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Section  
**21**

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**EXCLUSIVE**  
We test the  
**Greeves**  
**TI 280**

**TRADITIONAL:**

**SSDT**  
**PRE-65**

**CLASSIC COLLECTION:**

**KTM T 325**

**MEETING:**

**DANIELLE**  
**WHITHAM**

Ball or Bike - we talk  
to the Ladies footballer

**TRAVEL:**

**New Zealand**  
"Ihatove" Trial

**GETTING**  
**STARTED**  
**WE VISIT**  
**TRAILWORLD**

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The city of Nelson at the top of New Zealand's South Island is officially the sunniest place in the country, and just south of there tucked into the foothills of the Richmond Ranges is 88 Valley. This is the home of the NonStop Adventure Trials Academy. Trials has a passionate following in this beautiful part of the world and recently the sport received a new boost, thanks to the introduction of a winning concept borrowed from Japan: the Ihatove adventure trial.

By: David Britten and Stephen Oliver



**S**tephen Oliver is a previous multiple New Zealand Trials Champion and his family's relationship with Japanese trials riders goes back many years. Their friendship with the chairman of the Idemitsu Ihatove Trial, Yasuo Manzawa, was enhanced in 2006, when three generations of the Oliver family rode in the 30th anniversary of that famous trial in Japan. Ihatove can be translated as Dreamland, and reflects the event's social and fun aspect as well as the scenery through which it passes. Unlike most trials held in compact areas the Ihatove includes considerable touring between observed sections, and in Japan, where the bikes are street-legal, they are ridden on roads and tracks as the riders complete daily loops of many tens of kilometres. Idemitsu, an oil company, has sponsored the event for many years. Stephen's sons Nicholas and Peter returned to Japan in 2008. They rode the Ihatove in company with Takumi Narita, a multiple Japanese Trials Champion whose father Shozo co-founded the





Day two at the second venue Kaituna Ridges, Hawke Bay

Ihatove with Yasuo. Takumi first visited New Zealand in 2009 to compete in the Oceania Championship. When Stephen was invited to hold a New Zealand version of the Ihatove trial in Nelson in the summer of 2010 it was no surprise that Yasuo, Takumi and two of their friends, Rumi Takahashi and Youji Ishiyama jumped at the chance to attend. With cooperation from the local Tasman District Council, which has a policy of supporting Sport Tourism, and long-time sponsor Goldpine the course began to take shape. Currently trials bikes are not registered for use on public roads in New Zealand but the Academy's neighbour generously offered his farm property for use, and the prominent Ihatove Bridge was constructed to enable the

boundary fence to be crossed. Crucially the properties are large enough to cope without damage from the attack of the low-pressure trials tyres, and being working sheep farms have a number of tracks to access even the most distant boundary.

#### Concept

The concept of an Ihatove trial differs from the accepted trials format in four important ways. Firstly, rather than say three or more laps of ten sections, most sections are only ridden once, which places great importance on line selection as there's no chance to have another attempt. Secondly the traditional possible demerits per section are changed from 0, 1, 2, 3, 5 to 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to emphasise

the benefit of keeping your feet up. Thirdly all sections are ridden non-stop which is to say that the bike's wheels must continue to rotate, compared with the normal balancing at the halt, hopping a wheel into position and then riding another short spurt. Fourthly and very importantly is the touring aspect. It has been shown that to persuade newcomers to try the sport an element of fun will encourage their participation, so the sections in Nelson are widely spaced sometimes kilometres apart, and there is easy trail riding on farm tracks between them. The views from high ridges over the nearby hills are spectacular, and the chance to enjoy this aspect of the competition was one all riders appreciated.





Best mates Takumi Naito — Nick and Peter Oliver at the start of the 2010 event.



Callum Anderson — Peter, Andrew and Nick Oliver are very happy after descending one of the Pro class sections.



Takumi keeps a close eye on the students.

## Layout

The trial was set up in three loops of varying length. The first took one to two hours to ride and concluded with a set of six sections laid out at the home base at which the spectators were entertained all day, as those six were to be ridden at the end of each loop. The second loop was a whopper, with some riders spending more than three hours on the course. Two crossings of the famous bridge were made and extensive use of the neighbouring property allowed riders to have a touch of the Japanese long-distance style of such an event. Riders dodged occasional grazing sheep and mountain goats to reach elevated ridges offering 360 degree views taking in the rugged Richmond Ranges and extending over Tasman Bay toward Abel Tasman National Park. The third loop was much shorter, and coming at the end of a long hot day it was the perfect way to finish. The sting in the tail for the Pro riders was a massively long and steep climb on long dry grass followed by the descent from hell — a scree slope so terrifying that it had to be ridden in a giant zigzag for fear of plummeting to an untimely demise.

## Classes

Most sections had three distinct lines, one for each of the classes. Pro riders were at expert level and naturally their lines were of the greatest difficulty. On one hillside through tree roots interspersed with loose leaf litter I heard Takumi mutter "Championship section" so Stephen must have got the difficulty rating just right. Sport riders made up the bulk of the entrants and their sections were of medium difficulty. That's easy to say of course but it was a tiring day, so after a total of about 40 sections and seven hours riding some were pleased just to complete the course. The Recreation grade was the least difficult and was designed to be ridden in a flowing manner. This was suitable for riders gaining their confidence before attempting obstacles that are more serious. Modified trail bikes such as the altered Honda CRF230 that Stephen rode (higher bars, rear-set foot pegs, much lower gearing) and sporting a compulsory trials rear tyre could be ridden in this grade, as could the older twin-shock or classic bikes.





Show time!



The Kaituna Ridges venue on day two



Dave Atwool in blue acts as the translator

### Sections

All the sections laid out on the loops were of natural terrain and included spectacular scenery, waterfalls, native bush glades, hillsides and gullies, rocky streams and banks, blasts up grassy climbs and naggerly through trees with their exposed and not-so-slippery roots. The six repeated sections were all very well designed and thought out and included artificial hazards such as giant concrete pipes and tree trunks. An optional special section called Risk was introduced as an experiment, and was as popular with the crowd as it was with the top-level competitors. Of a type never previously tried, the goal on this section was a high score. With the boundary taped, a sequence of flagged gates gave riders the choice of gaining five points per gate or passing by for no penalty. Naturally the more difficult the obstacle (some natural terrain and some artificial)

the more gates that could be attempted, but the risk was that a failure part way through the section ended your ride. The final score in this section was the number of gates times five, minus the total number of dabs taken. Nick Oliver put in some skilled and bold moves here and was the winner. What finer way to spend a summer's day than plonking along through an observed section, then riding to the top of a ridge with stunning views over the countryside before descending into a gully for another competitive section. With 40 sections attempted over seven hours of riding there wasn't a rider who hadn't finished weary and happy, and glad to have been part of a new concept in trials riding in New Zealand.

### Second Day

Those wanting even more headed east to Havelock on the Sunday for some low-key coaching and a scenic trail tour. Since everyone was pleasantly tired from the previous day's exertions the pace was relaxed with plenty of time for socializing over a barbecue lunch. In the morning Takumi provided some pointers on tackling banks and creeks, with all riders having a chance to put their skills to the test and get some one-to-one advice. After lunch it was time to blow away any remaining cobwebs with a brisk trail tour taking in lush paddocks, soaring and plunging tracks, cool green bush trails, and stunning views over the Marlborough Sounds, another of New Zealand's scenic highlights. Even when the action

was over no one was in a hurry to leave, lingering to chat in the late-afternoon sunshine.

### 2011 Event

There will be another New Zealand Ihatove Trial in February 2011 so feel free to contact the team at Nonstop Adventure NZ Ltd if you would like more information. Details can be found on their website: [www.nonstopadventure.co.nz](http://www.nonstopadventure.co.nz)

International riders are guaranteed a warm welcome and February is an ideal month for combining the event with a New Zealand holiday. A limited number of rental bikes are available so get in early if you'd like to book one. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience not to be missed. ●

### RESULTS

**Pro:** 1: Nicholas Oliver (Nelson - Sherco 290); 2: Takumi Narita (Japan - Scorpa SY250); 3: Peter Oliver (Nelson - Montesa 4RT); 4: Andrew Oliver (Nelson - Montesa 315); 5: Callum Anderson (Nelson - Sherco 250).

**Sport:** 1: Nigel Shilton (Tauranga - Beta Evo 250); 2: Malcolm Reid (Dunedin - Scorpa SY250); 3: Alan Duthie (Christchurch - Triumph Tiger Cub); 4: Craig Wassel (Motueka - Kawasaki KT250); 5: Jim Henderson (Hamilton - Scorpa SY250); 5: Bryan Penney (Nelson - Scorpa SY250).

**Recreation:** 1: Andrew Latimer (Lower Hutt - Gas Gas 200); 1: Youji Ishiyama (Japan - Scorpa SY145); 3: Yasuo Manzawa (Japan - Montesa 4RT); 4: Richard Latimer (Lower Hutt - Gas Gas 250); 5: Dave Atwool (Blenheim - Scorpa SY200); 6: Rumi Takahashi (Japan - Montesa 4RT).