

SPEEDWAY LEGENDS

John Chaplin and John Somerville

Speedway historian John Chaplin and image archivist John Somerville have teamed up again to produce the third in their highly praised trilogy about the world's most exciting sport.

Speedway Legends deals with their lifelong passion for speedway racing and their admiration for the men who, over almost ten decades, have by their skill, daring and bravery, made it what it is. It honours the many personalities they particularly admire and is designed to make speedway enthusiasts aware of how their contribution to the development of the sport has made it what it is today.

As speedway's centenary rapidly approaches, the dynamic partnership present another superb celebration of the sport that journalist Chaplin has written about and reported on for sixty of those years. He has built a reputation as one of the world's leading speedway writers, whilst Somerville has amassed an unequalled collection of priceless pictures by the very best of speedway's photographers from across the world.

Speedway Legends is the third in their successful series to follow *Speedway Superheroes* and *Speedway: The Greatest Moments*. Both books featured illustrations of outstanding quality, many dating from the sport's pioneer years of the 1920s, and the latest Chaplin/Somerville epic continues their championship-winning high standards.

THE AUTHORS

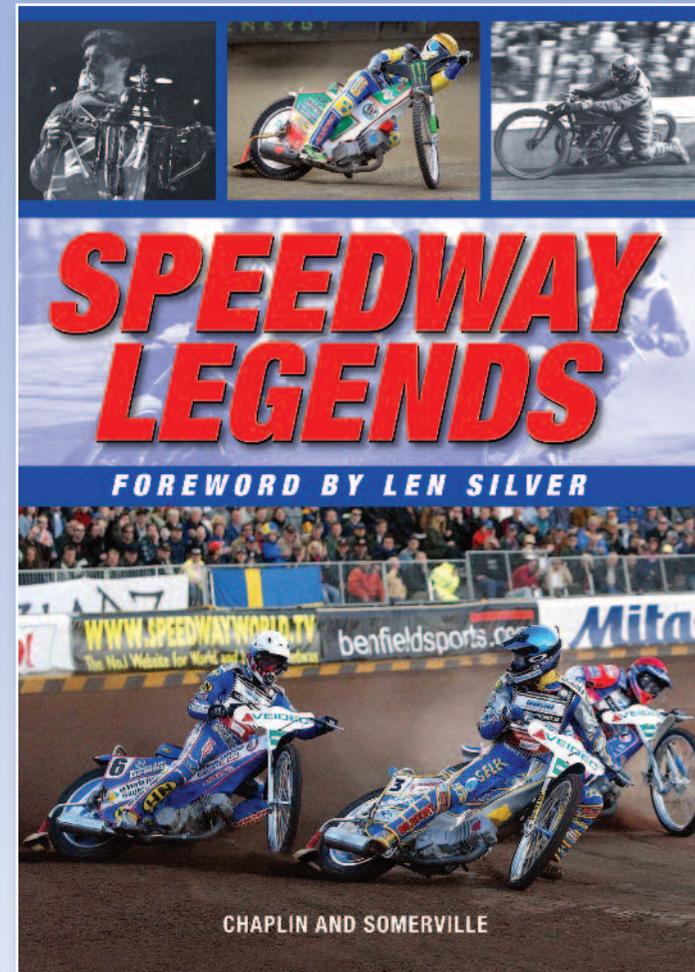
John Chaplin is generally acknowledged throughout the speedway world to be the leading authority on the history of the sport. An author and broadcaster, his pedigree goes back almost sixty years, and this book is based on his writings during that time, including his acclaimed regular contributions to *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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Halsgrove Publishing, Halsgrove House, Ryelands Business Park, Bagley Road,
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www.halsgrove.com e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

SPEEDWAY LEGENDS

Two great, but differing, talents: George Newton shakes hands with one of the masters, Eric Langton.



Away from the adoring crowds, it was down to work for Bill Kitchen on the precious machinery in conditions a long way from the clinical, operating theatre-style workshops enjoyed by today's Grand Prix stars.

Example of a double-page spread.



Above: Tomasz Gollob chasing four-times World Champion Hans Nielsen of Denmark who Tomasz considers one of the 'true legends'.

Below: Sat home in front of the huge crowds that made the speedway atmosphere of those days so exciting: Fred Williams leading Barry Briggs and Peter Moore of Wimbledon.



"John Chaplin and John Somerville are a stunning team. Their full-throttle style is speedway magic."
Sam Ermolenko, World Speedway Champion 1993

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Above left: Have a real advantage... for the challenger. Ron shakes hands with Syd Jackson before their meeting at Wimbledon. Ron kept his legs.
 Above right: On a salary. The two-time Australian team before the second Test of 1931 at the Leicester Square Swimming Palace on what was described as 'an appalling track' - so appalling that Ron and England's Keith Barnes crashed in the first heat and Ron took no further part in the meeting. But Australia won by a comfortable 4-2. Standing from left: Lionel Vint Parry, Vic Mackay, Albert McKinn, Ron Johnson, Zoltar Boker, Frank Arnold, Archie Horsler, Les Woods, Fred Mc Crossan, Dickie Cose, Busby Wilkinson.

the tops of two fingers. The incident happened at Crystal Palace and it was there that he began his long association with promoters Fred Mackford and Cecil Smith, riding in the Palace team alongside such greats as Tom Farnham and George Newton.

In 1934 Mackford and Smith moved the Palace side to New Cross. In the meantime Ron had become British Champion, a much more competitive one against one home and away with any necessary decision on a neutral track. It was then the names of the sport had to be World Championship and was tearfully advertised as such. Ron won the title from Wimbledon's Claude Roy and then promptly lost it to West Ham's Harold 'Tiger' Stevenson.

Ron was not a workaholic. He had a modest and withdrawn personality. It meant he rarely showed when it came to the big individual events. He explained it like this: 'My temperament is supposed by a lot of people to put me on the big solo occasions. Well, I am a bit highly strung. I do get all set up inside. But what rider doesn't? Unfortunately I show it more than others.'

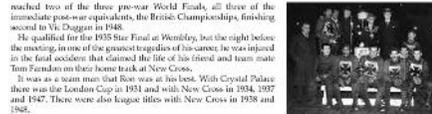
But he was never short of big occasion experience. He reached the finals of five of the seven pre-war Star Championships, finishing second in 1935 to Tom Farnham. He made 55 times for Australia, frequently as captain, won two London Riders' Championships,



Among the elite of the pre-war era, the very best of speedway at the time. Centre standing: Sidney King, Herbert 'Dusty' King, Dudley Cox, Geoff Payne, Billy Wilkinson, Arthur 'Franklin' Van Pelt, Jim and Vic 'Hotdog' Farrant, Arthur Johnson and Terence Connors. Standing at the rear: Syd Jackson and representative Sidney Clark.

RON JOHNSON

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Above: Defying Hitler: Ron Johnson was one of the few overseas riders who stayed in Britain throughout the war. To keep his standing alive and the faster (and) more vocal, he was a regular at the wartime meetings at Belle Vue, here in a close encounter with Eric Langton.

Below: At the start of the most successful period of his career, leading New Cross in 1946 with fans like Art Ray, Mike, Keith Harrop, Eric Farrant, Alf Calks, team manager, Les Waller, Frank Lawrence, Mick Mitchell. Ron is in the blue and Geoff Payne is his back seat-gunner.



Full from grand: A 1934 issue of one of several of Ron Johnson's meeting programmes up to that time - from 45 and around after crossing the bar on the way to track at Plymouth. Attempts to recall the occasion failed.