



TRICKS IN THE STICKS!



"... GET IT RIGHT AND YOU'LL BE STUNNED AT WHAT YOU CAN RIDE UP. GET IT WRONG AND YOU'LL END UP IN A HEAP ON THE FLOOR, COVERED IN MUD. WATCHING BARRY LAUNCH HIS BIKE TWO-THIRDS OF THE WAY UP A TREE WAS ONE OF THE FUNNIEST THINGS WE'VE SEEN ALL SUMMER..."

If you live in the South-East and fancy giving trials riding a go, there's an outfit based in Kent with 50 acres of woodland just waiting to be played on...

Pictures: John Corbin

Everyone's heard of Dougie Lampkin. He's that biker from Yorkshire who can ride up vertical rock faces on his trials bike. Absolutely bloody amazing. But what's more bloody amazing is that for £150, you could be doing just, attempting the same thing yourself this weekend with a bunch of mates.

Ticks in the Sticks are a small operation based near Tonbridge in Kent that provide bespoke trials riding days for groups of up to eight riders. The owner/instructor is Jason Pears, an ex-stunt rider and trials competitor who provides the bikes, riding kit and all the instruction you need. Jason can accommodate absolute first timers or riders who know what they're doing and want to improve. "We're pretty unique here in the South of England," says Jason, "and I'm very lucky to have the land to do this on. Trials riding teaches you about balance, throttle and brake control. Everything you can learn and practice on these bikes will make you a better rider on anything with two wheels, and the joy of trials bikes is that you can experiment with different techniques, fall off in front of your mates and get back on laughing."

We sent our art editor (Barry, who's had his bike licence two years and despite his inexperience is surprisingly adept on a motorcycle. He just doesn't know why. Jason starts us on basic techniques - holding the bike against the brakes, light cornering, riding with the front wheel locked on, weighting the bike correctly for huge slides and body positioning. The £700 Beta trials bike he uses weighs nothing - around 80kg - and it's like riding a super-light, powerful mountain bike. "It's all about finesse on these bikes," continues Jason. "Take your time, stay in control, see for what the bike is doing and you'll be amazed what you can do."

After warming up in a field, where Barry pops his wheels cherry (see pic) for evidence it's down into the dark woods for more advanced riding. You never sit down on a trials bike, there's no seat anyway, it's all about staying on your toes, moving your weight forwards and back to keep the balance and grip where you want it. Get it right and you'll be stunned at what you can ride up. Get it wrong and you end up in a heap on the floor, covered in mud and laughing. Watching Barry getting crossed up out of a bog and launching the Beta two-thirds of the way up a small tree was one of the funniest things I've seen this summer.

Verdict: brilliant. Get a few friends who've always wanted to try something different and get them down to Kent. Jason's instruction is excellent and he has the patience of a saint. You'll learn heaps about bike control, fall off without hurting yourself and have massive fun in the process. Repeat business is big business at Ticks in the Sticks and we're not at all surprised. **7/10**

Rider in the Sticks is open all year round. Visit their website at www.ticksinthesticks.co.uk for prices & info.