

## **Trials – A-Z**

*“The following may give any potential trials enthusiast or even current riders an insight on Trials A-Z. This document is not all inclusive, hopefully it will answer some of your questions” - Bob Billyard*

Motorcycle trials, also termed observed trials, is a non-speed event on specialized motorcycles. The sport is most popular in the UK and Spain, though there are participants around the globe including Canada and the United States.

Trial motorcycles are distinctive in that they are extremely lightweight, lack seating (they're designed to be ridden standing up) and have suspension travel that is short yet supple, relative to a motocross or enduro motorcycle.

The event is split into sections where a competitor (men, women and children of all ages) rides through an obstacle course while attempting to avoid touching the ground with the feet. The obstacles in the course may be of natural or constructed elements. In all sections, regardless of content, the designated route is carefully contrived to test the skill of the rider. In many local observed trials events, the sections are divided into separate courses to accommodate the different skill level of riders, who compete in skill-rated classes. In every section, the competitor is scored by an observer (hence the sport's name) who counts how many times the competitor touches the ground with the foot (or any other part of the body). Each time a competitor touches the ground with a foot (commonly called "dabs" or "prods"), the penalty is one point.

The possible scores in each section consist of 0, 1, 2, 3, or 5. If a competitor makes his or her way through the section without touching the ground with a foot, a score of 0 (called "cleaning the section") is earned. If he or she touches the ground only once, the score of 1 is earned. If he or she touches down twice, the score of 2 is earned. If he or she touches the ground three times or more, the score of 3 is earned—as long as the section is completed without stalling the motor, dismounting, going out of bounds or going backward. If the competitor fails to complete the section a score of 5 is earned. The winner is the competitor with the least points at the end of the event. Some events are also timed with penalty points assessed to late riders.

There is a world indoor and outdoor championship, as well as indoor and outdoor national team "world cups" (Trial des Nations). British competitor Dougie Lampkin is notable for winning seven world outdoor titles in the 1990s and 2000s. Previous observed trials greats include Northern Ireland's Sammy Miller (1960s), Finland's Yrjö Vesterinen (1970s), Spain's Jordi Tarres (1980s and '90s). The current outdoor world champion is Antonio Bou from Spain who is also the current indoor champion.

In addition to the world championship events, there are other major events, such as the Scottish Six-Day Trial (SSDT) and the Scott Trial.

Major current manufacturers of trials bikes are Gas Gas, Beta, Sherco, Montesa Honda, and Scorpa. In the past there have been many manufacturers, from countries such as Spain, Japan, Britain and Italy.

Classic classes exist for vintage bikes. Classes include pre-1965 or -1967 motorcycles (typically British), as well as newer vintage events for observed trials motorcycles with two rear shock absorbers. In most cases, twin-shock motorcycles were manufactured before 1985 and are typically Japanese or Spanish. A recent addition has been a class for air cooled monoshock bikes, this covers machines up to around 1990.

## MEET YOUR NEW FRIEND THE TRIALS BIKE

If you have never ridden a modern trials bike, you simply don't know what you're missing. The ability to negotiate rough terrain is unmatched by anything on two wheels, but the real secret is how much fun they are to ride! The combination of light weight (145 to 160 lbs), incredible low-speed handling and a torquey engine allow them to go practically anywhere with ease. Not only will you have fun, but you'll experience new places to ride, meet new friends and learn new skills that will take you to the next level of motorcycling. Intrigued? You should be.

## BETTER MAKE ROOM FOR ANOTHER MOTORCYCLE

Most trials riders own other types of motorcycles as well. A trials bike is the perfect second bike because it complements the riding you are doing now, whether it is motocross, trail or even street. You'll find it's the ultimate tool for cross training as well as "Adventure Riding". We'll explain it all here, and when you're done reading, you'll know all about trials and the funny looking bike with no seat.

## A TRIALS BIKE WILL PUT A SMILE ON YOUR FACE

A trials bike is unlike anything you've ever ridden. Comparing one to a conventional off-road bike is like comparing a Cessna to a 747. Imagine riding a standard off-road bike (XR, WR, EX/C; you name it) up a steep mountain trail with several miles of rock ledges, tight switchbacks and loose rubble. Unless you're Ty Davis, you would soon become exhausted as you lifted, pushed and cursed your way to the top. Now imagine conquering the same trail with ease while lofting the front wheel over those rock ledges with full control and near-perfect traction. Then picture yourself floating the front wheel around those tight switchbacks in a continuous feet-up wheelie turn! You can do that and more on a trials bike and you'll have a blast doing it.

## YOU NEED NOT BE A SUPERHERO TO RIDE ONE

Trials riding can be difficult for sure, but the bike itself is not difficult to ride. It is actually quite "user friendly", despite its amazing capability. Think about it. The bikes weigh only 145 to 160 pounds, has a low seat height, smooth power (although surprisingly snappy), soft, sticky tires and are easy to start. How could that be hard to ride? If you have any off-road riding experience at all, you'll soon be crossing logs and climbing vertical steps that you never could have imagined before.

## A TRIALS BIKE IS THE ULTIMATE CROSS-TRAINER

Trials riding can be physically demanding. When you first start out, you're legs will burn, your hands will ache and your arms will turn to putty. That's a good thing, of course, because eventually your muscles will adapt and you'll be in much better shape for all types of riding. The sneaky part is that an intensive workout can be accomplished in half an hour in an area the size of a backyard.

But there's an even bigger advantage than physical conditioning. Your motocross, cross-country or street riding skills will dramatically improve because trials' riding forces you to learn precise throttle control, peg-weighting, balance and line selection. And that's a fact.

## THE PERFECT BIKE TO RIDE WITH THE KIDS

Every off-road riding parent wants to teach his or her child to ride well, but let's face it; it's difficult to ride together when your kid is on a Z-50 and you're on a CR250. But with a trials bike, you can actually ride WITH your child while demonstrating proper brake and throttle control, turning and balance - the basic skills that are key to becoming a competent rider (trials OR otherwise). You'll spend more time together and you'll both gain more from the experience.

## FORGET KNOBBIES – TRIALS TIRES ARE MAGIC

The special trials tires are a key part of the bike's amazing capability. The rubber is super-soft and the carcass is designed to flex at low pressure and grip better than anything you've ever tried before. The rear tire is tubeless and typically run between 4-5 PSI. Punctures can be fixed using a standard tubeless tire plug kit.

## TRIALS BIKES ARE EASY TO MAINTAIN

You've got the usual air filter cleaning ritual, of course, and a chain to lube. The gearbox and fork oil ought to be changed occasionally along with a check of all the nuts and bolts for tightness, but that's about it. The engines are well designed, and since they don't spend much time at redline, they seem to last forever. Piston rings last many years, as do chains, sprockets, clutches and brakes. About the biggest expense are tires, which cost about \$200.00 a set, but they, too, last quite a while.

## "WHERE'S THE SEAT"?

Everyone asks this question. There isn't a seat in the normal sense, but there is a wide, smooth place to sit down. This "seat" is actually quite comfortable; the problem is it's so low that sit-down riding is awkward, even for short riders. Why is this? Simple. Trials (or any technical riding) is done standing up, and the low seat allows your legs to absorb more impact before your butt hits the seat. This "leg suspension travel" is very important when crossing a three-foot log, for example, and contributes to the trials bike's amazing manoeuvrability. Plus, the low seat allows you to "dab" (touch the ground) in spots not possible on a regular bike. And if the going gets really tough, you actually CAN sit down and "paddle" very effectively with both feet.

## A TRIALS COMPETITION IS FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

After a bit of practice on the bike, you may want to enter an Observed Trials competition. These events test your riding skill against other riders with similar skills. Six different classes exist from Novice to Expert, so regardless of your ability, there is an appropriate class to enter. Most trials are held in the forest or ravine usually far from any town. A typical event consists of a fairly easy trail "loop", three to seven miles in length. Within this loop, eight to ten "sections" are marked with red and blue ribbon or tape. (Red marks the right boundaries and blue the left). Each class rides a different route through the section, and the goal is to ride each one without "dabbing" a foot or crossing any boundaries. The rider can walk each section first to become familiar with it, but is not allowed to pre-ride it. The "checker" (also called an observer – hence the name "Observed Trials") will score the rider and punch his scorecard. Scoring is as follows:

0 Points: Called a "clean", is the best you can get and the goal of every rider.

1 Point: Completing the section with only a single "dab".

2 Points: Completing the section with two dabs.

3 Points: The "Three" is awarded for completing the section with three or more dabs. If you paddle your way through a section, but do not go out of bounds or stall the engine, you will receive a "Three".

5 Points: The "Five" is given for failure to complete the section. This could be caused by not making an obstacle and stalling, riding out of bounds, falling down or moving backwards.

At the end of each loop, the rider turns in his or her scorecard and receives the next one. If desired, the rider may take a few minutes between loops to rest, grab a drink or snack and check over the bike

before heading out on the next loop. Because a trials event is not a race, the atmosphere is much more laid back, and you are free to ride by yourself or with anyone you choose. Many ride with a group of friends and cheer (or heckle!) each other on. It's great fun! The event is over once you have completed the required (usually four) loops.

#### A TRIALS COMPETITION WELCOMES ALL SKILL LEVELS

Novice is the beginning class and consists of sections that are about as difficult as an easy trail ride. The next class is Junior followed by Intermediate, and Expert. There are also a 35+ and 45+ classes for older riders not wishing to ride expert. Only a select few are capable of riding Expert-class trials, but everyone likes to watch! Even if you aren't ready to try trials just yet, come on out to an event and be a spectator. It costs nothing, and you are free to walk to the various sections, take pictures and get within a few feet of the riders.

#### YOU MEET THE NICEST PEOPLE AT A TRIAL

The folks involved with trials are the best! Nowhere will you find a more sincere and trustworthy group, and it is these people that help make trials such a fabulous sport. No one knows exactly why trials attract such a great calibre of people. Perhaps it is because the sport can be humbling and the hot-tempered ones lose interest and move on. Or maybe trials' riding just brings out the best in people. Whatever the reason, it's a unique group and one you will be proud to be a part of.

#### IT'S EASY TO GET STARTED IN TRIALS

There are several ways. First, contact your local trials dealer. He will be happy to answer any questions and point you in the right direction. Next, come out to an event and talk to people and tell them you are interested. You will be pleasantly surprised at how polite and helpful the trials crowd is. But be warned – someone may invite you to try their bike! After a test ride, you may be ready to buy a new or used machine. You'll learn a lot, and by the end of the day you'll know for sure if trials is for you.

#### WHOLE LOT OF TRIALS GOIN' ON IN ONTARIO

The Amateur Trials Association (ATA) holds approximately 10-12 trials every year throughout Ontario starting in May and ending in October. If you want to compete, you can find a trial about twice a month on average. In addition to the ATA the Michigan Ontario Trials Association holds two trials per year in the Windsor area and an additional 10 trials about two to three hours from the boarder. There are also plenty of trials in New York State if your game. Remember to check exactly what type membership you will need to enter a specific trial.

#### THERE ARE MANY GREAT PLACES TO RIDE A TRIALS BIKE

One of the nice things about trials is that you can have a lot of fun in a small area. Many riders even practice in their own backyard on obstacles made of logs, railroad ties and rocks. (At a recent backyard party, the host was seen riding his trials bike over a picnic table, much to the dismay of the hostess). Even the driveway is fine for practicing full-lock turns and front wheel hops, but the real fun is getting out for the weekend and riding the gnarly stuff.

#### TRIALS IS A SERIOUS SPORT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

It started in Europe, of course, and spread to Canada and the U.S. in the late 60's. Most countries, including Canada have a National Championship series, but the Granddaddy is the World Trials Championship series which visits approximately ten countries. A "World Round" trial is without-a-doubt the most spectacular of all motorsport events. The newest sensation is the World Indoor Championship series that takes place in stadiums throughout Europe. The indoor sections are so difficult as to defy description and only a handful of riders in the entire world can even qualify to ride them.

The all-time classic stand-alone event is the Scottish Six Day Trial (SSDT). This gruelling event draws competitors from all over the world and consists of several hundred sections and over 800 miles of riding (yes, without a seat!)

The Trials Des Nations (TDN) is a prestigious international event in which each country fields a four-person team of its best riders, both men and women. (A separate women's class was recently added). Each year Canada sends a team to the TDN.

**Spectators enjoy the day for free!**

**New riders more than welcome!**

Competition Day - If you are new to trials it might be a bit intimidating your first time out. Show up a bit early, relax, say hello, ask a many questions as you can to feel comfortable. Try and find out who might be riding in your class and follow them at least around the first loop. Take a small ride on your bike and have look at the sections if you can.

Before You Arrive

Familiarize yourself with the Trials Competition rules

Ensure your trials bike is in good repair and ready to go

Obtain the proper registration requirements such as a CMA membership if required

Spectators

Dress for the weather and a small hike

Bug spray

Food and drinks

Arrival

You should arrive a minimum of 1.5 hours before the trial starts to:

Set up

Have a look at the sections

Register – ensure you know what requirements are necessary – i.e. CMA membership at CMA sanctioned events etc.

Ensure everything is good with your bike – should be done day before the trial, do another once over at the trial

Eat and hydrate yourself

Warm up

Socialize – always good to get to know people, don't be afraid to ask questions, everyone is willing to help out

Things to bring to a trial:

Bike stuff

Trials bike in good repair and ready to go

Tools

Spark plugs

Gas, two stroke if required

Tire repair kit

Air pump

Tire gauge

Extra tie downs

Spare parts if you got'em

Personal stuff

Map to trial

Trials helmet

Gloves

Boots

Trials / motocross pants

Extra socks

Multi layered - shirt, sweater, coat etc.

Rain gear

Bug Spray

Watch

Camera

Medical kit - advil

Lunch

Power bars

Water – Gateraid - liquids

Fanny pack

CMA or any other registration card if req'd

Money - exact cash for entry is always helpful

Cell phone

Post trial refreshments

## **What does it take?**

(just in case you were wondering what each level does)

### **Organizers**

Liaise with Land Owner  
Awards  
Laying out sections  
Signage  
Flyers  
Checkers / Observers (if used)  
Washroom Facilities  
Results  
Sign – In  
Clean-up  
Paper work to CMA

### **Club**

CMA club affiliation  
Sanction application  
Support organizer in all above tasks – flyers, checkers, results, sign-in, whatever needs doing  
Financial backing to organizers and trials (eg. TDN)  
Organize yearly schedule  
Liaise with other Canadian clubs  
Web site  
Trade Show booth  
Meetings  
Memberships

### **CMA – Sanctioning Organization**

(from my experience what is least understood is what the CMA does, hopefully this will touch on some of their functions)

FIM Affiliation  
Provincial Championships  
National Championships  
Rules – organize yearly rule submissions – maintain rule book  
Sport Code – Maintain sport code book  
TDN – selection process of manager, approve team members, manage funds, liaise with FIM  
Liaise with AMA  
NAMU co-ordination  
Web posting  
Event Results and Point Standings  
Event Insurance Certificates

Rider Insurance  
Affiliation Processing  
Maintenance of data files  
Membership processing  
Rider Training  
Inventory Control Mailings  
French Services  
Competition Licence processing  
International Licence and Release processing  
Maintenance of rider classification files Awards  
Strategic Planning

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## Functions

(from my experience what is least understood is what the CMA does, hopefully this will touch on some of their functions. )

FIM Affiliation  
Provincial Championships  
National Championships  
Rules – organize yearly rule submissions – maintain rule book, see rules below..  
Sport Code – Maintain sport code book  
TDN – selection process of manager, approve team members, manage funds, liaise with FIM  
Liaise with AMA  
NAMU co-ordination  
Web posting  
Event Results and Point Standings  
Event Insurance Certificates  
Rider Insurance  
Affiliation Processing  
Maintenance of data files  
Membership processing  
Rider Training  
Inventory Control  
Mailings  
French Services  
Competition Licence processing  
International Licence and Release processing  
Maintenance of rider classification files  
Awards  
Strategic Planning

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### Riding out of Class:

#### Ability class riders (Novice-Junior-Intermediate-Advanced-Expert)

- Ride the class as designated on their licence
- Can move up a class level any time...But...must stay in that class for the remainder of the season
- Can apply to the CMA to be moved down for the next season
- Can ride 'Sportsman' (no award) at any event. Need to sign in on the 'Sportsman' sheet
- Be aware of the letter CMA sends you at the beginning of the season if you are being promoted to a higher class. For instance, you receive a letter moving you to Advanced but sign up for a licence and enter the Intermediate class at an event. Your points will not count in the Intermediate class.

#### Age classes (+35=VET, +45=SVET, +55=GVET)

- Can move up or down as they wish, providing they meet the age limit (35 and older, 45 and older, 55 and older)

#### Bike classes (Vintage, Modern classic)

- your bike must meet the requirements for the class

#### In my case, my licence is EX/SVET

- I can ride Expert, SVET, VET and have points count in the standings
- I can ride Vintage or Modern Classic on my Bultaco
- I cannot ride Novice, Junior, Intermediate or Advanced unless I apply to CMA to have my class changed
- If I found the SVET C lines too tough at an event...I could ride the D line (Junior) but I would sign up as 'Sportsman-No Award' class

Please consult your CMA rulebook for any further clarifications

Bob Abell

## AMATEUR TRIALS ASSOCIATION

### Observed Trials Scoring

Scoring starts when the centre of the front wheel passes between the start gates  
Scoring ends when the centre of the front wheel passes between the end gates  
Rider's score is 0,1,2,3 or 5.

Clean Ride= 0 points

#### Faults

- 1 Fault = 1 point
- 2 Faults = 2 points
- 3 or more Faults = 3 points

Failure = 5 points

#### Faults Definitions

1. Footing - Any contact, that provides support, of rider's body or machine (except tires, skid plate, footpegs) with the ground or obstacle  
Note: Footing - may occur outside the section boundary providing the machine is within boundaries
2. Foot rotation - 1 point
3. Foot sliding - 3 points
4. Both feet on the ground at the same time = 2 points

#### Failure Definitions = 5 points

1. Machine is moving backwards
2. Machine touches ground outside the boundary
3. Any displacement of markers that requires them to be reset
4. Rider dismounts and has both feet on one side of or behind machine
5. Rider does not have both hands on handlebars, when footing, while stationary
6. Rider receives outside assistance
7. Ride does not complete the section within time allowed (no time limit usually)
8. Rider changes the section
9. Rider begins section without being signalled by the observer
10. Engine stops while foot or any other part of machine is used for support
11. Handlebar touches ground
12. Machine crosses it's own track. It is OK to cross tracks if the section rejoins itself after a split gate
13. Not riding line designated by split gate for the riders class
14. Riding outside the tape boundary (ground visible between tape and tire) One wheel may be floated over a marker. Jumping the bike over a boundary is a failure

#### No Fault or Failure for:

1. Motorcycle stationary in a section
2. Motorcycle hopped from side to side in a section, providing it is not moved backwards
3. Stretching the tape (5 points if the tape breaks though)

#### Classes

A Line - Expert - Black number on White number plate  
B Line - Advanced and Sr35 - White number on Green number plate  
C Line - Intermediate and Sr45 - Black number on Yellow number plate  
D Line - Junior, Sr 55, Classic - Red number on White number plate  
E Line - Novice, Vintage - White Number on Black number plate

#### Scoring suggestions

- Learn the lines of your section
- Find a spot where you can see all of the section
- Write rider's class (A-B-C-D-E) beside their number on their first lap
- Call out "Rider, clear the section" when you are ready for rider to start if there are other riders in the section
- Mark the rider's number with your thumb on the clipboard while he is riding
- hold a fist up (0 points) to the rider when you want him to enter the section
- As rider accumulates faults, count them using your fingers, be sure to hold up your hand indicating the score to the rider as he leaves your section. Try to hold your hand up with the score if rider looks at you during his ride.
- Write the score neatly beside the riders number
- Riders will come to you to get their scores after their last lap
- Write score once on the riders plastic sleeved scorecards, the scores will show up.
-