

Manx Autumn Trailquest – 31st October 2010

A record entry of 100 competitors (although with 3 no-shows on the day) turned out for the Autumn Trailquest on the Isle of Man on Sunday. Despite some overnight rain, which muddied the ground in places, the threat of rain during the day never materialised and gradually improved throughout the day.

The event centre was at the Kennaa Equestrian Centre near St John's – which proved to be an ideal venue. With a massive car parking area, large barns and concrete aprons (complete with hosepipe for washing the bikes) everyone was easily accommodated. For the give-out area we used the small reception area – whilst for the post-event social and catering we made use of the excellent function room above the stables. Sue once again did a sterling job of serving drinks and cakes which were consumed in impressive quantities. Many thanks to Fay Corlett for her assistance in keeping the tea and coffee flowing....

The event area was spread across both sides of the TT course, with a cluster of controls on moorland trails on the 12-shares land above Greeba with an opportunity to ride the bit of the E2E course that was “missed out” due to course vandalism. The checkpoint was right at the top of Beary Mountain at a high point of 300 metres.

With a further pair of checkpoints on the seldom-used Laurel Bank path, the remainder lay to the South of the central Douglas to Peel valley. Slieau Whallian hosted a trio of tough checkpoints which opened the gate to Arrasey plantation and a cluster of high-scoring magnets to lure the stronger riders. A scattering of checkpoints around the Archallagan area ensured that there was plenty of interest for those staying closer to base camp. A string along the old railway line plus an out-and-back at the Raggatt also served to make it more attractive to stay on the trails rather than on the road. The aim of the event was to make sure that there was enough choice and variety for everyone whilst providing sufficient challenge and choice for the toughest riders.

Looking at the scores and the routes used, it is obvious that a wide variety of route choices emerged, with no clear circuit being the favourite. The top team of Rob Sorby and Martin Bell (winners of the Open Men's Team) notched up an impressive 22 controls of the 25 available which suggests that the scale of the course was just about right. In theory, no one should be able to get to all the checkpoints – and they were in fact a few (well-judged) minutes over the time limit. An excellent performance.

Just 19 points behind was Fell Runner Lloyd Taggart – who has been demonstrating impressive Mountain Biking aptitude in XC and Trailquest events. Lloyd won the Vet Man category. Partner Jackie Lee was third overall and winner of the “Open Women” category: Apparently Lloyd ‘borrowed’ a large part of Jackie's route based on a casual observation of her pre-course planning. Perhaps Jackie could offer similar route planning guidance to a few more of us?

Chris Crellin put in a powerful ride to come 4th overall with 18 checkpoints, beating the regular team of Steve Partington & Dave Rielly (winners M40 Men's Team) owing to the latter incurring 9 penalty points. I think (not sure) that this may have been Chris's first Trailquest – in which case a very impressive performance.

Julian Corlett teamed up with birthday-boy and regular training partner Phil Mackie. This should have been an Elite partnership had it not been for an unfortunate succession of punctures on Phil's bike around the Dowse area. They lost loads of time (and the initiative) in trailside repairs yet still managed to come home in 6th place.

Juan Kinnish (winner of the "Open Men" category) finished 8th just ahead of father & son team of Stuart & Robin Garry. Regulars Gary Hinds & Mark Caley rounded off the top 10.

Looking through the categories, Adam Cowin was the only Youth solo entry and was forced to retire early with mechanical problems.

John Qualtrough & Dave Curry were the only M50 Men's Team. Paula Gelling was the best of two in the Vet Women's category. Nikki Lane & Ian Lamberton were best of 4 Mixed Teams. Andy & Matthew Bostock were the top Generation team ahead of rivals Simon & Joseph Haddock.

Amongst the regulars were many new faces – and we hope that you all enjoyed your first Trailquest? Amongst the first timers were Jon Watterson from IoM newspapers along with Jackie & Nicola Kennaugh – who have not been seen on MTB's for many a summer....

Also gradually working their way up the MTB rankings at successive events in 14th place were Peter Taylor and Neil Kerruish. Definitely names to watch for the future!

But, as I always say after each Trailquest – it is the taking part and the buzz of route-planning and maybe riding a few trails that other events do not cover that makes the event so much fun. Then there is the anticipation of watching the scores gradually come in – whilst relaxing and enjoying a well earned cup of tea and slice of cake.

Special thanks to the staff at Kennaa for making us so welcome and providing such excellent facilities – we will definitely be back! Also a big thank-you to Peter, Neil, Shaun and John for helping to gather in the controls after the event. After Sue and I had packed up and cleared the hall, we spent a few hours collecting controls – ending in an (unlit) descent of the Dowse in the dark – which was interesting to say the least...

The next Trailquest is the night-time event. Scheduled for the full moon on Saturday 22nd January – weather permitting. Details to follow.

Graham Hughes. 1st November 2010