

THE CYCLING CAREER  
OF  
KENNETH GORDON ROSS  
  
AN ABRIDGED HISTORY



MARK WALTERS

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## 'AN ABRIDGED HISTORY'

By: Mark Walters (February 2026)<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Australia has an exceptionally successful and proud history in the sport of cycling that extends back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and includes numerous World, Olympic and Commonwealth champions as well as world record holders. Australian cycling experienced two 'boom' periods. The first during the pre-war (WWI) era and the second during the inter-war era. Both attracted spectators and enthusiasts in the tens of thousands to cycling tracks and road courses - in Sydney and Melbourne particularly - and also saw many of Australia's best riders head to Europe and the United States in search of glory, fame, and money. Some of these expatriates would go on to have extremely successful and lucrative careers that included world championships, world records and international six-day race wins. The wheelmen of these eras can be said to have laid the foundations for and established the 'DNA' of Australian cycling that the enormously successful cohort of post-WWII era riders have drawn upon to achieve their own remarkable results and continue Australia's international cycling success. The second boom period evolved during the inter-war era, and it was during this time that Kenneth (Ken) Gordon Ross, a rider from the Parramatta district and later the Gosford district pursued his trade as a professional cyclist on the cycling tracks and road courses of Australia, and for two seasons in Europe (1920-21). Ken started his career as a 16-year-old with the Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club and quickly earned a reputation as a rider of great promise. As a 20-year-old, he packed his bags and headed for Europe to try his luck on the tracks and roads of France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, and Germany where the 'plucky' Australian was very popular and won more than his fair share of races and achieved many commendable results for such a young rider on the Continent, often against vastly more experienced riders. Returning home with valuable and hard-earned experience, he became one of the leading riders whom the various promoters, led by Jack Campbell, regularly contracted to their 'stable' of local wheelmen to take on visiting international riders during the series of summer cycling carnivals whilst during the winter months, Ken took to the road courses around the country. There was barely a cycle racing format that Ken did not tackle on the tracks and road courses making him a genuine all-round wheelman, and his determined and strong riding, coupled with his endurance, was greatly admired and attracted many fans wherever he rode. He was regularly described by cycling correspondents as Australia's most popular, as well as one of the best all-round riders of his era. Much of his success came in long distance races including six-day races (three-time winner and most successful rider to contest the Sydney Six Days' Race) and long-distance road races (winner of, and three-time fastest time in the Goulburn to Sydney Road Race and a third fastest time in the Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race). He was also a great track rider with many wins over international champions to his credit and was crowned the unofficial Australian Motor Pace Champion in 1923. Ken was fortunate to ride with and against many of the world's best track and road wheelmen of his generation and did so with great courage, success, distinction, humility, and sportsmanship. In his autobiography *Pedals, Politics and People*, the legendary Australian cyclist Sir Hubert Opperman referred to Ken as one of the 'greats' of road cycle racing in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Ken was posthumously inducted into the AusCycling Hall of Fame on 3 December 2025 as only the seventh pre-WWII rider to be inducted.

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<sup>1</sup> Version 5. (see Version Record at Page 58).



Ken in the backyard of 8 Rose Street, Auburn proudly displaying the winner's sash for the 1923 Parramatta District League Club 10 Miles Road Championship.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection).

**Front Cover:** A young Ken Ross in 1917 - the first year of his professional cycling career.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

## INTRODUCTION

On 30 April 1996, Prime Minister John Howard stood at the Despatch Box in Australia's House of Representatives and moved that the House express its deep regret at the death of Sir Hubert Opperman - arguably Australia's greatest cyclist. In delivering his condolence speech in support of the motion, Prime Minister Howard acknowledged, 'the passage of time ... can rob you of an understanding of the sporting achievements of people in earlier years, even in such a sports crazy nation as Australia'.<sup>ii</sup> Although made in reference to Sir Hubert, these sentiments are also relevant to one of his great cycling rivals and contemporaries of Australian cycling's inter-war era, Kenneth (Ken) Gordon Ross.

Cycling was one of, if not Australia's most popular sport in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Ken rode professionally - from 1917 to 1937. His achievements as a professional cyclist may not emulate those of Sir Hubert – or some of the other legends of Australian cycling - however, he was described by Sir Hubert in his 1977 autobiography as one of the 'greats' of Australian road cycle racing. Sir Hubert's sentiment was justified and subsequently validated when nearly fifty years later, Ken was posthumously inducted into the AusCycling Hall of Fame (in December 2025) alongside Sir Hubert and Ken's idol, the 1920 world sprint champion, Bob Spears. Ken's induction affirms his status as among the best of the best of Australia's long and illustrious list of world class cyclists.

Having won his first cycle race, a novice race in February 1917 aged 16 years, Ken immediately joined the Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club. He kept a small pocket notebook in which he recorded the start of what would be a celebrated career. In pencil, Ken made a simple notation, 'started racing 3 March 1917. K.G.R.'. Several years later, and perhaps with visions of conquering the cycling world, the twenty-year-old Ken boarded the steam ship *R.M.S. Omar* in Sydney on 2 April 1921 accompanied by several other local wheelmen. Their destination was the Continent and their ambitions the fame and fortunes its world class cycling events offered. Ken's European campaign saw him ride with great success for a year and a half as he competed in a variety of track cycling events in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and Denmark as well as several road races in France. He returned to Australia in late December 1922 and using the experience gained in Europe, proceeded to establish himself as one of Australia's best all-round wheelmen of his generation.

The names of the wheelmen Ken rode with and against in Europe and Australia is a who's who of the world's greatest cyclists of the pre-war and inter-war eras.<sup>2</sup> There were few racing formats he did not contest during his career in the track and road disciplines thereby establishing him as not only as one of the genuine all-round riders, but one of the greatest of his generation when his track and road records are examined.<sup>3</sup> He competed in handicap and scratch events on the track including wheel and sprint races, pursuit races, alternance and omnium matches, tandem races, motor-paced races and long distance events - up to and including 100 kilometre and six-day races (the 'sixes' or 'sixers' as they were known) - whilst on the road he took on the shorter distances as well as the longer one-day events. He was acknowledged by some experts as a better road rider however, track promoters loved his determined style of riding and his popularity with the public. Consequently, he was consistently contracted as a rider for the summer carnivals on the tracks of Sydney and Melbourne to compete against Australia's best and the visiting internationals and did so with great success across many track formats. Some sports correspondents and experts were of the view that greater success may have been inhibited by his versatility. His decision to purchase an orchard in 1925 hindered his ability to train as effectively as he needed to and was a major factor impeding his return to Europe, or competing in the United States, and achieving greater success than he otherwise attained.

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<sup>2</sup> Pre-war is the period before World War I and inter-war is the period between World War I and World War II. Post-war is a reference to the period following World War II.

<sup>3</sup> Ken did not compete in a staged road race.

Ken was popular with the many cycling enthusiasts around the country, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria and was often in the cycling headlines but understandably was not as revered as the likes of Hubert Opperman, Alf Goulet, Reggie McNamara, Alf Grenda and others who were feted here and internationally for their cycling exploits. He was however, highly regarded and respected by his cycling colleagues, promoters, fans, and the cycling correspondents who regularly recorded his achievements in the newspapers as he accumulated an impressive Palmarès. To anyone who knew Ken, it came as no surprise that he was considered by many as Australia's most popular cyclist of his generation as, with seeming effortlessness, he combined his stamina, endurance and determination on the tracks and roads with his sportsmanship, integrity, and humble character.

Although able to more than hold his own as a sprinter on the track with many world class 'scalps' to his credit, it was Ken's endurance coupled with his strategic and tactical abilities that made him arguably most suited to longer distance racing and where his success was perhaps more recognised. These included the longer distance track events such as 100 kilometre and six-day races as well as road events, particularly over the longer distances. An examination of Ken's career reveals achievements in two specific racing events that stand him apart from his contemporaries and many riders who came later: his Goulburn to Sydney Road Race record and his record in six-day races, particularly the Sydney event. Both types of racing are gruelling and test every element of an elite sportsman and speak to Ken's physical and mental abilities as a cyclist and particularly his character.

One of the few publications to provide a detailed history of Australian cycling during the pre-war and inter-war eras was also one of, if not the earliest - H. ("Curly") Grivell's iconic book *Australian Cycling in the Golden Days* (1954).<sup>4</sup> Grivell's reference to Ken may not provide a comprehensive description of his career but it succinctly captures some of his major achievements and all-round talent that certainly justify his inclusion in that digest alongside the many other renowned wheelmen mentioned:

*Ken Ross proved his all-round ability by masterly displays on both road and track. He won the Goulburn to Sydney road race from scratch in 1928 and secured time honors in 1920 and 1926. On the track he was just as successful. His winning of two six-day races teamed with George Dempsey in 1925 and Jack Fitzgerald in 1927 were displays seldom equalled. (p. 114.)<sup>iii</sup>*

Ken's physical prowess coupled with his steely determination propelled him to national and international success on the roads and cycling tracks of Australia and Europe. Those same abilities and attributes have passed onto some of Ken's progenies who have carried his sporting genes onto various sporting arenas in Australia and around the world with great success. Ken's grandson Mark Walters won New South Wales and Australian championships in surf lifesaving as a beach sprinter as well as a 3rd placing at the inaugural World Interclub Life Saving Championships in Bali in 1981. He also played 1st grade rugby league for the Erina Rugby League Club in the Central Coast (NSW) competition and represented the Central Coast on several occasions. His daughter and Ken's great granddaughter Christine Walters represented Australia in women's football. In 2008 she made four appearances with the Matilda's at the AFF Women's Championship in Vietnam (won by the Matilda's) as well as four appearances for the Young Matilda's at the AFC U-19 Women's Championship (Qualifiers) in Malaysia. She was also a member of the Canberra United W-League team that was runner-up in the inaugural FFA W-League Championship in 2008/09 and the squad that won the premiership in

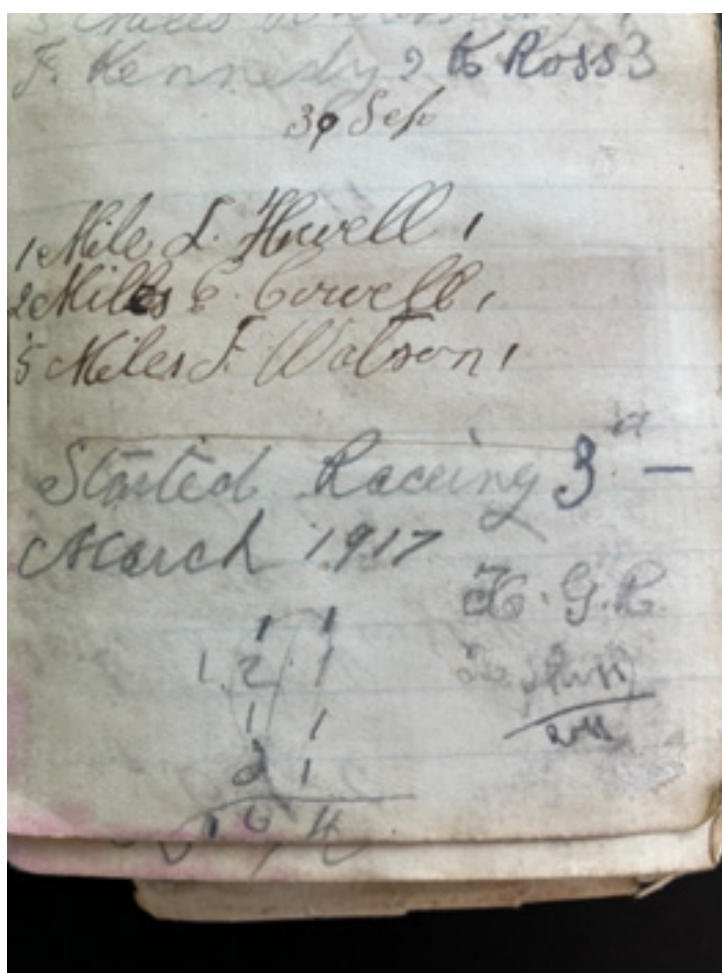
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<sup>4</sup> As iconic as this book is, it primarily focuses on track racing and sprinting with limited references to road racing. It therefore does not provide a complete picture of Australian cycling in the period covered. It provides descriptions - of varying detail - of the careers of the Australian riders and the international riders Grivell considered to be the best at that time who competed during the Australian track seasons up to the post-war era. It also has an emphasis on South Australian cycling. It also omits Ken's first Sydney Six Day's win in 1922 partnered with Les ("Stumpy") Hammond. Grivell does acknowledge however, he did not have sufficient detail on some riders. It is presumed this accounts for the limited detail on Ken's career.



2011/12. Ken's great granddaughter Darcie Berry won consecutive Australian surfboard riding championships (surf lifesaving) in 2017 and 2018. Ken's great grandson Fletcher Berry played representative junior rugby league for the Central Coast and was selected in the New South Wales Schoolboys Development squad in 2012. He was also a member of the Sydney Roosters National Rugby League (NRL) Club's Harold Matthews and Jersey Flegg sides between 2018-2020. Ken's great great grandson's Toby and Ryan Couchman (twins) have embarked on promising rugby league careers with NRL club, the St George Illawarra Dragons, both debuting in the top side in 2023. In 2021, Ryan was selected in the Australian Schoolboys Rugby League Merit side and in 2022, Toby was selected in the New South Wales Under 19 State of Origin side. Both are predicted to have stellar NRL careers whilst their younger brother Fletcher is showing the same promise and is also a potential NRL star of the future as he makes his way through the junior rugby league pathways to the NRL.

This *Abridged History* complements the more comprehensive book on Ken's life and career and seeks to provide an informed and more concise record of Ken's cycling career and achievements so that his legacy and contributions to the golden years of Australian cycling - when it was one of the most popular sports in the country - are not lost to the passage of time. Further, it is hoped that it will also serve as a humble reference to those golden years and its fabulous wheelmen that have unfortunately not been as thoroughly documented as they should and deserve to be.



Ken's handwritten notation in pencil in his personal pocket notebook recording the start of his professional cycling career.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This *Abridged History* draws on the research for a 'work in progress' book on Ken's life and cycling career,<sup>5</sup> and the submission nominating Ken for induction into the AusCycling Hall of Fame. The information relied upon to compile the story of Ken's career was derived from several primary sources: The Ken Ross Collection (see below), the National Library of Australia's Trove Database (Newspapers and Gazettes) and various books and on-line articles that covered the relevant period of cycling in Australia (see pp. 57-58).

The Ken Ross Collection comprises the memorabilia collected by Ken and his mother over his outstanding cycling career and passed on to the Couchman and Walters families after his passing.<sup>6</sup> It primarily comprises: the various medallions and sashes won by Ken, one of his riding jersey's, photographs, newspaper and magazines cuttings (from Australia and Europe – France, Germany, Italy and Denmark), souvenir race programmes, contracts & agreements, sponsorship posters, caricatures, and correspondence to his mother, brothers and other people during his time in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The Ken Ross Collection is currently in two Parts: **The Ken Ross Cycling Collection - National Museum of Australia (NMA)** - in 2009, the Couchman and Walters families donated Ken's medals, sashes and a riding jersey to the NMA. The NMA established the Ken Ross Cycling Collection which forms an important component of the Museum's *Freewheeling: Cycling in Australia* exhibition that featured Ken and toured Australia in 2014 and 2015 and was on display at the NMA in 2017. **The Ken Ross Private Collection** - the remainder of the collection is currently privately held by me and was loaned to the Museum in 2018 with copies of various items from the collection incorporated into the on-line biographic (Collection Highlight) of Ken. At the time of writing, I am engaging with the National Library of Australia in the hope it will accept the private collection as a Special Collection where it can be appropriately archived and accessible.

The popularity of cycling in the pre-war and inter-war eras compelled extensive media coverage and the city, metropolitan, regional and sports newspapers of the day readily obliged. The public's desire for particulars about cycling and the exploits of their cycling heroes saw specialist sections devoted to cycling and cycling correspondents such as Bede Carroll, "Dark Horse", "Wheeler", "Roadster", and others writing extensively on all aspects of cycling in Australia and abroad. These correspondents, some of whom like Carroll were also League or Union officials, followed the wheel sport closely and were very knowledgeable about the cycle 'game' and considered experts. The authoritative observations and opinions they expressed in their extensive writings provide a unique window into the world of competitive cycling during these eras. In researching Ken's career, an estimated 1,500 newspaper articles referencing Ken were identified through Trove and have been relied upon extensively to reconstruct and record Ken's career in greater detail. Other articles provided important background information regarding cycling in Australia and abroad at that time.

There are several references to Ken, including articles dedicated to his cycling career, that can be sourced on-line as well as references to him in several cycling related books. These various publications were sourced during the author's research. Unfortunately, various errors and anomalies, mostly minor, were identified in a number of these publications. This *Abridged History* not only significantly amplifies what has already been written about Ken's career but provides a more accurate account of certain aspects of his life and career thereby correcting these errors and anomalies.

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<sup>5</sup> "Rossie" *The Ironman of Wheelman – The Life and Cycling Career of Ken Ross*.

<sup>6</sup> Via his two daughters, the late Joan Couchman (nee Ross) and Helen Walters (nee Ross).

<sup>7</sup> There was a large volume of correspondence to and from Ken during his career however, not all of the correspondence was saved and therefore the collection is unfortunately incomplete regarding correspondence.

I would like to acknowledge Mr. Daniel Oakman, former curator at the NMA and author of *Oppy – The Life of Sir Hubert Opperman* (2018). Daniel is a cycling enthusiast and historian who was instrumental in creating the Ken Ross Cycling Collection and its inclusion in the museum's exhibition *Freewheeling: Cycling in Australia*. His research for the Opperman biography shines a light on Australian cycling during the inter-war era and influenced various aspects of the body of work undertaken by the author. As a result of researching Opperman's cycling career, Daniel developed a genuine admiration for Ken as one of the great pioneers of Australian cycling. Ms. Judith Hickson of the NMA was also instrumental in compiling the Ken Ross Cycling Collection and writing several articles featuring Ken. The Couchman and Walters families are extremely appreciative of their interest in Ken's career and their efforts in establishing the Ken Ross Cycling Collection.

I would also like to acknowledge cycling enthusiasts and Goulburn to Sydney Road Race historians Mr. Jack Hephner and Mr. John Drummond who have also contributed to the history of Australian cycling through their publication *90 Years of a Cycling Classic - Goulburn to Sydney 1902-1992: A Narrative of a Sporting Classic*. Their extensively researched publication is a valuable resource for anyone interested in Australia's cycling history and was a valuable source of information for this project.

It would be terribly remiss not to acknowledge the immeasurable value the National Library of Australia's TROVE on-line database delivers as a national capability in preserving and enabling the recording of our national history and heritage. The integration of the Australian Newspaper Beta Service (supporting the Australian Newspaper Digitisation Project) into Trove in 2009 enabled access to thousands of relevant newspapers of the era. It would not have been possible to reconstruct Ken's career as compressively as I have been fortunate enough to do without this brilliant national asset. I am indebted to the people involved in the development of Trove and the associated projects and the people who maintain them.

The Walters and Couchman families wish to extend their sincere gratitude to AusCycling, particularly Mr. Matthew Keenan (Chair of the AusCycling History and Heritage Committee) and the Committee for endorsing Ken's nomination for the Hall of Fame and AusCycling CEO Marne Fechner and her team for the very warm reception afforded to Ken's family at the 2025 AusCycling Awards night when Ken was inducted.

The author is Ken's grandson.

Mark Walters  
South Brisbane  
February 2026

#### **Attachments:**

There are several attachments to this *Abridged History* to complete the story of Ken's cycling career.

Attachment 1: Palmarès.

Attachment 2: A summary of some of the great international and Australian wheelmen Ken rode with and against during his career.

Attachment 3: A collection of extracts from Australian and European newspapers and magazines featuring Ken's exploits.



## KENNETH GORDON ROSS

Kenneth (Ken) Gordon Ross was born on 11 August 1900 at Paterson, in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, the youngest of Lachlan and Rosina Ross' six children. He was preceded by four brothers: Donald, Alexander (Sandy), John (Jock) and Allan and a sister, Alexandress. When Ken was still quite young, the family moved a little further north to the hamlet of Weismantels in the centre of, and about equidistant from, Gloucester, Stroud and Dungog where they lived for about seven years.

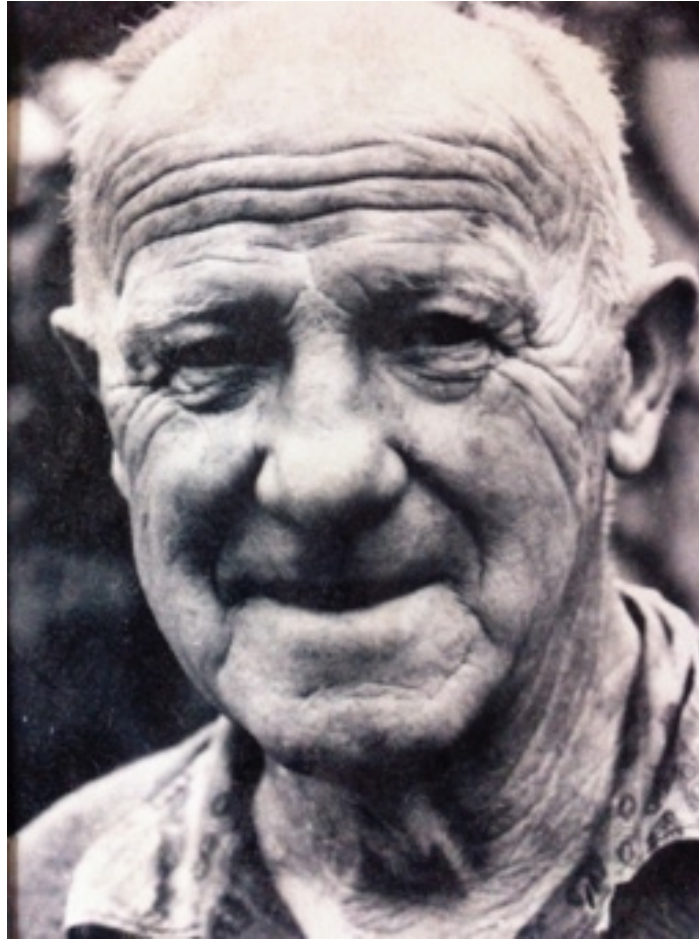
In late 1913 or early 1914, the family purchased an orchard at Castle Hill in the Parramatta district of Sydney however in 1914, at the age of 13, Ken lost his father to cancer. He subsequently spent long hours helping his mother and brothers Sandy and Jock tend the orchard but found time to observe some of the local lads racing bicycles and as a 16-year-old was persuaded to ride in a novice race which he duly won. This was enough to convince him to take the sport seriously and he joined the Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club.

Having quickly established himself as a rider of great promise, Ken was contracted to race in the 1919/20 track season in Sydney and had his first taste of international competition against several of the world's top wheelmen who were visiting to race in the carnival series. Gaining further experience during the following track season, and with some good results to his credit, Ken was persuaded to travel to Europe to race. He would be gone for a little over eighteen months but would make a name for himself riding against some of the giants of European and world cycling. Whilst abroad, Rosina would sell the orchard and move to a modest suburban cottage at 8 Rose Street, Auburn.

After an absence of almost three years – two in Europe and Melbourne for a year in 1923 – Ken returned home for the 1923/24 Sydney track season but was largely absent from the 1924 road race season. On 20 September 1924 he married Elsie Mildred McKenzie at Auburn and in early 1925, they moved to the property "Ferndale" which they had acquired at Green Point near Gosford on the New South Wales Central Coast. Ken and Elsie worked hard to establish an orchard and home for their daughters Joan (born in 1928) and Helen (born in 1942) whose early years were spent at "Ferndale".

At this point in his burgeoning career, Ken could have chosen to continue as a full-time professional cyclist or retire to pursue a quieter life as an orchardist on the beautiful "Ferndale" property. He chose to balance both and ride a middle path that arguably inhibited his potential to achieve even greater success but at the same time, allowed him to continue the sport he loved and some of his most memorable achievements were during this period. Ken continued to ride in club and League events, promoted track carnivals and road races in New South Wales and Victoria for the next thirteen years however would often put aside racing for varying durations to concentrate on orchard and family commitments and so for the remainder of his career he was in and out of 'retirement'. The curtain was effectively brought down on his career when he suffered a serious injury in October 1934 when he was hit by a car at Gundagai whilst riding to Melbourne for the Centenary 1000.

In 1948, Ken and Elsie moved with Joan and Helen from "Ferndale" to a beach-front property at nearby Avoca Beach. Ken and Elsie became popular and well-respected residents who were prominent contributors to the fledgling seaside community through their service to the village's various community organisations. Ken was Vice-President of the Avoca Beach Surf Lifesaving Club and became the Club's fourth Life Member. He was also involved in the local Progress Association and was for several years, Captain of the Avoca Beach Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. Elsie was the first Life Member of the Avoca Beach Branch of the Country Women's Association (CWA) and was also involved in the local Lantern Club. The park and children's playground located behind the Avoca Beach Surf Club is named Ross Park in recognition of their financial support for establishing the playground as well as their valuable contributions to the Avoca Beach community.



Ken in the early 1970's.

On 1 March 1974, Ken suffered a heart attack at their beachfront home and passed away aged 73 years. His wonderful wife of almost 50 years, Elsie passed away on 6 April 1993 aged 89 years.

### **AUSTRALIAN CYCLING'S GOLDEN YEARS: THE PRE-WAR AND INTER-WAR ERAS AND THE 'BOOM' YEARS**

Australia has an exceptionally successful and proud history in the world of cycling that extends back to the 1880's. Over this time, Australia has more than held its own against the world's best. It has 'punched well above its weight' with many World and Olympic champions wearing Australia's famous green and gold sporting colours or carrying the national flag on top of the dais. Australia's pre-war and inter-war cyclists particularly, were extremely successful, and a worthy case can be made that the 'DNA' of modern cycling in Australia is derived from the gritty and fearless achievements of these cyclists both in Australia, and on the international stage, often in conditions that were vastly different to those experienced by post-war cyclists. These two eras are often referred to as the golden years of Australian cycling when it was one of the most popular sports in the country. Whilst many of the wheelmen of both eras were professionals and made a comfortable living from the sport, like their amateur brethren, they all strove for individual honours. Their achievements, complemented by their sportsmanship and character, arguably contributed significantly to the DNA through which Australian cycling and its post-war champions have achieved so much success.

Australia experienced two 'boom' periods of cycling, the first during the pre-war era and the second during the inter-war era, when crowds in the tens of thousands would flock to the Sydney Cricket or Sports Grounds, or the Exhibition Oval or Motordrome in Melbourne to watch their cycling heroes. Huge crowds would also line the roads and finish lines of the great long-distance road races such as Australia's road classics, the Warrnambool to Melbourne and the Goulburn to Sydney races. Like the dominant sports of cricket, Australian football and rugby league, cycling during these eras was hugely popular and the hectic training and racing schedules of the first-class riders, coupled with the various racing formats, also made them arguably the fittest athletes in the country. Many of the cyclists were household names and Ken was one of the promoted feature riders who 'put bums on seats'. The activities of Australia's growing number of cycling clubs and the exploits of Australia's wheelmen were also extensively represented in the city, metropolitan, sporting, and regional newspapers of the day.

Without diminishing in any way, the achievements of the modern-day riders, the conditions pre-war and inter-war riders experienced were far more austere and challenging than the well catered for modern day riders may have ever thought imaginable at the elite level. These wheelmen did not enjoy the vastly improved road and track conditions of today or the availability of faster and more reliable travel services. Similarly, they did not have the elaborate support modern day riders experience such as the various forms of administrative, training, technical, medical, nutritional, and financial assistance. As an example, travelling to Europe took five to six weeks via steam ship.

There were essentially three 'levels' of competitive cycling for Australian cyclists during the pre-war and inter-war eras. There were of course, the Olympic Games and World Championships.<sup>8</sup> The next level also comprised an international element but involved competing in the premier events – primarily professional – held principally in Europe and the United States which attracted the best riders from around the world. The third level was local Australian cycling competition headed by the seasonal track carnivals – at times featuring 'imported' riders to enhance the calibre and quality of competition – as well as the classic road races, League and Union promoted events<sup>9</sup> and club competition. Whilst promoters succeeded in luring many world class riders to Australia, with handsome financial remuneration for the annual track seasons, very few Continental riders travelled to compete in Australia's major road races. Although more than a handful of Australian cyclists headed abroad to Europe and the United States to race, it was this third level that catered for most of Australia's wheelmen of the pre-war and inter-war eras, professional and amateur alike.

When top tier professional competition of these eras is assessed, the variety and scope of track events provided the greatest opportunities for wheelmen at the elite level. The World Track Championships, coupled with the diverse range of track formats, particularly the hugely popular and lucrative six-day racing in Europe and the United States provided plenty of opportunity for the world's top track wheelmen. Road racing was a slightly different proposition. Extremely popular in Europe, and particularly France where it was considered the last word in the game, races such as the *Grand Tours*, the *Monuments*, and many other road races with long and proud histories such as the Paris-Tours, Bordeaux-Paris and Brussels-Paris road races were considered the highest level of competition for road wheelmen. Most of the road racing in the United States at this time was amateur and even when a world road championship for professional riders was eventually introduced in 1927, Europe and its road races remained the summit for the best road riders. Australia had its two classic road races – The Dunlop Warrnambool to Melbourne and the Dunlop Goulburn to Sydney.

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<sup>8</sup> The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) held separate World Championships for the track and road disciplines with amateurs and professionals also competing in separate championships: until 1993 for track and 1995 for road championships.

<sup>9</sup> Professional wheelmen were affiliated with League of Wheelmen relevant to their state i.e. The League of New South Wales Wheelmen whilst amateur wheelmen were affiliated with a Cycling Union i.e. The New South Wales Cycling Union.

The 1900's through the 1930's saw many of Australia's best wheelmen chase fame and fortune on the famous velodromes of Europe and particularly the United States. Some returned home whilst some stayed in the United States where they married and became United States citizens. Sprint racing and six-day racing were hugely popular, particularly in the United States where big money was available, and it is here that Australia's wheelmen stood tall. Names such as Ernie Pye, Gordon Walker, Paddy Hehir, Alf Gouillet, Reggie McNamara, Bob Spears, Jackie Clark, Alf Grenda, Cecil Walker, Frank Corry, Harris Horder, Alex McBeath and George Dempsey all achieved great success, fame, and for most, great wealth. Most of these riders, and others such as Ken, Jack Fitzgerald, Hubert Opperman and Gerry Halpin also rode on the Continental tracks where they also achieved great success and very good financial remuneration.

Road racing was essentially centred in Europe, particularly France, however only a handful of Australians had taken on European road racing during the pre-war era. They did so with great courage but modest success. In 1914, Iddo ("Snowy") Munro, Don Kirkham, Charles Piercey, George Bell, Charlie Snell and Fred Keefe were the first Australians to compete in Continental road racing with Kirkham and Munro the first to take on the Tour de France finishing a highly credible 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> respectively in the general classification.

Ken was one of the earlier Australian riders to attempt to 'crack' into European road racing and he was joined by Ben Ogle and Jim O'Farrell as the first Australians after the war to try their luck on the European road 'circuit' in 1922. An Australasian quartet of Hubert Opperman, Percy Osborn, Ernie Bainbridge and Harry Watson competed in the 1928 Tour de France and another Australian team of Opperman, Richard ("Fatty") Lamb, Frank Thomas and Ossie Nicholson competed in the 1931 Tour de France. The experience of the 1928 Tour de France Team highlighted how difficult it was to mount a successful European road campaign.<sup>10</sup> For Australian road riders of these eras, the challenges of sustaining any form of European road campaign meant Australian road races and primarily the Warrnambool to Melbourne and the Goulburn to Sydney classics were in real practical terms, the highest level the majority of Australian road riders would tackle. Sir Hubert Opperman however would prove one of the exceptions and he would achieve hero-like status in France.

The cycling exploits of Sir Hubert are well documented elsewhere and his Palmarès includes many successes in Europe on both the track and road to complement his many achievements on home soil. In Europe, he had two Tour de Frances starts as well as tackling other long distance road races including a win in the 1931 Paris-Brest-Paris race. He also broke numerous long distance road records in Great Britain including the famous Land's End – John o'Groats course. In 1928, he won the Bol d'Or 24-hour Classic at the Buffalo Velodrome in Paris.

This brief perspective of Australian and world cycling in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides crucial context to fully appreciate the scope of Ken's twenty-year career and his many achievements.

## **THE "IRON MAN"**

Legendary Australian/American wheelman and US Bicycling Hall of Fame inductee Reggie McNamara achieved most of his success and fame riding in the US, particularly the popular and lucrative six-day races in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was 'styled' by American and Continental newspapers as the "Iron Man of Cycling" and was often referred to as "Iron Mac".<sup>iv</sup> Back in Australia, and a few years after, Ken was also referred to as an "Iron Man" for his exploits on the tracks and roads of

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<sup>10</sup> Melbourne's *Sporting Globe* organised a campaign of public subscription to raise the estimated £1,250.00 needed to send the team to Europe.

Australia. It is not advocated in referencing this that Ken's achievements were equal to those of McNamara, simply that Ken earned this honorific on his own merits for his stamina, endurance, and steely determination on the bicycle. Early in his career, Ken was laying the groundwork that would see him later referred to in this way by cycling correspondents and cycling historians. In a three-week period in early 1922, he competed in the Brussels Six Days' Race, returned to Paris for a 100 Kilometre Teams' Race and then on to Germany for the Berlin Six Days' Race. The stamina and endurance that underpinned Ken's "Iron Man" description was also evident in the role he often adopted in six-day races where he would ride continuously for long stretches to allow his partner time to rest. The following commentary of his win in the 1925/26 Sydney Six Days' Race appeared in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and personifies his vital role in these events:

*Ross with his international experience in Paris, Berlin and other centres proved an ideal partner, and though Dempsey won nearly all the sprints, there were many occasions when Ross did gruelling work on the track. At times he was astride for six hours in a stretch in order that Dempsey might enjoy a rest to be fit for the sprints. Ross never tired, in fact, Dempsey said his partner was "a glutton for work" and without his advice he could not have succeeded.<sup>v</sup>*

The *Daily Telegraph* later referred to Ken as the "Iron Man" after he defeated Richard ("Fatty") Lamb in the 1928 Dunlop Goulburn to Sydney Road Race:

*He [Lamb] had with him on the scratch mark, Ken Ross, the "Iron Man," always a determined rider and a real power in six day events ...<sup>vi</sup>*

The *Daily Telegraph*<sup>vii</sup> again referred to Ken in this way after his defeat of Oscar Rutt at the Canterbury Velodrome in January 1929:



Cycling enthusiasts and Goulburn to Sydney race historians Jack Hephner and John Drummond conferred Ken with the "Iron Man Award" for the road classic in their book *Goulburn to Sydney 1902-1992: 90 Years of a Cycling Classic* (1994).<sup>viii</sup> This 'honour' was shared with Joe Cruise who competed in the "Goulburn" nine times.

## THE CLUB MAN

The majority, if not all, elite riders learn their craft and hone their skills at the club level and Ken was no different. Cycling clubs are the lifeblood of the sport and Ken was a genuine and committed 'club man' who thrived on club competition. However, as his career evolved, Ken was unable to compete at the club level as often as he may have liked as his popularity and commitments took him abroad and around New South Wales and Victoria to compete in top tier competition. He was popular with his club mates and club followers and brought great experience and talent to the clubs he rode with.

Ken joined the Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club in 1917 as a 16-year-old and quickly established himself as a rider of great promise. The Central Cumberland Club was affiliated with the League of NSW Wheelmen and therefore was a professional club. Ken justified early predictions as he rose to prominence placing second in the Club's Three Miles Road Championship that year. As well as winning many club track and road races, including numerous fastest times in club road races, Ken was the Club's Twenty Miles Road Champion in 1918 and 1919 and the Club Point Score Champion in 1919.

In 1920, Ken moved to the newly established Parramatta District League Club which was also affiliated with the League of NSW Wheelmen and won the Club's Road Championship in 1923 and 1924. After returning from Europe in December 1922, Ken spent most of 1923 in Melbourne and whilst there rode with the famous Coburg Cycle Club which was affiliated with the League of Victorian Wheelman.

After moving to the Gosford district in early 1925, Ken joined the newly formed Woy Woy Cycle Club (formed in July 1923) where he competed that year taking the Club Championship. The Gosford District Cycle Club was formed in August 1925 and Ken transferred from the Woy Woy Club in early 1926 winning the inaugural Rowe Cup<sup>11</sup> as Club Champion in the Club's first full year.<sup>12</sup> He remained an active member of the Gosford Club for the remainder of his career and continued his involvement in retirement, coaching and mentoring younger riders of the Gosford and Ourimbah Clubs.

## THE EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN: 1921-1922

The ability of Australia's cycling Leagues and Unions to rebuild the popularity and strength of cycling in post WWI Australia was inhibited somewhat by the departure of some of Australia's top riders to try their luck against the world's best in Europe and the United States. Although cycling was very popular in Australia, any comparison with Europe, - particularly France where they were fanatical about cycling - and the United States highlights how much bigger and more lucrative the sport was for the professional riders overseas. This proved very attractive for many of Australia's top wheelmen.

At the end of the 1920/21 Sydney track season, Ken had been persuaded to 'throw his lot in' and try his luck on the velodromes and road courses of Europe. Although still only 20 years of age, but with a few years of increasingly successful track and road racing under his belt, Ken had gained valuable experience and a growing reputation as one of Australia's best road cyclists and arguably the best all-round rider in the country.

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<sup>11</sup> The Rowe Cup was a point score championship over varying road race distances held during the season.

<sup>12</sup> Although Ken left the Woy Woy club to join the Gosford Club in 1926, newspapers and other publications consistently recorded him as being from Woy Woy till the end of his career.



There were two 'teams' of riders departing Australia's shores in mid autumn 1921. The first was headed for the United States in late March and the second, Ken's team, to Europe in early April. The departure of the two groups of riders meant a total of sixteen would be racing in either Europe or the United States and resulted in a large hole in the field of first-class riders left in Australia. The loss of so many quality riders was described as a great blow to the prestige of cycling competition in Australia.<sup>ix</sup>

Writing in the *Referee*, Bede Carroll offered his views as to Ken's chances in Europe:

*It has already been chronicled in this column that Gerald Halpin, H. H. Horder and C. L. Papworth intend to race in France this season. Ken Ross has also decided to try his luck and will leave in company with Halpin next month. Ross is not 21 yet, and has a great future ahead of him, when he develops a better sprint. He is remarkably strong and game. Even if he misses on the track, there are many rich races on the road in which to try his luck. Ross is the best road rider in Australia today, and the long-distance French races should suit him down to the ground. One of the more popular fellows in the game, I wish him the best of luck'.<sup>x</sup>*

On 2 April 1921, Ken boarded the *R.M.S. Omar* in Sydney accompanied by Harris Horder, Gerald Halpin and Cecil Hanneman who would also race in Europe although principally in track events.



Very dapper voyagers. Ken and Gerald Halpin pose as they board the *R.M.S. Omar*.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

The departure of this young but enthusiastic quartet of riders was covered by the *Herald* (Melbourne):

*With the exception of Ross, all are mainly track exponents. Ross is the best all round man of the party and he is expected to win success on both road and track ... For his never-say-die style of riding, Ross is one of the most feared riders in the State. He is a pursuit rider of the highest calibre and is never so determined as when he has the field in front of him ... An idea of this rider's ability may be gathered from the fact that he concedes starts to riders like Clarke and Ohrt.<sup>xi</sup>*

In mid-May 1920, Ken arrived in Paris where he would base himself for his European campaign over the next eighteen months during which he criss-crossed the Continent competing in places such as Paris, Lorient, Bordeaux, Limoges, Saumur, Copenhagen, Turin, Milan, Nice, Marseilles, Brussels and Berlin. He was fortunate to race with and against many of the greats of Continental racing of the pre-war and inter-war eras, names such as Bobby Walthour Snr., Walter Rutt, Wille Spencer, Ernie Ohrt, Oscar Egg, Leon Georget, Maurice Brocco, Adolf Huschke, Emile Aerts, Marcel Berthets, Francesco Verri, Charles Deruyter, Marcel Dupuy, Leon Parisot, Jean Chardon, Adrien-Robert Toussant, and Giuseppe Oliveri.

Time would show Ken's decision was wise and justified. Although suffering home sickness, his campaign was a successful eighteen months of track and road racing that not only provided a comfortable source of income, but also valuable experience that he would use with great effect on his return to Australia. His reputation was also greatly enhanced by his success, and it is evident he was extremely popular with fans in each of the countries he visited who appreciated his style of riding.

Although a more noted road rider, Ken decided he would 'try his luck on the track first' where he felt there was more money to be won however, he would take to the road races if he didn't ride well on the tracks.<sup>xii</sup> Any concerns about his track riding were immediately dismissed after his first contest on the Continent - a 33-mile teams event held in Lorient - where he teamed with Ernie Ohrt to win quite easily, lapping all other teams bar one. He immediately followed up this win with another in fifteen miles scratch race in Turin, Italy in late June and also won a twenty kilometres race in Milan contested over five heats. More fine performances followed as Ken transitioned into the unfamiliar motor-paced racing as well as what were styled "American" races usually over 50 kilometres.

A keen supporter of Ken's was Ray Crome, an amateur rider from Sydney whose travel through Europe coincided with Ken's time on the Continent. Ray closely followed Ken's campaign and in 1921 wrote the following in a letter which was subsequently published by Bede Carroll in the *Referee*:

*Ken Ross is without doubt the most popular rider over here. He has put up some remarkably fine rides, although dogged by bad luck, and has displayed a stack of courage and endurance which has endeared him to the public. Ten days ago, he rode in a 50 kilo teams' race but drew as a partner a fat old has been who left the Parramatta boy all the work, but, in spite of that, he managed to lap the field. A few days later, he rode in a 50 kilos motor paced race (without rollers). His motor broke down at the start but, nothing daunted, rode without pace until the motor got going again. He then settled down to wipe off the deficit. Although up against the crack followers of France, Ross recovered two of his lost laps and finished second, a great ride. The crowd went mad over him. For absolute gameness, Ross has it all over these fellows. I have seen some bicycle riders, but lift my hat to the Parramatta boy. When Ross takes on the road racing it will be a shame to tell what he will do to the riders here.<sup>xiii</sup>*

The 1921 Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) World Professional Track Cycling Championships were held in late July 1921 in Copenhagen, Denmark. Just after the departure of Ken and the 'team' to Europe, Mr. Jack Hill (Secretary of the League of New South Wales Wheelmen) wrote a letter to the Dansk Bicycle Club in Copenhagen nominating Bob Spears, Harris Horder, Gerald Halpin, C. Hanneman and Ken for the world championships. The Dansk club was offering a special prize for the country nominating the most representatives. Mr. Hill received a cable from the Dansk club on 6 June stating the nominations of the five had been accepted. Ken recollected the world championships some years later noting that at that time 'he was more of a road racer than a sprinter',<sup>xiv</sup> yet he competed in the sprint and although he failed to make the final, he gained valuable experience competing against Continental riders.<sup>13</sup>



Ken (supported by Ray Crome) racing with the Australian flag proudly displayed on his shirt at Parc de Princess, Paris in September 1921. He is racing three greats of Continental cycling in Leon Georget, Maurice Brocco and Emile Aerts. (Ken Ross Private Collection).

Ken was introduced to motor pace racing early in his European quest and quickly adapted to the nuances of this discipline which was popular with cycling enthusiasts in Europe and the United States. His efforts met with quick success, and he became very popular in this form of racing which would hold him in good stead on his return to Australia (see pages 23-24).

<sup>13</sup> Further details of Ken's entry in the World Championships could not be ascertained. Australian Bob Spears finished second in the Sprint. The only other professional race was a motor-pace race.



#### TEAM GRAPPERON

Translated: KEN ROSS behind his petrol tandem piloted by BUSSAT-GRAPPERON  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

Ken teamed with American Ernie Ohrt for an American style three-hour race at the Velodrome Jean Bouin, in Marseille in October 1921. Although they finished equal fourth, the quality of their riding that day is evidenced by the majority of the field (including Ken and Ernie) breaking the world three-hour record by more than 2 kilometres.

The early months of 1922 would highlight Ken's competitiveness, endurance, and popularity with his European supporters when he competed in two international six-day races within three weeks with a 100-kilometre race (teamed with Willie Spencer) in between. The Brussels Six Days' Race started on 30 January 1922 and Ken was teamed with American and future 'Hall of Famer', Bobby Walthour Snr., a former world champion pace follower and multiple six-day winner. Ken and Walthour finished in ninth place however Ken's performance attracted the attention of many good judges.

The Berlin Six Days' Race started on 17 February 1922 and Ken was teamed with the Canadian/American champion Willie Spencer however Spencer retired on the third day putting Ken's race in jeopardy. The champion German road rider Adolf Huschke suffered a similar fate to Ken when his partner retired at the same time as Spencer. Officials allowed Ken and Huschke to partner as a new team, but they were penalised one lap according to the rules of six-day racing. They regained the lap through some magnificent riding by Ken and eventually finished fourth. It was later said by good judges who witnessed the race at the Sportpalast (Sports Palace) that had they not been penalised the lap, they would probably have won. Years later, Ken recounted how cold it was with snow having to be swept from the track and a huge fire burning continuously in the centre of the ground to keep them warm. At stated periods, the riders were allowed to dismount and sit around the fire to combat the freezing conditions.<sup>xv</sup>





The Finish of the Berlin Six Days' race – Adolf Huschke is on the left and Ken on the right  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

Ken so impressed the crowds and race promoters during his performance in the Berlin Six Days' Race that he was offered contracts to continue riding in Germany. The management of the Sportspalast in Berlin were keen to match Ken with the German champion, Walter Rutt and were actively arranging a three-man match race over three heats between Ken and Rutt and a third rider, preferably a well-known German road rider.<sup>xvi</sup> None of these offers came to fruition however, as Ken was no longer permitted to race by German authorities in response to Germans having been banned from Australia pursuant to the then policy of the Australian government.<sup>xvii xviii</sup> In 1927, he was invited back to Germany to compete in a series of six-day races<sup>xix</sup> however had to decline due to commitments to the "Ferndale" orchard and Elise who was expecting their first child.

Returning to Paris in April 1922, Ken turned his attention to the French road racing season and on 18 April, he signed a contract with "Cycles" Austral<sup>14</sup> to ride three road races: Paris-Tours; Bordeaux-Paris; and Paris-Brussels. Ken was joined by former Coburg Cycle Club teammates in Jim O'Farrell and Ben Oggle who had also arrived in France especially for the road races and the trio trained together for these races. Cycling was hugely popular in France but as Jim O'Farrell wrote, '[R]oad racing here is the last word in the game',<sup>xx</sup> and as the first Australians after the war to try their luck on the European road circuit, Ken and his compatriots were about to find out just how different it was to back home. Regardless of their performances, securing a place on a European team was, as it is today, a great achievement and reflected a high level of ability.

For an Australian rider, European road racing was far removed from anything back home where the handicap system was still used, and loose team arrangements operated depending on what bike you were riding. As Ken noted in a letter to his brother Alan, 'They race in teams over here, and No. 1

<sup>14</sup> "Cycles" Austral was a big French company who had a number of quality riders in its stable including Maurice Brocco, Marie Aubry and Robert Constantin.

member has all the advantages and can call on any member of his team for his bicycle. Unless a rider is drawn No.1, he stands very little chance as there are lots of accidents'.<sup>xxi</sup> Although there were many professional teams, there were not enough contracted positions available to the hundreds of fine continental riders and securing a coveted No. 1 position was extremely difficult, particularly for an outsider.

On 30 April, a field of 111 riders lined up in the darkness outside a café on the Boulevard de Versailles for the 3.30 a.m. start of the 250-kilometre Paris-Tours race. Ken finished in 56<sup>th</sup> place and was the first of his team to finish which was an admirable performance for his first Continental road race against a field of predominately first-class Continental riders. The going was tough and not without mishaps as Ken noted in a letter home that was published in Sydney's *Referee* and features an interesting anecdote that would be unheard of today:

*I broke a pedal when up with the leaders after 120 miles, and was going well at the time. I lost a lot of time hunting up a bicycle shop and getting a new pedal and had a puncture after that. When going again I gained a lot of time on the winner. I surprised myself the way I finished considering that it was my first road race on the continent and had very little training to ride such a distance 240 miles.*<sup>xxii</sup>

As previously noted, Ken was contracted to ride in the Bordeaux-Paris race on 14 May 1922, however found himself featuring in a Grand Omnium Match Race at the Parc du Princess Velodrome, Paris for the Marcel Cadolle Prize (a gold medal) the same day. The road race finished at the velodrome and the gold medal for the grand omnium was endowed by the winner of the 1906 Bordeaux-Paris race. Chasing the coveted gold medal, Ken was matched against world record holder Oscar Egg of Switzerland and Charles Deruyter of Belgium. Egg took the match, but Ken again received much acclaim from the Parisian fans and cycling correspondents for his tenacious performance.<sup>xxiii</sup>



(Ken Ross Private Collection)



The Brussels-Paris road race over 410 kilometres was held on 25 May 1922 and again Ken joined Jim O'Farrell and Ben Ogle in the field of 110 riders. Jim and Ben were signed with Le Sportive whilst Ken joined his Austral teammates, Frenchmen Robert Constantin, Lucien Rich and Marie Aubry. Both Constantin and Aubry had ridden the Tour de France for the Austral Team. The race started at midnight and the first 50 kilometres was over cobbled roads in the pitch-black night, a new experience for the Australian wheelmen. The trio would not finish the race. In fact, only 17 finished the race with Ken having to quit at Dinant, only 80 kilometres from the finish and half an hour behind the leaders when his ankles swelled compelling him to withdraw.<sup>xxiv xxv</sup>

Ken was probably somewhat disappointed with the results of his Continental road racing campaign and was possibly unlucky not to have another opportunity to ride on the European roads several years later in the Australasian team comprising Hubert Opperman, Percy Osborn, Ernie Bainbridge and Harry Watson that tackled the 1928 Tour de France. Ken was considered by some (mainly NSW correspondents), to be a surprise omission from this team when viewed in the context of the selection of Ernie Bainbridge and Harry Watson. As one of the earliest Australian riders who sought to crack the European road circuit, he had at least some European road experience under his belt coupled with his Australian record.

After the trials and tribulations of his road races, Ken returned to track events but was now turning his mind to returning home. Ken arrived back in Australia a few days before Christmas 1922 after a little over 18 months touring the Continent. His European campaign took in racing in France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, and Denmark. He raced gamely and successfully against some of the best and most famous riders in the world but more importantly, he gained valuable experience and won over the crowds wherever he raced. He was as popular on the Continent as he was back in his homeland and his performances were widely recognised by the well informed, and sometimes critical, European cycling correspondents who were suitably impressed by the young Australian rider.

## **TRACK RACING - AUSTRALIA**

Australia's track racing season was usually held from October to April each year with the pre-war era comprising the country's first competitive cycling 'boom'. Although cycling was popular in Australia with a good number of first-class wheelmen, the arrival of big-name international riders including world champions in Arthur Zimmerman (1895/86), Major Taylor (1902/03 & 1903/04), Iver Lawson (1900/01 & 1903-04), Floyd McFarland (1903/04 & 1904/05) and Walter Rutt (1904/05 & 1905/06) lifted its popularity to new levels.<sup>xxvi</sup> By the 1906/07 season however, the sport started to fall into a period of decline although Australia continued to produce champion riders who would ride in the United States. The early years of the inter-war era, saw promoters such as Jack Campbell and Jim du Frocq working hard to revive the halcyon days of track cycling in the years following the Great War and did so with great success. This was again built upon a good 'stable' of local riders complemented by quality international riders and by 1924/25, the crowds attending the Sydney Sports Ground and Melbourne Exhibition Oval were reminiscent of the boom days of the late 1890's and 1900's.

The 1919/20 season was the first after the war that saw international wheelmen back in Australia and was Ken's first season as a contracted rider. His performances and enormous popularity with the Sydney and Melbourne cycling fans also made him popular with promoters and he was regularly contracted for the series of summer track carnivals throughout his career. He was also regularly sought after for metropolitan and country track carnivals and appeared all over New South Wales many times throughout his career. He regularly appeared in front of crowds of between 10,000 and 15,000 at the Sydney Sports Ground, Melbourne's Exhibition Oval and later, at the Canterbury Velodrome, where he not only competed with and against the best Australian riders but many of the world's best who visited Australia for the track seasons.

The wheelmen Ken raced with and against on the tracks in Australia is a who's who of Australian and international riders of world acclaim: Bob Spears, Jackie Clark, Alf Grenda, Cecil Walker, Frank Corry, Hubert Opperman, Fred ("Jumbo") Wells, Ernie Tamme, Gerald Halpin, Jack Fitzgerald, George Dempsey, Harris Horder, Les ("Stumpy") Hammond, Alex Beath, Dick Marshall, Les and Harold Smith, Grant Pye, Jim Beer, Ted Byron, Keith Oliver, Jack Standen, Willie and Arthur Spencer, Hans and Ernie Ohrt, Charles Osteritter, Willie Keller, Ray Eaton, Jean Jaeger, Willie Grimm, Lucien Fauchaux, Oscar Rutt and Brask Andersen to name some.

On the track, he raced in most, if not all formats of handicap and scratch races including the varying sprint distances, five-mile races, motor-pace events, alternance and omnium matches, pursuits races, and teams' events all the way through to 100 kilometre and six-day races. Ken recorded some very fine performances on the track during his career with a number of classy and memorable performances against the visiting world class international wheelmen. He won the 1923 Easter Wheel Gift in Melbourne, and his versatility was evident in his second placing in the 25 Miles Track Championship of Australasia in 1924 - the finish was that close that many experts thought he had won - and his second placing in the 1926 Quarter Mile Championship of Australasia. Ken's major track successes in Australia however were in six-day racing, 100-kilometre teams' events and motor-paced match races.

### *Six-Day Races – The "Sixes" or "The Grind"*

Ken competed in seven six-day races between 1919 and 1927: five times in the Sydney event (1919; 1922; 1923/24; 1925/26 and 1927) as well as the 1922 Brussels and 1922 Berlin races. He was considered one of the country's best riders in six-days races during the inter-war era and is the most successful rider to contest the Sydney Six Days' Race winning three races from five starts between 1920 and 1927.<sup>15</sup> Although a highly regarded sprinter in his own right, it was his endurance and ability to ride for long periods coupled with his tactical riding that saw him teamed with great sprinters to form formidable teams.

Ken's first six-day race was the 1919/20 Sydney Six Days' Race where he partnered with Len Orchard however, they were unplaced behind winners Charles Osteritter and Willie Spencer. This gave Ken his first taste of this style of endurance racing, and he would gain further valuable experience during his European campaign where, as previously noted, he also contested the Brussels and Berlin Six Days' Races in 1922. Returning to Australia in late 1922 with valuable six-day experience, Ken would contest the next four Sydney races, held at the Sydney Sports Ground, with great success.

He teamed with Les ("Stumpy") Hammond for the 1922 race (25-30 December) which was a modified version of the continuous racing format used in Europe and the United States. In this event, riders were on the track for only a total of eight hours per day. An enthusiastic crowd of 15,000 was present for the final session on day six to witness Ken and Hammond win by a handsome margin of 86 points having accumulated 364 from the scheduled sprints over the six days.

In the weather interrupted 1923/24 race (24 December 1923 – 1 January 1924), Ken was partnered with Dick Marshall with the format the same as the previous event. Going into the final day, Ken and Dick were in third place and were collecting good points in the sprints which would have assured them at least a third placing before Ken was controversially disqualified – on a technical element (riding on the grass) - from claiming the 50 points won after winning one of the final sprints. Amidst the commotion, Ken and Dick subsequently withdrew from the race in protest at what they saw as a grossly unfair decision therefore denying them a finishing placing.

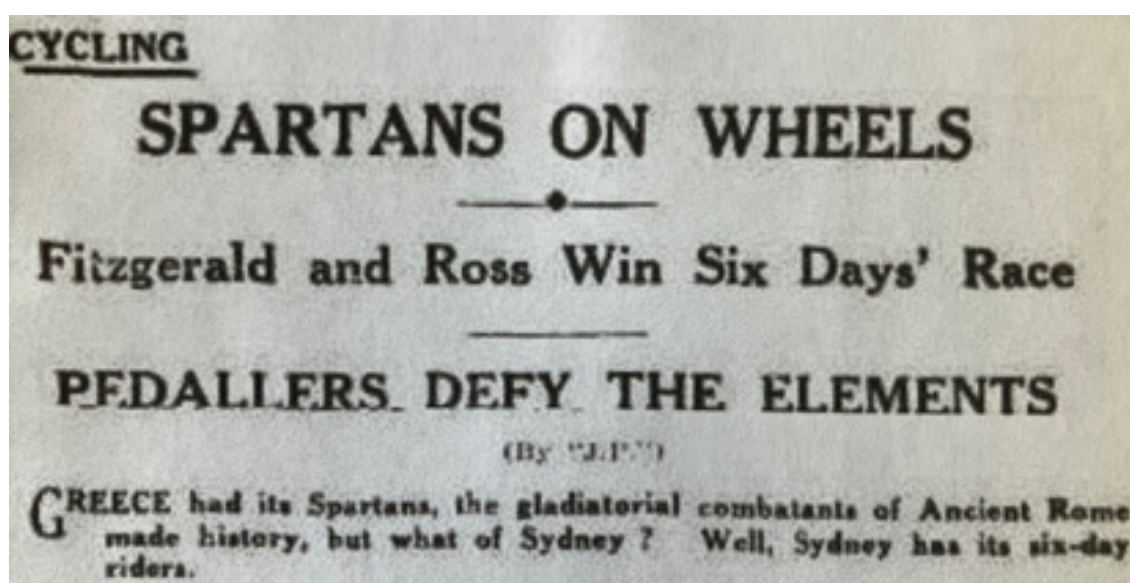
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<sup>15</sup> There were 17 editions of this race from 1911 to 1974.

Ken had to wait two years for the next race which was held in 1925/26 (28 December 1925 – 2 January 1926) - the first continuous<sup>16</sup> race since 1912. Ken was teamed with George Dempsey, and they put on a flawless display over the six days before taking race honours in front of a crowd estimated at 25,000 that were packed into the Sydney Sports Ground to watch the concluding session. They accumulated a massive 715 points and won by a margin of 114 points from the nearest rivals Jack Fitzgerald and Dick Marshall. The *Sydney Sportsman* reported:

*The crowded arena gave them a reception that will live long in the memories of those present. The spectators bounded to their feet at the conclusion of the race and there followed a scene of unbounded enthusiasm. The cheers and clapping continued long after both men had circled the track in acknowledgement.*<sup>xxvii</sup>

Sydney's *Sun* newspaper described it as 'the greatest sight ever seen on the Sports Ground'.<sup>xxviii</sup>



Headline from the *Truth*, (Sydney), 17 April 1927, p. 5.

The next, and Ken's final Sydney Six Days' Race, was held during Easter 1927 (11-16 April) when he teamed with long-time rival Jack Fitzgerald in another continuous format. The race was marred by horrendous weather for much of the race and with the other teams, they battled the challenging conditions before emerging victorious and giving Ken his third six-day win. They accumulated a total of 565 points, with an impressive margin of 143 points from Les Hammond and Harry Moody in second place.

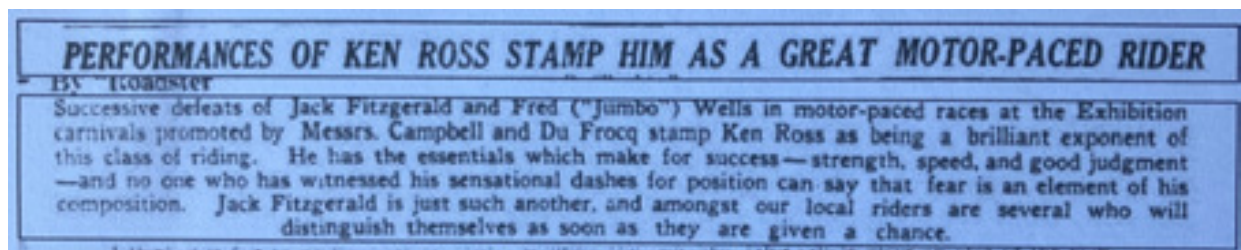
The 1927 race would be the last Sydney sixer for 11 years with Ken having retired by the time the 1938 race was held. Australia produced a number of world class six-day riders with Alf Gouillet and Reggie McNamara – riding the big lucrative races in the US - considered the world's best. Others such as Paddy Hehir, Jackie Clark, Alf Grenda, Frank Corry, Cecil Walker, Reg Arnold, Alf Strom, Russel Mockridge and Sid Patterson all achieved great success with the latter mainly in Australia. Although having competed in only 7 six-day races, Ken's record in this form of racing can stand proudly alongside the other Australian greats.

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<sup>16</sup> A rider from each team would be on the tack at all times over the six days unless otherwise directed by the race referee.

### *1923 Motor-Pace at the Exhibition Oval – Unofficial Champion of Australia*

On his return from Europe, and after winning the 1922 Sydney Six Days' Race, Ken spent the majority of 1923 riding in track and road events in Melbourne. He was contracted to Jack Campbell and Jim du Frocq for their carnival series at the Exhibition Oval, and the motor-pace experience he gained in Europe would come to the fore. The local spectators were thrilled by these events, and they were extremely popular during this season.



Article from the *Sporting Globe* (Melbourne), 10 March 1923, p. 6.

After weeks of match races involving Australia's best motor-pace riders, a match between the best two performers in Ken and Ted Byron was held on 28 May 1923. Melbourne's *Sporting Globe* reported on the match and also declared Ken as deserving of the title of Motor Pace Champion of Australia:

*Saturday night's match saw Ken Ross right at his top and stamped him as the strongest and most determined behind pace we have seen in Melbourne for many a long day. The manner in which he rounded Byron inside half a mile in the first heat was remarkable and it roused the 8000 spectators who witnessed the racing to a higher pitch of excitement than has any other event since the Exhibition carnivals opened.*

*The Australian Cycling Federation – the governing body of cycling in the Commonwealth – has done little or nothing for years past in the matter of arranging Australian championships and therefore the League of Victorian Wheelmen could not give its official sanction to the bestowing of a title upon then winner of the match race between Ken Ross and Ted Byron, both of New South Wales who raced behind the motors at the Exhibition oval last Saturday night. But this fact does not prevent Ken Ross, the winner, from rightly claiming the championship. It would be absurd to contend otherwise. His latest victory indicates his supremacy over all contenders for the best of them have been beaten either by him or by Ted Byron in eliminating matches and now Ross has decisively disposed of Byron...*

*As I said before, Ross's claim to be styled Australian Champion is beyond all question.<sup>xxix</sup>*





Melbourne *Herald* cartoonist and sporting enthusiast Samuel Wells was a fan of Ken's and captured his win against Ted Byron in this caricature.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

### *The 25 Miles Track Championship of Australasia (1924)*

On 26 April 1924, Ken was one of eighteen first class riders who lined up on a relatively cold night at the Sydney Sports Ground for the start of the final event of the 1923/24 track season - the 25 Miles Track Championship of Australasia. At the bell lap, the field had dwindled to half and those in attendance were about to witness one of the closest decisions seen at the Sydney Sports Ground. The race was awarded to Ken's six-day partner, Dick Marshall by a tyre however there were many at the Sports Ground, including cycling correspondents who believed Ken had won the race.<sup>xxx</sup>

## *The Australasian Championships and New South Wales Country Championships (1926)*

In April 1926 the Australasian Championships were held at the Sydney Sports Ground under the auspices of the League of NSW Wheelmen. Ken competed in three Australasian championship races – the ¼ mile, ½ mile and ten mile events as well as both New South Wales country championship events over ½ and one mile distances. Ken finished second in the ¼ mile Australasian Championship and finished second in the ½ mile championship only to be disqualified for riding on the grass. He won both country championships.

### *100 Kilometre Teams' Events*

Next to the sixes, the 100-kilometre (kilo) teams' events were the other long distance track events that became very popular in Australia. Ken had ridden in several of these races in Europe and again his experience coupled with his endurance and tactical abilities showed through back home. In Australia he competed in five 100 kilo races in Sydney teaming with Dick Marshall on three of those rides and his 100 kilo records stands as:

1924 – 5<sup>th</sup> with Dick Marshall  
1924 – 3<sup>rd</sup> with Frank Corry  
1925 – 1<sup>st</sup> with Les Smith  
1926 – 6<sup>th</sup> with Dick Marshall  
1927 – 3<sup>rd</sup> with Dick Marshall

In terms of other long distance track events, he also teamed with Jack Fitzgerald in winning the Eight Hour Team's Race in Sydney in 1929 and coming out of retirement in May 1937, he teamed with Fitzgerald one final time for a 50-kilometre Team's race in which they finished seventh.

### **Track Carnival Racing Contracts with Promoters**

The track cycling carnivals during the pre-war and inter-war era track seasons were very popular with the cycling enthusiasts of Sydney and Melbourne whom promoters relied on to fill the bleachers to watch their hero wheelmen. Commencing in late spring and running through to mid-autumn, the track season regularly involved Saturday and mid-week race meetings.

Not surprisingly, cycling languished during the Great War and Mr. Jack Campbell, who with his partner Jim du Frocq, are credited with staging a revival of cycling's fortunes - and a second 'boom' period of cycling in Australia - by promoting carnivals in Melbourne and Sydney under the auspices of Carnivals Ltd. A critical component of their success was attracting quality international riders, mainly from the US, but also Europe to compete against the best local riders. Many of the international riders were in fact Australians who were riding overseas but were attracted back home for several months for some stiff competition against their countrymen.

Ken was a very appealing proposition for promoters and was consistently contracted for these carnivals underpinning his appeal as one of the country's most attractive riders not only because he was one of the best all round riders in the country, but he was also extremely popular with the fans. Ken was often referred to as the "Pride of Parramatta" and was a rider whose determination, endurance and sportsmanship put 'bums on seats' and therefore helped keep the gate receipts ticking over. Ken was regularly contracted by promoters to ride in the carnivals, mainly in Sydney, but also in Melbourne in 1923 after this return from Europe. Ken's standing with Campbell is highlighted by the following commentaries:



In Melbourne last year, Jack Campbell worked wonders. With limited talent at his disposal he lifted cycling from mediocrity and placed it on a pedestal it had not occupied for years. Mr Campbell had a few first-class riders, Harris Horder, J. L. Fitzgerald, E. T. Byron, Jumbo Wells and Ken Ross were the nucleus of his team. That cycling was still a popular sport was proved by the crowds which flocked nightly to the track.<sup>xxx</sup>

Ross was one of the most attractive riders to race under Mr. Jack Campbell's direction. His performances last season were consistent and his popularity undoubted.<sup>xxxi</sup>



Another Wells cartoon in the *Herald* depicting the opening night of the 1923 carnival season at the Exhibition Oval, Melbourne.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

These carnivals were also regularly advertised in the city newspapers with Ken consistently featuring and billed as Australia's most popular cyclist. Several such examples are reproduced here:

### Sensational Cycling

NEXT SATURDAY NIGHT AND MONDAY NIGHT, JAN. 19 and 21.

SYDNEY SPORTS GROUND.

THE BEST PROGRAMME THIS SEASON.

Australia's Greatest International Teams Race.

CECIL WALKER, the world's greatest Cyclist, with JUMBO WELLS, N.Z. Champion, will race

WILLIE KELLER, America's Champion Cyclist, with KEN ROSS, Australia's Champion and most popular Cyclist.

Two races of One Mile. Final to be run Monday night.

Saturday Night, FRANK CORY, the World's Champion Motor-paced Cyclist, will give big starts to the Australians; also Motor-paced Cyclists, Monday Night, 3 Heats of 3 Miles each night. Winner of 1st final to be penalised for Monday Night.

£60, 2 Mile Wheel Race, 2nd and 3rd Final. Monday night, £30 Consolation for riders not winning first prize in Wheel Race.

Final for 2nd and 3rd. 2nd Class, 3 Miles.

1st Class 5 Miles will be run each night.

Owing to the Band Contests being held on Saturday, Jan. 26th, the Cycling Meeting will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 30th.

PARRAMATTA CYCLING CARNIVAL, SATURDAY, JANUARY 26th. All the Champions competing.

Noms. and acc. free, close Saturday Night with Mr. Lyon, Secretary of N.S.W. League of Wheelmen for Parramatta Carnival, to be held Saturday night, Jan. 26th.

J. DU FROGQ, Manager, No. 1, 3rd Floor, 178 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

## CYCLING!

### Sydney Sports Ground

## TO-MORROW NIGHT

The Most Extraordinary Programme ever Held.

GREAT TEAM PURSUIT RACE—4 Riders in a Team.

GRAND 400 CHALLENGE MATCH RACE—JERRY HALPIN v. KEN ROSS.

A lot of friction occurred over the result of this match last Saturday, and these two popular favorites have wagered £50 a ride on the result of Saturday's race.

GRAND TEAM PURSUIT RACE (3 Corners)—PYE and KENNEDY, SMITH and HANNON, SANDS and LEWIS.

GRAND MATCH RACE (America and France v Australia) Best Two out of Three.

WILLIE KELLER and JEAN JAEGER v CECIL WALKER and JUMBO WELLS.

GREAT MOTOR PACE MATCH RACE—E. MUTTON (who showed such great form behind the rollers last Saturday) v JACOB ATKINS.

Mutton says if he can beat Atkins, he will challenge Byron, and then go after Cory's scalp.

GRAND MOTOR PACE HANDICAP. With BYRON and JAEGER starting on scratch.

Also

1 MILE AMERICAN SCRATCH RACE—Last over the line each lap drops out. When only three left, then the final sprint. Who will be the three? This finish should be worth seeing.

Also

1 MILE SCRATCH RACE. (Continental Rules)—The rider securing the most number of lap sprints will be the winner, and special first, second, and third for the final sprint.

UNDOUBTEDLY THE PROGRAMME OF THE SEASON.

EXCITEMENT ALL THE TIME!

POPULAR PRICES: Stand, 2/6; Outer, 1/6. Special reserved limited 1/1.

CAMPBELL and DU FROGQ, No. 1, 3rd Floor, 178 Castlereagh Street, SYDNEY. Phone, City 1796.

## CYCLING

Sydney Sports Ground

SATURDAY, 3rd., at 8 sharp.

Saturday's Programme is the Largest ever submitted to the Sydney Public.

28 EVENTS 28

£168 PRIZE MONEY £168

### Great Motor Pace Handicap

3 Heats and a Final, 3 Miles.

### CLIFF PAPWORTH

will concede starts up to 200 yards and will give starts to Maribou, Byron, Arisgar, Grotto, Atkins, Sands, Grotto, and Bonney.

### MATCH RACES

#### GERALD HALPIN

(N.S.W.) v.

#### RAY EATON

(U.S.A.).

On the last occasion when these two met, Halpin was successful, but EATON was very dissatisfied with the result, and has offered to wager £50 that he will defeat Halpin on this occasion.

So another Big

### MATCH RACE

will take place between

#### KEN ROSS

(N.S.W.) and

#### WILLIE GRIMM

(U.S.A.).

Both the Australian and American are very popular, and on the last occasion they met each won a heat, while Ross won the final heat by the narrow margin of 5 inches.

So that thing too!

### MATCHES

should be well worth seeing. All the riders are anxious for matches with

Spencer and Walker

### 1/2 Mile Wheel Race

Amateur Handicap

### 2nd Class MISS and OUT

### SCRATCH RACE

### 5 Mile Scratch Race

1. Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 15 January 1924, p. 10: 2. Arrow (Sydney), 15 February 1924, p. 12: and 3. Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 2 January 1925, p. 6

# YOU WON'T BE BORED AT THE BOARD TRACK

## Ken Ross Gave the Pedals a Pushing

## EVENTS WENT OFF WITH A WHIRR

THE mirage of our cycling desert took definite shape last Saturday.. night, when the first eight-lap board track in the Southern Hemisphere was thrown open to 8000 people.

Sydney Sportsman, 25 December 1928, p. 14.



Frank Corry was instrumental in the construction of Sydney's first boards track, the Canterbury Velodrome in 1928, and Ken was one of the featured riders in the first two seasons of racing.

**The Sensation of America & Europe**  
**—NOW COMES TO SYDNEY**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Dec 22nd at the Velodrome CANTERBURY.**  
**24 THRILLING EVENTS!**  
**Fascinating Furious Speed—Turns Banked to an Angle of 45 deg.!!**

Board track cycling created a furore abroad. Now Sydney will enjoy, for the first time, the thrills of this fascinating speeding.  
 Can Frenchman Nagel defeat cranks, Death and King, behind motor pace?  
 See the big 5-mile scratch race with SIX pacers making a mad dash of speed that will smash all existing records. Ken Ross and Grant Pye have raced ahead on board tracks. Who is the better man on his own ground? Watch them closely in the 4-man match.  
 The Frenchmen are here and riders are coming from every corner of the Commonwealth. Roll up on Dec. 22nd, and the International devil will thrill you.

**WHO WAS THE BEST OLYMPIAN, STANDEN or GRAY?**  
**DECIDE FOR YOURSELF ON DEC. 22nd.**

**THE "VELODROME," CANTERBURY. Admission: 2/-, 3/-, 4/-, 5/-.**  
 Seated seats in 4- and 5/- sections. Reservations 1/- extra. Room 212, 2nd Floor, Borne House, Macquarie Place. At the door. Also during St. Vincent and Canterbury Trams. ACCESSIBLE AND CONVENIENT PARKING SPACE.

**VELODROME**  
 Right at Canterbury Station.  
**New Year's Day**  
 Afternoon and Night  
**TWO SESSIONS, STARTING AT 2 P.M.**  
 See Great 8 HOURS' **Teams Race**  
 Run on Six Days Foreign Style.  
**TWENTY (20) BEST RIDERS IN AUSTRALIA COMPETING.**  
 See Sensational Cox, Liddell (Boy Wonder of Board Track)  
**KEN ROSS & JACK FITZGERALD**  
 SIX DAYS KINGS.  
**NAGEL & GERMAINE**  
 French Stars. THRILLS GUARANTEED.  
 Take Electric Trains, Buses, and Trams to Canterbury Station.  
**2/-, 3/-, 4/- and 5/-.**  
 Children under 12 Half-Price.

*Truth* (Sydney), 16 December 1928, p. 7, and *Sun* (Sydney), 31 December 1928, p. 1

## ROAD RACING - AUSTRALIA

The early years of Ken's career were dominated primarily by club and some League<sup>17</sup> road racing where his fine riding quickly earned him a reputation that saw club and League handicappers consistently place him on the 'mark of honour'. At club level, he won his fair share of races from the scratch mark and his name was regularly recorded against the fastest time prize. The few road races he entered in France where the conditions were extremely challenging afforded him great experience that would serve him well back home. Ken's greatest success in the 'top tier' road races came in the Goulbourn to Sydney Road Race although he had success and put in some fine performances in other major races including the Warrnambool to Melbourne, Bathurst to Sydney, Bathurst to Lithgow, and Dubbo road races.

<sup>17</sup> The NSW League did not recommence Open Road races until October 1919 due to the war.

On the roads, Ken rode, with great success against virtually all of Australia's best road riders of his era including Hubert Opperman, Richard ("Fatty") Lamb, Ernie Tammé, Percy Osborne, Jack Beasley, Ernie Bainbridge, Ossie Nicholson, Phil O'Shea, Ben Ogle, Jim Honeyman, Harold Smith, Norm Gilroy, Harry Moody, Les ("Speed") Morgan, Harry Watson, Frank Thomas, Jim Harrington, Dick Munro and Harry Cruise.

### *League Races*

From the early 1920's, an increasing number of open road races were held in New South Wales by League affiliated clubs under the auspices of the League of NSW Wheelmen such as the Woy Woy and the Gosford Open Road Races. These club promoted races complemented those run by the League itself with races such as the Picton to Enfield, and the various "Speedwell" races becoming prominent races on the League calendar. Ken was a consistent entrant in League and combined club road races in NSW adding numerous wins, minor placings but particularly fastest times to his growing list of race credits.

### *The Dunlop Goulburn to Sydney Road Race - The "Goulburn"*

When it came to road racing, Victoria not only had many of the country's top riders but also the Dunlop Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race (the "Warrnambool" or "Warny") Road Race which was first contested over 165 miles (266 kilometres) in 1895 and is Australia's oldest and the world's second oldest one day cycling race. It has always been regarded as Australia's premier road race – the first 'Classic' - and from 1901 to 1939, the fastest time over the course was awarded the Blue Riband and the title of Long-Distance Road Champion of Australasia. It was sponsored by the Dunlop Rubber Co. which decided a few years after the first "Warrnambool" that a similar classic in New South Wales was needed and so Australia's second Classic was born, the Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (the "Goulburn").

The first official "Goulburn" was held in 1902 and was for professional riders only with an amateur race introduced in 1913. The course of 128 miles (212 kilometres) from the southern tablelands town of Goulburn to Sydney (finishing at the Ashfield Post Office)<sup>18</sup> was described as 'one the finest tests of a long-distance rider in any part of Australia'.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Whilst the "Warrnambool" may have been the oldest and most prestigious road race in the country, the "Goulburn" course was considered a more gruelling test for Australia's best road riders. Although some 35 miles longer, the "Warrnambool" course was labelled a 'billiard table' by none other than Opperman himself<sup>xxxiv xxxv</sup> when compared to the "Goulburn" course which took in many hills and steep climbs along the Great Dividing Range and its rougher roads.

The "Goulburn" became the premier road race in New South Wales and Australia's second most important road race. The fastest New South Wales rider was awarded the Blue Riband and the title of New South Wales Road Champion. In the early years and during Ken's era, the fastest NSW rider in the "Goulburn" was selected to represent New South Wales in the "Warrnambool" which was held several weeks later. The "Goulburn" became an annual race, albeit interrupted by the wars and road closures during its 110-year history with the last race being held in 2012. The race was a handicap event until 1995 when the graded mass start scratch format was introduced.

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<sup>18</sup> The race finish changed several times of the years as did the course itself particularly in the latter years.

Ken's first attempt at the Classic was as a fresh 20-year-old and whilst he would go on to ride to great acclaim in many cycling formats in Australia and overseas, it is his achievements in the Goulburn to Sydney Road Race for which Ken is probably best remembered. Ken's Goulburn to Sydney record of seven starts with one win (from scratch) in 1928; two seconds (1920 and 1926); three fastest times (1920, 1926 and 1928); one third fastest (1930) and one fourth fastest (1931) prompted race historians Jack Hypher and John Drummond to recognise his feats with the "Iron Man Award" for professionals – jointly with Harry Cruise - in their publication *Goulburn to Sydney 1902-1992 – 90 Years of a Cycling Classic*.



Gold Medallion – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, 1928 Dunlop Goulburn to Sydney Road Race  
(Ken Ross Cycling Collection, National Museum of Australia)

### Ken's "Goulburn" Record

Year/Date	Mark	Time	Placing	Finish Location	Other
1920 (18SEP)	05 min	6.31.05	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Enfield	Fastest time
1926 (18SEP)	Scratch	7.13.45	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Enfield	Fastest time
1927 (17SEP)	Scratch	-	DNF	Enfield	-
1928 (29SEP)	Scratch	6.39.45	1 <sup>st</sup>	Enfield	Fastest time
1930 (13SEP)	10 min	5.32.30	13 <sup>th</sup>	Enfield	3 <sup>rd</sup> Fastest time
1931 (19SEP)	Scratch	6.47.35	N/A	Enfield	4 <sup>th</sup> Fastest time
1934 (22SEP)	10 min	N/A	56 <sup>th</sup>	Enfield	-

Ken was the first of the five professional riders in the history of the race to claim fastest time on three occasions and the fifth rider of fifteen who won the race with the fastest time – Sir Hubert Opperman was the only one to achieve this feat twice. In securing third fastest time in 1930 and fastest New South Wales rider, Ken finished two thirds of a second behind Opperman who set a new race record. Opperman, Frank Thomas (second fastest) and Ken had smashed the previous record by a remarkable 34 minutes.



Rosina, Joan, Ken and Elsie in 1928 after his win in the Goulburn to Sydney Road Race.  
(Ken Ross Private collection)

### *The Dunlop Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race – The “Warny”*

Ken’s record in Australia’s premier road race was perhaps not as respectable as he would no doubt have liked however, his performance in the 1930 classic was memorable. Although securing fastest time in the 1920 “Goulburn”, the “Warrnambool” was not held in 1920 depriving Ken the opportunity of his first “Warny” start. Whilst living in Melbourne in 1923, he entered the “Warrnambool” and was handicapped off scratch but did not make it to the start line suffering a bad bout of the flu. Ken’s first start was in 1926 as the New South Wales representative having once again secured the fastest time in the “Goulburn”. He was off the mark of honour with Hubert Opperman, Percy Osborn, Jack Beasley and Harold Smith and although he kept with Opperman and Smith until Geelong, he was not among the top finishers with Opperman claiming fastest time.

As the fastest New South Wales rider in the 1930 “Goulburn”, Ken was once again selected as the New South Wales representative for the “Warrnambool” and his good form had him as a race favourite. Ken was the lone New South Welshman in a formidable scratch bunch of seven, headed by Hubert Opperman, that was conceding the limit bunch 70 minutes. Closing in on the finish line, four of the back markers had dropped off leaving Ken, Opperman and “Fatty” Lamb to fight out one of the most exciting finishes in the early history of the “Warny” for fastest time and the Australasian Long-Distance Road Race Championship. The finish was described in the *Sporting Globe*:



*...[T]his left Lamb, Opperman and Ross to fight out over the back road. Coming onto the back road, Opperman tried in vein to shake off his adversaries, but they were not denied. Then came the fight for the line. The trio had picked up lost ground on the 10 min and 15 min men and had the time in their hands. But who would win? That was the big question.*

*For a while, many thought Ken Ross would prove the victor. Then like a bolt from the blue, Opperman shot out. Lamb was biding his time. At the right moment, he unwound a sprint that told its tale and amid terrific cheering from the many thousands present, Lamb secured the verdict by 1 ½ length from Opperman with Ross a length away in third.*

*It was a fitting finale to a great race.* <sup>xxxvi</sup>

Ken's third fastest time would be his best "Warrnambool" result and his last ride in the classic.

### *1920 Bathurst to Lithgow Road Race*

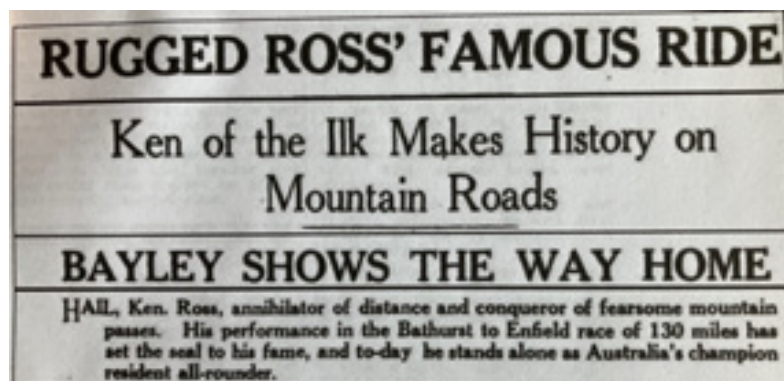
The League promoted Bathurst to Lithgow Road Race was not the longest of road races at 42 miles but what it lacked in distance, it made up for in steep challenging climbs in mountainous country. The 1920 race was the first since the pre-war years and was held on 28 August with Ken one of only two scratch men conceding the limit men 20 minutes. Ken finished 4<sup>th</sup> however his fine ride saw him take the fastest time.

### *1923 Grafton to Lismore Road Race*

Ken was coaxed out of Melbourne by the council of the North Coast League to ride in the inaugural Grafton to Lismore Road Race held on 27 August 1923. The race annexed a very attractive prize pool and therefore attracted a field of not only local riders, but some fine city and metropolitan wheelmen led by Ken who was the lone scratch man for the 90-mile course through the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. Conceding the limit bunch 55 minutes and with no pace assistance, Ken put in a fine ride to claim fourth fastest time.

### *1927 Bathurst to Sydney Road Race – A New Race Record*

The 1927 Bathurst to Sydney (Enfield) Road Race over a distance of 130 miles was held on 3 September with Ken surprisingly off 5 minutes instead of his usual scratch marking. He finished in sixth place however his fabulous ride secured him fastest time and a new race record of 7 hrs 7 mins 5 secs.



Headline from the *Sydney Sportsman* (Sydney), 6 September 1927, p. 14.

### *1926 Woy Woy and Gosford Open Road Races*

The Woy Woy and Gosford Cycle Clubs held their inaugural open road races on 24 July and 7 August 1926 respectively. These races are conspicuous for the participation of Hubert Opperman (who was residing in Sydney at the time) and several other first-class riders. In the 25 miles Woy Woy Open, Opperman was off scratch and conceded Ken 1 min 30 sec and in a closely fought race, Opperman took second fastest time and Ken third. Two weeks later in the 26 miles Gosford Open, Opperman was again the scratch man conceding Ken 1 min 50 sec. Ken's fine ride saw him finish ahead of Opperman and also claim the fastest time.

### *The Dunlop Grand Prix (1927) – Tour de France Selection Race*

For the first year since its inception, the Dunlop Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race was not run in 1927 in favour of the Dunlop Grand Prix. Billed as the greatest road race ever held in the British Empire and, at that time, the richest road race in the world, the Dunlop Grand Prix was a four-stage road race covering 685 miles around Victoria held between 14 and 19 November 1927. The title of Australasian Long-Distance Road Champion for 1927 was awarded to the winner of the Grand Prix. A committee was established to select the field from the nominations and Ken was one of only four New South Wales riders selected. He did not compete in the race as Elise was pregnant with their first child at the time and was experiencing complications that saw her spend lengthy periods in hospital.

Ken's withdrawal from the Grand Prix also potentially impacted his competing in the Tour de France. In 1928, an Australasian quartet of Hubert Opperman, Percy Osborn, Ernie Bainbridge and Harry Watson (NZ) competed in the Tour de France. Melbourne's *Sporting Globe* organised a campaign of public subscription to raise the estimated £1,250.00 needed to send the team to Europe. Selection was determined by a committee with performances in the Grand Prix and other races such as the "Goulburn" key considerations. Ken was nominated by the League of New South Wales Wheelmen and despite his DNF in the "Goulburn" due to punctures and not starting in the Grand Prix, Ken was considered by some, to be a surprise omission from this team when viewed against the selection of Ernie Bainbridge and Harry Watson. As one of the earliest Australian riders who sought to crack the European road 'circuit' in 1922, he had at least some European road experience under his belt coupled with his Australian record.

### *1928 Dubbo Road Race*

The 1928 Dubbo to Narromine (return) road race over 50 miles was held on 5 September with Ken the lone scratch man in a field of fine local and metropolitan riders. Without a pacer for the majority of the race, Ken finished an admirable eighth place, but his efforts saw him claim the fastest time.

### *The Centenary 1000 (1934)*

In 1934, the State of Victoria celebrated its Centenary with many special events. The cycling contribution was the Centenary Cycling Carnival incorporating the Centenary 1000, a 1100 miles stage race over seven days which replaced the Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race for that year. This special race was of such prestige that it lured the 34-year-old Ken out of retirement once more for yet another tilt at the top riders in the country and some class riders from overseas. Word of another comeback reached the *Daily Telegraph* in early August which reported, 'Ken Ross who was a scratch man in League road races evidently intends to stage a comeback with a view to competing in the Melbourne Centenary'.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Each state was allotted a quota of riders with New South Wales being allotted 15 starters. The League of New South Wales Wheelmen determined that it would nominate seven as an official State team from the performances of the Goulbourn to Sydney as well as a 'Test' race – a 318 miles two-day road race from Bathurst to Sydney via Mudgee the week after the "Goulburn". Ken suffered from leg cramp in the "Goulburn" and finished in 56<sup>th</sup> place so was now reliant on the 'Test' race which was held on 28 and 29 September.

Ken arrived in Bathurst with a bad flu and it was doubtful if he would compete but he made it to the start line and finished day one in thirteenth place and remained 'desperately ill' throughout the second day but refused to retire.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Drawing on his reserves of energy and the tenacity that made him so popular throughout his career, he finished an admirable eighth place. It was now up to the selectors. Ken was one of the six riders selected in the official New South Wales team and it was later reported that, '[T]he plucky pedalling of Ross who was a flu victim while the race was in progress won his preference to other competitors who made faster times.'<sup>xxxix</sup> No doubt his career history was also influential in his selection, but his selection resulted in a near tragedy.

It might come as a surprise to non cycling enthusiasts that the New South Wales team would actually ride from Sydney to Victoria as training for the event. Shortly after the team was announced Ken and teammate Tom Brown departed Gosford for Albury where they would then catch a train to Melbourne for the big race. Ken and Tom were on the Hume highway near Gundagai the following afternoon when Ken was hit by a car. The driver of the vehicle was travelling behind Ken and Tom and struck Ken when apparently trying to overtake. Ken suffered injuries that were not considered life threatening but involved a bad wound to his side, abrasions and shock and were considered serious enough that he was conveyed to the Gundagai hospital where he remained for five days. The incident not only ended Ken's Centenary 1000 aspirations, but it also effectively ended his career.

## **RETIREMENT**

Following the Gundagai incident, Ken made a few appearances here and there in the ensuing years with the Gosford Cycle Club and some League meetings in Sydney and at country carnivals. His final first-class appearance was at Lidcombe Oval, Sydney on Sunday 23 May 1937 when he teamed with his old rival and teammate Jack Fitzgerald in a 50 Kilometre Teams' Race. Their seventh place effectively brought the curtain down on an outstanding career for arguably Australia's most popular and one of the best genuine all-round wheelmen of the inter-war era. It was perhaps fitting that the winner of the 50 kilo event was the young Gosford rider, Ian Cross whom Ken was coaching and mentoring (see page 36).

## **MARKETING AND SPONSORSHIPS**

The reliance on bicycles as a popular and cheap mode of transportation and the popularity of cycling as a sport lent themselves to the big cycle manufacturers engaging the top riders in using and promoting their bikes. The most prominent example of this is the relationship between Hubert Opperman and Malvern Star which also attracted many of Victoria's top wheelmen to its brand. During his career, Ken rode three brands of cycles: an "IXIOM" cycle; and "S.J.H." cycle and a "Superb" cycle. Ken featured in many advertisements for these cycles' throughout his career, particularly after wins in major races. A few examples are reproduced below:



## IXIONS AGAIN !

### £1000 Six Days' Race, Sydney

**Geo. Dempsey and Ken Ross easily won above race riding IXIONS**

Against Australia's Best Riders by over 250 points, Geo. Dempsey defeated P. Schulz (el Oromo) in match race 25. 55. 110 yards, and set up world's record for the distance, and finished up by brilliantly winning five-mile match race.

P. HEHIR and ALF. DOULLEY, who are still riding, won Six-Day Race, Sydney and Melbourne, and still hold Australasian record for the distance.

KEN ROSS won Six-Day Race Sydney.

WILLIE SPENCER won Six-Day Race Sydney and also broke French World's Record at Exhibition, Melbourne.

Any distance Road or Track

**NEW AND S.H. CYCLES**

**IXIONS FOR SPEED AND RELIABILITY**

**IXION CYCLES**

REPAIRS AND ALL SURPRISES

114 and 116 HIGH STREET, ST. KILDA.  
80 JOHNSON STREET, FITZROY.  
Nelson Place, WILSONS PROMENADE.

Catalog  
**Blair & Hehir**

*Sporting Globe* (Melbourne), 14 January 1926, p. 10.



## "S.J.H." CYCLES

### The Goulburn-Sydney Race

demands a First-Class Bicycle as well as a Star Rider.

That is the reason why KEN ROSS won the Fastest Time on the "S.J.H." This cycle is manufactured by S. J. Hillsdon, who is himself a cyclist, and can therefore understand your needs. He will build to your requirements a Bicycle which will hold its own with anything on the road. The "S.J.H." has many wins to its credit, and if it suits Ken Ross, surely it would suit YOU. WHY NOT GIVE IT A TRIAL?

It is a great machine, faultless in build, and it runs so smoothly that you simply cannot help yourself, and you find that the further you go, the better you feel.

IT WON'T LET YOU DOWN — IT WILL HELP YOU TO WIN

**S. J. HILLSDON, 103 Church Street, Parramatta.**

*Sporting Globe* (Melbourne), Wednesday 6 October 1926, p. 10.  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)





1927 Goulburn to Sydney Souvenir Race Program – Sponsored by “Superb” Cycles  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

## COACHING AND MENTORING

The Gosford Cycling club was established in August 1925 with Ken joining the fledgling club the following year from the Woy Woy Cycle Club. To have someone of Ken’s ability, experience and standing was a huge boost to the club and attracted a number of young riders to the club. The Ourimbah Cycle Club was established in 1926 and its members regularly rode with the Gosford lads (as did the Woy Woy boys) and Ken coached and mentored many of the younger riders from both clubs to success with the “Goulburn” standing out among their achievements.

The 1932 Goulburn to Sydney Road race was a great one for the Gosford and Ourimbah Clubs, and Ken, with three of his proteges claiming three of the top four placings in the professional race: 1<sup>st</sup> Tom Brown (19 years of age); 3<sup>rd</sup> Clyde Walters and 4<sup>th</sup> Jack Catt, as well as several other respectable placings. The following year, Geoff Humphries and Jack Catt finished first and second respectively in the “Goulburn”. Ken’s nephew Jock Ross benefitted from his uncle’s experience and guidance and finished third in the 1938 “Goulburn” and also competed in the “Warrnambool”. Ken also introduced a young Randall Cook to cycle racing and he would have a very good career under Ken’s early mentoring with a second and a third in the Sydney Six Days’ Race in 1941 and 1941/42 respectively.

Ken also coached athletes from other sports where his knowledge and experience with fitness and dietary regimes was pivotal. In the early 1950’s, he coached Trevor Gallard of the Avoca Beach Surf Lifesaving Club to the Australian Surf Ski championship in 1952. Trevor was the Club’s first Australian champion.



## **THE ROAD RIDDEN AND THE ROADS NOT TAKEN**

Ken's professional cycling career of twenty years was punctuated by numerous announcements in the newspapers regarding his retirement when he was absent from the tracks or roads for extended periods. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ken's cycling career was not his only profession and any evaluation of Ken's career achievements and where he sits in the pantheon of Australia's pre-war and inter-war cyclists, is influenced by his commitments outside his professional cycling career.

The year 1925 presented Ken with a 'sliding door' moment, where he could have chosen to focus on his riding or, retired altogether to pursue a quiet life as an orchardist and devoted family man on his beautiful coastal property. He chose to balance both and ride a middle road that arguably inhibited his potential to achieve even greater success but at the same time, allowed him to pursue a family and farming life whilst continuing the sport he loved. Some of his most memorable achievements were accomplished whilst riding this road. Had he chosen the road of retirement altogether, Australian would have been deprived of witnessing some of the great cycling moments of the early inter-war era.

The "Ferndale" property was located some 80 kilometres north of Sydney and the distance coupled with his commitments to the orchard would place new demands on Ken to continue the hectic schedule of first-class competition he had maintained in the previous years. The orchard commitments limited the time he had to train and the move out of Sydney limited access to facilities for training. He was keen to return to Europe to ride and in 1927 received offers to return to Germany, where he had been very popular in 1922, but had to decline due to his farm commitments and Elsie was also expecting their first child.

He was also at times, a 'victim' of circumstance where factors beyond his control intervened to prevent him from competing or causing him to withdraw from several large events. Elsie's serious illness during her first pregnancy resulted in Ken withdrawing from the 1927 Dunlop Grand Prix in Victoria and the incident at Gundagai in 1934 when he was hit by a car whilst riding to Victoria for the Centenary 1000 effectively ended his first-class riding career.

Virtually all of Australia's great wheelmen of the pre-war and inter-war era chased fame and fortune on the bigger and more profitable racing stages of Europe and particularly the United States and did so with great success. Six-day racing was popular in Europe but even more so in the United States where it was extremely lucrative with riders, particularly the likes of Australian greats Reggie McNamara, Alf Gouillet, Alf Grenda, and Jackie Clark making enormous money from these events. Ken's prowess and success in this form of racing has been well documented and had he not chosen the road he did, it is highly probable he would have returned to Europe and/or the United States and would have been extremely successful, particularly on the six-day circuits.

It can be argued that in choosing the middle road, Ken, despite his great all-round talent as a wheelman, may not have exhibited the drive and commitment the great sporting champions possess. It could be equally argued that his achievements following that decision, given the competing demands he faced, are all the more remarkable.

## **LEGACY AND A FINAL WORD**

Much was written about Ken during his career by the well-informed cycling correspondents of the day including several feature articles. For reasons unknown, most of the limited post war publications that address the history of cycling in the pre-war and inter-war eras do not adequately represent his career or do justice to his achievements. This is a personal observation and maybe considered to be a biased view. Perhaps the subjective judgements of the respective authors were that his career was

not that remarkable and therefore worthy of only limited comment, if any at all. This is most certainly not the case if his career – comprehensively detailed for the first time in this *Abridged History* and his nomination for the AusCycling Hall of Fame – is examined. Where Ken sits in the pantheon of Australia's all-time greatest cyclists was answered and affirmed with his induction into the AusCycling Hall of Fame. His induction ratifies Ken's place as one of the great inter-war wheelmen and a true great of Australian cycling – one of the best of the best. As well as reviving and highlighting his individual career and achievements, his induction also shines a spotlight on the inter-war era which is deserving of greater exposure to recognise and promote the many great cyclists of that era and their stories.

It is perhaps fitting however, to draw on arguably Australia's greatest cyclist, a contemporary and great rival of Ken's, Sir Hubert Opperman for the final word on the cycling career of Ken Ross:

#### *Long Distance Best*

*Vic Brown, Jack Beasley, Percy Osborne, **Ken Ross**, [emphasis added] George McLeod, Franklin Thomas and Ossie Nicholson are names which will live in the history of Australian cycling for the excellence of their competitive cycling, the modesty of their demeanour and the records which link them to the fastest miles ridden on our roads'.<sup>xi</sup>*



Ken and admiring fans after securing the Blue Riband in the 1920 "Goulburn"  
(Ken Ross Private Collection)

# AUSCYCLING HALL OF FAME

## Kenneth Gordon Ross

On 3 December 2025, Ken was posthumously inducted into the AusCycling Hall of Fame confirming his status as a true great of Australian cycling and among the best of the best of Australia's champion cyclists. He was one of twelve inductees in 2025 and only the seventh inductee from the pre-WWII era joining Sir Hubert Opperman (2015), Edgar "Dunc" Gray (2015), Alf Gouillet (2016), Robert Spears (2019), Iddo "Snowy" Munro (2024) and Don Kirkham (2024). Ken's daughter Helen Walters and the author accepted the award on behalf of Ken from Mr. Matthew Keenan (Chair of the AusCycling History and Heritage Committee), and Ms. Tracey Gaudry (two time Olympian and member of the AusCycling History and heritage Committee).



Ken's Hall of Fame Certificate



Ken's daughter Helen Walters accepting the Hall of Fame Induction from Ms. Tracey Gaudry.



Helen with her proud family at the 2025 AusCycling Awards night.  
(see page 57 for names of family members)





The author being interviewed by renowned cycling commentator and Chair of the AusCycling History and Heritage Committee, Mr. Matthew Keenan.



A very proud daughter with Tracey Gaudry.



## Attachment 1

### Kenneth Gordon Ross Palmarès

1917	2 <sup>nd</sup> . Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club 20 Miles Road Championship 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club 3 Miles Championship (track)
1918	1 <sup>st</sup> . Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club 20 Miles Road Championship
1919	1 <sup>st</sup> . Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club 20 Miles Road Championship 1 <sup>st</sup> . Central Cumberland League Bicycle Club Point Score Championship
1920	4 <sup>th</sup> . Bathurst to Lithgow Road Race (off scratch) <b>Fastest Time – Bathurst to Lithgow Road Race</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off 5 minutes) <b>Fastest Time – Goulburn to Sydney Road Race</b>
1921	3 <sup>rd</sup> . Australian Cycling Derby Scratch Race - Sydney 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Hourlieur-Comes Award Race – Paris, France (with Adrien-Robert Toussaint) 2 <sup>nd</sup> . 17 <sup>th</sup> Octave Lapize Prize Race – Paris, France 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Turin Grand Prix - Turin, Italy 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Autumn Grand Prix - Nice, France
1922	9 <sup>th</sup> . Brussels Six Days' Race (with Bobby Walthour Snr. of the United States) <b>4<sup>th</sup>. Berlin Six Days' Race (with Adolf Huschke of Germany)</b> 45 <sup>th</sup> Paris Tours Road Race (16 <sup>th</sup> Edition) <b>3<sup>rd</sup>. Grand Omnium Match (Paris)</b> Brussels – Paris Road Race (13 <sup>th</sup> Edition – DNF)) <b>1<sup>st</sup>. Sydney Six Day's Race (with Les Hammond)</b>
1923	<b>1<sup>st</sup>. Easter Gift Wheel Race (Melbourne)</b> Australian (Unofficial) Motor-Paced Champion 4 <sup>th</sup> . Malvern Star 25 Miles Race (Melbourne) 9 <sup>th</sup> . Grafton to Lismore Road Race (off scratch) <b>Fastest Visiting Rider – Grafton to Lismore Road Race</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> Parramatta District League Club 10 Miles Road Championship
1924	<b>3<sup>rd</sup>. Sydney 100 Kilometre Teams Race (with Frank Corry)</b> <b>2<sup>nd</sup>. 25 Miles Track Championship of Australasia</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> . Parramatta District League Club Road Championship 5 <sup>th</sup> . 100 Kilometre Team Event - Sydney (with Dick Marshall)

1925	<b>1<sup>st</sup>. 100 Kilometre Team Event – Sydney (with Les Smith)</b> Club Champion – Woy Woy Cycle Club
1926	<b>1<sup>st</sup>. Sydney Six Days’ Race (with George Dempsey)</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> . 100 Kilometre Team Event – Sydney (with Dick Marshall) <b>2<sup>nd</sup>. Australasian ¼ Mile Championship</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> . New South Wales Country ½ Mile Championship 1 <sup>st</sup> . New South Wales Country One Mile Championship Fastest Time – Gosford Cycle Club Open Road Race (off scratch) <b>2<sup>nd</sup>. Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off Scratch)</b> <b>Fastest Time – Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off Scratch)</b> Club Champion – Gosford Cycle Club (Rowe Cup)
1927	<b>1<sup>st</sup>. Sydney Six Days’ Race (with Jack Fitzgerald)</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup>. 100 Kilometre Teams Event - Sydney (with Dick Marshall)</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> . Bathurst to Sydney Road Race (off 5 minutes) <b>Fastest Time – Bathurst to Sydney Road Race</b> <b>Race Record – Bathurst to Sydney Road Race</b>
1928	8 <sup>th</sup> . Dubbo Open Road Race (off scratch) <b>Fastest Time – Dubbo Open Road Race</b> <b>1<sup>st</sup>. Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off Scratch)</b> <b>Fastest Time – Goulburn to Sydney Road Race</b>
1929	<b>1<sup>st</sup>. Eight Hours’ Teams’ Race – Sydney (with Jack Fitzgerald)</b>
1930	<b>3<sup>rd</sup>. Fastest Time - Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off 10 minutes)</b> <b>3<sup>rd</sup>. Fastest Time - Warrnambool to Melbourne Road Race (off scratch)</b>
1931	4 <sup>th</sup> . Fastest Time - Goulburn to Sydney Road Race (off scratch)
1934	8 <sup>th</sup> . Centenary 1000 Selection “Test” Road Race (NSW) <b>Selected in the NSW Team for the Centenary 1000</b>
1937	7 <sup>th</sup> . 50 Kilometre Teams’ Event - Sydney (with Jack Fitzgerald)
2025	<b>Inducted into the AusCycling Hall of Fame</b>

## Attachment 2

### Summary of Contemporaries

#### Australian Riders

**Sir Hubert Opperman:** An AusCycling Hall of Fame inductee whose achievements set the benchmark against which riders are often measured, Sir Hubert is considered in some circles as the world's greatest cyclist. His rise to prominence coincided with Ken's residence in Melbourne during 1923 which provided opportunities for them to race early in his career as well as into the future. In his autobiography *Pedals, Politics and People* (1977), Opperman referred to 'an unanticipated result during the Cycle Trader's Annual Picnic at Portarlinton when I secured fastest time over the New South Wales Champion Ken Ross' (p. 54). This result led to handicappers placing Opperman off the scratch mark, which he was never to leave up to his retirement.

One of Sir Hubert's first major wins was in the 1923 Sale to Melbourne race when he took fastest time from Ken, Don Kirkham and Ernie Bainbridge. Ken had wins over Opperman in the 1925/26 Sydney Six Days' Race in which Opperman and partner E. Gibaud finished third and the 1926 Gosford Open Road Race. 1930 saw Ken battling with "Oppy" in both road classics. By the time Ken and Sir Hubert met in the "Goulburn" in 1930 for the first time, they were among only five men to have won from scratch whilst Ken had secured fastest time more than anyone else with three Blue Ribands and Oppy searching for an equalling third. In the "Goulburn", Ken and his co-scratch men in Opperman and Frank Thomas rode all the way together and staged a thrilling sprint to the finish with only one fifth of a second separating each of the riders with Opperman first, Thomas second and Ken third. The three riders broke the race record by a staggering 34 minutes<sup>19</sup>. The following month, Ken featured with Opperman and Richard ("Fatty") Lamb, in one of the closest finishes in the "Warrnambool" classic with Lamb winning from Opperman by a length and thence a length to Ken in third.

**Robert ('Bob') Spears:** Another AusCycling Hall of Fame inductee who commenced his career a few years before Ken and quickly became one of Ken's idols. Spears spent considerable time in Europe and the United States (US) and was essentially a sprinter who also had success in six-day races. He was world sprint champion in 1920 and finished second in 1921 and 1922. He won the Grand Prix of Paris three years in a succession (1920-1922) and the Grand Prix of Copenhagen in 1922 and 1925. He partnered with Reggie McNamara often in US six-day races during the early years and won the Melbourne Six Day's Race (1913) as well as Newark (1915) and Chicago (1916).

Ken first came up against Spears during the 1919/20 track season where he defeated him in a one mile handicap race. Spears was racing in Europe when Ken arrived in 1921 and although it does not appear that they raced together, they certainly followed each other's careers. Returning to Australia together from Europe in December 1922, Spears and Ken agreed to pair in the Sydney Six Day's race over the Christmas/New year period. This did not eventuate with Spears deciding not to race however Ken went on to win with Les Hammond. Spears returned regularly to Australia to visit family and was regularly in demand but raced little. It was again reported he would team with Ken in the 1925/26 Sydney Six Day's Race however, once again this did not eventuate. In choosing Ken as a six-day partner, Spears saw something in the younger rider and indicates the high regard Spears had for Ken's abilities at such a young age.

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<sup>19</sup> The first eight riders beat the race record.

**Richard ('Fatty') Lamb:** A kindred spirit of Ken's affinity for the Goulburn to Sydney Road Race, Lamb commenced his career as an amateur circa 1925, well after Ken had made a name for himself, and would go on to great success as one of the great Australian all-round cyclists. He won the 1925 and 1926 amateur division of the Goulburn to Sydney with fastest time and secured fastest time in 1927. He turned professional in 1928 and finished second in the "Goulburn" behind Ken and won fastest time in the "Warnambool" in 1930 and again in 1932 taking the title of Australian Long Distance Road Champion. Lamb would form one member of the four-rider team under Opperman that toured Europe and contested the 1928 Tour de France and again in 1931. Riding in the US, he achieved great success in motor-paced racing.

Ken's first tussle with Lamb was after he turned professional in the 1928 "Goulburn" with both starting from scratch. Ken won also securing fastest time with Lamb coming in second and also claiming second fastest time. Ken again tussled with Lamb in both classics in 1930 defeating him in the "Goulburn" but Lamb turned the tables in the "Warrnambool".

**Alf Grenda:** Grenda was a track cyclist from Tasmania who moved to the US in 1911, soon after turning professional, where he specialised in six-day racing. He won eight six-dayer's including the New York Six Days' Race on four occasions and also won a silver medal in the 1912 UCI World Track Championships at Newark, New Jersey. Grenda would remain in the US and become an American citizen but did make regular visits to Australia before his retirement in 1926. He finished second in the 1912 Sydney Six Days' Race at the Sydney Cricket Ground teamed with Gordon Walker and second in the 1919 Sydney teamed with Frank Corry.

Ken raced against Grenda on several occasions during his Australian visits for the 1919/1920 and 1921/1922 track seasons at the Sydney Sports Ground and defeated him on several occasions in handicap as well as individual and team pursuit races.

**Cecil Walker:** Walker was predominately a track cyclist and like Ken, left Australian shores but his destination was not the Continent but the US. Arriving in 1920, he competed in the US until 1938 but regularly returned home. In 1924 he won the US All-Round Championship and would go on to twin this title a total of nine times as well as several US Sprint Championships. Jack Campbell brought him home to Australia for the 1923/1924 track carnival season in Sydney where he teamed with Frank Corry to win the Sydney Six Days' race.

Ken and Walker went head-to-head on several occasions in match races with Ken notably defeating him in straight heats of a half mile match race at Parramatta on 26 January 1924.

**Frank Corry:** Another Australian who spent considerable time in the US where he was successful in six-day races and motor-paced events. Corry commenced his career in 1911 and headed to the US in 1913 where he achieved much success in six-day races often teaming with Reggie McNamara. Corry returned to Australia and raced in the 1923/24 track season

Ken teamed with Corry to gain third place in the 100km teams' race in Sydney.

**Gerald Halpin:** Gerry Halpin commenced his career as an amateur and represented Australia in the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp in the men's sprint event having been selected following his win in the Australian Half Mile Championship. He was third in the World Amateur Sprint Championship in 1920. On his return to Australia, he joined the professional ranks and the following year, left Australian shores with Ken and Harris Horder in 1921 headed for the Continent.

Halpin was primarily a sprinter and whilst he and Ken crossed paths regularly on the Continent, Ken's racing took him in different direction on both the road and track. They returned to Australia together in December 1922 and would race together and against each other in a fierce rivalry with both having wins over each other in match races on a number of occasions. Their rivalry in 1924 made headlines and produced what was described as some of the best racing seen at the Sydney Sports Ground.

**Alex McBeath:** Predominately a sprinter, Alex McBeath came to prominence during the 1919/20 track season in Sydney. He would follow the well-worn road to the US where he would team with Willie Keeler to win a two hour teams race during which McBeath won sprints beating Bobby Walthour Snr., Oscar Egg, Alf Grenada and other top-class sprinters. He finished second in the 1925 American All-Round Championship and with Willie Grimm finished fourth in the 1926 New York Six Days' Race.

Ken first competed against McBeath during the 1919/20 track season in Sydney where they were evenly matched, and results evenly shared across various track formats.

**Jack Fitzgerald:** Jack ("Fitzie") Fitzgerald commenced his career in Victoria in 1919 and won the famous Austral Wheel in 1922 from the scratch mark announcing himself as one of Australia's best sprinters. In 1924, he followed in the footsteps of some of his fellow wheelmen and headed to Europe where it is reported he won 26 scratch races in succession. He was third in the 1923 Sydney Six Days' Race and second in 1925 eventually winning with Ken in 1927. He finished third in the 1932 Brisbane Six Days' Race teamed with Opperman. In 1927, he travelled to the US to compete on the east coast and in 1929, he won the Australian Sprint championship and the National All-Round Championship (also referred to as the National Board Championships for Professionals) at the Canterbury Velodrome.

Jack and Ken rode with and against each other over many years with many keen struggles and honours often shared although "Fitzie" edges Ken out in terms of sprinting wins. They partnered on a number of occasions in teams' events and were a successful pairing winning the 1927 Sydney Six Days' Race and the 1928 Eight Hour Teams' Race.

**Harris Horder:** Harris was the son of first-class rider George Horder who raced with success in Australia during the pre-war and the early years of the inter-war eras. Harris started his career in 1918 and like Ken, developed into one of the country's best wheelmen at an early age before heading to Europe with Ken in 1921-22. He was also regularly contracted by promoters such as Jack Campbell for the Australian track seasons and claimed many wins in Sydney and Melbourne over local and imported riders in handicap, scratch, and match races. In 1927, he travelled to the US winning the US National Sprint Championship with second placings in 1930 and 1931 and second in the All-Round Championship in 1931.

Ken and Horder's careers followed a similar trajectory in their early years in terms of track riding (Horder did little if any road riding) and were frequent rivals. They travelled to Europe together in 1921-22 where they forged their own paths but occasionally came together as they teamed in a 100 kilo race in October 1921. Horder won the Grand Prix de U. V. F. (the next biggest race to the Grand Prix de Paris). George was a more consistent sprinter than Ken however Ken did have his share of wins over Horder on the track in Australia in shorter race formats, particularly during the 1919/20 track season.

**George Dempsey:** Dempsey commenced his career in the amateur ranks in 1922 and represented Australia at the 1924 Paris Olympics in the 1,000-metre sprint and 50 kilometres events. He turned professional in 1925 and had a successful track season in 1924/25 claiming wins over Arthur Spencer, Ray Eaton, and Cecil Walker. Dempsey was almost unstoppable in 1925/26 which may well be



regarded as his finest season. He won many match races and teamed with Ken to win the Sydney Six Days' Race before later claiming all four Australasian Championships: the ¼, ½, one, and ten miles races. He turned his attention to racing abroad and headed firstly to the US and then on to Europe and then back to the US returning to Australia several times to compete however he raced primarily in the US from 1928-1937. He placed in many six-day races there and in 1932, finished third in both the US Sprint Championship and All-Round Championship. In 1933, he claimed the coveted US National sprint Championship and followed that up the following year with another third and another win in the US All-Round Championship and a second in the All-Round Championship the year after.

Ken and Dempsey were frequent rivals on the track from the time Dempsey turned professional and fought out many battles. George was a more consistent sprinter than Ken however Ken did have his share of wins over Dempsey on the track in the shorter race formats. They teamed for the 1925/26 Sydney Six Days' Race and in a standout performance, won by a margin of 114 points.

### **International Riders**

**Walter Rutt (Germany):** Rutt is one of the greats of German cycling who rode in the pre-war and inter-war period. He is credited with 933 race wins in his professional career (1900-1926) including the 1913 World Sprint Championship (he also won bronze in the same event on three occasions prior: 1907, 1909 and 1910). He also won the European sprint championship in 1911 and the German sprint championship 4 times. He won the Grand Prix de Paris in 1913, the Grand Prix de l'UVF in 1904 and 1909 and the Grand Prix de l'UCI in 1907. He also won 9 six-day races: New York three times; Berlin five times (and a third); and Frankfurt once. Rutt visited Australia twice early in his career arriving in 1904 for the summer and again the following year. He competed with great success in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide.

Ken's performance in the 1922 Berlin Six Days' Race attracted wide acclaim in Germany, particular with promoters who were eager for him to remain in Berlin, and he was signed up to compete in further races. The management of the Sports Palace in Berlin arranged a three-man match race over three heats between Ken and Rutt and were seeking a third rider, preferably a well-known German road rider. No further details of this race could be found (probably because Ken was eventually prohibited from riding in Germany) however the fact promoters saw fit to match Ken with Rutt speaks to the calibre of the 21-year-old Australian and the regard in which he was held in Germany.

**Oscar Egg (Switzerland):** One of the greatest Swiss riders, Egg rode professionally from 1912-1928. He was a Swiss national road and sprint champion who in 1911 simultaneously held all world records from 500 metres to 100 kilometres. He held the world hour record on three separate occasions in the 1910's (before the war) and won the Bol d'Or in 1924. He rode in the Tour de France (1911 and 1914) and Giro d'Italia (1919) winning stages in both and won the Paris-Tours (1914); Milan-Modena (1917) and Milan-Torino (1917) road races. He rode in 28 six-day races, mainly in the US but also in France and Germany winning eight. Egg established the world six-day race record with Francesco Verri at the 1915 Chicago Six Days' Race (2,804 miles). This record stood for many years.

Ken's performances in France had impressed promoters and he was selected for an Omnium match with Oscar Egg and the Belgian rider Charles Deruyter (see below) who were considered the two best riders in France at that time. The match was held on 14 March 1922 at the famous Parisian Velodrome, the Parc de Princess. Egg won on the day however Ken was widely applauded for his efforts. After a year racing on the Continent, Ken had established a wonderful rapport with cycling fans and a great reputation and, as with the match up with Rutt, his riding was of such quality that he was deemed of such calibre to be matched with Egg and Deruyter.

**Charles Deruyter (Belgium):** Charles Deruyter was a track and road rider winning the Circuit des Champs de Bataille stage race in 1919 and registering second places in the Paris-Roubaix (1913) and the Tour of Flanders (1923). He also won the Brussels Six Days' Race in 1921.

As per the above re match race with Egg.

**Leon Georget (France):** Leon Georget was known by several names: "The Brute", "Big Red" and the "Father of the Bol d'Or", the last being for his record in the famous Parisian endurance race of 24 hours, the Bol d'Or<sup>20</sup> which he won on nine occasions with second, third and sixth places in a remarkable record. He finished eighth in the fourth ever Tour de France in 1906 and also placed twice in the Bordeaux-Paris road race (second and third). He also won the Toulouse Six Days' Race in 1906 and was third in the New York Six Days' Race in 1907. In 1902, Georget broke the world 100 km record (paced).

Ken rode with and against Georget on many occasions during his time in Europe, undoubtedly the most of any of his European rivals and with great success across several differing track formats involving match and teams' events. From the information available, they each had three wins against each other, one win as a team and a second together in an international pursuit race. In September 1921, Ken was matched against Georget, Maurice Brocco and Emiel Aerts in a motor pace match race over three heats at the Parc de Princes Velodrome in Paris. Ken finished third however his invitation to ride in this match up against three of the best European riders speaks volumes for his growing reputation on the Continent.

**Maurice Brocco (France):** Maurice Brocco (also nicknamed "Coco") was a French professional rider between 1908-1927. He was a road rider initially competing in the Tour de France on six occasions winning one stage (1911). He won the 1910 Paris-Brussels and had success in the Giro di Lombardia and French road racing championships gaining multiple placings in both. Before the war, he took on six-days racing finishing third in the Berlin Six Days' Race three years in succession (1909-1911). After the war, he focused on track and six-day races where he was successful in winning in New York four times and Chicago once (1923) with Oscar Egg. The Maurice Brocco 400 (MB400) is an independent charitable 24 hour challenge race held annually in France in honour of Brocco.

Similar to Georget, Ken came up against Brocco on a number of occasions defeating him in a match race and a three-hour teams' race, whilst Brocco turned the tables a year later defeating Ken (teamed with Francesco Verri) in a 100 km teams' event.

**Emile Aerts (Belgium):** Emile Aerts was a Belgian road and six day specialist who also competed in shorter track events. He placed in the top ten in the 1913 Paris-Tours and 1914 Paris-Roubaix road races. He has seven six-day race wins in the Brussels (3), Paris (3) and Berlin (1) as well as four minor placings in the Brussels.

In addition to the aforementioned motor-pace match race, (see Georget) Ken raced against Aerts in the 1922 Brussels Six Days' Race which he won, and Ken finished 9th.

**Marcel Berthet (France):** Berthet rode professionally between 1907 and 1923 on the road and track. He rode in the 1908 Tour de France but is more well known for his duel with Oscar Egg over the world one hour record which he held on three occasions. Berthet set the new record in June 1907 and held it for five years before Egg broke it in 1912. He then broke it again a year later before Egg reclaimed

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<sup>20</sup> Hubert Opperman won this race in 1928.

the record two weeks later. Berthet reclaimed it four weeks later and held it for another year before Egg once again increased the distance.

Ken faced off against Berthet in the 17<sup>th</sup> Octave Lapize Prize race in which he finished second and Berthet finished third.

**Francesco Verri (Italy):** Verri was primarily a track rider who followed up his Italian sprint championship in 1905 by claiming the World Sprint championship the same year. He won the Italian championship a total of eight times and won three gold medals at the 1906 Intercalated Games in Athens. He also won two six-days races in 1915; the Buffalo with Reggie McNamara; and the Chicago with Oscar Egg.

Ken was teamed with Verri in a 100 km American style teams' event at the Velodrome d'Hiv after Verri's partner withdrew. The race was won by the team of Emile Aerts and Charlese Deruyter with Ken and Verri finishing seventh.

**Leon Parisot (France):** Parisot was a French track specialist who won a silver medal at the 1923 World Championships in the middle distance and was runner up in the French middle-distance championships in 1923, 1927, 1928 and 1929.

Ken faced off against Parisot in the 17<sup>th</sup> Octave Lapize Prize race in which he finished second and Parisot failed to finish.

**Marcel Dupuy (France):** Primarily a sprint specialist, he also raced in six-day events. Dupuy was the French national sprint champion in 1920 and runner up in 1919. He won the Grand Prix l'UVF Sprint in 1919 and was third in 1910 and 1920. He won the 1916 New York Six Days' race with Oscar Egg (and was second in 1919 and third in 1920) and won the 1919 Brussels Six Days' Race.

Ken raced against Dupuy in a 100 kilometre American style race at the Velodrome D'Hiv where he was teamed with Francesco Verri. Dupuy and his teammate Peyrode finished fifth with Ken and Verri seventh however French correspondents praised Ken for his fine riding whilst criticizing Verri for not doing more to support Ken.

**Adolf Huschke (Germany):** Predominately a road rider, Huschke was the German road race champion in 1921 and was runner up in 1920 and 1922. He won the Tour of Germany in 1922 and was second in 1911 also claiming second in the Munich-Berlin in 1922 and 1923. He also competed in six-day races with second placings in Frankfurt in 1911 and Berlin in 1923.

Ken rode with Huschke in the latter half of the 1922 Berlin Six Days' Race after Ken lost his team mate in Willie Spencer and Huschke his team mate also. They finished fourth.

**Bobby Walthour Snr. (United States):** Bobby Walthour Snr. is a US Cycling Hall of Fame inductee (1989). He began his career in 1894 as an amateur rider but quickly moved into the professional ranks where he excelled as a sprinter, six-day rider and motor-pacer. By 1905, he had claimed two US motor-pacing championships, two world motor-pacing championships and won the Madison Square Garden Six Days' Race twice. He was also the European motor-pacing champion in 1911 and 1912.

Walthour rode in Europe where he was popular in Paris and Berlin and in 1922, he was partnered with Ken for the Brussels Six Days' race where they finished a credible ninth place. Reporting of the race suggests it was Ken's great riding, particularly in the final two days that enabled them to regain two laps lost earlier in the race.

**Willie Spencer (Canada):** Willie Spencer is a US Cycling Hall of Fame inductee (2005). He commenced his career in Canada in 1910 as an amateur before, turning professional in 1916 to ride in the New York Six Days' Race. He won the 1917 San Francisco Six Days' Race before was called up for service in the US Army. He returned to the track in 1919 and went to race in Europe. In 1919/1920 he visited Australia where he won the Sydney Six Days' Race with fellow American Charles Ostritter and broke the world record for the quarter mile. He won the America Sprint Championship in 1922 and took the title again in 1923 and 1926. He returned to Australia for the 1923/24 and 1924/25 seasons where he rode with success against Bob Spears, Harris Horder and Jack Fitzgerald.

Ken first rode against Spencer during his visit to Australia for the 1919/1920 track season in Sydney with limited success as a 19-year-old but by the time they reunited their acquaintance in France two years later, they had become racing partners and firm friends. They were partnered in a 100 kilometre teams' event in Paris a week before the 1922 Berlin Six Days' Race where they partnered again with an excellent chance of winning. On the third day, the pair had a good points lead however Spencer tired and dropped out potentially bringing Ken's race to an end. The champion German road rider Adolf Huschke was also riding however suffered a similar fate to Ken when his partner retired at the same time as Spencer. Officials allowed Ken and Huschke to partner as a new team, but they were penalised one lap according to the rules of six days' racing. They regained the lap through some magnificent riding by Ken and eventually finished fourth.

**Arthur Spencer (Canada):** Spencer's career was primarily in the US where he won the US sprint championship in 1917, 1920, and 1924. He visited Australia for the 1924/25 track season where he competed in Sydney and Melbourne defeating brother Willie, Ray Eaton, Cecil Walker, Harris Horder, George Dempsey, and Gerry Halpin in various events. In 1924, he defeated five-time World Sprint Champion Piet Moeskops on four occasions.

Ken competed against Spencer during the 1924/25 track season in Sydney where he regularly pushed him in various track formats.

**Hans Ohrt (United States):** Hans and brother Ernest ("Ernie") (see below) started as amateurs in San Francisco in 1906. Hans turned professional after winning the US amateur track championship in 1915. He and Ernie raced in Europe between 1919-1925 and travelled to Australia for the 1919/1920 track season in Sydney.

Ken competed against Ohrt during the 1919/20 track season in Sydney and although he did not register any wins over Ohrt, the young Ken received favourable press for pushing his older rival in some of their clashes.

**Ernest "Ernie" Ohrt (United States):** Ernie transitioned from the amateur ranks to professional after the 1914 season. He rode with great success winning events in France, Italy, and Belgium during his time in Europe. Ohrt would go on to coach the US Olympic team.

Ken raced against Ernie in Sydney during the 1919/20 track season, and they reunited their acquaintance in 1921 when they teamed successfully on several occasions for teams' events in France and Italy.

**Willie Keller (USA):** Keller was a first class rider from the United States.

Ken raced against Keller during the 1923/24 track season in Sydney defeating him in a three-heat match race.

**Willie Grimm (USA):** In 1922, Grimm won the USA Amateur Track sprint Championship. He subsequently turned professional and had great success on the US six-day race circuit with wins in New York (twice), Chicago and Philadelphia as well as many placings.

Ken competed against Grimm during the 1924/25 track season in Sydney defeating him in a ½ mile sprint match race and the International Teams' Pursuit Match.

**Ray Eaton (USA):** A first class all-rounder, Eaton won the 1919 US Sprint Championship defeating 16-time US champion and future world champion Frank Kramer. Eaton was also a capable six day rider winning the 1920 New York event and finishing third in the same event two years later. He also finished second in the 1926 Berlin Six Days' Race.

Ken competed against Eaton during the 1924/25 track season in Sydney with some success, defeating him in the 100 Kilometre Team's Event, an International Team's Pursuit Match and a heat of a Team Match Race. He teamed with Eaton to win a three miles pursuit match.

**Oscar Rutt (Germany):** The son of Walter Rutt (see above), Oscar was born in Sydney when his father was racing there during the early 1900's. Rutt returned to Australia as a 23 year old in 1928 having achieved much success in Germany having beaten Matt Engel the German Amateur champion.

Ken defeated Rutt on several occasions during the 1928/29 track season at the Canterbury Velodrome.



## Attachment 3

### Extracts from Newspaper and Magazine Articles

#### European Campaign (1921 and 1922)

*It has already been chronicled in this column that Gerald Halpin, H. H. Horder and C. L. Papworth intend to race in France this season. Ken Ross has also decided to try his luck and will leave in company with Halpin next month. Ross is not 21 yet, and has a great future ahead of him, when he develops a better sprint. He is remarkably strong and game. Even if he misses on the track, there are many rich races on the road in which to try his luck. Ross is the best road rider in Australia today, and the long distance French races should suit him down to the ground. One of the more popular fellows in the game, I wish him the best of luck. (Referee (Sydney), 2 March 1921, p. 15).*

*With the exception of Ross, all are mainly track exponents. Ross is the best all round man of the party and he is expected to win success on both road and track ... For his never-say-die style of riding, Ross is one of the most feared riders in the State. He is a pursuit rider of the highest calibre and is never so determined as when he has the field in front of him ... An idea of this rider's ability may be gathered from the fact that he concedes starts to riders like [Jackie] Clarke and [Hans] Ohrt. (Herald (Melbourne) 9 April 1921, p. 4).*

*Harris Horder, Ken Ross and Cecil Hanneman are very useful men and if they do not get into the finals, continental riders will at least find them hard nuts to crack. In fact, the Australian quartette will be a most formidable combination in any teams contest in which they participate. (sic.) (Pre world championship assessment in the Herald (Melbourne), 29 July 1921, p. 5).*

*Ken Ross is without doubt the most popular rider over here. He has put up some remarkably fine rides, although dogged by bad luck, and has displayed a stack of courage and endurance which has endeared him to the public. Ten days ago, he rode in a 50 kilo teams' race but drew as a partner a fat old has been who left the Parramatta boy all the work, but, in spite of that, he managed to lap the field. A few days later, he rode in a 50 kilos motor paced race (without rollers). His motor broke down at the start but, nothing daunted, rode without pace until the motor got going again. He then settled down to wipe off the deficit. Although up against the crack followers of France, Ross recovered two of his lost laps and finished second, a great ride. The crowd went mad over him. For absolute gameness, Ross has it all over these fellows. I have seen some bicycle riders, but lift my hat to the Parramatta boy. When Ross takes on the road racing it will be a shame to tell what he will do to the riders here. (Referee (Sydney), 31 August 1921, p. 15).*

*Ken Ross is riding better than ever behind the motors in France. On September 25 he defeated such great pace followers as Leon Georget, Aerts, and Brocco, at the Palais de Princess, Paris. Ross enjoyed the honor of being the first rider to defeat Brocco who is one of the best riders on the Continent. With further experience – he had none behind the motors prior to leaving Australia – Ross should develop into a great pace follower. He possesses wonderful stamina and is game. (Arrow (Sydney), 18 November 1921, p. 12).*

*Despite the dimensions of the track, the America 50 kil. earned us some very interesting phases, in which the winners Peyrode and Texier, and also the Australian Ross, were the heroes. This last is really an ace of this kind of test. It will be interesting to see him, in the company of his compatriot Halpin who failed him yesterday, battling with the best Belgian and French specialists. (Transcription of an unknown French publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection – Ref the Hourlieur-Comes Award 50 km American style teams' event).*

*I'll be curious to see what the little Australian Bulldog Ross will do, who made such a brave race last Sunday.* (Transcription of an unknown French publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection – Ref the 17<sup>th</sup> Octave Lapize Prize Race against Leon Georget, Marcel Berthets, Andres Juby, Leon Parisot and Jean Chardon).

*The third round, finally was the prerogative of Ross, and never was victory more deserved, for the Australian took advantage of the circumstances to make us admire without reserve a truly rare courage and tenacity. Ross is a man who will be talked about and whom we will respect; he has all the qualities to be so.* (Transcription of an unknown French publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection – Ref Half-Distance match against Leon Georget, Emile Aerts and Maurice Brocco).

*The Autumn Grand Prix for stayers behind motor tandems partly kept what it promised, because it earned us three races made interesting by the brilliance brought by Bolzoni and Ross ... The excellent Ross that we had seen in an American at night this summer appeared to us another man behind tandems. He also has a flowing, supple and comfortable style and his defeat in no way diminishes the man who seems to have the size to take his revenge if necessary. A big congratulations for Ross who, for his beautiful outfit, was very pleased.* (Transcription of an unknown Italian publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection Ref the Autumn Grand Prix, against Bolzoni, and Henri Rheinwald at the Nice Velodrome, December 1921).

*[t]he management of the Vel d'Hiv had thought of two men to replace Belloni : either Degraeve, one of the most remarkable American specialists in Belgium and who arrived in Paris yesterday and the excellent Australian crack Ken Ross whose fine qualities have already been appreciated by the Parisian sportsman on various occasions. (sic.)* (Transcription of an unknown French publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection).

*The surprise of the race was the good driving of Ken Ross. The young Australian came to us as an unknown man and left Berlin with the reputation of being one of the best six-day racers. Ross caught up with Adolf Huschke on the lap lost due to the retirement of his partner Spencer, and the Australian played an excellent role in the sprints...* (Transcription of the German sports newspaper *Wheel World*, Sunday 26 February 1922, from the original in the Ken Ross Private collection - ref its report on the 1922 Berlin Six Days Race).

*Endowed with a gold medal by the former amateur champion, winner of the Bordeaux-Paris 1906, this event will oppose, in three rounds, three renowned specialists in train races, with or without trainers, Oscar Egg, world one hour record holder and winner of the Six Days of Paris 1921 ; Charles Deruyter, winner of the Six Days of Brussels 1921, and Ken Ross, marvellous little Australian Champion, who was not afraid to face his two formidable rivals.* (Transcription of an unknown French publication from the original in the Ken Ross Private Collection. Ref the Marcel Cadolle Prize – Grand Omnium Match against Oscar Egg and Emiel Aerts at the Parc du Princes Velodrome on 14 May 1922).

## **Australian Reporting**

*The fame of K. Ross, the fine little Central Cumberland rider, has spread to America. A Yankee cycling journal pays him a fine compliment in a long paragraph, which winds up: "Ross is but 19 years of age, and from all accounts looks to be a wonder."* (Arrow (Sydney), 24 January 1919, p. 4.).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The American cycling journal referred to could not be identified or located.

*Ken Ross, the popular Parramatta rider put up the best ride of his brilliant career on Saturday when he annexed fastest time honours in the Goulburn-Sydney ... The performance of the promising Parramatta rider was an excellent one. (Arrow (Sydney), 24 September 1920, p. 14).*

*One of the features of the cycling carnival last night was the exhibition of unpaced riding in the pursuit race by Ken Ross. He lost his two team mates early but continued unaided to the end, against heavy odds, and won with ease. It was a great ride and Ross was warmly applauded. It is this kind of race which unearths the real bicycle rider. There is not a better all-round rider in Australia today than Ross. (Sunday Times (Sydney), 2 January 1921, p. 9).*

*There were some very exciting races at the Sports Ground on Saturday evening before a large attendance of spectators. The principal feature of the good night's racing was the great ride put up by Ken Ross in the pursuit race. With such fine riders racing, it would not seem that such a feat was possible; still it was done and well done too...The pursuit race was an exceptionally fine field with riders such as Grenda, Wells, Hans Ohrt, W. Erskine. With five minutes to go saw Ken Ross the only member of his team on the track. He put up such a great unpaced ride that he won by 100 yards. (sic.) (Sydney Sportsman, 5 January 1921, p. 10).*

*Ken Ross, always a good rider is riding at his best this season. His riding coming up the straight is a revelation to sport followers. Reminds one of the hard and fast rides Gouillet used to put up. (Sydney Sportsman, 12 January 1921, p. 10).*

*Harris Horder and Ken Ross (Spears' companions) on the vessel are both young Australians only 22 years of age who have done remarkably well in the Old World.... In company with Gerald Halpin who has not returned with them, Ross and Horder left Australia in 1921. On the continent, Ross specialised in the more arduous type of racing, such as six days endurance tests. Behind motor pace he was successful in a large number of events, particularly in Italy where he was known as the "Boy Wonder". (Re return from Europe - Sporting Globe (Melbourne), 16 December 1922, p. 4).*

*Successive defeats of Jack Fitzgerald and Fred "Jumbo" Wells in motor-pace races at the Exhibition carnivals promoted by Messrs. Campbell and Du Frocq stamp Ken Ross as being a brilliant exponent of this class of riding. He has the essentials which make for success – strength, speed, and good judgement – and no one who witnessed his sensational dashes can say that fear is an element of his composition. (Sporting Globe, 10 March 1923, p. 6).*

*At Parramatta Oval on Saturday night, Ken Ross performed the greatest feat of his career by defeating Cecil Walker in two straight heats of a half mile match race. For some time, Ross has been recognised as one of the best all round cyclists in Australia. But though he had done well in Australia and Germany, he was not expected to triumph over Walker and in two straight heats at that. Walker has admirers here who are of the opinion that he can beat anyone in Australia. And Australia contains Bob Spears ... Ross is one of those rare riders who can go for almost any distance and finish with a paralysing sprint. (Referee (Sydney), 30 January 1924, p. 15).*

*Although riders of entirely different types, it is generally admitted by all who saw the match between Ken Ross, the Parramatta champion and Willie Keller, the American on Wednesday evening that it was one of the finest contests of this kind yet seen at the Sports Ground. Each rider had to make the fullest use of both his generalship and the speed he possessed, and it was finally in each heat a case of Ross' remarkable strength opposed to Keller's remarkable burst of speed in the straight. (Sydney Morning Herald, 8 February 1924, p. 12).*

*After a keen contest for the 10 minutes to which it was limited, it resulted in a well judged win for the international riders, Willie Keller (USA) and Cecil Walker (NSW) mainly due to the excellent judgement and stamina shown by Walker but in the eyes of the public, the finest performance was that of Ken Ross who after losing his partner R. H. Marshall in the first mile, fought the other teams unaided for three miles and was only defeated by a bare 40 yards. (Sydney Morning Herald, 4 February 1924, p. 7).*

*Ken Ross – Great Australian Rider whose Versatility is Amazing:*

*When broadcasting the track deeds of the prominent Australian cyclists it would be little short of sacrilege to overlook the brilliant achievement of Ken Ross, than whom there is no more promising rider in the Commonwealth. Already he has built up for himself a fine record, and with youth on his side he bids fair to accomplish even greater deeds in the near future. His style of riding, and his wonderful versatility – he can ride any distance from half a mile up to 100 kilometres – have made him a prime favourite with the cycling public, and he is always enthusiastically greeted whenever he makes an appearance on the track. (sic.) (Featured article in Fairplay, 11 February 1924, p. 5).*

*Some wonderful riding was witnessed but it was the clever team work that enabled Dempsey and Ross to pull off the points. Ross with his international experience in Paris, Berlin and other centres proved an ideal partner, and though Dempsey won nearly all the sprints, there were many occasions when Ross did gruelling work on the track. At times he was astride for six hours in a stretch in order that Dempsey might enjoy a rest to be fit for the sprints. Ross never tired, in fact, Dempsey said his partner was “a glutton for work” and without his advice he could not have succeeded. (re his win in the 1925/26 Sydney Six Days’ Race – Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 4 January 1926, p. 9).*

*The winners, George Dempsey and Ken Ross showed that experience in six day races counts a great deal more than sprinting powers. The pair never exerted themselves in the sprints which carried only 4 points for a win. They reserved their energy for lap gaining which carried 250 points. They were successful in gaining two laps on the field which won them the race. On Saturday, they were 200 points in the lead. Most people expected them to try in every sprint and increase their lead. Instead, they just hung on to the field in the sprints filling a place now and then, all the time reserving themselves for an attempted breakaway by any of the other teams. The lion’s share of the credit must go to Ken Ross. He has been through the mill previously in Sydney, Berlin, Paris and Brussels, and skilfully he prepared the campaign of his team. He was ably assisted by trainer Harry Horton who has trained most of the leading cyclists in the world. Ross realised that Dempsey would have to be nursed so he gave the young ex-Olympian plenty of rest, while he stayed on the track for hours. (re his win in the 1925/26 Sydney Six Days Race - Referee (Sydney) 6 January 1926, p. 15).*

*Horder wound up at the bell lap and suddenly kicked before reaching the board at a point of approximately 300 yards from the finish. Ken Ross in recent years favoured this mark for a “getaway” but it is not popular owing to the prolonged effort involved. (Sydney Sportsman, 1 December 1926, p. 7).*

*Ross has a remarkable career as a teams’ rider not only here but on the Continent ... Ross revels in the hard going which is not surprising in view of his powerful physique and rugged stamina. He is easily the most popular six day rider in Australia and enthusiasts would probably look askance at any marathon race which did not include Ken. (Sydney Sportsman, 5 April 1927, p. 4).*

*Jack Fitzgerald will ride with Ken Ross and they should make a wonderful combination. Both have performed ably in races of this kind previously, Fitzgerald being a grand sprinter and Ross the “iron man” who can keep going for hours at a stretch. With his assistance, Fitzgerald will be able to keep himself fresh for the important sprints and the team should win. (sic.) (re the 1927 Sydney Six Days Race - Evening News (Sydney), 9 April 1927, p. 2).*

*Should Ken decide to turn down the tempting offers he recently received to ride in a series of Six Day's Races in Germany, where he was very popular, we shall look forward to the next road season proving our contention that given proper opportunities for training, he is at least the equal of any long-distance road rider in Australia, and probably the best all-round track and road exponent our continent holds. Such a hard-working, clean living modest straight goer as Ken Ross deserves the best that his many admirers wish him. (The Superb Cycle News, Vol. 1., No. 2, October 1927, p. 7).*

*At one time or another most leading riders have earned the spectators' displeasure. Usually a round of hooting greets the offending one, with a few informative comments thrown in. Any man who escapes such public censure must surely have the confidence of his audience. Ken Ross has never, to our knowledge, incurred such displeasure. His big heart and willing body always give their best, while "squealing" is foreign to his make-up. He's just a big boy anxious to please everybody and bring happiness to a staunch little wife and baby. (Sydney Sportsman, 22 January 1929, p. 14).*

*Ken Ross is another whom everyone is delighted to see succeed. The pleasant conditions at Canterbury (velodrome) have increased the number of new devotees of cycling, but all seem to have heard of the splendid doings on track and road of Ross. His desire always to give of his best has made him a great favourite. (Sporting Globe (Melbourne), 2 January 1929, p. 10).*

*Among the surprise entries for the Leeton carnival were those of Bob Spears and Ken Ross both wonderful sportsmen in their time ... Ken Ross was a brilliant track and road rider who rode with success on the continent. Fifteen years ago, he was the whirlwind on the track. (Sporting Globe (Melbourne), 28 April 1937, p. 10).*

*Another few years and perhaps this lad will be pedalling in the wheeltracks of Hubert Opperman, Bob Spears and Ken Ross, and others who have written Australia's name on the cycling map. (Herald (Melbourne) 16 November 1937, p. 26).*

*KEN ROSS proved a good Samaritan more than 20 years ago" writes Bob White the well known wheel identity. "A rider from Victoria went to Sydney and after a while went broke. Ken Ross took him to his home at Woy Woy befriended him in many ways and got him back on his feet. He was not only a great track and road rider, but was a great man on and off the track" adds white. (Sporting Globe (Melbourne) 25 October 1929, p. 9).*

*He was popular because of his gentlemanly manner and great sportsmanship and willingness to help others. Many a stranded athlete was advised by the popular wheelman. (The Sentinel (Victoria), Wednesday 24 July 1974, p. 2).*



## SOURCES:

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## ON-LINE LINKS:

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<https://auscycling.org.au/people/kenneth-ross>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xilHMQhJN-c>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken\\_Ross\\_\(cyclist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Ross_(cyclist))

## NAME OF FAMILY MEMBERS IN PHOTO AT PAGE 40:

L to R: Ben Couchman (Ken's great grandson), Linda Goodwin (Ken's granddaughter), Christine Walters (Ken's great granddaughter), Helen Walters (Ken's daughter), Kirsty Walters (Ken's great granddaughter), Brooke Walters (Ken's great granddaughter), Sonya Walters (Ken's granddaughter), Vanessa Clarke (Mark's wife) and Mark Walters (Ken's grand son).

## ENDNOTES:

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- <sup>i</sup> Opperman, H. F., *Pedals, Politics and People*, Haldane Publishing, Sydney, 1977, p. 59.  
<sup>ii</sup> Oakman, Daniel., *Oppy – The Life of Sir Hubert Opperman*, Melbourne Books, Melbourne, 2018, p. 330.  
<sup>iii</sup> Grivell, H. ("Curly"), *Australian Cycling in the Golden Days*, Unley, Adelaide, 1954, p. 114.  
<sup>iv</sup> Homan, Andrew M., *Iron Mac: The Legend of Roughhouse Cyclist Reggie McNamara*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2016.  
<sup>v</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 4 January 1926, p. 9.  
<sup>vi</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, (Sydney) 1 October 1928, p. 27.  
<sup>vii</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 21 January 1929, p. 27  
<sup>viii</sup> Hepher., Jack and Drummond., John *Goulburn to Sydney 1902-1992: 90 Years of a Cycling Classic* (1994), p. 129.  
<sup>ix</sup> *Herald* (Melbourne), Saturday 9 April 1921, p. 4.  
<sup>x</sup> *Referee* (Sydney), Wednesday 2 March 1921, p. 15.  
<sup>xi</sup> *Herald* (Melbourne), Saturday 9 April 1921, p. 4.  
<sup>xii</sup> Letter from Ken to his mother Rosina from Paris dated 24 May 1921.  
<sup>xiii</sup> *Referee* (Sydney), Wednesday 31 August 1921, p. 15  
<sup>xiv</sup> *The Gosford Times*, Friday 4 April 1952, p. 9.  
<sup>xv</sup> *Sun* (Sydney), Thursday 7 April 1927, p. 8.  
<sup>xvi</sup> Article in an unknown German newspaper in the Ken Ross Private Collection.  
<sup>xvii</sup> *Sporting Globe* (Melbourne), Wednesday 27 December 1922, p. 11.  
<sup>xviii</sup> *Sydney Sportsman*, Wednesday 7 November 1923, p. 10.  
<sup>xix</sup> *The Superb Cycle News*, Vol. 1., No. 2, October 1927, p. 7.  
<sup>xx</sup> *Referee*, Wednesday 19 July 1922, p. 15.

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- xxi *Referee* (Sydney), Wednesday 9 August 1922, p. 14.
- xxii *Referee* (Sydney), Wednesday 9 August 1922, p. 14.
- xxiii *Sydney Sportsman*, Tuesday 11 July 1922, p. 6.
- xxiv *Sporting Globe*, Saturday 9 September 1922, p. 4.
- xxv *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), Saturday 2 September 1922, p. 6.
- xxvi Grivell, H. ("Curly"), *Australian Cycling in the Golden Days*, Unley, Adelaide, 1954.
- xxvii *Sydney Sportsman*, Tuesday 5 January 1926. p. 8.
- xxviii *Sun*, Sunday 3 January 1926, p. 5.
- xxix *Sporting Globe* (Melbourne), 2 May 1923, p. 13.
- xxx *Referee*, Wednesday 30 April 1924, p. 15.
- xxxi *Arrow* (Sydney), 5 October 1923, p. 11.
- xxxii *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 17 June 1925, p. 5.
- xxxiii *Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday 15 September 1931, p. 13.
- xxxiv *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), Monday 22 October 1934, p. 9.
- xxxv *News* (Adelaide), Monday 22 October 1934, p. 9.
- xxxvi *Sporting Globe*, (Melbourne), Wednesday 8 October 1930, p. 12.
- xxxvii *Daily Telegraph*, (Sydney), Wednesday 8 August 1934, p. 3.
- xxxviii *Truth*, (Sydney), Sunday 30 September 1934, p. 9.
- xxxix *Labor Daily*, (Sydney), Wednesday 3 October 1934, p. 2.
- xl Opperman, Hubert., *Wheel Champions Past and Present*, No. 9, *Herald* (Victoria) Wednesday 10 July 1935, p. 2.

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