Mathematics

If school report cards are anything to go by, you could say that I am quite clearly less than a mathematical genius. My son follows the family tradition well. Getting the boy to do his homework and breakout from the family tradition is one trial I take no joy in. Personally I try two tracks. In one I say, "If you don't succeed in math, you will end up like me, condemned to a lifetime of mediocrity and cashless". This sometimes works as children are quick to see fault in parents and money is a good motivator. My second path is to point out the need for mathematics in daily life. Now teenage boys and I suspect girls too, do not see that mathematics could possibly have such daily use (*apart from spending and therefore counting the universal motivator; money*).

Luckily my boy is a keen trials rider and here I have a new angle to my mathematics tutoring. How, I say, can you approach a trials section without factoring little mathematics equations in your head? There is the angle of approach, the angle of turn in, the degrees of slope, the diameter of log, etc. So here the boy starts thinking, ah ha, yes, maybe there is something in this, even if Dad manages to make likely looking sections just as boring as the daily grind through math class.
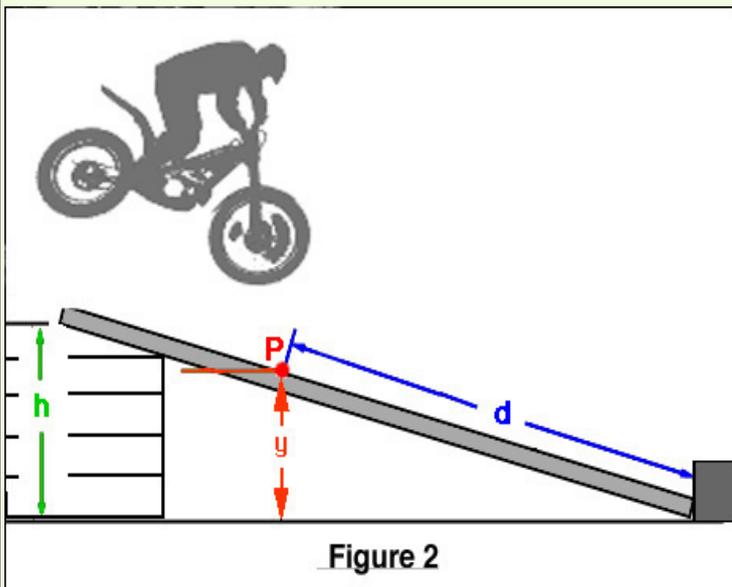

Figure 2

So on our way to a trial here's me saying, "There's twenty kilometers to go, we're traveling at 100 kilometres an hour: how many minutes until we arrive at the trial site?"

Once there, "We are mixing at 80:1, we have 10 litres of petrol: how much oil do we need?" Here's another; "We are looking for a 60/40 differential between front and rear tyre pressure, my front tyre is 8psi: what pressure do I need in the rear?" Then, "On average I need 20 kicks to get my cold twin shock started before I throw it down in a fit of rage, and when doing this on average break a lever every three trials: how many levers will Dad break in an average season of 18 meetings?"

But the mathematics tutoring doesn't stop in the pits. We walk a section, "This rock has a deflection angle of 8 degrees and in total is 2 metres tall: "what speed of approach and at what height must you punch the bike in to clear it?" Or, "When Dad falls from this rock what percentage of likelihood that he breaks another lever?" Here are some logs: "I need 13 double-blips to successfully negotiate this log section, a double-blip is really half a full blip: so thirteen divided by 2 equals what?" Or: "One double blip per log equals what fraction of half of this section?"

Nor does it end with the trial. We are now at the presentation ceremony and I say, "You have completed this trial with a *quite low* score of 26, you had one five, three threes and two twos: how many singles did you have?" And: "Dad hasn't won the twin shock class for 16 seasons: what snowballs chance does he have now?"

So you can see it's no fun being my kid. The ride home (*at 100 kilometres an hour*) is done in silence as I ponder what really is the price of mediocrity and calculate the worth of a year's supply of levers.