

An Introduction to Time Trialling and the TT Buddy System

What is it? A time trial is simply a race in which competitors are timed individually over a set distance. It originated in the late 1800's, when road racing, and road cycling in general, was in danger of being banned. There were a number of incidents where horses and pedestrians were intimidated by groups of cyclists "pedalling furiously". So, the cycling governing body at the time decided to ban road racing. In order to continue racing on roads, in secret, the time trial was invented. Time gaps at the start, meant riders set off individually, and as they were not allowed to ride close to one another they were not in groups. They had no numbers, wore dark clothing with no race or club identification, and if challenged could say they were just out on a lonely bike ride! As they finished the course, they shouted out their number to a hidden time-keeper. Time trial courses had secret codes, races took place in the early hours of the morning and all race information was kept private and confidential.

Today, the time trial remains the same. Riders still start individually, usually at one-minute intervals, and must not ride together. This is one of the principals of time trialling – you cannot give or take any form of drafting. Time trials often start in the early hours, but this is because the traffic is light rather than for secrecy reasons. Riders now tend to wear brightly coloured clothing, for safety reasons, and they have identifying race numbers – although you will still hear the occasional rider shout out their number as they pass the finish line.

Time trials are often run over set distances – such as 10-mile, 25-mile, 50-mile, etc. These tend to be on flat or flattish courses, and usually on larger roads. They are also run over non-standard distances of varying length, but usually around 15 to 30 miles. These tend to be on smaller roads with more hills, and are often referred to as "sporting courses".

All courses have a code number (a leftover from the secrecy days). Our club 10-mile course is G10/87. "G" is the area (London South), "10" is the distance and "87" is the course number. All courses have an officially measured distance, and, for safety reasons, traffic is monitored with signage and marshals at high risk points.

Time trialling in England and Wales is administered by Cycling Time Trials ([CTT](#)). You have to be a member of a CTT affiliated club, in order to compete in a time trial – Lewes Wanderers is a CTT affiliated club. However, some time trials are designated as "Come and Try" for newcomers. You don't have to be a member of a club to do one of these. Our evening-10 series is one of these and non-club members are more than welcome to come along and give it a go.

What do I need? You will need a bike in good working order. You must also have a hard-shell helmet and a rear red light. Apart from that, your usual cycling clothing is fine. As you progress you may want to invest in specialist equipment and clothing, but it's not a requirement! However, should you wish to wear a specialist skinsuit they can be ordered from the club shop which opens approximately every quarter through the year. Skinsuits should be fairly tight fitting and as its difficult to get the right size, the club has a selection of male and female skinsuits in various sizes that you can try on for size.

Where do I do it? LWCC runs a number of club time trials – called club events. There is a series of 10-mile time trials on Monday evenings from the beginning of May to the end of July. This is the evening 10-series, and most cycling clubs have something similar. The evening-10's start and finish near East Hoathly (either on the [Boship](#) or [Ringmer](#) course). We also have four circuit courses that run from late-spring to early Autumn. Two of these are run mid-week (evenings) and two on Sunday (mornings). They are roughly 17 miles in length and vary from being quite flat to quite hilly sporting courses. They start and finish near Danehill, Laughton, Ringmer and Chailey. We also run a hill climb, which is a variation on the theme of

time trialling. Except in this case it starts at the bottom of a hill and finishes at the top. We run the hill-climb in August and use Firle Beacon, which is quite short (about one mile), and really quite steep.

LWCC also runs two “open events” on behalf of the CTT. We have a 30-mile time trial and a two-person team time trial, called the Gents GP.

In addition to LWCC time trials there are many other club and open time trials in the area. LWCC is also affiliated with a number of cycling associations that also run time trials. There is no shortage of time trials. During the peak time trial season (late spring to mid-summer) it is possible to do a time trial almost every day of the week within a 25-mile radius of Lewes.

How do I do it? For the club events, no pre-registration is needed. You simply turn up, sign-on, pay a nominal entry fee and ride! When you sign-on you will be given a race number and assigned a start time. Just go to the start just before the start time. You will be told when to start and then you simply ride the course and on finishing return your number. You will be told your ride time after all the competitors have finished. The cost of club events is £5 to members.

For open events you will need to pre-register, usually at least two weeks before the race day. Registration is through the CTT website, and for the first time you will need to setup your registration details. Just enter your details and your club (you will find LWCC in a drop-down list) and you are ready. The cost of Open events ranges from about £8 to £12.

Buddy System. If you have never done a time trial before, it's worth making use of the LWCC buddy system. Just pick an evening-10 date and let the TT Secretary ([Aidan McConville](#)) know that you want a TT buddy. He has a list of experienced club TT'ers that have volunteered to be buddies. Then you just turn up at the headquarters (HQ - East Hoathly Sports Club) at about 6:15-6:30pm with £5 and your bike and your TT buddy will take over. Your TT buddy will guide you through the sign-on, help with the warmup and take you to the start. Your buddy will ride the TT course with you, from start to finish, so you won't get lost. It's up to you whether you want to ride in front or behind, and you dictate the speed you want to go. At the finish, you will be guided back to HQ to warm-down, get your ride time and join the rest of the field for a chat and refreshments. You should be finished and ready to leave by about 8:30pm.

Go on – have a go!

How do I ride it? Remember as a kid, your PE teacher saying just before a run “don't go out too fast, you will only pay for it in the end”. That sums up time trialling – a second too fast at the start will cost you two seconds at the finish. Try and ride at a fairly constant effort. If you have a heart rate monitor or power meter, it's easier to control your work rate. If not, use this rule of thumb. For the first third you should be able to hold a light conversation. For the middle third your conversation would be reduced to yes and no answers. And the final third – you can't talk! If you use this you will probably find that your work effort is quite constant throughout - you are just getting more and more tired. At the end, give it everything as you cross the finish line. This is important. The amount you can give will reflect how well you paced it and whether you need to go harder or easier next time.

Finally – why? Time trialling is called the “race of truth”. It's just you and the clock – and there is nowhere to hide. If you can ride a bike, you can do a time trial and it's entirely up to you how hard you work. It might be uncomfortable at the time, but it can be enormously rewarding at the finish, as the endorphins kick in. The endorphins explain why, in spite of the pain, there are so many smiling faces at the end.

Oddly, for an individual sport, time trialling is social. At HQ, there is plenty of nervous chat beforehand and with refreshments at the end, experiences and times are shared and compared over plans for next week. It's amazing how many newcomers say "I can't wait to do that again".

If you have a fairly good base level of fitness, but want to ride faster and longer, then it is generally recommended to do some kind of lactate threshold training each week. Doing a time trial rather than a training session is for some, a more interesting way of doing this type of training. The evening-10 series is perfect for a weekly threshold session.

And, of course a time trial gives you numbers (time, speed and if you have the equipment heart rate, cadence, power, etc). If you time trial on a regular basis, then you not only have a fantastic record of past performance but also a steady stream of data to remind you how well (or not) your training and racing is going. Some choose to share this with the world, whilst others keep it well hidden. It's your choice. Time trialling is a very personal thing and it's entirely up to you how you do it and what you do with it.