

Summary

Speedway in Poland, portrayed in this paper, has developed a lot during forty years. Spontaneous races and tournaments have become well-organized. Provisional tracks have been replaced by dedicated ones meeting stricter and stricter requirements. Diverse regulations have transformed into a set of regulations recognized at every match. Amateur motorcycles - usually modified army motorcycles have been replaced by a professional vehicles designed especially for speedway. Unquestionable successes were achieved during the years 1948-1989. The number of medals won in Speedway World Championships in 1960's and 1970's has made speedway one of the most achieving sport disciplines in Poland. However, one must remember that every sport discipline has its own specificity and objective comparison of achievements can be problematic. The popularity of speedway in Poland was also reflected by the number of international tournaments organized there. Roughly one tournament with World Championship level was organized each year starting from early 1970's, which was not spotted in any other sport discipline. Thanks to all those successes and matches on the top-level organized in Poland, resulting popularity of this sport among public during described period cannot be surprising. However, it was relatively elitist due to its specificity. It would be hard to find another sport with such a big difference between the number of all people doing the sport and the number of fans. All successes both sport and organizational successes are described in this paper. The traces of these successes spotted in the press, literature, feature and documentary films are discussed in this paper as well. It should be remembered that the evolution of speedway in Poland during the years 1948-1989 was a reflection of its social, economic and political relations. The government has supported this sport considering it not only a good source of entertainment for the working class, but also an important factor in the process of motorization of Poland. It was not an accident that guidelines concerning speedway were included in the so-called six-year development plan for the Republic of Poland, which was an important object of the official propaganda. At the same time authorities tried to use speedway to legitimize their power and to increase public support for them and the communist system they were maintaining. In 1940's and 1950's speedway tracks were built with a high share of public works just like it happened with housing districts, public utility buildings etc. Very often official openings of stadiums were executed during official national holidays. Top speedway riders were to be model citizens. The social and economic crisis during 1980's was a reason of a deep crisis of Polish speedway, which is reflected in archival press and stories about these days told by racers, trainers and speedway activists. In this context, the history of speedway can be considered as a representation of every-day life in the People's Republic of Poland.