

Ipswich

The River Orwell and River Gipping run parallel in Ipswich slightly west of the centre of the town and in the thirties a greyhound track was constructed directly east of this point. It was to be called the Suffolk Stadium and the promoter Mr Nat Shaw organised the opening meeting on Wednesday 11th September 1935 as a licenced track.

It is evident that some form of independent dog racing had already taken place here because newspaper articles describe the Old London Road track as being re-modelled, covered stands being erected in the enclosures and the old kennels being demolished.

The meeting was advertised as Ipswich's greatest attraction and the promoter stated that he intended at all times to do his utmost to be certain that the sport shall be promoted cleanly, decently and with careful attention to the many details that are so necessary. The reconstruction of the track was by Fisk & Co Ltd, the electric trackless hare was installed by H.Blann of London, safety hurdles and track equipment was supplied by Mortimer's of London and finally the wireless was by S.West of Ipswich.

Admission was free on opening night resulting in a decent first night attendance of 4,000 to watch the seven races on offer. The first race was a 270 yard race and was won by a greyhound called Comas and the other six races consisted of one 270 and five 475 yard events.

The track would be independent after the war but was still able to attract large crowds; totalisator turnover in the first two years after the war was £594,645 & £417,101. As the years passed patronage remained good due to the location of the track between the Yarmouth and London Roads.

Ipswich continued as a prominent 'flapper' throughout the fifties and sixties racing mainly on Wednesday and Saturday evenings at 7.15pm. Eight races were the norm over 300, 500 and 700 yards. Amenities included a licenced bar and snack bar and the totalisator was described as the Union Multi-speed wonder tote.

The 405 yard circumference circuit now had an outside McKee hare and the all grass track was served by a spray watering system.

Major changes arrived in 1974 when the NGRC offered the chance to independent tracks to race under the NGRC permit scheme, a scheme designed to allow official status at a fraction of the expected cost increases. Ipswich Stadium Ltd under the control of Ernie Whedon took up the offer. Whedon had also responsible with Len Franklin for Yarmouth stadium being constructed in 1940 and was also Racing Manager at Ipswich.

A new stand was built to the tune of £100,000 and a new computerised tote was added. The Suffolk Derby and St Leger were to become the tracks prestigious events.

The first race held under NGRC rules was on 2nd February 1974. The change from yards to metres resulted in race distances of 277, 437 & 647m. Open race success soon came in the form of Irwin Lawn and London Spec; the Pat Mullins pair won the Wembley Coronation Stakes and Crayford Vase respectively in 1975.

During 1977 a new consortium headed by Tom Stanley and Bill Davis took over Ipswich. Tom Stanley arrived as Director of Racing following the closure of Rayleigh and Bill Davis was to be the Racing Manager. Further track changes would result in a new circumference of 375m and race distances of 258, 440, 628 & 810 metres behind an outside Sumner hare.

Track trainer Tom Lanceman started supplying runners to Southend in 1979 becoming one of the first dual attachment trainers in the country. The loss of some of Lanceman's greyhounds was more than made up with the appointment of Joe Cobbold from Cambridge. The Cobbold kennels would provide Ipswich with significant success during the next two years of racing; Cobbold was one of the leading trainers in the country and won the Scottish Derby in 1980 with Decoy Sovereign. That first classic win was quickly followed by the Laurels win for Echo Spark in 1981. Cobbold returned to join Cambridge again in 1982.

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Dolly Gwynne steered Rhincrew Moth to Puppy Derby victory in 1983 and the TV Trophy became a popular competition for Ipswich. Decoy Boom had won the 1980 TV Trophy for Joe Cobbold and Ipswich and another greyhound that was about to change the face of greyhound racing after success in the TV Trophy.

That greyhound was of course Ken Peckham's Scurlogue Champ. The legendary hound broke the track record in September 1984 before securing two TV Trophy wins in 1985 & 1986 which propelled his status to national superstar and helped revive the entire industry.

Sadly despite the late eighties boom that greyhound racing then experienced Ipswich failed to flourish and closed its doors on the 17th February 1988. The last winner was Albert Skelton's Ventry Joe.

The closure had been a complete shock with the track completing the Wednesday fixture and then finding out the next day that no future races would ever take place there again. The owner Bill Davis had been told to vacate the premises by the local council who had been informed by the Department of Environment that Bentrax Investments had won an appeal to build warehousing on the site next to their Texas superstore business whose parent company was the Ladbroke Group.

Davis a former trainer and his family received a reported £2 million in the deal and the site was indeed built on and today is occupied in the area where the 'Dunelm' and 'The Range' stores stand.

Selected Track Records

| Distance | Name | Time | Date | Notes |
|----------|-----------------|-------|------------|-------|
| 300y | Fishpond | ?? | 26.06.1965 | |
| | Thunderbird I | 16.50 | 15.07.1967 | |
| | The Whistler | 16.50 | 22.07.1967 | |
| 500y | Fish Pond | ?? | 04.08.1965 | |
| | Barons Way | 27.96 | 02.09.1967 | |
| 700y | Marcella | 39.94 | 10.10.1964 | |
| 258m | Night Runner | 15.15 | 1987+ | |
| 440m | Swift Rapier | 26.48 | 1987+ | |
| 628m | Choice Rock | 38.39 | 1987+ | |
| 810m | Scurlogue Champ | 51.44 | 19.09.1984 | |

+ Date when record was held, not necessarily the year it was set.

Selected Totalisator Turnover

| Year | Turnover £ |
|------|------------|
| 1938 | 106,332 |
| 1941 | 108,266 |
| 1942 | 142,438 |
| 1943 | 208,383 |
| 1944 | 259,335 |
| 1945 | 460,562 |
| 1946 | 594,645 |
| 1947 | 417,101 |
| 1948 | 276,202 |
| 1949 | 176,639 |
| 1950 | 141,375 |
| 1952 | 122,167 |
| 1953 | 127,750 |
| 1954 | 118,000 |