

Thursday, 20th January 2011



Pre Christmas drinks with a few local trials enthusiasts was to be the beginning of a New Years that will forever be special to me. Andy Hoddle from Kaebel Leisure casually asked me if I would like to join him in Japan to compete in a New Year Festival trial, and believe me, I didn't need to be asked twice!

I left the Aussie summer behind on the 31st of December and landed in Osaka, Japan, right in time for the New Year Celebrations. Ryozo Aoyama, who owns a Trials shop in Japan, called "Toolbox", and his wife Akemi, met me at the Airport Hotel.

New Years day was spent sightseeing around Osaka with Ryozo and Akemi. They were so incredibly hospitable and I really felt like I was friends with them after only a couple of hours! With a significant language barrier, we spent a couple of hours later that afternoon translating conversations with each other and watching DVD's of the Japanese Championship events. I studied Japanese briefly at school, but as with most school subjects, didn't really apply myself at all, which I am now regretting. We finished up the day at their daughters for a traditional Japanese dinner, that was really amazing!

Kameoka Trial Land ([www.kameokatrialland.co.jp](http://www.kameokatrialland.co.jp)) was the venue for the competition and here I met my bike that I was spending the next two days with. Kojiro, the youngest son of the Mori family, who own the trials specific property, kindly, lent me his own bike. He had converted the bike from a 250 to a 300 so that I would feel more comfortable with the power, just one example of how amazingly generous the Japanese are!

I quickly jumped on the bike and started on my mission to get used to riding in snow and ice! During that day I met some really awesome people and spent some of it practicing with other Japanese riders. They seemed almost as happy to have me at the event, as I was to be there! The terrain consisted of mostly rocks that were much harder and more slippery than Aussie rocks and some steep and REALLY MUDDY hill climbs!

Kojiro showed me through the museum that the Mori family have, including some really cool classic bikes and cars! It was later that I realised that a lot of the snow that had melted during the day with us riding through it, was now turning into ice!

January 3rd we returned to the trial site to see that things were certainly very icy! The trial, called the Rocky Trial, has been running for over 30 years on the the same date every year and is part of what they call a 'festival' held for all the trials riders to celebrate the new year. The event has traditionally been attended by all sorts of riders in Japan starting from beginners all the way up to the best in their National Champion, Kennichi Kuroyama.

I entered in the International A Class on the hardest lines. Later I realised that there was another grade in Japan called International A SUPER, held on the same lines but from what I gather, is only for the professional riders. In attendance was Kennichi Kuroyama, Ogawa along with quite a few other riders from the top ten in Japan.

It seemed to be a mutual agreement that no-one would ride for the first half an hour while we waited for the ice to melt off the top of the rocks.

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**GASGAS**  **DUNLOP**



The trial was set a little below the normal Japanese Championships because of the type of trial it was, but still of an Australian Expert standard. This was actually a relief for me because I have seen what they are capable of!

I cleaned the first 2 sections being the easiest of the day and then moved onto the 3rd, where I dropped a single dab and got into a significant amount of trouble! I was lucky to escape with just the one.

From section three, the sections increased in difficulty, but I carefully picked my lines combined with watching other riders. With a few near misses I was able to finish the rest of the lap clean!

Here I realised that I had to maximise my concentration. If I had managed to pull off a lap of one, then the Japanese professionals would no doubt be close or even clean. The ground began to dry out a bit and the ice and snow melted so the sections became more rideable and I was able to clean the second lap without too many hassles.

Surprisingly, when the trial was officially finished, everyone was still really energetic and pumped to have fun so almost the whole field of 80 or so riders went out for a practice! I managed to get myself (with the help of my new friend Yushi) involved in the proceedings. I had a quick chat to Kenichi, who at first seemed a little wary of my presence, and continued riding. We all had such a brilliant time coming up with new sections and trying to do what each other had done. The Japanese are just so light hearted and fun loving that we all had a big laugh when ever someone else made a silly mistake (or even a monumental crash!) and we all clapped and cheered when it went well for the other riders.

I decided to pull up stumps a little earlier than the others when a strain I had received in my upper arm when training at home, was starting to give me trouble with the level of sections raising as the afternoon went on.

Returning to the paddock after cleaning Kojiro's bike, I was invited up to the podium in second spot!

We finished the night off with a trip up the hill to the onsen and dinner.

The Japanese trial experience was absolutely amazing and has really had a big impact on my trials riding. For this there are quite a few people I need to thank! Firstly, Kaebel Leisure and Andy Hoddle for making the whole thing possible and so easy for me. Ryozo and Akemi Aoyama from Tool Box for taking such great care of me. Kameoka Trial Land and Mori Trial team for the bike and EVERYTHING else! Gas Gas Motos Australia for always being there for me, Global racing Oils for the amazing oils and the Howell Family for their awesome support!

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