

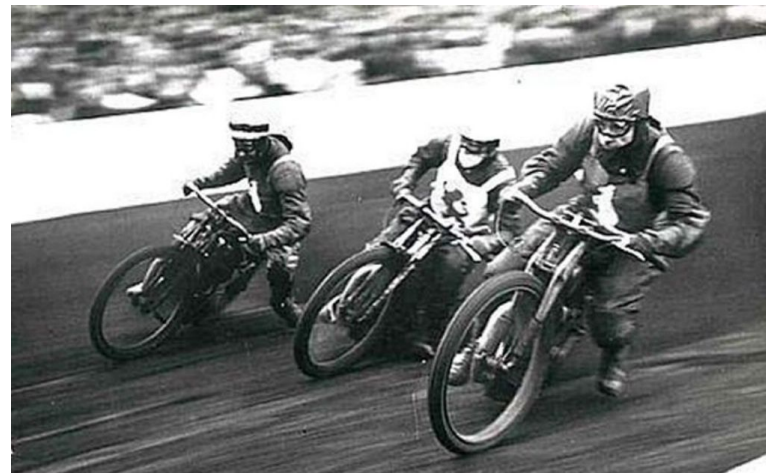
THURSDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER

Imagine the excitement of watching motorbikes racing without brakes! That's Speedway! Speedway arrived in Britain from Australia in 1920s and the British adopted the sport quickly. The excitement of four riders racing through 4 laps on a dirt track using powerful 500cc bikes was popular and local meets in Britain attracted up to 60,000 spectators.

90 years ago today, 74,000 spectators packed into Wembley Stadium, London not to watch football, but the **inaugural** Speedway World Championship. Two Australians and a British rider went into the final with a chance of winning. Despite winning all five of his races on the night, Australian Bluey Wilkinson could not bridge his deficit and Aussie Lionel Van Praag and Brit Eric Langton finished the evening tied for first place.

Langton false-started their deciding run-off which should have seen him disqualified, but Van Praag didn't want to win by default and insisted the run-off be replayed. Langton led for most of the race but Van Praag past him on the final bend and won by half a wheel.

Speedway still has British leagues but crowds of the 1930s are rare. The National Speedway Stadium in Manchester holds 6500. ([2025 Grand Prix final](#)) A reminder that sporting obsessions can change and slip surprisingly quickly from the centre of popular culture.



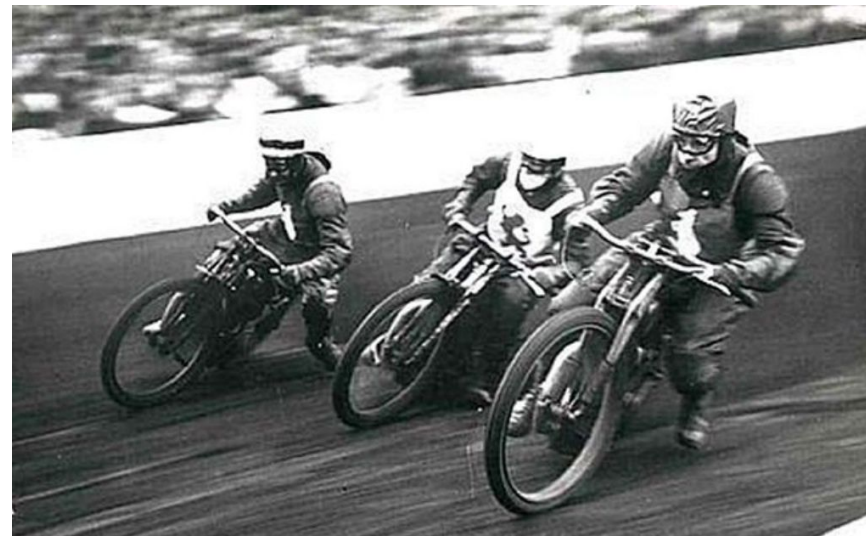
- What do you think of Van Praag's refusal to win by default?
- Have you ever seen [Speedway](#)?
- Why do you think Speedway lost its popularity?
- Which sport do you wish could be more popular?

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- What do you think of Van Praag's refusal to win by default?
- Speedway crowds are now much smaller – National Speedway stadium holds 6500 ([video](#)). Why do you think Speedway lost its popularity?