

STROLLING DOWN HISTORY LANE

(by Sören Kjaer 2009)

(Pictures by courtesy of Hanne Holberg, daughter of Engström)

MORE THAN 1000 RACES

A Danish motor sports legend in
his centennial

Svend Aage Engström, Copenhagen
Born on march 3. 1909

First appearance in 1927 riding on
the track at Köge (DK)

21 years old he already was the owner of 6
motorbikes, Rudge, Douglas, NSU, AJS, New
Hudson and JAP.

Farewell race at Charlottenlund long track
August 10.1954 (Elektrol Cup race)



Cup winner at Ganløse 1934

The management of the Danish Motor Union spotted his talent and encouraged him to participate in the Nordic Championship on the Bjerke track near Oslo in Norway where he won the 350 cc standard class. After that win he signed a firm contract with the Roskildevej Dirt Track near Copenhagen.



Billy Lamont, Engström and "Sprouts" Elder



Roskildevej 1933, Engström passing inside

In 1931 he won the Nordic Championship on the Amager long track at Copenhagen ahead of the Swedes Gunnar Kalén and Ivar Skeppstedt

(At the same occasion the two Swedes formed a sidecar team and won the sidecar championship)

The Nordic Championship was successfully defended in 1932 on the Solvalla track near Stockholm. The same happened again in 1933 on the Bjerke track, where once again Ivar Skeppstedt was one of the toughest opponents.



The Nordic Champion being celebrated in Copenhagen at his return from Norway

In 1934 Engström had to settle with 3rd place, but with the – maybe poor – consolation, that it was behind two of those days' other Danish star riders, namely Svend Aa. Sørensen, who won the Nordic Championship with Baltzer Hansen in second place.

The travel in 1937 went so far north as Trondheim in Norway to decide the Nordic Championship, but the long journey did not pay off. Mechanical trouble forced Engström back to second place behind the Norwegian Børge Haag,

The Nordic Championship Final returned in 1938 to Denmark to be ridden on the somewhat bumpy 1200 meters long track at Frederiksund. Here the Danes took a clean sweep. Engström reclaimed the Nordic title, and the Danish team Engström, Sv. Aa. Sørensen and Baltzer Hansen won the Nation's Match ahead of Finland, Norway and Sweden.

To fulfill the Dansk triumph the Danish sidecar pilot David Axelsson won the championship in his class. At that occasion the 18 years young Norwegian Leif "Basse" Hveem had his Danish debut in the 350 cc class, which he won.

The scheduled Nordic Championship in Norway got cancelled due to the outbreak of WW2, and at the first final after the war, which took place at Bjerke in 1946 Engström no longer participated. In his absence Basse Hveem began his long career as Nordic Champion.

From 1929 and on until the outbreak of the war dirt tracks in Denmark popped up all over, and Engström took a heavy toll in the prize lists in that period. According to himself he won prize money 5 – 600 times and a great number of silver jars and –cups. An exact figure is not given.

Furthermore he sat track records a. o. Vejle, Odense, Ganløse, Korsör and Amager and after the war in Esbjerg, Snoghøj and Bogense.

The Odense newspaper "Fyens Stiftstidende" wrote on November 24. 1930:

3500 fans at the Odense Dirt track yesterday

With a track record of 1 minute 30 seconds Svend Aage Engström was the man of the day.

Dirt Track is obviously the last Sunday's amusement for the people of Odense. Up to 3500 fans attended yesterdays racing despite the cold weather. The rider Svend Aage Engström from Copenhagen was the man of the day who impressed everyone with his phenomenal riding.

First he rode a presentation lap before he made an attack on the existing track record of 1 minute 45 second. Having seen him ride the first lap everyone knew that it did not stand a chance. All 3 stopwatches showed the phenomenal time of 1 minute 30 seconds!

Despite a 15 meter handicap he also won second heat. It was marvellous to watch him beating his competitors. He mastered the bends to perfection and a cloud of dirt sprayed from his bike. For non-connoisseurs it looked Neck-breakingly dangerous, but he fully controlled his bike. It was absolutely justified that after receiving the beautiful 1. Prize Engström got a threefold cheer from the fans. We hope to see him soon again. He is really an attraction.



Engström on his bike at the Prize ceremony Odense November 24. 1930

A clip from the newspaper "Vejle Folkeblad" 6. Sept. 1931

Exciting races yesterday. The invincible Engström improved his record.

No doubt, the interest for dirt track racing is increasing. That was clearly to be seen yesterday. Despite rain and competition from a number of sporting events in nearby cities, 5 – 6000 people gathered around the dirt track races at Vejle yesterday afternoon in the chilly weather through the 2 hours, the event lasted. One has to admit that these races are exciting, no matter whatever one thinks about motorsport. Dirt track racing demands not only great courage from its performers, but also exceptional skill and quick

perception and overall unity between man and machine like between a rider and his horse. All these properties could be richly admired yesterday, mainly of course at Sven Aage Engström. He mastered his new A.J.S. bike to perfection and to everyone's thrill. Due to rain the track was deep and heavy, but nevertheless he managed to improve his former track record – only by 1/5 of a second, but improving was a “masterpiece of art” in itself regarding the track condition.

He had bad luck in his first heat, when his motor caught dirt and stopped. So really he should not have ridden in the final heat, but luckily it got arranged so that he could ride in it but outside competition, and of course he led the heat in fine style.

Also in a handicap race he showed superior riding, and finally he won a crack race.



The track record ride in Bogense August 25. 1946, time 1,45,4.

In 1947 he rode only 7 races which he all won.



Gating at Charlottenlund 1948, Engström No. 3 from left.



Engström and son, Charlottenlund 1948

The Elektrol Cup

The Elektrol Cup was a very fine and utterly prestigious trophy made of forged high Sterling silver. It was sponsored in 1936 by Alfred Olsen & company in Copenhagen on behalf of the Elektrol Oil Company. It should be won three times by the same rider to become property.

In 1936 and 1937 the Swedish rider Torsten Sjöberg, who unluckily lost his life at a race in Varberg, Sweden during the war, claimed the first two shares in the cup.



Frederiksund 1938

In 1938 the Elektrol race was ridden on the Frederiksund track, where Engström won his first share in the cup.

Like all other motor sport also this race series lay idle during the war and in the years after, but after an 11 years break it came back in 1949 on the Charlottenlund track, where Engstroem claimed his second share,

Then the Swedish rider Göte Brester won in 1950 and 1953 while Kiehn Berthelsen and Orla Knudsen each claimed a share respectively in 1951 and 1952.

Then there really was fired up for the race in 1954. Engström and Brester had two shares each, and with a win either could claim the cup for good. But faith spelled differently.

Both riders suffered engine troubles on the day and the tiny Leif Bech from Copenhagen instead won his first share in the trophy.

After the race Engström issued a press release telling that he stopped his speedway career. As reason he mentioned lack of time and that he through longer time had considered stopping.

(After three wins in a row Arne Pander claimed the Elektrol Cup for good in 1958).

Even Engström at the end of the forties and the first half of the fifties downstepped his race participations he didn't leave the sport, and he was often seen in leading official roles a. o at Gladsaxe Speedway

In the following years and on to a very high age (90+) he joined several veteran rallies on his beloved "Stovepipe", a Nimbus 1923 model, which he only reluctantly took to the roads in rainy weathers. Then his raincoat got sacrificed to protect the engine against water, (se picture)



Engstroem nursing the Stovepipe. Note the plastic raincoat over the engine.



Engström enjoying a cup coffee on his 100 years birthday