

# TRAIL SKILLS

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## CONQUER KILLER HILLS 102

In Uphills 101 we recognized that NZ's steep terrain varies greatly and one technique won't get you up every hill. In this month's Trail Skills we look at hill climbing techniques for the trail rider in more detail.

**Momentum:** Momentum (the impetus of a moving body) is vital for climbing hills. Carry as much momentum as you can into the hill. Once you have that momentum, do everything possible to keep it.

**Look ahead, make a plan:** Look well ahead to pick your line, it's natural to focus on the immediate problems in front of your wheel, but you also need to be looking and planning much further ahead.

**Don't be a lemming:** Most riders will just churn into a situation without thinking. Look for alternatives, are there better lines to the sides? If you get stuck go back down for a second go, or haul your bike out to better ground and start afresh – pushing is last resort.

### **Retain control:**

Vital as momentum is, you also need to be in control, with your back wheel on the ground and driving. Standing up and using your legs as extra springs will help and free your body to move around the bike. Control of traction (from minimal to maximum wheelspin) will then come from a combination of throttle and clutch control and body position.

### **The vital zones:**

The most critical zones of a tough hill are immediately before the climb, and the first real slope of the climb. In the first zone you gain momentum, the second zone is where you need to maintain and control that momentum.

**What gear?** Enduro bikes climb best in second or third gear, depending on the capacity of the bike, how steep and fast the climb and how aggressive the rider. First gear will not give you enough momentum and changing down from fourth to third can be difficult. Usually hills are topped in the gear you hit the slope with.

**Clutch and rpm :** For tricky rutted, rocky, or slippery hills use the engine's mid-range so you can increase or reduce throttle as you need. Constantly shadow the clutch. If you are thrown off line or need to slow, smooth clutch control will allow you to maintain drive and hold the gear you require. Aggressive clutch work will keep the engine at maximum power for sandy and pumice hills.

### **Traction or wheelspin?**

Some hills are conquered with blazing aggression and wheelspin, others are scaled quietly with perfect traction, apply the right technique for the conditions.

## **EIGHT UPHILL TIPS**

**1. Sand, deep loam, pumice:** Feet on the pegs and use plenty of revs and throttle to blast your way up in third gear. Slip the clutch to keep engine revs up.

**2. Sticky clay:** Plenty of speed keeps the knobs clean and biting. Use second or third gear with plenty of revs - be ready to slip the clutch to keep engine revs up. Maintain momentum and control by standing, and use only one foot at a time to maintain balance and direction.

**3. Grass:** Assault smooth grassy hills with aggression, sitting, in third gear. Be ready to back off the throttle and get your weight forward if the front wheel starts to climb. For rough grass a standing position in second or third gear will allow you to work your knees through the bumps and maintain rear wheel drive. When wet, get your weight further back to give consistent drive.

**4. Deep ruts:** Uphill ruts usually appear in soft loam and soft clay surfaces. Ride out of the ruts, even jumping from side to side if the ruts twist. If caught in a rut try keep at least one foot on the peg and get as much momentum as you can in second gear. If you can't balance, get those legs paddling strongly and maintain momentum at all costs. If the bike grounds in a rut, sit back on the seat and wheelie the frame clear.

**5. Loose rocky climbs:** Aggression will not work on uneven sized rubble or rolling rocks, spinning your rear tyre will just get the rear wheel bouncing. Pick the straightest, smoothest line. Use second gear, get all the momentum you can early. Crouch on the footpegs, weight well back to the rear, using your legs as extra suspension to soften the effect of the rocks on the rear tyre. Back the power off as required to maintain grip.

**6. Hard slippery clay or smooth wet rock:** Don't rush, stay relaxed, crouching on the pegs with your weight well to the rear. Make your approach as straight as possible and lean to keep the wheels at 90 degrees to the rock surface. Use low revs in second or third gear and aim for zero wheelspin.

**7. Commitment:** Climbing hills is more than just positive thinking, but it certainly helps. Use you head, make a plan - and deal to the bugger!

**8. Clear the tyre:** Stuck? Give yourself a fresh start by clearing a clogged rear tyre - hook top gear and spin the mud out with the bike on the stand.