

Which Direction

These days Yorkshireman Malcolm Rathmell spends his time running the successful MRS business, importing the popular Sherco machines as well as many after market accessories. He has seen the good times in trials, when he rode for Bultaco and Montesa taking many titles along the way, including European Champion, British Champion and numerous SSDT and Scott Trial victories. At the moment the sport is going through a difficult period with falling bike sales and loss of land. Here he voices his opinion on why trials have to return to the no-stop rules to take the sport forward and give it the future it deserves.

The Open Free System is now being introduced in certain events in Spain and France after they tried it and liked it. Maybe I am not up to speed on this concept of trials but perhaps someone can explain to me how the Open Free System is trials and how exactly the organisers, who are already thin on the ground, are going to be able to understand it? By all means make this a championship but they need to think of another name for this sport as it certainly isn't trials. All these different systems are okay but please don't call them trials. For instance the Skiing Federation were clever enough to differentiate between Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding. They don't both come under the same title of skiing. Manchester United doesn't play under different rules at Old Trafford to those Barcelona play under at their home ground. Their governing body has enough sense to see that all games have to be unified. Why can't our governing body do the same? It strikes me that, as in our government, there are more and more perks and expenses so no one wants to make any decision which might rock the boat. So the easy solution is to go along with everybody and everything and forget what we enjoy most – in this instance our sport – even if it dies. Back in November we went to the ACU in Rugby to decide the British Championship rules for 2010. Sorry, I will correct that. I had a trip to Rugby and back – everything had clearly already been decided! Even the manufacturers had no say. Before the trip I managed to talk Beta trials importer John Lampkin into coming along, even though John being John he had no real interest in the Rugby trip. Anyway in the end and after a lot of persuading he agreed to come! We had had many conversations about the state of the sport before the trip, but the two hour journey really fired John into gear. He is now on a crusade to try and sort the sport out. I am now trying to slow him down as I explained to him that I have been trying to do this for the last twelve years!

1997 Strike

Going back to 1997, when the rules were similar to today, even the riders eventually went on strike when the lenient system of marking made it virtually impossible to have a five. The problem was that the sections had to be made

harder and harder, until in the end even the top elite few did not want to attempt the sections and went on strike at the Italian World round. This was probably as low a point in the history of trials as we are in now. In fact I had personally worked hard to help improve the rules, and after a lot of testing with federations and riders we did manage to return to a sensible system in 1998 with the stop-for-one rule. Why this was altered still, to me, needs explaining. The outcome was that eventually the Spanish got their way and we returned to the farcical system of today which is basically indoor rules outdoors, which is and always will be limited to an elite group of maybe four or five riders. I explained to John Lampkin that everyone talks about the right route to go, everyone knows the right route to go but when it finally comes to a decision the governing bodies, that could do something about it, haven't got the guts to do it. If any viable business had been run in a similar fashion to how trials has been treated by our so-called federation, who are supposed to have the interests of our sport at heart, they would have been closed by the banks a long time ago. Or do I see a staggering similarity between our organising body and the banks? For me it is totally unacceptable that the rules for our sport are decided purely by the competitors and sponsors. You may say 'why not' if you are a sponsor or a rider. There is an easy answer to that – these riders and sponsors will not be here in ten years time but, hopefully, the sport will be – although, the way things are going maybe not.

Enjoyment

I have heard it said that because I have a vested interest in the industry I am only interested



in the financial side of the sport. I started motorcycling as a hobby at the age of 10 and it is like sex, the more you do it the more you enjoy it! Even though I am now 60 I still want more of both! I have come to the conclusion that the powers that be don't have a decision in them and I think the time has come where 'trials riders' will start looking elsewhere for good old traditional trials. Maybe we need to look at other organisations to get our sport back on track. One thing is for sure we cannot continue down the path we are going if we want the sport we all love to continue and thrive as it should. Throughout my motorcycling life I have seen the end of the British Motorcycle Industry and the end of the first round of the Spanish Motorcycle Industry. One thing is for sure I, along with many, many people do not want to see the end of the present factories, but unless something rather drastic is done pretty quickly we may see this happen.