Clee Hills Trial 2023 Mark Wills Number 10, Beta Alp

This was my first Clee Hills Trial. I took part in the ACTC series last year for the first time but joined after the Clee Hills 2022. I did a lot of travelling last year, travelling down to Devon and Cornwall from Leicester and staying overnight on the Saturdays, trialling on the Sunday and four hours' drive back home after the trial. So, the Clee Hills, at Ludlow, is only a couple of hours drive from home so I didn't book into accommodation.

Then, on the Saturday before the trial I talked through travel arrangements with Joseph, my son, who had also entered and so we would travel together, me picking him up in Birmingham on the way, and worked out that I would have to get up at 5am. Next year I will stay over at the Squirrel – looks a nice place to stay!

We met up with George (Godkin) and mate who I teamed up with last year and hadn't seen since the Neil Westcott trial last November. We, George, Joseph and I set off on time – it was bloody cold at minus 2 degrees on the first 10 miles on the A49. Then onto the treacherous ice/frost on the narrow and winding country lanes until it warmed up mid-day in the lovely sun.

The first hill, Harton Wood, was a nice lane but I didn't understand why it wasn't "observed" – it meant there would only be 10 observed sections?

We had a chat with Celia at the special test at Coats Farm, thanks Celia. We took care here as we didn't want to slide and end up on the floor on the concrete. Test passed OK off we went into the field and then right realising we should have turned right along the old railway line – so returned and back onto the railway line. I lost my front end going across the camber at Coats Wood and was very pleased to have recovered and not footed.

It was picturesque waiting in the snowy woods at Easthorpe and suddenly the trial had become more interesting because the hill looked frozen at the bottom but thawed in the wood and very muddy. The first few bikes were spinning out at the bottom of the section which got our adrenalin going a bit more. We three all had good and exhilarating climbs. The guy on the BSA Bantam looked to have a good climb before us – and looking at the results had a good trial which shows the old British bikes are competitive in these trials.

Majors Leap was another section with a tricky frozen/slippery first 10 yards then all OK to the top and turn around back to the track.

Enjoyed Ippikins Rock.

Joseph had a rear puncture on the way to Abdon Liberty. We did say before we started the trial that if we had a puncture, we wouldn't repair it as it was too cold. However, when it actually happened, we had a discussion and decided we would – I had a new rear tube to put in. Trying to the break the seal on the original Beta rear wheel rim is notoriously difficult – so much so that I have had a new Akront rim on mine and now in the process of getting one on Joseph's Alp. The profile of the Beta rim is for a tubeless tyre, but Beta sell the Alps with a tube in. It took us an age to get the new tube in and back on our way. We couldn't get enough pressure in the tyre to pop the bead right back on – but on enough to ride safely at slow speed.

At Abdon Liberty one of the cars let us use their on-board compressor. We watched a couple of cars go up the section, but they stopped after the first bend and came back down – but weren't able to see around the bend so wondered what was there – we later found tractor ruts. Joseph and I climbed the section OK, but George needed a dab on the corner.

The start at Hungerford Steps reminded me of Warleggan on the Land's End Trial. Enjoyed going over the rocks and up into the muddy ruts – but I couldn't keep going feet up all the way along the long muddy ruts – first feet down of the day near the top.

Founders Folly looked another section that was a tight turn over the first 10 yards, steep, ruts each side with a frozen looking middle of the track. George had remembered the section from last year – he said its tight then very steep, so you need to give it some. We watched a couple of the bigger bikes struggle around the corner in the ruts so decided we would go up the middle. I slowly coaxed the Alp up the middle and round the bend – then a good climb to the top and an interesting descent the way I had just come. Joseph got on well here, but George had an "ff" going around the first bend. I think George blipped the throttle on his Beta RR two-stroke just a little early and span out on the frozen surface.

We have found that the Beta Alps really grip mud and are good over frozen ground.

We have a leisurely ride back to the finish and enjoyed a drink with friends before setting off for home.

Thanks to organisers and marshals.