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# Oriental experience (Made in Japan)

The Scottish Six Days Trial is renowned worldwide as the ultimate trials riding experience - or in the case of the ordinary club rider as a sporting holiday in the Highlands of Scotland. The event has been an inspiration to trials organizers all over the world with similar versions of the event appearing in most European countries such as Spain, France and Italy. In 1973 and 74, Japanese riders came over to sample the Scottish mounted on the little 125cc Honda TL trials machines. To say they enjoyed the whole adventure would be the understatement of the century.

By: Yasuo Manzawa - Pictures: Masao Suzuki, The Oliver Family and Ihatove Trial

Two Japanese riders, Yasuo Manzawa and Shozo Narita, returned home wanting to share what they had enjoyed with their fellow trials riders. The country already had the "Kanto Trial", a big trials meeting which had taken place near Tokyo since 1969. The problem was that Japan did not really understand trials. This would all change in the early seventies as trials legends Sammy Miller (Honda), Mick Andrews (Yamaha), Don Smith (Kawasaki) and Gordon Farley (Suzuki) would educate them in the

ways of the sport as they developed trials machines for the relevant manufacturers. They wanted to create an event to take in the natural beauty the country has in abundance. By 1977 the dream would become a reality as the very first Ihatove Trial was held. In May 1977 they went to the Iwate region to make a preliminary inspection of the new course they had in mind. This region has beautiful wide-open scenery and this area of Iwate reminded them of Wales and Scotland. Three months later the first Ihatove Trial was held as a two day event with only 27 riders and 10 observers. The area and the beauty of Iwate

captured the heart of the trial's organizers. At the Fudai village where the riders were staying for the first day there was a banner "Welcome Ihatove Trial", which was made to show the government office and officials that trials were good and friendly, and which delighted all the participants. They were accepted as ordinary trials riders and not as a motorcycle gang. They were people on an adventure. With this impression made, the Ihatove Trial became popular and word soon got around that this was "The" event for trials riders. For 1978 the entry level had risen to 60 riders and for the third running of the event in 1979 it had increased significantly to 120!

### Not too difficult for Sunday riders

The Ihatove Trial is not a championship trial. Therefore no special license is necessary to participate. This is only one of the reasons why 500 participants now gather. Another reason for this success is that a rider can taste

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The introduction of the Mono-shock Yamaha would see many riders return to the sport.

## ADVENTURE THE IHATOVE TRIAL JAPAN

the trials spirit for the first time, as the event caters for all abilities including the "Not too difficult for Sunday riders".

This lesson was learned from the trials boom in the early seventies when off-road riders realised that the sport was harder than it first looked. During this period many people caught the "trials bug" but were soon put off from the sport by the severity of the sections. They broke their machines and injured themselves as they tried to emulate the new breed of British trials super-stars. The boom that had started in 1973 soon disappeared. In 1973 both Shozo Narita and I were contracted to ride the Honda TL 125cc. There were expectations that a new machine would be developed from these but it never happened, as Honda put a brake on the trials project due to the decline in competitors. They had gone away after sampling the trials scene and deciding that it was too difficult for all the family to enjoy. With our trial we have tried to instil in the rider, "Anyone can continue to ride for long enough to make it fun".



Urban riding 1977 style.

With an entry of 500 people you cannot have just one trial. Therefore, there were four separate routes and a trail tour for the 497 people who participated in 2008. There was only a Current Classic class (two days) at first, but the number of classes have increased to accommodate the entries, which continue to increase year on year; from the 12th trial a novice class, (Neli) was added as a one day trial. This year in the Neli class we had 209 riders, combined with 104 riders in the intermediate Budoli class, which ran together. These two classes ride across about 120km and 20 sections in the mountains of the Appi skiing area that is about 30km away from the Classic start place. The traditional Classic trial runs on a course of approx 350km out to the Pacific and back with 50 sections in total. Nanashigure Lodge is the base for this class in the beautiful Tashiro Heights region. This year's Classic entry had 108 people competing. The beginner's class trial, Heamca was added this year. There were 34 riders but they had only 12 sections so that they were able to relax, take in and enjoy the splendid scenery of Iwate. The participants of the Heamca class stayed at the same hotel as Classic riders and they were able to enjoy a party together.

It is certain that the number of participants in the Heamca class will increase next year.

### The Scorpa 125 originated at the Ihatove Trial

The chief development rider of Yamaha, Haruo Kimura has competed in all the Ihatove Trials to date. In 2000 he showed up with his own development trials bike which later became the base for the Scorpa TYS125F. Kimura first entered on a Yamaha in 1972 and was taught how to ride trials by Mick Andrews. Immediately he became the first All Japan champion in 1973. Thereafter Kimura aimed at making the motorcycle, which was capable of winning a world championship trial, through his work as a development rider for Yamaha. Latterly it was a long-held dream of Kimura to develop a cheap trial motorcycle with good performance and also being easy to ride, much like a modern day TY175.

We have also aimed at much the same thing since we began Ihatove Trial. By creating a big market of riders we needed a manufacturer to develop a cheap but good trials motorcycle so they would keep coming back! The objectives of both manufacturer and organizer coincided at this moment in time. When the Kimura prototype was developed into a commercial proposition with the cooperation of Scorpa it was first shown at the Ihatove Trial in 2002. Here it aroused the interest of many participants. Even so Kimura did not ride on the prototype, as this honour went to a lady who worked at the same place as Kimura, Miss Okamoto.

Okamoto did not have any experience in trials at all. Kimura trained her for a while before the trial. As a result, she made the whole distance of 350km wonderfully in two days and proved the concept that it was a motorcycle with the good performance that anyone could ride.

The Scorpa 125 monopolized first to fifth place of the Classic event this year. The winner was Takumi Narita. He first participated and won the Ihatove Trial on a Fantic 240 at the age of 16 years. After this he concentrated on the world championship trials with Honda and Beta and since then, there has been an interval of 21 years. But he showed us all how to ride, with a sense of balance that remains undiminished. Top All-Japan rider Nozaki took second place, 19 year old Nic Oliver from New Zealand took third place. Fourth place went to All-Japan champion of this year, Kuroyama (who had some mechanical problems). The fifth place went to younger brother of Takumi, Ryo Narita. Whilst the Scorpa 125 was conceived as a universal bike for beginners, it has proved that in the right hands it can also win the Ihatove Trial. (The only impossible section for the 125cc was a very steep hill climb that was slippery due to rain this year.)

### The volunteer group and T.V. Iwate

The Ihatove Trial is held every year in the Iwate region of north Japan on the last Saturday and Sunday of August. The trial runs on the 40 degree north latitude line. There is



much snow in winter and it is very green in summer. Yasuo Manzawa is the Chairperson with Shozo Narita as Vice-Chairperson, and from Iwate, Miyagi, Akita and Aomori come the volunteer staff, who help throughout the event. Huge assistance comes from the local television station, T.V. Iwate which acts as the main office for the trial. They take care of the business side, from administering the entries, producing the poster and programme of the meeting and undertaking website administration, to providing a receptionist and accountant for all funds received from sponsors Idemitsu and individual participants. Our website is [www.sukaheru.net/~ihatove/](http://www.sukaheru.net/~ihatove/). There is also a local broadcast from every event on T.V. Iwate which lasts for one hour. After broadcast, T.V. Iwate sells the TV program in DVD format. In other words, Ihatove Trial is organized by the volunteer group in cooperation with T.V. Iwate. This relationship has already lasted for 19 years and continues very well to this day without any problems. A team of around 15 works on course planning, the marking of sections, and liaison with the police and the forest management station for the relevant permissions during 2 1/2 months from May when the snow has completely melted. All expenses such as petrol, meals and accommodation required during the preparations are paid by T.V. Iwate but there is no other financial reward. On the other hand, consumables we really need such as a rain suit or a new tyre are provided.

To recruit staff from the next generation could be a big problem in the near future. They need to take over the work of the present team who will fade away as time goes by. We are hoping that Takumi Narita, immersed in Ihatove Trial spirit from childhood, will take over as Chairperson from Manzawa-san. This succession would ensure the trial is handed over into very capable hands.

### "Together in our hometown"

The trial has secured substantial sponsorship from Idemitsu Kosan (a petrol company) for



Spaniard Andru Cordina rode the trial on a Gas Gas in 1996.



# ADVENTURE THE IHATOVE TRIAL JAPAN

the last 20 years. This has allowed us to be in a very comfortable position financially, whilst at the same time sharing the honour of the trials success with them. The trial also receives much support from local people in various forms. For example, when we need to run on private land, most

that records his own score. This places a large amount of personal honour on each rider to correctly record his actual score. As for those who cheat, fortunately, it has not been a big problem so far. "When playing, do it seriously!" This is our motto.

The biggest difference of the current scoring system is the no stop rule. Stop in a section and you have five points. When forward motion halts for an instant, even if you do not touch the ground, it's five points. In other words, it is necessary to ride a section like water flows in the Ihatove Trial. Using the no stop rule, we don't need to have big steps or huge rocks in the section. Just tree roots on a camber or tight turns on a moderate climb will be enough to separate riders. We have no big injuries or heavy damage to bikes if you fail. We hope this means you will be able to ride in trials longer during your lifetime.

It is a novel characteristic of our scoring system to count 4 points for four dabs or more. Tied scores happened quite often with 1235 scoring system because we have so many participants, especially on the beginner classes. After incorporating the 12345 scoring system and no stop rule, tied scores decreased dramatically and every rider goes smoothly through a section. With the combination of 12345 scoring system and the no stop rule, we now think we have an ideal format for a fun trial to be enjoyed for a long time.

Needless to say, land is necessary to make a trial. Because we set a long course, we make various efforts to get understanding and cooperation from a lot of landowners. For example since 2005 we do not run a section, or route the course, through running water as far as it is possible; we have made this one of our principal objectives, firstly to prevent water pollution, but also to ensure that the image of the trial has not been compromised. I believe we still have same amount of pleasure during the Ihatove Trial since we stopped using water sections. The riders also state

1977 The adventures begin.



"It is good because we do not have a guilty conscience about polluting water".

With the passage of time, the Ihatove Trial continues to evolve. Next year, our friendships will bear fruit in beautiful New Zealand. The Tasman Ihatove Trial will be held by Stephen Oliver and his fellow riders, using the same concept as our trial.

If you have the opportunity, please participate by all means!



Urban riding 1977 style.



1995 would see Yamaha produce this TYZ "Scottish" machine for the Ihatove trial.

Ex Japanese world championship contender Takumi Narita.



By 1982 interest in the trials was beginning to grow.



2007 World Ladies Trials champion Iris Kramer samples the local delights with her father Willy in 2001.



Every ones welcome including the ladies.



Mick Andrews on Fantic! Mick and his wife Gill attended in 1992.

You do not have to own a Japanese machine to compete in the trial.



landowners are very cooperative and we can often follow the exact route we wanted to when setting the course or marking a section. The forest management station is also very cooperative in granting permissions. The event is warmly welcomed by the local government office and the people who live on the route. They like to treat riders to a slice of watermelon or a drink of water. Children and old men wave too, to the delight of riders. All these things add to the charm of Ihatove Trial. One company policy of Idemitsu Kosan can be summarized by the motto "together in our hometown" and they continue as a sponsor because the spirit of the Ihatove Trial coincides with the ideology. Idemitsu not only contribute financially, but also employees participate, as either riders or event staff. Rather than just a simple sponsor, Idemitsu is nearer to a complete partner. In 2006 all the riders were presented with a special 1litre can of engine oil, which had been made specially to commemorate the 30th Ihatove Trial sponsored by Idemitsu. In 2008, the same 1litre oil was presented again, just before it became commercially available on the market. All Japanese trial riders use a product made by Idemitsu for petrol and oil...so I believe.

The contribution to the local society by Idemitsu Kosan can be found in the following link: <http://www.idemitsu.co.jp/e/environment/pdf/2005/35e.pdf>

## No stop rule and 12345 scoring system

We do not use the same scoring system as world championship events in the Ihatove Trial. In the first events riders observed each other and marked their own scores. We took a leaf from the Scottish game of golf that adopts the principle of trust, which somehow combines the spirit of these two sports. There can be some sections that are very crowded and we deploy observers in many of these sections, however it is still the rider