

Peter Craven: Speedway World Champion 1955 and 1962

MOSI owns a Langton-JAP motorcycle made for the most famous Belle Vue Aces Speedway rider, Peter Craven.

Peter Craven was born in Liverpool on 21 June 1934. Unfortunately his twin brother died at an early age. Craven began speedway racing with the Liverpool Chads in 1951 and also raced with the Fleetwood Flyers. On 24 May 1952 he made his debut as a Belle Vue Ace, though he failed to score a point. Craven joined the Aces in 1953 on a free transfer from Liverpool.

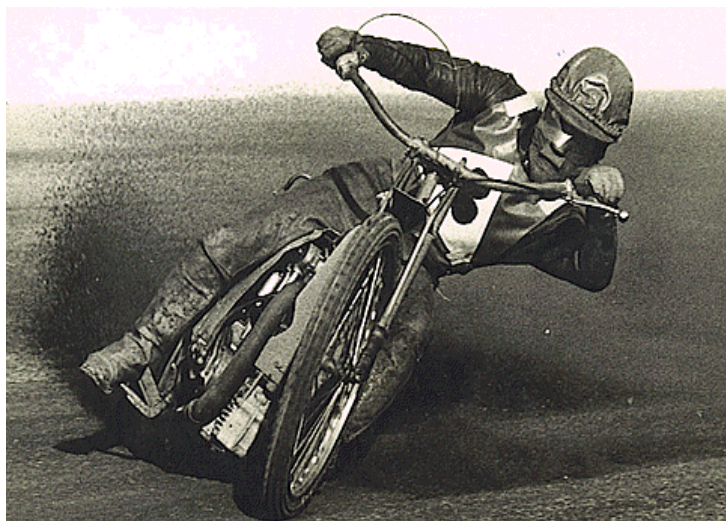


Belle Vue's Hyde Road track suited Craven's style, and through 1953 he began to benefit from technical and team support he received as one of the Aces. In 1954 he received maximum points from his 24 league appearances and qualified for the Speedway Individual World Final at Wembley. In 1955 he returned to Wembley to win. Craven qualified for all of the World Finals up to 1961, though he failed to finish higher than third. In 1962 he became the only British winner of two Speedway World Finals.

Craven competed for the Golden Helmet British Match Race Championship every year from 1956, ending the season as the holder in 1956, 1957 and 1959. He was also British Champion in 1962 and 1963. Craven made 50 appearances for England and 11 for Great Britain, finishing as a top scorer against both Sweden and Australasia in 1958.

1976 Speedway World Champion
Peter Collins recalled:

'He was so small you could hardly see him on the bike. It looked as if there was no-one on it as he raced through from the back. He was known as the Wizard of Balance and it was easy to see why. He sparked my ambition. Not only did I want to be a speedway world champion, I wanted to ride like he did.'





Peter Craven's final race was against The Monarchs at Edinburgh's Meadowbank Stadium on 20 September 1963. As he closed with the race leader, Monarch George Hunter, Hunter's engine failed. Craven ran into the fence rather than hit the fallen Hunter. Rushed to hospital, Peter Craven did not regain consciousness and died later that night. He is buried in Liverpool.

Although Peter Craven's death was a great loss to Manchester and international speedway fans, his memory continues to inspire. Since 1967 an event has been held at Belle Vue to compete for the Peter Craven Memorial Trophy. The first winner was Ivan Mauger, who went on to win the World Individual Championship six times. World Pairs and British Champion Chris Morton, current Belle Vue Aces team manager, won the Trophy in 1974, 1975 and 1986. Peter Collins won the Trophy in 1978.

Robert Craven said of his late father: 'He would be too modest to admit such a thing, but he was a great ambassador, not only for the sport, but also for his country too. He was a perfect advert for what the ordinary man in the street can achieve, given the right attitude, lots of determination and hard work.'

For more information:

Read Burford, Brian. *Peter Craven: The Wizard of Balance*. Stroud, UK: Tempus (2003).

Visit Belle Vue Speedway website: http://www.bellevueaces.co/history_craven.aspx