



ON THE BUTTON

It doesn't just start and end with the racing. Being a match referee is a full-on job, as **BEN FINDON** discovered as he shadowed Wayne Jarvis on a recent evening at Northampton...

THEY don't do it for money, and they certainly don't do it for public acclaim. They are under perpetual scrutiny from all sides and any mildly contentious decision is likely to trigger an avalanche of opprobrium.

The life of a speedway referee can be hard and lonely but also busy and full. If you enjoy responsibility, have an affinity with the speedway community and genuinely love the sport, this could yet be the job for you.

It certainly is for Speedway Control Bureau referee Wayne Jarvis, who is swinging his car into the near-empty Northampton Foxes car park, more than two hours before the tapes are due to rise on the local derby with Leicester.

He has already done a day's work, as a self-employed education consultant. Now

comes a different challenge, overseeing a Premiership speedway meeting safely, fairly and efficiently.

The Association of Speedway Referees (ASR) are keen to provide an insight into the workings of a match official on race night. What follows over the next four-and-a-half hours is, Jarvis says, pretty much the standard drill for all referees.

If that is the case, their physical and especially mental stamina is something to behold. Jarvis is in a constant state of full alert for the duration, not stopping for a single break or sit-down.

His preparations have started before he got anywhere near the track, readying himself for the action with early checks.

"When the teams are declared, I check the line-ups are in order. I'll read reports from the most recent meetings at the track and make sure I'm aware of anything going on

at the clubs or with their riders," he says as we walk towards the referee's box.

"The referee will also need to note any specific competition rules. For example, if it is a two-legged cup-tie, there are no tactical substitutes and if it is the second leg of a league tie there could be a Super Heat."

Jarvis carries a laminated folder that gives him all the information he could need at his fingertips. In addition to the check sheet he is about to work through, the sheaf of papers include the meeting and track homologation certificates and cover supplementary regulations, amendments, team declarations, the Rising Stars list and rider registrations.

It is his first visit to Britain's newest track and once up in the Brafield box, with its panoramic view of the impressive arena, he is keen to inspect viewing lines and the control panel.

"Each control panel has the same buttons but they can be arranged differently. You need to be aware of where everything is because you often must react instantaneously," he says. "I have noticed the random start mechanism isn't functioning correctly when testing the panel, so I will revert to manual starts."

From there it is down to the pits and a quick word with the team managers. There's banter with Stewart Dickson, the Leicester boss. "I can smell a wee bit of aftershave here," Dickson chuckles. "I was just trying to compete with you," ripostes Jarvis.

Moments later, Leicester captain Ryan Douglas walks by and an incident at Sheffield the previous month is recalled amid an exchange of laughs.

Jarvis has a serious message for Dickson and his Foxes counterpart Chris Adams; a

"I couldn't see whether his rear wheel had slipped under the polyfoam bag, so erred on the side of caution. It wasn't a wrong call but maybe as a result of gauging the new track, I might have been able to let that one continue."



warning that riders will be fined if they transgress on to the infield. Adams is also keen to clarify a recent tweak to the start-line regulations, with Jarvis explaining it followed an incident at Ipswich and has now aligned British speedway with FIM rules.

He also speaks to the machine examiners, asking them to check the carbs for riders one and four in the team line-ups, and to make him aware if there are any issues with machinery or equipment.

Next comes the track inspection. The new Brafield circuit looks in good condition but there was a stock car meeting at the weekend and some debris remains to be cleared away.

"The most important part of the job is rider safety, so a lot of the inspections I make and questions I ask are with the aim of making things as safe for the riders as it is possible to do," Jarvis says, stepping out on to the well-watered raceway.

Jarvis and clerk of the course Kevin Gipp inspect the polyfoam fence, a simpler installation than the air-bag barriers elsewhere. Jarvis lifts back the flaps to see how they are fixed together. There's a discussion around the need to put capping on the safety fence, with Gipp saying this would be done before the next meeting.

"On the track walk, I'm scouring all the while. I'll be talking to the clerk of the course and track staff all the time. Track surface, safety fence...here I'm looking at the stock car traffic lights. Are they far enough behind the safety fence? Are they turned away at a safe angle?" Jarvis says.

"The main aspect is ensuring there is compliance with the homologation certificate which outlines what can and can't be on the infield and outside the safety fence, the number of stop lights and the number of air or polyfoam bags that must be in place.

"I'm also looking at the track shape, especially here as it is a new track. How will it affect the racing and what will I have to take into consideration? Each track is different. At first sight there are similarities with Leicester but it is very different to somewhere like Sheffield, which is essentially D-shaped."

By now we have reached the third bend, where Jarvis spots a big hole on the infield, potentially a problem if a rider left the track at that point. He takes pictures with his mobile phone for inclusion in the meeting report.

"Much of what I see is not necessarily

needing to be done now – it will go into the report – but there are some metal post coverings near the pit gate and traffic lights on the fourth bend that need to be done before racing tonight," he explains.

Jarvis is a hands-on official. "If I see something that needs doing, I'm ready to help out. If there's stuff on the track, I'll pick it up," he says as he throws a piece of old exhaust pipe over the fence.

"The volunteers do a fantastic job here, as they do everywhere. The sport doesn't happen without them. Referees want to foster good relationships. We are in it together, we want the same thing. We love the sport. There are plenty of thank-yous. I want to bring them with me."

Jarvis takes a walk around the banking outside the safety fence before returning to the circuit as the teams are undertaking their track walks. There is a quick reminder to both sets of riders about avoiding the infield, with the sharp-thinking Dickson quick to seek assurances that the starting tapes will be lifted if his riders need a shortcut to beat the time allowance.

With that, Jarvis stops off at the starting gate to remind the marshals to check gate positions in good time for the two minutes, pull the tapes forward – and lift them for both sets of riders if necessary.

Time is marching on. As the bikes are warming up in the pits, Jarvis takes another walk through, glancing at each machine and checking on fire extinguishers, fire buckets and oil disposal containers. There are no obvious issues, so now it is off to the medical room.

"I don't need to tell you this," he addresses the eight medics, "but don't let anyone tell you what your job is or try to interfere. Tell them to go away and we'll deal with it. Always do what you need to do."

Jarvis makes a quick inspection of the changing rooms, noting that they are clean and there is hot water. On his way back to the referee's box, he is intercepted by Foxes co-promoter Paul Hunsdon who, with 200 spectators still queuing outside, requests a brief delay to the start time.

Up in the box, fellow referees Chris Durno and Dave Watters put in an appearance. There's the customary joshing but then Durno turns aside, nods at Jarvis and says: "He's good," before adding the kicker: "I trained him!"

Time to draw breath before the start of the action? You must be joking. Jarvis is

checking the meeting certificate to ensure everything is in place and signed off by the relevant officials. He looks over the technical forms from the machine examiners to ensure there are no concerns with bikes.

The riders are on parade but have already had instructions from the watchful Jarvis, allowing them to do practice starts wearing helmets but observing any red lights.

Jarvis remains on his feet. "You are always scanning. Are the medics and track staff in position, is the pit gate closed, are any of the riders warming their tyres, dirt deflectors on properly, lanyards attached?" he says.

THE start light is on, moments later Jarvis pushes the gate release button and Douglas tears from the start to win the opening heat. Jarvis calls out the helmet colour sequence as the riders cross the finish line and immediately presses the two-minute warning for the next race. He then turns to his laptop to update the SCB's new computerised scoring programme.

Drew Kemp and Kye Thomson are in an engrossing battle for the lead in Heat 2 when Jarvis suddenly thumps the red emergency stop button. Dan Gilkes has tumbled at the opposite end of the track.

Then, in Heat 3, Kyle Howarth comes down at almost the same spot. Jarvis hovers over the stop button but the Lion is quick to clear the track and the race continues.

"The most difficult thing is when not to stop a race," Jarvis says during the grading break after Heat 4. "I may have hit the button early, as Gilkes did clear the track, but I also have to think about the number of red lights and flags the riders will pass before reaching the faller, and the time for the flag marshals to respond.

"I couldn't see whether his rear wheel had slipped under the polyfoam bag, so erred on the side of caution. It wasn't a wrong call but maybe as a result of gauging the new track, I might have been able to let that one continue.

"Howarth was a bit different. He was getting to his feet and intent on getting off the track, so my call was to let it continue. I gave him a public commendation for getting clear but safety comes first. Any doubt and that light goes on."

There is a decision to be made in Heat 5 when Douglas goes down, seemingly



Northampton v Leicester, from left: Ryan Douglas, Niels-Kristian Iversen, Lewis Kerr and Jaimon Lidsey

unimpeded, on the first turn. It looks a clear-cut disqualification for the rider in white but Jarvis makes a quick visit to the live streaming team next door for a video check. Moments later he's back to relay confirmation to announcer Dave Rowe.

"When there's an incident, I take a moment, run it back in my mind, make sure I'm certain and then take the decision. It is something Chris Durno and Paul Carrington, my mentors during training, taught me. That's my decision-making process," Jarvis says.

"I'll always use the live stream if available. It can give you a different perspective. It usually supports your initial instinct. If it is clearly and obviously different from that, then that would change my mind. If it had shown Douglas being clipped by another rider it would have been all four back in.

"Decisions are not always as straightforward as that. We can see the start line and we have a good view of the first and second turns but third turns are often a lot harder. If something happens there the stream will often give a view that is hard to get from the ref's box."

There is little discussion about individual riders. "No, for a lot of referees, when we watch a race we've often got no idea who is actually racing. They are just helmet covers."

IT is to be a straightforward night but Jarvis, in his seventh year on the buttons, has not, like many other referees, been immune from controversy.

As in all sports, there is the public jury – although it more often resembles a kangaroo court – to contend with.

"Referees are human and they can make mistakes just like anyone else. There will be times when you make a call that can be argued both ways," the 54-year-old says in a quiet moment later in the evening.

"I stay off social media. It's not healthy. You'll just punish yourself reading stuff from people, the keyboard warriors, who often haven't seen the incident at first hand.

"I know some refs go online but I don't know why. It can be so destructive. We are our own harshest critics. If you've made a decision that you are beginning to doubt,

"For a lot of referees, when we watch a race we've often got no idea who is actually racing. They are just helmet covers."



Foxes' Jaimon Lidsey and Nicolai Klindt receive the acclaim of the crowd

that long drive home alone won't be very enjoyable."

Not that there is anything to agonise over tonight. A big crowd watch a Foxes' fightback that brings the newcomers' first-ever victory. The meeting runs smoothly, there is some good racing and, despite the warm, dry conditions, there is no dust.

"Referees can control the pace of meetings with their two-minute warnings. It's a balance. We want to give the crowd a show and if it is a warm night and it is pleasant out there, we can run at a steady pace. If it is cold and wet, it will be in most people's interests to hurry things along a bit," Jarvis says.

"The first races tend to get run off quickly. The tempo can ease a bit later on but if you fall behind early it is always more difficult to make up time."

Jarvis' only other intervention is to stop Heat 10 and warn home rider Troy Batchelor for moving at the start. Foxes complete their historic 48-42 win and the home camp are all smiles on what has been a great night for Northampton Speedway. Jarvis closes the meeting at a pretty much ideal 9.22 pm.

"It's been good tonight. A great team at

the track and we all worked together. Big crowd, good meeting, you feel it has been a good night, for Northampton obviously, but for the sport all round."

Jarvis heads down to the pits for some handshakes, more thank-yous and goodbyes. But his work is not yet complete.

A two-page meeting report, detailing everything from weather conditions to the number of tractors and the condition of the referee's box (excellent), must be sent to the SCB by the following midday, along with the scorecard.

Jarvis appends an additional report covering pit-gate/fence capping, the infield hole and one rider's unregistered transponder. Then he can start thinking about his next meeting.

"I don't do it for the money, which will just about cover travel expenses and the cost of kit. The ASR provide everything. I've been a supporter for a long time and I want to put something back in," Jarvis said.

"Speedway is a community: riders, team managers, promoters, supporters, all those volunteers and, of course, us referees. We want to play our part."

Visit the ASR website for further info about referees: www.speedwayreferees.co.uk

2015/2026: 18:26 Northampton "FOXES" v Leicester "LIONS" - SPEEDWAY LINE-UPS
 Meeting: Northampton "FOXES" v Leicester "LIONS"
 Meeting Date: Thursday 21st May 2026
 Date & Time Posted: Tuesday 19 May, 2026 @ 08:14am
 Posted by: Northampton

NORTHAMPTON "FOXES"

1. Jaimon Lidsey 2.87 ✓
2. Troy Batchelor 4.73 ✓
3. Jonas Jepperson 5.65 ✓
4. Niels-Kristian Invernson 6.71 ✓
5. Nicolai Klindt 6.16 (C) ✓
6. Kyle Thomson 3.95
7. Sam Hagon - R/S replaces Luke Harrison on international duties in SONZ

Team Manager: Chris Adams
 Colours: Blue, White & Orange

Leicester "LIONS"

1. Ryan Douglas 8.2 ✓
2. Lewis Kerr 5.87 ✓ GUEST
3. Nick Morris 5.89 ✓
4. Kyle Howarth 5.00 ✓
5. Sam Masters 7.28 (C) ✓
6. Drew Kemp 4.72 (C) ✓
7. Dan Gilkes R/S

Team manager: Stewart Dixon
 Colours: Red, Black and Yellow

Referee: Wayne Jarvis

[Back to SPEEDWAY LINE-UPS homepage]

This news item is from SPEEDWAY LINE-UPS
 (http://www.speedwaylineups.co.uk/news.php?eventid=9109)

Print this page

11.4
 Rising Star MA must be lower or equivalent to missing rider.
 RS not in current 1-7
 Sam Hagon 3:00 (Prem Issue 27 2025)
 Luke Harrison 3:00 ✓

Lewis Kerr in for Dan Thompson (5:87)
 Collarbone
 Kerr 2025 Issue 27 Prem average
 5:50

