



Walkers Cycling

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we understand cycling

An Introduction to: Time Trials

Time Trials

Time trialling is a sector of cycle sport which, although an integral part of the road racing scene in Europe, is regarded as a discipline in its own right here in Britain. Many of the UK's top racing cyclists began their competitive careers in time trials.

The time trial is a no-fuss introduction to competitive road cycling. Competitors – individuals or teams – set off at intervals and are timed over a fixed distance course. In theory, a time trial is simply test of a rider's ability but in practice most time triallists treat it as a race, comparing their performances against those of their peers.

The time trial is often referred to as the "*race of truth*" because, when compared to mass start road racing, it involves little in the way of tactics. In a time trial it is man or woman against the watch – with no one to slipstream, or set the pace as in road racing or cross-country mountain bike racing.

What Types Of Time Trial Can I Ride?

Time Trials fall into two main categories:

- Individual Time Trial (or TT) – riders compete singly starting at one minute intervals
- Team Time Trial (or TTT) – teams of two, three or four competitors are set off at intervals, usually of two, three or four minutes depending on team size.

Individual Time Trial

Courses vary in length with the standard distances being 10, 25, 50 and 100 miles. The winner is the rider who records the shortest time to cover the course. The ideal time trial course has no hills, is fairly straight and has smoothly surfaced roads.

Many courses are on dual carriageways where the road surface is generally better and traffic can overtake the competitors more easily. Traffic flow is often heavier and faster on main trunk roads however, so a rider has to have confidence in riding on these roads before venturing onto them in competition.



Some 'non-standard' distance events are held, often around one or more laps of a circuit. These so-called 'sporting' courses – present more of a challenge in the way of hills and bends. Non-standard circuit based courses are also a popular choice for team time trials.

A few 12 Hour events are held each year. In this specialised endurance event the distance each competitor can ride in the fixed time period determines the finishing order.

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The skill in doing well at individual time trialling lies in a rider's ability to know the limit of his or her physical fitness and ride to that limit - but not beyond it. Good judgement is required in pacing oneself over the distance whilst taking factors such as the nature of the course and weather conditions into account.

Individual time trial championships are held at club, division and national level. These cater for all the different categories of competitor - e.g. juvenile, junior, senior, men, women and veterans etc. There are championships for all the standard distances of 10, 25, 50, 100 miles and the 12-hour event.

Season long Best All-Rounder (or BAR) championships seek to find the rider with the fastest average speed over a range of distances, e.g. 10, 25 and 50. The BAR competitions create intense rivalry amongst contenders and can see riders travelling the length and breadth of the country in search of 'fast' courses.

Team Time Trial

This is more of a specialist discipline. Riders in the team take turns at setting the pace in front, providing shelter to the other team member/s in their slipstream. This system of riding usually produces a faster average speed than a competitor riding solo can achieve.

The majority of team events in the UK are "two-up" time trials for teams of two. These are an ideal introduction to the discipline and some events allow for mixed teams of riders from different clubs. This makes it easier for a rider to find a team member of similar ability.

A popular variation of the two-up is the "Tour de Gentlemen" where a younger (supposedly faster!) rider sets the pace for a veteran (over 40) team mate. This event had its origins abroad and is a feature of the late season calendar when all the "serious" racing is usually over.

The four-man team time trial was a feature of the World Championships and Commonwealth Games until fairly recently when it was replaced by individual events. The TTT still features on the UK championship scene with Cycling Time Trials and the Scottish Cyclists' Union still recognising the event. The four man TTT requires the successful team to ride in very close formation – a skill that often sees road racing riders doing particularly well. The time is taken on the third rider in the team to finish. This allows for a degree of tactics to be employed where, for example, the weakest rider can be "sacrificed" in the closing miles allowing the three stronger riders to push on to the finish.

The Time Trial Bike

You don't need a special bike to take part in time trials. Your machine must simply be roadworthy and stripped of any accessories such as mudguards, carrier racks etc.



However, time trialling, in common with every cycling discipline, has seen the evolution over many years of specialised machines which can cost many thousands of pounds.

The ideal time trial bike is aerodynamically efficient to reduce drag and is as light as possible whilst retaining sufficient structural strength. Lightness and strength comes from the use of materials such as aluminium alloy, titanium and carbon fibre. The use of disc wheels, compact geometry frames, triathlon type handlebars and so on increases the aerodynamic 'wind cutting' qualities of the bike.

I Would Like To Try Time Trialling – How Fit Do I Need To Be?

If you can ride comfortably without stopping over ten miles – then you are probably capable of competing in a 10 mile time trial. This holds true for the longer distances as well.

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No one expects beginners to be particularly fast and once you have established a time for a particular distance the challenge comes in trying to better your personal best, or 'PB'. You need not pit yourself against other riders until you feel ready. There will be plenty of opportunity for that once you've gained more fitness and experience.

It is always a good idea to employ the services of a coach when planning any training schedule. Many clubs have one or more qualified coaches in their ranks. There are also a growing number of self-employed and commercial coaches who offer clients a one-to-one service. Each of the national governing bodies maintains a register of qualified coaches.

How Do I Get Started?

As it is predominately an individual discipline, time trialling can be practised at any time. All you need is a suitable stretch of road that has been measured with reasonable accuracy and a watch! Once you feel ready to measure your performance against your peers you can enter an organised time trial event. Entry fees are rarely expensive and in some cases may be free for younger competitors.

In the UK, open time trials (mainly 10 and 25 mile events) are held throughout the summer season. Many clubs also hold weekly club-confined events where newcomers are welcomed on a 'come and try' basis. It is worth noting however, that the rules vary slightly depending on the governing body involved.

In England and Wales the vast majority of time trials are held under the auspices of Cycling Time Trials with some organised under British Cycling rules. North of the border, Scottish Cycling governs all aspects of cycle sport including time trials. Membership and licence requirements vary so please check to avoid disappointment.

Where to Buy

The best place for the beginner to buy a time trial bike, accessories and clothing is at a local, independent cycle dealer who should be able to offer a range of good quality products to suit your requirements.

At Walkers Cycling we aim to get people cycling – and keep them cycling. Our customers can benefit from the knowledge and experience our friendly staff have gained doing most types of cycling. We want you to enjoy your cycling as much as we do and can help you choose the best kit for the job.

Walkers Cycling also offer an evening appointment service when you can have a consultation with a member of staff on a one-to-one basis and choose your new cycle in peace, quiet and comfort. Visit our website for further details.

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