

LNCMC newsletter March 2026

Chairman at full chat

So spring has sprung — well, not really, just the odd day that has threatened it — but we were lucky that the Launceston Trial fell on a relatively dry day. That said, underfoot conditions were still very challenging. Even the sections that drain quickly and are south facing had extra bite this year.

We are very proud that the trial was our 5th consecutive classic trial with a full entry although there were a few non-starters on the day.

Nigel Cowling, as usual, had spent many hours in the woods, with Simon O and Andrew helping. I managed half a day on Friday, but they had zoomed on and got a lot laid out by the time I arrived.

The motorcycles, as ever, were very close and each year the overall award seems to change hands (well done to Neil O'Connor for the overall win). This year saw the Newman Cup for best sidecar change hands for the first time in a long time. Alan & Patrick Keat had won it 4 years in a row but were pipped this year by Simon Rogers. In the cars Simon Groves edged the Class 8 battle to take the overall award and join the illustrious club of winning three Fulford Cups.

Well done to all and all the other award winners.

Thanks to Vic's Catering for the hot food, and huge thanks to the Newman family for the venue once again, and to all the marshals, who gave excellent coverage this year.

The Awards Night was prior to the Launceston Trial. We never thought we'd top last year's numbers, but we did — a fantastic turnout of 116. Thanks to one and all for supporting the event. The evening had its usual relaxed atmosphere, and with a very popular return of the dodgems!

Once again, a huge thanks to Nigel for arranging the evening, sorting the awards and MC'ing. Time to put your feet up now Nigel — hang on, chief marshal duty on Crackington for the Lands End at Easter first!

A huge thank you also to Lisa for taking all the bookings, sorting the desserts, handling the money on the night, very well assisted by Lorraine of course, and Lisa had the added responsibility for taking the photos. A real team effort that goes so far in making the club run successfully.

Next up is our AGM on 23rd March in the Hall at the Fox & Grapes pub in Tinhay, starting at 7 pm. I don't want to pre-empt anything, but can reveal that the club continues to thrive with strong entries, superb volunteers and record memberships. If you'd like to get involved then please do come along. We are a friendly bunch, promise!

Simon Riddle, Chairman

Two trials in two weeks, but no driving

Simon Oates 'relaxes' by not driving his Liege

As the twilight years of life approach at breakneck speed, it's time to take it easier, relax and let someone else take the wheel of Mr Toad, my Liege. The previous Exmoor and Holsworthys Chairman's Trials in February had been offered to other people to drive but were eventually both driven by me, not necessarily in a good way.

The way the weather has been since Christmas has meant that grip has been difficult to find and when you think you've got some it disappears like a Tommy Cooper magic trick!

My trial-winning streak disappeared like another Cooper trick and was replaced with dullness and two 2nd in class results, beaten by much better class 7 cars and drivers. Nick and Ben Symons in the Subaru powered Singer Chamois trounced me by one point in the Presidents as they climbed hills brilliantly and at last have found the sweet spot with the car. I believe the car is being fettled further but let's pray the sweet spot remains.

John and Natasha Early in their Liege were flying high with their excellent car and Greek God like abilities on the Exmoor Trial coming 2nd overall in the trial and beating me by nine points which put me 4th overall in the trial and second in class. Our club's single venue Launceston Trial was again fully-subscribed and Lisa Gregory took the wheel of my car. Victim in the passenger seat was Rob Holden which left the rest of the Ruby family free to enter on two wheels and four.

With little experience in the Liege, Lisa approached the first hill as the first car up with a lot of apprehension, but Rob encouraged her with closed eyes!

Guess who was marshalling on the first hill?

Yep, it was me and I was also a bit panicked. She attacked the short section with vigour and the front axle just went through the 1 marker before total grip loss, a bloody good effort and signs of promise for the rest of the trial.

The clutch pedal stuck on one of the sections later in the day and there were a few issues on some restarts, I heard. Before Lisa as the first car we had the motorbikes of varying abilities taking different lines through the section with probably more falling off or footing after completing the section than when doing the section. They all followed the correct course which wasn't true of the chairs! I put it down to first hill adrenalin.

All sections are marked with poles and numbers on the right side of the course but there can be confusion if the exit route crosses the section. Keep your head up and plan ahead.

A break for lunch with Vic's Catering was appreciated by all especially some of the bike riders (knackering morning's ride). The afternoon saw us marshalling the first section where the bikes had a diversion to the right (clearly marked) but one went straight on despite being told at the start! Once all bikes and chairs had gone the course was changed with a diversion to the left through the trees and a nasty restart on a right-hand bend around a tree and its slippery roots. The more restarts, the deeper the ruts and holes got and the roots provided loads of gloopy slime, lovely, it took a load of points off people. Lisa nearly cleared it, there was movement until there wasn't!!

I watched and helped on several other sections with quite a lot of pushing and pulling of stuck vehicles but there were so many happy, even surprised faces which I hope means satisfied customers. The bikes had quite a long wait while the cars caught up, but it can't really be helped.

Lisa managed 1st in the combined 6 & 7 class on 41 points which is impressive on any scale!

The week after I picked Nigel Cowling up early Sunday morning on our way to the woods behind Castle Motors for the Presidents Trial in the Liege. Nice and foggy and oh so wet under foot.

We were both going to Marshal for the Trial and Shelly Deacon was having a first attempt at trialling in the car with Alan Keat by her side with his years of experience and knowledge. Oh, how the best laid plans don't always come together and Alan had to withdraw at the last minute, so poor young Shelly had to put up with Mr Grump in the passenger seat.

I was so looking forward to another Sunday of marshalling but I put my best foot forward, closed my eyes and jumped into the wrong side of the car. At least Shelly is used to putting her right foot down (does real hill climbing) but I had to explain the Liege is 40 bhp in 600kg and her car is 160+ bhp in 300 Kg, so eight times more powerful! I think she noticed the difference in power and definitely felt my brakes (or lack of) in a worrying panic. I thought they were performing well and the hydraulic handbrake will hold it anywhere (this became her go to brake).

The first hill wasn't easy and we pressed the GoPro at the start and off to the restart. A brilliant stop high on the line and then a coordinated pull away to clear the hill – bloody hell!!

Her skills continued throughout the day with a few hic-ups but overall, brilliant. A couple of hills we should have got further and if she'd had Liam Hartley next to her instead of me, she could have beaten Andrew and Loraine Rippon's Beetle. I gave it my best, but it wasn't quite enough.

A Ladies' Award at the end of the trial (for Shelly, not me!) was well deserved and I hope that I haven't put her off our sort of trialling.

Land's End in April next, let's see how that goes!!

Going mad on the March Hare

While the rest of the LNCMC enjoy the Launceston Trial, Richard Simpson plays away in Gloucestershire with the Falcon Motor Club



Journey's End: The ES700 is back at home, and needs a wash and new levers. Note the incredibly trick front number!

You wouldn't expect an event named after the famously irrational animal, the March Hare, to be entirely straightforward, and if you'd entered the Falcon Motor Club's March Hare Classic Trial, you wouldn't have been disappointed by the few eccentricities encountered along the way.

Starting at a café on an industrial estate somewhere near Evesham, it followed an 83-mile route through the Cotswold countryside to a finish at a pub somewhere near Stroud.

I entered into the spirit of the event by eccentrically entering on my GasGas ES700 (which is actually a KTM 690 Enduro in red). Previous attempts at trail riding on this

have been challenging to say the least: the suspension appeared to be set up for supercross, and the power delivery even in 'road' mode abrupt.

But there was some method to my madness. I planned on staying overnight at a budget hotel in Stonehouse (which is as close to the M5 as you can get to the finish) and riding up from there to the start in the morning on the motorway. I didn't fancy taking the X-Trainer on that particular jaunt, and I had been assured that the March Hare was just like an MCC trial, only much easier and shorter. So what could possibly go wrong?

Quite a lot, as it happens.

I had two modifications to make to the GasGas: one was to fit trials tyres with security bolts, and the other lower the gearing.

I put the Pirelli off the Beta on the back (I figured a new rear trials tyre would become 'used' pretty quickly on a 70+ bhp, 150 kg motorcycle), and a new Pirelli on the front, with new Michelin tubes all round, and static-balanced the wheels.

I ordered a 14-tooth front sprocket off the internet, and only during fitting did I realise it was actually a 15-tooth...the same size as stock!
Too late to do anything now.

A quick trail trial revealed that the trials tyres had transformed the GasGas into a useable trail bike: the flatter profile tyres improved stability no end, and the softer pressures and carcass made the suspension more than acceptable. Also, there is a lot of nonsense about 'Mode 2' of the GasGas/KTM engine management making the thing into an uncontrollable wheelie monster spoken on the internet: it actually moderates the power and traction control, while removing the ABS from the back wheel and toning it down at the front.

Good news!

Saturday dawned, and I of course had a gentle start to the morning before the event, followed by a nourishing meal and a leisurely drive to Gloucestershire...in my dreams.

The reality was to extract maximum value from the hire van, I was knocking the door at AAA Rentals first thing, driving it home, and loading it up with rubbish so Kate and I could beat the Saturday rush into the tip.

Back home, print out the road book, load the bike up (it's a more challenging shove up the ramp than the Beta) and off later than planned to Stonehouse. No time for a nourishing meal, and all that was on offer on the motorway by way of hot food was McDonalds, so I had a sandwich and crisps as an alternative.

To bed at late o'clock in the Stonehouse Travelodge, and woke up in the early hours with an air-con induced minor nose-bleed. Luckily, the window opened, and I was able to get a few hours of sleep before a 6 am alarm.

Unloaded and off I went up the motorway, then across the Vale of Evesham to the start at Porky's Dinner: an old school transport cafe on an industrial estate. Most of the entry formalities had already been completed on-line, but the organiser forgot to bring the pre-printed number boards so we ended up with numbers biroed onto pieces of paper from a notebook!

Realising these weren't going to last the trial, I created a number '6' from masking tape, and made sure the marshal was told my number at the foot of each section. There didn't seem to be any formal 'start' to the trial, so I just finished my breakfast and rode off at the appointed time down to a nearby green lane to join the queue at Section 1.

Most of the sections were relatively easy, but the roadbook was written in a unique style that required careful interpretation. For instance: half the field had to do Section 3 before Section 2, because Section 2 was a practically impossible climb up a narrow footpath with no exit route.

You were supposed to just reverse down from the top...because reversing down a steep hill is easy and safe on a motorcycle!

Naturally I found myself in the second half of the field, and the section was practically impassible on my arrival, with most bikes stopping before the 10 board. I elected to ride around the entrance, then exit for a 12. Some of the cars that attempted it ended up damaging themselves on a concealed rock.

The first observed test was also set up for cars at a farm track crossroads where you had to stop astride lines on each of the exits in turn. Great if you've got a reverse gear, but a challenge to get a larger bike turned around in the width of the lane. With hindsight, it would have been quicker to paddle the thing backwards. I have no idea what sidecars were supposed to do.

The fun continued at the second observed test, which from the route card was the usual start at A, top at B, exit at C. What wasn't said was that you were supposed to reverse back over B then carry on down the lane to C. Going straight ahead after B landed you in a swampy gateway. Guess how I know?

I wonder if the horseshoe rut I created turning around will still be there next year? The route itself was a delightful tour, first of the Vale of Evesham, then past Broadway Tower and into the Cotswolds ANOB: it's amazing the trial can take place at all given the local demographic of wealthy townies and NIMBYs in chocolate-box villages.

Fords en-route had to be tackled blind, streams which are just a trickle in Summer were torrents of coffee-coloured liquid.

Most of the sections in the first part of the trial had followed a simple format: ride up a lane, then a deviation around a tree or similar obstacle with a restart before rejoining the lane. Many of the lanes were very wet, and some of the access routes were more challenging than the sections.

Then we got to Fry's Quarry: the proclaimed 'difficult' part of the trial. There were four sub-sections in the quarry: which had to be tackled in the order of 3, 4, 2, then 1. Well, I'm sure it made sense to someone, and there was a Google Maps view of the quarry in the roadbook to help you!

Sadly, I crashed heavily on one section, and snapped the tip off the front brake lever (must have been looking at the Google picture, rather than where I was going!). Then on to the lunch stop, which was a layby on the A435 with no food, no drinks, no shelter and no toilets! Doesn't anyone think of the female competitors?

The penultimate section was a long and fairly easy one called Gentle Juniper. The rough bit was at the start, and I negotiated that OK, then it turned into a steep, well surfaced but twisty climb. And this is where it all went wrong for me.

I was riding in hill-climb style, relishing the ES700s power and maybe perhaps over-trusting the traction control, when I encountered a cattle grid on the exit of a turn. Sadly, it was the kind of grid that's made out of round pipes which offer zero lateral grip. Down I went, and bent the clutch lever!

Exiting not so Gentle Juniper, your demoralised rider made his way through Stroud to the final section. The roadbook here was not very helpful, but fortunately as a former local, I was able to work out where the final section was on the edge of town and led a clutch of entrants to it. There were even some spectators to see me wobble up to the top for a clean.

From there the route looped around to finish at the historic Amberly Inn on Minchinhampton Common, where there was live music, a free drink and an opportunity to have a late lunch. Not for me though: time was pressing, so I rode back to the hotel, put the bike in the van and set off for home.

Next month: Two days of trail riding in Devon with my brothers, then riding the GasGas ES700 on the Land's End Trial!

Contributions wanted for ASWMC newsletter

Please send your contributions for the Spring Newsletter as soon as possible and no later than 30th March.

Event reports, club developments and social matters are all welcome. Please remember to credit the photographers of any accompanying images.

Thank you.

Rupert Barker, Media Officer & Newsletter Editor.

media@aswmc.org.uk

T: 01392 490848; M: 07594 584129

Tales from the Bike Shed



Spot the difference

This month's topic is rusty valve stems.

The GasGas ES700 is just over three years old. It's only done a small mileage, but much of that has been in the wet. When I pulled the original tyres off, I found the front tube looked like new, but the valve of the rear was rusty, and if left to its own devices would have eventually rotted out of the tube.

Both tubes are Mitas, made in China.

I can only think that the rear valve rusted because it gets far more in the way of spray and dirt on it than the front.

I replaced both with Michelins, with a thin smear of rubber-safe grease on the foot of each stem. Will they do any better?

I'll let you know next time I change the tyres.

Richard Simpson

Tall tales wanted

It would be lovely to get some reports in the next newsletter of other people's trialling/marshalling experiences, triumphs/disasters in the workshop, or anything else remotely relevant!

richardsimpson94@yahoo.co.uk