

TRIALS IN TRAINING

In coming issues we'll look at all aspects of skills and knowledge that will make you a better, safer trail rider. Our guest specialist on riding techniques will be **Jason Pearce** of Tricks in the Sticks who specialises in trials and enduro training. As a taster of what's to come here we join two Sussex TRF members for a day with Jason as they learn some fundamental techniques

Words & pics: JB

Jason starts the day riding up a field one handed, tapping his left then right leg as he swaps his weighting on the footpegs of his trials bike. As he does so the bike sweeps accordingly left and right. There's no input through the handlebars. It's a simple demonstration, but equally a powerful one – a reminder that you don't just steer your bike through the handlebars, it's with your whole body, too, and importantly through that connection of foot to footpeg.

It's also a building block, probably one of the first lessons you should learn, and upon which you'll develop more advanced techniques. And it brings us back to remembering there are laws of physics that help us when trail riding, we just need to remember to apply them.

This Jason demonstrates in his next two lessons – turning super-tight circles and skid-stops. In both, weight placement through the footpegs is key. With the correct body positioning and footpeg weighting it's amazing how low and tight a bike can be turned. Equally, by consciously varying weight placement you can control skids, again guiding the bike left or right – something that's worth practising, so you can apply the skills in that moment of crisis.



Rich (front) and Gray (rear) practising confident log-crossing



Rich at the point where the camber got away from him – he needed to get his weight over the right peg earlier



Practising on a trials bike is a great way to learn the technique – smaller, lighter and less speedy, it's easier to apply the techniques, the feedback is very direct and the spills are smaller, less painful. And everything you learn you'll find you automatically upscale to your trail bike.

"An enduro or trail bike is just a big trials bike," says Jason. "The techniques are virtually the same. Once you've learnt them on the trials bike you transfer them to the trail bike and you can then be riding a trail bike very well in just a couple of hours by just having those base skills to start off with."

Jason's two students on this day are Gray Robinson and Rich Newton from Sussex TRF. Both are experienced riders with serious bikes – Gray a Husky FE501 and Rich a KTM 525EXC – but both agree they've learned so much through this training, which is in fact their second session with Jason.

"The lessons we've learned have already made me a better trail rider," says Rich. "I've started employing some of the techniques and it's making me think more about what I'm doing; anybody can get on a bike and ride it, but if you want to ride it well and safely then training is worth having. I went to Wales after the last session and I felt a lot more confident. I wasn't scared of anything, whereas if I had gone prior to the training I'd have been really nervous."

Jason moves his students on to riding cambers. He's



Gray practising slow hill climbing, seeing how slow and how low in the revs he could go without stalling – and it's surprising how low that is

not picked an easy camber either, a steep bank with roots crossing it – worthy of any trials competition. Here Jason coaches Rich and Gray into traversing, then making 180degree turns across the camber. The turns require an almost 100% shift in footpeg weighting while balanced on the edge of the tyre and simultaneously turning the handlebars to full lock – on what looks like a 45degree slope. It's scary stuff and both Rich and Gray take some tumbles. Rich can't get his weight shift timing right and consequently his bike doesn't turn at all, but Gray gives it total commitment and carries off the turns in style. Again, we're relearning basic physics here, basic maybe, but not easy to embrace.

The day ends with log crossings. Curiously, Rich's timing is spot on and he's riding over a sizeable fallen tree with ease. It's Gray's turn to struggle but he gets there eventually. He's working well – he's breaking down the process: compressing the forks, accelerating, kissing the log with the front wheel, centring and rolling the throttle on the downside. He's got it, it's just the milli-second timing of each part that he needs to perfect.

"I've come here to improve my trail skills," says Gray. "It's a lot easier on these bikes to learn and build up the slow-technical skills, which is what we need really – especially things like how to deal with ruts and and fallen logs and what have you on the trails. I'm going to be doing a lot of TET next year so I want my skills to be a lot better. I think that with increased understanding and practice you gain confidence and it makes you a more competent, safer rider."

So in coming issues, with Jason, we'll look at trail obstacles that we could all do to tackle more confidently. Ruts, cambers, roots, hills, rocks and more! ■

Jason Pearce
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Jason has been training riders in trials and enduro from his base in Kent for over 17 years. He's an expert trials rider and veteran of many international hard enduros. He can train the complete beginner through to preparation for extreme enduro.

Full details: www.tricksinthesticks.co.uk