

## WHICH UPHILL?

By John Nick.

Go to any trail ride and you are sure to see some unfortunate souls stuck part way up a hill - you may even have been one of them! NZ's varied terrain and wet weather breeds challenging hills, in astounding variety and yes you guessed it, they all require subtly different techniques to conquer. Here are some practical tips to help you avoid grief.

**Slippery smooth hills:** Often called papa clay, these climbs require gaining and maintaining momentum by getting your weight, back using a higher gear to minimize wheel spin, along with perfect throttle control. This is a fine balance because as you gain traction the front wheel may start to rise. If you can keep the front wheel just short of lifting you will have maximum traction. Plan your path and lean your body side to side to keep the bike vertical to the ground, if not the rear wheel will start slipping. As you hit the steep pitch gently ease back on the throttle to maintain traction.

**Rutty hills:** These hills favour the technical rider who can plan. Often the best strategy is get as far up the hill as possible outside the rut, using momentum and good throttle control to ride the banks. Sometimes it's possible to jump across the ruts to fresh traction on the sides, though you might at some stage need to drop into the rut and paddle the rest of the way up. If you do drop into the rut try to keep one foot pressed hard down on the peg, weight well back to assist traction and if you do stop, make sure you are in second gear to take off.

**Rocky hills:** Hills with loose or embedded rocks usually require that you have to temper speed for steady momentum and more control, because if you start bouncing off rocks the plan will go ugly. Better ride smoothly upon the pegs, weight back for traction, ready to lean the bike side to side to dodge rocks. Use an even throttle, aim for no wheel spin and look well ahead to plan your path.

**Sandhills:** These hills tend to be faster, more regular and smooth, but very soft and power-sapping. In these situations momentum is everything, sit well back on the seat and feed it all you have in the highest gear you can pull with full revs. In sand there's no substitute for cubes.

**Sticky clay hills:** Opposite to rocks, these climbs usually require lots of throttle and wheel spin to keep the rear tyre clean and biting, so work on the clutch to keep the plot spinning. If there are no ruts, get up on the pegs for extra grip and momentum. If the ruts are deeply formed you might need to drop into a rut, in which case second gear usually gives enough drive without too much momentum. If you have to foot, in deep ruts try doing so with a one-legged standing technique, keeping the other pressed down hard on the foot peg.

**Grassland hills:** are very slippery when wet or if the grass is long, so require good technique. Often the ground is bumpy, with steeper sections. Standing is best, using your legs as springs to even out the ground and maintain traction. You will have to use plenty of power but avoid excess wheel spin and maintain smooth drive on the shallower sections with as much weight back as you dare, but be ready to get your weight forward or back off slightly, or slip the clutch a little on the steeper pitches if necessary.

Having established that there are several different basic hill types we are better equipped to apply the right riding techniques. Of course there's no one stop answer to climbing all hills, but in future Trail Skills I will look in further detail at the techniques used to make it all the way in one go.