

The Idemitsu Ihatove Trial – Fun, Friendship and Challenge

It all began at the SSDT...

Back in 1973 and 1974, Japanese riders Yasuo Manzawa and Shozo Narita rode Honda TL125s in the Scottish Six Day Trial. Having faced all the challenges of that event and experienced Scotland's spectacular scenery, they decided to hold a trial in Japan to give local riders a taste of Scottish-style riding.

Since the densely-populated Tokyo area offered no suitable venues for such an event, they headed to Iwate Prefecture in northern Japan, where they came across terrain that reminded them of Scotland and Wales. In mid-1977 the first 2-day Ihatove trial was held in Iwate, with just 27 entrants. The riders received a warm welcome from local residents and made a good impression on them. The second trial in 1978 attracted 60 riders, and 120 riders participated in 1979.

Fun for everyone

Nowadays the event attracts around 500 entrants each year, ranging from first-time novices to All-Japan trials champions. The Ihatove Trial is not a championship event and no license is required to participate.

Many people who attempt the sport of trials are quickly put off if they ride difficult sections that do not match their skill level, since they run the risk of accident and injury. The founders of the Ihatove trial aimed to create an event that anyone could ride safely and enjoy. The trial has several classes to accommodate all levels of rider, ranging from the 120km Neli course for novices to the 350km Classic course.

Non-stop rule for non-stop enjoyment

The Ihatove trial has a unique scoring system, which differs from the system used in regular championship trials. Riders are not allowed to stop in a section, even if they don't put their feet down. Stopping incurs a five-point penalty, which keeps riders flowing smoothly and quickly through the sections and averts the need for big obstacles – just tree roots on a camber or tight turns on a moderate climb are enough to judge a rider's skill level. Even if riders fail in a section, they will not seriously injure themselves or damage their machines. The idea behind this is to make trials a life-long sport that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Another feature of the scoring system is the four-point penalty for putting a foot on the ground four times or more (so the possible scores for a section are 0,1,2,3,4, or 5, rather than the conventional 0,1,2,3,5). This system reduces the likelihood of tied scores, especially for beginners. Not all sections are observed, and riders score each other on unobserved sections.

Corporate and Community Support

The Ihatove Trial is run by a group of energetic and enthusiastic volunteers. The local television station, TV Iwate, provides administrative services such as gathering entry fees, producing posters and pamphlets, and hosting the event website (<http://www.sukaheru.net/~ihatove/>). TV Iwate also produces and broadcasts a one-hour programme on the trial each year.

Idemitsu, a major Japanese oil company (the equivalent of Shell or BP in New Zealand), has sponsored the event for 20 years, and Yamaha also provides support in the form of staff and motorcycles. The Ihatove trial has excellent relationships with landowners and local government, and residents turn out on the route to wave to the riders and hand them drinks and fruit. These strong local bonds are highly valued by Idemitsu, which is proud to foster links with the local communities in which it operates.

The organizers of the trial place a great deal of importance on running an environmentally responsible, low-impact event, and this attitude has played a big role in building positive community relations. Each year the event attracts hundreds of participants and their families to Iwate Prefecture and provides an opportunity to showcase the region's scenery and attractions to visitors from around Japan and overseas.