

How can I start in sporting trials?

First of all, how *not* to start. Every couple of months I get a phone call which starts “You don’t know me but I am building a trials car....”.

This is not the right way, no one has yet succeeded in building a successful car from outside the sport. There are too many “wrinkles”, trials is too much of a black art for anyone from another discipline to grasp what is required before they get involved.

The best way is to use the calendar in *The Clear Round* or on www.btrda.com or www.sportingtrials.com to find your local event, ring up the contact to get directions and then turn up early to watch the fun, having in mind the weather. Wear warm waterproof clothes that you don’t mind getting dirty, and wellies are ideal. A hat is a very good idea, as there will probably be plenty of mud flying around, and, unlike most other forms of motorsport, you will be able to get very close to the action, which is one of the attractions of the sport.

Almost all events start on Sunday morning at about 10.30, and finish around 3.30, so it is no use coming along after Sunday lunch just in time to see the cars being loaded up on their trailers, as I did once many years ago.

Having spectated at a couple of events, and braved the weather, since trials is a winter sport, you may feel you would like to be involved in some way, so why not volunteer as a marshal? You will need to arrive at 10.00, and sign on. No equipment or qualifications are required, and most organisers are only too pleased to have marshals offering to help on the day.

Make sure that the club know you are a novice so you can be teamed up with an experienced marshal. You will soon learn what is required, and will be able to see what is going on at first hand.

Joining the BTRDA at this stage is a good idea*, you get the quarterly BTRDA News, and if you join the Sporting Trials Championship you get all the regulations for each event, which tells you how to get there and what time it starts amongst other things, as

well as *The Clear Round*, which is monthly in the season. Anyone can subscribe to *The Clear Round* for just £10 per year.

Even if you are not sure that you want to get involved, but are interested enough to want to study the rules in detail, buying an MSA (was RACMSA) Non Race Clubman licence is a good idea. It costs just £24, and includes the Blue Book, the “bible” of motorsport. Normally the Blue Book costs some £28 or so on its own, but the MSA subsidise it for Clubman licence holders. The book contains almost everything you could want to know about trials, or any other motorsport. To get a licence just ring the MSA** for a form, fill it in and send the money. There are no qualifications required other than a self declared fitness clause.

If marshalling does not appeal, being a passenger is another way to get to know the sport. Most drivers started as passengers.

Again you need to turn up early enough, and if you offer your services as a passenger at the signing on caravan, there is a good chance that one or more drivers will be looking for help on the day.

Passengering is exciting, but is quite physical, you will be bruised and stiff at the end of the day, as a result of having attempted a total of about 30 hills. You will also have learned a lot about trials driving, at no cost to yourself.

You may find that you make a good partner for your driver, and are offered further opportunities. If you enjoyed the day, why not avail yourself and learn more? Often drivers will ask passengers to move the car during the day, and you may also get a chance at the end of the day to have a little “go” in the car to see what it is really like to drive.

You will find it is very different to anything you have done before, the “fiddle brakes”, which operate one rear wheel each, make it a new experience. Without using the fiddles the car will not even go, stop or turn properly!

Having passengered for a while you may want to get hold of a car and start competing. Do not even

consider building a car, look at the classified adverts in *The Clear Round*, or on www.sportingtrials.com and ask around at events about cars for sale. As a rough guide cars which are ready to use and fairly competitive start at around £3,500. A good car will retain its value and will help you to learn to drive much easier than a bad one, and if you find the sport is not for you, it will be much easier to re-sell.

You will need an MSA non race clubmans licence, a trailer and a suitable tow car. Trials cars are often sold with their trailers, since they are much smaller than those used for other motorsports.

If you are of a mechanical frame of mind you will find plenty of things to do to your car, such as making everything work the way you like, and getting yourself comfortable in the car. At the very least you will need to wash the car and service it between events, so a garage or workshop is pretty well essential since this all happens in winter, usually after dark on cold evenings.

Competing in trials is a major commitment, in time and effort, if not in money terms. The “learning curve” is a slow one, and it will be a long time before you start to show your potential. The driving techniques are unique to trials, and are not natural, so they take some learning.

For this reason the BTRDA have ruled that from the beginning of 2003 you must attend a “training day***” before competing for the first time in a championship trial. This will enable you to “shake down” your car as well as your driving techniques. There will be helpful experts around the point you in the right direction, and you cannot fail to enjoy the day and to be more prepared to face the rigours of a BTRDA sporting trial, not least because you will probably get the chance to sample some top line cars and see what a good car feels like.

Although the learning curve is very steep, the satisfaction of successfully climbing a section is immense, and you get a lot of sport for your money. A typical trial will have 30 sections, and will last around four and a half hours, not counting a break for lunch, yet entry fees are about £30. The car will use one gallon of petrol, and a pair of rear tyres will last

at least 10 events for about £35 each. The biggest cost is travelling, since the BTRDA trials are spread all over the country from Carlisle to Maidstone, and from York to Newquay, Cornwall and every where between.

If you live somewhere fairly central (several BTRDA drivers live in Cornwall) you can usually compete in a good range of events without exceeding an 80 mile radius from home. On that basis a sensible budget cost would be about £90 per event, including the cost of petrol for travelling to events, and all the running costs for the trials car and the driver, such as licence, memberships, entry fees, tyres, repairs etc. This make trials one of the cheapest ways to compete in motorsport, and if you break the car, no problem, just load up and take it home. You will not have a late night followed by a problem getting to work in the morning!

Trials is a very friendly sport, so if you want to know anything, just ask.

If you would like to discuss any of the above, Email me on j.fack@virgin.net, fax me on 01922 414432, or ring my mobile on 07812 108 588.

Julian Fack.

Note: There are all sorts of trials related sites on the web, start by using a search engine like Google and always search for “Sporting Trials”. Searching for “Trials” will turn up all sorts of medical trials and legal trials!

* BTRDA Membership secretary Liz Cox, 19A Oxford Street, Lambourn, Berks. RG17 8XS 01488 72027, www.btrda.com

** MSA, Motor Sports House, Riverside Park, Colnbrook, Slough SL3 0HG 01753 681736, www.msauk.org

*** BTRDA Trials secretary Jonathan Gibbs, 82 Oliver St. Rugby, Warks, CV21 2LE, 01788 542 694 or email gibbsjr@tiscali.co.uk for training day bookings.