

## Coventry (Brandon)

Fourteen years after the closure of Lythalls Lane the city of Coventry was able to go greyhound racing again. The Brandon Stadium better known for hosting speedway had heard the roar of the bikes around the circuit since 1928 and fifty years later greyhounds arrived.

The Sanderson family who had owned the majority shareholding at Brandon since the end of the war had bought Lythalls Lane around the same time where they concentrated running the greyhound operation. Charles Ochiltree was installed as the Managing Director of Coventry Stadium Ltd at Brandon despite only having a minor shareholding.

The stadium off the Rugby Road and north of Speedway Lane in Brandon lies east of Coventry and the public in this area has always been passionate about speedway. The company changed names in 1950 following the purchase of Leicester stadium in Blackbird Road from Leicester Stadium Ltd. The new guise would be Midland Sports but three tracks would become two ten years later when an agreement was reached for redevelopment of Lythalls Lane and planning permission was passed.

Alan Sanderson passed away in November 1968 whilst in Monte Carlo resulting in Ochiltree becoming the dominant decision maker for the track. Greyhound racing arrived at Brandon in 1978; possibly something to do with the fact that Leicester had been subject to a Barratts Homes bid the same year and although it was rejected perhaps Ochiltree knew that Leicester would not host greyhound racing for much longer.

The first greyhound meeting took place on 19th September 1978. Facilities were excellent with a restaurant, a modern computerised tote and bars. The circuit was all sand and the hare was an outside McGee.

Owned by Midland Sports a new racecourse management was brought in; Ron Day (General Manager) and Geoff Hammond (Racing Manager). Day had been the Racing Manager at Oxford some years earlier and Hammond was the Assistant Racing Manager at Oxford when he switched over. The pair introduced the Eclipse to the track reuniting the event with its traditional roots.

Coventry quickly snapped up some very good trainers; they lured the likes of Geoff DeMulder, Barbara Tompkins and Natalie Savva. The calibre of attached trainer soon brought reward, Westmead Power (Savva) clinched victory in the St Leger final and Dale Lad (DeMulder) lifted the Edinburgh Cup. Geoff DeMulder went on to win the Trainer of the Year in 1978 whilst a Coventry trainer and despite switching to Hall Green soon after would return to Coventry once again the following year.

During 1980 Iskagh Ruler (Tompkins) reached the Derby final, Brainy Prince (Rita Hayward) won the Golden Jacket and Weston Bluebell came home with the Greenwich Cup for handler Barry Austin.

Sadness befell the track in the early eighties, General Manager Ron Day passed away whilst in South Africa in 1981 and Sean Doyle (son of trainer Paddy Doyle) the young Racing Manager who had joined Coventry at the end of 1980 from Cradley Heath lost a battle with cancer. Mick Wheble the Racing Manager at sister track Leicester was brought in as Racing and Operations Manager to help run the stadium whilst still performing his duties at Leicester at the same time.

DeMulder had the prefix Fearless and it was Fearless Mover that nearly managed to secure the Derby in 1982, the fawn dog had to settle for the Consolation Stakes on Derby final night. However just one year later Barbara Tompkins achieved the big one for Coventry when the brilliant Im Slippy successfully lifted the Derby crown at White City. Bertie Gaynor added to the tracks victories by throwing in two Eclipse triumphs.

Midland Sports finally sold sister track Leicester in 1984 to Barratts Homes leaving many worrying if the company had the same in store for Coventry. It was at this point that Wheble decide to leave the company and take the Racing Managers chair at Oxford after an offer from their Managing Director David Hawkins. Dan McCormick and Bob Kane would organise the racing after this with Charles Ochiltree overseeing the operation.

Another Derby final appearance by a Tompkins trained runner (Murlens Slippy) was overshadowed by the imminent closure of the stadium to greyhound racing. It finished on 24 Oct 1986 but Ochiltree remained the Speedway promoter where his real passion laid.

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Ochiltree died in 1998 and in 2003 the stadium was sold to Avtar Sandhu who had big plans for a re-launch of the stadium. Seventeen years later the track re-opened to greyhounds, the Coventry Bees speedway team had remained very successful team in the interim and would now share the venue with the dogs. Straight away the intentions were clear as new owner Avtar Sandhu achieved a coup by recruiting Simon Harris the Wimbledon Racing Manager at the end of 2003. Malcolm Francis was the operation Manager and the track was re-laid in time for an April 2004 start. New kennels were built for the racing schedule of Wed, Fri & Sat nights. The track received more good news when it was awarded the trainers championship even before it had run its first race; the championship would be won by Hove trainer Brian Clemenson who claimed his third successive championship.

Other top trainers would join the Midlands track, Oxford's 2005 champion trainer Nick Colton arrived but would soon move to Hall Green, Carly Philpott (daughter of the likeable Paul), Frank Wright and Matt Dartnall (son of Terry) also signed up.

Philpott would earn recognition for Coventry after winning the William Hill Classic and Gold Collar with Ballymac Niloc and Roxholme Girl respectively. Dartnall would steer two hounds to through to the 2009 Greyhound Derby final, Ballymac Ruso was a beaten favourite and Glenard Sunrise the outsider of the field.

Problems arose once again for the track, Simon Harris left and Russ Watkin took over but the track was losing money and towards the end of 2009 the greyhounds looked likely to stop again. After Boxing Day the company went into liquidation and post-closing Racing Manager Russ Watkin was fined £5,000 by the GBGB for allowing 67 races to go off before their official race time. However the GBGB found no evidence between him and a Sheffield based off course betting employee who had placed numerous successful winning bets on the races affected. It was an awful finish to the five year venture.

Just three years later the well-known professional gambler and owner Harry Findlay re-opened Coventry, he had tried to open the track before 2012 but failed to get the GBGB licence. The procedures to restart were put into place. The track had been re-laid and the well-respected Martyn Dore had been installed as Racing Manager.

The issue of finding new trainers was helped by the closure of Oxford, their champion trainer Angie Kibble plus Tony Magnasco and Maurice Massey all moved to Coventry. Findlay was true to his word and bucked the trend as he offered excellent open race prize money but suffered a blow when respected Racing Manager Martyn Dore left, his replacement was Karl Ward. Racing continued and the expertise of Andy Lisemore was brought in to help with the racing before he took over from Ward.

2014 saw the debut of Salad Dodger in a B4, the white and brindle finished second and no one would have known they had just seen a Derby winner in action. For the third time in recent history the track closed again. This time it came as a surprise, Findlay had pulled the plug. It was a shame because although many felt the position there was untenable he had invested a huge amount of money into trying to make it work and deserved some credit. The only criticism was the short notice at which it closed leaving many trainers in limbo and Racing Manager Andy Lisemore hearing the news whilst on honeymoon.

Independent racing would soon take place at the venue and currently does today (1° 24' 5.599"W 52° 23' 33.146"N).

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### Selected Track Records

Distance	Name	Time	Date	Notes	
260m	Ballagarrow Jet	16.06	1979+		
	Echo Spark	15.87	28.01.1983		
263m	Dynamo Joe	15.73	09.06.2012		
	College Olympic	15.66	15.07.2012		
280m	Southview Ace	15.66	15.05.2013		
	Flywithoutwings	16.97	23.05.2004		
	Cavecourt Jon	16.81	13.06.2004		
	Ningbo Jack	16.80	11.07.2004		
450m	Ningbo Jack	16.63	18.07.2004		
	Many Are Called	27.02	29.05.2013		
460m	Brainy Prince	28.23	1979+		
	Parkers Moon	28.20	29.05.1984		
480m	Avon Towser	29.44	23.05.2004		
	Avon Towser	29.30	06.06.2004		
	Baltimore Joe	29.23	27.06.2004	Trainers Championship	
	Pitch Rocket	29.21	30.06.2004		
	Droopys Shearer	28.89	18.07.2004		
485m	Barnfield On Air	28.85	31.10.2007		
	Fridays Shea	29.20	20.05.2012		
	Holdem Spy	29.16	26.08.2012		
	Castlebride Dan	29.15	09.12.2012		
	Castlebride Dan	29.00	03.03.2013		
	Farloe Warhawk	28.99	05.05.2013		
	Calzaghe Davy	28.97	26.05.2013		
	Sawpit Sensation	28.79	16.06.2013		
	Well Tutored	38.96	23.12.2006		
	Rough Domino	38.69	11.01.2009		
670m	Solar Shamrock	42.54	1979+		
	Decoy Lassie	42.04	15.10.1982		
672m	Blonde Fletch	41.44	22.07.2012		
	Crinkill Jewel	41.32	05.08.2012		
680m	Farloe Tango	41.15	18.08.2013		
	Lear Princess	42.75	13.06.2004		
	Maxie Rumble	42.71	20.06.2004		
	Shelbourne Star	42.55	28.07.2004		
	Tinrah Lad	42.48	29.01.2006		
859m	Barnfield Brooke	42.47	23.12.2007		
	Ballymac Swift	53.71	28.04.2013		
	Eternal Mist	56.68	14.11.1978		
	880m	Shelbourne Maura	57.77	02.05.2004	
	Gors Nikita	56.91	19.12.2004		
	Hollinwood Dolly	56.97	14.01.2005		
	Head Iton Jordan	56.75	23.04.2006		
	Head Iton Jordan	56.62	14.05.2006		
	Head Iton Jordan	56.53	22.07.2007		
	894m	Charleys Lucy	57.06	14.07.2012	
Dromana Becky		56.59	09.09.2012		
Tyrur Pudsy		56.66	24.02.2013		
1025m	Slaneyside Demon	68.32	17.01.2007		
1080m	Zuzu's Petal	70.77	23.12.2005		
485mH	Baran Bally Hi	29.95	03.03.2013		

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