

R MALPAS

Over the top: Harry Louis leaps the crest out of the Vinson sandpit

Lighter and Shorter

The Latest A.J.S. Three-fifty Trials Model : Impressions After Some Strenuous Exercise on a 1959 Prototype



PRODUCTION trials models have changed quite a bit during the last decade. In the late 1940s they had solid frames and engines that pulled unfalteringly at tick-over speeds, but were not particularly sprightly on a wide throttle. The weight saving was limited to using narrow-blade mudguards and smallish fuel tanks, and removing lighting equipment. Riding styles were different, too; the top boys were, above all, balancing artists.

Then the trials elite accepted spring frames, after maintaining for years that a solid frame was essential for maximum wheel grip! Weight had to be saved elsewhere to compensate for the pounds added by spring frames so aluminium-alloy cylinder heads, barrels and mudguards became common. Riders realized that some sections could be more successfully tackled on full ignition advance and a whiff of gas.

Nowadays the trials model is a remarkably functional tool. It has rear springing with a reasonably wide range of movement; provides gas-engine, low-speed pulling combined with racer revs at a twist of the grip; and almost every pound of unnecessary weight has been shorn off by thoughtful design. In riding styles, "flat in two" and faster is the usual gait, with the Blondin stuff reserved solely for where no other technique is possible.

A.M.C. competition models, the Ajays and Matchless, have always been in the forefront of the evolution race and so have the factory riders—Hugh Viney a few years ago and Gordon Jackson at the present time. Let me introduce you, therefore, to a prototype 1959 A.J.S. trials job which we had fun with a few days ago. As compared with this year's model, it had some important modifications: a shorter and lighter rear sub-frame and rear fork; smaller-diameter front-fork stanchions and sliders; 5½-in-diameter brakes with waisted hubs instead of 7-in brakes in full-width hubs; a 2½-pint oil tank (4pt on current models) that is well clear of the leg when one is poised on the footrests; wheelbase shorter by 1¼ in to 52½ in;

dry weight in trials trim down by about 25 lb to under 300 lb.

Have you ever been to a sandpit just after the excavators have finished their work? The sides offer a virtually sheer 25ft drop. At any rate they do at the newest piece of rough-stuff on the Sidcup Club chairman Mick Vinson's farm. Without the slightest hesitation, Gordon Jackson had given his bogwheel a squirt of throttle and was riding diagonally down the near-vertical side and ploughing a deep furrow. Only his courage in opening the throttle hard and *driving* down kept him from hurtling sideways to the bottom and landing in a heap—the modern technique demonstrated to the ultimate degree. After a little easing of the edge with pick and shovel the Jackson furrow became a comparatively easy section for full-

bore, second gear climbs and Jock West, Mick Vinson and I were all successful sooner or later, even under the critical eye of spectator Hugh Viney.

Of course, we had lots more fun on other sections not far away. On greasy chalk, in mud, up and down steep banks, along narrow, twisty tracks among trees, and we also reeled off a few laps of the Canada Heights scrambles circuit.

The new A.J.S. is a remarkable all-rounder, is at home on any type of rough-stuff, is as stable, it seems, as any two-wheeler could be on the most slippery of surfaces, is easy to balance at a snail's pace and has no tendency to buck on wavy going when at speed in spite of the shorter wheelbase. The engine plonks to perfection but has the surge of a scrambler when given the gun; it starts readily, is quiet mechanically and does not get trefful when really hot after punishment in boggy going.

Over the years it has been my good fortune to borrow A.M.C. factory jobs for Press trials. At the time I have thought them to be the last word in trials hacks. They were, but improvement is always possible. The latest models have the Jackson stamp. How are they better? "The lower weight," says Jackson, "particularly the pounds saved at the front end, makes them just that bit more positive on the steering. The shorter wheelbase improves wheelgrip and really shows up to advantage on naggy sections."

That's fair comment. I predict that as the 1959 models come into use, trials organisers will be faced with more and more clean sheets!
H. W. L.

On the left, Gordon Jackson, whose ideas have been taken into account in redesigning the A.J.S. and Matchless trials models, enlarges on their merits. The location is the Canada Heights scrambles course

