

Fred Strecker and Nottingham Speedway in the 1930s

SUPERSTARS OF THE DIRT TRACK

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Speedway historian Philip Dalling follows up last week's article on world championship contender Louis Lawson by looking at his links with Nottingham's pre-war track heroes Fred Strecker and George Dykes

The city of Nottingham has applauded several outstanding sporting duos over the years: Torvill and Dean, Clough and Taylor, and Hadlee and Rice are the most obvious examples. Many years before those successes, Nottingham boasted a characterful twosome which brought fame and success to the city in a sport which, in its heyday, rivalled soccer as a spectator and headline attraction.

Fred Strecker, from St Ann's, and George Dykes, from Burton Joyce, were home-produced stars of the Nottingham speedway team which operated at the long-vanished White City Stadium in Trent Lane, Colwick, throughout the 1930s.

Strecker and Dykes were the speed stars of the madcap 1930s era of the sport, the predecessors to Gunthorpe man Louis Lawson, who featured in Bygones last week and was a hero in speedway's golden age of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The teenage Lawson was inspired to become a speedway star by the duo's performances at White City and, during his successful career for Belle Vue and England, he kept in close touch with Fred and George, who gave advice and help with the preparation of his racing machine.

The Strecker and Dykes partnership survived the end of their speedway careers, which were brought to a close by the outbreak of the Second World War. They went on to run a car-dismantling business close to the stadium where they had thrilled huge pre-war crowds.

And when the new craze of stock car racing was introduced at Long Eaton Stadium in 1954, Fred and George, although now not far off their fifties, built the heavily-armoured cars then in vogue and set about the opposition.

West Bridgford businessman Frank Hughes who, with his stock car driver brother Neville, later promoted the sport at Long Eaton, recalls that the Strecker/Dykes technique never varied whether in the two-wheel or four-wheel form of racing.

"George made the gap and Fred went through it - it was as simple as that," he said.

The Nottingham speedway team had a roller-coaster existence. Competing in the 1930 Southern League and the 1933 National League, the team rode against the top British opposition in the

form of Wembley, Manchester Belle Vue, West Ham and other leading sides. The world's finest riders performed at Trent Lane, with international fixtures against Australia and the United States.

Fred Strecker rode for several other teams apart from Nottingham - Harringay, Belle Vue (Louis Lawson's side) and Southampton among others - and made the long trip by boat to ride in Australia in 1933.

Nottingham competed in the sport's second division in 1936 and 1937. In the latter year, with Strecker and Dykes riding as a pairing, the team finally found success, winning both the Daily Mirror Trophy and the Coronation Cup.

Individually, Fred Strecker also won a magnificent silver trophy donated by Nottingham motor firm Oscroft's. George Dykes, despite injuries, captained the side when available.

In July 1937 both Fred and George, together with Nottingham team-mate George Greenwood, formerly of Wembley, rode in an English provincial riders side against Australia, who were led by the then world individual champion Lionel Van Praag.

The Australian team included another Nottingham rider, Billy 'Cyclone' Lamont.

More than 20,000 thronged the stands and terraces at Trent Lane to see Australia gain a narrow 55-53 points victory.

The following year saw Strecker and Dykes continuing at the White City. But the enthusiasm evaporated and the team pulled out of the sport at the end of May 1938, with Nottingham's league fixtures being taken over by Leeds.

White City, a well-appointed venue with covered accommodation for several thousand spectators, never heard the sound of speedway engines again, continuing with greyhound racing until its final closure in 1970.

Strecker and Dykes continued their involvement with speedway as the starting marshall and machine examiner at the Long Eaton track, before their Indian summer involvement with stock cars.

Philip Dalling is researching the history of speedway at Nottingham White City (1929-1938). Anyone with any programmes, photographs or memories about the sport or the Nottingham Tornado Motorcyle Club contact him on 0115 930 2217.

<http://www.speedway-forum.co.uk/forums/index.php?showtopic=12061>