

## **Reading (Bennett Road)**

Just one year after Reading Stadium on the Oxford Road, north-west of the town was closed by the GRA a company called Allied Presentations opened a new track accessed from the Bennett Road much further to the south of the town. The stadium build was assisted by owner trainer Bill Dore who sat on the board of directors with Reg Fearman, F Higley and Len Silver.

The first meeting was held on 10 June 1975 the same year that the country had gone metric resulting in this tracks dimensions only ever been stated in metres instead of yards. The site for the new stadium was south of Island Road and the Foudry Brook running alongside the stadium to the east and sewage works and sludge beds ran alongside to the west.

The new Reading attracted a good class of trainer and one in particular would have ties with the track for many years. Terry Dartnall was his name and he soon started to claim silverware taking the Wembley Summer Cup in 1976. The Hunt Cup was brought back to life by the track ensuring the continuation of the old competition and the Berkshire Cup was also reintroduced. Facilities were basic but the stadium began to cement its place in greyhound racing with its all sand surface and 'Outside Sumner' hare. The circumference was 385 metres with main race distances consisting of 275, 465 & 660 metres.

Under racing Manager Martin Haigh the contracted trainers began to fly the flag for Reading, Bright Tiger (Len Stiles) won the Oxfordshire Stakes in 1981 and Jerry Fisher won two Blue Riband events in 1982 & 1983 as well as claiming the Cesarewitch title with Jos Gamble in 1983. Fisher was then fortunate to handle a greyhound called Game Ball who he bought with owner Brian Smith for the large sum of £8,000 at the end of 1982. Game Ball was put with Sean Bourke for the Derby and he nearly fulfilled his promise by reaching the final but could not take the crown despite being the hot favourite. After another failed attempt the following year Fisher finally trained the white and black dog himself and duly lifted the Pall Mall title. The greyhound became a prominent sire before Fisher claimed more silverware after Daleys Gold triumphed in the Scurry. Reading was beginning to experience a purple patch with the next star being Mollifrend Lucky; Colin Packham's white and blue dog lifted the Scurry and Laurels in 1986.

Martyn Dore (the son of director and General Manager Bill Dore) was Racing Manager by 1988 as the track became renowned for having a strong class of runner. The next few years was about to provide a remarkable sequence of winners. It started in 1990 when Maldwyn Thomas trained greyhounds with the prefix 'Trans' began to win many trophies. The trainers championship was hosted in 1991 and was won by Linda Mullins.

The following year (1992) was an incredible year with an announcement that a competition called the Reading Masters would take place. The race offered substantial prize money with only the English and Scottish Derby able to top the £15,000 winner's prize. A second trainers championship was hosted which resulted in the champion John 'Ginger' McGee joining the training ranks. Poor Brian won the Oxfordshire Stakes for Ron Jeffrey (a former trainer at the old Reading track), Luxury Light claimed the Derby consolation for McGee, Bob Gilling's Skelligs Smurf became Oaks champion and Bixby (Bill Black) was a Puppy Derby winner.

The question of how could the success 1992 ever be surpassed was answered the following year as the tracks trainers won the Trainer of the Year, the National Sprint, Laurels, Regency, Birmingham Cup, Golden Sprint, St Leger and Peterborough Derby. McGee landed another Trainer of the Year title in 1994. The Keith Howard 'Hedsor' prefix was next to provide the track with glory supported by Diane Stichcombe's Scurry win in 1997. An outsider in the form of Walthamstow hound Palace Issue wowed the crowd by claiming a third consecutive Hunt Cup in 2001.

The track underwent a major change when in 2002 the BS Group bought the venue from Allied Presentations but rumours persisted for many years that following the construction of the busy A33 out of Reading towards the M4 that the track could not exist so close to this major road.

Terry Dartnall returned to the track as a trainer once again and won two Selects with Cleenas Lady before retiring and handing the licence to son Matt who lifted the Juvenile crown the following year in 2008 with Ballymac Under. It was the last moment of jubilation because the local council refused to extend the tracks lease citing redevelopment plans. The BS Group plans to build a new modern stadium came to nothing with the final meeting being held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008.

Today the nearby sewage works are now a huge Thames Water facility but although the stadium was demolished it remains wasteland.

### Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
275m	Greenfield Box	16.32	23.10.1982	
465m	Fevata Spec	28.12	31.01.1987	
	Fearless Mustang	28.10	09.04.1991	
	Coomlogane Euro	28.08	24.11.1994	
	Blue Murlen	27.56	28.04.1997	
660m	Racewell Royale	41.02	17.11.1987	
	Waltham Abbey	41.00	22.10.1988	
	Airmount Flash	41.00	01.12.1992	
	Lydpal Frankie	40.71	16.05.1999	
	Double Take	40.50	14.12.2003	Hunt Cup Final
850m	Jos Gamble	54.50	19.11.1983	
	Cloverhill June	54.28	1989+	
	Ivory Lamb	54.19	11.09.1990	
	Lady Flyaway	53.56	03.05.1998	
	Greenacre Lin	53.26	16.09.2004	
1045m	Home Yer Go	68.60	01.11.1986	
	Coverall	68.09	30.11.1990	
	Sandollar Sophie	67.90	30.04.1994	
	Souda Bay	67.58	03.05.1998	
	Slaneyside Demon	68.82	01.10.2006	
465mH	The Dingle Man	28.93	08.01.1983	
	Harbour Knight	28.92	08.04.1991	
	Gis A Smile	28.58	30.04.1994	
	Wisley Wonder	28.45	22.05.1997	
	Druids Mickey Jo	28.40	22.09.2005	
660mH	Trixies Snipe	42.51	19.11.1983	
	Run On Tar	41.96	30.11.1990	
	Gold Splash	41.95	24.04.1993	

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