

NZ Sporting and Observed Trials

Development of NZ Trials

Sporting trials, or Observed trials, developed out of Reliability trials and Road trials. The first NZ Sporting Trials Championship was run in 1951, as a two-day event held over a single weekend. This format remained for twenty years.

The first North Island Championship was held in the 1958/59 season, and the first results found for the South Island Championship are from the 1965/66 season. These Island Championships were two-day events.

The first North-South Trial was held in May 1966 at the end of the 1965/66 season. It was run as a stand-alone two-day event in Wellington and won by the South. The team size was made up of two thirds of the riders entered from the island with the least entrants, up to a maximum team size of 10 riders. The competition aimed to demonstrate the strength and depth of trials in both islands, not just the strength of the top few riders. This first year the teams were 10 riders from each island.

For the next three years the North-South Trial was run as a single day event the day after the two-day NZ Champs. Teams of eight took part in 1967, and teams of six in 1968.

The 1969 North-South Trial was a stand-alone two-day event held in Palmerston North. The 1970 North-South Trial was also a stand-alone two-day event run in Christchurch, but due to a poor North Island entry, each team was only three riders.

During the period to 1971 the ACU annual conference each winter would allocate the running of events for the next 12 months to different districts. In 1967 this resulted in two NZ Championship events being run in the same calendar year; one for the 1966/67 season, and the other for the 1967/68 season. This also happened in 1971 with two South Island Championships run in the same calendar year. From 1972 the trials season changed to being a calendar year.

In 1972 the NZ Championship became six weekend rounds giving 12 days riding, with three rounds held in each island. The three rounds in each island also made up the North or South Island Champs. Only the best four results in the six round NZ Champs series counted towards the final result, and only the best two results on the three rounds for each Island Championship.

From 1972 the North-South Trial was held the day after the final two-day round of the NZ Champs, with teams of seven riders competing in Wellington in 1972.

1972 was also the year the NZ National Trials Champion shield was introduced. Previous to this the winner was given a cup provided by the hosting club. For example, in 1962 when the NZ Champs were held in Wellington, the winner of the event was presented with the Ixion Cup.

In 1975 the NZ Experts Trial was introduced and the North-South event was abandoned. The first NZ Experts Trial was run in Wellington, and typically the event was run in late November or early December, after the NZ Champs were finished. It was a one-day trial in 1975, 1976, 1981, 1984, and 1989, and run as a two-day trial in 1982, 1983, and 1985. To qualify for entry to the NZ Experts Trial, riders had to finish in the top 20 at a national round.

1979 was the last year the NZ Champs were run as a six-round series. Since 1980 the NZ Champs has run as a three-day event held in October at Labour Weekend. With these changes the Island Championships became separate events independent of the NZ Champs. The South Island Champs are typically now run over two weekends (four rounds), while the North Island Champs are run over four weekends (eight rounds).

In 1987 the North-South Trial made a comeback as part of the Experts Trial being held that year in Nelson. Organisers were looking to attract more interest in the event from Clubman riders, so they re-introduced the North-South team competition with teams of five made up solely of Clubman (blue) grade riders.

The largest North South teams would likely have been in 1996 when each team was made up of 20 riders.

From 1990 the Expert Trial has been held during one day of the NZ Champs, and the North-South competition has also returned and is typically competed for on a second day of the NZ Champs. The exception was in 2024 when the NZ Champs in Alexandra were cancelled due to snowfall. That year a separate Experts Trial was held in Wellington.

Introduction of Grades

Prior to 1982 a single line was used at Championship events. With falling entries at NZ and Island Trials Champs, unofficial Intermediate (yellow) and Clubman (blue) support classes were added in 1982. A submission to recognise these classes was successfully put to the ACU conference in 1985, though these were support classes, not championship classes.

Two new championship classes were added in 1996 that used the Clubman (blue) line. These were Junior and Presidents.

Junior was for riders under 16 years of age, though this was changed to riders under 17 from 2000.

Presidents was for riders over 40 years of age. The trials community had been running President's grade unofficially since 1992, but this was not recognised officially by MNZ until the 1996 season. Initially Presidents rode the Clubman (blue) line but from 2009 Presidents was increased in difficulty when a new green line was added. Initially this class followed the green and blue arrows, but a rule change in 2015 changed this so Presidents riders only followed green arrows.

A number of changes were made in 1997 including splitting the Expert (red) line into Expert A and Expert B. Half the Expert sections would have harder passages for Expert A riders including obstacles described as having considerable difficulty to match what was ridden in Europe. This introduced VCS for Expert with results for Expert A riders considered first, then Expert B.

While Intermediate (yellow) and Clubman (blue) remained support classes it is interesting to note that Intermediate sections were required to be set out so they could be ridden without hopping the bike.

Twin Shock was added in 1997 to cater for riders on twin shock bikes. This class changed to VCS in 2018 to allow some riders on twin shock bikes to ride higher grades.

A Women's class was added in 2011 and, recognising that events would sometimes fail to have the minimum six entrants required, the class initially was excluded from minimum class numbers that applied to all other classes if the result was to be recognised by MNZ. These

minimum numbers were later reduced to three competitor's for all classes. From 2012 Women's and Junior classes were both changed to VCS to reflect the wide range of rider abilities in these classes.

In 2016 a new support class was added called Sportsman. This allowed riders under 40 to ride the green line as a stepping stone between Clubman (blue) and Intermediate (yellow).

In 2022, reflecting the increasing age of the Trials community, the President class for riders over 40 years was renamed Veteran 1 with eligible riders being 50 to 64 years of age. At the same time Veteran 2 was added for riders 65 years and older. These classes were also VCS so riders could pick a difficulty level to suit their ability.

2022 also saw an Air Cooled Monoshock class introduced though, to date, this is a class that struggles to achieve the minimum of three entrants required for the class result to be recognised by MNZ.

The most recent change was in 2024 which saw the support classes changed to Championship classes and all classes renamed T1 (orange), T2 (red), T3 (yellow), T4 (green), and T5 (blue). A non-championship Social class was added, T6 (white).

Expert T1/T2 are run as a combined class. Junior, Women's, Vet 1, Vet 2, Twin Shock, and Air-Cooled Mono continue as VCS Championship classes.

Other Championship Events

In addition to the events and classes summarised above, the following events have also held Championship status:

A NZ Scott Trial was allocated to Tauranga by the ACU at their AGM in 1965. No further information has been found about this event. The first results obtained to date are from 1973. The Scott Trials were either one or two-days duration where cross country loops up to 200km (125 miles) meant speed was as important as rider performance in the observed sections. The Scott Trials were typically held independently of other championships, except in 1977 when it was run as a single day event the day after the final two-day round of the NZ Champs. It appears the Scott Trial has not been run in NZ since 1984.

The first Arena Trial was proposed for August 1990, but no results have been found. The first results obtained to date are from 1994 when Richard Kent from Australia won the event. The Arena Trial then ran regularly for the next few years, with the last result found from 2002.

The last Championship identified is for Sidechair Trials. The earliest record found was when the class was included in the three-day NZ Trials Championship run at Christchurch in 1994. A and B Grade lines were run, with David Chambers and Peter James winning Sidechair A and Derek Scott and Peter McGrail winning Sidechair B. Sidechair trials were also a class in the South Island Trials Champs from 1994 to 1998. It is not clear whether these were recognised as a championship grade or run as a support class.

In 1997 the National Sidechair Trials Championship was held independently of the NZ Trials Championship, when it was run as part of the Pioneer Clubs Kaikoura Three Day Trial held on Queens Birthday Weekend. The winners of the sidechair class were Paul Jackson and Rob McKay. Having the Sidechair Champs on a separate weekend allowed all sidechair riders to also compete in the solo classes at the NZ Champs held in Hawkes Bay at Labour Weekend.