

Trials Basics

This page is about basic Trials techniques to try to help beginners and perhaps even a few more experienced riders. This is information gathered from several sources, not the least of which comes from friends and riding companions who have brought this knowledge from Trials schools they have attended. Information has also been gathered from various Trials books. We'll try to take from "here and there" to give you what we feel works.

Getting Started Having your bike set up properly is one of the first steps of riding Trials well.

If your bike isn't right, you'll be fighting it instead of working it. We won't go into that here except to mention that if you are just getting started in Trials, find someone with experience to help you sort the bike out so it will give you its best.

Riding Stance To get through a Trials section successfully, you must keep yourself and your bike balanced. So start with yourself. If you have a friend to hold the front wheel while at a stop you can see the basics of a proper stance. Stand erect on the pegs as you would on the ground. Your feet are flat across the pegs. Keep them toward the outer part of the peg, the toes pointed slightly outward. This will help the outside knee stay away from the tank in a turn. Now bend the knees slightly. Your body is supported by your bone structure, so let them do their job by not bending the knees a lot. The slight bend is so they can act as long shock absorbers. The more they are bent, the less travel they have and the sooner you will become fatigued. Now bring your hands up to the bars, bending at the waist so they just rest on the bars. Don't put a lot of weight on the bars, just let the hands rest there. Now you are in the basic stance. From this position you work the bike, letting it move under you as you ride. Stay balanced over the line you are riding. Keep your movement to a minimum, letting the bike move under you. When going up hill, let the bike come up to you while you remain vertical and balanced, feet still horizontal on the pegs. Going down hill, let the front go away from you, straightening your arms to keep your weight balanced as the front end drops. In turns, lean the bike using pressure on the foot pegs and handle bars while you stay balanced over your line. The inside leg and arm should remain fairly straight and the outside limbs should bend as the bike leans into the turn. This is very basic, but it is from here that you build your technique. The idea is to let the bike move under you, not using your energy any more than necessary moving about trying to balance and counter balance. Use foot peg and bar pressure to make the bike do what you want. This can be practiced anywhere. Start on your driveway or in your yard. Let the bike move under you while you remain upright and balanced.

Straight Lines Before trying turns, perhaps it's prudent to try riding a straight line to get a feel for how peg and bar pressure effect your line. Start with a marked out straight line and try to ride it. You can ride in between two stretched out hoses, a line painted on the surface, a long board, or anything that gives you a fairly long straight line to practice riding. Practice looking ahead, not just beyond the front fender, and see how peg and bar pressure move your bike. Use these pressures to

correct for drifting left or right. Most of all, stay balanced and let the bike move under you as you try to hold a straight line.

Turns There is more than one school of thought regarding turning, but what they all have in common is that you must stay balanced above your bike's line. An old style used by Martin Lampkin was to keep the legs tight against the motorcycle and pivot from the knees to remain centered and balanced. That style has been replaced by the leaning of the bike into the inside leg, and bending the outside knee away from the bike. Going into the turn, using peg pressure, lay the bike into the leg on the side you are turning to. At the same time, since the outside peg is rising, bend the knee outward, the whole time staying balanced over the line of the motorcycle. At this point good riders differ in their styles. Some say to keep your shoulders parallel to the bars. This in turn, moves the upper torso to the outside, helping you to avoid "falling into the turn" and footing to the inside. The only drawback to this approach is that moving the hips to the outside tends to bring the knee into the tank, which straightens out the bike. With this turning style practice holding the outside knee out by exaggerating ankle pivot. Get your foot to the end of the peg and lay your ankle over. The second approach is to keep the upper torso and head facing ahead, keeping movement to a minimum. Let peg pressure and arm pressure and arm movement turn the bike while you remain upright and balanced over your line.

You can start by doing circles or figure eights on your driveway or in your yard. Practice laying the bike into the turn against your inside leg with peg pressure, while bending the outside knee outward. Stay balanced over your line. Try keeping your shoulders parallel to the handle bars, or try turning the bars with arm movement while keeping the upper torso pointed ahead, and see what works best for you. After practicing this on level ground, move to an incline or hillside. Very tight turns can be accomplished by squatting more so the bike can lean more and the outside knee can move further outward. Handlebar pressure on the "outside" bar will often "weight" the front wheel and keep it from sliding out from under you. Try this on down hill as well as uphill turns.

Ascents Again, the key to taking steep ascents is to keep your body vertical and balanced. If the traction is poor, more speed and a higher gear will help, trading speed for traction on the way up if necessary. The higher gear puts less torque to the rear wheel, helping it stick to the ground better. With good traction, we have found that most hills can be ridden in any gear the bike can pull, which includes first gear. We start in a crouched position and focus, not on the obstacle ten feet in front of us, but where we want to go (far up the hill). Keep a steady throttle. In that crouched position, only slight movements forward or backward, will help you correct your body weight. If the front end becomes light and wants to lift, move forward slightly to keep the front wheel down. If the rear wheel starts to lose traction, move slightly back to regain that traction. There are other ways to compensate for the front end coming up, such as slipping the clutch slightly, or applying some rear brake, but the above technique keeps your body position right, which is always the key to success. Looking where you want to go (most likely the

top) and not at the obstacles along the way is a big help also, and this applies to all your Trials riding. If you focus on an obstacle, chances are you will foot there or lose your balance. Look ahead to where you want to go. Your peripheral vision still sees it, but your focus is beyond it, and this helps you (you go where you look).

Descents In descents, sometimes it is impossible to get far enough back to keep centered. Your arms just aren't long enough. But in a steep descent get back as far as you can, bending at the waist and knees. Keep your arms out straight to push your upper body back. Apply the rear brake, trying not to lock it up. Once locked it will have less of a tendency to follow the front.

Usually you can also apply a fair amount of front brake, especially in straight sections, but be very careful on down hill turns. Often you can apply some front brake, but too much robs you of your ability to turn the bike and you are likely to lose balance and foot or fall. If your old bike has poor brakes, and can be fitted with a compression release, this will help to slow you down without the danger of locking up the rear wheel. Most of the big single four strokes came equipped with them, and many two strokes can have their heads tapped to accept them.

Small logs As you approach a small log, close the throttle momentarily to compress the front forks. Then pull up on the handlebars and straighten your legs while opening the throttle enough to have the front tire just graze the top of the log. Straightening the legs puts pressure into the rear tire adding to your traction. As the rear tire contacts the log, close the throttle and bend your legs, unweighting the rear, allowing it to roll over the log. This unweighting is done with slight pressure on the pegs. You don't want to jump off the pegs. Let the front end drop away from you, maintaining your centered, balanced position. On these small logs, let your arms and legs do most of the moving, while the trunk of your body stays upright and balanced.

Larger logs The same principles apply to larger logs, though there is an added "blip" to the throttle to help drive the rear tire to the log. Close the throttle while approaching the log. Then blip the throttle, lift up on the handlebars with your arms (don't lean backwards with your body) and straighten your legs to transfer weight into the rear for more traction. This is all done together. As the front tire touches the top of the log, blip the throttle again to drive the rear tire to the log. Then close the throttle and unweight the rear by bending the legs at the knees. As the rear comes up over the log, let the front fall away from you by straightening your arms. If you do not unweight the rear, the tire will hit the log and you will go no further. If you stay on the throttle when the rear tire hits the log, you are more likely to spin the tire and lose traction. Even if you make it over the log, the spinning rear tire will tend to throw you off balance by lurching as it makes contact with the ground. As the rear tire drops off the log, straighten your legs again (not completely straight) so that your torso remains upright and balanced.

Final note (at this time) The author here is certainly no expert, but I have learned through experience that real progress riding Trials seems to begin with becoming very comfortable with the basics and your bike. If your bike is set up well and you ride with good basic technique, this opens the door to successfully riding over more difficult terrain and obstacles. A rider who can stay centered and balanced on his bike by using proper form and weighting can move on to master more advanced techniques. Hopefully we have provided a "good foundation" here for you to "build on". Your comments and/or hints are welcome. Hopefully, in the future we will post some of the more difficult techniques.