

ROAD RACER: John Morgan is aiming to help defend the National 100 miles Time Trial Championship trophy



Preston outfit gear up for defence of marathon road test

THE Preston Wheelers trio of Gethin Butler, John Morgan, and Paul Fleming are showing great form as they prepare to defend their team title in next Sunday's National 100 miles Time Trial Championship.

In 2002, the trio secured the first national team honours in the long history of the Wheelers when Butler took the individual silver medal in 3hrs 41min 48sec, Morgan in his first '100' logged 3-49-06 for fourth, and Fleming defied a cold to log 3-56-16.

The trio's combined time of 11hrs 27min 10sec gave them the team gold medal by over 17 minutes from pre-race favourites Pete Read Racing.

The 2003 championship is to be contested on one of the trio's favourite courses and is based on the A50 dual carriageway near Uttoxeter in Staffordshire.

It was on the Uttoxeter course that Butler, in June of last year, recorded the fastest 100 for five years, 3hrs 32min 02sec.

More recently, it was there that Morgan, in his third 100, improved by a massive 12 minutes to log 3-37-33.

Butler's form has been underlined by victories in the Cleveleys Road Club six miles hill-climb time trial to the summit of Oak-enclough Fell, and in Manchester Wheelers' open 50 miles test, where his time of 1hr 47min 39sec gave him a winning margin of over eight minutes.

He is also the current leader in the Rudy

CYCLING

By Paul Cahill

Project national circuit time trial series. Morgan tied for first place with Blackburn's Ian Stott in the Cleveleys RC 30 miles test on the Cockerham circuit, and then recorded a new personal best time of 1hr 44min 13sec in the Ferryhill Wheelers 50 - an improvement of one-and-a-half minutes.

In the same event, Fleming, too, set new personal figures, improving by 1min 11sec to log 1-45-53.

He was the only one of the trio to ride the NLTTA 100 miles test on local roads, finishing second in 4hrs 5min 06sec.

His team-mates' improvement led Butler to comment, tongue-in-cheek: "I will have to watch myself. I might finish up as the third counter in the team!"

But all three men are aware of just how difficult it will be to retain their team title.

They face stiff competition, once again from Pete Read Racing, from API Bikes, and from a very strong Velo Club St Raphael squad.

Fleming is the earliest starter on Sunday at number 113, followed by Morgan at 125. Butler is number 150 in the championship field of 155, with his arch-rival and defending individual champion Kevin Dawson (Life Repair CRT) off last.