

Dream Team : Ian Gill

I saw my first speedway meeting at Long Eaton in August 1963 as a six year old as the Provincial League 'Archers' tumbled to a humiliating 24 point home defeat to local rivals Stoke Potters. Visits became more and more regular, though mostly confined to school holidays as we lived some 12 miles away, and the M1 motorway hadn't reached our neck of the woods. When Long Eaton moved to Leicester in 1968, I didn't miss the sport too greatly as I was then into following Notts County. In the next 39 years, many people have commented that – through both speedway and football – I must be "a glutton for punishment!" As interest in football waned, so Station Road – and the Rangers – became more of a draw, and although the crowds weren't great, there was something special about following the 'underdogs' on a Thursday night with my father.

Over the years, the love of speedway became greater and, with my own transport in 1976, I watched speedway all over the country, though following Sheffield Tigers as Long Eaton had closed – again! The ill-fated and short-lived Nottingham venture which tested supporters patience to the full, gave way to John Turner's new-style 'Invaders' and my wife and I became regulars at home and away. We took our kids along as well, but, after some great years under 'Booey' the amalgamation season of 1995 finally did for me. Long Eaton received little support in the team equalisations and watching the hyped 'better' riders and racing, simply did nothing for me and I resumed suffering at Notts County!

Since then, an average season would see me attend a handful of meetings at Sheffield, Coventry and Wolves and the far-flung Trelawny, Edinburgh etc whilst on holiday. But, of course, it's not the same as having your 'own team' to support. This season (2007), however, with our daughter being at Aston Uni, I have found myself at Perry Barr on quite a few occasions and I've enjoyed the speedway more than for perhaps 10 years. Well done, 'Brummies'.

Over the years, I have made many voluntary contributions to the Long Eaton programme. I interviewed Dave Perks in 1983 and then contributed a weekly piece called 'Backtrackin' for three seasons in the 1990's. I hope that my choice of riders bring back some very happy memories for Long Eaton and Sheffield fans – and speedway fans in general.



Perks



Dixon

Dave Perks

The Master of Station Road, A super-smooth stylist who would be in any Long Eaton fan's 'Top Team'. At his best, was the out-and-out no. 1 we all craved who could take

on and beat the best of the rest. An important bonus was that Dave was always prepared to team-ride; his efforts with a young Chris Pidcock in the Championship winning season of 1984 will stay long in the memory. I had the pleasure of interviewing Dave after meetings at Long Eaton during 1983 as the basis of a programme feature I was compiling about "A match day in the life of Dave Perks". He was most obliging, answering with humour and enthusiasm the many questions I needed answers to. A most enlightening experience.

I was privileged to witness Dave feature in many 'classic' races; these were of course, the genuine article rather than the over-rated 'classics' that Messrs Green, Tatum, Ermolenko, Millard et al go overboard about over on SKY! Chris Harris excepted! One particular favourite during a troubled 1983 for Long Eaton, was the stalking for three and a half laps of League No. 1, Newcastle Diamond's Joe Owen at Station Road. On the last bend, Dave made to blast round the boards; an unusual move for him. Joe responded, and within a micro-second Dave had switched lines to blast under him and win the race to the line. Speedway at its best.

It was so sad that Dave didn't win the Riders' Championship in 1984 which would have been the culmination of a wonderful season at individual and team level. I don't think I have ever experienced a greater 'low' in 42 years of watching speedway, than seeing Dave, 30 metres from the chequered flag in the run-off grind to a halt with a broken chain, allowing Ian Barney to become surely, the most fortuitous winner of that Championship – ever. Dave was one of an extremely rare breed – a genuine 'star' rider, and a gentleman on and off the track. My favourite rider of all-time.

Doug Wyer

With Long Eaton's demise at the end of 1974, I headed North every Thursday evening with my father for our weekly speedway 'fix'. Starting to follow a 'new' team meant I had no pre-conceived ideas about 'favourites' but it certainly wasn't too long before Doug emerged. Here was a truly 'hard' rider; no quarter asked or given. Doug saw it that his job was to go out and win races for himself and Sheffield Tigers. Team riding was for others. His was a win, win, win mentality and he had considerable success as a result.

Almost as soon as we had commenced following the Tigers, their fortunes as a team, slumped. Bad injuries to Arnie Haley and Reg Wilson and some poor signings over the subsequent seasons, meant that 'The Flyer' was often left to compete with the opposition on his own, and, when that was the case, you were assured of 'entertainment'. Big reputations meant nothing- particularly round Owlerton – as Doug took them all on. I remember him sarcastically waving Ole Olsen through at the end of a Heat, having whipped the Great Dane for the second time in three heats. I think I associated with him more because he was what was termed an 'unfashionable' No. 1, but that made his victories over the media-hyped – usually Southern based – stars all the more pleasing. He could do it on the away tracks as well, often incurring the wrath of the home fans with his hard charging style.

Gerald Short

The 'Action Man'. Certainly the most spectacular rider in my 'Dream Team' he enlivened many a meeting in the mid-80's whilst wearing the Invaders race-jacket. A true leg-trailing, fence-scraper, his all-action style led to more than its fair share of

bumps, bruises and broken bits which weren't confined to his spell at Station Road. A broken leg while with the Sheffield Tigers and, later on, another when he was with the Milton Keynes Knights curtailed the number of appearances he should have made in a pretty short career. Gerald was a character off the track as well, mixing freely with the fans and always game for a laugh. Where are his counterparts today?

When he broke his leg at Long Eaton, the wife and I both wrote to him, to wish him a speedy recovery. Mine was the typical bloke's observations concerning his on track exploits and passing comments on what it looked like from the terraces. I remember commenting that – with his riding style leaving very little room for error – it must be great to race with people who gave him 'room', Reg Wilson (Birmingham) being a great example. I contrasted that with riders who appeared – from the terraces - to leave him little room. A certain Stoke skipper of the time instantly sprung to mind! The wife wrote a jolly little ditty to cheer him up. Imagine our surprise when, a few weeks later, Gerald wrote back. He commented on all my points, agreeing with the racing room angle and sent back a superb – and lengthy and humorous – poem to Karen to thank her. I've still got them in my Long Eaton collection of memorabilia. Priceless! I notice that 'Shorty' is still competing – successfully – on the grass track scene today and, I'm sure, is still "Wowing" supporters with his truly individual style. Great bloke! Great racer!

Geoff Bouchard

The loss of speedway to Station Road at the end of 1967 put my growing interest in the sport on hold. Having been frightened by the 'monkey' masks and the noise at my first meeting in 1963, by the end of 1967 I was a regular fan with my Dad and had even progressed to neatly marking the programme on the obligatory piece of hardboard that pre-dated the colourful plastic 'proggie' boards of the 70's. For a few years football became my main sporting interest but a summer holiday visit to see Ivor Brown's 'Rangers' in 1971 swung the balance back to speedway. Geoff Bouchard was one of the young riders who took the eye that night, which was pretty impressive, given that an also youthful Phil Crump was appearing on track for the Crewe Kings. Geoff proved to be a real stalwart for the Rangers (and Archers) and rarely did his performance waver. He persisted with the JAP engines long after they became unfashionable, but the fact that he was always 'competitive' must show he had true ability.

With the exception of the 1973 team, the Long Eaton line-ups always seemed to be struggling against insurmountable odds - often at home and always away. One thing you could rely on though, was that, invariably, a certain G. Bouchard would have made the journey to Station Road worthwhile, whilst opposition supporters from Berwick to Eastbourne would have appreciated his sporting but committed riding as, in the days of 50-28 being an average Rangers' away score, you'd at least have seen your own riders' pushed for four laps. Geoff seems to have been one of those rare breed of riders who was enjoyed by all fans at all tracks and this obviously continued in the years after he progressed from Long Eaton. I've mentioned Long Eaton in conversation with other supporters and Geoff's name is synonymous with 70's Long Eaton. "A good rider and a great bloke!" is what I tend to hear. To be remembered with such affection is a great legacy.

Richard Hellsen

When the signing of Richard Hellsen was announced during the last weeks leading up to the start of the 1989 Station Road season, I have to admit to being somewhat underwhelmed. After another desperately poor season, was this the 'star' that was to propel the Invaders into the upper reaches of the League? Well, he might not have achieved the turnaround in fortunes of the team. But over the next couple of years, the loyal Invaders' fans were to be ever more grateful to him for regularly 'carrying' our once-again inadequate team. We quickly became accustomed to that right leg sticking out in celebration (or was it a blocking move?) as he came off the 4th bend and it was obvious that he was a proud rider whose maintenance of racing standards was all important to him.

He was another in that seemingly long line of Station Road heroes who made it worthwhile attending meetings even though a disappointing result was inevitable at times. He could trap and made it hard for many of the young stars who were half his age. Of course, he lost a few battles over the way, but he was worth the admission. No one who was present will forget a classic third bend dive under Station Road Public Enemy No. 1, Andy Galvin, which saw our Southern 'friend' physically shifted out. Only a small snapshot in a long watching career, but which meant so much to committed Invaders fans as it paid back, in a split second, many of Galvin's antics at our track. Rick returned in the mid-90's and possibly enjoyed his racing even more as, by then, he had others to do the brunt of the scoring. It was great to see Rick team-riding on many occasions with Jan Staechmann and overall, I think he was a fantastic rider for Long Eaton.

Martin Dixon

One of the few riders that I had a grudging respect for when he was in an opposition camp and, though – seemingly – his best years were behind him when he arrived at Station Road in 1992, he proved to be a wonderful racer and team man for the Invaders. Prior to joining Long Eaton, he always seemed to have great success on visits to Station Road, his hard-riding comfortably seeing off our customary light-weight line-ups. Particularly memorable was a six ride full maximum in truly abysmal conditions at the end of the 1987 season. So, when Boeey brought him in, we expected quite a lot of The Mad Dog. But machinery gremlins and injuries took their toll and it wasn't until 1993 that the scoring matched our expectations. Then we saw some really great rides from Dicko who displayed the dying art of track-craft in many memorable from-the-back wins.

Although aggressive on track, he had time for the fans off it and he proved to be articulate in some really great interviews for the Long Eaton season highlights videos which were produced. A true speedway character, well known for giving value for money home and away, he was never 'flash', despite a fair bit of success on the raceways. Apart from, that is, the one and only time he tried a celebration 'wheelie' along the home straight at Long Eaton and promptly turned the bike over! Embarrassing! Proud to have him in my line-up.

Graham Drury

The last team slot and a difficult personal choice to make. Mark Fiora? Alan Molyneux? Jan Staechmann? In the end, I've gone for 'The Judge' or 'The Big Fella' as he seemed to be known as at Long Eaton in the mid-80's. After many years around

the tracks, Graham's career finished at Station Road, but not before he had played a major part in securing the 1984 National League Championship for the unfashionable Invaders. He offered the consistency of a true third heat-leader to the joint spearhead of Paul Stead and Dave Perks and his track knowledge and ability to get big points away from Station Road was a massive bonus as Long Eaton picked up crucial away points. Aside from his obvious ability on the bike, he had a good rapport with the fans and was always worth listening to when interviewed on the 'roving' mic by Ken Walker, where he had a natural appreciation that the terrace fans wanted to hear more than just simply "Yes" and "No" responses.

Unfortunately, whilst at Long Eaton, he suffered from more than his fair share of injuries and, certainly in 1985 (the year after the Championship success), his lack of appearances contributed greatly to the team's slide down the table to finish an uncompetitive last. Those injuries included being knocked off his machine whilst waiting by the pits exit, by the tractor driver (and crop-sprayer) at Rye House and being ridden into after a race by Martin Goodwin after Graham had pointed the finger at him following some over-robust tactics against a young Long Eaton reserve, John Proctor. Graham was the catalyst for the Invaders' massive over-achievement in clinching the 1984 Championship - something I never thought I would see, after years of struggle - and quickly became one of my favourite riders.

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