

HONDA MANIA

First of all we will give a little in the way of explanation of the aims of the RTL Club Europe. It is an association of fans and collectors of 'historical' four-stroke Honda trials bikes, from the first TL 125 built in 1973 to the last the RTL 250 S of 1989. The main objective for members of this club is to share their passion for the marquee and to create friendly relationships between them all. The club has over 100 members who own nearly 300 bikes; from the stock TLR's through to the exotic factory machines including a number of the legendary Eddy Lejeune 360 machines. Most of the members are French, but they also have Italians, Belgians, Swiss, Germans, English and Spanish members. Yasuyuki Kudo (world wheelie record holder at 331 Km on a TLM!) has also created an offshoot of the club in Japan. Their main activities are: Publishing an annual booklet called 'The Letter'

- The manufacturing of new spare parts and re-publishing of manuals and other documents.
- Visits to museums or private collections in

Japan, England or France.

- Club participation at a number of 'classic' trials (e.g. Vieilles Tiges or Verdon 5 days)
 - Exchanges and contacts between members (by mail or local meetings)
 - Trials trips between a few friends and of course the Big Meeting every two or three years.
- The main benefit to members is being able to contact someone who shares the same passion to share new information and also to trade spare parts, which are becoming more difficult to find. Trial Magazine went to the 2008 Big Meeting in the French Alps to the Ski Massif alpine chalet in the French resort of Samoens. Some of you may remember the area from the article in TM issue 7. Our hosts were Julian and Tina Ralley who arranged the accommodation and guided the two day tour and Patrick Jay who organised the routes and arranged for the necessary permits through the offices of the new mayor, the very progressive and charming Jean Jacques Grandcollot who even came to the Saturday evening meal to wish us well! Such is

the interest in the event a Japanese film maker Ryosuke Ikuno came to record the action.

Meeting

The group began to arrive over the Friday, each van or trailer discharged another part of the Honda history, they ranged from well used and abused, to immaculate restorations through to the most rare and exotic factory machines I have ever laid my eyes upon in one day. Needless to say, the conversation revolved around only one thing as bikes were examined in the minutiae of detail. Saturday morning was ideal, clear blue skies promised magnificent views over this corner of paradise. The first task was to arrange in chronological order a history of all the machines present from the Sammy Miller development bikes through to the very last twin disc RTL passing through a number of ex-works 305, 360 and even a 270 RTL, this line up can only be described as truly remarkable. With the photo shoot completed it was time to mount up and ride, it is really weird riding with 20 other Hondas as the group made its way

Accommodation

Julian does not do much publicity in France; the chalet is generally filled with English people all year! It is for enjoyment, to eat well (and to sleep well!), and is in an excellent location: Massive ski Pellys, Julian and Tina Ralley, Route des Saix, 74340 Samoens. Tel: 04 50 18 00 27. Email: tina.ralley@wanadoo.fr



◀ The TL 300 Sammy Miller prototype from 1974 through to the 4RT from 2008, all the models are except the 125 TL from 1973!



The world of trials is relatively small, but even so, there are some groups that have an affinity for machines from one manufacturer or another. We went to meet one group of enthusiasts in the French Alps for the Honda RTL Club Europe at the 2008 'Big Meeting'. The Honda RTL club is special, not only does it clearly define in its title the extent of its interests from the RTL to the TL through to the TLR it is a genuine 'four-stroke only' club with the TLM two-stroke model from the same manufacturer being gently excluded! Talk about a meeting of like minds, we went to the Alps to discover the depth of passion displayed by its members.

Words: Matthew Heppleston - Pictures: Jean Caillou and Matthew Heppleston



After being ridden in one season of the AFATA series in America the ex Whaley RTL 305 was retired.

CLUB HONDA RTL

through town and out into the hills behind. The route had been carefully selected to suit the wide range of riding levels. Part of the fun is stopping to create some sections and listening to the bikes being used as they were meant to be. Lunch was by a stream where sandwiches, cold drinks and fuel were delivered by Justin in the Ski Massif support Landrover, luxury or what. As we rode around the countryside, Mont Blanc was often very visible in the distance; even the tourists and walkers seemed to find the sight of so many machines quite acceptable.

A late afternoon stop for liquid refreshment at the Aspen Bar in the centre of Samoens allowed the locals to come and see the bikes, which certainly caused quite a stir.

The evening meal held on the terrace of the chalet was brilliant; the talking went on long into the night but not before a number of awards was made. Paul Miller from Jersey was awarded the 'concours d' elegance' thanks to his stunning Rothmans inspired TLR 250 restoration undertaken by Classictrial in the UK. The most original machine was the TLR 200 ridden by Swiss rider Francois Tille and it looked as though it had just been ridden from the dealer's showroom. On Sunday, we again rose early to ride up to the Tete de Saut where we had 360-degree views across the surrounding mountains. We even made some silent motor descents freewheeling for miles at a time. The remaining patches of snow made some impromptu test for flat out blasts before sinking into the mush, it was just like riding in a (white) peat bog! All too soon, it was time to descend back to the Chalet for a late buffet lunch where soon after bikes were loaded for the return journey, but not before details had been exchanged and promises were made to meet again in the near future.

The machines!

These bikes represent some of the most historic and exotic machines on planet earth! They included the legendary long stroke TL developed by Sammy Miller to the RTLs ridden by Eddy Lejeune and Marland Whaley. Take a look at the photos and check out the bikes being used for what they were intended. Jean Caillou had gear selection problems with a 360 on Saturday but was able to ride a long stroke 305 on Sunday, just how lucky can one person be!

TLR

As expected the most common bikes were the TLR this included the 125, 200 and 250 versions, some were well used and abused and others totally original or highly modified versions. They all ran like clockwork over the weekend. The number of modifications available for this model is quite amazing.

RTL

Now we are coming to the bikes, which amazed me as a youngster. I achieved my dream of owning an RTL a couple of years ago with an '86 model, this is the first time I spent such a long time on the bike and I love it! There is only one thing better that is the full factory Rothmans sponsored 270cc bike, as ridden by the Lejeune/Saunders dream team. I was allowed the privilege of riding it and boy, oh boy is it fabulous, and I will save the details until another time.

RS

These machines, which were hand built by Racing Services Centre (RSC) before the competition department became HRC. It was on a special 200cc version that Eddy Lejeune started his world round career with. They are quite rare in Europe although more and more are being imported from Japan.



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TL

The bike that started the trials legend at Honda was the TL125, amazingly not one of the little sewing machines was present. If you own one join the club and make sure you are at the next Big Meeting to complete the legendary roll call!

Pierre Vaillant makes the jumps with his small TLR.



Patrick Jay accommodates the guests at Aspen café. The café in Samoens is famous for its Whiskey.



The star of the big meeting! The RTL 270SW is the rarest of the machines.



Riding under the ski lifts, perhaps it would be quicker on a motor cycle!



President Pissis, king of slopes on his ex-Lejeune RTL 360 from 1984.



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