

OCEANIA TRIAL QUEENSLAND EASTER 08

The first Oceania Challenge between Australian and New Zealand trials riders took place at the New Zealand Trials Championship organised by the Manawatu Orion MCC in 2003, which New Zealand won. The Aussies done themselves no favours that year as they turned up on the first day of the three day event late, and couldn't complete the first day. However the history of Australia versus New Zealand goes way back to 1975 when the Trans Tasman Trophy Challenge was inaugurated. The idea was for the two countries to meet every year (Aus one year, NZ the next) and two teams of three or four riders would compete for the trophy. Australia ran that first trial in 1975 and won. The fact that it is now under the name of "Oceania Challenge" is irrelevant as the same trophy is still competed for and after all those years there is now some history involved.

Unfortunately the trophy wasn't competed for on 16 of the past 33 years since 1975. However it's now dead evens at nine wins apiece for each country on the 18 times it has ben competed for and let's hope there aren't any gaps in future years.

One thing that was changed starting last year was instead of the teams consisting of top Expert riders only, the teams now consist of one Expert, one Master (over 35) and one Junior (under 21). Master and Junior riding B Grade (Intermediate) sections. A concept that seems to have been well received.

As a young whippersnapper who had only been riding trials for less than two years in 1975, upon hearing about this new Trans Tasman thing I remember thinking I'd like to make that team oneday. Well I did in 1983 when we lost to Australia at the Aussie Champs in Victoria. I was a member the winning NZ team in NZ in 84, again in 07 (as the Master rider) and was lucky enough to be chosen for the NZ team to travel to Qld this year. In fact looking back I've ridden in 12 of the 18 Trans Tasman/Oceania trials over the years but only four as an official team member.

So getting back to this year's Oceania, there were three of us Kiwis who arrived in Brisbane on Wed March 19th. Wayne Thompson - Taranaki (Expert/Open Solo), Nick Oliver - Nelson (Junior) and myself Kevin Pinfold - Manawatu (Master). Luke March (Hawkes Bay) was the original Expert choice but a major dirt bike accident and consequent injuries ruled him out. We were met at the airport by Motorcycle Trials Club of Queensland representative Chris Williams who promptly whisked us off to his hometown of Toowoomba some 150km away where he'd booked us into a motel. Chris had also gathered up our borrowed bikes. Chris confessed the next morning to being a Kiwi - he moved from Wellington to Aus 25 years ago. You are forgiven.

Thursday and part of Friday was spent at Chris' 130 acre "trials" farm out in the bush setting up our bikes, practising and generally dodging all sorts of creepy wildlife that wants to bite you. Spiders the size of dinner plates and ants the size of B trains. I think the boys saw a lizard about a foot long (didn't see any of the big 1.5 metre buggers they call bush crocs though) and I missed the brown snake that Nick almost trod on. I did hear the scream when Nick rode into one of those large spider webs you see stretched between two trees - ripped him clean off his bike apparently and the spider had him pinned to the ground before Wayne beat it off with a stick. And never put your helmet down on the ground over there as it's likely to be invaded by all sorts of crawling things. Never a dull moment for a Kiwi in the Australian bush.

Our practice sessions went ok, in fact the creek down in the gully at Chris' place where we rode was similar to some I've ridden here in NZ. It was pretty slippery too. We all were struck with rear tyre punctures and all identical sidewall cuts in our tubeless tyres. Luckily I'd taken a bunch of "dog turds" over in case of punctures, just didn't expect to use them all up in one afternoon - up to three in one cut. I sussed out the culprit, one sharp rock in a narrow exit of the creek where we were blasting up a steep bank. Kicked the rock out and no more flats. I was riding a borrowed 06 Gas Gas 280 in show room

condition. Almost identical to my 04 250 but being newer and not having had a lot of use it felt real nice to ride - sharper suspension and nice smooth power right off the bottom and bags of it too, although I didn't need the extra power.

Friday afternoon and Chris and his son Cameron transported us and our bikes in the Fairmont V8 and enclosed trailer to Beaudesert about an hours drive south of Brisbane where we were booked into another motel. And the pool was nice and refreshing too.

It was strange travelling in Australia and seeing lush green grass everywhere instead of brown grass like here in the Manawatu drought at present. That area of Queensland has had a summer of much rain. Even the temperatures were similar to NZ when we left - mid to high 20s. A bit more humid and warmer at night but nothing to worry about.

The trial at Undullah near Beaudesert had an interesting mix of sections with four laps of ten each day. Saturday's sections were modified for Sunday although parts of some remained the same. There was a mixture of rock steps, loose moving rocks, steep climbs, soft sand and even a bit of water in the creek to wet your tyres or backside if you were unlucky enough to sit in it. (I didn't - in fact I didn't part company with the bike the whole time there). The dry sand stone type rocks were interesting in that they varied from grippy to very slippery, usually depending on how much dust was on them. Certainly not the ultra grippy type rocks I've encountered in NSW or Victoria in the past. More like some of the rocks we get in some areas of NZ.

I enjoyed the challenge of the B Grade (following yellow arrows) sections that Nick and I rode and the majority were probably closer in difficulty to the NZ A grade sections that I'm used to riding here than our Intermediate (B grade). There wasn't a section there that I knew I couldn't clean, but unfortunately there were a few I didn't have clean rides on. I was very nervous (packing myself actually) when I reached the second section on Saturday to find a big rock cliff we had to jump off. A bit bigger than anything I've jumped off before. I watched a few, including Nick, ride ahead of me and they all managed it ok, but they all over jumped and had hard landings which didn't inspire confidence. With two dodgy shoulders I was as worried as hell I'd hurt them and ruin my weekend or worse still break the bike that wasn't mine. However I got to the brink and after being stopped at the top for what seemed like 5 minutes balancing, trying to overcome my fear, I took the leap and executed a perfect landing and the shoulders didn't mind a bit - relief. However after the first lap the clerk of course eased the section to let us down a lesser step and the jump became a no-fear doddle. I've often questioned the need for large drop offs in sections that need to be jumped off. However Sunday's version of this section for our grade with a nice step up was far better, although the Experts still had one huge drop to leap off.

The only other section that worried me a bit was a large log section. This entailed launching the bike from a shortish sand run up with no kicker, across the creek and "splating" rear wheel first onto a big old log. Probably a distance of close on two metres. I've never been good at this type of section - getting distance as well as height. I know the technique required but often get it wrong. However first time up I got it perfect - very pleasing. We rode this same log both days and I must confess to not getting it perfect everytime - I did have two fives when I took it a bit lazy a couple of times and slid back off the log into the creek.

I enjoyed the two following hill climb sections, especially the first day before they were eased for the second day. And I enjoyed section 13 - one with a steep descent, tight turn at the bottom and a steep climb with no run up. A real challenge that ended in ones and cleans for me on half my attempts but also so close to a five on the other half, but saved by some demon groin stretching leg work.

So after two days riding, Nick was our best rider taking two wins over his Junior opponent Jack Kavenagh whilst Wayne and myself were beaten by our respective Australian opponents, Boyd Wilcox

(Expert) and Garan Hale (Master). Wayne was a little disappointed with some of his rides but also had some very good rides over the two days and especially on the last two laps of the second day when he posted laps of 8 and 10 after losing 27 and 28 on the first two laps. He certainly put in a maximum effort for the team on some demanding sections. Over two days Boyd lost 84 points and Wayne 137.

Like Wayne, I had my best rides of the two days on the last two laps dropping 8 on each after a disastrous second lap of 19. In fact both days I was disappointed to have one bad lap of 19, which was enough to prevent me having any chance of finishing ahead of Garan who rode more consistently both days. Garan dropped 87 points over two days and I dropped 97. If I had any excuse for not doing better it's probably not doing enough riding in the previous few months. I was in a tricky situation with my crook shoulders, too much riding and the chance of them getting worse or ease off the riding too try and let them heal so I could go and compete with out them hindering me. The result was the shoulders handled it ok but I was slightly under done on practice.

Nick rode the same B Grade lines as me and had no problems, riding very confidently both days. (He's one of our up and coming young guns). I think his only five was on day two when he missed a fairly well hidden yellow arrow. Nick's total over two days was 37 with Jack losing 97.

So suffice to say our luggage was one shield light on our return to NZ. And congratulations to Australia for evening the score to nine wins each. Easter next year, somewhere in New Zealand, game on.

The NZ team of Wayne, Nick and myself would like to thank all those MCTQ members (and non members) who helped us on a memorable trip to Queensland over Easter and for running an excellent two-day trial. Especially Chris and Cameron, who ran around after us the whole time. Also thanks to Don Murray (Australian Sherco importer) for lending Wayne's Sherco, Paul Arnott (Australian Scorpa importer) for lending Nick's Scorpa and Paul Moore (just a Veteran rider) for lending me a mint 280 Gas Gas. And also thanks to all the observers, control tent team and riders who were a friendly bunch. Much appreciated guys and gals, and I can only say Trans Tasman trials are much stronger due to your efforts. Also thanks to MNZ for supplying our trendy team riding shirts and a huge thanks to the Manawatu Orion MCC for contributing towards my expenses. Much appreciated.

My goal for the next year, try and make the NZ team again and help get the trophy back off Australia.

Kevin Pinfold

NZ Oceania Trials Team 2008