basis. When the Provincial League revived long-defunct venues like Liverpool, Sheffield, Bradford and Newcastle, the outlook improved considerably for Dennis and many others.

My own records show that he rode for Liverpool in 1960, that he made a few appearances for Sheffield in 1961, and was a regular at Bradford in 1962. My own personal experience of Dennis came, however, at Long Eaton in April and May 1963.

When speedway photographer Alf Weedon attempted to line-up the new Archers team for a picture for the back page of Speedway Star, he ran up against the obstinacy of Charlie Monk, who at that stage refused utterly to pose for pics of any kind.

Alf posed Archers promoter Reg Fearman with the remaining six Archers riders, and celebrity guest for the night, Kenneth Cope, who had been a star of Coronation Street.

To make up the seven riders, Reg called Dennis, programmed for a couple of second half rides, to join the group.

The picture duly appeared in Speedway Star on July 13 1963, with a smiling Dennis standing next to Kenneth Cope. Unfortunately, no-one had seen fit to supply Dennis with a race-jacket, and he appears in just his racing leathers.

Speedway historians have no doubt puzzled over the picture, as Dennis did not race in the Archers team in that opening home match, against St Austell. He did however make one or two team appearances in the early part of the season. Injuries meant that the original reserve, Ken Vale, was promoted into the team, and the reserve slot was shared between Dennis and Tony Eadon for a while.

Monk may have refused to appear on the picture that night, but few fans cared very much. In the first competitive race at Station Road since 1954, he smashed the track record established in the first meeting of 1951 by legendary Swede Olle Nygren.

Actions not words (or pictures in this case) mattered most to Charlie. I have no information about Dennis Jenkins' racing before 1960 or after 1963, but at least he managed to be part of a team picture on an historic opening night.

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