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HOLDSWORTH - CAMPAGNOLO 'SIX - DAY' STAR.



## Circus star - - or slave?

WHAT'S it like to be a British pro in the Continental six day circus? Take it from me, it's not a very happy situation.

For one thing only three current riders apart from me have ridden and finished a Continental Six, out of the British professionals.

Our days are your nights. Have you ever worked on a night shift? If you have you'll understand how, within a couple of nights you lose all sense of time. Instead of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, normal days and nights we have our own little world.

There's the night of the handicap, the day of the extra hour's Madison in the afternoon because a pop band has failed to appear and we must give the public value for their tickets.

You didn't know that, did you, that failing everything else, the riders put in more hours, more leg-breaking work?

Six days seem glamorous—but to a participant they are like six days hard labour in a concentration camp, with no communication with the outside world.

British riders find these problems harder to overcome. We have no small permanent track, then the prevalent languages spoken are German and Dutch. This is because the majority of Sixes are held in Germany—AND THESE ARE MUCH HARDER THAN ANY OTHERS.

You've seen the hour long chase in the Skol Six? In some of the German races we have to ride three of four hour chases, and there is no comparable racing in Britain.

Fully-prepared, a rider has a team with him and his partner: a soigneur who looks after massage and your physical well-being; a runner, often the soigneur's assistant, who fetches, carries, and helps you change after each event, to prevent you catching cold; a mechanic, who keeps your machines in tip-top condition.

Often your life and your livelihood depend on staying upright as much as anything else, and you need no imagination to realise how

much luck and skill is needed to keep vertical after having a puncture on a steeply-banked indoor track!

All of these men are professionals: they get paid by us out of our own pockets, and at the going Continental rate, despite the devalued pound.

In Britain we ride on Wembley, about 165 metres, and occasionally on Calshot, which is the same.

Abroad the tracks vary from the 130 metres of Munster to the Zurich "autobahn" which is 250 metres—picture trying to gap a lap on that! But at Delhi, Canada in May last year the track was less than 120 metres and dangerously narrow, with no proper balustrade or guard rail.

There were 10 pro teams in that Canadian race, only five in the amateur event. Even so, when there was a points sprint in the amateur event one of the riders had to come off to lessen the danger. With only four riders there were countless crashes!

We have to have specially-built bikes to cope with the steep (sometimes 52 deg.) bankings: short cranks are used on a high bottom bracket, they have a very short wheelbase, and tubs have to be shellacked securely (see p. x) onto tied and soldered wheels. These incidentally, are 36-spoke large flange Campagnolo with heavy rims to stand up to the pounding.

Our position is also different, lower, and with the saddle farther back than on the road.

Derny following, just inches behind the back wheel of a pacing motorcycle, is also part of a Six now, and this calls for a skill all its own. Like all the other facets of six-day racing, it calls up reserves of riders' concentration and skill.

But London's Skol Six started a new style, with racing mainly at nights and some afternoons—before this, one of the riders in the team of two had to be on the track 24 hours a day for the whole Six.

For the connoisseurs, it is still the "chase", the Madison, or whatever you wish to call it, that provides the highlight; and in the end it is your strength then that dictates whether or not you can finish well up the classification in six nights of hell.

