

Chapter 9 ~ The Blue Riband “*that 25 record*”

Whilst numerous strong arguments could very easily be made out in respect of the virtues and merits of, say, the 100 and 12 hour competition records it is no secret that more have cast coveting eyes on the 25 than on the more classic distances. The Club 25 record has passed down the years as each generation of Withington Wheelers has lowered the standard.

As far as is possible to tell the first record holder was V. Harris who in 1932 won the very first club 25, the journal simply recording that he won in 1.10. From then on, of course, there was a standard to be beaten and Jim Forbes did the trick with 1.9.47 in the Stretford Wheelers 2nd Class event of July 1933, only to see it beaten the same year by A. Smith in 1.9.11 in an inter club event with the Irwell Castle on 8 October.

This was destined to stand until May 1935 when in another inter club, this time against the Salford Roads, Alan Grant put up fastest time of the day in 1.7.35. Smithy, not to be outdone, came up with 1.6.42 in the Altrincham Ravens event in August of the same year. By this time competition was so keen that in the same event Grant was only 2 seconds slower, and yet a third rider, C Shattock, was also inside the old record.

In May 1936 seven of ours competed in the North Staffs CC 25 and the following times were recorded;

Alan Grant	1:6:31		
C Shattock	1:8:45	Charlie Haines	1:8:57
Harry Lloyd	1:9:45	Fred Wheeler	1:10:18
Herbert Whitbread	1:10:24	Jim Forbes	1:15:00

Alan Grant had beaten club record by 11 seconds but there were rumours at the time that the course was short, lo and behold a letter was received to the effect that upon re-measurement the course was found to be 200 yards short. The Club Journal from June 1936 states “This information will result in the nullifying of Club Record placed to the credit of Alan Grant with 1:6:31 and will re-establish Arnold Smith as record holder with his time of 1:6:42”.

Alan Grant had to wait another two years before establishing supremacy with 1.6.14 in the West Pennine. Then, just to make sure, he came up with 1.5.38 in the Ravens only a month later in July 1937, a ride destined to stand for many years; in fact right through to the end of the thirties, through the war and into the 1950s.

It was in fact May 1950 when Lance Tulip who had been thwarted on several occasions in the late forties, did 1.5.18 on Brock. Then exactly as Alan Grant had done 13 years earlier, once having found the way, got up in the Ravens and did 1.3.57. So it will be seen that this event, the Ravens 25, has featured three times in club record rides.

Lance’s 25 record was to stand for two years when David E Waterworth a young man in only his fourth competitive ride made short work a standard others have struggled for years to achieve with 1.2.46 in the Nelson Wheelers event on Brock in May 1952.

The record was to last little more than a month when Stan Foster, making a very determined come back after some time away from racing lowered the record to 1.1.36 in the Manchester Clarion 25. His time was third fastest in the event and gained first handicap.

The following year, 1953, David E Waterworth took the record back in the Stretford Wheelers 25 with a time of 1.0.53.

It was to be 27 years and the world had changed a lot before this record would be eventually broken. It fell to David A Slater on 20 September 1980 in the Abbotsford Park RC 25 with a time of 1.0.41. David's times had been steadily falling since April 1978 when he finished First Novice in our own 25. By 1981 David was conquering all distances and he set new club records at 10, 25, 30, 50 and 100. The most notable of these was of course the 25, David was the first Withington Wheeler to get under the magic hour with a time of 59.03 in the Doncaster Wheelers 25 on 10 May 1981.

By the time this record fell there was new generation of Withington Wheelers on the racing scene, on 27 May 1985 Simon Pearson recorded 58.58 in the Apollo Wheelers 25. Three years later Simon knocked 9 seconds off his own record with 58.49 in the Dukinfield CC 25 on 18 June 1989.

Two years later Leo Koch travelled over to Yorkshire and recorded 58.05 in the Scala Wheelers event and then 2 months later lowered his own record to 56.54 on the T254 course in the Cleveland 25 on 6 July 1991.

This record was to take some beating and stood until 1993 when Phil Pearce went nine seconds faster recording 56.45 on the D25/11 course in the Anfield BC 25 on 26 September 1993. Then four years later in 1997 Phil lowered his own record by exactly 3 minutes in a time of 53.45.

Phil's account of his ride in 1997.

"The date was around late March/early April 97 and I was racing regularly most weekends, I'd decided to travel with my dad to try the well known O2 course near Ranby Nottinghamshire. One of the fastest courses at the time other than the Borough. Remember it being pretty cold even though it was a Saturday afternoon. Form at the time was reasonably good, I'd done plenty of miles, Level 2 stuff and as usual used my races to get myself fit. Typically I was racing twice a weekend as I had the time back then with my ever faithful and supportive Dad (Ted) always willing to urge me on and providing the transport to the races.

The O2 started right before a large traffic island and on the day had no problems negotiating it. From memory there wasn't a great deal of traffic on the course, which was good, remember just bombing it to the turn on old faithful (my old tt bike as it's called now!) Bike was a refurbished made to measure Harry Hall 653 tubing timetrial frame with Hed CX front wheel and Zipp 950 disc both wheels tubs.

Remember the course being very open, but pretty fast and was a usual out and back with a number of roundabouts to be negotiated. There was some slight down hills, which you had to come back up on the way back and you passed the side of Sherwood Forest. Remember finishing the race a sharp left turn and a short downhill to the finish, was really surprised by the pb, but then again I was only riding cheshire races at the time so didn't realise how fast I'd gone. Finished 2nd overall in the race, beaten by Darren Willets by around 30-40 secs. Raced the course again about two weeks later and did a very short 54, I was held up at the first island by a juggernaut so maybe I could have improved the record, but hey we'll never know. I remember being 2nd again by 15 secs, beaten by John Rickards. I was 23 at the time, so only a young wippersnapper, went onto to have a great season pb'ing at all distances including riding my first 100 (Anfield), 2nd overall in the Manchester 12 hour and winning the Manchester BAR."

It was to be 2 July 2011 before this record went. Darren Maironis lowered the club 25 record to 52.05.

Here's Darren's own account of his ride on 2 July;

"The conditions were very good although not as good as I thought when I hit the dual carriageway. It was hard work on the way out with slight crosswinds on the open sections, however nothing to moan

about. I hit the turn at 27mins and knew from other people that the return leg is usually faster so I had in my mind that the worst I could do would be a 54.

I started to see other riders in front of me which gave me a bit of extra motivation to dig in. Speeds started to pick up to over 30mph and at this point I knew that I had the record it was then a case of by how much.

I then hit the 2nd to last roundabout and had to virtually stop to a halt and wait for a juggernaut to pick speed back up in front of me. Then at the next roundabout I had an airhead moment and was convinced I had taken the wrong exit!

I slowed right down and was just about to get off and run across to the other side when I saw a rider on his outward leg, I then had to regroup and dig in for the last 2 miles. On reflection I should have been under the 52minute barrier but I know that I can set this as a target for next season”

Darren couldn't lower his own record the following year but his best for 2012 was exactly the same as he did in 2011; 52.05. Not to worry though, in 2013 Darren recorded the first sub-50 minute ride (over 30mph!) by a Withy Wheeler when he recorded 49.59.