

King of Brands on his glorious reign

Race legend Minter says walking circuit backwards was secret to his dominance

By TOM HOWARD

WIMBLEDON has Roger Federer, the Tour De France has Lance Armstrong, but Brands Hatch belongs to Kent's motorcycle legend Derek Minter 'King of Brands'.

Born in Littlebourne, near Canterbury, in 1932, Minter became one of the most successful motorcycle riders in the country during the 1950s and 1960s. He earned success in the Isle of Man TT and across Europe, but most famously Brands Hatch.

Minter bought his first bike as a 16-year-old, but his career really took off a decade later when he became a professional racer.

In 1958 he announced himself on the scene by finishing fourth in the Isle of Man TT and two years later became the first man to lap the 37.7-mile course at an average speed of 100mph.

Unbeatable

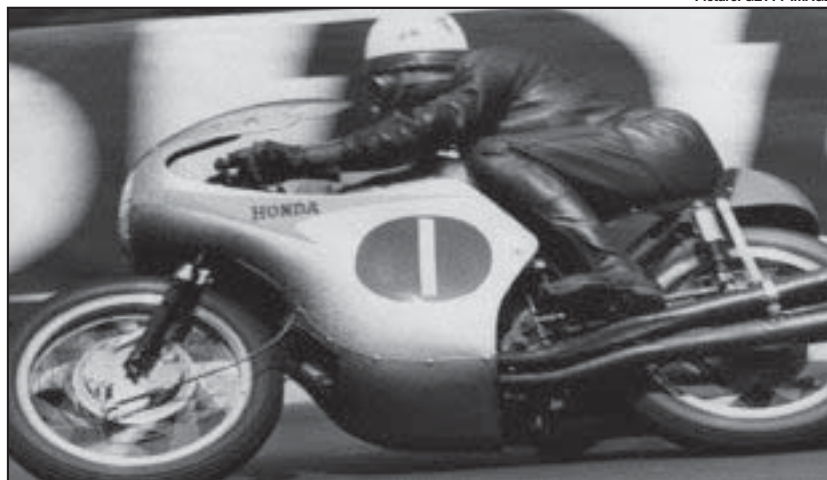
While he enjoyed racing on the dangerous roads of the Isle of Man TT, his real love was for Brands Hatch.

Minter, who won two British Championships, soon became the man to beat on the Kent circuit.

Legendary commentator Murray Walker dubbed him the 'King of Brands' after winning five races at the circuit in one meeting in 1962, a nickname which stuck.

Minter, now 79, told Kent on Sunday: "They called me the 'King of Brands' because I was a bit unbeatable. I always put up a good performance but the only thing I couldn't do was start well.

"I was always sixth or seventh at the first corner. I enjoyed that because I had to try and catch up instead of worrying about people behind you when you are in front.



Picture: GETTY IMAGES



"I knew the circuit well and I used to walk round it backwards to judge the corners better and get a more direct route, which was my secret."

Minter's success at the circuit saw Brands

SUCCESS: Derek Minter, one of our most successful riders and his beloved Brands Hatch (left), where he dominated during the 1950s and 60s

Hatch launch the 'King of Brands' trophy race in 1965, which he duly won, receiving the trophy from pop star Lulu.

His achievements at Brands Hatch were officially acknowledged when the circuit named a straight on the grand prix circuit after him.

He said: "It is nice to be honoured with that but I didn't really do much of my overtaking along there, that was saved for the corners."

Minter, who still lives in the Canterbury area, suffered a brain haemorrhage in 2000 but has made a good recovery.

He still retains his passion for motorsport and will be an interested viewer today as the British Superbikes return to Brands to battle for his crown.



RECOVERING: Karen Stupples

Picture: ADY KERRY

Stupples hoping for strong finish after injury woe

KAREN Stupples is hoping for a strong finish to the season to rescue a frustrating year plagued by illness and fitness problems.

The 36-year-old, from Deal, plays the vast majority of her golf on the LPGA Tour in North America. For the first time in her 11-year professional career she has yet to record a top-10 finish this season, missing seven cuts in 14 tournaments.

Stupples' problems began in March when she felt unwell during a tournament in Phoenix.

She said: "I went to hospital but they didn't find anything and turned me away. I went back the next day in agony and they found a problem with my appendix. It was very lucky it didn't burst, but the surgeon got it out just in time."

Surgery

Ongoing problems with veins in her legs have also affected Stupples, restricting the amount of time she could spend practising.

She opted to have surgery to correct the problem, which is not expected to be completely cured until the end of the year.

The 2004 British Open champion missed the cut at this year's event last weekend, but there were encouraging signs in Thursday's first round at the Wales Ladies Championship of Europe. A three-under-par round of 69 put her among the leaders at the tournament, which finishes in St David's today.

Stupples is hopeful of recapturing something close to her best form before the end of the year.

She said: "I feel I'm just starting to hit some quality shots again and get back into the flow of tournaments. I still want to win tournaments this year. I still say I can win and that's what my goal needs to be.

"I'm hoping next year I will be leaner, meaner and ready to go, but I still think I can salvage something from this season."

Picture: NICK DUNGAN



NEXT MOVE: British Superbikes ace Leon Camier

Camier eyes step up to MotoGP next year

LEON Camier is considering a move to the lucrative MotoGP series for 2010 which would see him line up on the grid alongside the five-time world champion Valentino Rossi.

The Ashford-born rider, who has a commanding lead in the British Superbike Championship, is starting to look for a new deal for next season.

The 22-year-old has dominated the British Superbike Championship with 11 wins to his name before this weekend's meeting at Brands Hatch.

His success has turned heads in the superbike racing fraternity. Camier has admitted he would like to move to the World Superbike Championship, following an impressive wild card debut at Donington Park in June.

But with close friend Casey Stoner racing in MotoGP and with the chance

to go up against a legend in Rossi, Camier has not ruled out a move to series.

He told Kent on Sunday: "Later this month it will be a lot clearer as to what I will be doing next season. World Superbikes is an option, but we will have to wait and see what other riders have planned.

"MotoGP is also an option but the only way I would go to the championship was if I could guarantee a ride on the right machinery.

"There are plenty of riders hoping to race in that championship so it would be difficult, but it is an option."

Log on to www.kentnews.co.uk to follow Camier's progress as he bids to make history at Brands Hatch this afternoon by breaking the record for most wins in a British Superbike season.