

BACK ISSUES

We couldn't possibly take the time to answer everyone individually who has asked about back issues, so we'll do it here. Some issues are out of print and out of stock, never to be seen again except by the fortunate few who subscribed early. We do have available copies of some of our back issues. You will be relieved to know that the price indicated includes postage, which costs us more than the bulk rate we use for your subscription copy. Price is **\$2.50** per copy. Outside the U.S., add **\$1.50** (U.S.) for each copy.

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March-April 1982

(Cyclo-Cross, Ricky Cha, Mud-Pup)



May-June 1982

(Resenda-to-the-Sea, Coyote Derby, San Anselmo Race, Ricky Cha, MudPup)



July-August 1982

(Race Reports, Carmel Valley Clunker Tour, Here Come the Kids, Ricky Cha MudPup)



January-February 1983

(The Wheel Thing, Crested Butte Tour, Las Vegas Show, Tech Tips, Fat Tires Explode in America)



March-April 1983

(Gearing, NORBA, Glossary, Balmy the Frog, TechTips, Products)



July-August 1983

(Of Bikes and Men...and One Crazy Lady, Brake Review, TechTips, Frames...Why Custom?, MudPup, Shimano Grand Prix, Poetry Corner)



January-February 1984

(Crested Butte, Race Results, NORBA vs. USCF, Wreck Tips, TechTips, Race Reports, Trail Etiquette, MudPup)



July-August 1984

(Joe Murray Interview, Mudpup, TechTips, Wreck Trips, Whiskeytown Downhill, Tecate to Ensenda, Book Review)



September-October 1984

(Flyer Jets to Japan, Mulga Bill's Bicycle, Chequamegon Fat Tire Festival, Get Thee Behind Me, Mudpup, TechTips, To The Top Down Under)



November-December 1984

(An Elder of the Off-Road Tribe, Mountain Bikes in Mountain State, Uncommon Options, Point Reyes Update, TechTips, NORBA Nationals)



February-March 1985

(Call to Perspective, Poetry Corner, Race Reports, Techtips, Uncommon Options, FatNotes)



April-May 1985

(Fat Tire Touring, Al Farrell, Guest Opinions, Products, Uncommon Options, Punk Bike Enduro, FatNotes)



June-July 1985

(Biking in Brooklyn, Mountain Bike Anecdote, Fatnotes, Fat Fotos, Tech Tips, Products, Minority Opinion)



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miles at Crested Butte
Trials, by Charles Kelly



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by Kevin Coffey

Editorial

This being our Observed Trials Issue, it seems reasonable to use this space to expound on what trials means to the world, and to the bicycle faction in particular. As of this writing, not much. Yet. Bicycle trials in 1986 is in about the same stage of development as BMX was in 1974, mountain bikes in 1979, or even Freestyle bikes in 1985. All of the above have come on strongly as competitive aspects of cycling, influencing the way bicycles are used, designed and marketed.

In its infancy, observed trials has already inspired special designs from Fat Chance, Fisher, Cunningham, Ross, Salsa, Ibis, Mountain Goat, Richman, Kuwahara, and no doubt a host of lesser known builders. Some manufacturers' standard products have the features and geometry sought by trials riders, which means that a bike "off the shelf" may be suitable for plenty of trials action with few modifications. Keep in mind however, that damage resulting from stunt or trials riding is usually excluded from any warranty on the bike, so you should weigh the risks before using your precious vehicle.

We are excited about trials because it is a natural extension of what we've been doing for years off the road. But trials gets plenty of attention from spectators, the media, and other riders because it is a perfect sport for presentation. All the action, and there is plenty, takes place in a relatively small area. Since agility rather than aerobic capacity is tested in trials, anyone who can ride a bike can compete. This is slow speed skill, the flip side of downhill bombing.

Now an observed trials is as common on the event card as coffee on the menu. The fact that time is not a factor permits observers to mingle with participants between rounds, a level of intimacy not seen at any other mountain bike event.

Outside of competition there is a vast amount of potential obstacle riding in the world. Everything from stairs to stumps to streams is a potential "section." Where a difficult part of a trail is familiar with local riders, it is often dubbed the "trials section." Each in his own way, we are all trials riders.

What all this has meant in terms of bicycle sales is to date very little. The key word here is "yet."



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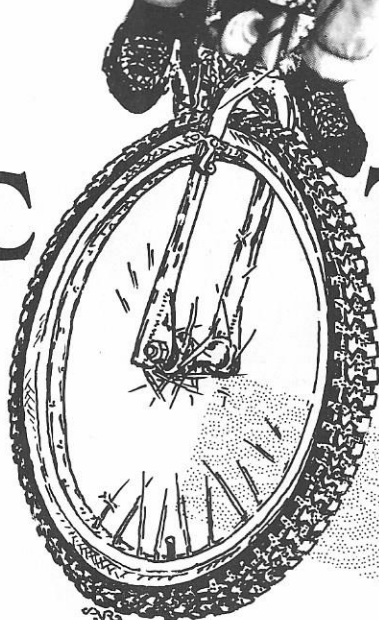
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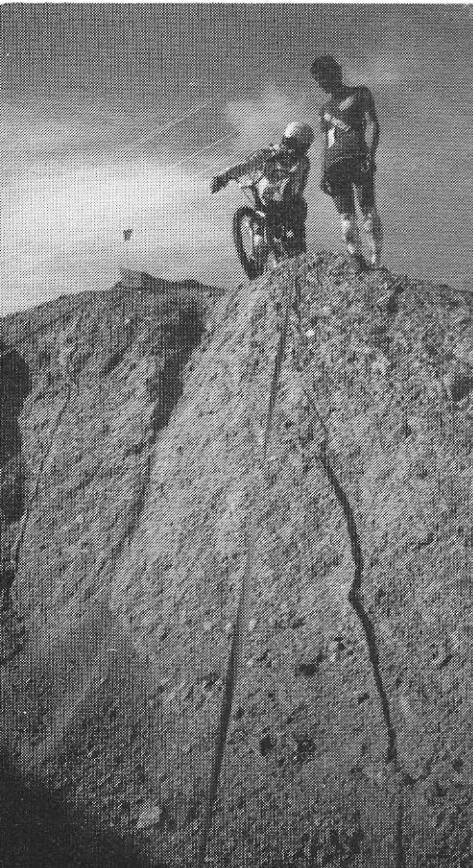
SECTION

BEGIN





"...the trick here is to ride quickly and with confidence."—SeeKay; see Tech Tips, page 18.



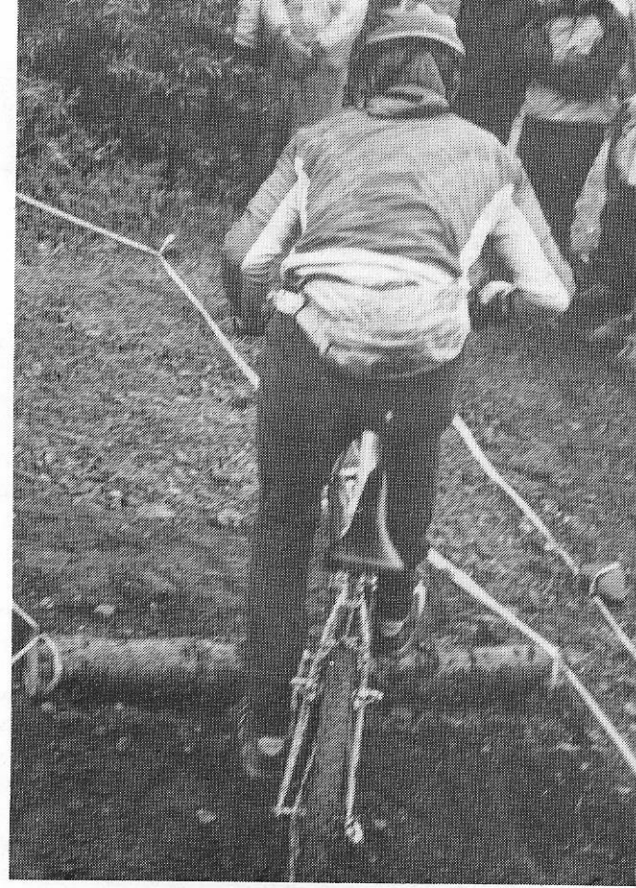
"It ain't the steep that gets you, it's the flat part at the bottom."

Walk...er, ride the plank, matey!





photos by Charles Kelly



Trials: an observed picnic!



NICOL

SCOT

Among the apple trees in the front yard of Nicol's Ibis shop, FTF's Don Mertle and Charles Kelly interview Scot from the saddle of his personal Ibis trials model. In between perusals, Nicol demonstrates his finely crafted trials tool in a manner that makes us believe his feet were born to average about a foot off the ground...and almost never touch down!

Scot: This is the current evolution here.

DM: Let's see; is there anything familiar on this bike?

Scot: If you look at this bike it looks really weird. You notice it has a 24" rear wheel? The 24" rear wheel does several things. It allows you to use very short chainstays: the chainstays on this bike are just over fifteen inches. A couple of other advantages are stronger and lighter wheels. Also, if you're coming off something really big, it has two inches less diameter that you can use to get your weight lower and further back, so you're not going to go

over as much. A 24" rear wheel, for reasons I haven't been able to figure out logically, gets superior traction to a 26".

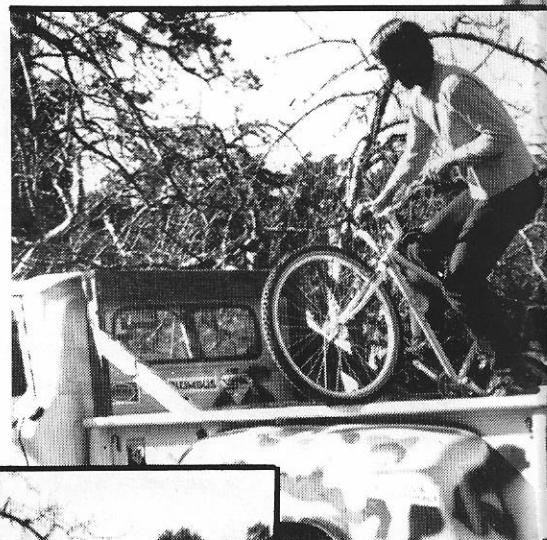
DM: Maybe it's because of the shorter chainstays.

Scot: Partly, but you take a 24" bike with seventeen inch chain stay and a 26" bike with seventeen inch chainstays, same length, (and) the 24" bike is going to get better traction on the climbs. It must have to do with the the weighting, the point of traction. Anyway, this bike does have excellent traction.

DM: It does have a different feel. I rode this bike in Reno at the NORBA (trials) demonstration area, and of all the bikes it was one I was least comfortable with. I didn't notice the rear wheel. These bikes obviously take

some getting used to.

Scot: Yeah, they are definitely different. I started out with my wife's bike, a small bobtail bike with a 24" rear wheel, and that bike worked really good except that the bottom bracket was only 12", a little low, and the wheelbase was a little long. Then I made my first trials bike, which was 26-26, but it was steeper and the bottom bracket was higher, all the things that you necessarily do for trials. That was a year ago. I rode that for a while, then I realized it didn't get as good trac-



photos by Charles Kelly



2. Blocked by the cab, he dribbles his low-pressure tires until he finds the right position for...



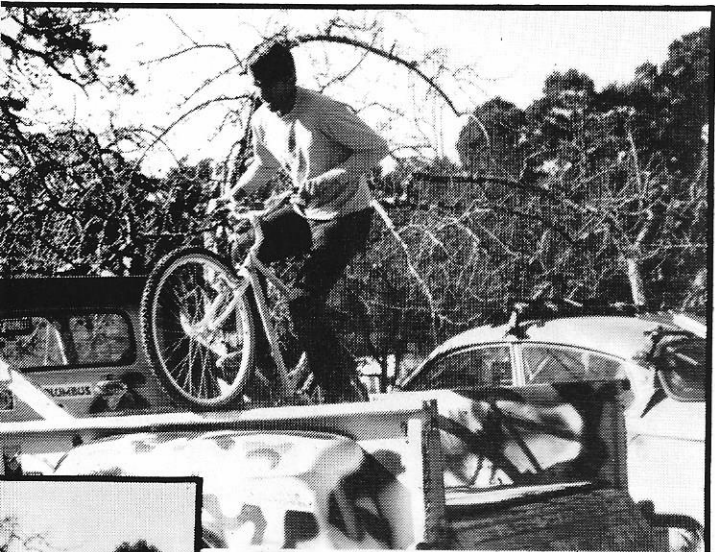
1. Nicol slam-dunks his trials bike and self into Team Ibis pickup. Note 24" rear wheel.

tion as my wife's bike did. I decided to go back to 24" rear wheel, plus it gives me shorter chainstays. If you look at a motorcycle trials bike you'll notice that the foot pegs are really far back, and I tried to simulate some of the features of a motorcycle.

DM: So does that mean a longer top tube?

Scot: Actually it does mean a little bit longer. The reason you need a longer top tube is you need to have clearance here.

DM: Foot clearance from the front wheel?



4. Or, change 'slam-dunk' in #1 to 'slam dance' and call it pogoing BOIMP... BOIMP... (same noise) ...into position for...

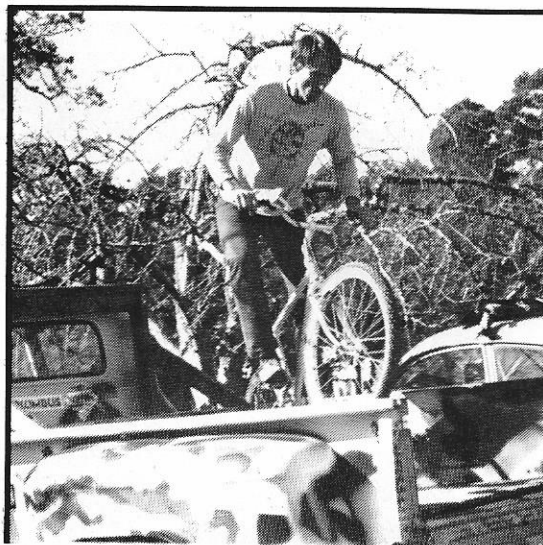


3...a 90° pivot wheelie up onto the side rail. Nicol keeps dribbling on this precarious perch: BOIMP... BOIMP... BOIMP... BOIMP...

they have to do something, when they get to a trials section, and they kind of bounce the bike around like this.

DM: Now on trials rules it gets kind of marginal; are you going back and forth or is that forward progress?

Scot: You may not stand still with your foot down, but if your feet are on



5...another ninety to get him off. Then it's a pogo or three and it's time to...

6...get DOWN! ...CLEAN!

the pedals and your body's not touching anything, you may stand still as long as you want.

DM: What else do we see here?

Scot: Steep head angle, 72 degrees, which is not too terribly steep, and not very much rake. I'm not going to get into any numbers here, but I made the whole front end of the bike steer ... predictably. I didn't make it so short for getting that tight turning capability. I didn't think that was nearly as important as having a bike that felt really

stable. All my bikes are seventy, except for my trials bikes, and they're seventy-two. I'm sold on it. I think it's great. If you get into some place where you need to turn sharp, you don't turn, you just go like this (bounces bike in a circle). The important thing is just being able to balance on it and move it around with your own body.

DM: It's not just a combination of numbers that seem right, it's also some feedback from how it feels. You're not just saying it has to be a tight, short bike.

Scot: It has to be an extremely versatile bike.

DM: You have to be able to ride it on the front wheel, you have to be able to ride it on the back wheel.

Scot: You have to do a variety of things with it. A lot of trials are set up so you ride a quarter of a mile between sections, and why make it miserable? So my bikes generally come with ten speeds; this one only has five here. They generally come with ten, and they have a chainring guard that looks pretty, where this one is my own bike, and I only use it for trials, and I only have five speeds.

CK: Two shifters though?

Scot: Sure, that shifter's dormant without the big ring, except to adjust the cage so it doesn't rub. That makes it a rideable bike; plus, you can use it as a normal mountain bike. It's a little steeper; I don't build my all-purpose bikes that way because I feel it's a little too steep to be predictable on steep downhills.

DM: Let's talk about some of the other details. What gears are you using? If somebody had to put together a one-speed for trials, what kind of gears would he be thinking about?

Continued on next page



Scot: For one-speed I would probably recommend using a 24-tooth chainring, and an eighteen or nineteen-tooth rear. That seems to be the standardized way to go. If you're really a good trials rider, you can climb just about anything with a gear like that. It gets to the point where if it's really steep, you don't have to pedal up, you can hop the bike (Scot does so). You can hop it up little hills, it's all legal.

Notice the clip for the scorecard (on the brake cable). Notice how the brake levers are mounted upside-down. Because if you have them rightside-up, and you're up here like this, you might hit your knee (on the clamp protrusion). Little things you learn from experience.

The shift levers, you notice they're not in a convenient place, but they're out of the way. No matter where you are on the bike, and you're all over the place, they're obviously out of the way here. You're never shifting in a section.

It's funny, (Charlie) Cunningham uses them on his expensive bikes and they cost very little. It's pretty outrageous, it's the kind where you can shift before you pedal. It's one of the bottom of the line.

DM: There is a lot of steel in it.

Scot: It has more toughness. You can probably see that I've landed, look at this: this thing is broken off. I land

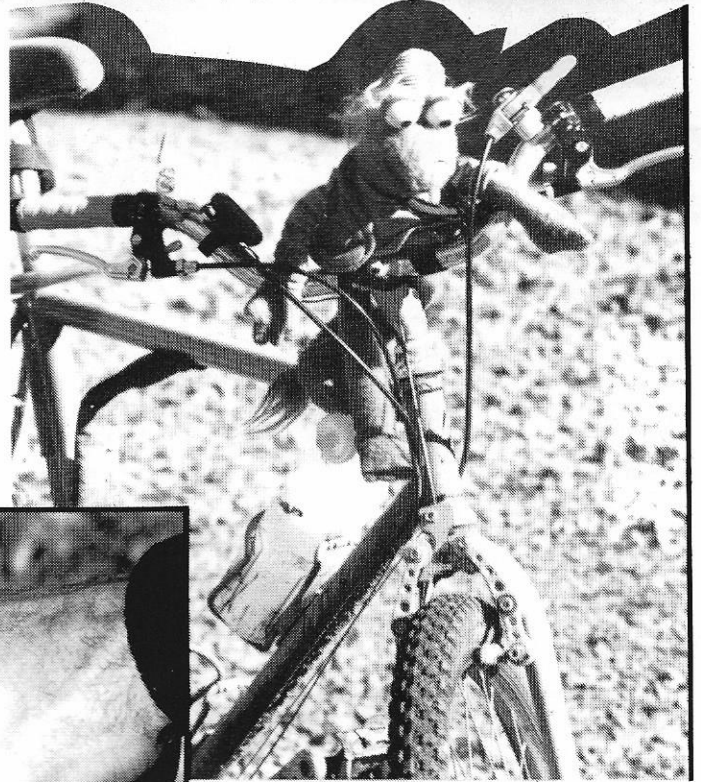
using?

Scot: I'm using 170's now because I find you don't need the torque advantage. there is more clearance. This frame is small, it has a sloping top tube. It's only a 15" frame but I have an X-C seatpost so I can get it up to my normal riding height.

Now I'll show you what I mean about having the small rear wheel. You



Team Ibis mascot, GoBo, takes a factory rig out for a bit-o'-tricky. Note the intense concentration, learned at the heels (and wheels) of a master.



photos by Charles Kelly

No knee knockers! Scot mounts his shifters out of the way and his brake levers downside-up to make the trials contortions as painless as possible.

Check these brake levers out, the Tech-5s. They're Dia-Compe, they're called the Tech-5s or the 283s.

DM: What's that, a travel adjustment?

Scot: Yeah, if you have small hands, or if you want to keep the lever closer to the handlebar.

DM: What about that derailleur?

Scot: It's the L series from Shimano.

right on it, you can see a lot of smarts. It's a strong derailleur; it's a short cage, out of the way of all the stuff you're likely to run into. It makes a lot of sense, it's a good derailleur.

I use Specialized cranks 'cause you can get all the chainrings for them, they're strong, guaranteed, and I think they are really good.

DM: What crankarm length are you

have to get pretty far back. (Rides into and out of pickup truck.)

DM: What about tires and tire pressure?

Scot: For the front tire I'm using the Ground Control. It's not the fattest tire, and doesn't give you the most flotation, but it is the tire with the best traction, and they are really soft. I think it's a good rear wheel tire too, except that they don't make it in 24". IRC is coming out with a new tire made especially for trials, but the only people promoting trials on a big scale is Kuwahara, and they are doing them in 24", so that is all that is going to be available. I run really low pressures like twenty pounds; that's what you want. A little sponge is okay; it's not efficiency we are dealing with, but when you come up to a rough or funny little place where you need traction to get over a rock or log, you want to just float over it. Number one, you don't want to have a lot of pressure that is going to knock you all over the place,

and the lower the pressure, the better the traction.

DM: What about rim pinches? Does that happen?

Scot: You fix it; time is not a factor in these things.

DM: How about those rims?

Scot: The RM-20s here in the front, I put RM-25 on the bikes in production, but because I'm light on the bike I use the 20s, they are very strong. The 25s will be available in a 24" rim. The hubs are the Specialized QR front and rear; they are bombproof and no problem. I haven't seen much problem with these hubs, or any as long as you stay away from the cheap BMX hubs which tend to pull apart at the flange. Hubs aren't that critical.

DM: Does the headset take a lot of pounding.

Scot: It's something that you should probably replace every year.

For brakes, cantilevers work fine in the front but not in the back. When you have the short rear wheel you'd just be munching yourself (on the legs). These are the X-C sports and they are just as good as the other ones. The Sport brakes work great up front too. The stem is a Specialized team stem, it

**"If you get into some place where you need to turn sharp, you don't turn, you just go like this:"
BOIMP...BOIMP**

...BOIMP...



comes up high, it doesn't have a heck of a lot of extension, and there is a lack of protrusions. A stiffer fork on these bikes is probably better; you don't need the resiliency because you are not dealing with a long ride. You want a raked fork; it doesn't matter if it's straight or curved. That is most of it; high bottom bracket, 13-1/2 inches. Pedals, personal preference; these are X-Cs, the Shimano are also good.

DM: Final thoughts about trials bikes?

Spot: Any mountain bike can be us-

ed for trials. It doesn't take a special bike to learn balance and control—just a bit of coordination and practice. When you become skilled you'll need a better bike. Until then, the sections in the Beginner and Novice Classes are designed for people with stock bikes. That is, a 48 tooth chainring will clear all of the obstacles in all the sections. As you move up through the classes to Intermediate and Expert, the obstacles become much harder and a stock bike could be in for some crucial crunching.

So after you've mastered the art of hopping the front wheel, jumping the bike sideways and a few other tricks, then it's time for a real trials bike. The most important thing, though, is to go do it, and have fun.



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KEVIN NORTON

Kevin Norton glides over an obstacle with aplomb on his way to a national championship near Virginia City, Nevada. Section judge holds up zero fingers while scoring Norton, a recurring number in Kevin's competitive life.

We caught Kevin Norton on the winner's stand at the NORBA Observed Trial Championship, where we asked him about his background in trials and cycling.

KN: "When I was a little kid, I started BMX in 1973 with Dean Bradley, riding for Sea Schwinn (Costa Mesa, CA) at Escape Country for a long time. In trials, my first competition was in Mammoth, earlier this year. I rode motorcycles for about eight years, and I wanted to get a bicycle to get better on my motorcycle. I bought a cheap Murray, about the worst steel bike you can get, a 24-incher. I rode that 'til it broke, then I got a GT, and I rode that for a while, then Kuwahara (his current sponsor).

"Mammoth was the first trials I was in, and it was set up really easy, so everybody could do it. It was real hard to get ahead because it was so easy. Then I went back east to the Ross race

"I gotta ride really hard stuff to get excited. It's a lot of fun when you pull something off rad."

in New England and I beat everybody by sixty points. That was a tough course, but I cleaned every section at least once. I like it nice and hard, so I can get way ahead.

"After I came back I went to Santa Rosa and the California State Championships and I beat Scot (Nicol) by thirty points ... I had eight points, and he had thirty-eight."

FTF: So you like a course where you don't mind getting a few points, because you know other people will be getting them too?

KN: "Yeah, I like it really hard, because when I practice I ride really hard stuff. That's exciting. It's not exciting to go on some little cow trail. I gotta ride super hard stuff to get excited. It's a lot of fun when you pull something off rad."

FTF: I talked to Rich Cast today before the trials, and he just about conceded to you before the competition.

KN: "I've been at it a long time, and I think I deserve it, I've spent many years of practice for this day."

FTF: You'll get a few more shots at it, I'm sure.

KN: "Yeah, this is just the beginning."

FTF: So are you dialed in for a factory ride with Kuwahara?

KN: "Yeah, IRC tires and Suntour all the way. IRC, they're here, cheering me on, made me a new tire. Suntour, Sonny's delivered my brakes, driving, dropped them off, paying a guy to put them on my bike. Things happened quick. Howie Cohen, he's a great guy."

FTF: So Dean (Bradley) is your team manager?

KN: "Yeah, he's a great guy. Because I haven't been in the bicycle world, this is my first year. He really helped me out, because I don't know anything

"...I think I deserve it, I've spent many years of practice for this day."

about this bicycle world. It's so much more fun than motorcycles. The people are better. This is great. I should have gone to it a long time ago."



Piece a' cake!

photos by Charles Kelly



“...when I learned that the sport wasn't a test of speed or recklessness I grinned from ear to ear...”



photo by John Rogers

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

by
Nancy Earley

Women's Trials Champ, huh? That's a tough one to live up to. Riding a bike comes naturally to me, and has since I was six and learned how on an uneven sidewalk that turned into a bumpy dirt path.

Eventually my Schwinn stingray and I went everywhere together, two miles to school every day, a mile through the woods to the park, or even for a seven miler around the lake.

I've gone through lots of bikes by now, skinny and fat and I'm basically doing the same three things I always have: ride, ride, ride. I added fat bikes to my riding shenanigans about four years ago, starting off an old Schwinn three-speed that I equipped with alloy wheels and Snakebelly tires. I'd take that monster on trail rides complete with fenders and rack. It wasn't as quiet or graceful as I would have liked, but it was practical in the city and adequate in the woods; that is, until the day I rode a borrowed Fat Chance and realized that there are big differences.

I wasn't sure what to expect from my first trials competition, but when I learned that the sport wasn't a test of speed or recklessness I grinned from ear to ear and relaxed into it, coming in third. That was encouraging, so I took on trials as my area of natural expertise and started looking forward to every event.

There seem to be 20 to 30 people who show up consistently at every scheduled event in our area and three or four groups who lay out good trials courses, so we get a variety of sections to play/compete on. Events are the only times when we can all get together like this, so we spend the day riding trials, usually ending up with hand-printed t-shirts for prizes, a picnic and beer.

There are several good places to ride trials in and within, all supporting a good crop of New England rocks and boulders, standing and fallen trees, short, steep climbs, moss, and loamy soil that can be used to create great trials sections once you get the idea of what makes a good one.

Hearsay and magazine articles have given the impression that the East Coast is the trials capital of the country. I don't know about that, but I certainly prefer the terrain and variety of obstacles at home over what I competed on in the Nationals at Virginia City. With the popularity of observed trials growing in the last year or two, I wouldn't give credit to any particular neighborhood these days.

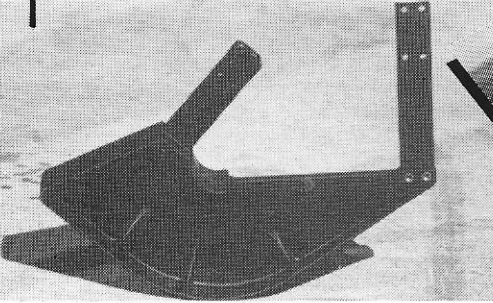
A few of us get together now and then to plan events or try and figure out a schedule for regular monthly events. We call ourselves NETHO—New England Trials Hotbed Organization. Someday we'll take the time to make it a serious “club” and get a network going; at least that's the plan. We would like to get some communication opened up and help make trials more important. Anyone interested should contact:

Mike Augspurger
92 Oak Avenue
Belmont, MA 02178



TRIALS PRODUCTS

Only one item on this page is a trials product per se. The Bashguard is a nylon skid plate that absorbs some shock and slides nicely over obstacles because of its material.



BASHGUARD

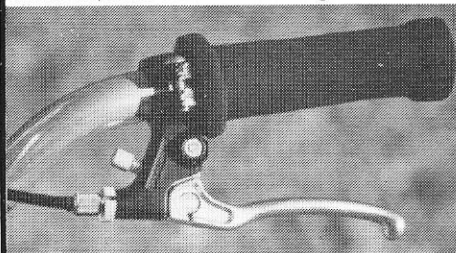
The others are products preferred or suggested by serious observed trials competitors because they work.

These carry pads from Fat Ware double nicely as nard guards by virtue of their wrap-around design. See your local BMX dealer for other padded clothing for your trials bike.



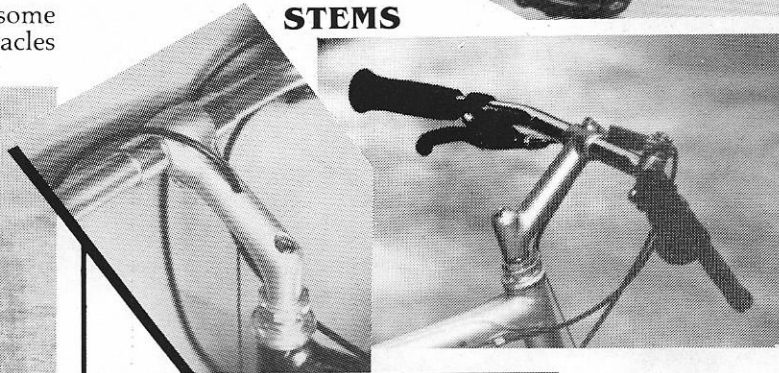
PADS

Dia-Compe make this Tech-5, or 283 model brake lever which features a travel adjustment knob that lets you adjust the play out of your system for close-in, fast twitch braking.



DIA-COMPE TECH-5 LEVER

LONG STEMS

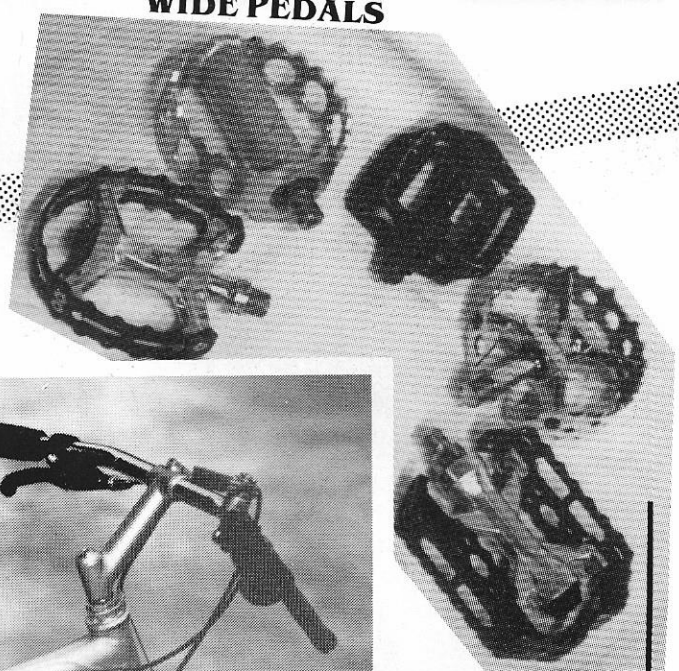


SPECIALIZED GROUND CONTROL TIRE

Both this Specialized stem on the left and the Cunningham on the right get your bars up and out, while providing more knee-flailing room than the triangulated designs.

This Wilderness Trails Bikes/Specialized Ground Control is favored by some riders; though the only "trials tire" on sale to date is the IRC 24-incher produced for the Kuwahara K.N.

WIDE PEDALS



The basic message here is: in this no-toe-clip sport, the wider "bear trap" style pedals give surer footing where the feet are supposed to stay -- on board the bike.

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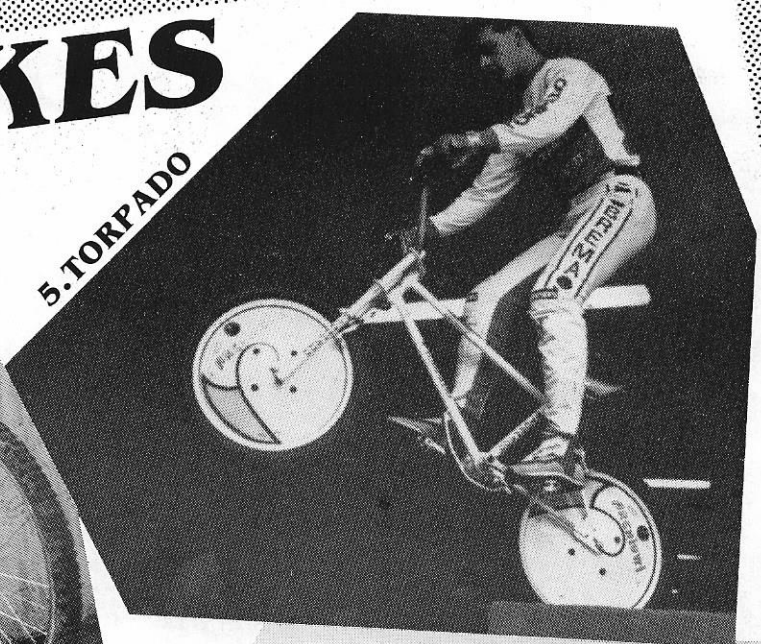
...AND BIKES

1. FISHER



photos by Charles Kelly

5. TORPADO



4. RICHMAN



photo by Jeffrey Richman

ADDRESSES for most of the products on these 3 pages and on page 33

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| Bashguard
B.S.L. Machining
148 Los Molinos
San Clemente, CA 92672 | Ibis Cycles
P.O. Box 275
Sebastopol, CA 95472 | Ritchey Quad Tire
Ritchey U.S.A.
Rt. #2, Box 405
La Honda, CA 94020 |
| Bruce Gordon Cycles
1070 W. 2nd St.
Eugene, OR 97402 | Jeffrey Richman
Richman Manufacturing
P.O. Box 224
Fulton, CA 95439 | Salsa Stem
Salsa Cycles and
Salsa a la carte
110 Howard St.
Petaluma, CA 94952 |
| Cook Bros.
1609 E. Edinger Ave.
Santa Ana, CA 92705 | Kuwahara
Everything Bicycles
1207 Mahalo Pl.
Compton, CA 90220 | Specialized Stem
(see Mountain Transport,
under Cunningham). |
| Cunningham
Mountain Transport
P.O. Box 362
Point Reyes, CA 94956 | Moots Mfg.
P.O. Box 2480 / 1136 Yampa
Steamboat Springs, CO 80477 | Sushi Bars
(see Cook Bros.) |
| Fat Chance
331 Somerville Ave.
Somerville, MA 02143 | Mountain Goat
(see Mountain Transport
under Cunningham). | Toe Flips
WTB (Wilderness Trail Bikes)
(see Cunningham) |
| Fat Ware
Rumney Survival
Box 31, Rumney NH 03266 | Olympic Lube Wax
Olympic Mountain Products
22627 85th Place South
Kent, WA 98031 | |
| Fisher MountainBikes
1421 Francisco Blvd.
San Rafael, CA 94901 | | |
| Ground Control Tire
WTB/Specialized
(see Mountain Transport,
under Cunningham). | | |

2. CUNNINGHAM



1. This Fisher MountainBikes trials unit was built so the racing team would have one for the trials stages of combo stage races.

2. This Cunningham, the Ross and Mountain Goat (bash portions of which appear on next page) were produced for the same reason. Good luck trying to get your grimies on a Ross or Fisher just yet; though Charlie Cunningham, and Jeff Lindsay of Mountain Goat could be persuaded to build you one of theirs.

3. This Ibis is in Scot Nicol's brochure, just as (4) this Jeffrey Richman appears on Richman's info sheet. Both definitely available. Other builders we know about that are building trials bikes include Moots, Fat Chance and Salsa.

5. This Torpado 20-incher, shown gettin' rad at the Long Beach show in the clever hands of an Italian compatriot, is a production model. So is the 24-inch-wheeled Kuwahara "K.N." (as in NORBA Champ, Kevin Norton -- see page 12), but you may have trouble locating a showroom that has either one for fondling and drooling purposes.

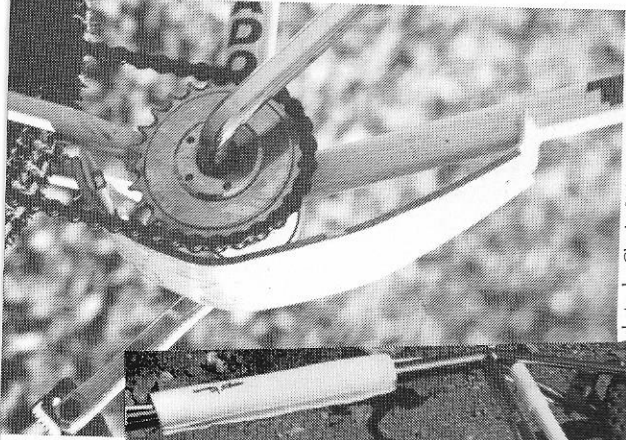
3. IBIS



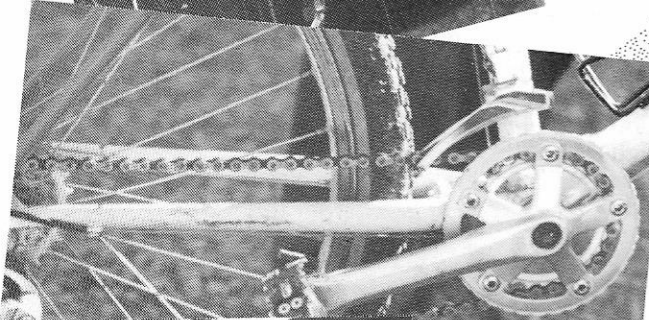
Digital static stabilization device, as shown in these two photos, must be supplied by customer.

BASH PLATES

photos by Charles Kelly



The Mountain Goat.



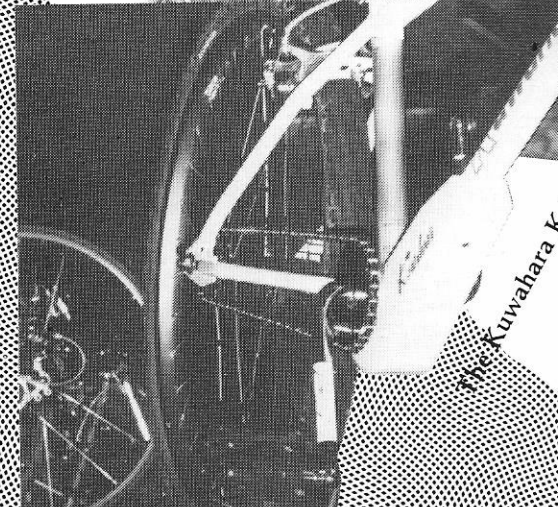
The "grind one,
don't grind the other"
method.

The Ross.

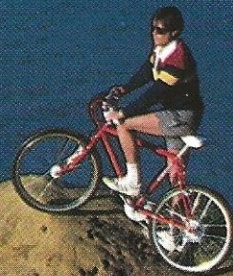
Here's a batch of bike muzzles. Such a variety of improvised and built-in hardware, just to prevent dentist bills when cog bites log and sprocket chews rock! Also see page 14 for the over-the-counter model.



The Kuwahara K.N.

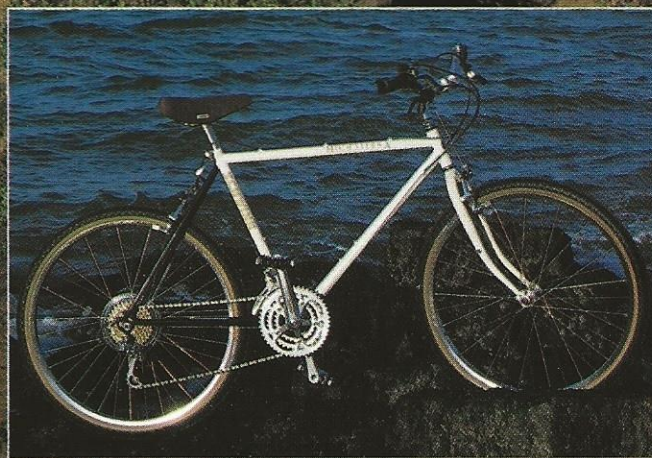


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RIDE WITH THE TREND
SCHWINN



Tech Tips

by SeeKay

Observed Trials is (are?) coming on strong as the newest branch of fat-tire competition. The reasons for the new-found popularity are an enthusiastic cadre of riders and sponsors: the former see it as a great test of skill and the epitome of "showing off" on a bicycle while sponsors are catching on to it as an attractive spectator sport. Because all the action takes place in a relatively confined area, spectators can watch the experts all the way through the competition rather than seeing them leave, then come back hours later. Because even a specially prepared trials bike can be relatively simple and inexpensive when compared to a bike made for distance racing, the rider does not need to invest a lot of money in his equipment to be competitive.

If any evidence is needed that sponsors like trials, consider this: which fat-tire competitor has the only "signature" model bike? Kevin Norton, sponsored by Kuwahara, has shown at the bike shows the prototype for his version of a mass-produced trials bike with his initials on it.

If there are any losers in the new popularity of this branch, it is the long-distance specialists whose trials skills are a little rusty. Because most off-road stage races now include a trials competition, lack of the basic skills can cost placings in overall results.

Although advanced moves in trials defy adequate description, there are a few rudiments that must be in each rider's arsenal if he or she is to be successful in competition. The rudiments reflect the situations one is likely to encounter in any trials, or for that matter in the woods.

The most obvious trials move is riding over an obstacle. These obstacles can be as large as a three-foot diameter log, or for show only, an automobile. The first trick is just to get up onto it. Look at the sequence of Rich Cast riding over the Road Warrior; as he approaches, he pulls the front wheel up into an extreme wheelie. In the first shot you can see that he has already raised his body weight above the hood of the car, preparing to push on the bars to bring the back wheel up.

Once the weight is on the car, it's no trick to ride over, but it's still a good trick to ride off. This can be done two ways; either the rider can wheelie off and land on the rear wheel, or ride down with the weight far behind the saddle and jerk the front wheel up just as it contacts the ground to keep from stuffing it. Since riding down steep surfaces is a required skill, it bears practice.

Obstacles of this size almost require that the bike be equipped with some sort of bash-guard to protect the chainring and to give the rider a solid pivot point for rocking over logs. Cyclo-cross style chainring guards are a little passe now, because riders don't need a large chainring for this slow-speed event. Now there are on the market a number of frame-mounted guards to protect a small chainring, and all good riders use them.



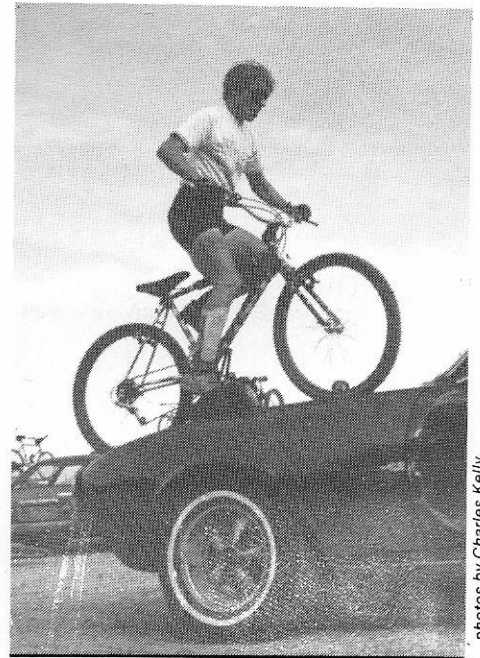
Another basic skill is riding a narrow track. Riders are often required to ride the length of a log or a plank where the slightest deviation will cause a fall. Although it's hard to do, the trick here is to ride quickly and with confidence. Riding fast you ride a straighter line, and by covering the distance more quickly you have a better chance of keeping on line by shifting body weight.

Many courses include turns in which

the rider must completely reverse direction in a small area. The move here is borrowed from freestyle, as the rider "pogos" by standing on the pedals and jumping the bike around in a cir-

"Since riding down steep surfaces is a required skill, it bears practice."

cle: a track stand in three dimensions. An option less frequently used is a nose wheelie, with the rear wheel swinging in an arc to complete the turn. (In video tape of European trials riding, a



photos by Charles Kelly

Rich Cast of Moots encounters the Road Warrior (see text for details).

rider uses this method to reverse directions while riding on a log!)

One diabolical trick of trials promoters is to space small logs exactly a wheelbase apart, which makes it hard to pull the front wheel up and over the log. Here riders must find the rhythm and bounce both wheels over logs at the same time, then set up for the next pair.

Of course, promoters are required by the rules to lay out courses that are humanly possible to ride. If one rider "cleans" a section one time, it must be possible, n'est ce-past? But while the

competitors must ride sections without practicing them, the promoter or his or her designated rider can practice at length before the competition in order to prove the course is rideable.

Generally the better the rider, the better he will like a course that is impossible for anyone to "clean." National champ Norton likes a course that he can't ride clean, because he figures that will widen the gap between him and the next rider.

It's almost a given that trials breeds its own bikes. Forget any kind of high-speed handling; what you're looking for here is slow-speed agility. There



Obviously, one doesn't need a car-crushin' "Big Foot" to pay one's respects to the automobile; just a couple healthy dollups of skill and some kind of trials bike.

aren't many production versions, although nearly every custom builder has put together one or two either as experiments or as team bikes for stage races.

In general the trials bike will have a very short wheelbase, which in turn gives it greater ground clearance. A high bottom bracket with a small chainring and a bashplate will get it over anything. The saddle is just there to prevent injury, and riders will want it as low as possible, perhaps using an extremely small frame. A smaller bike is lighter also, which lends agility; Kevin Norton won his championship with a 24" wheel bike.

Even those who favor drop bars for

general riding are likely to prefer flat or upright bars for trails. A higher handlebar gives the rider a little more leverage against the frame for tough moves such as yanking the rear wheel up onto a stump, and makes it easier to pull the front wheel up into a wheelie to climb obstacles.

Some expert riders prefer a fork made of straight oversize tubing, which allows them to perform moves that would be likely to damage a lighter-duty racing fork.



For example, not many curved forks would stand up to repeated pogo-ing on the front wheel. Also, since the rider constantly risks stuffing the front end on a steep drop-off, a tough fork seems like a good idea.

"...to ride the length of a log or a plank...the trick here is to ride quickly and with confidence."

Stock models of trials bikes are hard to find, and although they should be appearing eventually, manufacturers still see this as a small market. Custom builders Jeff Lindsay (Mountain Goat) and Scot Nicol (Ibis) have their own trials models, and as mentioned, Kuwahara sells the Kevin Norton model with 24" wheels. From Europe comes the Torpado, a 20" trials bike,

although this will be hard to find (distributed by Agrati-Garelli Crop of Lexington, SC 803-359-5145).

Trials freak Tom Hillard has made his own trials bike from a cheap Univega that he modified for shorter chainstays. He recommends carving up cheap bikes because they are easy to find and because you don't need the fanciest tubing to go three miles an hour. Besides, with a cheap bike you don't have to get bent out of shape if your bike gets bent out of shape.

For those who aren't NORBA members, here is the 1984 version of the Official Rules for Observed Trials. (Some of the procedural rules have been edited.)

INTRODUCTION

An Observed Trials is an event conducted over a course including natural hazards such as mud, rocks, water, etc., and consists of any number of observed sections. The object of the contest is for the rider to conduct his/her bicycle through the various sections in their proper order, while incurring the minimum loss of points.

7.0 OBSERVED TRIALS COURSE REQUIREMENTS

7.1 — The number of observed sections and number of laps as well as the course closing time must be announced before the start of the event.

7.5 — The course must neither contain impossible turns, ascents or descents, nor be too hazardous.

7.6 — No section shall be included in the Trial which has not been test ridden by either the Event Director or his/her designee to determine that deterioration or weather changes will not render the section too dangerous or impossible to be ridden.

7.7 — No observed section may be

Continued on next page

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