

SPEEDWAY THE GREATEST MOMENTS

John Chaplin and John Somerville

THE acclaimed and highly successful partnership of speedway's top writer, JOHN CHAPLIN, and speedway's top image banker, JOHN SOMERVILLE, have teamed up again.

SPEEDWAY: THE GREATEST MOMENTS is just that ... the sport's most memorable events and personalities vividly described in CHAPLIN'S brilliant words and SOMERVILLE'S incredibly rare and classic pictures.

All speedway life is here. The highs and the lows. CHAPLIN and SOMERVILLE have set out on a remarkable odyssey to reveal, as only they can, the entire speedway spectrum – from the simple idolatry of the humble fan to the high drama that has created speedway's moments of greatest sporting endeavour.

From the story of how the modern phenomenal on-track understanding of 2012 World Champion Chris Holder and his team mate the precocious Darcy Ward compares with that of the Incredible Parkers – Jack and Norman – to how speedway riders cope with seeing a fatality before their very eyes.

Who really did invent speedway? How did a team of speedway riders preserve their modesty when their race suits failed to turn up? Which speedway star's wife became the world's most outrageous stripper? Which speedway rider had to have a chaperone? Who was speedway's Thunder Stealer? And why did they call one speedway rider Termite?

It's all in *SPEEDWAY: THE GREATEST MOMENTS* the magnificent sequel to CHAPLIN and SOMERVILLE'S top-selling *SPEEDWAY SUPERHEROES*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

John Chaplin is generally acknowledged throughout the speedway world to be the leading authority on the history of the sport. An author and broadcaster, his pedigree goes back almost 60 years, and this book is based on his writings during that time, including his acclaimed regular contributions to *Speedway Star* magazine and his own hugely successful *Vintage Speedway* magazine.

John Somerville has spent a fortune acquiring from the world's top speedway photographers their best and most vivid pictures. They appear in publications throughout the world. He is dedicated to preserving the sport's most iconic images.

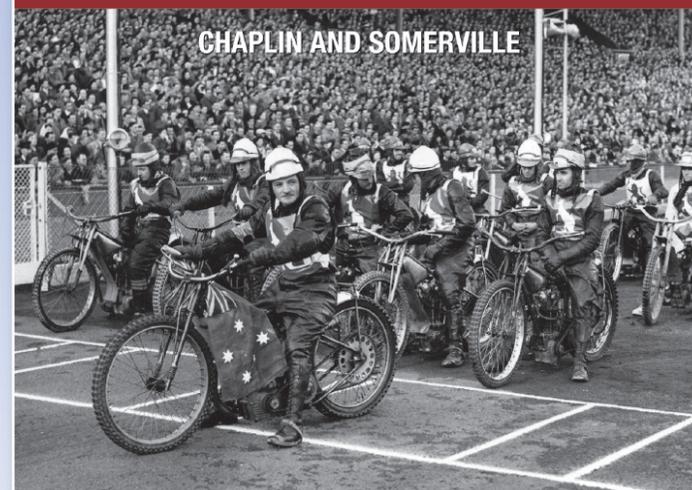
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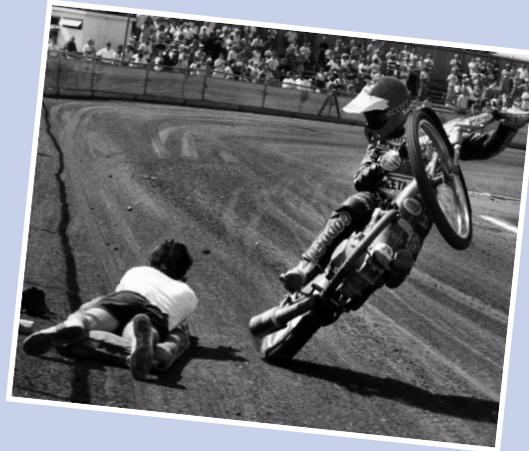
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SPEEDWAY – THE GREATEST MOMENTS

Terrifying: hard man Cyril Roger on the rampage at New Cross for England.



Close call: the ultimate wheelie shot that took Hans Neilsen (on the bike) ten laps to get right. You can't see it, but Mike's eyes are closed . . .

Example of a double-page spread.



Above: Team mates at West Ham: Reg (far left), Frank Bettis, Kid Curtis, Wally, Aub Lawson, Malcolm Craven, Cliff Watson, Howdy Byford and George Wilks.

Below: Still speedway life: Tom Farndon with the New Cross London cup winning side before a meeting at Belle Vue.



Chapter 4 AKKO'S EPIC NIGHT

THIS little speedway drama is based on a true story. Well, actually it IS a true story, and few with all the best dramas it is a tale of adversity and eventual triumph.

There are precious few fields of sporting endeavour left in this cynical, win-at-any-cost, modern world where the contestants can actually elevate the human condition. But in this particular instance, speedway is definitely one of them.

The shining example of such an event is Akko's Epic Night. As well as disaster and triumph, those well-known imperators – as Rudyard Kipling described them in his famous poem 'If' – there is the requisite touch of pathos, to tug at the heartstrings. But, above all, it is simple.

First one, it is a story that has everything, though in equally cynical media sound bite terms it can be dismissed in a mere two paragraphs. Thus:

The brilliant comeback of Arthur Atkinson overtook everything else in West Ham's first round meeting of the World Championships. The West Ham ace had been out of the saddle for nearly a month with a broken collarbone, and he returned for this meeting to occupy the dock.

It was the real Akko. Making with his head and grim determination, there was no one to touch him. His shoulder strapped up and every effort a miracle, he won all of his five races to secure 15 points and prove he is definitely in the running for Blaney Wilkinson's crown.

To discover behind that matter of fact report, the real drama in terms of human courage and sporting achievement, you will have to come with me across Hesse-quarters of a century to a distant 1936 July night in the Cusker House pits in East London. It was a night with 'epic' stamped clear all the way through it, a night for wise old men to recall, and young men, pecked for equally epic accomplishments, to draw inspiration from. There were 30,000 witnesses to greatness that night. The terraces were packed with eager fans to see the drama unfold.



Close encounter: Leading the pack in his familiar trademark white scarf and dappled balaclava, Arthur Atkinson ahead of a couple of real veterans, Colin Watson on the outside and Charlie Spinks.

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Almost a month previously the Hammer's Yorkshire-born kid Arthur 'Akko' Atkinson had taken a tumble at the track, he considered, he just caved. Wheelbeds, while competing for the famous Laurels. The fall had fractured a collarbone. It was a serious setback for Akko who had been in brilliant form that summer. He had become the darling of the Dockland crowds in succession to their dynamic little hero Blaney Wilkinson.

Blaney, who had thrilled the fans for so long, was the reigning World Champion. He had won the crown at Wembley the previous season and then, at the very pinnacle of his popularity and fame, had quit to become the promoter at Sheffield.

Nothing that his devastated West Ham boss Johnnie Hoskins could do was able to change the little Australian's mind. He stayed retired from active racing, and it allowed Atkinson, whose brilliance had been somewhat overshadowed by Wilkinson, to come into his own.

On that July evening the stricken Atkinson appeared in the West Ham pits, injured, pale and ailing, with his damaged shoulder heavily strapped. He was hiding in defiance of his doctor's orders because he knew he must take part in the meeting to stand any chance of qualifying for that year's World Final.

Not only that, but he knew he had to score heavily because of a bonus points system which riders carried with them to the big night. It had cost Wilkinson the Championship in 1936 when he had ridden untested in the Final only to be dethroned by the fact he hadn't taken enough bonus points with him.

When Atkinson went out onto the track for his first ride, his face was a pale as the pure white scarf he always wore round his chin. It was an old West Ham scarf. He was up against his team mates, but there were no favours being done . . .

Tommy Crosswell, the white line king, flashed into the lead from the tapes with Eric Chitty second, Akko third and Harold 'Tiger' Stevenson last. There was no change for three laps, then came a moment when the terraces, a blue-helmed figure surged past Chitty and overtook Crosswell. The sick man had been holding back, conserving his strength until the chequered flag was in sight. On the final bend the race was his.

A weary but happy Akko rode with head bowed into the pits to sink down on an out-of-the-way bench, away from the crowds. He did not want to talk, merely to concentrate on looking the pain in his shoulder at bay until his next ride. There were four more to go – seven agonised laps.

Heat five, and a new hushed expectancy settled over the crowd. Activity in the pits grew still as the slight figure of Atkinson stepped forward bravely for his second ride of the night.

This time there was no waiting. He gated like a dream. Wembley's Tommy Price – a future World Champion – chased him wilyly. His West Ham team mate Jimmy Gibb came in a battling third. Billy Dalrymple of Southampton, badly away, fell on lap two. Akko inspired, led all the way and tacked another valuable three points onto his score.

Back on his solitary bench in the pits Akko managed to weakly acknowledge his admirers in the crowd. Then he closed his eyes as the waves of pain overwhelmed him once more.

Yet Atkinson's was not the only drama of the night. Charlie Spinks took a spectacular last bend tumble in front of his home crowd in Heat six. Ben Johnson of New Cross crashed while leading Middlesbrough's George Greenwood in the next race.

Then it was Heat seven, Atkinson's third ride.

It seemed that the fairy tale must end. Johnson, none the worse for his previous fall, streaked from the tapes ahead of Spinks and another Hammer, Dick Geary. Atkinson appeared to have no light left in him. It seemed that at last nature's warring pain was about to become just too much for his remarkable courage and gallantry.

The darlings of Docklands: Arthur (on the bike) and Blaney Wilkinson receive the trophy for winning the national Ben Pits ride at Harringway in 1937.