

“The Russians are coming!” Entangled Peripheries and the Emergence of a  
Communist Challenge in Cold War Motorcycle Speedway  
*by Richard Mills*

At the time of writing, Coventry’s motorcycle speedway stadium encapsulates the extent of the sport’s decline in Great Britain. Dereliction reigns behind its rusting security fences, as nature and vandals have combined to ruin the towering Grandstand and crumbling terraces. The venue appears destined to share the plight of so many speedway stadiums, but local campaigners have mounted a firm rear-guard action in the face of omnipresent housing developers. Six decades ago, this had been a jewel in British speedway’s crown, playing host to one of the most eagerly awaited international test matches the sport had ever seen. The Russians were coming...



**Figure 1:** Dereliction at Coventry Stadium, Brandon, Warwickshire. Author, 2019.

Developed in 1920s’ Australia, but evolving into a mass spectator sport in interwar Britain, speedway is a form of oval racing suited to stadiums: four bikes battle it out over four laps. At breakneck speeds of over 60 miles per hour, riders broadside around a tight loose-dirt track, without brakes. Races are over within a minute. Immensely dangerous for competitors, this was exhilarating and distinctly modern entertainment in the first half of the twentieth century. Though always susceptible to cycles of boom and bust, speedway shared the experience of Britain’s other spectator sports in the years after the Second World War: this was a heyday, powered by British-made JAP motorcycles, when over 10 million tickets were sold in a single season and the sport’s annual Wembley World Final regularly attracted crowds in excess of 80,000.<sup>1</sup> However, the sport endured a slump in the 1950s, as the dominance of Commonwealth riders came under challenge from continental competitors. The Swedes were the first to wrest the world title from Anglo-Saxon hands in 1956, but by then a far greater – and potentially existential – challenge had seemingly emerged on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Polish riders made huge leaps during the 50s, and by the dawn of the 60s the Soviet Union was preparing to enter international competition.

In 1964, a full Soviet team arrived on British shores for a test series against the best the Commonwealth had to offer. Racing internationals at Wembley, Coventry, and Manchester, alongside appearances at several other venues, these ‘mysterious’ Soviet visitors received a warm welcome. The tense Cold War context gave the sport a much-needed publicity boost, but also exposed apprehensions at a time when British speedway, the British state, and its embattled Commonwealth project were struggling to uphold prestige on the global stage. To a striking degree, the political contours of British speedway resembled those of Westminster’s postwar imperial policy; the Commonwealth’s assets were to be harnessed so as to ensure the UK continued to punch above its weight internationally. What Ian Sanjay Patel refers to as the ‘endless deferrals’ that characterised Britain’s transition to a post-imperial status – with a succession of increasingly nativist laws aimed at holding the Commonwealth together and protecting ‘the right of return to white Britons overseas’ – provided the framework for British speedway to claim the most talented Australasian riders.<sup>2</sup> In this context, though mesmerised by the prospect of the Soviet Union’s entry into the sport, speedway’s authorities, journalists, and fans were all too aware of the potential for embarrassment at the hands of Cold War rivals. A tour preview stated:

The reasons for the glamour and appeal of Russian speedway riders are not difficult to find. First: anything Russian has a tang of mysticism and excitement about it ... a vast, resurgent sub-Continent, one of the Titans of modern history, a country which traditionally produces a fiercely patriotic and highly skilful sporting breed. Second: it is a recognised sporting fact that Soviet Union authorities never enter International circles unless they are supremely confident of success. Their “unknown” athletes stormed to Olympic domination ... their “mystery” soccermen proved of elite calibre ... their “unfashionable” ice hockey team swept startlingly to world supremacy. And now, speedway racing. Another confident crusade by sportsmen from behind the Iron Curtain into the truly international arena ... another Red Conquest?<sup>3</sup>

Drawing upon archival research, periodicals published from London to Moscow, conversations with former riders and journalists, and fieldwork conducted in the UK, Sweden, Czechia, and Poland, this essay builds upon important recent work into European interactions through the Iron Curtain. Rather than viewing the curtain as an impenetrable divide, Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen note that ‘despite the rhetoric of two separate worlds, eastern and western European societies and people were entangled in a number of ways’.<sup>4</sup> In the sporting sphere, existing research has begun to explore such interactions, including pioneering work on transnational motorsports.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the Eastern Bloc’s assault on speedway has received scant attention. A growing body of work has probed the Soviet embrace of other sports as political tools in the early Cold War years. The assumed supremacy of British football was shaken by the touring performances of Dinamo Moscow in 1945, and shattered by two thrashings from the Hungarians in 1953.<sup>6</sup> Between those seismic events, the Soviet Union entered Olympic competition and explicitly embarked on a programme to secure global sporting supremacy. The British government were well aware of the reputational damage that accompanied sporting humiliation, not least because Britain’s pioneering role in many modern sports increased the imperative to punch above its weight.<sup>7</sup> By 1964, it was the turn of speedway – a sport born and bred within the confines of the declining British Empire – to face the Soviet challenge. It will become apparent that British speedway eventually succumbed to the Eastern Bloc to some extent, though not in the way its adherents had feared on the eve of the ‘Red Conquest’.

### COLD WAR ‘ENTANGLED PERIPHERIES’

This sport is uniquely placed to facilitate a reinterpretation of Cold War dynamics on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In his study of Anglo-Polish speedway relations, Paul Newsham describes speedway as ‘the ultimate provincial sport’.<sup>8</sup> Having emerged in rural Australia, the sport graced – and regularly filled – the cavernous stadiums of Europe’s metropolises in its heydays of the 1930s and late 1940s. In the Eastern Bloc too, speedway generally received its first public airing in the grandest stadiums of national capitals. Yet, for a number of reasons the sport lost its footing in the metropolises of both the Eastern and Western Blocs, and subsequently thrived in the provinces and so-called margins. Few Cold War-era activities can claim to have nurtured relations between Australian outback farmers, Muslim riders in the shadow of the Urals, Rhodesian spectators, and the pride of small-town Scandinavia. Not infrequently, speedway thrust neglected regions that rarely feature in the historiography into the global limelight.

Theorising on ‘peripheries’ has produced valuable analytical tools.<sup>9</sup> These provide a means of utilising speedway to complicate understandings of the Cold War’s transnational interactions. Hans-Heinrich Nolte shifted the ‘centre-periphery model’ away from the unit of the nation state and towards the regional level. This refinement, encapsulated in the term ‘internal peripheries’, acknowledges diversity within states, and the multiplicity of ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’ they can contain.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars point to the fact that states such as Russia might best be understood as ‘a poly-periphery constituted by broad regions and a plethora of disparate communities and cultures’, as ‘a conglomerate of peripheries’.<sup>11</sup> Researchers working on the former Soviet space are increasingly turning towards the geographical, political, and cultural ‘peripheries’ in order to obtain deeper appreciations for the vast Eurasian area the state encompassed.<sup>12</sup> Yet, perhaps the most applicable concept for our exploration of speedway’s disparate outposts emerges from a collection of studies into Portuguese-Moroccan relations over the *longue durée*. Modifying the historiographical current of ‘entangled history’, these scholars of the western Mediterranean have coined the concept ‘entangled peripheries’. For them, periphery denotes ‘the distance and dependence of a given society from historical processes in which others play a leading role’.<sup>13</sup> An examination of the frequent interactions between some of speedway’s ‘entangled peripheries’ can demonstrate the extent to which the sport cut across Cold War binaries and challenged prevailing power dynamics. Viewed in this light, the eagerly awaited 1964 matches between ‘Soviet Russia’ and ‘Great Britain’, billed as both the latest threat to Britain’s teetering place in the world and as an opportunity for the aspirant USSR, was in many respects a misnomer.

### COMING TO THE TAPES – RACING ORIGINS IN THE EASTERN BLOC

Speedway boomed in the interwar empire, with a string of Australian and British stars – alongside some big-name American imports – enjoying victories before capacity crowds. At the same time, motorcycle racing also blossomed on the continent. The International Federation of Motorcycle Clubs (*Fédération Internationale des Clubs Motocyclistes*, FICM) was founded at the dawn of the twentieth century, and by the 1920s national federations from across central and eastern Europe were joining its ranks. The Czechoslovaks joined in 1923, and by the 1930s Prague played host to the FICM congress.<sup>14</sup> Czechoslovakia was also an early pacesetter in terms of international competition. Its showpiece event, the iconic Golden Helmet of Pardubice, was a steeplechase launched in 1928. It soon attracted an international field. A crowd of over 100,000 flocked to this small provincial town to witness the first postwar Golden Helmet of 1947.<sup>15</sup> By then, Czechoslovak manufacturers were producing competitive racing motorcycles. Competition took root across eastern Europe, from Latvia to Yugoslavia, in the decades before the Cold War. Beyond the jurisdiction of the FICM, the Soviet Union also developed its own forms of racing. Motorcycle duels in Russian hippodromes and stadiums were popular in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>16</sup> while by the 1950s the Soviets had also embraced

motocross, endurance events, and ice racing.<sup>17</sup> In certain respects, the USSR was ahead of the curve, with women's categories in various disciplines at a time when women were not permitted to race competitively in Britain.<sup>18</sup>

Speedway spread across central and eastern Europe in the late-1920s and 1930s, as the sport's pioneers showcased it as far afield as Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria.<sup>19</sup> Speedway rider and Communist Party member Clem Beckett was part of the British Workers Sports Federation (BWSF) delegation that visited the Soviet Union in 1932. There, he gave a demonstration of broadsiding his motorcycle at Moscow's Dinamo Stadium.<sup>20</sup> However, the Second World War was to provide the major catalyst for the craze's eastward spread. The conflict engaged thousands of motorcycle dispatch riders, many of whom honed their skills on makeshift speedway tracks carved out by armed forces across war-torn Europe. By March 1945, with peacetime on the horizon, Britain's speedway clubs were receiving 'a flood of applications' for team places from aspirant riders. Among them were applications from Russians, Czechs, and Poles. At the same time, the sport's British governing body, the Auto Cycle Union, expressed a willingness to support efforts to develop speedway racing in the USSR, not least to facilitate the visit of Soviet teams to Britain. Such support would include the dispatch of coaches to the wartime ally and team berths for talented 'Russians' in the British capital.<sup>21</sup> Yet, while the footballers of Dinamo Moscow took Britain by storm later in the year, deteriorating relations and the imposition of the Iron Curtain delayed further Soviet experimentation with speedway. Elsewhere in the emerging Eastern Bloc though, speedway was actively encouraged as a symbol of modernisation.

It took Stalin's death and Khrushchev's subsequent 'Thaw' to bring Soviet motorcycle racing into the international arena. As was the case with relations between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Soviet Union,<sup>22</sup> negotiations on a Soviet entry into world sport's governing bodies had been ongoing for years before the Soviets eventually deemed membership to be appropriate. Having said that, contact with the international federation (the FICM was renamed the *Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme* (FIM) in 1949) had been established as early as 1948. With a number of Eastern Bloc states already playing an active role in international motorcycle sport, the USSR's Central Auto-Moto Club (*TSentral'nyĭ avtomotoklub*, TSAMK) finally joined the FIM in 1956.<sup>23</sup> These tentative steps, which opened a path for Soviet participation in international speedway, were taken against the backdrop of the rapidly expanding east-west trade, easing travel restrictions, and blossoming cultural relations that characterised Khrushchev's move to 'peaceful coexistence' with the west. From the mid-1950s onwards, the Soviets demonstrated a confidence in their chosen path, signing a slew of commercial agreements with Europe's capitalist states and welcoming thousands of western guests for cultural and educational exchange programmes.<sup>24</sup> In the sphere of motorcycle racing, one of the USSR's initial objectives was to engage in bilateral competition with Scandinavian countries in the discipline of ice racing.<sup>25</sup> It was in that sport where the Soviet Union first encountered elite speedway riders.

#### SWEDES TAKE THE LEAD

The Tinnerbäcksbadet open air swimming baths in the provincial Swedish city of Linköping are perhaps not the most likely setting for a Cold War sporting duel. But it was here, in early 1962, that a team of Soviet ice racers ventured beyond the Iron Curtain for the first time. Forms of ice racing, which requires the fitting of dozens of metal spikes to a motorcycle's tyres, had existed in both countries for decades. As the century progressed, it would provide opportunities for motoracing enthusiasts in some of the most remote extremities of the Eurasian landmass. During the 1950s the sport moved away from large hippodromes and closer to a speedway format of tight stadium racing. Consequently, Sweden's ice racing team was packed with the

country's leading speedway talents, while a number of their Soviet opponents were also destined to succeed on speedway tracks in the near future.

The Soviets knew they had much to learn from the Swedes, given the latter's rapid rise to prominence in the speedway world. Interactions between Sweden and the UK had deepened in the immediate postwar period, with a number of British speedway clubs embarking on Swedish tours in the late 1940s, and reciprocal visits by Swedish teams to the British Isles in the early 1950s. Swedish developments on both ice and shale received regular attention in London-based publications during these years.<sup>26</sup> Olle Nygren, 1949 Swedish Champion, was in the vanguard of Swedish efforts to challenge Anglo-Saxon dominance in the sport. He first raced in the UK in a World Final qualifier in 1949, before signing a contract with London's Harringay Racers in 1951. Dan Forsberg was another Swede to enter British league racing in the early 1950s, and both of these riders had qualified for the showpiece Wembley World Final by 1953.<sup>27</sup> Soon they were joined by fellow countryman Ove Fundin, from the rural town of Tranås. Fundin also reached the World Final, before signing for the Norwich Stars. For him, success in Great Britain 'was a great thing... Every speedway rider from the continent, ... their dream was to race in England. Because England was the number one'.<sup>28</sup> Fundin shocked the speedway world in 1956, when he became the first continental rider to win the individual World Championship. He would go on to win the title five times.



**Figure 2:** Ove Fundin alongside the statue raised in his honour in Tranås, Sweden. Author, 2020.

When the FIM established an international team competition in 1960, Sweden underlined their prowess in the sport. In a sign that Britain was losing its grip as the speedway metropole, the initial World Team Cup Final was awarded to Gothenburg. The hosts won the event, and went on to dominate international speedway for much of the 1960s. Indeed, the Swedes regularly beat the self-styled British masters of the sport, even though the British team was bolstered by the strongest riders from Australia and New Zealand. Fundin recalls that 'Tiny little Sweden had to compete with the Empire! And I never thought that was fair.'<sup>29</sup>

Swedish experience was soon in demand across an aspiring Eastern Bloc. In fact, Scandinavian encounters with communist countries had already commenced by the late 1940s, when a Swedish team visited Poland.<sup>30</sup> The Poles learned very quickly from their Swedish counterparts, who visited again in 1954. Huge crowds flocked to see the visitors in Wrocław and Warsaw, and Swedish riders were soon working short stints as trainers at Polish clubs. Nygren coached the riders of Polonia Bydgoszcz, albeit under the watchful eye of an ever-present *politruk* (political officer).<sup>31</sup> British journalists were aware that Sweden's rapid success

was likely to serve as a template for others. By the 1960s, this also included the Soviet Union. A *Speedway Star* columnist lamented: ‘The Swedes showed us how to take up a sport, learn a sport, and then take it over.’<sup>32</sup>

It was against this backdrop that Sweden welcomed the Soviets for the aforementioned series of ice races in February 1962. British League stars Ove Fundin and Björn Knutsson lined up for the hosts, as the Soviets enjoyed a ‘brilliant premiere’ abroad.<sup>33</sup> Swedish journalists were not overly surprised, given the widespread knowledge that the USSR ‘sends out nothing but stars’ for international competitions.<sup>34</sup> The Soviets impressed with their exemplary behaviour and immaculately tuned Czechoslovak ESO motorcycles. Alongside the competitive element of such cross-border encounters, riders, mechanics, and journalists also faced the challenge of communicating with foreign guests in the absence of a common tongue. Rudimentary sign language and small gestures like the sharing of basic equipment went a long way in these circumstances. Nevertheless, early exchanges with Eastern Bloc visitors were inevitably bound by political constraints. Peter Oakes, a British journalist who began writing for the *Speedway Star* in 1962, recalls that Party men accompanied riders at every turn and ensured they did not step out of line or attempt to defect. Fundin recalls that of all the Eastern Bloc riders, the Soviets were the most tightly guarded by their attendant *politruks*.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 3:** Ice racing heritage on display at the National Speedway Museum. Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, UK. Author, 2020.

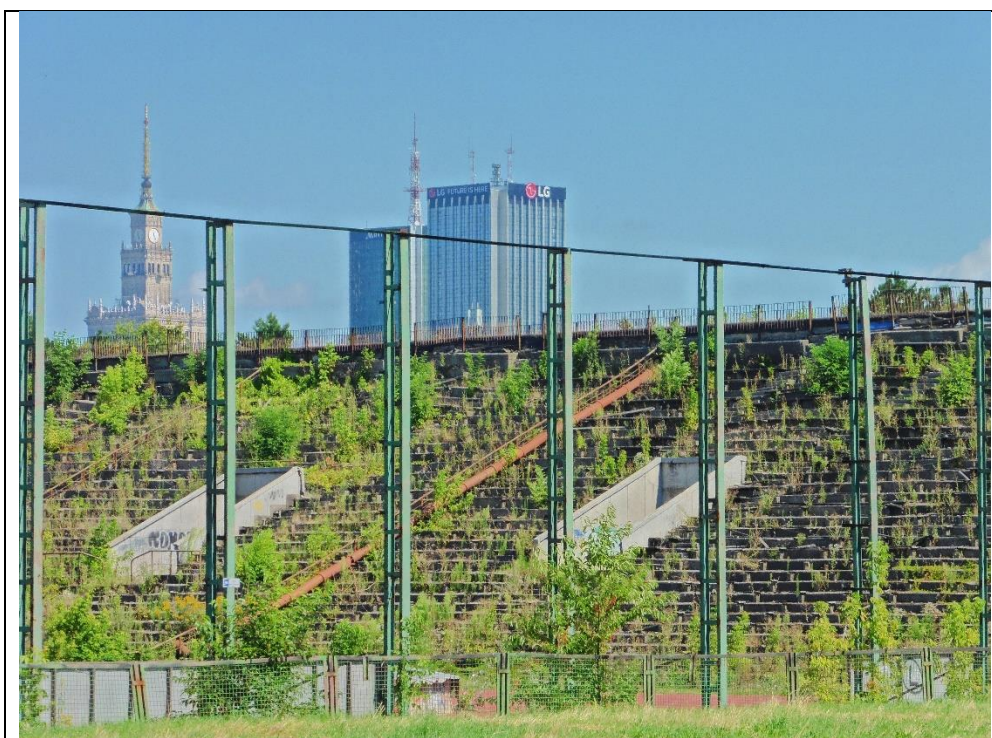
Within a month, it was the Soviets’ turn to play host to Swedish ice racers. The tour began with a meeting at Moscow’s Lenin Stadium, before the teams moved on to delight packed crowds in the city of Ufa, the capital of Russia’s Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, located over 800 miles east of the Soviet metropole. Fundin recalls receiving a warm welcome, as his team was treated to the best hotels, lavish dinners, and endless vodka toasts ‘to friendship, freedom, and whatever’.<sup>36</sup> The British Embassy in Moscow were well aware of the Soviet tactic of bestowing luxurious hospitality on sporting opponents in order to undermine performance.<sup>37</sup> By the time of these early international meetings, the Soviets had already proposed the creation of an international ice racing championship to the FIM. Following acceptance, they were given the responsibility to develop the concept and, despite

teething problems, the FIM Cup was inaugurated in 1963. A European Championship followed two years later, and the first World Ice Racing Championships were held in 1966. This discipline was completely dominated by the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Soviet riders won all but four individual championships, and the USSR reigned supreme in the Team Ice Racing Championship following its establishment in 1979.<sup>38</sup> These competitions regularly thrust such modest host towns as Swedish Nässjö, West German Inzell, and Dutch Assen into the international limelight, and they also brought elite sport to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.<sup>39</sup>

The dawn of international ice racing coincided with the Soviet Union's first tentative steps in the related summer discipline of speedway.

#### POLE POSITION IN THE EASTERN BLOC

Warsaw's SKRA Stadium was another storied venue in a state of dereliction at the time of writing. Its sweeping Panathenaic horseshoe terraces had accommodated tens of thousands of speedway aficionados in the early Cold War, when the venue hosted Swedish (1949), British (1955), and Soviet (1961) riders for the first time.



**Figure 4:** SKRA Stadium's rotting terraces in contemporary Warsaw, Poland. Author, 2021.

When the cream of Soviet speedway rode here in October 1961, they were very much pupils to Polish teachers, and were heavily beaten. Indeed, eager to avoid associating their performances too closely with the USSR brand, this initial touring side raced as a selection of the Central Auto-Moto Club.<sup>40</sup> In developments that found echoes in other sports,<sup>41</sup> the Polish satellite state had been closely involved in honing the skills of Soviet riders for some time. They had sent teams to the USSR annually since 1959, gradually increasing the calibre of riders each year.<sup>42</sup> Poland was in a position to do this because, like their Swedish counterparts, regular exposure to speedway's international elite had sparked rapid progress.

In addition to their early encounters with Sweden, Polish teams had enjoyed regular reciprocal tours with British sides since the mid-1950s. Manchester's Belle Vue Aces, with

reigning World Champion Peter Craven in their ranks, were invited to Poland by the Polish Motor Federation (*Polski Związek Motorowy*, PZM) in 1955. A key objective for hosting Belle Vue was to learn valuable lessons to drive progress in Polish speedway.<sup>43</sup> Despite initially heavy defeats, the Poles proved quick learners. By 1961, they had ‘showed that they have come to stay in the elite of speedway.’<sup>44</sup> This view was down to the qualification of Polish riders for world finals from 1959 onwards, the defeat of an English test side on Polish soil, and the impressive performances of a string of promising Polish riders sent through the Iron Curtain to race in the ‘English Riding School’ that was British league speedway. Such exposure to the West was not without risk, with Polish authorities particularly concerned about potential defections.<sup>45</sup> Tadeusz Teodorowicz, who came to the UK with Polish touring sides in 1956, 1957, and 1958, was subsequently granted political asylum in the Netherlands. By the time of Poland’s 1960 visit to Britain, the affectionately nicknamed Teo was a star rider for Swindon Robins. A serious diplomatic incident was narrowly avoided when, with the Poles refusing to race against a Swindon team determined to ‘call the Polish authority’s bluff’ and track their erstwhile Polish international, the hosts reluctantly agreed to drop Teodorowicz from the line-up after the programme had been printed.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, British clubs clashed over the allocation of talented Eastern Bloc prospects. As far as Belle Vue’s manager was concerned, having ‘pioneered the way with Poland’, his club had unfairly missed out on the earliest Poles, who instead plied their trade at rival tracks.<sup>47</sup>

A key accelerator of Polish progress was the World Team Cup. The Warsaw-based *Motor* magazine had been a driving force behind this FIM competition’s establishment in 1960, donating a trophy for the winner. The Poles hosted and won the competition in 1961.<sup>48</sup> Domestically, Polish speedway exploded into life. The country boasted three leagues and the highest number of licenced riders in the world.<sup>49</sup> In an effort to reach the sport’s peak, the Polish motorcycle authorities had imported eight JAP machines from Great Britain in 1948. Polish historian Robert Noga sees this moment as a ‘true milestone’, and the number of JAPs in the country had increased to 52 just two years later. However, these British bikes were expensive, and parts were difficult to come by. Consequently, in a precursor to what would become the regular Eastern Bloc practice of manufacturing bespoke versions of western vehicles, Polish engineers sought to recreate the JAP. The resulting machine, the FIS, soon powered domestic Polish speedway.<sup>50</sup>

With hard-won experience in the west, the Poles went on to play an active role in encouraging their Soviet counterparts to take up the sport. In 1958, Poland invited a talented group of Soviet motocross riders to try their hand at speedway. Among those exposed for the first time was Igor Plekhanov, who was destined to become an international star in his newly adopted discipline.<sup>51</sup> But before the Soviets could mount an international challenge, the sport needed to be introduced to domestic audiences, suitable tracks would have to be built, and the USSR would need to acquire competitive machinery. All of these tasks would rely on the know-how and expertise of Warsaw Pact allies.

#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE SPEEDWAY ‘ARMS RACE’

The iconic Golden Helmet of Pardubice was reinvented as a speedway competition in 1964. This highly prestigious event became the sport’s pinnacle in the Eastern Bloc, and attracted elite riders from the capitalist west.<sup>52</sup> Multiple speedway world champions held the Golden Helmet in such esteem that it was deemed ‘as big as a World Final, the next biggest event that you could win on the calendar’.<sup>53</sup> Western riders viewed it as a challenge, hence the illustrious list of Cold War-era winners in Pardubice. Yet, Czechoslovakia is famous in the speedway world for another reason: Czech-built ESO and JAWA motorcycles powered Eastern Bloc participation, and subsequently dominated speedway in the west too. Indeed, Czechoslovak



machinery bucked Cold War trends by conquering western markets in a number of motor racing disciplines.



**Figure 5:** An international field still competes for the Golden Helmet in the post-Cold War era. Pardubice, Czechia. Author, 2019.

Like the original Golden Helmet event, the country's talent for motorcycle design predated the communist takeover. Commenting on this branch of Czechoslovak industry, a Radio Free Europe report noted that '(f)or several decades, these ... motorcycles have held a well-deserved place among the leading examples of two-wheeled vehicles in the world'.<sup>54</sup> Just as the Poles had imported British JAP engines and experimented with producing their own versions, the tiny ESO factory in the Czech town of Divišov succeeded in creating copies of the sought-after JAP. By 1953, ESO began producing an affordable, reliable, and competitive engine of its own design.<sup>55</sup> When the Soviets embarked on their speedway adventure later in the decade, they imported both Polish FIS and Czechoslovak ESO motorcycles, and it was the latter brand – subsequently made under the JAWA name – which was embraced in the USSR.<sup>56</sup> These developments were very much in-keeping with prevailing trade flows to, and within, the Eastern Bloc. From the 1950s onwards, the Soviet economy sought to import large volumes of quality western technology in an effort to close the 'efficiency gap' with richer, capitalist economies. Simultaneously, this hunger for quality machinery exposed internal hierarchies in the communist world. Soviet manufactures were of notoriously low quality, while products produced in Czechoslovakia and East Germany were valued to a much greater degree. This enabled more developed satellite states to take advantage of the USSR through what Oscar Sanchez-Sibony describes as the exchange of 'relatively overpriced machinery products for relatively underpriced Soviet raw materials'.<sup>57</sup> And so, when speedway was showcased to a Soviet crowd for the first time in June 1958, 'special machines obtained from Czechoslovakia' were part of the mystic and allure of this 'unusual competition'. Just 1,600 inquisitive souls

showed up for the first day of races at the cavernous Lenin Stadium in Moscow, but Soviet reporters were intrigued, and crowds mushroomed in subsequent days.<sup>58</sup>

The inaugural Moscow spectacle fuelled Soviet ambitions. The city of Ufa swiftly established itself as the epicentre of Soviet speedway, and the inaugural USSR Championship was held there in 1959. When the first national selection was made at a training session in Odessa, Ufa riders constituted the team's backbone. Bashkortostan's capital also had the honour of welcoming the first foreign riders to the USSR, when a Polish selection visited in September 1959.<sup>59</sup> Yet, Ufa was just one of the 'entangled peripheries' that would power Soviet speedway. Two cities in western Ukraine, Lviv and Rivne, also emerged as strong speedway heartlands, regularly hosting international meetings.<sup>60</sup> The Soviet Club Championship, launched in 1962 and spanning vast distances, was dominated by far-flung provincial cities. The inaugural season featured sixteen teams, four of which hailed from Ufa – including champions Bashkiria – while there were also two teams from both Rivne and Lviv. Other important speedway centres of the Soviet period included Balakovo, Novosibirsk, and Vladivostok in Russia, Daugavpils in Latvia, and Olmalik in Uzbekistan. While Leningrad occasionally enjoyed domestic success, Moscow-based teams rarely troubled the Soviet elite.<sup>61</sup>

As the USSR quietly developed a speedway pedigree far from the western gaze, Ufa-born Igor Plekhanov emerged as the sport's most promising domestic talent.<sup>62</sup> In 1961, he burst onto the international scene, becoming the first Soviet rider to qualify for the World Final. His motorcycle, 'the then revolutionary new ESO', attracted much attention, as seemingly instantaneous Soviet progress took western observers by surprise: 'All this occurred unbeknown to speedway racing in the Western Hemisphere. Whispers, yes. Rumours, yes. But Britain never really knew that Russia had seriously entered the field of international racing until 1961.'<sup>63</sup> A British journalist raised alarm bells when stressing the magnitude of this development: 'Russia is breeding a team of speedway riders to challenge the world'. Yet, it was also acknowledged that a Soviet presence in the sport could rekindle public excitement for Britain's flagging speedway scene.<sup>64</sup> Given the Polish precedent of placing riders with British clubs to gain experience, it was a logical move when the Speedway Control Board invited Plekhanov to join a British club so as to familiarise himself with UK tracks prior to the World Final of 1962.<sup>65</sup> Experience of British tracks was deemed an essential ingredient in the nurturing of future world champions.<sup>66</sup> Though the Russian star did not take up the offer, he achieved a respectable top ten finish at Wembley. The following year, multiple time-USSR ice racing champion Boris Samorodov joined his former motocross colleague at speedway's premier event. At the Empire Stadium, Samorodov 'added fuel to the already blazing public impression of Russian riders' by earning an impressive fourth place.<sup>67</sup>

As noted, riders from both sides of the Iron Curtain came together to race for the Golden Helmet of Pardubice. Plekhanov won the 1964 edition, while the previous year's World Champion Ove Fundin was also among the field.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the prized helmet, the event established a tradition of gifting the victorious rider a new JAWA speedway bike. Fundin recalls making a visit to the factory at the time of the Golden Helmet, where the Czechs offered him a contract to perform as a works rider. Although Fundin preferred other engines, this was the beginning of JAWA's assault on the western market. New Zealander Barry Briggs would win the World Final on a JAWA in 1966, and also became the factory's import agent in the UK, while multiple Danish World Champion Ole Olsen was a JAWA works rider in the 1970s.<sup>69</sup> The Swedish trailblazer Olle Nygren notes that virtually every rider abandoned British-built JAPs for JAWAs in the end.<sup>70</sup> While other Eastern Bloc manufactures found their way onto western European markets during the Cold War era – including cars, agricultural machinery, and commuter motorcycles – they tended to compete on price rather than quality. Soviet cars, for instance, were notorious for their flaws, but sold in reasonable numbers by substantially undercutting comparable western-built alternatives. *Speedway Star's* Peter Oakes

was among those 1960s' consumers who took advantage of the low cost of the imported Moskvich, and well into the 1980s cheap Soviet-built Lada cars sold well in the UK.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, albeit for a brief period, quality Czech-built motorcycles became the dominant global force in speedway and ice racing, as well as some categories of motocross and enduro.<sup>72</sup>



**Figure 6:** JAWA relishes its relationship with the rich history of the Golden Helmet of Pardubice. Author, 2019.

**‘THESE MYSTERY MEN OF MOSCOW - WELCOME! HISTORY MAKERS’<sup>73</sup>**

The Abbey Stadium used to be home to British National League team Swindon Robins. Like so many of the sport's famous venues, it reverberated to the sound of Soviet-piloted ESO motorcycles in the summer of 1964. Also like so many of the sport's famous venues, its forlorn terraces and corrugated iron stands were being bulldozed against the backdrop of encroaching housing estates as this research was being conducted.



**Figure 7:** Swindon's Abbey Stadium at the mercy of heavy machinery. Author, 2021.

The World Final performances of Plekhanov and Samorodov whetted British appetites for Eastern Bloc speedway, and the sport's authorities were keen to capitalise on Soviet mystic in the midst of ongoing Cold War tensions. UK speedway was in crisis. The situation in the capital was particularly stark: half of the National League's ten teams had hailed from London in the 1952 season, but twelve years later only two London sides endured in a seven team top flight.<sup>74</sup> Just 32,000 made the effort to attend the showpiece World Final of 1964, as a damaging dispute tore domestic league speedway apart. A large number of provincial tracks rejected the authority of the sport's governing body, forcing the RAC to mediate between the two warring factions. Foreign attractions were viewed as a means of generating excitement at ailing National League venues. It was in this context, at the beginning of July 1964, that a *Speedway Post* contributor declared: 'Speedway's future rests very largely on the International fixtures of the coming month'.<sup>75</sup>

Initial talks to bring a Soviet team to Britain looked to have borne fruit more than a year earlier. In February 1963, speedway's authorities at the ACU announced that a 'Russian' side would perform in the UK during the 1963 season.<sup>76</sup> Details of three test matches were subsequently reported in the national press, as was the fact that the British had been invited to name suitable dates for a reciprocal visit to the USSR.<sup>77</sup> Tickets went on sale for the three matches, scheduled for Wimbledon, Southampton, and Manchester, and the Speedway Control Board printed a programme for the eagerly awaited visit. Hosts Great Britain had lined up a strong side for this official FIM international series, drafting in such Commonwealth stars as New Zealander Barry Briggs. While journalists and fans had limited experience of Plekhanov and Samorodov, the rest of the USSR team was shrouded in mystery, just as the footballers of Dinamo Moscow had been back in 1945. Programme editors regretfully informed their readers that the Soviet authorities had provided nothing but 'bare names', while the publication's photos carried such enigmatic captions as: 'Two unidentified, camera shy, Soviet speedmen. On the left is thought to be Boris Samorodov of whom Swedish ace, Ove Fundin talks in glowing terms'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, given Norwich-based Fundin's extensive exposure to Soviet ice racing, editors had turned to him for the inside story. Nevertheless, 'these secretive Soviet speedmen' were expected to surprise and impress in much the same way as the Swedes and

Poles had done over the preceding decade. Yet, to the hosts' evident dismay, the USSR cancelled their visit at the very last moment. With programmes printed, tickets sold, and many other expenses laid out in preparation, the Soviets lamented they had insufficient riders at their disposal. The matter was placed on the agenda of the FIM Autumn Congress.<sup>79</sup>

The aborted 1963 tour was a source of deep frustration, but it did little to dampen the anticipation for an eventual Soviet visit. As the domestic situation deteriorated, and the ACU found themselves confronted by a Provincial League mutiny, in May 1964 the authorities again announced the imminent arrival of a USSR test team.<sup>80</sup> This time, the 'historic and memorable' visit went ahead as planned. Twelve months had passed, and British journalists already had a much better idea of what to expect. Promoters printed substantial rider biographies, alongside striking photos of hammer-and-sickle-clad Soviet stars on their distinctive ESOs. In addition, the tour sufficiently attractive to warrant the use of London's Wembley Stadium as the first of the three test venues, and a highlights package aired in a primetime slot on BBC1.<sup>81</sup> Billed as a contest between 'Old Masters' and 'Brilliant Pupils', these encounters against 'the might of Great Britain and her Commonwealth' were depicted as being vitally important to Soviet 'world-beating plans'.<sup>82</sup>

The first test was a fraternal affair. Although the Wembley crowd was under 30,000, it was not markedly lower than that season's World Final attendance. In what was undoubtedly a special night, the 'friendly Russkies ... endeared themselves to the British public'. Evidently in the UK to learn, the visitors suffered heavy defeat, but were admired for their good humour, fighting spirit, and bravery. In fact, Vitaly Shilo sustained a life-threatening injury during the meeting, and would remain in a British hospital after the rest of his teammates departed for home.<sup>83</sup> The crowd clamoured around the Soviets for autographs, and stayed on after the racing to demand a Soviet lap of honour. Some of the riders were elevated instantly to star status. The 'likable laughing Soviet skipper', Igor Plekhanov, had kisses bestowed upon him by admirers.<sup>84</sup> The programme and media coverage talked predominantly of 'Soviet Russia' and 'Russian' riders, but there was some recognition of the diversity and dispersed geographical origins that characterised the visiting squad. The programme listed Konstantin Krishtal and Vitaly Shilo as Ukrainians, Anatoly Gruzintsev as having been born 'in Uzbekistan', and Gabdrakhman Kadirov as 'certainly the first Tatar rider ever to race in the Western Hemisphere'.<sup>85</sup> Kadirov was undoubtedly a fan favourite. Nicknamed the 'Russian Beatle', or 'Beatle-boy', thanks to his stylish haircut, he attracted significant attention wherever he went.<sup>86</sup> Thanks to the ongoing Thaw, 'Beatlemania' was already present in the Eastern Bloc by 1964, so such popular culture references likely resonated with the young visitors.<sup>87</sup>

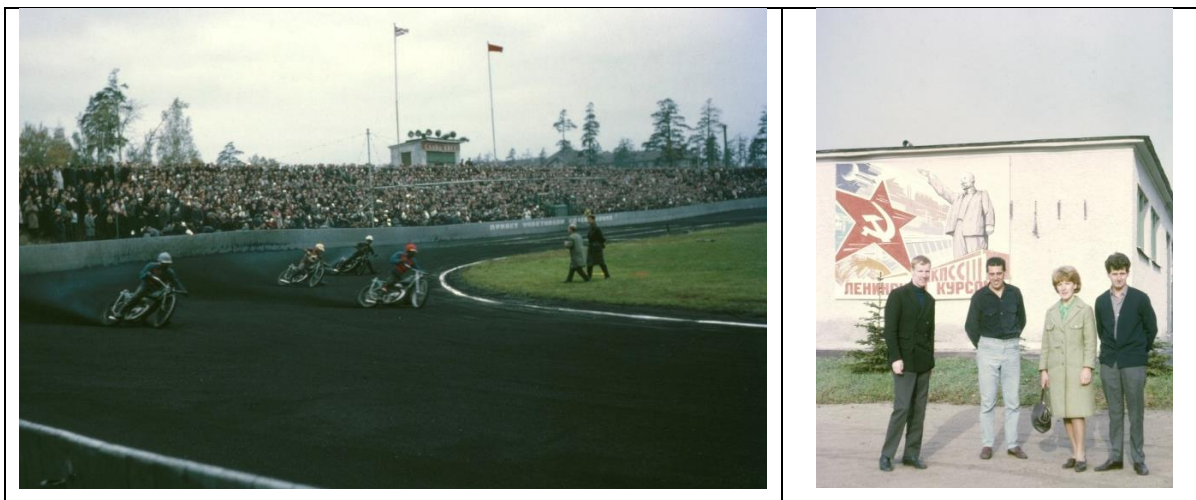
After Wembley, the Soviets raced two more tests against Great Britain, in Coventry and Manchester. All were lost, but in Coventry the visitors had led the meeting with five races to go. At least some of the crowd had been rather disappointed that the Soviets were unable to hold on to their lead.<sup>88</sup> Alongside the tests, the Soviets were also engaged in a busy schedule of lesser race meetings across the country. The team was divided up to ensure that as many audiences as possible got a sight of these exotic visitors. Riders made additional appearances at Swindon, Oxford, and Wimbledon, while their finest hour arguably came in Norwich.



**Figure 8:** Coverage of the inaugural tour, including the programme from the legendary Norwich meeting. Author, 2023.

The Norwich fixture was arranged at the last minute, and the bumper crowd which turned up to watch a full Soviet test team were initially very disappointed to learn that the Speedway Control Board had sent some riders to a meeting in Swindon.<sup>89</sup> Instead, a team of just four visitors, billed as ‘Soviet Russia’, took on a full-strength Norwich septet, built around Swedish stars Fundin and Nygren, and including a Hungarian refugee by the name of Sandor Levai. Plekhanov and his comrades embarked on a gruelling schedule which forced them to race twice as many heats as their opponents. The Soviet captain led by example, outscoring Norwich’s Swedes, as his team recorded the tour’s only victory. Both Nygren and Fundin recall this legendary meeting, and especially the skill of Plekhanov.<sup>90</sup> Journalists also waxed lyrical in their reports. The *Speedway Star* stated that the ‘fantastic Russians won the hearts of all East Anglia with an endurance test that can hardly have been equalled in speedway history’.<sup>91</sup> The *Eastern Daily Press* declared that ‘the night belonged to the courageous battling foursome from the U.S.S.R.’.<sup>92</sup>

As the Soviets loaded their equipment into a fleet of Volga estate cars and embarked on the long homeward drive east, their hosts were very satisfied. The Speedway Control Board described the visit as an ‘unqualified success’.<sup>93</sup> Rumours of a reciprocal British tour to the USSR had been fuelled by the Soviet team manager, when he expressed his hope of being able to welcome British riders to Moscow in 1965.<sup>94</sup> Yet, such a tour never materialised, and it would not be until 1967 that a British club side, Belle Vue Aces – ever in the vanguard of nurturing ties with the Eastern Bloc – would venture to the Soviet Union for a meeting in Manchester’s twin city of Leningrad. Ove Fundin and Sandor Levai were among the riders to make the trip.<sup>95</sup>



**Figures 9 & 10:** Belle Vue in action in Leningrad, 1967. Ove Fundin (left) with teammates and an interpreter in front of a Lenin mural, USSR, 1967. Courtesy of Chetham's Library, Manchester.

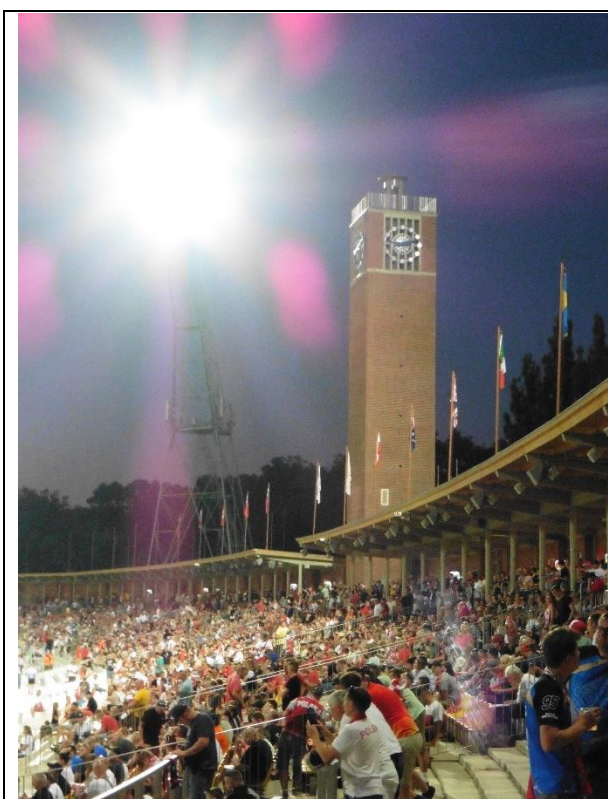
However, while the British speedway authorities never dispatched a full national team to the USSR, the Soviets were regular visitors to the British Isles. Their test team came to the UK on three more occasions before the end of the decade, appearing at such dispersed venues as Exeter, Newcastle, and Newport.<sup>96</sup> In 1964 alone, the Soviet Union's elite riders would face their Western Bloc counterparts on multiple occasions. Plekhanov raced to an impressive second place in the individual World Final, behind New Zealander and Great Britain test team captain Briggs. The Soviets also took second place in the World Team Cup, outscoring both Great Britain and their Polish mentors.<sup>97</sup> At the broader level of international motorcycle racing, the USSR had the honour of hosting the FIM Autumn Congress of 1965.<sup>98</sup> All the signs were that the Soviet Union had arrived on the world stage and that it was just a matter of time before they won the major trophies.

There was a murkier side to these Cold War encounters, fuelled by Eastern Bloc hunger for hard currency and universal desires for competitive machinery. From the first tentative interactions across the Iron Curtain, a thriving black market in motorcycle parts developed into an indispensable component of cross-border competition. Eastern Bloc riders eagerly traded JAWA parts, and even whole engines, during their visits to the west, engaging their capitalist opponents in secretive negotiations for hard currency.<sup>99</sup> On at least one occasion, the appeal of Czechoslovak machinery lured British riders into criminality. When the Soviet delegation visited Wembley for the 1972 World Final, some of them engaged in the usual clandestine trade. However, three of their JAWA motorcycles and quantities of parts were later stolen from a store at the stadium. England rider Anthony Clarke was among those subsequently jailed for receiving stolen goods, while other riders who had paid for engines in good faith were eventually cleared of the charge of stealing from the Soviet state.<sup>100</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: A FALSE SOVIET DAWN?

From a twenty-first century perspective, it is clear that post-socialist Poland has wrestled the title of speedway metropole from the UK. Polish league teams packed with the world's best riders perform before bumper crowds in state-of-the-art stadiums. And, in 2023, three of a total of ten speedway Grands Prix were hosted in the country. By contrast, the sport continues to struggle in Britain, where grand Wembley finals are a distant memory. Here, the story is all too often one of falling attendances, stadium demolition, and a failure to attract speedway's biggest talents (or even to retain the services of elite British riders). Yet, in both cases, the sport is

dominated by provincial clubs; at the time of writing, neither Warsaw nor London is represented in domestic league speedway. The major cities of Manchester and Wrocław compete against sides from King's Lynn, Leszno, Wolverhampton, and Gorzów Wielkopolski.



**Figure 11:** Packed crowds enjoy the Speedway Grand Prix at Wrocław's Olympic Stadium. Author, 2021.

While Eastern Bloc speedway held much promise in the mid-1960s, by the early-1970s the Soviet star was waning on the track, partially because Czechoslovakia's JAWA motorcycles were struggling to compete with new designs developed in the west.<sup>101</sup> British speedway also enjoyed a renaissance both at home and abroad in that decade. Domestically, a reunified sport had successfully reinvented itself following the chaos of the 1964 split. Internationally, 1976 bought a British World Champion, while a rejuvenated 'England' (finally sufficiently confident to compete without Australasian stars, in a reflection of the UK government's steady retreat from a not-so-all-embracing Commonwealth citizenship<sup>102</sup>) won a string of World Team Cups. But the late-60s and early-70s were also years when Polish speedway grew to maturity. Wrocław hosted the individual World Final in 1970, before 130,000 Poles witnessed the first victory for a Polish rider, Jerzy Szczakiel, at Katowice in 1973.<sup>103</sup> During the same period, Soviet speedway was mired in controversy. Vladimir Gordeev had raced to fifth place in 1971, but a subsequent FIM investigation determined that his performance had been fuelled by a prohibited nitro additive. He was excluded as a result and stripped of placing, while the Soviet authorities withdrew his racing licence.<sup>104</sup> As JAWA machinery became less competitive, the Soviets – ever-dominant in ice racing - were never able to win the summer sport's highest honours during the Cold War era (though they earned a number of World Team Cup second places during the 1970s). Neither did the USSR get the opportunity to host a World Final or a World Team Cup Final during the Cold War. Consequently, the mid-1960s might be viewed as the high-water mark for Soviet speedway.<sup>105</sup>

In many respects, the Soviet embrace of speedway as a means of winning 'world supremacy' is broadly comparable to their experience in football. Ground-breaking UK tours, whether in 1945 or 1964, whetted western appetites and fuelled expectations of a USSR-



dominated future, only for reality to play out rather differently. In football, it was satellite Hungary that brought an overly confident England to its knees,<sup>106</sup> while in speedway Poland was to play the same role over a much longer period.<sup>107</sup> The Soviets, welcome ‘history makers’ in 1964, had to settle for the minor placings in both the Eastern Bloc and the wider world thereafter.

From an ‘entangled peripheries’ perspective, the nature of the Eastern Bloc’s entry into the sport underlined speedway’s enduring appeal to provincial riders and audiences. Indeed, the 1964 test series might be reframed as an encounter between the Commonwealth’s Kiwi star rider and the best that Bashkortostan and western Ukraine had to offer. By that time, the sport’s elite international riders were plying their trade at such clubs as the Swindon Robins and the Norwich Stars. Many of these riders also competed for silverware in Eastern Europe’s flagship competitions, while migrating annually to spend the European winter racing in southern Africa and Australasia. The well-trodden paths between speedway’s increasingly dispersed ‘entangled peripheries’ continue to shape the contours of the sport today. In the 2023 season, the British Premiership featured riders born in Ufa, Russia, Cowra, Australia, Ejby, Denmark, and Leszno, Poland, to name but a handful.

Even at a personal level, transnational relationships endured when successful careers ended. Sweden’s Ove Fundin and Soviet stars Igor Plekhanov and Boris Samorodov re-established contact when the Soviet Union disintegrated in the 1990s, thanks to a mutual acquaintance from Chişinău, Moldova. Cold War barriers had prevented these riders from striking up friendships in the 1960s, but when they reunited decades later – the Russians having travelled more than 1,500 miles by train from Ufa – they cried tears of joy, shared a warm embrace, and talked of the past with the help of an interpreter. After that, Fundin arranged for Plekhanov to visit Britain, and subsequently made the trip to Ufa himself. Unfortunately, by that time Plekhanov, Samorodov, and most other members of the USSR’s 60s Test Team had died. Five and a half decades after the Swede first ventured into the Soviet Union to ride ice speedway, he received a warm welcome, with TV appearances and the production of a commemorative pamphlet to mark the occasion. Camera crews accompanied him to both the Orthodox and Muslim cemeteries, where this man born in small-town Sweden – who won the World Final on five occasions and led the Norwich Stars in the British League for over a decade – paid his respects to legendary Cold War opponents at the foot of the Urals.<sup>108</sup>

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

I would like to acknowledge the trailblazing Swedish riders Olle Nygren (1929-2021) and Ove Fundin, as well as *Speedway Star*’s Peter Oakes, for remarkable insights into their sport. Thanks to Matthias Neumann, Becky Taylor, and Cathie Carmichael for commenting on early drafts. I am particularly grateful to the Lviv Center for Urban History, which kindly granted me a fellowship to pursue this project prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. I look forward to visiting in happier times. Thanks also to Igor Sokolovskyi, Tom Licence, Barry Pentelow, Nicholas Vincent, and the staff at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick; Norfolk Heritage Centre; Linköpings Stadsbibliotek; Cambridge University Library; Swindon Central Library; the National Speedway Museum; Chetham’s Library; and the Centre of East Anglian Studies.

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Sanjay Patel, *We’re Here Because You Were There: Immigration and the End of Empire*, London, 2021, pp. 10-21.

<sup>3</sup> *Norwich v. Soviet Russia* (Programme), Norwich, 10 July 1964, pp. 4-5.

- <sup>4</sup> Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, 'Introduction: Beyond the Divide', in Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen (eds) *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe*, Oxford, 2015, p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Keck-Szajbel, 'Motocross Mayhem: Racing as Transnational Phenomenon in Socialist Czechoslovakia', in Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (eds) *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World*, Cham, 2016, pp. 197-217; Caroline Fricke, 'Getting Off Track in East Germany – Adolescent Motorcycle Fans and Honecker's Consumer Socialism', in Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum and Alexander Vari (eds) *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, New York, 2013, pp. 213-31; Paul Newsham, 'Encounters on the Dirt Track: Polish – British Speedway from 1955', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 34: 10, 2017, pp. 866-79.
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- <sup>7</sup> Peter Beck, 'Britain and the Cold War's "Cultural Olympics": Responding to the Political Drive of Soviet Sport, 1945-58', *Contemporary British History* 19: 2, 2005, pp. 169-85.
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- <sup>9</sup> Klemens Kaps and Andrea Komlosy, 'Centers and Peripheries Revisited: Polycentric Connections or Entangled Histories', *Review* 36: 3-4, 2013, pp. 237-64.
- <sup>10</sup> Hans-Heinrich Nolte (ed.) *Internal Peripheries in European History*, Göttingen, 1991.
- <sup>11</sup> Francisco Martínez, 'On the Peripheral Character of Russia', *e-cadernos CES* 19, 2013, pp. 54-84. <http://journals.openedition.org/eces/1562> (Accessed 9/2/21).
- <sup>12</sup> Peripheral Histories? 2018 <https://www.peripheralhistories.co.uk/> (Accessed 4/2/21).
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- <sup>14</sup> Jean-Claude Schertenleib (Gen. Co-ord.) *FIM 1904-2004: 100 Years of Motorcycling*, Mies, 2004, p. 65, p. 117.
- <sup>15</sup> Petr Dufek, *Sedmdesátkrát Zlatá Přilba*, Prague, 2018, p. 47.
- <sup>16</sup> N. A. Ermolenko, *Znakom' tes': Spidveĭ*, Moscow, 1984, pp. 14-17.
- <sup>17</sup> *Izvestiia*, Moscow, 3 June 1945 and 24 February 1954; *Pravda*, Moscow, 11 July 1955 and 4 June 1956.
- <sup>18</sup> *Pravda*, Moscow, 28 December 1953. For the prevailing UK attitude, see: 'ACU General Council', 7 November 1947, Minute book, Jan 1938-Dec 1947, Auto-Cycle Union, Modern Records Centre (MRC) 660/1/1/10. Within the FIM, a 1962 discussion on the admission of women to road races brought no change: Schertenleib, *FIM 1904-2004*, p. 208. British speedway had featured a number of female pioneers at the outset, but women were banned in 1930. Brian Belton, *Fay Tylour: Queen of Speedway*, Burnham, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> Rob Hargreaves, *Clem Beckett: Motorcycle Legend and War Hero*, Barnsley, 2022, p. 57. Speedway was also taking hold in Poland at this stage. Newsham, 'Encounters on the Dirt Track', pp. 868-9.
- <sup>20</sup> Hargreaves, *Clem Beckett*, p. 138.
- <sup>21</sup> *Daily Mail*, London, 2 March 1945.
- <sup>22</sup> On the USSR and the IOC, see: Jenifer Parks, *The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War: Red Sport, Red Tape*, Lanham, 2016.
- <sup>23</sup> FICM was renamed FIM in 1949. Schertenleib, *FIM 1904-2004*, p. 144.
- <sup>24</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 106-7; Becky Taylor and Martyna Śliwa, 'Polish Migration: Moving Beyond the Iron Curtain', *History Workshop Journal* 71, 2011, p. 138; Matthias Neumann, 'Children Diplomacy During the Late Cold War: Samantha Smith's Visit of the "Evil Empire"', *History* 104: 360, 2019, p. 278.
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- <sup>26</sup> For instance, *Speedway News*, 2 March and 2 February 1950.
- <sup>27</sup> Olle Nygren in conversation with author, Felixstowe, UK, 31 January 2020.
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- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>33</sup> *Östgöta Correspondenten*, Linköping, 22 January 1962.
- <sup>34</sup> *Östgöta Correspondenten*, Linköping, 20 January 1962.
- <sup>35</sup> Peter Oakes in conversation with author, Peterborough, UK, 7 December 2022.

- <sup>36</sup> Fundin in conversation with author; Anatoly Ermolenko and Nikolay Ermolenko (eds) *Ove Fundin: Nazad v Rossiū - K 55-letiiu pervogo vizita v SSSR - 1962*, Russia, 2017.
- <sup>37</sup> Beck, 'Britain and the Cold War's "Cultural Olympics"', p. 177.
- <sup>38</sup> Schertenleib, *FIM 1904-2004*, p. 233.
- <sup>39</sup> Ermolenko, *Znakom 'tes': Spidveī*, pp. 93-9.
- <sup>40</sup> repr. *CAMK ZSRR – repr. P Z M Polska* (Programme), Warsaw, 22 October 1961.
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- <sup>42</sup> repr. *CAMK ZSRR – repr. P Z M Polska* (Programme), Warsaw, 22 October 1961.
- <sup>43</sup> Newsham, 'Encounters on the Dirt Track', pp. 866-7; *Manchester – Warszawa* (Programme), Warsaw, 23 October 1955.
- <sup>44</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 6 January 1962, pp. 16-7, p. 19.
- <sup>45</sup> Newsham, 'Encounters on the Dirt Track', p. 871.
- <sup>46</sup> *Evening Advertiser*, Swindon, 13 April 1959, 19 and 23 July 1960; *Swindon v. Poland* (Programme), Swindon, 23 July 1960. Teodorowicz lost his life in 1965, succumbing to injuries sustained in an earlier racing incident.
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- <sup>48</sup> *World Speedway Team Championship* (Programme), London, 19 September 1970, p. 4, p. 21; Rogers, *Illustrated History of Speedway*, p. 57-8.
- <sup>49</sup> Noga, *Žužel w PRL-u*, p. 367; Peter Oakes, 'Speedway in the 1950s', in Schertenleib, *FIM 1904-2004*, pp. 186-7.
- <sup>50</sup> Noga, *Žužel w PRL-u*, pp. 371-2.
- <sup>51</sup> *Norwich v. Soviet Russia* (Programme), Norwich, 10 July 1964, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>52</sup> Dufek, *Sedmdesátkrát Zlatá Přilba*, pp. 69-71.
- <sup>53</sup> *Speedway Star*, London, 29 February 2019, pp. 31-4.
- <sup>54</sup> Keck-Szajbel, 'Motocross Mayhem', pp. 201-2.
- <sup>55</sup> Jan Lahner and Miloslav Straka, *Motocykly z Divišova: Historie značek ESO a JAWA*, Prague, 2011, pp. 62-71.
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- <sup>58</sup> *Izvestiia*, Moscow, 7 and 14 June 1958; *Speedway Star and News*, London, 4 February 1966, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>59</sup> Ermolenko, *Znakom 'tes': Spidveī*, p. 21.
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- <sup>75</sup> *Speedway Post*, London, July 1964, p. 3.
- <sup>76</sup> 'Minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting (1962 session) of the speedway sub-committee held at the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1, on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> February 1963 at 10.30 A.M.', Minute book, Feb 1962-Feb 1963, Auto-Cycle Union, MRC 660/1/1/23.
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- <sup>79</sup> 'Minutes of the fourth meeting (1963 session) of the competitions committee held at the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1. on Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1963 at 10.30 a.m.', Minute book, Feb 1963-Feb 1964, Auto-Cycle Union, MRC 660/1/1/24, p. 4; *Daily Mail*, London, 6 June 1963.

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- <sup>81</sup> *Daily Mail*, London, 8 July 1964.
- <sup>82</sup> *Norwich v. Soviet Russia* (Programme), Norwich, 10 July 1964, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>83</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, p. 12. While the incident brought Shilo’s elite racing days to an end, he survived. Having emigrated to California, this legendary rider made an emotional return to the Rivne track in 2012, and celebrated his eightieth birthday in 2021. I am grateful to the Ukrainian speedway historian, Igor Sokolovskiy for this information. Speedway was a very dangerous sport in this era. Former World Champion Peter Craven, who had been named in the team for the aborted 1963 series, had been killed in a racing incident by the time of the 1964 tour. On the Soviet side, rider Boris Zakharov was killed during the pre-tour selection trials. *Soviet Weekly*, London, 2 July 1964.
- <sup>84</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, pp. 6-9.
- <sup>85</sup> *Great Britain vs. Soviet Russia* (Programme), London, 4 July 1964, pp. 5-6. Fundin recalls that it was not until decades later that he found out that Kadirov was Muslim. Fundin in conversation with author.
- <sup>86</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, pp. 12-13; Oakes in conversation with author.
- <sup>87</sup> Sergei I. Zhuk, ‘Détente and Western Cultural Products in Soviet Ukraine during the 1970s’, in William Jay Risch (ed.) *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*, Lanham, 2015, pp. 119-20, p. 144; Tom Junes, ‘Facing the Music’, in Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, p. 227.
- <sup>88</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, p. 20.
- <sup>89</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, Norwich, 10 and 11 July 1964.
- <sup>90</sup> Fundin in conversation with author; Nygren in conversation with author.
- <sup>91</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, p. 15.
- <sup>92</sup> *Eastern Daily Press*, Norwich, 11 July 1964.
- <sup>93</sup> ‘Minutes of the Fifth Meeting (1964 Session) of the Competitions Committee held at the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1, on Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1964 at 10.30. am’, Minute book, Feb 1964-Feb 1965, Auto-Cycle Union, MRC 660/1/1/25, p. 6.
- <sup>94</sup> *Speedway Star and News*, London, 17 July 1964, p. 20.
- <sup>95</sup> *Belle Vue Aces versus Auto Club Leningrad* (Programme), Manchester, 27 July 1968, p. 4; Fundin in conversation with author. The club had broached the idea of a tour to the Soviet authorities as early as 1960. *Speedway Star & News*, London, 12 March 1960, p. 3.
- <sup>96</sup> Rogers, *Illustrated History of Speedway*, pp. 137-8.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50, p. 59.
- <sup>98</sup> ‘Auto-Cycle Union General Council – Report of the Second Meeting (1965 Session) held at the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1. on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1965, at 2 p.m.’, Minute book, Feb 1965-Feb 1966, Auto-Cycle Union, MRC 660/1/1/26, p. 4.
- <sup>99</sup> Nygren in conversation with author; Fundin in conversation with author.
- <sup>100</sup> *The Times*, London, 23 September 1972 and 22 November 1973; Lee Robert Kilby, *To The Heart of Kilb: The Bob Kilby Story*, Exeter, 2017, pp. 146-9.
- <sup>101</sup> Ermolenko, *Znakom ’tes’: Spidveï*, p. 28.
- <sup>102</sup> Patel, *We’re Here Because You Were There*, pp. 12-13.
- <sup>103</sup> Rogers, *Illustrated History of Speedway*, pp. 52-3.
- <sup>104</sup> Schertenleib, *FIM 1904-2004*, p. 247; Rogers, *Illustrated History of Speedway*, p. 53.
- <sup>105</sup> In 2021, Vladivostok-born Artem Laguta became the first World Champion from the former Soviet space.
- <sup>106</sup> Beck, ‘Britain and the Cold War’s “Cultural Olympics”’, p. 176.
- <sup>107</sup> Newsham, ‘Encounters on the Dirt Track’, pp. 872-875, p. 877.
- <sup>108</sup> Fundin in conversation with author; Ermolenko and Ermolenko, *Ove Fundin: Nazad v Rossiïu*.