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## Bicycle Polo

The LINK has previously reported on the hard-fought bicycle polo matches between the Willesden and the Westerley. Here **Stan Vygus** recalls bicycle polo in the 1930s.

I was most interested to read about our members competing in a bicycle polo match, it sounded like fun.

Back in the 1930s the WCC had a good polo team, the club was affiliated to the Bicycle Polo Association, and during the winter months played regularly at Chertsey which was at that time the Mecca of West and South West London Polo. I don't know how they fared in the championship league but



but they were a well-respected team and always gave a good account of themselves. About 1938, Willesden Parish church, St Mary's in Neasden Lane, celebrated 1000 years of existence. A grand garden fete was held in the vicarage grounds and the Willesden played a polo match against the Crusaders C.C. who were then our cousin club.

It was a hard fought contest, I don't remember the score, but the Willesden won, of course.

World War II stopped many sporting activities including bicycle polo. 1945-46 saw the return of most of our warriors; club life began to return to normal and the polo team was reformed. The problem was that some of our players for various reasons did not return to the club and those who did were six years older and sometimes battered by wartime experiences. Jack Wilks was polo secretary and team captain. Jack was primarily a track man but would have a go at anything and encourage others to take part. He tried to recruit younger

**1 February 1930:** Second creation of the Bicycle Polo Association of Great Britain with members of Corrance C.C.

**13 March 1930:** New rules of cycle polo (with 8 players per team) inspired by polo pony rules of the Hurlingham Club.

## Bicycle polo



**“Cyclists are a crazy lot.”**



**“His job had been to keep the M.E. 109’s away from the tail end of a bomber, a risky job.”**

members into the team, but I was the only one to respond.

Cyclists generally are a crazy lot. They would risk breaking bones and grazed elbows and knees at track racing, get smothered with mud at cyclo cross, think nothing of getting up at 3am to ride a 12 hour event, and these days grinding from Paris to Brest and back non stop, but tearing round a muddy field at the risk of being battered with a polo mallet in the mud and freezing rain has little appeal, I wonder why?

I inherited Bill Philpot’s bike and kit. Bill was one of our members who failed to return from the war. His job had been to keep the M.E. 109’s away from the tail end of a bomber, a risky job. Too many of them came at him at the same time, Bill and his ‘Brownings’ couldn’t cope. He had attended the club dinner a few weeks previously. club dinner a few weeks previously.

A polo bike was smaller than a road or track bike and sturdier built, wheels and tyres similar to those used on today’s off road bikes. A very small gear, (30 ins would be a bit high) short, flat handlebars and the saddle well behind the bracket. Dress was cotton shirt and shorts, the shirt Emerald green with white sleeves, we used a leather crash helmet and footballers shin pads, and of course a long-handled mallet to hit the ball (Chukker) with.

The team consisted of five players, our team was Jack Wilks, Nobby Clark, Don Overall, Frank Greenaway, Tom Tweed, Trevor Bean and myself. We always had one reserve. The game was played in four chukkers each of 20 minutes duration, with a short break between. The ball/chukker was made of wood, painted white and somewhat smaller than a football. It was changed every chukker. At the start of

each session the ball was placed on the centre spot and the teams’ sprinters starting from the goal line sprinted for the ball. The first to get there had an obvious advantage.

By this time, I don’t know what happened to Chertsey, but we played our games at Uxbridge. At one end of the pitch were some air raid shelters, reinforced trenches with the soil neatly piled up on the structure. It didn’t take Jack, who was a good sprinter long to suss that starting on top of this banking gave a formed perfect ski slope start. Alas we never could back up Jack’s advantage and we never won a match.

The winter of 1946/47 was one of the most severe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and on occasions the ball was painted black so as to be seen in the snow! There was a stream running at the back of the ground and we often broke the ice and rode straight in and washed our bikes and ourselves. There was a changing room but no hot water. I have

already made the point that cyclists are in general 'nutters' – you youngsters were not the first generation of the above.

Some games did get a bit rough, and on one occasion one of the opposing team was giving me a bad time, and I complained to our captain between chukkers. Trevor Bean was a big man, 6ft something, 14 stone, all muscle. He asked me to point out the offender and said "don't worry son, I'll sort him out". Soon after the games started I heard a thump and a cry and the offending rider was travelling at a high rate of knots slumped over his handlebars. It didn't pay to offend Trevor.

As mentioned, we never did win a game, but we always scored at least one goal though I had never scored. I think it was the last game I played, the end of the game was near and we were losing heavily. Being 8 goals in arrears didn't bother us, that was normal, but we hadn't scored. I saw the ball going up the right wing, chased and overshot it, but swung round and gave the ball a mighty back hand. Seconds later there was a cheer, I had scored my goal and redeemed our record.

National Service finished my polo career. When I was demobbed the team had packed up. Polo was still being played, South London clubs used to

play on the recreation grounds by Purley Way. What happened to the B.P.A. I don't know. The cycling press used to report games, but these days I'm afraid they are sadly lacking in reporting club news. But there I'm just a grumpy old man. If you don't mind a few knocks and bruises and enjoy tearing round a muddy field in the cold, wet, ice and snow (what cyclist doesn't?) then try some bicycle polo if you get the chance, its fun!



## Willesden Reliability Trial

A very gratifying 100+ riders took part in this year's WCC Reliability Trials back in February.

Smalldean Lane caused the usual problems for the 100k hard-riders. For the 60k, the tough part was whether or not to stop at Bourne End Garden Centre. An easy decision, in the end, for some.



John Williams said "It's great when a plan comes together. I'm tired, but happy".



A staged start for the massed riders (above left).

Triumphant and relaxed, Organiser **John Williams** (right).

# Jayne Paine



At Herne Hill in May Jayne Paine was in action in the Women's National Omnium Series finishing in 4th place overall. She won the Points Race, 2000m event and the Scratch event and finished 8th in the time trial.

# Isle of Wight Randonnee

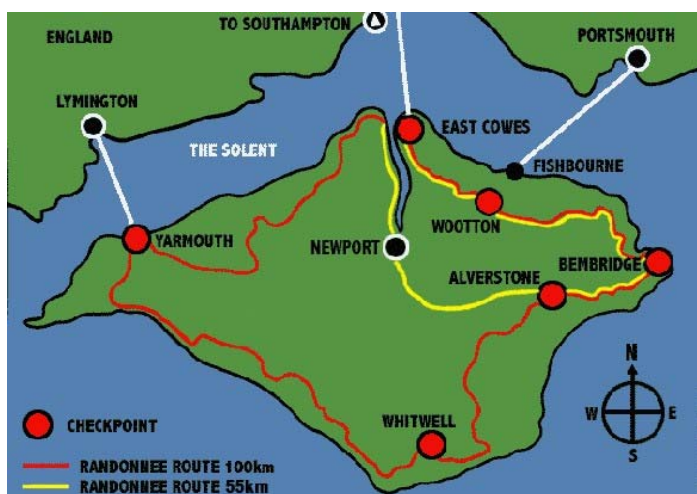
A select group of Willesden riders made the now regular trip to the Isle of Wight in May, for the annual Wayfarers round the island randonnee.

**2156 cyclists** took part this year, up from 1644 in 2008 which was great to see. Of the 2156 riders, 1851 took part in the 100km ride and 305 in the 55km ride.

Mark Brooking's ride was tragically cut short. The tandem he was riding suffered two chain breakages, and then the front rim exploded. Luckily he managed to keep the tandem upright.



Hotels on the IOW can be interesting. In the past we have enjoyed outdoor heated pools with an atmosphere like a Turkish bath. We have had soup served at 6pm whether or not we had finished our wodkas. We have launched rocket balloons in the midst of sedate retirement parties. This time, the Willesden contingent reported excellent hospitality and everyone is looking forward to a return trip—either at Xmas and/or next May!



*For more on the IOW randonnee, visit*

*<http://www.cycleisland.co.uk/index.php?page=home>*

# CLUB RUNS LIST

JUN- AUG 2009

## JUNE

14 Leighton Buzzard Pages Park

21 Fairoaks Aerodrome

Also John Morris Charity cycle:

<http://tinyurl.com/nvzk7h>

28 Waddesdon - Plant Centre

## JULY

5 Benson

Wallingford, Sunnyside Playing Field

12 Rickmansworth

Aquadrome/Canal cafe

19 Marsworth Black Barn

26 Newlands Corner

## AUGUST

2 Thame

9 Wendover

16 California Country Park

23 Chearsley Tea Rooms

30 Ivinghoe Tea Rooms

The scale model shown here was built by Don Allan from Ron Webb's working drawings and from actual 6 track wood deck, stripped down to a scale size.

Don lives in the Dand-nongs, about an hour out of Melbourne. His house sits in 7 acres, beautifully landscaped entirely by himself over 25 years.



He does B&B if you are in that area. Don is also a former winner at Ghent.