

The Shawcross Report

Key Dates

1.10.63	Southampton stages its last ever meeting. Their closure reduces the National League to an unsustainable six tracks
October 1963	Wolverhampton 'invited' to join the National League
November 1963	Mike Parker declines the offer and joins Provincial League promoters in planning for 1964
14.1.64	Speedway Control Board decline to approve PL plans for 1964 and instruct Wolves to join the NL
4.2.64	A lengthy joint meeting fails to make progress. The SCB threatens to suspend the PL tracks licences and the PL promoters respond by demanding an RAC inquiry.
15.2.64	PL Promoters AGM elect a new chairman: Mike Parker (replacing Trevor Redmond (who becomes vice-chairman))
11.3.64	Parker having failed to respond to one final appeal, the SCB meet and suspend the licences of all PL tracks and send letters to all riders warning they would lose licence if they rode on 'black' tracks.
19.6.64	Having spent three months considering the PL promoters complaint, the RAC announce that Lord Hartley Shawcross will lead an independent inquiry assisted by Wilfrid Andrews (Chairman of the RAC) and Sqdn. Leader John Crampton (Vice Chairman of RAC)
28.7.64	First session of the Shawcross Inquiry
13.10.64	Interested parties attend Inquiry to give evidence
3.12.64	Further session of Inquiry at which broad conclusions agreed – one big league, and an immediate end to suspensions
13.1.65	Final meeting of Inquiry to consider details of new administrative set-up with ACU
15.1.65	Following a number of exploratory meetings in December the first meeting of the British Speedway Promoters Association takes place at the Harbour Hotel Poole and decides on the structure of British speedway for 1965.
29.1.65	Shawcross Report signed off
17.2.65	RAC accept report and formally announce findings
4.3.65	'Old' SCB meets for the final time. Nelson Mills-Baldwin announced as chairman of new body, a position he maintained until his death in 1980.

Key Personnel

Lord Hartley Shawcross (1902-2003): Attorney-General (1945-51), prosecutor at the Nuremberg war crimes, elevated to peerage 1959.

Wilfrid Andrews (1892-1975): Chairman of the RAC (1945-72), and in 1965 became the first British President of the FIA (the Governing body of Formula 1).

Squadron Leader John Crampton (1921-2010): educated at Harrow his father was a founder member of the RAC. Twice vice-chairman of the RAC and served on its committee until 1993.

George R Allan: involved in the sport since it's early days. ACU Steward (referee) for many years until his appointment to the SCB in 1948. Appointed chairman in 1962 on the retirement of Major Vernon Brook.

Major Bill Fearnley: Manager/Secretary of the SCB from 1947 to 1964. he also represented the ACU at FIM conferences.

Mike Parker (1924-1987): Blackpool born, with a business empire centred on Manchester, he moved from driving midget cars at Belle Vue to promoting them and then onto speedway in 1959 when he had his first run-in with the SCB. Promoted at 13 tracks between 1959 and 1981. Variousy described as ruthless, mercenary, a scoundrel and single-minded.

Charles Ochiltree (1919-1998): worked at Hackney (pre-war) and Haringay (1947) before becoming Coventry promoter in 1948, a role he maintained for fifty years. He had a formidable reputation, as a straight-laced administrator renowned for his attention to detail. Joined SCB in 1962.

Ronnie Greene (1899-1978): First promoted at Bristol in 1936, adding Wimbledon the following year where he continued until 1971. A vocal critic of the Control Board in the early 1950s, he had become part of the establishment by 1964, joining the Control Board in 1960.

Commentary

Page 1, para 1	<p>The original request for an inquiry was made by the Provincial League promoters in February. The initial RAC response was to request that the PL promoters set out grounds for investigation, and this was still ongoing in early April. It was not until mid May that Speedway Star revealed that Lord Shawcross had been invited to chair the inquiry, and another month before it was formally announced.</p> <p>Terms of Reference: are remarkably general and broad.</p>
Page 1, para 2	<p>The first two meetings presumably considered the scope of the inquiry and written submissions. Oral submissions were made at the October 13 meeting. The December 3 meeting was more in the nature of a conciliation session where the warring parties (having already been asked to submit a joint proposal) were encouraged to reach agreement. Further meetings between the NL and PL promoters took place between 3rd and 17th December. The December 17 meeting presumably considered this progress along with proposals for governing the sport.</p>
Page 1, para 3	<p>Prior to the appearance of speedway in 1928 the Auto Cycle Union (established as a separate branch of the (Royal) Automobile Club in 1903) was responsible for the administration of motorcycle sport, but was geared to amateur clubs running events for members who were participants and enthusiasts. Speedway was seen as a business providing entertainment.</p> <p>On speedway's arrival a track licensing committee was set up (members included Major Vernon Brook who had a role in the 1964 dispute as the PL Appeals Arbiter) and out of this evolved the Speedway Control Board in 1933. Promoters representatives were added to the board's membership two years later.</p> <p>In the following years there had been many adjustments to the role of the SCB and its powers, and a number of occasions when speedway promoters had cause to voice discontent with its conduct. (1957 in particular saw the SCB under sustained attack for its handling of a number of issues.)</p> <p>The RAC ceased to have any involvement in the oversight of motorcycle sport circa 1999</p>
Page 2, para 4	<p>At the start of 1963 the Provincial League consisted of 13 and not 14 teams. The 14th track could have been Rayleigh who were operating on an open licence. In addition Rye House (first meeting 12 April) operated in the NL sphere and Ipswich, Eastbourne and Weymouth all staged meetings under the PL banner from May onwards.</p> <p>Mike Parker, Reg Fearman, Charles Ochiltree and the Charles Foot/Knott combination were the multiple track promoters.</p> <p>On cost: Mike Parker estimated that over a season the costs of running in the NL would exceed those of a PL track by £5,000 (nearly £100,000 in 2014 prices, and given that the largest component is points money it would be more appropriate to use the earnings deflator making the current comparator nearer £200,000.)</p> <p>A mid-season amnesty resulted in one suspended rider returning to the National League (David Crane) and after legal action back in Australia Chum Taylor (Poole) did ride at Perth.</p>
Page 3, para 5	<p>In September 1963 SCB membership consisted of:</p> <p>Chairman: George R Allan Other ACU nominees: S G Cope, C H King, T E Ryan, K E Shierson Promoters: Ronnie Greene (NLPA chair) Charles Ochiltree, Trevor Redmond (PLPSA chair) Riders Rep: Danny Dunton Secretary Maj Bill Fearnley</p> <p>The principal pre-existing dynamic was the distrust of Parker that accrued when he first arrived on the speedway scene in 1959 promoting unlicensed meetings.</p>

Page 3 para 6	<p>By the time the inquiry got round to the central part of its work the writing was already on the wall for the National League and it was clear that Mike Parker and the PL would be able to dictate the terms of the settlement. While the PL had managed to conduct its business with minimal disruption the NL were facing the closure of Norwich and the likely defection of Belle Vue to the PL ranks.</p> <p>Excepting the inclusion of a few star foreigners, the set-up for the 1965 British League looked remarkably similar to that proposed by Mike Parker in December 1963 (reproduced in Speedway Star 21/12/63).</p>
Page 3, para 7	<p>The 'freedom to conduct business' argument goes back to 1928 when the debate reached a similar conclusion. For discussion of this see the paper by Jack Williams reproduced in Speedway Researcher Vol 2 no 3.</p>
Page 4, para 8	<p>Saturday was the regular race night for four of the seven NL tracks.</p> <p>Section 55 of the Speedway Regulations gave the Board the power to review the composition of the leagues</p>
Page 4, para 9	<p>Although movement between the NL and PL is raised in the context of promotion the only movement between the leagues had been in the other direction. Poole moved from the 1959 NL to become founder members of the PL in 1960, and Leicester followed suit in 1962. At the time of the inquiry Belle Vue, speedway's most famous club, were poised to join the PL.</p> <p><i>“The kernel of our recommendations to the RAC therefore has to be that, at all events for the present, the distinction between the two leagues should be abolished”</i></p> <p>The central recommendation – amalgamation – although as worded it did not preclude the setting up of one league with two divisions under a single administrative authority. However all parties concerned had already accepted that there would be a single league of 18 teams in 1965.</p> <p>The rider suspensions were lifted by the SCB immediately after the December 3 meeting.</p>
Page 5, para 10	<p>This remains the structure in place to this day, although there has a gradual re-balancing that has seen more power shift from the Control Board to the management committee of the BSPA</p>
Page 5, (1)	<p>(i) The original members of the new SCB were - RAC members: Nelson Mills-Baldwin (chairman), Dean Delamont ACU members: Norman Dixon OBE, Jack Whitaker</p> <p>Circa 2000 the SCB increased from four to five in number, with the addition of two speedway promoters and the removal of one independent nominee. In 2003 it ceased to be a 'Board' and became a 'Bureau'.</p> <p>(ii) This looks like legalese for 'the continued presence of Mr Allan would not be helpful'. The case of Major Bill Fearnley is slightly different. He had been manager/secretary of the SCB for 18 years and took the opportunity to retire from the post, an announcement made shortly before the October 13 inquiry meeting. The inclusion of the phrase 'may in truth be entirely blameless' suggests that despite his role as the bearer of some of the SCB's most draconian edicts he continued to be held in high regard on both sides of the dispute.</p>
Page 6/7 (2)	<p>(ii)(A) The first BSPA management committee consisted of: Ronnie Greene, Charles Ochiltree, Mike Parker, Trevor Redmond and Charles Foot</p> <p>(iii)(C) Although still referred to in the regulations the SRA no longer appears to be active.</p>
Page 10, Final para	<p>Mr JB Izod was solicitor to the RAC, and subsequently secretary of the newly formed Control Board.</p>