

Trials Tales



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The lunatic fringe

All sports have their fringe dwellers and trials are no exception.

Who are these shady characters who dwell at the edges of mainstream trials...and what are they all about?

Well for a start, there are the “collectors”. These virtual kleptomaniacs know nothing better than to gather together the detritus of trials, and so veritable mountains of cast offs in their sheds do grow. This in the hope that one day the trash may indeed be useful, *but secretly hope it won't because it's precious to them*. They hoard their booty, allowing it to grow dusty and rusty. Old and bent handlebars hang like trophies, dented petrol tanks vie for space amongst legions of variably bespoked old wheels. All that mess, all in vain trust that once again the countershaft sprocket nut off a 1976 128 Italjet will be of inestimable value. Start the collector on the subject of collectable reed valves of the late sixties and there's no stopping them.

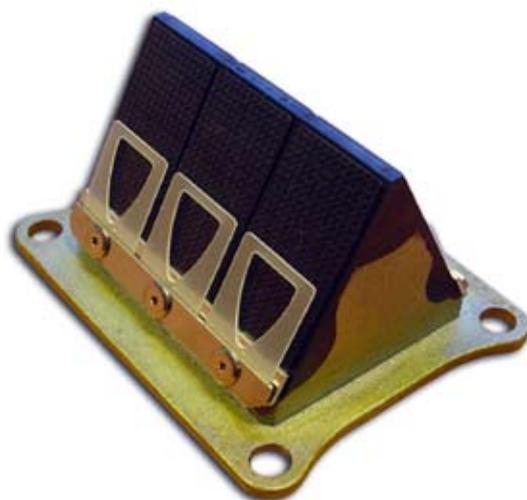
Then there are the “studiers”. These oddball types would rather study the ignition mapping diagrams for a 1956 Greeves than to study the playmate of the month. Renaissance spoke patterns excite them. They would rather see an obscure 3 hour DVD of still photos showcasing muffler design of the early 1970's than to watch a DVD of Shrek with their kids. The studier agrees with the collector on the subject of collectable reed valves, and fervently believes they should have their own section in the Smithsonian. Unlike the collector however, this lunatic would rather study than collect - there's the degree of deflection of the reeds, the bimetal composite ratios of the reed framework, etc. The studier knows of nothing more satisfying than being able to identify a trials tyre brand just by it's tread pattern alone at fifteen paces.

The “fiddler” is a restless type who never has his bike working quite right. The air bleed screw needs one poofteenth of an inch adjustment; the tyre pressure needs to be set for this trial which has a mix of sand and mud to 4.58 psi exactly; perhaps the levers need to have an 8 degree deviation; perhaps if I shaved the knobs of my tyres square I may improve performance; I prefer a slightly hot plug, say an eight normally, but fine weather today might suggest a seven; my fuel is mixed at 69.55/1 precisely. When a “fiddler” is also a studier, then there is simply no time to actually ride the bike and no trial is ever completed.

Somewhat like the fiddler is the “polisher”. Now a polisher may spend 16 – 20 man hours prep time prior to a trial, cleaning, recleaning and blinging up his bike. Making sure the chain gleams, the spokes bedazzle, the plastics look impossibly new. Well it's not really impossible for the polisher to keep his bike looking new, because like the fiddler and the collector he rarely rides. The polisher lives in fear that the bike will get dirty as is inevitable if one goes trialling. As heart-wrenching as it is the polisher is more likely to ride than his other fringe dwelling brethren as it gives him an opportunity to get the chamois out on Sunday night.

Finally we look at the “dandy”. The dandy is the Beau Brummel of the trials world; a regular fashionista on and off the sections. The dandy has all the latest and most garishly fashionable gear available. A helmet with ultra-mega cool graphics, bright boots, trials pants and jersey the same and all in matching colours to his bike. While a dandy may have slight polishing tendencies, in general all priming is saved for themselves. Modern dandies may go for body art, and hair dyeing as long as it fits the overall theme. Of course, the fact that trials boots are of Italian leather is not lost on the dandy. Dirt is also an anathema to the dandy and hence they don't ride much. Follow the olfactory trail of French cologne to find a dandy at a trial.

Trials like all sports has it's lunatic fringe. If you identify yourself with one or more of these groups, take a bow. Because as our friends and makers of fine cologne, the French, would say, “*vive la différence!*”. That is to say, [long] live the difference.



The very collectable Model 56 (Limited) reed as seen on all the James 105cc trials bikes of 1968.