

Your Commissioners views

Many of you 'Trialsters' feel need to tell me the shortcomings of whatever you deem relevant to Moto Trials. I listen and comment and after some years in the job I now want to turn the tables and tell you of the difficulties that I incur as your leader. I ask you to give me the amount of time that it takes to read and digest the following:

I see my brief as administering a **"safe"**, **"fair"** and **"fun"** sport. These are 3 words that always appear where you see the MNZ logo. The other word that I am responsible for is **"competition"**. I am NOT you recreation commissioner. My job is to differentiate between winners and other place getters.

In the sphere of **safety**, MNZ are better organised for than all other organisations that you would be likely to ride under on your Trials bike. At an MNZ event there are systems and protocol as spelt out in the first 10 chapters of your MNZ motorcycle manual [rule book] to give guidance on how the permitting, stewarding and log books work together to make yours a safer sport. With a prevalence of lack of understanding of these procedures, MNZ has taken the steps of insisting on a better level of officials training and it is hoped that many of you will not only pick up your Stewards and COC tickets but become aware of the need of your responsibility in these roles. The fact that very few Trials personnel have their CoC qualification is causing concern at present but will abate as you attend these officials training days.

To bring you a **"fair"** sport requires, in the eyes of some, performing miracles. There are expectations from many that the Trial they attend will cater for them by presenting them with enough of a challenge that they can feel satisfied to have **"achieved"** but not so much of a challenge that they feel **"shattered"**. In theoretical terms this could require [say] a dozen different levels of difficulty [grades] at any given event so that all riders lose enough points to suit their demeanour. This could be anywhere between 10- 50 points lost. If some of these riders lose fewer than 5 pts or over 100 pts there is insinuation that the event is neither **"fair"** nor **fun"**. What makes it difficult to **"get it right"** is that riders have voluntarily placed themselves in groups [they call them grades] which are overlapped. That is, there are many instances where a rider in a lower **"grade"** is actually a better rider than a rider in a

higher “grade”. It becomes a section setter’s nightmare as riders who are at the top of their grade will be putting a ‘quiet word’ [or even setting sections themselves] to have sections demanding enough to take some points off the top riders in the grade but in fact riders at the bottom of the next higher grade would find difficult. Your first suggestion of remedy to me has been to grade the riders effectively so there is very little overlap. That would not be difficult to do if you were working with Golfers or Motocross riders because competitors use the same facility giving a static level of course/track over many class ranges. What you would be asking if we asked a lower grade rider to move up to a higher grading level at Moto Trials because of a perceived skill level, is, you would be asking rider to increase risk of injury because of the increase of difficulty level in higher grades. I am not prepared to do that. We must learn to work with the 2 variables, one variable being the grading [difficulty] level of the section and the other variable being the class [rider group] that has volunteered to ride these sections. We must close our eyes to those we know to be capable of competing in higher grades. If they choose to ride a grade that is below their skill level they must be prepared to incur some very low scores. That is **fair**. The **fairest** way to consider section setting level is to focus on the group median [not the top or bottom end]. That said, we also need to consider what will always be an issue and that is the “bell curve of normal distribution”. We will always have sport populated with more average riders than those who are either very good or those who are new developers [not so good]. Obviously with many riders in the “average” [President and Intermediate] grades we can try to get ALL of their sections close to ideal requirements. As we move to the extremities of Social [known as ‘Sportsman’ in upper NI] and Expert grades we could find that there is maybe only one or two riders in each of these grades that was exceptionally good and one or two only that is exceptionally new [not so good] at the sport. My suggestion with the “fringe” grades is to differentiate between some of the sections within the grade. That is, we would have 4 easier sections, 4 average sections and 4 hard sections within the grade [in a 12 section trial]. This could be deemed as **fair** and should also rate as **fun** to those riding.

As I have previously stated, there is usually an overlap between classes. We have developed our classes in NZ on a ‘gentleman’s’ agreement as to where the line should be drawn between each class. This is a very voluntary

line. As much as I have tried to keep riders from wandering back and forward across this line it is still happening with regular occurrence. As a commissioner I cannot see anyway that could conceivably be **fair** to make any of the voluntary groups into championship classes. I have already outlined I am not prepared to conscript riders into higher risk lines [or lesser lines]. Therefore official 'skill based' grading is not an option. The only basis that remains viable to "class" our sport is by rider's age and/or machine specification. This is what we are doing at present for our championship classes. My brief is to make age based classes **fair**.

At present I have reservations about the President grade being an accurate representation of the seeding of the best over 40year old Trials riders in NZ. However I am happy that we are getting very close to identifying the best under 17 year old [Junior] rider in NZ. It is done under a system I introduced [VCS] yet this system is still finding some criticism. We can do even better with our junior riders under VCS. There is no way that an 8 year old should be competing with a 16 year old. A fix for this would be to have many more youngsters at similar ages and add an introduction of an under 10yr [or some agreed age/s] class/es within the VCS system.

Or do we need Mini Moto Trials to operate its own competition?

To have a situation where we have one 8yr old and one 12yr old competing with adults in a gully where there is need to also challenge "Experts" within the same sections is asking too much of the sport. There is difficulty in getting it 'right' and huge risk in failing to supply **fun** to either the "Expert" or the 8 yr. old. Having a separate "Mini's" competition at maybe different venues on maybe different dates to senior events may be the ultimate solution but would obviously require a substantial increase in 'youngsters', 'kids bikes' and willing parents. Maybe the Oset electric bike will play some part here!

It may sound contradictory but I do not have a problem with the way that "classes" operate now. It is really a system whereby grades [groups within same difficulty level] have their own important [but not championship] competitions to find a winner of that grade. It fills one of my criteria and that is.... riders having **fun**. And most riders do. Within their own groups they also find a winner by **fair** means but there is a lack of relevance between groups. My problem arises when you have someone who is not welcome in a group

because he/she wants to reduce risk but peers are assessing their skill ability and see the riders class change as upsetting to their 'grade competition' that they have been enjoying. Even if the addition to the group is 'welcome' it can raise the average skill level of the group which tends to elevate the level of difficulty of that sections are set. This has an impact on those who reside at the bottom of the group [grade] and could lead to these particular riders feeling more comfortable if they also changed grades which will "snowball" the process. It must be emphasised that most riders do not volunteer into lower grades to take trophies. It is almost always about self-preservation. I still live in hope that VCS is embraced by all riders in Trials as it will easily allow for riders entering different grades from event to event. It would work equally well for all age classes and/or bike classes. I believe it would be very **fair** however there are many who are questioning a loss of **fun** factor as importance will be taken away from their present 'grade competitions'

Rule setting is part of my brief to keep the sport **safe, fair and fun**. Believe it or not, you are very reasonable and supportive when it comes to interpretation and modification of rules. VCS critics become vocal at times and the number of 'green pegs' is on-going but mostly I commend you all for compliance [usually]. 'Non-stop' proposals may become a marathon though.

If we provide riders with competent officials, good section grading levels, workable rules and good weather there is usually only one thing left that will supposedly have an impact on their **fun** and that is cost. The majority of the dissent that is brought to my attention relates to money and a common query is "why are our MNZ costs so high". I am constantly in discussions regarding money. It is not really in my brief to supply your **safe and fair fun** at negligible cost but because it is impacting your day I will have an attempt at addressing your issue..... **I don't think you have an issue!** According to my calculations your MNZ licence will cost \$100 - \$150 and at 10 Trials a year that is \$10 to \$15 per Trial to cover your MNZ licence. Your MNZ permit should be covered by approx. \$3 per rider giving a cost of say \$13 - \$18 per event that MNZ has cost you. Your 'motorcycle club' licence should only cost about another \$4 per event giving a total of around \$22 that it will cost you to cover administration costs of an average club event. I went to a trail ride some weeks ago and the charge was \$30 for the day [no free sausage with that]. Your grief

becomes a little more serious if you ride infrequently but even if you ride 5 only events per year it could be done for an MNZ cost of around \$35 per day using the cheaper MNZ licence. [If you are using an MNZ licence to ride championship events please be aware that you get at least 2 days riding for each Trials event]. Some have organised their own Trials outside of MNZ and no doubt they are leaning heavily on volunteers to do some of the things that MNZ have paid staff for. They are also no doubt utilizing some MNZ intellectual property and they can provide cheaper sport than MNZ events. I suggest they cannot do it at nil cost so I will stick my neck out and suggest that there maybe half the cost involved. If we assumed that it was going to cost \$22 to ride an MNZ event and \$11 to ride an “opposition” event there is a \$110 saving over a 10 trial year. That will buy the ‘saver’ about half a rear tyre. Is it worth it? Have you had more **fun**?

It is difficult for me on several fronts to have fragmentation. One of these ‘fronts’ is the relationship that I try to maintain with MNZ staff and board. MNZ have our best interests at heart and occasionally I ask them for funds or support for “Trials”. It does not bode well when I am asking them to support Trials riders or clubs who will ride under the MNZ umbrella when compelled, but more often they are riding under some parallel or opposition regime.

MNZ threw me a ‘curve ball’ when they introduced a seemingly good initiative of the “club licence” for riders not wanting to compete in championship events. This has many Intermediate and Clubman riders taking advantage because of the fact that they do not compete in championship classes but it has taken the wind out of my sails when I was hoping that we could construct a better championship class system for ALL riders. [It is one of the reasons that a Masters class is no longer pursued].

Our sport would be enhanced by unity, which was one of the first statements I made as a new commissioner a few years ago.

To summarise:

My days are a mixture of enjoying the company of wonderful Moto Trials folk and agonising over the issues that concern some of them. The issues are:

Administrators and officials are hard to find. Most just want to ride their bikes. More non riders are needed at all events. Clubs must find a good supply of 'Trials' stewards and CoCs.

Section setting is similar to 'hitting a moving target'. There is a lack of real consensus and standardisation on the topic.

Riders with a skill level capability of riding a higher grade than they normally compete are "driving" the section setting levels of the grades in which they ride.

Because of lack of standardisation with section setting there is rider movement within classes compounding the 'setting' issues.

There is limited fun for the extremely good and extremely novice. There is a need for some modified thinking around Expert and novice sections.

Maybe Mini Moto Trials is the answer.

Our Championship events would have more credibility if all riders were in Championship classes.

VCS or Gated Trials are the only concepts that I have studied that will 'FAIRLY' class without conscription.

Money matters. Trials is a relatively cheap form of motor sport. Don't spoil it by 'penny pinching' at the expense of unity and growth. Splintering away from MNZ will not end dissent and frustration. It will only move it. It will also create several weak bodies as opposed to strong one. Best to stay united and either live with or fix the 'issues'.

Although it is never a cause of dissent, the need for GROWTH must remain the number one issue in our sport. To grow we need to attract. To attract we need to be attractive and to be attractive we need to address all of the above issues and resolve to support the decisions made in the interests of unity.

Jim Henderson for Moto Trials MNZ