

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



STANLEY WOODS (1904-1993) **Champion Motorcyclist**

Stanley Woods was the last survivor of a galaxy of British and Irish stars who dominated international racing before the Second World War. He was also the most successful Isle of Man TT rider of the era with ten wins, a record he held for over 25 years until overtaken by Mike Hailwood.

Stanley Woods was born in Dublin in 1904, the son of a toffee salesman who drove Stanley around in the sidecar of a 1,000cc Harley Davidson. In 1921 Stanley borrowed this machine, minus the sidecar, to make his racing debut during which he crashed, breaking the handlebars. He used a branch cut from a roadside hedge as a substitute.

Young Stanley talked his way into the Cotton works racing team, and, on an inferior motorcycle achieved an impressive fifth place on his first attempt at the Isle of Man TT in 1922. In 1923 he was back with a new Cotton and rewarded the Gloucester-based company with their first TT win.

He joined the Norton team in 1926 and won the 500cc Senior TT. In 1929 he won the Spanish Grand Prix. In 1932 and 1933 Woods won 350cc and 500cc TT races then travelling on into Europe to dominate the grands prix.

In 1934 he signed with the Husqvarna factory, and in 1935 changed to the Italian Moto Guzzi factory giving them their first TT victories, with the 250cc and 500cc titles. From 1936 until his retirement from racing in 1939, Woods rode mainly for the Velocette factory, where he enjoyed a good personal relationship with the shop floor and the board of directors.

His racing took place against a backdrop of a poverty-stricken Ireland and a rapidly changing, pre-war Europe. In 1939, when road racing was suspended for the war, he joined the Irish army as a Commandant in the 4 Cavalry Motorcycle Riders and his last duty in 1945 was to help organise the Cavalry Motorcycle display at the RDS in Dublin. After the war ended, he concentrated on scrambling and trials riding for both fun and competition. He was honoured for his achievements at a testimonial dinner in Dublin in 1989.

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Stanley Woods died in Castlewellan, County Down on 28 July 1993

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Patrick Devlin