



# The Motor Cycling Club

## CLASSIC TRIALS ADVICE TO 'FIRST TIMERS' ON MOTORCYCLES

So you're thinking of entering an MCC trial? Good for you! There's nothing quite like an MCC long distance trial (LDT). Depending on how you found us, you may, or may not have some idea of what you're in for. Let's assume you've no idea and we'll try and fill you in. If you've some idea, we don't want to be teaching our granny to suck eggs so skip through the text as you wish.

We've been running classic LDT since before the First World War and they are still a great test of rider skill and fortitude. They're also great fun and a great adventure.

Our events are open to any biker with a driving licence and that means they're not just for 'the lads'; more women enter now than ever before. The Club is full of very friendly people so, if you've any queries, someone will offer an answer, or provide assistance.

If the thought of a breakdown, or difficulties on the trial is putting you off, don't be; there's always another competitor who'll stop to help. But, no organised assistance of any kind, except that provided by the Club, is allowed. So your mate, or family can't turn up with a can of petrol, or an inner tube.

### WHAT DO I DO IN AN LDT?

We're talking here about the three big trials; the Exeter Trial, the Land's End Trial and the Edinburgh Trial. Very briefly, you'll be doing the following:

1. Be released onto the road late at night, or in the early hours of the morning from a start point.
2. Ride on a variety of roads and lanes to an off-road section.
3. 'Clean', or 'fail' the section (more details below).
4. Repeat the second and third points about 15 to 20 times until the finish in the afternoon after which you'll have covered something like 100 to 250 miles, depending on the trial.
5. Collect finishers certificate, drink beer/tea/coffee and relax.

'Cleaning' the section is the main aim. You'll get a fail for putting a foot down (a dab), stopping and, most definitely, for falling off. In addition, some of the sections will have restarts, which have the additional fail of 'rolling back', or 'footing' beyond 3 yards (at least you can put your feet down at the restart). And just when you thought that was it, a couple of the sections will be timed tests. Oh, and there could be time controls on the route. That about covers it. Our LDT are not a race and there's no overall winner. You'll be pitting yourself against the challenges set for you by the Club.

If you achieve a fault-free performance, you can claim a Gold, or a Tin award, depending on what class you're in. If your performance is not so good, then there's a chance for a Silver, or a Bronze, again, depending on what class you're in. If your performance is bad, at least you'll get a Finisher's certificate. If you don't finish, well, there's always next year.



## HOW DO I ENTER?

Easy, do the following:

1. Join the MCC, or an 'invited club' (affiliated club).
2. Get an ACU Trials Registration Card.
3. Get a bike.
4. Open the Online Entry page on the MCC website, then fill in the details, including another biker(s) you'd like to accompany. (Note that groups of riders travelling together on the road is limited to three.) If you're not on-line, you can enter by post.

## How Do I Join a Club?

To join the MCC, apply through one of the following:

- Apply on line by first registering with the MCC. At our website, click on the 'Membership' drop-down menu, select Member's Area, click on 'Enter the online Membership Renewal and Trials Entry system', click on 'New Member? Register here', then fill in the details.
- Apply by post by downloading the application form. At our website, click on the Membership drop-down menu, scroll down to 'Postal application for membership', then click on the link '2015\_Membership Form' to download the form.

To join an affiliated club, contact their membership secretary. Clubs affiliated to the MCC are the Vintage Sports-Car Club (VSSC), the Vintage Motorcycle Club (VMCC), the Morgan 3Wheeler Club, the British Armed Forces Motorcycle Association and the Federation of British Police Motor Clubs riding motor cycles.

## How Do I Get an ACU Trials Registration Card?

To get your card, do the following:

1. Get the authorisation code from the club's membership secretary. (You'll need this code to apply to the ACU.)
2. Go to the ACU website, open up their Licence Forms page, then download the ACU Trials Registration Form.
3. Get a passport photo to stick on the ACU form. (You won't need to do this next year; renewal is a simpler process.)
4. Complete the form, then post it to the ACU. Await Trials Registration Card.

## What Bike Should I Use?

That's a big question and personal taste will probably be the main factor. We'll look at that in more detail below in What Bike.

## I've Entered; What Happens Now?

You'll normally receive your pack of documents, i.e. Route Book, competition numbers, Control Card, by post about a fortnight before the trial. The Route Book is an A4 printed book and gives your directions and instructions so you know where to go, know where the sections are, what the requirements for each are, times, etc. The Route Book is also available as a downloadable Word document from the Club. (Usually from a link published in the Club's newsletter '*News of the Week*'.) You can manipulate the Word document as you see fit, e.g. increase the font size, change the typeface, change the margins; this is especially useful if your eyes prefer a large font.

The route directions are good so you'll not need maps on the trial, though, they can be useful if you get lost. If you want to see where the trial travels, set aside a full evening to run through the route directions on a detailed roadmap, or on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps.

If you'd like to be 'buddied up' with a more experienced rider(s), contact the Club, who'll see if there is a club member local to you who could offer advice and support. That club member can help you understand the rules, such as positioning yourself for starts and restarts, the '3 yard footing rule' and so on.

## **WHAT ABOUT INSURANCE?**

We've got it covered. As a biker with your ACU Trials Registration Card, you're covered by the ACU insurance from the start of the trial to the finish. That insurance is free and provides third party cover. You'll still need your own Road Traffic Act insurance if you ride your bike to and from the start and finish. You don't have to take up the ACU insurance cover; you can arrange your own through your existing insurance company, who already may provide that cover, or may extend your existing cover. However, many members encounter difficulties when trying to arrange that cover.

Ensure that you don't forget to sign on at the start. No signature means no ACU insurance, meaning you could be in financial and legal difficulties if involved in an incident. No signature also means you're regarded as not competing so no awards.

## **WHAT BIKE**

### **Bike Classes**

Let's look at the classes first to see where your bike will be allocated. The classes are as follows:

- Class A - single or multi cylinder solo motorcycles manufactured before 1<sup>st</sup> January 1970 (engine and frame) and Enfield Bullets manufactured in India.
- Class B - single or multi cylinder solo motorcycles up to 450 cc.
- Class C - single or multi cylinder solo motorcycles over 450 cc.
- Class D - motorcycles with touring or trials side-cars. (Scooter side-car outfits are not eligible).
- Class E - three-wheelers. (Yes, we know it's not a bike, but it falls under the ACU.)
- Class O – intended for the less experienced, or those with fragile machinery. (Includes cars.)
- Class R - concentrates on timing. (Includes cars.)

If you're an experienced off-road rider, then classes A to E, which compete in the main trial, should be no problem. If you're unsure about your abilities, try Class O, which can provide a good introduction before you move into the main trial next time. If you're more interested in keeping to scheduled times, opt for class R.

Class O leaves out the first part of the night run, which is from one of three starting points, to a common assembly point. While some Class O sections are easier, this class shares some sections with the main trial, but still offers a challenging ride.

Class R is tarmac based with the competitor's choice of tackling some of the milder sections. The class is newly introduced and the challenges could differ slightly between the three trials.

Carrying a passenger on an outfit, or in a three-wheeler? They'll need club membership and an ACU Registration Card.

## Rider Specification

The next factor is your off-road ability, physical strength and stamina. Riding a 200 kg (440 lb) bike on tarmac can be a doddle; picking that bike up on a steep, muddy hill could be demanding and, for some, impossible. A heavy machine is always more challenging to handle on the rough than a light one. So look at your own capabilities first.

If you've marshaled, or watched our trials, you'll have a good idea of what's expected of you. If you haven't, go look at You tube; there are lots of videos available; just search for 'MCC trial'.

Have a look at how competitors fare on some of the tougher sections like Bluehills 2 in the Land's End trial and like Simms on the Exeter trial. Now ponder if that's the sort of thing you think you could tackle without footing, stopping, rolling back, or falling off. Be aware that videos don't fully capture the steepness of some sections.



## Bike Choices

With a better idea of what bike you'd like to use, consider the choice of bikes. People compete in our trials on all sorts of bikes, from the latest BMW GSs to humble Honda C90s. Triumph twin-powered models, Enfield Bullets, Ariels, Matchless and all sorts of classic machinery are still ridden competitively. The most popular bikes are 250 to 400 cc trail bikes, such as the CRF250 and DRZ400.



## Bike Specifications

Whatever bike you choose, it must have adequate ground clearance, good lights, reliable electrics, good starting, a road-legal exhaust, a fuel tank of about 9 litres and preferably folding footrests.

Inadequate ground clearance will have you struggling to control the bike. Electrics that pack up at the first whiff of rain will leave you stranded. (We compete in England; it rains.) Dim 6 volt lighting, or corroded headlamp reflectors will make navigating in the lanes dodgy. An engine that is a poor starter will have you sweating at the kick start, or sitting on a flat battery; worse still, holding up other competitors on a section. A loud exhaust could get you excluded. The less noise you make, the better for our image and our public relations.

Heated grips aren't essential, but many competitors fit them. Ensure that your electrical generator can cope with their load.

## BIKE PREPARATION

You've got the bike. If you're really lucky, the previous owner has prepped it prior to selling and it's ready to go. Most of us aren't that lucky and, anyway, do we trust that preparation? You've a long way to ride that bike.

The basics are obvious and we're not going into detail here. We know you're going to give the bike a service; grease the suspension; check the front fork seals, wheel bearings, chain and sprockets, cables; etc; the usual stuff. Note that your bike will be scrutineered at the start so make sure your bike will pass without any 'issues'.

Our trials are also a test of reliability. Modern bikes are pretty bullet-proof, but depending on your bike's previous history, things can still go wrong. No-one wants to be a non-finisher due to some trivial fault that could have been sorted out before the trial.

If you are riding an old classic bike, the chances are that you're switched on mechanically and electrically so you don't need our advice. Most problems are electrical related; if you're not so clued-up, pay particular attention to the following:

- Check electrical connections; clean and grease with Vaseline as necessary.
- Ensure that all the earths make good electrical contact.
- Replace any crimped cable joins with a soldered joint and heat shrink sleeving. (Corrosion of the copper wires inevitably works its way down the inside of the insulation sheaf so you might have to replace the whole wire.)

### Handlebars and levers

Another subject about which there are many opinions; if you're unsure of your set-up, do some research. For what it's worth, here's our advice.

The handlebar and lever position on our events has to fulfill two functions; an on-road, rider-seated position and an off-road, rider-standing position. You may have to compromise a bit, one for the other. Levers must be ball-ended for safety.

You'll spend a long time on your bike, most of it on the tarmac, so you want to be comfortable. Adjust the bars so your arms and shoulders are relaxed. Don't assume a hunched position because you'll end up with neck and shoulder ache. Find and assume a relaxed riding position. In the sections and a lot of the access paths, you'll be standing; poor leg position will produce twanging thigh muscles.

Adjust your levers for when you're going through a section, i.e. while you are stood up on the footrests. That position could be with the fingers, back of the hands, wrists and forearms all forming a straight line with the fingers resting on top of the levers.

The final position is the one that that works for you so experiment with different positions.



## Gearing

If you use a lower powered machine, gearing needs to be low enough for the sections, including re-starts, but not so low that you cannot maintain a 45 - 50 mph cruising on the open road where you need to cover long distances. If you're riding to and from the event, you might think about different size gearbox sprockets, for example a 16 tooth for the journey and a 15 tooth for the trial.



## Tyres

In brief, you need to fit a trials pattern tread. The most popular tyre currently in use is the Pirelli MT43, which has the required characteristics of grip, flexible walls and wear rate.

For class C only, you can fit the Continental TKC 80 tyre, or the Michelin T63 tyre. The reason is that bikes in this class usually have 17 inch rims, for which a trials pattern tread is unavailable, or not recommended. Suitable tyres for some sizes of wheels, e.g. 18 inch front, are becoming difficult to source so you may need to speak to other competitors, or officials for advice.

What you can't fit are MX, or Enduro type tread patterns (too aggressive), or soft compound trials tyres, e.g. Michelin X11 (they wear excessively and shed blocks on our trials).

Read the MCC Standing Supplementary Regulations (SSR) for detailed information.



While we're talking tyres, we might as well mention inner tubes. These can be purchased in different wall thicknesses. There's plenty of people with opinions on what thickness to install, but what you fit is up to you.

Finally, on this subject; wheel balancing. A lot of people will tell you off-road wheels don't need balancing. That may be true for the bikers that are riding down the local country lanes and byways open to traffic. However, cruising at 50 – 60 mph on the A303 for tens of miles with the handlebars vibrating will give you a slightly different opinion.

## Competition Numbers

Competition numbers must be fixed to the back and front of the bike so that they're in an upright position on a firm flat surface. The method of fixing mustn't spoil, or hide the figures. Ensure that they won't fall off and can be seen clearly by officials and observers on the sections. If in doubt, have a look at examples in the photo gallery on the Club's website. Laminating the numbers in transparent plastic, or something similar, is a good idea to stop them turning into papier-maché if it rains. For reference, the overall dimensions of the competition numbers are 110 mm high x 150 mm wide.

## Route Holder

Remember the rain? You'll need some sort of weather-proof holder, or laminated sheets to display the route directions. There are some fancy route holders on the market, or you can make your own out of a clear, plastic sandwich box and couple of lengths of plastic, or wooden dowel. A handlebar-mounted clock alongside the route holder will enable you to keep track of time.

Some competitors use electronic route books and navigation devices. This is permitted. Ensure that you understand how to use these devices reliably.



## Tools and Spares for the Bike

Carry only the necessary tools and spares. The more you carry, the heavier and bulkier the bike. Think ahead to when you are standing in a section, on the down side of a slope, trying to get back on the bike and a pile of stuff is in the way. Keep it neat and light; make a list. So what should you carry?

A guide is as follows:

- Brake and clutch levers.
- Headlamp and tail bulbs.
- Puncture inflation aerosol, or sealant, e.g. Tyreweld, Slime.
- Inner tubes. (A lot of punctures are due to splits from running on low pressures and hitting a rock.)
- Puncture outfit.
- Tyre levers.
- Selection of spanners specific to your needs.
- Pump.
- Clutch, brake and throttle cables, or inner cable and solderless nipples.
- Engine oil. (Are you a two stroke running on petrol?)
- Chain lubricant.
- Chemical metal. (For a punctured engine case.)
- Cable ties and gaffer tape.
- Good torch and a spare one, or perhaps a head-torch.
- Tyre pressure gauge.



## RIDER PREPARATION

### Clothing, Boots, Gloves, Helmet

We're stating the obvious here, but warm, waterproof clothing, boots and gloves are a must. It can get pretty chilly in the early hours before dawn and some trials have experienced continuous rain. Thermal underwear is a good investment and Gore-Tex is highly regarded. Mitts are usually warmer than gloves but you've got less feel; it's your choice. Spare gloves are a good idea. However, although that extra layer of clothing may keep you warm on the night run, you could sweat and overheat in the day, fighting your way up a section. Watch the weather forecasts just prior to the trial, then dress accordingly.

A high visibility vest, jacket, Sam Browne belt, or similar are recommended. 'I don't need that' you say. Yes, you do when you're crouched over a dead bike, no lights, scratching your head in a narrow lane and another competitor zooms around the corner. We've not even considered the other, non-trial, road users with their minds elsewhere.

We know your motorcycle helmet is in good nick; isn't it; of course it is. Misting up of the visor; always present due to rain and sweating biker, can be solved by a demister spray, or a Pinlock insert in the visor.

## Pocket Contents

You want to carry as little as possible, bulging pockets are uncomfortable. Whatever you carry, wrap it in a waterproof bag if rain is forecast. Freezer bags are waterproof; sandwich bags may not be. A guide is as follows:

- Mobile phone, fully charged and emergency numbers.
- Soft pencil. (To fill in your Control Card.)
- Energy bars, or a nibble of some sort.
- Soft tissues to clean the visor.
- Wallet with some cash.
- Trial documentation.

Trial documentation, which must be kept dry, is as follows:

- Control Card.
- MCC membership card and ACU Trials Registration Card.
- MoT certificate.

## Get Some Kip

Be well rested before the trial. If you can get your head down for a few hours' deep sleep before the start in the early hours, the whole experience is so much better and safer. If you want to stay awake and alert, rest is no substitute for sufficient good quality sleep.

## PRE-TRIAL CHECKS

Take your bike out for a shakedown ride at night in the condition the bike will be at the start. Is all that gear on the back, or tank going to stay in place if the bike falls over on a section? Will another couple of bungee straps be a good idea? Don't leave it until the last minute. Remember, 'If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail'.

If you can, find what tyre pressures work for you on various off-road surfaces. Every biker has an opinion on pressures and we're not going to debate that here. Suffice to say; high pressures on mud will most likely have you with the wheels slipping; low pressures on rocks and boulders will most likely give you a concussion puncture.

## WHEN WILL I EAT?

Don't worry; there are plenty of planned opportunities for refreshment along the way, including those controls where fuel is also available.



## TRANSPORT

How are you getting to and from the trial? Are you going to ride from your home to your chosen start, trailer the bike and your kit, or use a van? Is there anyone else in your area who is travelling to the start and might they be willing to share? Where are you going to park this transport during the trial? The Finish is usually a long way away from the Start. If you need some help deciding, ask the Club.

## ARRIVE IN TIME

Arrive at least an hour before your start time; earlier is even better. You want enough time to get your bike scrutineered, sign in and relax before the off. If you've ridden your bike to the start in rain, or cold conditions, you might want time to warm up.

## OVERNIGHT STAY

At the end of the trial, you'll be fairly knackered so, depending on how far you have to travel home, or unless you've got someone to drive you and your bike home, you'll need to consider overnight accommodation. Book early to make sure you get a room.

To carry your overnight kit, a tank bag, or tail pack, or both, can be useful. Load any kit on your bike if possible. Some bikers use rucksacks, which raise your centre of gravity, or bumbags, which get in the way. Take your pick, but carry the bare minimum. If the accommodation provides toiletries, why carry your own?

The Club holds the Club Supper on the Saturday evening of the Exeter Trial. It's well worth attending; an opportunity for good food, good company and new friends.

## LINKS

MCC website <http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/>

MCC contacts [http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/?page\\_id=89](http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/?page_id=89)

MCC SSR [http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/?page\\_id=61](http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/?page_id=61)

MCC forum <http://www.themotorcyclingclub.org.uk/forum/>

The Club's newsletter, News of the Week (NOTW) is available to the Club members by email, or post. An ideal medium to keep up to date on events and developments, ask questions, find answers and express opinions.

## CONCLUSION

Obvious, isn't it. Get your membership application in and start trialing with the MCC. Look forward to seeing you.

