**“YOU’VE GOT THE JOB”**

In 1975, I was purchasing the speedway magazines of the day and I also regularly bought *REVS* as it carried a good coverage of the speedway bike divisions. I didn’t buy *AMCN*, because it didn’t carry any speedway news.

Over the Easter weekend that year, I borrowed three issues of *AMCN* from a workmate. Included in the oldest issue was an ad seeking correspondents to report on speedway racing in Melbourne and Sydney.

In a subsequent issue, Wes Brown had taken up the cudgel and filed reports from meetings in Melbourne, but there was no news from Sydney. So, this budding journalist sat down and wrote (yes, wrote) a letter to the editor of the time, Mike Hanlon.

I never did speak to Mike about whether my ‘application’ was so much better than others he received, or whether I simply got the job because no one else had expressed any interest. I’ll accept that it was most likely the latter, but anyway, Mike wrote back to me, basically saying, “You’ve got the job”. So, in May 1975, I started with a column headed “IN SYDNEY”. Over time it expanded to news from across Australia and the world, mainly focusing on the exploits of Australian riders.

Over the decades, of course, *AMCN* has changed drastically in look, the very features that are included, as well as the way the sport is covered. Plenty of editors have come and gone, including two who did not particularly see speedway as a fit for *AMCN*. I survived longer than them.

A newspaper with green on its cover, to a coloured cover, to a glossy coloured cover were the steps along the way from 1975 to the switch in 1983 to magazine format, which in itself has seen various enhancements since.

Within, long gone are the results of every event on a program; these days it obviously looks well beyond those results, which are readily obtainable from a plethora of outlets, including so much live coverage, that we can all access.

I admit I am a bit of a dinosaur in that I still like to see basic results in print but hopefully my contributions continue to paint a picture of what has happened, how and why it happened, and what it might mean going forward.

Later I contributed to sister publications *Trail & Track*, covering the then minibike scene, *Auto Action* for many years covering speedway bike racing, as well as some speedway car divisions, and then *Australasian Dirt Bike*.

Speedway magazines in England and the US added to my workload at different periods, as well as preparing press releases for the Sydney Showground and later Liverpool Raceway for suburban newspapers – those last were fairly prevalent at the time, with most areas served by at least two papers from opposing networks, as well as some one-off independents.

As I got involved with numerous clubs that stage speedway and dirt track meetings since we ticked over to the new millennium, the press releases have played a big part of my involvement with those clubs, as well as announcing at their meetings.

The LONGEST RIDE

In 1975, a letter to the editor changed Peter Baker’s life. Fifty years later, we’ve invited him to share the memories, milestones and motorsport legends that have shaped a half-century with *AMCN*



In sitting down to write this, I’ve tried hard not to make it all about me – rather, a reflection of the years I’ve been contributing, and even back to my first memories of watching the sport.

I must say, I do feel pride in having been part of *AMCN* for 50 years. Ask anyone with no interest in the motorcycle world what are the longest continually published magazines in Australia and very few would realise the prominent position *AMCN* holds in that list. And worldwide, among motorcycling publications, *AMCN* still holds a highly regarded place.

Its longevity and respected status is a reward for a hard-working but constantly changing – and shrinking in numbers – team that has now kept churning out the magazine on a regular basis for almost 75 years.

My part in the grand scheme has been minimal, but thankfully I recall missing only one deadline – after a late Sunday night hospital admission when I should have been sitting at the keyboard!

Hopefully *AMCN* will be still going many years into the future, long after my days as a contributor come to an end, whenever that may be.



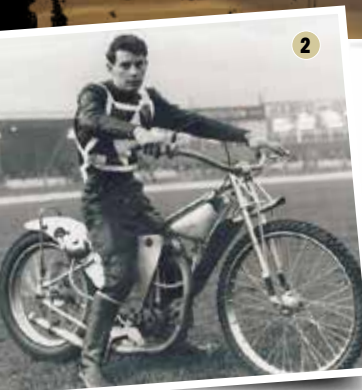
1. Graham Young on his JAP outfit goes around the outside

2. Getting the lowdown from Mark Fiora at the 1984 Australian Championships at Mildura

3. Interviewing Phil Crump at the Australian Solo Championships at Mildura in 1987

4. Phil Crump in full flight at Bendigo in 1976

5. Peter in his later role as announcer and interviewer, at Central Coast Junior Motor Cycle Club



Publicity these days is, of course, very different to 10 or 25 years ago. Many printed newspapers across the country have disappeared as the world has largely switched to a different way of being informed with what is going on out in the big wide world.

I have also tried to make a contribution to the sport by being part of the Speedway Committee in NSW, and both Motorcycling Australia's Speedway and Dirt Track Commissions over the years.

"I'VE SEEN TIME ROLL ACROSS THE ERAS"

My father started watching speedway in the late 1930s through the 1940s, but he missed the 1950s after getting married. He would talk about the greats of the early days like Bluey Wilkinson, Lionel Van Praag, Max Grosskreutz, Vic Huxley, Englishman Jack Parker and the Americans Jack and Cordy Milne.

Any discussion that people ever have about comparing performers from different eras in any field of endeavour always leads to great disagreements, and I always felt that those olden days ranked higher in his mind than what he watched through to the mid 1990s.

Of course, little did he realise what he was starting when he, Mum and I went to my first ever speedway meeting at the Sydney Showground Speedway on 2 January, 1960 – and yes, I still have the program.

Watching speedway racing for 65 years, I've certainly had favourite riders. It's hard not to. But, of course, journalist and announcer are two roles that demand impartiality – so when I later took on those roles I always strived to achieve that.

That's not to say I've never had a 'preference' as to which way a result eventuated. That started way back, and I think my interest in any sport was always directed at an underdog, or someone just below the top-ranked performers or team.

However, you can't help but develop an enormous admiration for champions who achieve greatness.

My parochialism towards individuals started with the sidecars and, thinking back, I wonder if my choice of the then-up-and-coming Graham Young was a decision to keep the peace between my parents, as Dad was a fan of Doug Robson and Mum a fan of Bob Levy – the two big guns of the time.

Barracking for Young became very frustrating, and has been mirrored by many other sporting passions over the years. He won one Australian championship and four NSW titles but left fans wondering – if only he'd stuck to a proven machine instead of going so 'experimental', including the infamous Hillman Imp-powered sidecar that could not be push started; it needed a tow rope attached to a car.

Sidecars have certainly gone through eras of individual prominence and although I never saw Jimmy Davies race, I developed a huge admiration for West Aussie Dennis Nash. His home track of Claremont was the monster of all major capital city venues but only two of his five national titles came at home. He won one at his first ever appearance at the Jerilderie Park track (later Newcastle Motordrome), one at the first ever meeting at the new Northline track in Darwin, and then cleaned up at Mildura, a track where one lap is barely half the length of a lap around Claremont.

The feats of Davies and then Nash of course paled when Darrin Treloar came along. Not only is Treloar the GOAT of speedway sidecars, he is the GOAT of all motorcycle competition in Australia. No one can match his record of 12 Australian championship wins, 40 state titles, as well as World, FIM Gold Cup and Australasian successes.

On two wheels, I've seen time roll across the eras. Jim Airey versus Gordon Guasco, then John Boulger, Phil Crump, Billy Sanders and John Titman



I WENT TO MY FIRST SPEEDWAY MEETING IN 1960 - AND YES, I STILL HAVE THE PROGRAM

dominating, before Craig Boyce and the long dominance of Leigh Adams.

The year I was born saw Jack Young win his second world championship but the next Aussie world champion was not until the year my first grandson was born.

Thankfully, two more world titles by Jason Crump have been followed by wins for Chris Holder and Jason Doyle... and just in rattling off those names I realise how fortunate I have been to see the stars since 1960.

I've also seen the big names of dirt track, from one of my all-time favourites Chris Watson to Luke Richards, Michael Kirkness and more recently Jarred Brook.

Along the way I also got into announcing – not something I initially sought, but I soon took a liking to it and I've now been the announcer at more than 50 different venues across speedway, dirt track, long track, supercross, motocross, supermoto, trials and the very last motorcycle meeting, a Six Hour Race, staged at Oran Park.

It has been an honour. I must still be doing it okay, as a number of clubs keep asking me back! And I'm still enjoying being part of watching riders coming through the ranks.

Perhaps in the future I might tire of the travel to some of the more distant venues, but I would certainly find it hard to sever ties with some clubs where I have long considered the people involved with them as friends.

"WHAT STICKS IN MY MIND MOST"

I've collected (well, hoarded) a lot of 'stuff' over the years and it does create some storage issues; 65 years of speedway programs, 99 per cent of speedway-only magazines from Australia, the UK and the US are intact, plus piles of cuttings from newspapers and other magazines.

Copies of REVS were never kept intact, and a ritual around each New Year is now culling AMCNs



down to what I went to keep, as the thought of 42 years' worth of the magazines would have added enormously to the library.

So what, from over all of that time, sticks in my mind most?

Some announcing locations are obviously better than others – one of the worst being in a scissor lift about 5m off the ground at a supermoto meeting at the Sydney International Tennis Centre. The contraption had a plate indicating maximum load of 120kg. Now, neither Mark Bracks nor I are heavyweights, but I am sure our combined weight exceeded that load by over 30 per cent. With just a single rail less than a metre above the platform to hold us in, it certainly made balance and even movement an issue – particularly when Bracksy decided to play silly buggers and start bouncing up and down when I was trying to write something on my program!

Another supermoto location brought an entirely different concern. A meeting in surely one of sport's great locations around the Newcastle harbour foreshore had a mischievously named stunt team as part of the show. They performed under the name 'Cunning Stunts' and I can assure you that those two words have never been spoken so slowly and carefully over a PA system.

Some long-track venues have given me memorable moments, with several visits to Port Pirie long track including calling a few breathtaking finishes that remain vivid in my mind today. A meeting at Wagga Wagga where I could not pick the winner as two slider machines crossed the line; transponders recorded the gap between as 1/1000th of a second. Next time out, the same two riders were again close, but I confidently called the result – and got it right – with a gap of 4/1000th of a second.

Certainly one of my all-time favourite venues is the Bathurst Showground, with my most recent visit in March 2024 highlighted by what was the race of a lifetime in the Dirt Track Sidecar final.

As a spectator, the very first appearance of five-time world champion Ove Fundin at Liverpool Speedway in the late 1960s is still vivid today, as is a memory of Jim Airey squeezing between the unforgiving concrete wall at the Sydney Showground and a startled Swede Soren Sjosten, who thought he was riding on the high line.

A few wins by the magical Ivan Mauger in Australasian Finals – just as fans could be excused for thinking he might be past his best – are also significant memories.

I've sometimes wondered what my interest and involvement in speedway would have been over the past 50 years had I not written that letter to Mr Hanlon.

I am glad I did write it. 🏍️

1. Darren Treloar, whom Peter Baker reckons is not only the GOAT of speedway sidecars but the GOAT of all motorcycle competition in Australia

2. Peter followed the amazing career of Ivan Mauger

3. Here he announces a podium of future stars from 2019: Seth Qualischeski (winner); Tom Drane (2nd place); Rennie Fyffe (3rd place); and Michael West (finalist)

4. Word perfect... Peter's coverage in a 1983 AMCN

5. Deadset legends the lot of them: (left to right) Shane Rudloff/Scott Morris, Mark Plaisted/Ben Pitt, the late Warren Monson/Andrew Summerhayes, Darrin Treloar/Blake Cox pictured in 2019

6. Young's Hillman Imp outfit

7. With Paralympic legend and State MP Liesl Tesch at CCJMC

8. Swede Ove Fundin Down Under

9. Jim Airey duelling with English legend Eric Boocock in 1967

