

Book Extract: Tragedy - Kenny Carter **By Tony McDonald**

Once again we're delighted to have teamed up with publishers Retro Speedway, who have produced the brand new Kenny Carter 272-page biography, entitled TRAGEDY. It is the harrowing story of the former England No.1 who shocked the speedway world by shooting his wife, Pam, and then turning the gun on himself at their Yorkshire farmhouse on May 21, 1986. Tragedy fully explores the complex, troubled man behind the face mask and reveals the personal heartbreak Carter endured in his sad youth and which no doubt had a bearing on the final, horrible act. Here is an extract from the book, which recalls the first of several very serious injuries Kenny suffered in his desperate attempt to reach the top...

You can order TRAGEDY for £15.99 post-free in the UK from www.retro-speedway.com



Kenny after snatching victory in the Dews trophy at Halifax from John Louis (left). Ian Cartwright was third.

FACING THE PAIN

IT was the worst crash they had witnessed at The Shay for many years. At one point, Bonnie Boothroyd, devoted wife of Halifax boss Eric, feared that the Dukes' number one rider had been killed.

The night of Saturday, April 4 began ominously for Carter when he suffered an engine failure while leading Birmingham's new star signing Hans Nielsen in the first race.

But it was about to get a whole lot worse for him when the respective number ones clashed again in heat 4. This time Kenny's partner, Craig Pendlebury, led from the gate, followed by Nielsen, but Carter was pushing him hard in a determined effort to join his Halifax team-mate at the front. At the end of the first lap, just as he was closing in on Nielsen, he ran into the Dane's back wheel, pitching himself, face-first, into the fence along the home straight.

It looked serious and immediate concerns for Carter's health were not eased when the St John Ambulance staff went to his aid. An ambulance was brought onto the track and, accompanied by the track doctor, rushed him to hospital.

Eric Boothroyd recalled: "Kenny flew up into the air and came down on his face. He broke his jaw in eight places and when the doctor got to him, Kenny's helmet was full of blood.

"The doc not our normal one, but a stand-in from the football club came into the office where Bonnie worked during the meeting and, when she asked how Kenny was, he just gave a desperate shake of his head and said: 'It's bad'.

"From the look on the doctor's face, Bonnie thought Kenny must be dead!"

Carter's close friend and mechanic, Phil Hollingworth, recalls that his friend never, ever forgot or forgave Hans Nielsen for his part in that spectacular high speed crash that could have ended Carter's life, never mind his racing career. He said: "He totally detested Hans Nielsen with a vengeance for what he did to him that night."

Hollingworth says that Kenny was convinced Nielsen deliberately knocked off the throttle going into the turn, leaving the following Halifax No.1 unable to avoid hitting his back wheel.

"When I went to visit Kenny in hospital, I walked straight past him because I didn't even recognise him. His jaw was so swollen, he looked like Desperate Dan.

"Kenny told me: 'The bastard knew what 'e were doing, 'e just rolled it off'. It was obvious Kenny was going to pass him but he hit him straight up the back end and went over the top into the fence. I'd stand up in a court of law and say it was deliberate on Nielsen's part.

"He didn't get on with Bruce Penhall, but he didn't dislike him he just wanted to beat him out on the track. But he totally hated Nielsen. If he'd had a chance to 'do' Nielsen after that, he would have killed him. But Hans never got involved in anything like that with Kenny again he knew what would come his way."

I recently telephoned Nielsen in Denmark to get his take on the crash and the four times World Champion, only the second former rider after Ivan Mauger to become a millionaire from his illustrious speedway career, said he had no recollection of it. Hans, who is now semi-retired with a large property portfolio and a nine hole golf course in the grounds of his luxury farmhouse, was just about to tee off for a leisurely round with his wife, Suzanne, when I called him on his mobile. "I can't honestly say that I remember the crash it was a very long time ago," he said, sounding genuinely puzzled.

"I remember some fuss about Kenny Carter but nothing specific. I certainly never thought he hated me.

"I can tell you for sure, though, that I would never have deliberately 'rolled off' the throttle in the situation you've described. Yes, I would have taken Kenny wide, as you do," he admitted, "but not shut off the throttle in that way."

The first bad smash of Carter's career came after the year had started so brightly for him. He had returned to Perth for a second spell under the Australian sun and a few weeks after leading a Great Britain team to victory against Rest of the World in the second indoor event at Wembley Arena, where he also picked up the individual King of the Concrete trophy, Carter was again displaying his versatility on the wide, open spaces of the Claremont track where he renewed his battles with friends Mick McKeon, Nigel Flatman and Ivan Mauger.

When the new British season got underway in mid-March after another very wet start, Carter claimed the first individual success of '81 the Second City Trophy at Birmingham, where he finished a point clear of . . . Hans Nielsen.

Off the track, his father had organised sponsorship of a new Mazda van, although the colourfully signwritten vehicle left no-one in any doubt who was paying for it. Emblazoned on the side were the words 'Malcolm Carter Pharoah Racing'. With a renewed deal for partial sponsorship from Weslake Bruce Penhall and Dave Jessup were their two fully-backed works riders for 1981 Carter was well set for continued progress towards the elite.

Before returning to the saddle, Carter raised eyebrows by testing his fitness on the 120-miles per hour straights at the Cadwell Park road-racing circuit. An exasperated Eric Boothroyd was not amused, having warned his prized asset before about taking unnecessary risks in previous road-racing jaunts at Oulton Park and Croft.

Carter, though, was simply irrepressible. A mere 35 days had passed since his jaw had been shattered in eight places and yet he not only made an astonishing comeback at home against Cradley Heath on May 9, he also beat Bruce Penhall on his way to a stunning 17 points from six rides. The 42-54 defeat paled into insignificance for the Halifax fans and management, who were just relieved to welcome back their main man.

Carter celebrated his return after a five-week break by beating Penhall in the opening race and though he dropped his only point to the American when they met next, in heat 4, Boothroyd was full of praise for his heroic efforts in very difficult track conditions. He said: "People have talked about how brave Lester Piggott was in coming back so quickly after his starting stalls accident when he had part of his ear sliced off. But Kenny's fractured jaw was much worse and his comeback was more courageous than Piggott's.

"He practiced on the Friday as if he had never been away. It took a lot of guts for the lad to go out and score 17 points in his comeback match against Cradley in the worst conditions we have had at The Shay for a long time, with mist and drizzle coming on top of heavy rain earlier."

Five days later, and with one wire still in place due to the damage to his teeth, Carter sailed through the British semi-final with 13 points just one behind winner Les

Collins. It didn't matter that he was beaten by Chris Morton in a run-off for second place overall. All that counted at Sheffield was that his world title dream was alive again.

He was also delighted to finally be able to eat solids again after having his jaw wired together for the previous five weeks, which he spent on a diet of soup and milk consumed via a straw.

Given the seriousness of his facial injuries, it was a brilliant performance by Carter in the British Final at Coventry, where he only lost out to Steve Bastable in a three-man run-off for the title that also included his Halifax team-mate John Louis. Kenny could not feel too disappointed at second place. He had confounded medical opinion and other doubters simply by riding in the meeting to go so close to winning his first British Final at the age of 20 was a fine achievement in itself, as ITV commentator Dave Lanning and pits interviewer Gary Newbon were quick to point out. Talking for the first time in front of national television cameras, Kenny's boyish face appeared chubbier than usual as a result of the operations and wiring of his jaw. "You don't notice the pain when you're racing," he smiled, and to prove it his thrilling heat 10 victory to pass Halifax team-mates Ian Cartwright and John Louis had provided one of the best races of the night.

Louis, who had seen the Dews Trophy snatched from his grasp when Carter powered past him, had nothing but respect for the team-mate who was half his age. Louis faced a long weekly drive from his Ipswich home to West Yorkshire and he was grateful to Carter for the mutual friendship and respect they shared during his two seasons with the Dukes.

Now promoter at Ipswich, Louis recalled: "Kenny didn't mix with the rest of the team at all, he was a loner, but I got on very well with him.

"I liked to arrive in Halifax two hours before the meeting, to give myself time to relax, and I'd often go straight to Kenny's place to see him before a home meeting.

"He impressed me with his attention to detail. People thought he was just a mad-head but he was very clever in the way he kept detailed records of every track he ever rode at. I kept a little book in which I jotted notes about tyre and gear ratios at different tracks, but he had it all written out neatly in charts. He recorded every engine set-up he ever used at a track.

"He had a super way of conducting his business that surprised me," said Louis.

The summer of '81 marked Carter's return to the international scene and England boss Len Silver welcomed him into his fold with open arms. Silver, who was appointed England team manager for the second time (he quit at the end of 1976) after both Eric Boocock and Ian Thomas had resigned the previous winter, never underestimated Carter's value to England. Admitting that he was somewhat surprised to see his Lions extract revenge over the USA with a 4-1 series win while Carter was still sidelined in late April and early May, a result that was all the more creditable in view of Peter Collins' retirement from British speedway, he told Speedway Star's Peter Oakes: "I

considered Kenny's injury a very serious blow I didn't really think I could afford to have that sort of bad luck."

"I looked upon Kenny as the new Peter Collins," said Silver.

"The last time I was England manager PC had more or less arrived on the international scene and used to do magic things for me.

"I was hoping Kenny would fill that role when the chips were down I could put a lot of pressure on his shoulders and because he was not frightened of anybody and because he was young, he would do it for me like PC did."

Silver said how very impressed he had been by the courage Carter had shown in making a rapid return from his bad jaw break. "I am always impressed by a man who comes back from very serious injury and starts scoring straight away. That, to me, is the stamp of a champion.

"Anyone who can come back riding a very fast track Halifax can be a bit frightening - and score 17 points has got to be something a little bit special. There's a man with absolutely the right character. "I think Kenny has the kind of mental make-up that will always make him a winner."

Another close friend of Kenny's, Jimmy Ross, said that Carter had no interest in picking up a second place medal, as he did in the British Final. "He used to say, 'who the f*** remembers second?' He saw the silver medal as a waste of metal," said Ross. "Kenny would rather finish fifth than second."

And there was nothing Kenny Carter hated more than to finish second to Bruce Penhall. The Overseas Final round of the World Championship was scheduled for London's White City and his simmering rivalry with the American was about to get dirty.

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