

SUSSEX CYCLE RACING LEAGUE
Preston Park, Brighton



AS 2009 BEGINS, COMMENTATOR GAVIN SMITH LOOKS BACK ON THE 2008 PRESTON PARK SEASON

Sussex League supremo Vern McClelland described the 2008 season as “the best season at the track since I’ve been promoting at Preston Park”. With consistently high attendances and some great racing every meet, who could possibly disagree with him?

The 2008 pre-season consisted of three highly successful “Try the Track” evenings. Women’s Team Pursuit World Champion Jo Rowsell was the star attraction at the first of these, displaying her gold medal and rainbow jersey. Over 45 riders attended every session, with John Scripps leading the coaching team ably assisted by Anthony Rogers, Sally Page and Roy Page. These taster evenings definitely gave riders of all ages and abilities the chance to warm up for the season itself and improve their trackcraft.

The warm-up evenings over, it was down to serious matters and the start of the league meetings on the last day of April. A very welcome new (for Preston Park) rider was none other than Sean Yates. The previous Tour de France yellow-jersey-holder and stage-winner has lost none of his keenness to race, as was witnessed throughout the following few weeks.

Despite the cold conditions on that first night of racing, 59 riders took part, setting the tone for the regular high attendances all season. Indeed, with better weather the following week, the total of signed-on riders was no fewer than 81 - a Preston Park record. Just two evenings were rained off in 2008 – a marked improvement on the year before, when four meets were completely cancelled and two others were curtailed by adverse weather.

The usual track set-up operated in 2008: the friendly people, the hard-working officials, helpers and parents (see below), the weekly supply of delicious cakes, and most of all the keenness of all the riders, from the super-enthusiastic under-8s to the veterans who should know better.

2008 saw a number of interesting innovations. First and foremost, U16 and U14 riders were on fixed-wheel for the first time – an idea put forward by Anthony Rogers at the previous AGM and voted in unanimously. This proved to be a runaway success, and is to be extended to the U12 age-group in 2009. Next, cash primes were on offer to seniors every evening, with £15 up for grabs, usually in the form of three fivers, and this helped liven up proceedings. Our pool of approved commissaires has grown - a very welcome development – and 2008 saw not only Vern McClelland in that role but also Rob Fuller, Dave Gerrey, Ben Miller and Daniel Gerrey each in charge of proceedings. Dave Gerrey set up his special notice-board system at meets to give key information to riders, such as who is in which heat, etc and this proved to be a real success. The East Sussex Speed Indicator Device made a welcome appearance in the summer, giving all riders the chance to have their speed displayed for all to see.

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For the second season in succession, the most successful and dedicated youth riders were rewarded with vouchers. This year, it was AD Cycles of Horsham who generously gave both £10 and £5 vouchers as sponsorship and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Last season, we continued the successful format of a 4-weekly cycle of race programmes. This provided a championship meet every month, the senior winners in 2008 being Felix English (scratch and points) and Lee Povey (sprint).

But what SCRL is mostly about is the overall league, with categories for A Seniors, B Seniors and all the youth age-groups. At the well-attended AGM and prize-giving in September, all the winners received deserved recognition for their efforts. The most outstanding performance was by 15-year-old Felix English, who won the A Senior league for the second time. Adam Gent confirmed his talent with a fine runner-up spot, while Mark Burgess also had a very impressive season to take third place. Youngster Charlie Heffernan put up some great displays of racing to win the B Senior league. The youth winners were U16 Nick Smith, U14 Ashley Dennis, U12 Gabriel Parle, U10 Ted O'Brien and U8 Bethany Lewis. Dozens of other riders were presented with trophies for their commendable results during the season.

There were, however, a couple of riders who made their mark in 2008 without actually being rewarded for their efforts with prizes as such. Firstly, young Brock Duncumb-Rogers, who consistently featured in breakaways with the top senior riders and ended up with a very creditable ninth place overall in the A league. Secondly, junior Lee Smith, brand new to racing in 2008, who rode stylishly and finished seventh in the B league. These two will both be riders to look out for in 2009.

Two other Preston Park regulars deserve special mention. Firstly, sprint champion Lee Povey, who devoted his season to securing a result in the European Masters Sprint Championships. Well, he achieved the best possible result, by winning the 35-39 years title in style! Secondly, we enjoyed having 2007 Junior Team Sprint world champion Pete Mitchell take part in a few meets early in the season, but Team GB duties unfortunately prevented him from attending as much as we would have liked.

A few words of praise for our helpers. Vern McClelland attended every meet and was not only the organiser, but also commissaire and handicapper, and he took many other roles. We were all kept amply and brilliantly fed by refreshments supremo Andrea McClelland, ably assisted by Ann and Mandy. Dave Gerrey took on so many tasks it will be hard to list them all, but they include the website, commissairing, judging and preparing the track. Other commissaires and judges, without whom the racing could not take place, included Daniel Gerrey, Marie-Neige Smith, Ben Miller, Rob Fuller and Lee Povey. Debbie Gent organised the signing-on with her usual ruthless efficiency. Ken Gent was our equipment

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organiser and also undertook the necessary task of gear-checking. Sally Page was our official first-aider who, we are pleased to report, very rarely had to leap into action. Our fine photographers, who provided the photos for the websites, were Daniel Dunbar and Sally Page. There are no doubt others who have helped who are not named here, and our thanks of course go out to them as well.

The Sussex League committee meets soon to put the finishing touches to the preparations for what promises to be yet another stupendous season of Preston Park track racing. A full preview of the season will appear in March. However, initial details are that the "Try the Track" sessions are on Wednesdays 1, 8 and 15 April, and that the official league meetings begin on Wednesday 22 April and will take place every Wednesday until 12 August. There will be three issues of "Preston Park News", out on the last Wednesdays of May, June and July. All articles, reports, snippets of news, etc are welcome, sent in via our website at scrl.co.uk.