

**LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS – 44**

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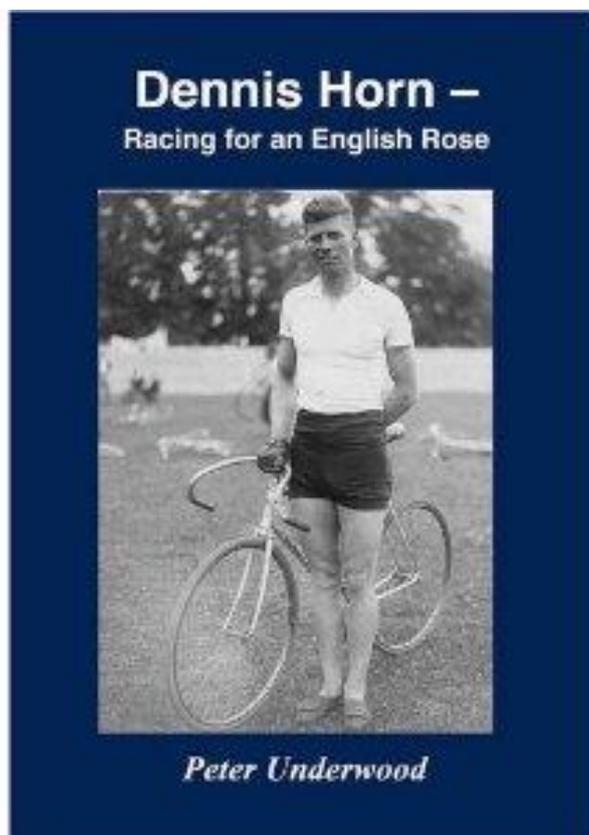
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As well as running the website and editing *Lightweight News* I have been devoting much of my time to producing a book on track racing in the UK during the decade from 1930 to the outbreak of war in 1939. The story focuses on one rider, Dennis Horn, who was a legend in the Fens and in Norfolk where I grew up and went on to become a national and international track champion. The book provides an insight into the lives led by a band of grass and hard-track racers who travelled the country fighting for prizes which, in view of the amount of time spent doing this, must have become a form of currency. It portrays the track world of the Thirties in which Horn competed, where crowds of tens of thousands followed these gladiators to events around the country. The book also deals with Claud Butler's involvement in the track world during that era.



***Dennis Horn - Racing for an English Rose***

by Peter Underwood with contribution by Geoff Waters

pp 84 (with 12 pp black and white photographs) ISBN 978-1-874739-66-1 210 x 148 mm Price £8.95

At the age of 20, Dennis Horn won his first English Rose – the emblem of a National track champion. Throughout the 1930s he rapidly graduated from the rough and tumble of makeshift grass track racing at country fairs and gala sports days in provincial towns to assail the heights of British track

cycling on the great urban cycling bastions of the time – the hard-surfaced stadiums of London's Herne Hill and Manchester's Fallowfield – and become the star of British track racing. Every year from 1931 to 1938 he was awarded the season-long Meredith Trophy to add to those legendary gold and silver cups he'd won in fiercely contested track battles in front of crowds of tens of thousands. It was a cycling scene entirely unique to Britain in the years before World War II.

But this is more than a simple tale of a strapping rural lad who took on and beat the streetwise metropolitan champions of his era. Dennis Horn, son of a Fenland blacksmith, proved himself to be as astute as any of his urban contemporaries at treading the fine line between amateurism and professionalism as defined by the puritanical British cycling establishment of their day.

*Dennis Horn – racing for an English Rose* will be published on 21st March and will be available from: [www.mousehold-press.co.uk](http://www.mousehold-press.co.uk) or from:



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**There was a recent discussion on the Classic Rendezvous Forum** bemoaning the fact that cyclists no longer acknowledge each other on the road these days. The discussion was started by someone who lives about thirty miles from us here in Cambridge.

This relatively small distance must mark out a big change in mindset as we find a cheery response from virtually every cyclist or group of cyclists we meet out on the open road.

In the city it is a different thing as there could be more than 10,000 cyclists riding around on business of some form or other during the day. It would get rather tiring have to respond to each and every one of these especially as a large number are from overseas and not used to this sort of thing I guess. Having said that certain people recognise like minds, even within the crowded streets, and some smile or wave. Surprisingly it is often mothers with children on bike seats, in trailers or on the newer long wheelbase box bikes with children in the box. I think the mothers recognise my admiration at their pushing and controlling these heavy loads. I spoke to one mother in the daily market, as we both purchased vegetables at a stall: she had three children of ascending ages and as she said, a lot of shopping to go into the box. Cambridge is fairly flat but just to get a load like this over a road/rail bridge is quite a feat.

There are four or five cycling/triathlon clubs in Cambridge plus clubs in nearby villages and towns so there is a lot of activity on the quiet roads and lanes in the area and it gives a warm feeling to get so many cheery responses when out, either alone or with a group. It is good that the fellowship still exists, even in small pockets of the UK.

On holiday in Italy every sporting rider gives a greeting, even clubs which look as if they are heavily sponsored, out training complete with manager using the speaker on the front of the team car. One of the favourite calls, especially as you travel further South is 'Salve', harking back to the old Roman days and meaning salute.

**A few miles South of Cambridge** in an area close to what used to be the old A11 road from London to Newmarket, is the village with the rather unfortunate name of Ugley which matches another a few miles away called Nasty. We won't go into the jokes about a meeting of the Ugley and the Nasty Women's Institutes! The A11 hosts the E1 time trial course for 25 and 50-mile events and is a popular venue. Along a minor road parallel to the old A11 and next to the railway line there are to this day several huts owned by clubs from the London area which serve as a base for many cycling events. Some are hostel-like with bunked accommodation for cyclists and room for their bikes plus catering facilities and somewhere to sit.

Mick Butler remarked: "I think the first hut belonged to the Rosslyn Ladies. They used to pitch a tent at Littlebury on the E1. Their hut somehow got burnt down. They were then given some land by De Walden's, the wealthy landowners who also owned most of Harley Street in central London. So the ladies had the land but no building. This coincided with Empire Exhibition at Wembley closing, so they purchased two surplus wooden huts. They had these dismantled and moved to Ugley to be re-erected.

Bit more about the "Ladies". Their first president was Lady de Fries, better known as Vesta Tilley, the music hall star. They also promoted the first women's track race in 1927 and in 1928 the first women's open time trial, no meagre 10-mile for them but a 12-hour event where they would race for close to 200 miles.

The Comet CC Hut was built in 1938 behind the Ash Pub in Burton End a bit further away. Up at Ugley there were quite a few club huts: Upton Manor also known as the "Doomers". The Shaftesbury CC hut was formerly the Forest CC hut. Victoria CC. Eagle RC. Lea Valley CC (which was the old Univeristy CC hut). Comrades CC. Crest CC. Easterley CC and the Chequers RC at the other end of the lane. There use to be a Glade CC hut towards Newport but it got burnt down."

*The Editor adds:* Back in the time these huts were built, cyclists used to ride from London up to the huts on Saturday, probably having worked through the morning until at least 1 or 2pm. They would then spend the night in the hut and be up at the crack of dawn the next day to compete in a time trial on the E1. Depending on the time of year these events could start as early as 6am. I have competed in time trials which were over on time for the 9am club-run start. Several of our local courses were based either on King's Lynn (my home town) or Wisbech, some 13-miles away. This often meant that the two clubs would amalgamate after a time trial, sometimes at a tea shop (opposite Greyfriars Tower in King's Lynn) and then set off on a club run of forty riders, often more, for anything from 100 to 160 miles. Although there was friendly rivalry between the clubs, all of the members were friends with each other. When the meet was at Greyfriars there would be a double layer of bikes along the garden railings of some sixty yards or so, quite a sight in retrospect but it was the norm in those days.

Modern club runs have a problem in that, although they often split the riders into ability groups possibly known such as Race, Medium and Touring, there is still a problem within the groups of riders bursting off the front and splitting the group into fragments. I have even heard of all the riders setting off at their own pace leaving the run leader on his, or her, own.

The club runs I went on had riders of all abilities from Open Event winners down to newcomers and I never remember this happening. There would be a sprint for a '30' sign from time to time but the group would reform within a couple of minutes. Rides were very

long and I wonder how I got round on my first excursions into club world. I must have been nursed round without realising it.

The first serious ride after the winter would be the start of season 100 in 8, a ride of one hundred miles to be done in less than eight hours. This took place quite early in the year and was always quite a challenge but it got us back to presentable mileages again. The club always rode as a group and although by today's standards it seems quite easy, it was always quite a shock for some reason. Soon after this the racing started with our club's Good Friday 25 mile time trial and we were off for the year.

**It always puzzled me** why the fashion in the fixie scene was to have a carbon tri-spoke wheel in the front and a spoked wheel in the rear. The rear spoke was not one of the minimalist jobs with 16 or 20 spokes but a very conventionally spoked wheel with something like 36 or 40 spokes.

If we had been talking about time triallists I would have guessed that it was a matter of aerodynamics as the leading edge of the front wheel is the first part to cut into the air. I didn't feel that aerodynamics was high on the list of a fixed-wheel riders priorities. A week or so ago I caught onto the real reason for this.

Some fixed-wheel riders like to ride brakeless in pure track bike style (I know, but this is not the place to start that debate!). To do this they practice the art of lifting the back wheel and locking the legs as the tyre hits the tarmac skidding to a halt. So far so good but there is a development of this skill in 'kicking' the bike to one side which, instead of producing a straight line skid mark, makes a mark akin to a chevron. I assume they know that this stops them quicker or it would not be such a universal habit resulting in endless images of riders on steep slopes such as in San Francisco with the bike slewed to one side and a wide skid mark on the road.

Herein lies the answer to the puzzle: carbon wheels are built with straight-line speed in mind and they don't have the residual built in strength to absorb the shock of this sideways lateral force whereas a sturdy spoked alloy wheel has a greater chance of surviving.

This way of stopping creates a great deal of tyre wear and one sees fixed-wheel bikes with bald patches around the circumference. Sometimes they are evenly spaced and few in number. The more canny riders calculate a sprocket/chainring combination that spreads these patches around the tyre rather than concentrating them in one spot, I guess 16 x 48 is probably the worst. I have a more effective method of preserving tyres - it is called a front brake.

This method of braking becomes quite addictive and I have been on rides where all I needed to do to slow down with the group was put some reverse pressure on the pedals but I would notice rear wheels hopping up and down like horses on a carousel on a Bank Holiday Monday as riders engaged in their compulsive behaviour habit.

The BMX world has its own iconographic moves, the prime one being again the sideways flick when the machine is taking air. I have never seen an image of a BMX'er jumping without the bike being slewed to one side in this way. What intrigues me is that even when racing flat out in a straight line a BMX'er will take time to perform this little flick when in the

air, be it in a local event or even at the Olympics (am I allowed to use that word now that the event is over?).

Another feature of the fixed-wheel movement is the ubiquitous track stand. In the late forties/early-fifties when I attended some top international track events it was not unknown for a couple of sprinters, upon release from the start line, to crawl to the banking where they would perform such a stand in an attempt to force their opponent to lead out.

As both combatants would be experts at this, a cool spectator could head to the tea van and buy a cuppa knowing that when he got back they would still be poised at the same spot on the track before crawling round to the other side of the track to do it all over again. To the experienced spectator this was quite thrilling but to the outsider it was akin to watching paint dry and even some journalists of the day showed their lack of knowledge by writing flippant articles - this was in the days when national newspapers would have a sports reporter covering a wide variety of sports.



In the intervening years the rules dictate that the two sprinters will draw for the first race and that the loser must lead out at least at walking pace (hopefully not defined as the speed of the average shopper in my local supermarket!). Should this manoeuvring result in a track-standing situation then the rules state that the riders must move again within a few seconds (the judges check this by stopwatch).

In the London Olympics Vicky Pendleton lost the advantage over Anna Meares when Anna forced her up the banking and then started to track stand. Vicky wasn't comfortable with this and felt it better to move off which gave Anna the advantage of being behind and able to dictate things for the whole of that race.

**As I ride regularly** on bikes from the 1940/50s up to the latest carbon and titanium machines I often ponder on the improvements which have accrued over the years. The recent cold weather snap drew my attention to an unintended consequence. I am sure that when

designers were working on the first of the clip-on pedals they did not have in mind that it would also be possible to have nice little neoprene booties to keep the rider warm in winter. This is my way to counter the cold - clip on pedals with booties are the order of the day and my feet keep to a comfortable temperature. We have one group rider who doggedly keeps to pedals with clips and straps and he is always complaining about cold feet and having to run up and down the road to keep his circulation going.

**I wonder what is happening** between the UK and the States to increase the time for parcels and packets so much. I have recently sent and had sent to me small parcels and they seem to disappear for weeks even though, from this end they are sent by a 5-day airmail delivery. They are taking weeks both ways, even longer if the parcels get hi-jacked for VAT charges. The 20% taxation is enough but the handlers add a hefty charge to collect it. You may manage successfully to claim the VAT back as I did when the parts sent to me were my own parts being returned (maybe you have heard of drillium!). Although after months the refund was made there was no way to claim the handling charge which on a small item could actually be more than the tax itself.

**I recently had a chain break** and luckily someone had a pocket tool set with a chain splitter on it. I managed to take out the offending link and rejoin the chain. The damaged link had a side plate broken, when I tried to ride off I could tell something else was wrong as the chain was twisted and was catching in the gear with every revolution. Luckily we were not far into the ride so the rest carried on and we planned to meet at the coffee stop later. I coaxed the bike back to our local bike shop for a new chain and when the old one was taken off we noticed that several of the side plates were cracked and distorted.

I have heard of more broken chains over the last year or so than ever in the past. I wondered if one of the manufacturers had a faulty batch but enquiries showed that no one make had the problem.

I am not so fussy with my town/shopper bike which is a Falcon Black Knight with straight handlebars, basket on the front and carrier on the rear. It has a 5-speed Suntour gear and I use my slightly worn chains on it. When we had recent snow I did quite a few town miles on it, often on freshly salted roads and within a couple of days my chain had gone a terrible colour, a cross between mud brown and rust orange. My attempts to clean it up (while still on the bike) came to nothing as within a few miles it was just the same, this after the roads were clear.

Putting two and two together I have come to the conclusion that this is the result of the saline solution used on the roads being thrown onto the chain by the wheels. My guess is that this is eating into the side plates which may be made of softer metal than the other parts of the chain.

I now have a nice new chain on the bike - doesn't it always make the bike feel like new again - and am dreading the day I have to clean it as the new chain covering seems to be the best of all. I favour 'dry-chain' lubrication which entails squirting something like GT85 on the chain every few days. I always give the chain a rub with cloth at the same time. From time to time I try some other chain lubricant but within days the chain is filthy black and gungy - I'm sure the lubricant is working well but I just hate the filth if you happen to touch the chain.

**On the subject of lubrication**, I have just built up a rather nice R O Harrison after having it stripped and painted - Salmon Pink since you ask! The build, from scratch, went exceptionally well and in no time I was testing the gears. After trying various workshop stands I found that they were never high enough for me and I always ended up with back ache, so now I have two cords hanging down from a beam on the garage, each with a loop on the end. I have a further loop from them using an old toestraps. One loop goes under the nose of the saddle and the other hooks under the stem/bar bolt. On later stems this is streamlined out and there is nowhere for the strap to grip. In this case I just undo the strap end take it under the stem before doing it up. Not quite as quick but it works. Also with the straps I can adjust the height a bit front and rear. Handy when you turn the bike round the work on the other side. I still manage to have the bars lower than the saddle by a few centimeters - it is a matter of pride!

Back to the R O H, I said that everything went smoothly but as I turned the pedals round to test the gears I noticed that the chain was 'sucking' giving what mountain bikers call 'chain suck' where the chain does not leave the ring cleanly at the bottom. It was not too bad but I didn't want to risk having mechanical problems on a ride so I decided to do a switch round. Take the rare Brampton cranks off the R O H and replace them with Chater-Lea cranks on a fixed-wheel Macleans. Should be straight forward enough as both chainsets were cotted. However the Chater set just wouldn't go onto the Bayliss-Wiley axle so I had to do a swap and fit a Chater axle in its place. I did consider changing the whole bottom bracket set but as it was late in the day I went just for an axle swap. Since building up the unit a few days earlier I had done no more than spin the cranks a few time to check gears, etc.

What surprised me was that all the carefully applied grease had worked its way out of, and away from the bearings, to stand proudly a millimetre or so away from where it was needed, I had worked it all carefully into the bearings in the approved manner. Obviously some of the grease was still doing its job but at least 90% was away from the workface.

**I am looking for** two alloy L H cranks - Stronglight 49D - 165 and 170 in good condition with British threads to match existing 5-pin RH cranks I have. I also need a pair of good condition Dunlop Light Alloy 27" HP rims 32/40 holes. Would be prepared to buy odd ones hoping to make up a pair as I have stolen the wheels off a Rotrax for my R O Harrison build and they need different sprocket set-ups.

Peter Underwood - details at top of page.

**Wanted:** Ladies open frame / mixte frame or complete bicycle, size preferably 18" (46cm) or close to it. Any quality lightweight or custom build considered. Contact Boyd on 01638 719248 (work), 01284 700165 (home - Suffolk/Cambs)  
email [boyd.nicholas@talktalk.net](mailto:boyd.nicholas@talktalk.net)