

Legends of Motorcycling

Pure Dynamite

IN THE EARLY 1960s, the weekly flat track races at Gardena, California's Ascot Park were practically ruled by a group of daring young men who piloted racing versions of BSA's wickedly fast Gold Star. Known as the BSA Wrecking Crew, they dominated Ascot's tacky-fast and unforgiving half-mile, a place that judged both the quick and the dead with little regard for either. The Crew included Al Gunter, Blackie Bruce, Jack O'Brien, Neil Keen and Sammy Tanner, and all were such masters of Ascot's tricky clay that they made winning on it look easy. Then along came an unassuming 25-year-old amateur scrambles rider named Elliott Schultz and an orange and yellow Royal Enfield tuned by one Sheldon "Shell" Thuet. Together, Schultz, Thuet and the Enfield gave the BSA Wrecking Crew nightmares by becoming the dominant force at Ascot.

Schultz once recalled how he came to land the seat on Shell's bike in 1961, during an interview in 2005: "Jim Goldsmith used to ride Shell's bike, and he didn't want to ride it anymore," Schultz said. "I think that he was scared, but actually I think he was kind of smart. So I asked Shell if he would let me try it, and he said yes."

During his earliest sessions on the Enfield, Schultz served notice that he had come to Ascot to win, backing it into the track's hairy turns as if he had no fear. He later admitted that the opposite was true, that he was very afraid, although not that he'd be hurt or killed, but that he'd look like a clown in front of his competitors. Of course, he managed to do that, too, in one of his early heat races on the Enfield.

"I remember I asked Don Hawley just how to get it off the line at Ascot, and then I came off the line and wheeled and almost crashed," Schultz said. "I was so embarrassed that I just turned it wide open and made it five laps and won a heat race. After that, I thought it was kind of fun."

So fast was Schultz on Thuet's Royal Enfield that he quickly began to break some of the Expert track records while still carrying Amateur status in 1961. Poised to graduate into the Expert ranks, Schultz suffered a broken leg during the season and returned as an Amateur in 1962. He picked up right where he left off, winning the weekly main events and setting track records with alarming regularity at Ascot, which had become known

as the toughest place to win anywhere in the country. When he finally did make Expert, the BSA boys knew they were in for a fight, and Schultz took it to 'em.

"Elliott was faster than the word of God," Keen recounted years later. "He was perfectly harmless anywhere else, but at Ascot on that Enfield he was one fast son of a bitch. And Elliott rode like Kenny



Royal Enfield-mounted Elliott Schultz (27) battles BSA Gold Star-mounted Blackie Bruce at Ascot Park in the early 1960s.

Pressgrove did and Dave Aldana did when he was young. Elliott would haul that thing 30' or 40' deeper into the turn than anybody else. He won from the front. He won from the back. He was almost unbeatable."

Tanner, who was one of Schultz's most bitter BSA-mounted rivals on the track and yet one of his best friends off it, has claimed that Schultz's success had to do with just how well Thuet's bike worked at Ascot.

"That thing was really fast and had a lot of torque," Tanner, who later rode the bike himself, recounted. "You could take it down low and almost come to a complete stop, then turn it, and point it and shoot off the corner. To make the BSAs work, you had to ride really high and keep up your momentum. We just couldn't do that low line on the BSAs."

The Shell Enfield/Schultz combination was magic while it lasted, but it didn't last all that long. After practically rewriting the Ascot record books between 1961 and 1964, Schultz left California and moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he sold motorcycles and started riding trials, later gaining sponsorship from Bultaco.

"Bultaco sponsored me to put on trials schools all over the United States," Schultz said. "It was a lot of fun but not as much fun as racing."

Schultz took one last stab at big-time flat track racing in 1973, qualifying 10th fastest at the Colorado mile national aboard one of Thuet's Yamaha XS-

powered machines—also piloted by such riders as Kenny Roberts, Eddie Lawson and Wayne Rainey during their time racing America's dirt tracks. Although he failed to make the main event, his qualifying time impressed all in attendance. After retiring from racing, Schultz moved to Arizona where he worked as a barber. Always active to his last days, Schultz, 70, died of a heart attack while working in his yard in 2007. By themselves, Thuet, Schultz and the Royal Enfield may not have amounted to much, but put them together at Ascot, and they were pure dynamite.

"I like that analogy," Schultz once said. "Anyone who ever rode one of Shell's Royal Enfields might be able to see the potential that it had, but I think that Shell and I just made a good combination. I'd like to think that without me the Royal Enfields couldn't have gone that fast. And without Shell, I know I couldn't have gone that fast."

—Scott Rousseau



Ascot Half-Mile Records, circa 1964

EXPERT CLASS

- 1-Lap: Elliott Schultz/R-E, 22.44 sec., 10/11/63
- 3-Lap: Jack O'Brien/BSA, 1 min., 10.70 sec., 8/24/62
- 5-Lap: Elliott Schultz/R-E, 1 min., 57.57 sec., 10/11/63
- 15-Lap: Al Gunter/BSA, 5 min., 51.48 sec., 8/24/62
- 20-Lap: Al Gunter/BSA, 7 min., 53.05 sec., 11/10/61

AMATEUR CLASS

- 1-Lap: Elliott Schultz/R-E, 22.95 sec., 8/24/62
- 5-Lap: Guy Louis/R-E, 1 min., 58.51 sec., 10/11/63
- 10-Lap: Guy Louis/R-E, 3 min., 58.18 sec., 10/11/63
- 16-Lap: Elliott Schultz/R-E, 6 min., 29.54 sec., 7/21/62