

BRIGGS, Barry

Born: December 30, 1934, Christchurch, New Zealand.

When Barry Briggs first arrived at Wimbledon as an unknown 17 year old in 1952, he showed little of the polish that would make him one of the greatest riders the world had ever seen. However, he did possess a ruthless streak and a never-say-die attitude to his racing which marked him down as one to watch for the future. The 'Dons' promoter Ronnie Greene persevered with Barry that season despite an early run of low scores and, by the end of the year, he had rewarded his boss' patience with two paid maximums, both coming in matches against Norwich at his home Plough Lane track.



Rather than return home to New Zealand that winter, he decided to take in a season of racing in South Africa and improved tremendously – so much so that he was able to add more than two and a half points per match to his average in 1953 despite his robust riding style incurring the wrath of both opponents and referees. By 1954, and still in his teens, Barry was a World finalist and one of the top riders in the league, forming a superb heat leader trio with Ronnie Moore and Geoff Mardon as the 'Dons' brought the Division One championship to Plough Lane for the first time. He continued to get better and better over the next couple of years, taking third place in the 1955 World Final behind Peter Craven and Ronnie Moore, and lifting his league average to above the magical ten point figure in 1956 as the 'Dons' continued to dominate the league title race.

A World title seemed to be inevitable and the ultimate prize in speedway finally arrived at Wembley in 1957 when he finished with 14 points, forcing a run-off with Swedish ace Ove Fundin. The deciding race was one of the most controversial in the history of the competition as Fundin crashed whilst attempting to hold out Briggo's challenge and Barry became the first New Zealand born rider to win the crown. He retained the World title in 1958 with a maximum, but all was not well in league racing as he requested a transfer from Plough Lane at the end of the season. When he failed to get the move he was looking for Barry shocked the speedway world by staying at home in New Zealand and, for the first time since the war, the league programme began without the presence of the World Champion. For some time it appeared that Briggo would not be at Wembley to defend his crown in 1959 but the speedway authorities contributed to his air fare and he took his place in the line-up as he attempted to be the first man to claim the title three times. In the end he had to be satisfied with third place but stayed on to put in a cameo end of season spell with Wimbledon, racing unbeaten in the two legs of the National Trophy final win over Southampton.

In 1960 Barry got the move he wanted as he joined up with New Cross and then signed for Southampton the following year, with his presence at Bannister Court inspiring the 'Saints' to their first and only National League championship success as they broke Wimbledon's domination of the competition in 1962. The only possible disappointment in his career was that New Zealand were not considered strong enough to field an international side on a regular basis and, for a time, he had to be content with making appearances for a composite Australasia side. The decision of the sport's authorities to accept Commonwealth riders into the Great Britain team to compete with the emerging nations like Sweden and Poland gave Barry the opportunity of regularly testing himself against other world stars at international level.

When Southampton closed at the end of the 1963 season Barry joined Swindon and spent nine years at the Abbey Stadium in what was arguably the best period of his career. At times he was totally dominant in league racing, holding the British Match Race Championship for over two full seasons, often recording averages of over eleven points per match for the 'Robins' and helping them to the league title in 1967. On an individual basis Barry won the World title for a third time in pouring rain in Gothenburg in 1964 and was so popular that a concerted voting effort by speedway fans almost gave him victory in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year competition. He completed a fourth World title success at Gothenburg in 1966, becoming only the second man to win the title on four occasions and had another shock runners-up spot in the end of year BBC awards when he finished between England's World Cup football heroes Bobby Moore and Geoff Hurst. He also had something of a monopoly on the British title, winning the competition on six occasions in the 1960s, and won the first six British League Riders Championships after the formation of the British League in 1965.

A crash in the 1972 World Final, when he suffered severe hand injuries, could have brought the curtain down on a glorious career but he made a brave return to the saddle, signing for his original club, Wimbledon, and putting in a useful spell for two seasons. Once again Barry looked to have retired but, at the age of 41, he was tempted to return for one final season, helping Hull in 1976. The season at The Boulevard was the last fans saw of Barry in league action and he was deservedly awarded the M.B.E. for his services to the sport.

Year	Club	Division	M	R	P	BP	TP	CMA	FM	PM
1952	Wimbledon	NL1	26	86	70	16	86	4.00	-	2
1953	Wimbledon	NL1	22	95	140	17	157	6.61	1	1
1954	Wimbledon	NL1	32	133	280	10	290	8.72	4	-
1955	Wimbledon	NL1	28	138	323	15	338	9.80	5	-
1956	Wimbledon	NL1	30	130	317	12	329	10.12	8	3
1957	Wimbledon	NL	20	105	260	6	266	10.13	5	-
1958	Wimbledon	NL	20	107	288	5	293	10.95	7	2
1959	Wimbledon	NL	3	17	46	1	47	11.06	1	1
1960	New Cross	NL	18	92	217	6	223	9.70	3	1
1961	Southampton	NL	26	115	292	10	302	10.50	8	5
1962	Southampton	NL	28	119	274	13	287	9.65	5	2
1963	Southampton	NL	26	116	247	8	255	8.79	5	2
1964	Swindon	NL	16	67	177	1	178	10.63	8	-
1965	Swindon	BL	34	149	406	1	407	10.93	21	1
1966	Swindon	BL	32	137	378	3	381	11.12	19	-
1967	Swindon	BL	32	131	361	1	362	11.05	17	1
1968	Swindon	BL1	21	92	248	2	250	10.87	10	1
1969	Swindon	BL1	35	164	454	2	456	11.12	18	-
1970	Swindon	BL1	34	147	385	2	387	10.53	13	-
1971	Swindon	BL1	35	153	407	1	408	10.67	12	-
1972	Swindon	BL1	24	109	281	2	283	10.39	7	-
1974	Wimbledon	BL1	30	129	294	6	300	9.30	3	1
1975	Wimbledon	BL	26	111	250	6	256	9.23	2	3
1976	Hull	BL	34	136	293	11	304	8.94	1	1

Individual Honours: World Champion 1957, 1958, 1964, 1966, World finalist 1954 (6th), 1955 (3rd), 1956 (7th), 1959 (3rd), 1960 (6th), 1961 (4th), 1962 (2nd), 1963 (3rd), 1965 (4th), 1967 (5th), 1968 (2nd), 1969 (2nd), 1970 (7th), 1972 (14th), New Zealand Champion 1959, British Champion 1961, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, British Match Race Champion October 1964 to September 1966, British League Riders Champion 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970.

International Honours: World Team Cup winner 1968, 1971, World Team Cup finalist 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1970, New Zealand international – 49 caps, 530.5 points, Great Britain international – 57 caps, 666 points.

Team Honours: National League Division One Championship winner 1954, 1955, 1956, National League Championship winner 1958, 1962, British League Championship winner 1967, National Trophy winner 1953, 1956, 1959, 1961.