

Slippery Stuff in the Woods or the 2019 Clee Hills Trial!

Because of a perceived shortage of resource, there was no Clee Hills Trial in 2018. Some said that would have an adverse effect on entries as competitors would drift away. Luckily the converse proved to be the case, and the club received a record entry for this year's event of 90, including 22 motorcycles and 15 in class 0 – an MAC invention back in 1994, which has since been copied by so many clubs.

Much of the course had been set up two or three days before the event, and on Thursday, three of us were knocking in marking poles and putting up signs in Priors Holt (Forest Enterprise land at the very southern end of the Long Mynd). There was a dusting of snow, and the sky was blue – perfect trials weather. Unfortunately, three days later, low mist and a little light drizzle covered the 90-mile route from Ludlow to Much Wenlock to Church Stretton and beyond.

New for this year was the start venue at Ludlow - from "The Squirrel" pub right next door to the Travelodge, with a supermarket filling station on site too! Again, the club offered scrutineering and signing on on the Saturday evening, an opportunity taken up by a quarter of the entry.

Diversity was very evident with entries from Northumberland to Falmouth, Wales to Kent and from Barnstable to Cambridge driving such oldies as 3.5 litre Model A Fords to 750cc Austin 7s and right up to nearly new BMWs. On 2 wheels. They rode 125cc Scopa to a 650cc Sheney Triumph. In class 0, there were 2CVs, a 3-wheel Morgan, several Dellows, two MGs, one from 1930 and a 1997 MGF, Peugeot 106, Suzuki X90, Liege, an Austin 7 and a Ford KA! In the main trial, there were just 2 in class 1 (both Peugeot), 7 in the pre-war class 2, a pair of BMWs filled class 3, and 4 Beetles in class 4 and two more in class 6. As usual these days, class 5 was the most popular with 14 entries mostly Suzuki X90, but with Reliant Scimitar, MG Midget, Mazda MX5, BMW Z3 and a Model-T Ford! Class 7 had an entry of 12 – Marlin, Liege, MG, Dutton and a remarkable Smart Roadster (with 2-litre Honda Civic engine). We had 9 in the ultimate class 8 of VW Buggy, Cannon, Troll and several home-built wonders.

For those riding two-wheeled machines, class A had two Triumphs and two Royal Enfields. class C had just two entries, a Beta RR Enduro and a KTM 500EXC, and there were 16 other 'bikes – KTM, Beta, Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Husqvarna and others I did not know.

The 'bikes, followed by classes 8 and then 7 tackled the western loop first. There can hardly be a more dramatic start to a trial than Castle Hill at All Stretton with banks perhaps twenty metres tall. Clerk of Course Simon Woodall had included a ferocious deviation up a near-vertical bank for the some of the bikes and pukka trials cars, but seven overcame it. The track at Ratlinghope, used in the late 1930s, was much rougher than in previous years. A timed test here caught out few. Dudley Sterry was uncharacteristically slow, and, but for this, could have won class 7 in his usual MG J2. There can be wonderful views at the top of Gatten's Gamble, but mist prevented any. It is a long hard track climbing up an open hillside and not usually difficult, but it stopped 2 'bikes and a Model A Ford in the main trial and six in class 0. The descent to Far Gatten is as challenging as the way up. Then the route took competitors along the top of the Long Mynd, through the Flying Club and into Priors Holt woods where there were three sections for the main trial, and two for class 0. "PH1" is as fine a section as you will find – all but three of the 'bikes made it up without 'footing' (or falling off) and twelve cars, including Simon Price's Model A and the 1300cc Beetles of John White and Sam Holmes, were penalty free there.

"PH4" included challenging restart lines for the 'bikes and classes 7 & 8. – so, challenging that only Paul Merson's Shopland Mk 11 car got up but four 'bikes eluded penalties there. Of those that did not have to stop on the extremely steep bank, fifteen went 'clean'. "PH6" with its double chicane and used only for the second time. It was no challenge for the 'bikes but stopped twelve cars including most of class 5. From there, it was back to Craven Arms. Earlier in the day, those doing the east loop first tackled Harton Wood – usually a 'doddle', but not so this year – eighteen failed. Then came Flounders Folly, a very slippery climb on almost white clay up through the forest at Callow Hill. The 'bikes of Colin Wilkinson, Glenn Morgan and John Kenny all saw the top of the hill (coming back down was probably pretty scary) but no cars made the top this year.

Then for the 'bikes and classes 7 & 8 it was a 9-mile run to Meadowley, not so far from the west edge of Bridgnorth. First used in 1947, Meadowley is another terrific section through the woods, and more slippery clay! Eleven cars made it to the top, but the only 'bike to see the summit was Glenn Morgan's Yamaha WR. Indeed, he went through the entire trial without loss of marks, so won the trial outright for the 2-wheelers.

The competitors re-united at Much Wenlock for "The Jenny Wind" a dead straight climb up the Edge on the course of an old winch-cable railway and it gets so steep at the top that one can hardly stand. Four 'bikes made it 'clean', but no cars managed it. Best climbs were by Matt Facey's BMW who stopped just short of the "2" marker and the Beetle of Mike Henney with a "3", and Sam Holmes (Beetle), Adrian Marfell (class 8 special), and the pre-war Singer of Keith Hill and the Model A of Simon Price who all scored "4". Just 100 m further on is Harley Bank - a 'killer' – extremely slippery and very steep for the 'bikes and class 8 – in the rain it seems impossible, but six bikes got up, the only car not to lose points was Adrian Marfell's VW special. In Easthope Woods, the first section (cars only) is rutted and slippery with a sharp corner at the top. Just four class 8 cars saw the top of the hill, but, on almost the last climb of the day there, the Smart Roadster got through. Oh, so

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near, dropping just one point there, were Paul Merson (class 8 Shopland) and the class 7 cars of John Bell (Dutton Melos), and Tony Branson (in my old 2-litre Efi Marlin).

A few hundred metres along the railway line was the motorcycle section (deemed too difficult for the cars) which was climbed clean by Colin Wilkinson (Scopa 125), John Kenny (Beta Enduro) and, of course, Glenn Morgan.

The tight hairpin on Ippikin's Rock caught out 15 whilst the 'bikes and classes 7 and 8 tackled "Major's Leap". Only Glenn Morgan and Adrian Marfell got to the top, and many scored in double figures – another horrendously slippery section in the woods. The lower classes went to Heywood Common, a couple of miles east of Church Stretton. A lovely section which stopped most of class 0 and twelve in classes 1 to 6.

The final results showed the best motorcycle was Glenn Morgan (no points lost), whereas the best car was the Beetle of Sam Holmes with just 4 penalty points lost.

The class winners were:

Class 0 – Tim Barrington (Dellow)	22 points.
Class 1 – James Shallcross (Peugeot 205)	13 points.
Class 2 – Simon Price (Model A Ford)	4 points
Class 3 – Matt Facey (BMW 316)	8 points
Class 4 – John White (Beetle)	12 points
Class 5 – Stephen Kingstone (MG Midget)	20 points
Class 6 – James Smith (Beetle)	22 points
Class 7 – Nick Aldridge (Smart Roadster)	24 points
Class 8 – Adrian Marfell (VW Special)	9 points
Class A/C combined – John Kenny (Beta Enduro)	17 points
Class B1 – Colin Wilkinson (Scopa 125)	15 points
Class B2 – Phil Sanders (AJP PR4)	30 points

The full results may be viewed at www.cleehillstrial.info

We have received so many highly complementary comments about the trial that we might just do it again next year!

Our most grateful thanks go to the many marshals who stood out in the drizzle for several hours, to Adrian Tucker-Peake (Chief Marshal, general organiser and host of many organising meetings), to Graham Austin, Mark Powis and Richard Houlgate for much support work, and, of course, to Simon Woodall who devised the whole thing, did a lot of the work and steered the event to great success.

Jonathan Toulmin.