

Yarmouth (New)

The story of the new Yarmouth began in pre-war London where a professional gambler by the name of Len Franklin gained a reputation for picking winners and in a ten year period emptied the bookmaker satchels. Franklin's first visit was to the newly built Clapton in 1928 where he was joined by Ernie Wedon; from there he became a regular at Harringay, Stamford Bridge and White City.

After investing in stocks and shares he was persuaded to invest in a new greyhound track in Yarmouth and armed with the knowledge that there was a horse racing course already he felt that the Yarmouth public would embrace a greyhound track. He duly purchased a field on the west side of the Yarmouth Road that contained the old flapping track on the opposite side of the Yarmouth Road to the horse racing course. The flapping track was just one field with no buildings so Franklin leased the adjacent field much better for access and applied for planning permission. Although the initial planning was refused a subsequent appeal to the ministry saw the decision overturned.

Work began in 1939 and the stadium was ready for business by the spring of 1940 with an opening date set for 11 May. That same day the Germans invaded Netherlands and Belgium resulting in the evacuation of Yarmouth and a potential disaster for the Franklin. The opening afternoon meeting went ahead as did several for meetings once a week until Franklin and most of the staff were called up. The stadium closed and it was taken over by the fire service for the duration.

After the war Franklin went into partnership with Ernie Wedon and Clifford Yaxley, the Norfolk Greyhound Racing Company were able to take advantage of the post war boom and opened for business on Saturday 7 December 1946. Although this is classed as the first meeting it must be remembered that the bizarre afternoon of 11 May 1940 was the actual first meeting.

During the 1946 meeting the racing was over 500 yards public could experience a restaurant in the main stand. Franklin was steward, judge and even helped out in the stadium kennels and when Wedon sold his share to buy Ipswich he had to fill in as Racing Manager.

The East Anglian Derby was inaugurated at the track but was of course an independent race at the time because the track raced with no affiliation from 1939 until 1975. Speedway arrived in 1948 running until 1961.

The original field where the flapping track stood was sold and in 1958 would form part of the North Denes Airport, which would become a heliport serving as a private base for helicopters to the gas platforms in the North Sea. There are plans for the closure of this airport in May 2015.

After the sudden death of Yaxley the Franklin family took sole control of the stadium, Len was the Racing Manager, his son Stephen was the Kennel Manager and M J Franklin was the General Manager. Race days varied from Tuesday & Friday evenings to Monday, Wednesday & Saturday evenings over distances of 300, 500, 710 & 910 yards.

Yarmouth made a pivotal decision in 1975 to join the NGRC permit scheme and soon showed that an ex-independent track could compete in the NGRC world of racing. Prize money for their premier event the East Anglian Derby was excellent and the facilities could match many established NGRC tracks. In 1985 Dick Keable the Racing Manager celebrated forty years at the track, (Keable had been a kennel lad at the track back in 1945). Two years later in 1987 Yarmouth became the first permit track to register a totalisator turnover of £1 million. Len took a back seat with Stephen becoming the General Manager.

The stadium was a very busy place with Sunday markets and stock car racing on three times per week, bingo nights and an amusement arcade all requiring the help of Stephen's wife Pamela and children Simon and Justin.

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NGRC open race success was also seen for the first time, John Wells won the East Anglian Derby in 1977 with Westmead Dance; Gordon Bailey trained Linkside Liquor when winning the Cesarewitch in 1981 and the Wembley Gold Cup in 1982 in addition to Rath Hero who claimed the 1981 Scottish St Leger.

The late eighties provided the track with decent attendances during an industry revival especially in the summer and the make-up of the track was a 382 in circumference with distances of 277, 462, 659, 843 & 1041 metres behind an 'Outside Sumner' hare.

As the nineties arrived and progressed the track continued to gain rewards when their trainers travelled on the open race circuit. Time For One trained by Michael Power won the 1991 Scottish St Leger but this was eclipsed by the feat of the Tony Gifkins runner Ballycarney Dell the same year because he dead heated for the Grand National title with Ideal Man. A decade later Hanover Pet scored home success by winning the East Anglian Derby for Raymond Pleasants and Jan Marjoram's Winocals Dream was victorious in the Oxfordshire Stakes.

The new millennium saw Simon Franklin appointed Racing Manager and then General Manager as Nigel Long took over the graders chair. Simon & Justin Franklin then brought in Nigel Bray as General Manager whilst they took control of other duties. One of which was overseeing the new £2.5 million grandstand built in 2006, the state of the art 250-seater restaurant and three executive boxes was hailed as a great success by the Norfolk public and press. A plaque was unveiled naming the building the Len Franklin Grandstand in memory of the founder of the stadium.

The upgraded facilities paid dividends as the track was rewarded with hosting the TV Trophy twice in six years (2007 & 2013), and the Trainers Championship in 2013. In addition it drew two of the biggest trainers in the sport in Mark Wallis and John Mullins after the closure of Walthamstow (the former via Harlow). Mullins won the Derby Consolation in 2008 with Toosey Blue the same year he steered Blonde Dino to the Derby final. Before Wallis joined Jim Daly picked up the Puppy Derby with the black dog Jesters Nap.

When Wallis arrived from Harlow track improvements to the tune of £190,000 had just been completed, Wallis of course became Trainers champion from 2012 to 2014 as a Yarmouth handler and there are too many big wins to mention them all. The cream of the crop was the Derby triumph of 2012 with Blonde Snapper and two St Legers with Blonde Reagan and Aero Majestic. Kevin Boon also got into the act by taking the 2014 William Hill Grand Prix with Farley Rio.

Yarmouth also runs on the BAGS service overseen by the courteous Racing Manager Marcus Westgate and it is a real go ahead stadium dispelling the theory that only bookmaker owned tracks can put on a good show in the world of modern greyhound racing.

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The excellent grandstand as seen from the back straight.

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Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes
277m	Knockrour Brandy	16.64	22.09.1979	
	Respect	16.50	16.08.2000	
	Against The Lead	=16.50	16.08.2006	
	Beardys Robbie	16.46	20.09.2007	
	Perrys Tango	16.44	13.08.2008	
	Boherduff Monti	16.40	18.09.2008	
	Boherduff Monti	16.34	23.09.2008	
	Rotar Wing	16.33	12.08.2009	
	Monleek Town	16.19	15.08.2012	
	Skate On	16.18	18.09.2014	
	462m	Ramtogue Dasher	27.91	09.09.1987
Dempsey Duke		27.68	19.09.1991	
Geordie Parker		27.52	12.09.2007	East Anglian Derby 2 nd round
Farloe Reason		27.49	10.09.2008	East Anglian Derby 1 st round
Ninja Jamie		27.40	23.09.2008	East Anglian Derby final
Fear Zafonic		27.27	04.09.2010	East Anglian Derby 1 st round
Fear Zafonic		27.17	11.09.2010	East Anglian Derby semi-final
659m		Dunmurry Girl	40.88	08.03.1972
	Big City	40.79	24.09.1988	
	Masterpiece	40.77	20.09.2007	
	Rackethall Holly	40.71	31.10.2007	
	Raving Black	40.54	12.09.2009	
	Centurion Enry	40.25	16.09.2010	
	843m	Change Guard	53.62	25.08.1986
Spiridon Louis		52.98	23.05.2007	
Musical Gaga		52.86	26.08.2013	TV Trophy Heats
1041m	Dunmurry Ruby	69.15	06.12.1986	
	Some Moth	68.81	08.12.1990	

Selected Tote Returns

Year	Turnover £
1946	12,392
1947	621,556
1948	428,635
1949	286,863
1950	200,750
1951	185,502
1952	179,233
1953	167,167
1954	151,000