

SAVING SPEEDWAY

The Provincial League & The Southern Area League

PHILIP DALLING and JOHN SOMERVILLE

British speedway in the 1950s experienced some challenging times. At the start of the decade the sport still enjoyed the fruits of its post World War Two boom, with more than 30 venues from Eastbourne to Edinburgh and annual attendance figures peaking at 11 million.

Dark clouds loomed on the horizon. Punitive entertainment tax, wet summers and the soaring popularity of television saw crowds dwindle and tracks close, leaving a hard core of less than a dozen professional clubs in the elite National League by 1957, with just two surviving in the North of England and none at all in Scotland.

In the South persevering riders and fans kept interest alive through the semi-professional Southern Area League, whilst in the North and Scotland speedway survived at venues as varied as the beaches of the Lancashire coast, a track carved out of an ash tip in industrial Manchester and at an agricultural showground owned by a leading Scottish aristocrat.

SAVING SPEEDWAY tells how the road to recovery began when a small group of men of vision re-opened long-closed venues and then, in 1960, formed a new competition, the Provincial League, which doubled the number of speedway venues overnight and eventually led to a new Golden Age for the sport.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

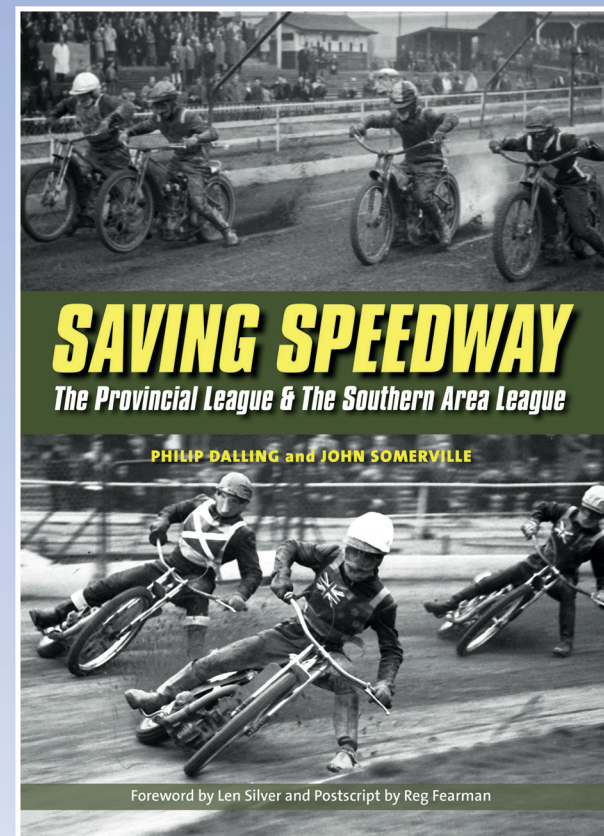
Philip Dalling first watched speedway in 1962, when the Provincial League was the sport's most successful British competition. He has written five books about speedway, countless newspaper and magazine articles, and has visited all but one of the sport's present day venues. He grew up in the former speedway stronghold of Long Eaton, Derbyshire, beginning his career as a journalist on his home town newspaper. He was for 22 years Director of Public Affairs at The University of Nottingham. He now lives in North Devon and writes as a freelance for West Country newspapers and magazines.

John Somerville has an international reputation as a speedway memorabilia collector. Since acquiring the negatives of legendary photographer Wright Wood in 2004, he has established the sport's most extensive and comprehensive archive, whose images appear regularly in speedway publications throughout the world. His fellow enthusiasts and collectors help provide the images with detailed captions. John Somerville collaborated with author John Chaplin on four speedway books and has now joined forces with Philip Dalling to mark the highly significant 60th anniversary of the Provincial League. The images can be freely viewed on his website *The John Somerville Collection* and are available for purchase.

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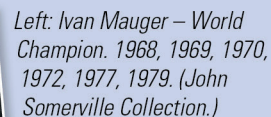
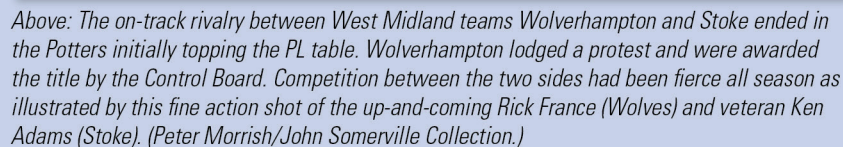
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Right: Speedway's flame was kept alive in the North by training tracks and grass track racing. Starting line action above from Ainsdale Sands, on Lancashire's Irish Sea Coast, which attracted spectators in large numbers. (Photo Roy Peacock.)

