

CEMETERY

CIRCUIT

1951-75 Top 16 - Solo

(1) Ginger Molloy

From the coal-mining town of Huntly in the north Waikato, Ginger Molloy had his first podium finish at the circuit in 1956 and between then and 1974 he amassed a remarkable 29 top three finishes to be the most successful rider in the first twenty five years of the circuit's history. He went to Europe in 1963 and with his busy international schedule he didn't always make it back but when he did the cut and thrust dices with Hugh Anderson, Geoff Perry, Trevor Discombe, Dale Wylie and Keith Turner became the stuff of legends. Some of his victories had a touch of the exotic. In 1968 he won the double on a Spanish 350cc Bultaco, in 1971 he won on a 500cc Kawasaki and in 1974 he rode a 350cc Harley Davidson to a debut win in a feature race. His contribution to the enjoyment of thousands of Cemetery Circuit race fans has been considerable.



Circuit Record: 14 wins, 10 seconds, 5 thirds

(5) Ron Grant

American Ron Grant dominated the 1969 meeting like few others had before him. In an age when black leathers were still the preferred fashion the tall slim Grant was a stand-out in his light blue outfit with the red and white stripes and the number on the back. And the difference didn't stop there. His very fast Suzuki's took him to four wins in a programme of six races. In the process he became the first overseas solo rider to win at the circuit. He was a winner again on a TR750 Suzuki in 1972, the same year that he represented the USA in the Trans-Atlantic Trophy series. On his retirement from racing he settled in Wanganui for some years before moving to the UK. He later lost his life in a boating accident off the coast of Ireland.



Circuit Record: 6 wins, 2 seconds, 1 third

(9) John Hempleman

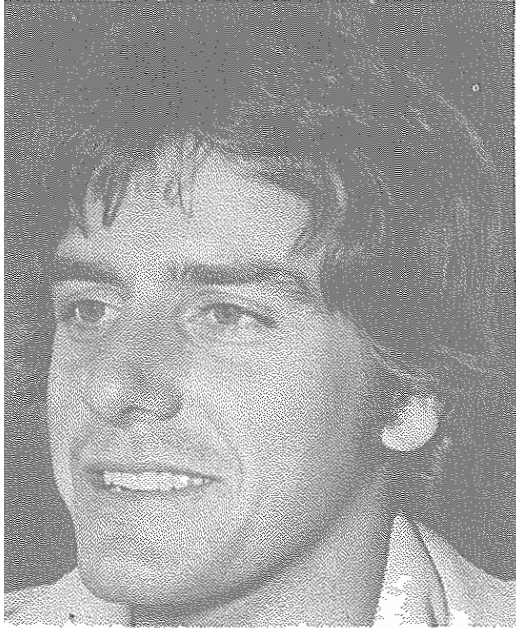
Aucklander John Hempleman was a first-up winner in 1952, but did not return again until 1956 to finish second behind Rod Coleman in the Senior feature race. In 1958 Hempleman and Wellington's John Anderson, both NZ IOM representatives and both on Manx Norton's had the near capacity crowd on its feet in two thrilling 15-lappers. Hempleman finished behind Anderson in the Junior feature although both riders equalled Rod Coleman's lap record of 61 secs in the process. In the Senior, he again ran at lap record pace to keep ahead of John Anderson and he held the lead to the finish. As an indication of the intensity of the racing that day John Anderson, in the chase to catch Hempleman, set a new lap record of 60.00 secs. John Hempleman in 1958 was a star player in a day of circuit benchmarks. After an outstanding international career he made a spectacular return in 1966 and took out four successive wins on his screaming multi-cylinder 305cc Honda and became the first rider to win a feature on a Japanese bike.



Circuit Record: 9 wins, 5 seconds

(13) Stu Avant

A former classmate of John Boote, Stu Avant's limited circuit experience counted for nothing in 1973 when he raced away with the "Shell Race of the Year". A third and fourth in other races on the day confirmed him as a rider of genuine ability. He rode a TZ700 Yamaha into third place in the NZ Open TT in 1974 to complete a Christchurch-based trifecta behind John Boote and Dale Wylie. The following year he arrived at Wanganui on the new RG500 model Suzuki bearing exotic Italian sponsorship gained after beating the great Agostini in a feature race at Laverton in Australia a few months earlier. His results were modest that day but he was destined for more success beyond 1975 before pursuing a successful international career.



Circuit Record: 6 wins, 3 seconds, 5 thirds

(2) Pat Hennen

Under the aegis of Ron Grant and support from Coleman Suzuki the 20 year old Californian Pat Hennen had an encouraging introduction to the Cemetery Circuit in the inaugural Marlboro Series in 1973. He ran with the pace in the two Marlboro heats and finished a brilliant third behind circuit veterans Wylie and Molloy but ahead of Avant and Boote in an 8-lap warm-up. He returned in 1974, this time with the very fast ex-Geoff Perry TR750 Suzuki and he won the second 20-lap Marlboro heat in under even time on his way to his first Marlboro Series crown. The die was cast. Visibly quicker than anyone else in 1975 he had a hat-trick of wins against an opposition that was becoming increasingly international, and he enjoyed a popular following that was to grow. The Marlboro years were the Hennen years. In 1976 he became the first American to win a 500cc Grand Prix on his way to third in the world championship. For all that, he still called the Cemetery Circuit his favourite circuit. Sadly, in 1978 he suffered a career-ending crash while competing at the Isle of Man.



Circuit Record: 6 wins, 1 third

(6) Geoff Perry

The eighteen year old son of the legendary Len Perry began his Cemetery Circuit career on a 250cc Bultaco in 1967 with a second place in his first race and he became a star in his own right when he swept to victory in two open scratch races on his 250cc Suzuki the following year. In 1971 he won three races, including the NZ Lightweight TT, in a day highlighted by the torrid dicing between himself and Ginger Molloy. Just a week earlier in Sydney he finished second to ten-times world champion Giacomo Agostini in a performance that confirmed his genuine world class. Tragically, Geoff Perry died in an air crash in May 1973 while en-route to the United States to ride for Suzuki Team USA.



Circuit Record: 8 wins, 7 seconds

(10) Peter Murphy

The diminutive Aucklander was a NZ Isle of Man representative from 1953 to 1957 and a regular on the Grand Prix scene during those years mostly campaigning the developmental Matchless G45. In his first appearance at the circuit in 1955 he won the Junior/Senior double. In a thrilling dice with Rod Coleman in the Junior race, both riders equalled a new lap record of 61.3 seconds in racing described by the local press as "world class". He was back in 1957 and again he took out the double, and as in 1955 he was again on an AJS 7R. Peter Murphy's Cemetery Circuit record remains the most perfect of all. He started in four feature races for four feature race wins.



Circuit Record: 4 wins

(14) Cliff Kingston

Tauranga's Cliff Kingston had a reputation for immaculate machine preparation and presentation but beyond that because he wasn't a regular front-runner in the bigger capacity classes his performances were sometimes overlooked. He had four top-six finishes in his debut appearance in 1966 on a Suzuki in an era when British bikes were still competitive. In 1967 he returned as the NZ 250cc Lightweight champion and in the days opening race he beat Bultaco-mounted Geoff Perry on his T20 250 Suzuki. He went on to a hat-trick of wins as well as a third and a fourth to be the day's most successful rider. He again campaigned the Suzuki the following year for some respectable minor placings before retiring from competition.



Circuit Record: 3 wins, 1 second, 1 third

(3) Hugh Anderson

Ohinewai's Hugh Anderson (on the right) chased Rod Coleman home in a come-back thriller in 1959 before winning his first major circuit victory later the same day. As a returning NZ Isle of Man representative in 1962 Anderson was a class act. His two feature race wins were as effortless as they were stylish. Fans loved the kiwi logo on the helmet, and the distinctive European knee-out style. He was New Zealand's most successful ever road racer and overseas commitments kept him away more than most. Ironically he never got to ride at the Cemetery Circuit as a world champion but did so at Moutua Gardens in 1963 as the current 50cc and 125cc World Champion and Ultra-Lightweight TT winner. He rode the Legend Lap of Honour in 2005.



Circuit Record: 9 wins, 5 seconds, 3 thirds

(7) Dale Wylie

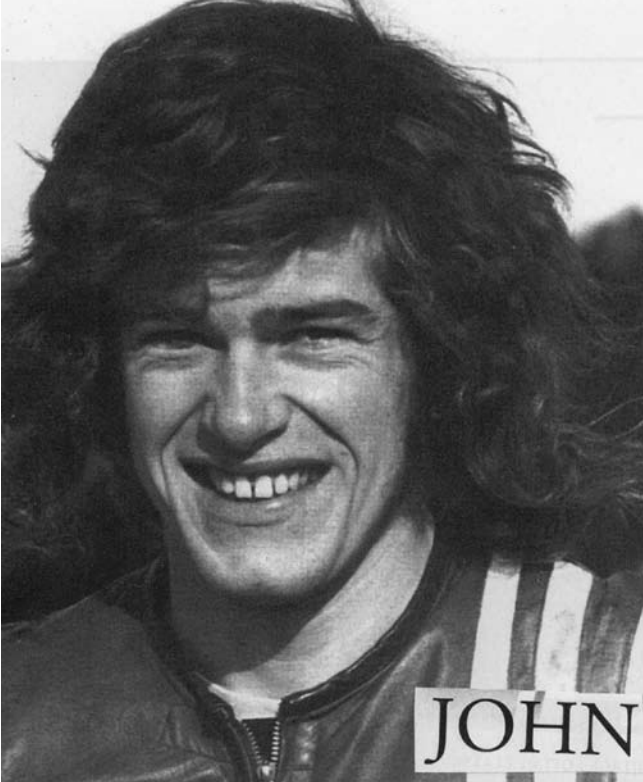
Christchurch rider Dale Wylie was a regular visitor from 1968 but despite some good results few would have expected the emphatic performance he produced in 1973 in the Marlboro Series opener. The signs were there in an eight-lap warm-up race when he became the first rider to lap the one-mile long circuit at a race average speed in excess of 60mph on his water-cooled TR500/2 Suzuki. And in front of the 10,000 plus crowd he did the same again in the two inaugural Marlboro Series heats winning the second 20-lap heat in a time of 18 minutes 54.7 seconds and setting a new lap record in the process. He returned from the United States to win the 1974 "Shell Race of the Year" in his last appearance at the circuit.



Circuit Record: 10 wins, 3 seconds, 4 thirds

(11) John Boote

The tall, blond Christchurch teenager's debut at the Cemetery Circuit in 1972 could not have been more sensational. On the very quick Mike Sinclair tuned TR 500 Suzuki John Boote simply raced away from an opposition that included the pre-race favourite, American Ron Grant, Dale Wylie, Ginger Molloy and Australian Jeff Sayle to win the prestigious "Shell Race of the Year" in the fastest race average time ever recorded at the circuit. He was in even better form on the mean TZ700 Yamaha in 1974 in winning the NZ Open TT and sharing Marlboro Series honours with eventual winner Pat Hennen. John Boote's Cemetery Circuit career was not a long one but it was eye-catchingly brilliant.



Circuit Record: 4 wins, 2 seconds, 3 thirds

(15) John Farnsworth

John Farnsworth's circuit career began in 1957 when he raced in close company with Hugh Anderson for a third and fourth in the Junior and Senior Handicap races. In 1958 he made his Xmas Day journey from home-town Auckland to Wanganui very worthwhile when he rode in four races, one after the other, on his 350cc BSA. He was third in the Junior Handicap race, won by Hugh Anderson on a similar machine, but he won the Senior Handicap, while Anderson finished fourth. In 1960 he was pipped by fellow-Aucklander Forrest Cardon in being the day's most successful rider. He was rewarded for his efforts in being selected to represent NZ at the Isle of Man in 1961

Circuit Record: 2 wins, 2 seconds, 4 thirds

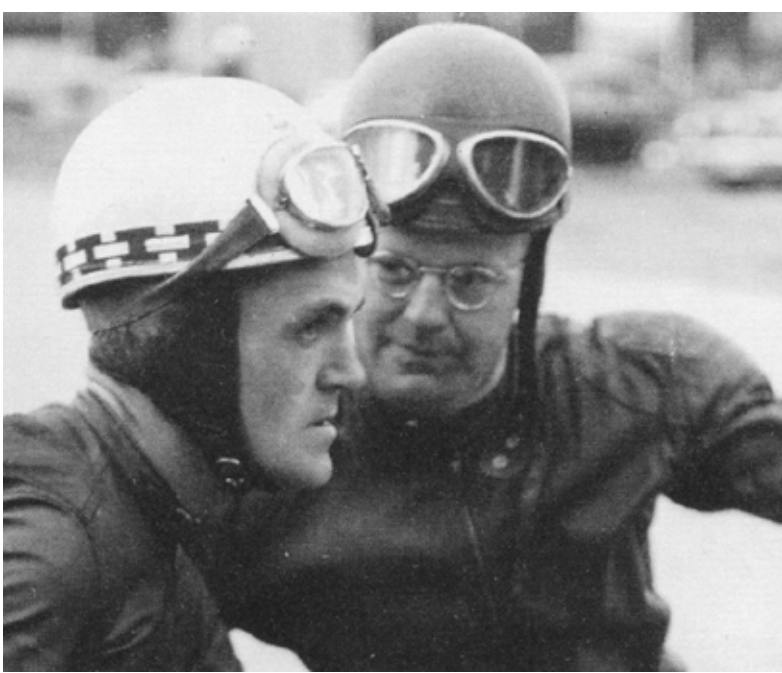
(16) Dene Hollier

The Taihape Motorcycle dealer was the inaugural feature race winner in 1951 beating home Kiwi internationals Len Perry and Ken Mudford in a race of 30 laps. He was hospitalised after a crash in 1952 but returned the following year to finish behind Rod Coleman and Bill Collett in a wet Junior Racing class event. Another podium finish in the 1954 Junior feature signalled the end of Dene Hollers Cemetery Circuit career as he went on to pursue a distinguished racing career on four wheels.

Circuit Record: 1 win, 3 thirds

(4) Rod Coleman

Despite father Percy Coleman being one of the prime movers in creating the Cemetery Circuit a shipping strike in 1951 prevented Rod Coleman (on the right) from competing at the inaugural meeting. However, he made up for that when he comfortably won the Junior/Senior Racing Class double in 1952. He won again in 1954 as the then Isle of Man Junior TT champion. In fact, had the Senior race not been cancelled in 1953 because of quite unusual circumstances he could well have become a "double" winner for three successive years. He won the double again in 1956 and then made a remarkable out-of-retirement comeback in 1959 to beat home the young rising stars Hugh Anderson and Ginger Molloy. He rode the Legend Lap of Honour in 2004.



Circuit Record: 8 wins, 2 seconds, 3 thirds

(8) Keith Turner

When the Cemetery Circuit resumed in 1966 British bikes still ruled and Keith Turner, from Taradale, won on his Manx Norton. He had the ability to mix the old with the new and he showed that in dramatic style in 1970 when he became the crowd favourite in an 8-lap Rothmans Points thriller pitting his Triumph "Bonny" against the Japanese Suzuki's of Wylie and Molloy. With his dark hair streaming behind his bronze helmet, and the hint of a knee out style Turner wrestled his ill-handling Bonny around the bumpy circuit faster than anyone before. And to confirm his world class he held off the most star-studded fields the meeting had ever seen to win two races on his TD2 Yamaha. In 1971, like Molloy before him, he returned as world 500cc number two, for a production bike win on a 750cc Norton and a third behind Molloy and Perry in the feature race on a TR500cc Suzuki. His distinguished circuit career came to an end in the final Marlboro heat in 1973 when he finished in fourth place ahead of the young American Pat Hennen.



Circuit Record: 4 wins, 3 seconds, 6 thirds

(12) Trevor Discombe

Cambridge rider Trevor Discombe was a first up podium-finisher with a strong second place behind John Hempleman in 1966, following that up with the double in 1967 on his AJS 7R as the reigning NZ 350cc champion. With these wins he became the last rider to win both the Junior and Senior feature races on a British bike. He ultimately made the transition from British to Japanese bikes with ease. He was consistently quick, and a second and third in the inaugural Marlboro Series heats in 1973 was the springboard for a runner-up place in the series on his TZ350 Yamaha behind Dale Wylie. He raced extensively on the lucrative South-East Asian circuits and had a fine reputation for immaculately presented machinery.



Circuit Record: 5 wins, 5 seconds, 3 thirds



1951-75 Top 4 - Sidecars

(1) Gordon Skilton

In a sort of changing of the guard, the man who chased Philps home in his last win in 1961 was Gordon Skilton, then as an apprentice mechanic from Napier but later to put Pahiatua on the map as the Cemetery Circuit's most successful sidecar driver. He had his first win in 1959 but his return to the circuit in 1960 was not without high drama. He had a spectacular crash on the overbridge and the sidecar ended up in the Ministry of Works yard below. From then on however Skilton was a consistent top three finisher, and more often than not a winner. Despite a serious accident at Levin in 1971 he still competed in the early Marlboro Series days and in 1974, on the 750cc Norton, he finished second to Australian champion Brian Holmes, on the 750cc Honda. It was time, it could be said for the guard to change again.

Circuit Record: 11 wins, 7 seconds, 2 thirds

(2) Ron Philps

There was no sidecar race at the first meeting in 1951 but there was one in 1952, the first time a sidecar race was included on the programme of a major road race meeting in NZ. Palmerston North's Ron Philps, just twenty years of age, fitted the side of a packing case to the frame of his BSA road-going sidecar and set off, with passenger Murray McHugh, for Wanganui. He was motivated by the need to beat the Hawkes Bay contingent and in the end did so easily. The organisers liked it and in 1953 the sidecar race became the NZ Sidecar championship as well. Philps won that, by 1/5th second, after an exciting dice with Jim Bright. Sidecar racing had arrived. In 1956 there were two races and Ron Philps had a first and a third, a score he repeated in 1961. Sidecar racing has long since become an integral part of the Cemetery Circuit attraction due in no small measure to the pioneering performances of Ron Philps and his daring passengers.

Circuit Record: 8 wins, 2 thirds

(3) Toddy Sollitt

The country's sidecar competitors were concentrated in the central North Island region through till the mid-seventies and Wanganui was always well represented. One of those was Toddy Sollitt. He began his day's racing in 1959 with a fourth place in the solo NZ Lightweight TT and with passenger Peter Scott he finished his days racing with a third place in the one sidecar race on the programme. Perhaps encouraged by his sidecar result, Sollitt became a very consistent top-three finisher for the next decade, the "Skilton Years", and his circuit record reflects that consistency. By Marlboro Series days his Norton Atlas 750 outfit had become uncompetitive and Toddy Sollitt retired from serious racing.

Circuit Record: 2 wins, 5 seconds, 4 thirds

(4) Graeme deMalmanche

Graeme De Malmanche, who was affectionately known as "Shorty", was influenced into sidecar racing by Gordon Skilton. Skilton had a motorcycle business in Pahiatua and De Malmanche was a local motor mechanic. His first win at the circuit in 1966 was ahead of Sollitt and Skilton and he finished second between the same two the following year when Skilton won. Although his Cemetery Circuit career was relatively short at just 5 years he almost always ran with the lead group. He used the same 650cc Triumph outfit throughout and Gary Binyan was the only passenger he ever had.

Circuit Record: 3 wins, 3 seconds