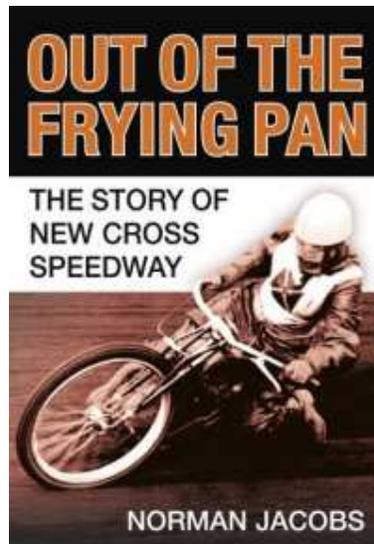


Book Extract: Out of the Frying Pan

By Norman Jacobs

These extracts will give you a flavour of Norman's upcoming history of New Cross.



1934

Farndon scored another maximum in the next home match against Harringay, helping the Lambs to a 29-25 win. These two maximums at New Cross were the start of a phenomenal run at home for Farndon as in his first six matches he won every race except two in which he fell and in the whole of the season, apart from falls or engine failures, he lost just four races to an opponent in 16 matches. Not only was he almost unbeatable but he was one of the most spectacular riders around as he still kept to the old leg trailing style and had the horrifying habit of flinging his machine over on the bends so far that in most races his knee was brushing the ground. He was then, by sheer physical strength, able to haul it upright again. He could ride inside or outside, hug the white line or scrape the fence, whichever seemed the best way at the time. His physical strength stemmed from the fact that he was a non smoker and tee-total and was always in the peak of condition. He was one of the few riders who could ride four laps and then come in without showing the slightest sign of the terrific exertion and strain he had undergone. To add to his appeal, Farndon was one of the most modest sportsmen around. He was said to be the only rider who would rather blame himself if he did not win a race rather than his machinery. And, as if that wasn't enough, he had all the good looks and charm of a Hollywood celebrity as well. Hero worship of this charismatic figure began to reach proportions that formerly only footballers and film stars could hope to aspire to. The whole of South East London seemed in thrall to this man as he became the most popular speedway rider ever.

1937

The National Trophy was next on the agenda as the Rangers took on Harringay in the first round and slaughtered them over the two legs. Away they pulled off a magnificent 65-41 victory, while at home they just simply overwhelmed the Tigers, 76-31, and yet, for the first time in eight official matches, 35 races altogether, Milne lost a race. The man who beat him was Harringay's Clem Mitchell, who ironically was actually a New Cross rider currently on loan to the Tigers. It happened in heat 17 of the match when Mitchell shot away from the start and led all the way. Until that point, Mitchell had scored just five points from five rides. This time it was Newton who scored a full maximum and Greatrex a paid maximum. New Cross progressed to the second round 141-72 on aggregate.

Shortly after his victory over Milne, Clem Mitchell took his place in the New Cross team, but the whole saga was a very strange one. He had originally signed up for New Cross on 8 April and his contract was eventually endorsed by the Control Board but they stipulated that he had to be loaned to Harringay until such time as either Bill Pitcher or Norman Parker returned from injury. Eventually the news that he was to return to New Cross to ride was broken by a national newspaper and came as a surprise to both New Cross and Mitchell himself. On enquiring of the Control Board, Mockford and Smith learnt that Harringay had indeed agreed to release him, but the Board itself had not yet validated this but did agree that, until a final decision was made, Mitchell could be loaned back to New Cross. So, for a while, Mitchell was a New Cross rider on loan to Harringay on loan to New Cross!

1948

It had been an amazing year for the Rangers. From their poor showing in 1947 and without Lionel Van Praag, New Cross became the team to beat in 1948. League champions and finalists in the two major trophies. The driving force behind their success was Ron Johnson, the most experienced rider now active in British speedway as he had started out in Australia 22 years previously in 1926. It was amazing to think that he was now riding better than at any time in his career, he had come second in the Riders' Championship, was second in the League averages and ranked second in the authoritative Stenner's end of year rankings. In all cases, he was behind the phenomenal Vic Duggan. Finally, he had continued to be a regular choice for Australia in the Test matches and, in the last match of the series, chalked up his 50th appearance, easily a record on both sides.

1961

New Cross broke their bad run in the league with a 44-33 victory over Swindon on 14 June and then finished the league season with three more wins and two losses. Probably the main reason for this better run at the end of the league season was the form of their captain, Split Waterman. In the early 1950s, Waterman had been one of

the best riders in the world, twice finishing runner up in the World Championship and for a short time holding the British Match Race title.

Although still just about heat leader class following his return to racing in 1960, he was nothing like the rider he had once been. Suddenly, in the middle of 1961, the old Waterman reappeared. On 28 June, in a league match against Norwich, he beat the current World Champion, Ove Fundin, twice. New Cross was one of Fundin's favourite tracks, he was track record holder at 57.0 seconds and was very rarely beaten there. Not only did Waterman beat him twice in the match on his way to a paid maximum, but he also beat him in the second half. The following week, Waterman won the New Cross qualifying round of the World Championship, beating the likes of Nigel Boocock, Bob Andrews and Ken McKinlay in the process. A full maximum against Coventry came next and then he top scored for the winning England team in the World Team Championship qualifying round with 13 points. For New Cross fans, it was a real privilege to see Waterman recapture the form that had made him one of the greatest riders of all times, albeit for just a short period.

1963

As the season wore on and there was no sign of Reeves's return, New Cross looked destined for a final position somewhere near the bottom of the table. Following the run of five losses, the team lost a further seven out of nine official matches, including a 42-54 defeat at the hands of Hackney in the Knock Out Cup.

The last match in the sequence came on 5 August, when the Rangers were comprehensively thrashed at Poole, 51-27. Sadly, this was the last match ever ridden by a team wearing the familiar orange and black of New Cross as Mawdsley and Lansdale reluctantly decided they had no option but to pull the plug and prevent themselves "running in to the ground", as Mawdsley put it. Four thousand people had attended the first meeting of the season back on Good Friday, but for various reasons, those numbers had fallen dramatically. Two in particular were advanced, firstly the poor record of the team after Reeves's accident. The Rangers had lost 12 out of 16 Provincial League fixtures including four at home. The second was that New Cross supporters were used to seeing only the world's best riders and good as Squibb and Reeves were, they were "second division" riders and were just not in the same class as Tom Farndon, Ron Johnson, George Newton, Jack Milne, Cyril Roger, Barry Briggs or Split Waterman.

The last time speedway was seen at the Old Kent Road track itself was on 2 August 1962, a Provincial League match against Poole, which New Cross lost, 37-41. The very last race ever seen there was the Late Night Rangers' Stakes final, which was won by Stan Stevens from Poole's Tony Lewis and Geoff Mudge with Jimmy Squibb in last place, who thus became the last rider ever to cross the line at the Frying Pan.

Out of the Frying Pan. A complete history of New Cross Speedway 1934 - 1963

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