



# The Motor Cycling Club

## ADVICE FOR MOTORCYCLISTS

Issue 6

When The Motor Cycling Club (MCC) ran its first trial in 1904 and competitors set off from central London to Edinburgh, tarmac had only been patented two years before and Rolls-Royce had still to build their first car!

The spirit of adventure those pioneers had is continued today. MCC trials are like no other. The world's oldest motorsport club has a long tradition of testing machines and their riders, and that ethos is just as strong today. Our trials continue to be a great test of rider skill and fortitude, and are one of the last great motoring challenges.

Our events are open to any motorcyclist, regardless of age or experience, no matter how suitable or unsuitable their choice of machine. Our trials are competitive, but have a very social feel with fellow competitors always willing to help with advice and practical support.

If the thought of a breakdown, or tackling the navigation is daunting, you can be sure that someone will always be along to offer you that helping hand or advice to get you going. There's always another competitor who'll stop to help. No organised assistance of any kind is permitted other than that freely offered by your fellow competitor.

### WHAT DOES AN MCC TRIAL LOOK LIKE?

The club runs the three big trials; the Exeter Trial (first weekend in January), the Land's End Trial (Easter weekend) and the Edinburgh Trial (first weekend in October):

1. Events typically start on the Friday evening or night to converge upon a common starting point.
2. Routes are from 180 to over 300 miles long. Organisers try to avoid as much A-road as possible, focusing on B-roads, unclassified roads, green lanes and private tracks.
3. Enroute competitors attempt 12 to 18 sections (hills) plus a couple of special tests.
4. Uniquely, MCC sections are either cleaned or failed; there are no bonuses for getting close to the top.
5. Trials usually finish from about 1:00 pm on the Saturday, but later runners can expect it to be dusk by the time they reach the finish.
6. On MCC trials, you don't compete against your fellow competitors, but against the organisers. So there are no winners, seconds or third places.
7. There are gold medals for successfully climbing every section, silver medals for failing one section and bronze medals for failing two sections. Anybody else who makes the finish control is eligible for a Finishers Certificate.
8. For the very best performance, we award the hardest to achieve trophy in motorsport, the coveted Triple. The Triple is a recognition of those competitors achieving a gold medal in three consecutive trials.

'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 trials are not a race and there's no overall winner. You'll be pitting yourself against the challenges set for you by the Club.



## HOW DO I ENTER AN MCC TRIAL?

Do the following:

1. Join the MCC (see below) or an 'invited club',  
Note: Each trial invites up to 13 other clubs so check the trial regulations for which clubs have been invited.
2. Get an ACU Trials Registration Card (see below).  
Note: You can still enter online while awaiting your ACU Card. Just leave that appropriate field blank, then return to the online system at a future time.
3. Open the 'Log In' page on the MCC website [MCC Log In](#); on the 'Members Services', click on 'Event Entry', then fill in the details, including another biker(s) you'd like to accompany.  
Notes:  
1 Members of invited clubs must obtain a temporary log-in from the Trial Secretary to access the online entry system.  
2 Groups of riders travelling together on the road is limited to three.

## How Do I Join the MCC?

Apply on line by first registering at our website [MCC registration](#).

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

To get your card, do the following:

1. Get an authorisation code from our Membership Secretary If you've joined the MCC. If you're a member of an invited club, get an authorisation code from that club. (You'll need this code to apply to the ACU.)
2. Get a passport photo to stick on the ACU form. (You won't need to do this the next year; renewal is a simpler process.)
3. Go to the ACU website <https://www.acu.org.uk/>, open up their Licence Forms page, then download the ACU Trials Registration Form.
4. Complete the form, then post it to the ACU. Await your Trials Registration Card.

## **I've Entered; What Happens Now?**

You'll normally receive your pack of documents, i.e. Route Book, competition numbers and Control Card, about a fortnight before the trial. The Route Book gives the 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 may be either hard copy or a digital document from the Club. You can choose to manipulate the digital document to meet your needs, e.g. increase the font size, change the typeface, change the margins, etc. This manipulation is especially useful if your eyes prefer a large font. You can also make notes and include diagrams of the special tests.

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. Some riders create their own GPX routes from the Route Book and some have downloaded the digital version to their Smart phones.

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 you're regarded as not competing so no award. No signature also means no ACU insurance, meaning you could be in financial and legal difficulties if involved in an incident.

## **WHAT BIKE?**

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

### **Bike Classes**

Let's look at the classes first to see where your bike will be allocated. These 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, excluding 411cc Enfield Himalayan.
- Class C - single or multi cylinder solo motorcycles over 450 cc, including 411 cc Enfield Himalayan.
- Class D - motorcycles with touring or trials side-cars. (Scooter side-car outfits are not eligible).
- Class E - three-wheelers, provided the seats are side by side. (Yes, we know it's not a bike, but it falls under the ACU.)
- Class F - adventure motorcycles manufactured from 1980 onwards with multi-cylinder engines and a capacity above 470 cc.
- Class O – intended for the less experienced, or those with fragile machinery. (Includes cars.)

If you're an experienced off-road rider, then classes A to F, 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.

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.

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 YouTube; 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 Blue Hills 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 GS to the humble Honda C90. 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.

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1. Check electrical connections; clean and grease with Vaseline as necessary.
2. Ensure that all the earths make good electrical contact.
3. 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

The most popular tyre currently in use is the Pirelli MT43, which has the required characteristics of grip, flexible walls and wear rate.

The list of permitted tyres is always under review, primarily due to the unavailability of the MT43 in sizes for 17 inch rims and wide rims. The Clerks of Course may also allow certain tyres for a trial period.

The current list of permitted tyres is given in the 'MCC Standing Supplementary Regulations (SSR)' and in the 'Motorcycle Tyres - Additional Supplementary Regulations'. These two documents can be downloaded from our website at [MCC downloads](#) .

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).

Any questions on tyres, email the Motorcycle Tyre Officer [motorcycletyres@themotorcyclingclub.org.uk](mailto:motorcycletyres@themotorcyclingclub.org.uk) .



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. We provide a set of waterproof numbers either in your final instructions pack or at the start. 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, 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?

Depending on your bike and experience, 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

In a sentence, dress for a winter ride. 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 compression puncture. Our advice is to run at normal road pressures up to the first section, then reduce pressure to your normal trail riding pressures.

## 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](#)

[MCC contacts](#)

[MCC forum](#)

[MCC facebook](#)

The Club's newsletter, News of the Week (NOTW) is available to the Club members. 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.

