

# A Newcomer's Guide to The Scottish

If you've ridden the SSDT before, then don't bother reading any further! This is just a basic guide to entering, preparing for and riding the SSDT for anyone who is thinking of entering for the first time, and shouldn't be taken as anything other than a series of handy hints (for hard and fast information you should always read the supplementary regulations and any other information distributed by the club).

Before you enter the trial there's a few considerations to be taken into account. The SSDT is probably the only time that you will ride your bike for six consecutive days of tough riding, so don't underestimate the level of fitness required to get you through it, and that goes for both you and your bike. You need to be sure that you're 'bike fit' as the trial requires a good deal of physical strength and, most importantly, stamina.

It is a well-known fact that the better a rider you are, the less energy you use, especially in the sections, so the average clubman does have to be pretty fit, and the fitter you are the more you'll enjoy your week. Once you decide that you're ready to have a shot at it, it's time to get your entry in!

## Entering the trial

Sounds simple, doesn't it! Unfortunately, completing the entry form very rarely guarantees you an entry in the SSDT.

We have to make sure that all riders have enough time to get round the entire route in daylight so we're limited in the number of entries that we can accept. There's usually around 270 entries available every year, but on average we get anything up to 500 entries to the trial, so for every entry accepted, there's one turned down. That's the first rule of entering the SSDT – don't fill in the form expecting to get an entry. If you prepare yourself for missing out then you can only be pleasantly surprised when you get in!

The entry forms become available around the end of September or the start of October. They're available for download from the SSDT website ([www.ssdtd.org](http://www.ssdtd.org)) or by sending an SAE to the trial secretary, and details will be published in the motorcycling press at the time.

In mid-December entries close and then there's the small matter of the ballot to allocate the entries. Those who get in will tell you what a great system it is and those who don't will insist that it's all a fix, but really we do it in the only fair way we can, and that's by allocating places at random. However, there is a catch – not all 270 places are allocated in the draw. There are 30 places set aside for the five factories and another 50 set aside for the Club to allocate at their discretion, but the remaining 190 are allocated through the draw. Once entries close you can expect to find out whether or not your entry has been accepted within about ten days, and that's when the real work starts because you've only got five months to hone your riding skills and get as fit as you possibly can before it all kicks off!

# A typical day

The very first thing you need to do is work out your start time for the day. For Monday that's nice and easy – riders leave the Parc Ferme at one-minute intervals from 7.30am onwards. For the rest of the week there's two additional factors to take into account :

1. The rider leading the trial varies each day, which means that your starting time also varies each day. You'll find the starting number for each day in the Supplementary Regulations, so make sure you read them!
2. There are likely to be riders who retire from the trial each day. A starting time is not allocated for retired riders, so for each retired rider that was due to start in front of you, your start time will be brought forward by one minute. A list of retired riders is issued with the results each night and is also posted in the Parc Ferme every morning.

Once you know when you're starting you can work out when you're allowed into the Parc Ferme, as you're given access to your bike 30 minutes before your start time.

Just before your start time the official in charge will call you up to the front of the Parc Ferme. You'll be given a time card which will give you your start time and the running times for the rest of the day. Time is probably the thing that gives a first-timer most cause for concern, so there's a whole separate section later to explain it all. For now all you need to know is that you need to keep your card as clean and dry as possible, but most importantly don't lose it!

Once you're out of the Parc Ferme it's up to you to follow the route, ride the sections and get back to the Parc Ferme in time. The route on the roads will be marked using the arrows shown below :



On straight main roads you can expect to see a SO arrow every few miles just to let you know that you're on the correct route, but keep your eyes peeled for L and R signs as the route sometimes breaks off the road and into the hill. When this happens there are usually a series of orange flags beforehand, but be vigilant all the same!

All off-road route-marking is done by orange flags – if there's a change in direction there will be a line of flags, but otherwise there will be a flag every 100 yards or so, dependant on the terrain. Tracks and well-defined paths tend to have fewer flags until it is time to change direction, but again it's important to keep your eyes peeled as there have been a few instances of people knocking flags over.

Sections are laid out in groups (labelled A, B, C, etc) with anything between one and eight sections in each group. The label of the group will be at the bottom of the first section, but ask an official if you're not sure. There are a few occasions where there are two groups close together, so it's always better to check to be sure that you haven't missed a group out.

The sections themselves are laid out with red 'begins' cards and red and blue section markers. Most sections will finish with yellow 'ends' cards, but where the section is the last in a group, it will finish with blue 'finish of hill' cards instead.

Where there are two continuous sections, the point at which the first section ends and the second section begins will be marked with red 'begins' cards, ie there will be no 'ends' cards to mark the end of the first section separately.

# Time

Right – now for the complex bit! Time is extremely important in the SSDT and each day has a specific running time, which is the amount of time you're given to complete the day's route. If you exceed that running time then you're penalised by one mark for every minute that you're late, and if you're over an hour late then that's you out of the trial, so time-wasting is not an option.

When you leave the Parc Ferme in the morning you'll be given your route card for the day. The route card is double-sided, one side has a diagrammatic map of the route for the day and the other is used for recording your running time. One of the most important things to note is that the route on the card may differ from that in the programme. You should always use the route on your card rather than the route on your programme.

The simplest way to explain the route card is by example :

Scottish Six Days Trial 2006 Route and time card								
Tuesday								
Name..... <b>AN OTHER</b> ..... No..... <b>100</b> .....								
Ref	Section	Route	Cumulative Mileage	Time Allowed	Time of arrival	Time of Departure	Control Delay allowances	Initials
A	3	Fort William	24			9.00		
		Laggan Locks						
		Fort Augustus Glenmoriston	35					
B	1	Meall Damh A	48					
C	5	Meall Damh B						
D	2	Creag Nan Gobhar						
E	3	Ceannacroc Forest	51					
F	5	Creag Lundie	56					
G		Rest Stop (15 mins)# White Bridge			12.45	13.00	15	JP
	2	Forest Gate	71					
H	4	Meall Choire Glas 1	77					
I	3	Meall Choire Glas 2	78					
J	2	Glen Cia-Aig	82		16.15	16.24	9	AM
K	1	Witches Burn Timecheck start	89	07/15	17.01			
		Fort William Timecheck finish (Machine Check)	99	0/25	17.26			

SSDT OFFICE Tel: 01397 702331  
Fort William Police Emergency Number 01397 702354

# Rest stop - 15 mins delay will be given at rest stop.  
This is NOT included in daily running time

There are nine different columns on the route card :

1. gives the label of the group of sections – in this case there are 11 groups of sections for the day, labelled A-K
2. confirms how many sections are within each group
3. gives the name of each (with interim landmarks and places given in italics)
4. gives the mileage to each group of sections
5. gives the time allowance for the day
6. holds the time of arrival at any delay or time control
7. holds the time of departure from any delay or time control
8. is for office use only
9. holds the initials of the official running the delay or time control

This example includes a lunch break and a time check. Every day except Saturday has a 15-minute lunch break, which is obligatory and must be taken by every rider, but not every day has a time check.

A time check exists for safety reasons. Generally the final section of the day is a fair bit away from Fort William, which means that the bulk of the route back to the Parc Ferme is by road. As some riders will be short on time by this point, the temptation to speed is always there, so the time check was introduced to stop riders from speeding. The timecheck generally starts just before you go on to the road and ends at the Parc Ferme, and the time allowed for this is the time it takes to ride that distance whilst adhering to all speed limits. If you complete this section of the route in less than the time allowed to do so you will be considered to have broken the speed limit and will be penalised at the rate of one mark per minute.

In this example your running time for the day is 7 hours and 40 minutes, but it's really better to think of the day ending at the start of the timecheck, ie allowing yourself 7 hours and 15 minutes to get there and then using the remaining 25 minutes to get to the Parc Ferme at the legal speed limit.

So that's the time check explained...now for the rest of the route card!

When you get your route card in the morning it will already show your name, riding number and start time. You'll normally get your card a few minutes before you're due to leave the Parc Ferme, and that's a good time to work out when you should aim to be back at the end of the day. Other people may offer to do this for you – whether you accept that offer or not is up to you, but remember that at the end of the day, you are ultimately responsible for getting it right...if you're late in, blaming the person that got their sums wrong will not cut you any slack!

To work out when you're due back all you need to do is add your 15-minute lunch break and the running time for the day to your start time. It's sensible to calculate this time to the start of the time check rather than to the Parc Ferme itself, as you can't make up any time after that anyway.

At times queues can form on sections. This is accounted for in your running time to a certain extent, but if the queues start to cause hold ups then you'll be told that a delay is being run and you'll get the time that you were delayed added to your overall running time. This is done by handing your route card to the official at the bottom of the section, who will record the time that you arrived at the section in the 'Time of arrival' column. When it is your turn to ride the section the official will write the time in the 'Time of departure' column and will shout your number – hearing them, collecting your card and riding the section is your responsibility so make sure you're ready...which isn't as easy as it sounds as you'll probably have to get over / under / around another 20 bikes to reach the section! If you don't turn up when you're shouted the official will just put your card on your bike and it's only your own time you're wasting, so it's worth paying attention. Your lunch break is run as a delay, so you'll have plenty practise during the week!

Anyway, back to the example – this rider has incurred 22 marks on time for the day. He was due back in the Parc Ferme at 17:04 as he left at 9:00, had 7 hours and 40 minutes to get back to the Parc Ferme, plus 15 minutes for lunch and 9 minutes delay. He didn't get in until 17:26, meaning that he has 22 penalty marks. He didn't speed in the time check, so there's no additional penalties to be added there.

It can all get a bit confusing if there's a lot of delay time given, but you'll find that after a couple of days you can add up any number of minutes in your head. It's a good idea to aim to have your bike back in the Parc Ferme a few minutes before your due time – better safe than sorry!

## Handy Hints

### Preparing for the weather

The Scottish can literally throw all weathers at you in one day. May can have some of the hottest days of the year, but be warned that the weather can change very fast – in one day you can be riding at all sorts of altitudes, so it has been known for riders to set off in sunshine and end up in snowdrifts before they get back to the Fort.

Take lightweight windproof clothing with you – an unlined Gortex jacket is best, as it can get very cold on the long road runs, especially if it's raining. Take a pair of goggles, as 20 miles on the road in rain or snow will be unbearable without them. If it is cold and wet some riders stuff lightweight overmits in their bag so that their hands don't freeze up!

If the weather gets really bad you can find that some of the high mountain passes can be above cloud level. In these circumstances the routemarkers place flags at much more frequent intervals but take your time, as you don't want to get off course up there!

### Tools

Most riders carry small rucksacks that can be left at the top of sections when you walk them, and then picked up after you hop through the end cards with a clean!

Don't carry too much. Any heavy tools should be strapped to your bike with cable ties and cut-up inner tube bands – but remember to keep something in your bag that will cut the cable ties. A front inner tube is essential along with tools to change the tube and a tubeless repair kit, and a good pump – mountain bike shops are the place to get lightweight tools and excellent pumps.

### Tyres

Keep your tyre pressure a bit higher than you would for a one-day trial. The difference it will make in the sections will be negligible, unless you're aiming for a special first-class award, but the risk of punctures is greatly reduced. For some of the long stretches of roadwork it is worth pumping up the back tyre, as long as you remember to let it down again when you go off-road – most of the army fuel points have facilities to blow up tyres.

Your tyres will get worn down on roadwork – most clubmen change the back on the Wednesday night or the Thursday morning. If you have time you can turn it in-between, the Dunlop man will do it for you if you ride Dunlops, but if not most manufacturer support teams have facilities to change tyres.

Taking your rear wheel out of the compound is allowed, and it is easy to do in the 30 minutes before you leave in the morning. If you check nothing else, check your spokes each day – the 70-100 miles a day seems to loosen them off – if you get a broken spoke it is worth fitting a new one either that night or the next morning.

## **Times**

Don't spend too long looking at sections – two minutes on each section adds up to an hour each day...which is time you can't afford to waste!

Don't hang around waiting for your pals to finish a section – you'll all catch up with each other, and the time you spend hanging around is time that could be better spent making your way to the next section.

A good way of judging whether or not you're on time is to keep an eye on the riders around you – there will always be some who are faster but the majority should be riding with a number not more than twenty places in front of / behind you.

If you have problems and have to make some time up, it's worth riding a few sections after only a brief look at them. Some riders will try to ride the section without looking at all, but unless you can see the whole section from the bottom, that's not a great idea as there can be some deep pools or big drops to contend with if you go off your line!

## **Speed**

Don't ride too fast on the rough or along tracks. The times are set so that you don't need to ride fast, so just keep riding steadily and you'll be okay. Riding fast just wastes your energy and increases the risk of punctures, crashes and getting stuck in bogs!

Whatever you do, keep to the speed limits on the roads. There are extra traffic police in the area on bikes and also in unmarked cars, and if you get stopped for speeding (or any other traffic offence) not only will you have to take whatever punishment the police dish out, you'll also be out of the trial faster than you can say Ballachulish Bridge.

## **Scores**

Remember you have to make a bona fide attempt at every section – if you don't then the observer may not mark your score, and if that happens you get a 50. Don't just ride through the 'begins' cards and straight out of the section – make sure you actually try it.

## **Land**

When you're riding on tracks and paths, be careful – it's very easy to get a front wheel puncture, particularly if you're riding too fast.

Remember that all of the land that you're riding over is private land. This trial is only run by the good will of the landowners, tenants, keepers, gamekeepers, farmers and shepherds so treat the land with the respect it deserves or the trial may not be there for you to ride again in the future.

Some of the land is environmentally sensitive and permission is only given for us to use it under extremely strict conditions, so don't abuse the trust that has been put in you.

We're not the only people out in the hills – consider other land users, including walkers and particularly locals going about their day-to-day life. Slow down near livestock and don't leave the flagged route. Take particular care near eroded land, and when joining paths or roads, do your best not to damage verges and ditches and try not to drag too much mud onto the tarmac roads.

## **And finally...**

...the most important thing for you is that you enjoy your first SSDT and all those that follow in the years to come!

Take time to stop at the top of some of the hills and admire the spectacular scenery – to walk to some of the places that you will be takes hours or even days. Feel privileged that you are allowed to ride your bike over some of the most breath-taking scenery in Britain. In good weather it is awesome, and in bad it is even more so.

Here's to your first SSDT and what will undoubtedly be the experience of a lifetime.

## **...GOOD LUCK!!!**