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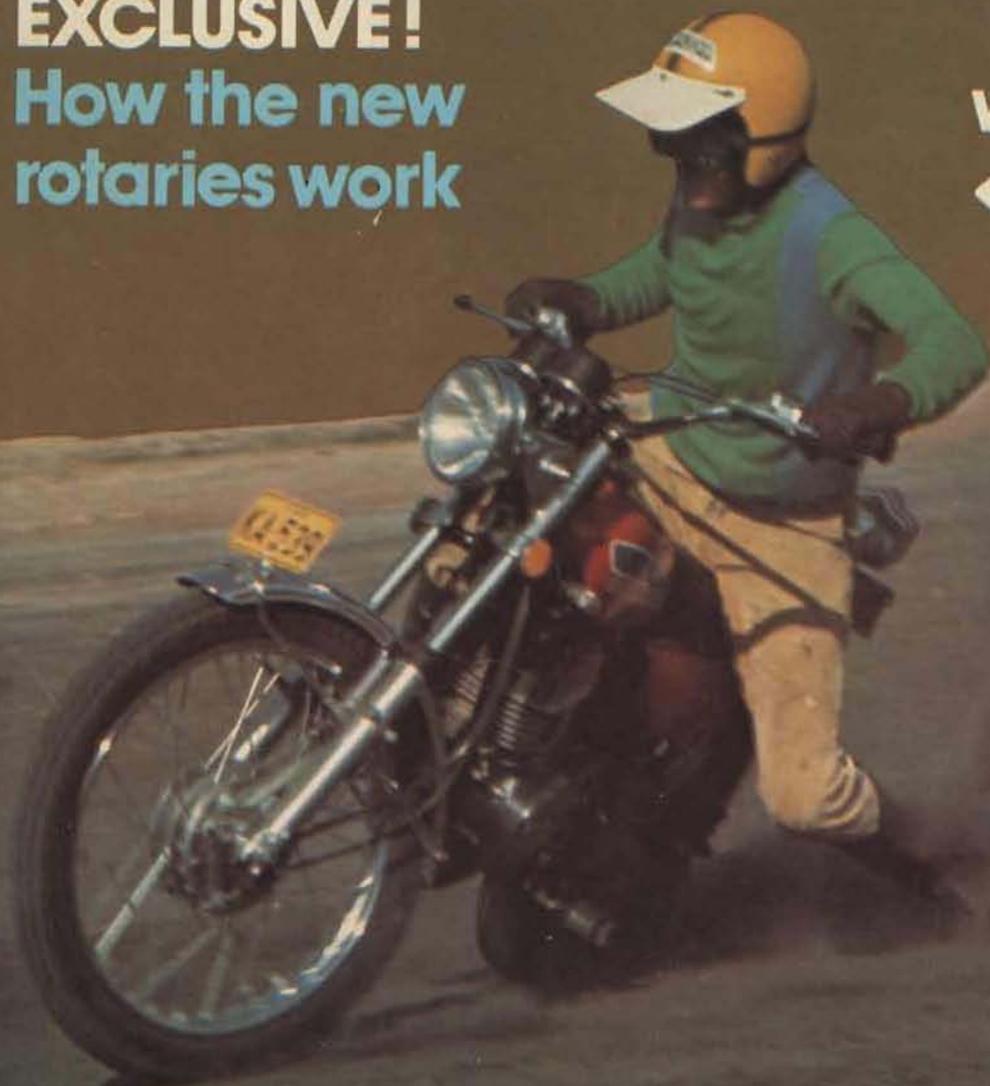
AUSTRALIA

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CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN...

At least, that's what competitors in the 1974 Australian Observed Trials Championships TRIED to do. Victorian Chris Leighfield came closest to succeeding, reports Our Man in Lismore, PHIL HUNT.

UNHEEDING OF THEIR water-soaked boots, they paddled through creeks searching for rocks and potholes. They stood back and, stroking their beards, surveyed rocky inclines. They carried snapped-off branches, using them as measuring sticks for the spaces between trees and rocks. They talked quietly amongst themselves, pointing with arcing hands at the best line. Then with heads nodding, they returned to their machines, left leaning against trees and rocks near the start-line bunting.

D. Malouf decided to go first. He waited for the nod from the observer then, selecting second gear, idled his Honda 'Bials' across the line.

Standing high on the pegs and keeping his weight far back, Malouf let the machine drop quickly down the slope, then eased on the brakes. Slowly, slowly he turned to the left, to skirt the edge of the creek-line. There were three possible ways to cross the creek. Malouf's path lay through deep water, but the drop into and rise out of the stream looked easy. A little Body English turned the machine to the right, and then he trickled the 'Bials' into the creek.

Water splashed over the crankcases, but the machine kept going. A jerk on the bars and a snap on the throttle took Malouf half-way up the bank. The front end pawed at the air. The rear wheel spun on the muddy bank, then hit on harder ground below. Slowly the Bials' front wheel lifted up, higher and higher, then Malouf splashed backwards into a metre of water with his machine upside down on top of him. Section Two had claimed its first victim.

If anything at all was proved at this year's Australian Observed Sporting Trials Championships, it was that most local Trials riders have yet to be able to recognize difficult ground just by walking over it. Most riders would look at a section, but not really

know how to tackle it until they actually rode through it. By the end of the day, riders who started with large points losses were turning in quite respectable scores. Invariably, the riders who won were those who started as well as they finished.

Queensland's Jeff Gough and Victoria's Alan Kerney were typical of the former group. Jeff lost 24 points (out of a possible 50) on his first round, yet his last three scores were 14, 12 and 11. Alan's last three rounds were three, four and seven, but his six-round total was a massive 62. But for those early mistakes, Jeff would have finished a lot better than eighth, and Alan might even have won the title.

However, lest you think I am singling out Jeff and Alan for criticism, let me stress that this seemed to be a problem shared by all but the top three riders and the bottom 20 or 30, who (like me) will never find the right line, no matter how many times they ride through a section.

Defending Australian Champion, Chris Leighfield, proved master again on his 250 Ossa with lap scores of four, six, nine, five, seven and 12. Leighfield, a Victorian, lost 43 points, all up, -10 less than runner-up Dave Pinkerton (Qld.) on a Yamaha TY250 (nine, 13, seven, seven, 12

Leighfield struts his stuff: percentage trials (he "dabbed" this time).

and five). Two points further back, on 55, was Peter Paice (N.S.W.), the 1973 N.S.W. Champion, also riding a TY250. Peter displaced last year's third-placegetter, Alan Kerney.

For the marque-minded, Yamahas filled seven of the top 10 places. Ossa was at the top, a Montesa came in seventh, and the best-performing Suzuki RL250 finished tenth. The Suzis were there, sure enough, but one suspects they were too unfamiliar to their owners to win.

The Championships were creditably run by the Richmond River Motor Cycle Club on a property near Bentley, about 20 kilometres west of Lismore, N.S.W. In terms of accessibility, Bentley is just about as far away from every large centre as you can get, but once you found the right road out of Lismore, the way was dotted with little signs. Anyway, the journey through northern N.S.W. could not help but put you in a good frame of mind. It really is beautiful countryside.

Ninety-four riders had to negotiate six laps of 10 sections each. Entries were received from every State, and Richmond River Club Officials were obviously pleased with the turnout. There were seven sidecar entries (though only four competed), for which a separate six-section course had been marked out. Only two lady riders came; it's a pity more girls don't have a go at trials! Jenny Johnson (from Preston, Vic.) and



Rose Wanchap (Qld.) both showed that the requisite skills were within their reach, Jennifer scoring somewhat the better with 218 points lost.

Chris Leighfield's six-lap winning ride of 43 points lost was hardly brilliant scoring. The organisers claimed that the top riders were expected to lose about 30 points for 100 sections; Chris' best was 43 points down over 60 sections. Still, both Chris and Dave Pinkerton thought the course was quite easy — Chris commenting later: "From the look of it between sections, they could have made it harder."

But most riders, turning in score cards of 30 or 40 per 10-section lap, figured it was quite hard enough, thank-you! Pinkerton suggested it was "a bit too tight", and admitted that a shorter wheelbase bike could have an advantage. Perhaps that vindicates the performance of the longer wheelbase Suzukis, but no Hondas (which have a 70 mm wheelbase advantage over the Yamahas) figured in the top 10. Six of one-half-a-dozen of the other!

I waited at the first section, watching riders 'clean' their way through, until the scores started to trickle in for completed laps. Then I circled the sections in reverse order. This is always the best way to go, since you see more riders.

Most riders found the hardest sections to be Nine, Eight, Seven, Six and Two.

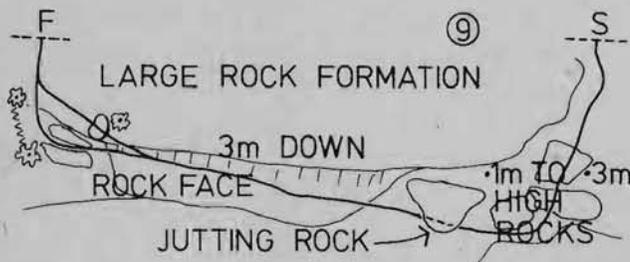
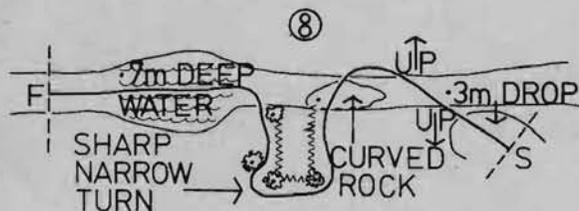
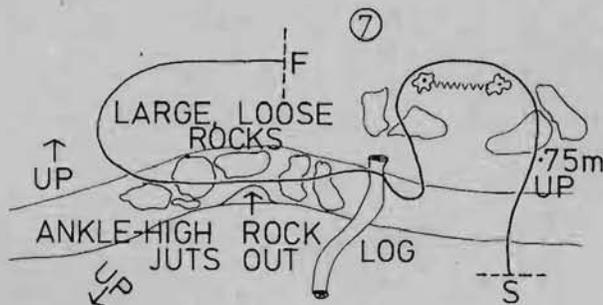
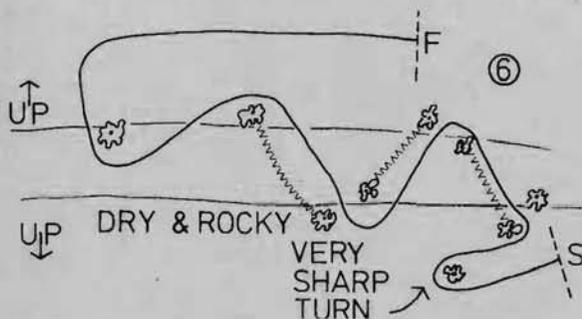
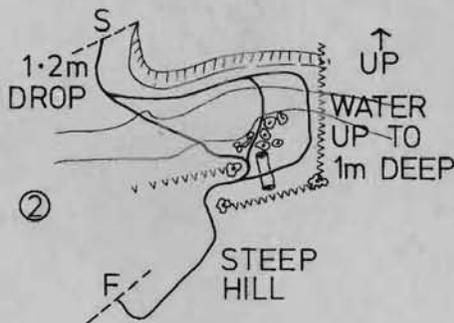
The real difficulty with Section Nine was near its end, where the rider had a choice of two lines. He could take an easy line between two rocks, but then he had to make a 60° right-hand uphill turn over slippery rocks. Most riders found this impossible without footing.

The alternative meant keeping to the right, over a 70 cm rock. Easy: just jump it! The trouble was, there was a distinct lack of headroom. Next to the rock was a tree with neck-high branches. Many who tried this line ended up nicely balanced on their cranks on top of the rock, with the rear wheel spinning in mid-air (five points lost).

The problem with Section Eight was a sharp, narrow downhill turn between trees before the water crossing. The European machinery, especially, tended to stall here, and not a few riders had difficulty getting the fires burning again before running out of downhill. Only the riders of the little Bials found this easy—but, then again, they had other headaches.

Three tight turns made Section Seven a real challenge. The first was a 75 cm step up over some large rocks, followed by a left-hand turn. For those who negotiated this correctly, there was a very tight right-hand turn over a fallen tree-trunk.

Some of the more difficult sections





RESULTS: AUSTRALIAN OBSERVED SPORTING TRIALS CHAMPIONSHIPS

	Rider	Machine	Points lost
1	Chris Leighfield	250 Ossa	43
2	Dave Pinkerton	250 Yamaha	53
3	Peter Paice	250 Yamaha	55
4	Alan Kerney	250 Yamaha	62
5	Frank Hull	250 Yamaha	66
6	Peter Luscombe	250 Yamaha	69
7	Stephen Johnson	250 Montesa	73
8	Jeff Gough	250 Yamaha	87
9	David Goldsmith	250 Yamaha	93
10	R. Bowden	250 Suzuki	104

Juniors

1	Howard Wallace	125 Honda	107
2	J. Hafner	N/A	114

Sidecars

1	D. Squires	325 Bultaco	78
2	R. Gough G. Jackson	250 Yamaha	76
3	G. Barrett L. Williams	250 Bultaco	61



Opposite: third-placed was Peter Paice (Yamaha): lucky he brought his Wellingtons!

Top, opposite: the real difficulty with the straight-through line in Section Two was an inappropriately placed tree . . .

Above: Jenny Johnson provided the feminine touch.

Right: some riders lost everything in the creek. Would you believe this is a Honda Bial—and that it started first pop afterwards?

And many riders who breathed a sigh of relief after getting through that lot found deliverance short-lived as they scraped past a jutting rock which removed many a chain from its sprockets.

A hairpin on Section Six also accounted for many riders. Like Section Eight, the European machines stalled most often. And for those who made it around the corner, there was another left-hander to follow with a course marker on the apex (lose one point for hitting it).

Then there was Section Two. I was at Section Eight when I heard that Canberra's Howard Wallace (Honda) had got through by jumping straight across the creek. Wallace went on to clean the section, but few

who tried to emulate him managed to do so. The problem was getting up enough speed for the 1.5 m jump with only a few metres' run-up (most of it downhill). Come down the hill from the start too fast and your suspension was all wrong for the jump. Go for the jump too slowly and you landed in the middle of the water, or square on your crankcases on the far bank. A couple of riders misjudged the trajectory altogether and did an Evel Knievel into the far bank, front wheel first. They ended up with their handlebars more suited to road-racing than trials!

Chris Leighfield reckoned that the "straight-through" line was too risky.

"Better to lose a point footing, than five with a drowned engine," he said. Alan Kerney gave it a go and footed once. Then Peter Luscombe (W.A.) "cleaned" by taking a line through the middle where the water was shallowest. The hang-up with this technique was the exit up the far bank. A tree stood square across your chosen line, forcing you to come up somewhat

sideways. Some tried it, and came more sideways than up.

In keeping with Australian tradition, the course was very tight by international standards. What it needed to make it complete was one of those really difficult off-camber runs and some long, steep climbs. Section One had both of these elements, but was too short to test most riders.

By winning his third Australian Championship in a row, Chris Leighfield demonstrated that percentage riding is the way to win. If Chris decided that "cleaning" was impossible, he was happy to lose a point on the side of safety. But he wasn't so cautious, nor so proud, that he wouldn't try a better line shown to him by a fellow rider.

Perhaps that's one of the reasons so many people are predicting a big future for trials in Australia. It is one of the few competitive sports that pits the individual against the elements, rather than against the other man. ●