

# TRICKS IN THE STICKS

*Want to make life easier on technical terrain? Fancy picking up some trials skills to apply to your dirtbike riding? We sent new boy Alex Waters off to pick up some Tricks in the Sticks.*

**Words: Alex Waters; Pics: Si Melber**

**A**s Si and myself set off from TBM Towers on a crisp January morning, two things were going through my head. Firstly, this was going to be my first assignment for TBM. Secondly, was the fact that we were going to spend the day riding trials bikes.

And I'd never ridden a trials bike in my life...

Our destination was a smallholding in Kent, where Jason Pearce runs Tricks in the Sticks, a training school specialising in trials technique, wheelies, stoppies and all manner of off-road shenanigans. TBM's sampled the school before, though we were keen to see what Jason had in store having called us up to say that he was now teaching people how trials skills can translate onto an *enduro* bike. Si describes the previous outing there, where the day had consisted of steep climbs in slippery woods, wheelies the full length of a field, and trying to get his knee-down (on wet grass) from the 'seat' of a trialler. Carry these skills over to an *enduro* bike, you say? In my head I'm predicting carnage...

Still, I am always up for trying something new, and with this in mind I have two goals for the day: To get through it without making a complete ass of myself in front of my new work colleagues. And to come away with some new skills (in that order)...





# NEW TRACKS

Right: Jason demonstrates the basics of trike riding to two mischievous TBM schoolboys.



Having been taught how to 'Pivot Turn' with the triallers, we were then left to practice our technique (left), before applying it to the enduro bike (right). If you're in a tight spot with no room to spin-turn, this technique works brilliantly.



*Our teacher Jason is sporting a glint of mischief*

### Stick Men

We arrive in Sandhurst in Kent and are firstly JK - TBM's trusty part-time tester and another fresh back from a snowboarding trip to the Alps. A small farmyard complete with a couple of ponies with some ponies being put through their paces.

After a quick chat with JK I wander off to be preparing a spanking new Beta trike bike from Inta Motorcycles. Jason's sporting a glint of mischief in his eyes - a hint of things to come.

Having introduced us to Mick who's helping with the formalities over and he kills me out an open-faced lid and some gloves. A pair of gloves horribly with the lairy orange riding gear I've

Three other Betas are ready to go, along with kindly lent by Jason's mate Steve, so after a few bikes we're led down a track, through some





## NEW TRICKS

main play area - a decent sized rectangular field surrounded by woods. At one end there's a gazebo with refreshments and a BBQ already smoking. Cool...

There's an air of informality that I warm to immediately. The emphasis of Tricks in the Sticks is on the practical side rather than hours of theory, which, never having been a huge fan of the classroom, suits me well.

Before he starts teaching Jason encourages you to simply spend some time on the bike and get a feel for it. The 270cc Betas quickly inspire confidence. Having never even thrown a leg over a trials bike the initial feel is quite strange. The pegs feel set back, the bars a bit of a stretch forward, and the gear lever is higher and much further forward than on a regular dirt bike - but with

good reason. The punchy little engines are designed in a way that makes you rethink how you use a gearbox. You often select one gear and stick with it, taking your foot off the peg and shifting with your heel if strictly necessary. And with careful use of the clutch they'll happily pull away in fourth.

We all buzz around the field for a few minutes and then gather round to watch Jason's first demonstration of the day. He starts off with a wheelie lesson quickly followed by a pivot turn - a handy technique for turning around in confined spaces (like a sunken lane); which requires you to plant a foot whilst holking the front-end, and simultaneously firing out the clutch, pulling on the bars and rotating the bike around your planted leg. I manage a fairly modest wheelie but struggle with the turn. Si owns a tri-aller so is far more familiar with the bikes and the techniques.

and JK rides on a regular basis but also initially finds the feel of the little Betas 'unusual'.

Dizzy with so many turns, we head off into the woods, and for me this is where the fun really begins. Jason guides us up and down a little gully with a small stream at the bottom, threading through the trees on either side and over to a series of specially felled boughs to teach us the next skill in his considerable armoury.

The little bikes are so light and manoeuvrable they really come into their element in this terrain and, as Jason puts it, you should 'steer them with your feet'. JK's just about to heave his size-13s up on the bars when Jason explains he meant by pushing down on the pegs...

Next, he demonstrates the two-part technique for tackling a fallen log lying across the trail. First gear, a small wheelie to place the front wheel three-quarters of the way up the log and then another quick blip of throttle to bring the rear wheel

smoothly over, rather than simply smashing into it using the sumpguard. We all have a few goes and after an initial nervousness I find myself crossing a series of progressively larger logs. Tidy!

Jason then shows us the same method on the WR. If you came across such small logs on your dirtbike you'd almost certainly hit them faster than we've been trying, but the technique makes for a smooth crossing and equally applies to the taller obstacles.

One freshly downed piece of timber had come to rest at an angle to the ground, giving us a chance to gradually develop our technique on progressively higher obstacles. You start off down at stump level and as your confidence grows you hit it higher and higher along its length. Again there's no pressure to put yourself outside of your com-

fort zone, so I carry on practising over the smaller logs to try and improve my technique before having a crack at the larger obstacles.

After a quick drinks break we run through a counter-balancing technique which involves riding along at a snail's pace, gently leaning the bike over on almost full lock, whilst hanging backwards and off to the (opposite) side to compensate for the angle of lean whilst increasing the tyres' grip. This allows you to turn in an incredibly tight circle, even when the ground is slippery. Having not ridden in a while, for me this was the most useful thing I learned all day as it inspired confidence in myself and my ability to control the Beta.

### Party Tricks

Having been lucky with the weather lunch was a BBQ, which was another new experience for me bearing in mind it was late January! The talk centred mostly around bikes and the recent Dakar result, but we also learned a bit more about Jason's interests including, but not limited to, his days of racing Superbikes and also chucking himself down alpine slopes against future Olympic skiers back in the day.

After lunch Jason showed us another trials skill that you can employ on an enduro bike, though it certainly takes some practise. And that is the bunnyhop. As a youngster I was mustard at these on

As a lad I was mustard at bunnyhops on my BMX, but the trials bike feel anything like my Raleigh Burn

my BMX, but the same technique didn't seem to work on a trials bike. Jason showed us the way. Especially the trick is to compress the suspension and then pull it, and as the bike rebounds upwards give it a crack of throttle and pull upwards with your arms. If you've a bump to launch off then even better. It's certainly something which takes a lot of practise and spot-on timing. I began to regret a second helping of sausages...

Following this, we spend our time putting into practise the techniques we've been shown, swapping between the Betas and the Yamaha. As the light fades, and so too our energy levels, we take on

'C'mon lad, stop messing about and give me back my seat!'







around the woods before heading back to the farmyard, with smiles all round.

### ***Trick of the Light***

The day also highlighted to me just how accessible the world of trials riding is. Between us, we only got through one gallon of fuel all day, and that's a lot of bang for your buck when you consider the bikes are also relatively cheap to buy and maintain. Plus you don't need a huge amount of land; you could use one to hone your skills in a reasonable-sized back garden!

Even if you've no intention of getting into trials I can still recommend a day with Jason and his team. The benefits of some basic trials skills will be of use to anyone riding the dirt, and even on-road (maybe not the log-crossing but certainly counter-weighting the pegs during slow, tight turns). Jason commented that he's ridden all manner of bikes over the years, from tuned R1s to big-cc customs, but always returns to his trusty trialler to perfect a new technique. If nothing else it certainly fine-tunes your throttle control...

So for me it was mission accomplished. I definitely polished-up my rusty riding technique and picked up some new skills, plus I didn't make a complete ass out of myself either. Well, looking at the solitary (stationary) picture of me, maybe just a little bit...

***Thanks to: Jason and Mick at Tricks in the Sticks (07743 949107/tricksinthesticks.co.uk) and to Inta Motorcycles (01622 688727/intabikes.com) for use of the 2011 Beta 290.***

### ***Tricky Business***

***Jason offers one-to-one tuition for complete beginners, and prefers to keep groups small so that he can offer as much tuition as possible to individuals. Alongside a full day's training a special half-day package is available for £125 per person (including use of a Beta Rev3, helmet, boots, gloves and all important refreshments - after a couple of runs through the woods you will need a drink of something cold!) From March onwards Jason will be offering the half trials/half enduro day, although at the moment he's still deciding which enduro bikes he will be using. In the meantime you are welcome to take along your own enduro bike for the afternoon session.***