

Slippery Hills

From the staff at the Trials Training Center

A couple months ago before the VT and NY nationals, Geoff Aaron stopped by to spend some quality practice time at TTC working on the slippery climbs. One of the things that make Geoff such a great champion is his dedication to practice and continuously working on his skills. He says that riding in Southern California doesn't give him the opportunity to practice the slick stuff much and he wanted to prepare for the eastern nationals. So that's cool, another opportunity for a how-to-ride article for the faithful Trials Comp readers!

The first key to slippery climbs is to get maximum drive at the bottom of the hill without any wheelspin because any little root or rock can break traction. It's best to keep the bike revved up and regulate drive using the clutch. This keeps the flywheel spinning up, and maximum power can be delivered according to the traction available. Using a bigger gear can also help. Bruce LeRiche and Geoff were practicing with a turn at the bottom of the hill so that they only had a short run at the hill. As you can see in photo 1, Bruce is squatting into the bike and loading the rear suspension to maximize traction and drive, while feeding out the clutch to launch the bike.

If there's a turn at the bottom or on the hill, get outside the bike while keeping the legs bent (squatting) and the outside elbow up, as demonstrated in photo 2 as Geoff moves up the hill into a bit of a turn.

You always try to get as much momentum as possible at the bottom, but if it's a big or long hill you must get drive on the hill. Bend your knees, not your upper body, and bring the bars to your chest as Geoff is doing on photo 3. Weight goes back to get more traction and comes forward to keep the bike from lofting the front, all while keeping knees bent and maintaining a steady throttle and drive. The steeper the hill the further the handlebars come to the chest.

In photos 4 through 6 Geoff is negotiating a "traction-breaker" bump on the steep hill, which can be a rock or slippery root. You can coast over these by clutching while at the same time unweighting slightly (not a jump) to help the tires over the obstacle without bouncing and disrupting your drive up the steep hill. Feather the clutch in and out, don't dump it. If you straighten slightly to unweight, suck the bike back in to yourself with flexible legs and good body position. Also keep the focus of your vision to the top of the hill; LOOK AHEAD!

And finally, Alex Bedley demonstrates the most important principal when your practicing: keep smiling while you pick yourself back up and then try, try again!