



Not The Spoken Word

Bi-monthly newsletter of The Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

Geoff Baker

In 1946, a young teenager accompanied State Champion Joe Casserley on a ride from Fremantle to Subiaco to watch some amateur cycle racing. Encouraged to compete, Geoff Baker "stripped" his old bike, flipped the bars and promptly won his first U16 road race.

By October 1949, the now 18-year-old Geoff was the Senior Amateur Sprint Champion of W.A. and racing against the likes of Sid Patterson in 1000 meter and 5-mile races. Patterson commented that "Baker had a great future, though he would need to go east to reach his full potential". (Daily News 5 Dec 1949). He was picked up and sponsored by Rainbow Cycles. As W.A. Champion of Champions and holder of the Australian 1,000 meter title in 1951, Geoff was rated amongst the best track cyclists in Australia and he set his sights on making the 1952 Helsinki Olympics cycle team. Though beaten by the legendary Russell Mockridge in team selection trials, Baker's place in the Australian Olympic cycling team was cemented after Mockridge declined to sign a contract requiring him to remain an amateur for two years after the games.

In the age of "true amateurism", Baker, working as a clerk, duly began saving to fund his Olympic dream. With the Olympics set to begin in July 1952, The Australian Olympic Federation dropped Baker from the team in May that year because his fund raising fell £250 short of the £750 required. In today's money, these amounts are estimated to be around \$13,000 and \$40,000 respectively.

It is interesting to note that the eastern states based Federation required the West Australian to cover the extra expense of getting himself to the eastern states so that he could travel with the team by air to Europe. They would not consider allowing Baker the cheaper alternative, to sail from Fremantle to Europe and meet the team there. "The Australian Cyclist" (May 1952) states that Baker would take no chances and "stepped out" by booking his boat passage to U.K. anyway.

Not including Hubert Opperman, who lived briefly in the south-west town of Greenbushes, and then as a toddler, at the time of writing there are only two other W.A. riders known to have raced overseas before 1950. The Smith brothers - Harold, Les and Eddie - hailed from Fremantle. Harold at one stage held 3 Australian championships. In 1927 he headed overseas and in the U.S.A. was considered, amongst other accolades, "the pursuit king". Eddie at one stage was Australian and World Sprint Champion and was a member of Hubert Opperman's Tour de France team that raced in Europe.

In a Daily News article (27 Sep 1949), it is reported that Eddie Smith and Geoff met in Perth and that Eddie suggested to Geoff that he travel to Victoria to be coached by Harold. Skip forward to 1952, in presumably peak condition with his Olympic ambitions dashed, and little doubt influenced by the allure of the overseas experiences - and wisdom - of Eddie and Harold, Geoff used the ticket he had booked to get to the Olympics and the £500 he saved and jumped on the boat to England to pursue his cycling ambitions on the Continent.

Geoff made his way to Birmingham in central England and found work with B.S.A.. His objective was to establish a reputation as an amateur and then be invited - as was the way - into the professional ranks and big races where the real money was. New South Wales cyclist Alf Strom was riding on the pro circuit at the time and is estimated to have been earning in excess of \$250,000 per annum in today's money.



In July 1952, the same month that the Helsinki Olympics kicked off, Geoff introduced himself by beating two of England's best sprinters in Shaw and Abrahams in an omnium match race. In a 1,000 metre time trial soon after, he set a time of 1min 12.9 secs at a speed of 49.4kph. This was 0.6 seconds faster than Mockridge's time when he beat Geoff in the Olympic trials and 0.5 seconds faster than Sid Patterson's Australian record. Geoff was riding well and in 1953 he won the Coventry Grand Prix by beating Alan Bannister, the runner-up "in English championship events" to four times world professional title holder and Olympic medalist Reg Harris.

In the 1950's, Denmark was where many professional cyclists spent their winter. There were four tracks, meetings three times a week, 27-hour track races, crowds of 6,000 at each meeting.... and totalisers. Geoff's abilities were by then recognised and promoters invited Geoff to race in Denmark. He was offered "expenses paid and pocket money". Back in Perth in 1954, Geoff reflected that he was impressed with the prospects of Denmark for a professional rider and if he were to return to the Continent, he would go to Denmark.

It was not to be. On his return to England in the summer of '53, he was racing in Bradford on the 1st of July when an accident occurred in front of him. Unable to avoid the carnage, he also crashed hitting his face on a notoriously bad section of the track. He suffered severe injuries around an eye socket and returned to Perth to begin saving for plastic surgery. Geoff had just been selected alongside Sid Patterson, Russell Mockridge and Lionel Cox to represent Australia at the World Championships in Zurich Switzerland in August that year.

Geoff would in time get back on his bike and race but, despite stating that he had improved tremendously whilst overseas using different training methods and bike gearing, the highs were behind him. He would go on to give back to cycling by training young riders and get into cycling administration.

The overseas chapter in Geoff's cycling life is unique and warrants more research. Since January 2020, the club had hoped to record an oral interview with Geoff. The extent of COVID-19 pandemic was unknown at that point and it soon became apparent that Geoff was in the high risk category and the interview was put off because of this concern. Regrettably, Geoff passed away on the 4th December 2020, just after we rescheduled our interview from the 29th of November, which happened to be his 90th birthday. His death was not related to COVID-19.

Research and text Frank West.
Photo; Geoff aged 20 in 1951, courtesy John McGrath.

WA State Museum Opens

I recently visited the new Western Australian State Museum in the Perth Cultural Centre.

The dramatic top heavy design, the outcome of a partnership between Dutch firm OMA and Aussie locals Hassel, dominates the museum site from every angle putting the once grand Jubilee building and Hackett Hall well and truly in the shade.

Once inside the structure the unwitting visitor is confronted with intensely overwrought exhibition design contrasted with empty, angular circulation spaces.

This triumph of style over content and meaning is evident in the display of Hubert Opperman's Nullarbor bike and Steele Bishop's world champion bike.

These bikes, finally liberated from decades in the Welshpool museum store, are the jewels in the Museum's cycling collection. They deserve to be shown in a way that respects their heritage and offers viewers the opportunity to see them in some detail.

In an effort to engage visitors the Museum has eschewed a traditional 'white box' hang in favour of a magazine style display that utilises the bikes to do little more than celebrate the idea of outdoor recreation in WA.

The white Estermann built bike that Steele Bishop campaigned in Zurich in '83 reads well against a predominately blue wall that greets visitors to the Reflections gallery. Sadly the spectacular 1930's Opperman Nullarbor bike, set against a busy and irrelevant backdrop of mountain biking and dragsters, is reduced to the status of a hard rubbish find.

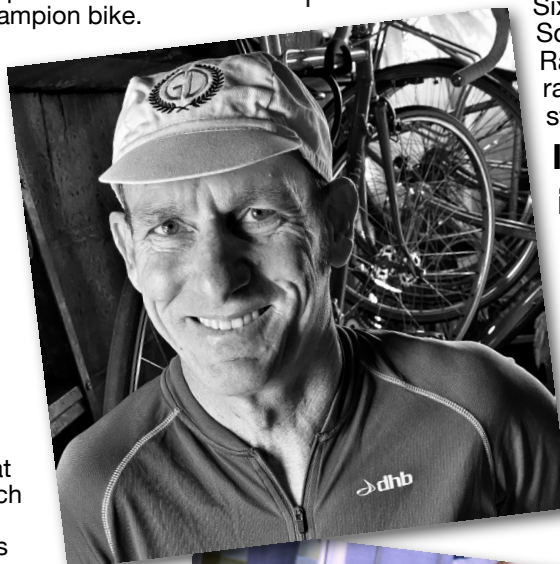
Robert Frith

Photos;

Top; Toby today

Centre; Toby yesterday

Below; Reflections Gallery, WA Museum



Stuck in the Shed with Toby Hodgson

What are you currently working on?

Nothing is on the stand at the moment, but I have a niggle, a bike calling to me, but I do not know how to answer it- a 1950s Rainbow Racer. Standard issue, not a special case, just a rusty catalogue bike. I do not know what I want to do with it, maybe sell it back to Frank West!

How many rideable bikes do you have?

Six. Sempre Amante Bianchi Racer, Sophia Pista Via Condotti Bianchi fixie, Rainbow single speed, Smithy retro racer, Repco ladies, and the Betty Page street Cruiser.

If push comes to shove what is your favourite bike?

Bike riding bliss is my Bianchi Pista fixie as it rolls with a tail wind. Actually, any bike with a tail wind. My Smith Retro Racer is a heart tigger. This gold and chrome beauty has 1970/80s parts on a frame gifted me by local 1950's Racer John Smith, repainted as a tribute to him. It rides beautifully. In any wind.

What was your first bike?

My first bike was blue, and I learnt to ride on a gravel track at 5 years old. I remember painting it yellow, stripping it down and bending the cotter pins. Then BMX came along, and I painted it red. I rode it hard and learnt tricks like sitting on the bars facing backwards. And one time I pulled off an Endo (using your foot to jam in the front tyre and then balance on 1 wheel.) Another day I got run over because I was not looking. The driver gave me \$20 for new spokes. In the end a new Gordonson racer sent my first love to the tip.

Pick a bike any bike.. in your dreams what are you riding?

A time machine: I want to ride the winners bike of the Beverley to Perth Race of 1897, then 1933 then 1950 and 1987. That way I could experience firsthand the time period, the buildings, the fashions and, the bikes of that age.

Whistle while you work? Give us a tip on the sounds that fill your workspace.

No power in the shed so music is natural. Plenty of birds in my backyard oasis, punctuated by a third person narrative, it goes a something like this: "Nice one Tobes, F\$#@k, I must go and check the bikes again, look at that one, what a beauty!"



Parts For Sale

WAHCC club members have been offered first bite at a sale of parts from a storage unit in South Australia. Photos of all the items are here:

www.flickr.com/gp/wahcc/pw21JA

The club will organise a one time group buy to economise on shipping. Please email your order to treasurer.wahcc@gmail.com using the subject line "SA Group Buy", or bring your order to the January club meeting **Order deadline - January 18th**

Orders will be accepted in the order they're received, and there will be a small contribution to shipping payable by participating members.

1. Mint 5 pin 46T Williams chainrings \$40ea
2. New 5 pin Williams chainrings \$35ea
3. Williams 5 pin inch pitch chainring \$25
4. New 3 pin Williams chainrings \$30ea
5. Used Williams 5 pin chainrings rusty \$15 less rusty \$20ea
6. Rough Williams 5 pin chainrings \$10ea
7. Used Williams 3 pin chainring \$20
8. Used Williams 46T chainset (some blue paint on ring) \$30
9. Used Williams 46T chainset \$35
10. New Williams 47/50 3 arm double driveside only \$60
11. Used Raleigh 49/40 double chainset \$50
12. New Nervar crankset \$100
13. New Nervar 3 pin driveside crank \$50 ea
14. New Williams 5 pin driveside cranks \$35 ea
15. New "Made in England" 5 pin driveside cranks \$30 ea
16. New Oval 5 pin crankset \$50 ea
17. New Legnano 170mm non drive side cranks \$20 ea
18. Legnano chainsets \$35 ea
19. Kids 110mm chainset \$25
20. Raleigh 46T chainset \$40
21. Orphan cranks \$25 for 5
22. New handlebar/stem \$50
23. Handlebars 65cm alloy \$35
24. Handlebars 52cm black \$30
25. Chrome stems \$20 ea
26. GB alloy stem \$45
27. New Grand Compe alloy stem \$90
28. Rear wingnuts - Gripfast, Huret, orphans \$20 pair
29. New in bag Dia Compe safety levers \$40
30. New in bag Shimano safety levers \$40
31. Unbranded alloy brake levers \$15 pair
32. Unbranded steel brake levers \$15 ea
33. Unbranded brakeset \$30
34. Black 40 hole vintage rear hub \$20
35. High flange 36 hole Normandy front hub \$20
36. 36 hole rear hub \$20
27. Suzue high flange 36 hole rear hub \$30
38. Steel 40 hole flip flop hub shell \$20
39. Atom 4 speed 14-21 cassette on 36h Pelissier hub \$100
40. Raleigh 40 hole rear hub \$40
41. Brompton 40 hole rear hub \$40
42. BSA 40 hole track hub \$50
43. Normandy 36 hole hub shell \$10
44. VEW 40 hole high flange hub shell \$70
45. VEW low flange 32/40 front rear pair \$200
46. New Williams 6 hole 47T chainring \$35

History of Spokes and Nipples

Club member and owner of Melody Wheels Adrian Emilsen is currently investigating the historical development of bicycle spokes and nipples, with specific regard to their history, design and various "standards" of measurement used to describe them.

Unlike a lot of other bicycle components, bicycle spokes and nipples generally don't receive much attention. Surprisingly little is known about this aspect of the bicycle industry that developed in the late 19th century.

Adrian is looking for any old boxes of spokes and nipples to make records of the spokes and add this information into a database. If you have any such old spokes and nipples please contact Adrian to organise a time to document them. He is particularly interested in finding spokes and nipples from before the 1980s.

Email info@melodywheels.com.au

Or phone Adrian on **0405 358 253**



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Club Calendar

Mon 18th Jan 19:30 General Meeting

Guest speaker John McGrath

In-person at 6 Hickey St (still only 17 people though so let us know if you'd like to be there)

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 811 1359 5652

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Sun 24th Jan 09:30 Point Walter Ride

Meet at the Wireless Hill clubroom at 9am for a ride to Point Walter.

Mon 15th Feb 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 6 Hickey St (maybe only 17 people though so let us know if you'd like to be there)

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 898 1699 7958

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Mon 15th Mar 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 6 Hickey St (maybe only 17 people though so let us know if you'd like to be there)

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 865 7362 8699

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Mon 19th Apr 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 6 Hickey St (maybe only 17 people though so let us know if you'd like to attend)

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 838 7336 2616

(Check your email for the clickable link and meeting password close to the date).

Sun 2nd May 10:00 Toodyay Display

We're back in Toodyay for the Moondyne Festival. The display location is in front of the old fire station on Stirling St.

Club Auction

<https://www.biddingowl.com/WAHCC>

The club's January / February auction sports several bikes and some lucky dip boxes of parts. The auction will close at the February meeting. All items will be available for inspection and collection there.

Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc. PO Box 224, Applecross, WA, 6153 email info.wahcc@gmail.com Chairperson: Robert Frith Vice Chair: William Riseborough Treasurer: Frank West Secretary: Robert Hunt Committee Member: Viv Cull

DISCLAIMER The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the WA Historical Cycle Club and the accuracy of information published herein is not guaranteed.

ROAD CYCLING.

:o:

THE NORTH FREMANTLE RACE.

WON BY P. O. SOLIN.

In splendid weather, and on what would have been a good road had not the alleged road-repairers scattered huge lumps of blue metal about in a reckless manner, the North Fremantle Cycling Club's Road Race was run this afternoon. The course was from the North Fremantle Public School to Crawley and back—a distance of about 12½ miles. The first men, T. J. Lewis, P. O. Solin and W. J. Craig, 6 mins., were despatched at 3 o'clock punctually, and after them followed: E. Caesar and P. Duggan, 5 mins.; J. Bovell and M. P. E. Smith, 4 mins. 30 secs.; A. H. Shaw, 4 mins; C. H. Summer, 3 mins.; E. H. Vickers, 2 mins. 30 secs.; L. B. Bolon, 1 min. 30 secs.; A. Bolton, 1 min.; C. J. Levien and F. Cooper, scratch. The officials were—Judge: Mr. R. Dearle, senior; timekeepers: Messrs. McFarlane, Hooper and Harris; starter: Mr. Harry Williams; secretary: Mr. T. J. Lovegrove.

The race resulted as follows:—

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| P. O. Solin (37 mins 54 secs) | 1 |
| E. Caesar (39 mins 4 secs) | 2 |
| P. Duggan (39 mins 36 secs) | 3 |

Lewis punctured a tyre after going a quarter of a mile and gave up; Solin fell near the turning point, and Duggan came a cropper a mile from home. C. J. Levien secured the fastest time prize, his time for the distance being 36 mins. 44 4-5 secs.

From The Umpire (Fremantle) Sat 17 Sep 1898