

Reflected glory



www.avon-tyres.co.uk

AVON
TYRES

Saturday 3rd September 2011
**Fowlers Motorcycles
Pro-Bike National**



Circuit

Price 1/-

1951 - 2011
60 years of
Motorcycle
Racing

Sat. July 28th 1951

the best performance buy...

Douglas

DOUGLAS (SALES AND SERVICE) LTD., KINGSWOOD, BRISTOL

The History of Castle Combe Circuit

Castle Combe has, during its 54 year history played a major role in the development of bike racing in Britain.

Throughout the fifties and sixties it was the scene of epic battles between all the leading riders during that period,

Mike Hailwood, Derek Minter, Phil Read and Barry Sheene to mention a few.

Early in the seventies it fell victim of stringent new safety rules and top rung bike racing faded away. Fifteen years ago there were early signs of a revival and now plans are being made to regain the status that put Castle Combe among the leading venues for big time bike racing

It all started in a small way back in 1950 when the Bristol MC & LCC included a bike race as an added attraction to the programme for the inaugural car race meeting at the circuit.

Just seven riders' donned leathers for the occasion on July 8 and the first rider to go on record as a two wheel winner was

D J P Wilkins who displayed race number 4 on his 500cc Triumph.

The following year the Wessex Centre of the ACU decided that motor cycle racing had sufficient spectator appeal to go it alone at the Combe and scheduled a seven race programme for July 28.

Among the winners were leading national and international riders of the era with Jim Hogan taking the 125cc honours and Robin Sherry claiming a double victory with a 250cc Velocette and 350cc AJS.

The sidecar race in particular brought out the top Brits of the time. 'Pip' Harris snatched victory from 1952 world champion Cyril Smith, and Bill Boddice at the end of an epic encounter that ended with just a fifth of second separating the trio of Norton powered outfits.

The introduction of a first bike meeting of national status in 1952 boosted the quality of the entry still further.

John Surtees, the dominant rider on Britain's short circuits, arrived in the West Country in September to add Castle Combe to his conquests. The son of former sidecar grass track supremo Jack Surtees netted a runaway victory in the 500cc event with one his immaculate Norton machines and raised the lap record for the original 1.84 mile circuit to 81.98mph.

Hogan was again first home in the 125cc race; this time on an EMC Puch, while Maurice Cann was victorious on the same Moto Guzzi that took him to fourth place in the 250cc world championship that year.

Sidecar victory went to Ted Davis on his mighty 1000cc Vincent.

Perfectionist Surtees was back twelve months later to bag victory in the 350 and 500cc races on a brace of Nortons and set the lap record for the former at 80mph.

He then went one better in 1954 when he was not only first over the line in 350 and 500cc races but the winner of the 250cc event which he dominated on one of Reg Geeson's privately built, twin cylinder REG machine's

The four year Surtees reign at Castle Combe ended on July 4, 1955, again with a victory triple.

He brought a streamlined NSU Sportmax in the 250cc fray and was the race winner with over half a minute to spare before switching to his for ever fast and reliable Manx Nortons for the 350 and 500cc encounters.

He made it look easy in the 12 lap 350cc race and even easier in the larger capacity event when



he was again half minute ahead of his pursuers and lapped all but second and third finishing Norton riders, Geoff Tanner and Alan Trow.

Surtees destined to become the only person to win both bike and FI car world championships, left an absolute lap record of 84.94mph that was to stand for two years.

The following season Surtees won the first of four 500cc world titles he amassed for MV while King of Brands Derek Minter recorded his first win at Castle Combe on a 125 twin from the same Italian factory.

In 1957 Castle Combe staged two major motorcycle meetings for the first time, one in April and the other in July.

Among the starters for the former was 17-year-old Mike Hailwood, who made his racing debut two weeks previously at Oulton Park.

In the 125 and 250cc races - both won by Michael O'Rourke on MV's - the teenager from Oxfordshire gave glimpses of the style that was to make him one of the world's best ever bike racers.

He finished fourth at the end of a three rider scrap for fourth place in the smaller capacity class and then added sixth in the 250 on a 175cc MV after an equally close battle for fifth place that comprised five riders.

Aussie, Bob Anderson was a convincing 500cc front runner from Tanner while Minter came out on top in a three way sort out for the last place on the rostrum.

Hailwood was back later in the year to claim third spot in the 125 race won by Jim Baughn and fourth in the 250 that also went to Baughn with Percy Tait second on a Beasley Velocette.

Alastair King came down from North of the Border to score a 350 win from Minter and then come out second best to Tanner in the 500 that also had Minter and Bernard Codd in with a winning chance.

It was a Castle Combe double header again the following season with Mike the Bike posting clear cut wins in both the 125 and 250cc races in April when Minter and Anderson filled the first two places in the 350 and 500cc events.

Phil Read was the new name among the entries and after winning the non-experts 350 race went on to take third spot on the same Norton when he got among 'the stars' in the main final for the class.

Hailwood was firmly in the frame at the second meeting that year. He had it all his own way during winning rides on 125 Ducati and 250 NSU machines but then had a tough time to stay ahead of Minter and Read in the 350cc final.

Minter grabbed the 500cc glory but Hailwood was back to collect the major Avon trophy after winning the all class 15 lap handicap in which he elected to ride his 250 NSU.

Hailwood continued his winning ways and battles with Minter throughout 1959 and 1960 and into 1961.

He was unbeaten in the 125 and 250 classes during the six meetings in the three year period and was the 500 winner four times and first home in the 350 on one occasion.

Minter's tally included success in the 500 class three times and a similar number in the 350. Read was also in the hunt at the time romping home on his 350 Norton ahead of Hailwood's slowing AJS at the July meeting in 1960.



Continued on page 10

1950's

1950 - July 8. Bristol MC&LCC run first ever meeting. This included one motorcycle race, 10 laps for Clubman's machines, won by DJP Wilkins (500 Triumph) from Franz Pados (350 Douglas).

1951 - July 28. First full motorcycle meeting. HL Williams (499 Norton) sets fastest lap at 79.04 mph in the 500 final; "Pip" Harris (600 Norton) wins sidecar final.

1952 - Avon footbridge constructed over paddock exit road.

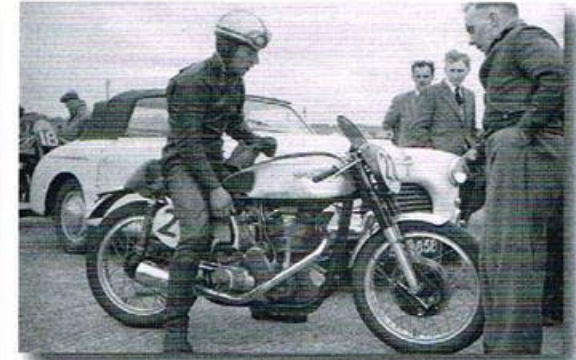
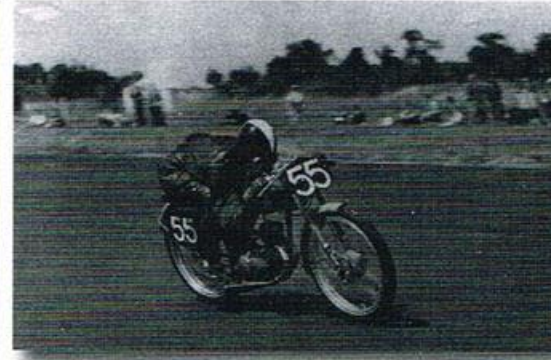
1952 - September 6. First National motorcycle Meeting. John Surtees (499 Norton) wins Senior final and sets new lap record (81.98 mph).

1955 - July 9 meeting is John Surtees' last at the circuit (his final lap record of 84.94 mph was to stand for another two years), as the following year he joined the MV Agusta team and scored the first of his seven World Championships. Surtees won 15 races at Castle Combe between 1952 and 1955.

1956 - Motorcycle racing continues, but no more car racing at Castle Combe until 1962.

1956 - July 14. Derek Minter (125 MV Augusta) scores the first of 43 race wins at Castle Combe.

1957 - April 27 meeting. First appearance of 17 year old Mike Hailwood, 4th in 125 race and 6th in 250 race riding MV Agustas. Hailwood won 29 races at Castle Combe between 1958 and 1962.



1960's

1961 - May 27. Mike Hailwood took a 500yard lead on the first lap of the 250 final on his 1960 Honda four, went faster every lap, breaking the lap record by 2.2sec leaving it at 84.05 mph. Race average higher than his previous lap record. This meeting included the first motorcycle races to be televised live at Castle Combe.

1961 - July 15. Pip Harris and Ray Campbell (BMW 500) set the first over 80 mph sidecar lap (80.97 mph).

1962 - June. Circuit Re-opens for car racing, then in 1964 the circuit is fully resurfaced.

1964 - April 18. Tom Phillips (Norton) recorded the first lap over 90 mph (90.75 mph), while winning the 500 final.

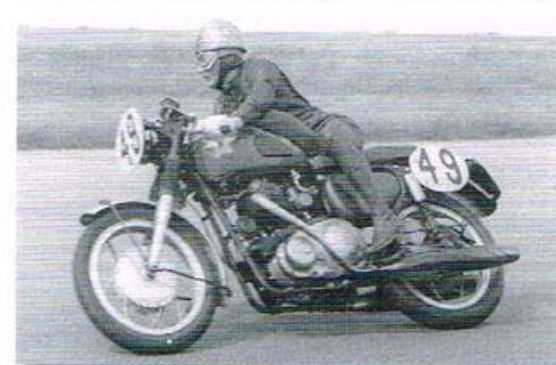
1964 - July 25. Tony Godfrey (Yamaha RD 56) won the 250 final from back of the field, and also set a new class record.

1964 - September 5. Starting from the back of the grid, Bill Ivy on the Chisholm Honda Special, won the 125 race and set a new 125 record.

1965 - July 10. Barry Lawton/Dave Degens (650 Triumph Bonneville) win the longest ever race at Castle Combe, the "MotorCycle" 500 miles International Grand Prix d'Endurance. They averaged 79.16 mph over approximately 6.5 hours.

1966 - April 30. Sidecar race won by Owen Greenwood/Terry Fairbrother, on the controversial Mini Special, also breaking Bill Boddice's sidecar lap record by 0.8 sec - new record 87.16 mph.

1969 - July 19. A young Barry Sheene (Bultaco 125) scores the first of four race wins at Castle Combe, 1969-71.



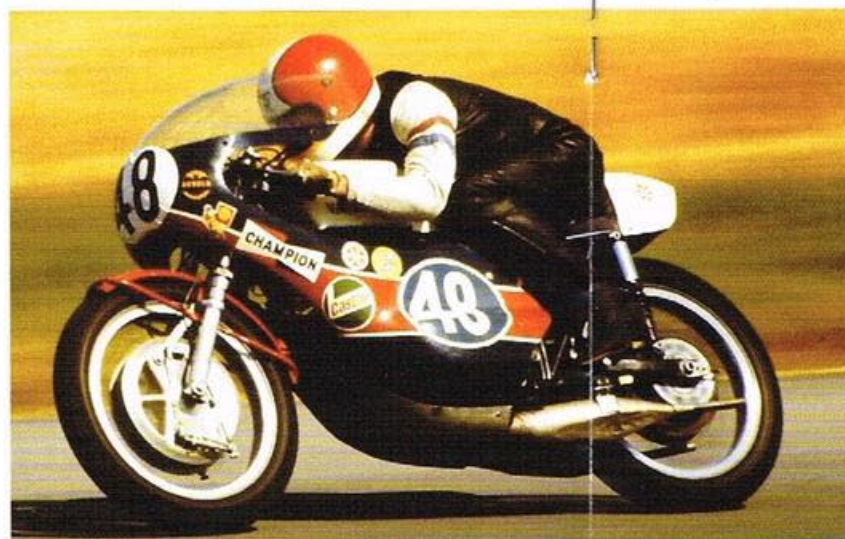
1970's

1970 - July 18. Bryan Kemp (Norton Commando) wins 500 race by a fraction of a second from Percy Tait (Triumph); both set a new lap record 92.77 mph.

1971 - April 24. Tony Rutter (Yamaha) wins 350 final by two lengths from Barry Sheene (Yamaha); both shared a new outright lap record (93.56 mph). Sheene (Suzuki) also wins 125 race and sets new class record (84.06 mph).

1971 - September 4. Percy Tait (BSA 3) clinches British 750 championship. Last motorcycle meeting at Castle Combe till 1981, and the last National motorcycle meeting until 1989.

1976 - Circuit bought by a consortium led by Howard Strawford.



Continued from page 4

It was the year of the 'Mint' in 1962 with the rider from Kent winning both the 350 and 500cc races. Hailwood said goodbye to the circuit with runner-up spot in the 350 and third in the 350 behind Tony Godfrey before signing for MV.

A resurfaced Castle Combe brought six new lap records in the first of three meetings in 1964 when Minter won the 250 on a Cotton and Tom Phillips recorded the first over 90mph lap during his winning 500 ride on a Norton.

The record lasted just three months before double winner on the day Minter raised it to 91.25mph. The last meeting of the year saw the arrival of Bill Ivy who set a new class lap record during a winning ride on a 125 Chisholm Honda.

It was a record year for the circuit in 1965 when it was the venue for four major motor cycle meetings.

As well as three nationals it hosted for one year, the Motor Cycle 500 Mile race, a round of the International Grand Prix d'Endurance organised by the Southampton MCC who switched the event from Thruxton.

Barry Lawton and Dave Degens were the winners at 79.16mph on a Syd Lawton 650cc Triumph Bonneville.

Minter, winner of eight national races that year, shared the 250 class winning Cotton powered Villiers Starmaker with Peter Inchley they took to third place overall.

On the national front, 1965 125cc world champion Dave Simmons was twice a winner on a 250cc Honda.

Barry Sheene was in Castle Combe action for the first time in 1969 when, at the age of 18, he was the clear winner of the 125cc race on a Bultaco. The following year he was back to contest a round of the 125 British championship but had to take second place to Yamaha riding Andrew Manship.

He was a winner later in the year of a 125 race in which Castle Combe's Rodney Gooch was third on a Yamaha!

The 1971 April meeting was destined to be the last national at 'the Combe' for almost 20 years when track safety conditions came under scrutiny. Sheene was again in action that day, winning the 125 race by half a lap on his ex-works, Stuart Graham, Suzuki but having to take second place in the 350 to Michael Rutter's dad, Tony Rutter. Both shared the lasting lap record at 93.56mph.

Although current circuit owner, Howard Strawford, instigated improvements when he purchased it in 1976 it was not until 13 years later that national status returned.

On the revised 1.80 mile circuit Carl Fogarty was on hand to break the 100mph barrier with a lap at 102.22mph during his winning 1300cc race ride on a 750 Honda. Mick Boddice and Chas Birks also powered in a 100.06mph lap on their Yamaha outfit, bettering the previous best they shared with Chris Vincent by 8.2 seconds.

Foggy's best was only good enough for a year. Steve Spray clocked 104.81mh while beating fellow JPS rotary Norton rider Trevor Nation and Kawasaki riding John Reynolds the following May.

Then, 12 months later, along came James Whitham and Ray Stringer to re-write the record books yet again before Reynolds stormed round at a staggering 107.18 mph to post a record that will never be beaten as the circuit has been revised again and extended to 1.85 miles.

Whilst it may not have featured at British Championship level on two wheels in recent years, the stars have most certainly been in evidence with a number of illustrious names lining up around the Wiltshire track.



With teams and riders reluctant to commit to additional races these days, 2004 saw them buck that trend when a number of leading teams agreed to contest the Castle Combe Grand National.

Supported by team boss Neil Tuxworth and headed by the HM Plant Honda duo of Ryuichi Kiyonari and Karl Harris, over 30,000 fans flooded through the gates to see Kiyonari set a new lap record of 95.06mph on his factory-specification Honda Fireblade but he couldn't stop Sean Emmett on the ETI Ducati from claiming a popular victory.

The stars were back out in force the following year and this time around it was rising star Tommy Hill who took the win on the Virgin Mobile Samsung Yamaha but not before top West Country privateer James Buckingham had upped the lap record to 95.24mph on his one off ride aboard the factory Rizla Suzuki.

June 2006 saw the first ever World Championship event at Castle Combe which hosted the Superside FIM Sidecar series with a full international entry but it was Kent brothers Tim and Tristan Reeves who romped to a double victory aboard their Eastern Airways Suzuki 1000 to put them firmly on course to lift the world title later in the season.

2007 saw a new pit wall and debris fencing constructed as World Supersport Championship rider Tom Tunstall headed the entry only to crash out at high speed on Avon Ride, luckily without injury and in 2008, a new start line gantry was erected.

That same year, one of the best races ever seen in recent years around Castle Combe saw local youngster Tommy Bridewell take an emotional victory aboard the 1000cc Team NB Suzuki on which his elder brother Ollie lost his life the year previously. Bridewell held off another local ace Victor Cox as well as European Championship ace Barry Burrell to win the race much to the delight of the partisan local crowd.

Legend Ron Haslam and son Leon were in action together on track in 2009 and with another host of legends here again this weekend, the appetite for top class bike racing has never been stronger in the region.

1980's

1981 - October 17. North Gloucestershire Motor Cycle Club run first motorcycle race meeting since 1971.

1989 - April 15. New ERA MCC run the first National motorcycle meeting for 20 years. World Formula One champion Carl Fogarty (750 Honda) wins 1300 Star race and sets new lap record of 102.22mph, the first 100mph motorcycle lap. Mick Boddice/Chas Birks (Yamaha) win sidecars, and set first 100mph sidecar lap (100.06 mph).



Photos credits: Castle Combe Circuit Archive, Gordon Francis Photography, Bristol Evening Post, Mortons Motorcycle Media, Cecil Bailey, Paul Korkus Photography, John Gaisford, John Dury, Robin Jung-Burton, Gerald Harding, Rod Scivyer, Bill Riley, Martin Warr, Darrell Higgins, JH Merrett, Alan Francis, Bonnie Lane.

Words John Brown and Larry Carter
Research Pete Stowe and Mike Newberry

1990's

1990 - April 28. Formula One won by Steve Spray from Trevor Nation, both on JPS 588cc rotary engined Nortons; Spray set new lap record at 104.81mph.

1992 - June 20. John Reynolds (Kawasaki 750) sets new lap record at 107.18mph.

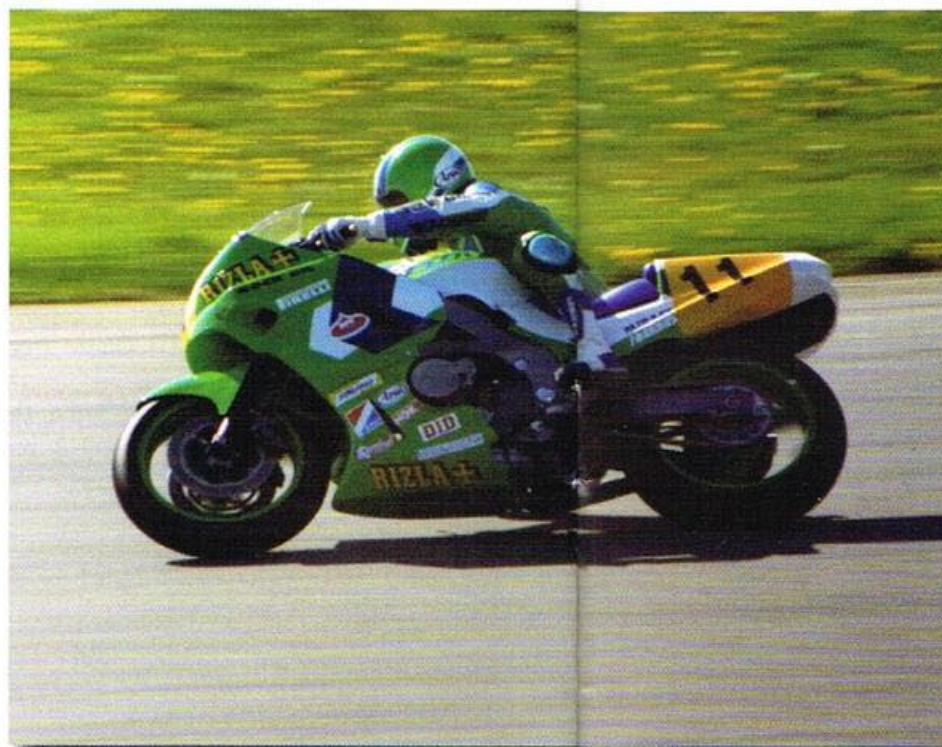
1992 - November. The circuit is fully resurfaced.

1996 - July 15. First Fowlers Motorcycles Pro-Bike National meeting.

1997 - June 14. James Toseland wins the Honda CB500 National Cup race (and went on to win the 1997 championship).

1999 - The circuit is revised to include two new chicanes, the Esses before Old Paddock, and Bobbies before Westway. The length is now 1.85 miles.

1999 - June 12. John Burgess (750 Yamaha) sets new lap record for revised circuit at 94.57mph.



CIRCUIT MAPS

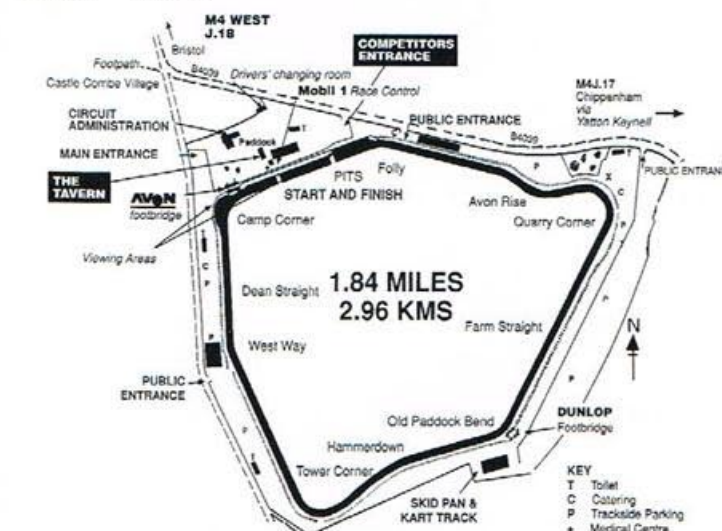
2004 to current - Bybrook added



1999 - 2003 - The Esses and Bobbies added



1950 - 1998



2000's

2004 - September 25/26. A new "bus stop" style chicane, Bybrook, constructed on the approach to Camp corner for the Superbike Grand National meeting, which attracts a 30,000 crowd. Sean Emmett (ETI Ducati F02) wins the Superbike Grand National. Ryuichi Kiyonari (Honda CBR1000) sets new lap record 95.06 mph.

2005 - July 30/31. Tommy Hill (Samsung Yamaha) wins Superbike Grand National. James Buckingham (Suzuki) sets current lap record (95.24 mph).

2006 - June 10/11. Eurocup motorcycle meeting includes the first ever World Championship event at Castle Combe, the Superside FIM Sidecar. Tim & Tristran Reeves (Eastern Airways Suzuki 1000) win both races.

2007 - New pit wall and debris fencing constructed, and in 2008 new start line gantry erected.

2008 - August 16/17. Tommy Bridewell (Suzuki 1000) wins Superbike Grand National.

