

HALIFAX & DISTRICT AMATEUR
RADIO SOCIETY



THE ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS GUIDE
TO CONTESTING

Max Townend : G4SDX



Introduction

Contesting polarises opinion among radio amateurs everywhere. There are many who complain about the bands being completely taken over by contest activity every weekend, especially if it's the only time they get on the radio. However, the huge worldwide popularity of contesting is unlikely to go away, and contesting does appeal to a large number of amateurs around the world.

So, perhaps we can look a little more dispassionately at the arguments, and try to seek out the benefits of contesting and what it can do for us. To do that, we need to look at another mode that divides opinion, but is also hugely popular – that of FT8. With FT8, there is a stylised, standardised, and very brief exchange of information. No personal details are exchanged other than Callsign, Signal Report and 73. It is a way of working incredible distances, very quickly, and to reach rare DX without ever speaking to anyone – the mic-shy (or key-shy) operators out there will appreciate that, and there are more of them than you think!

Now consider a contest – each and every attribute described above for digital modes holds true for contesting. If you don't think FT8 is for you, then you can achieve (almost) the same end in a DX contest, by using any other mode you like. Name your mode and there will be a contest somewhere dedicated to it – some modes arose purely to support, or were driven by contesting.

Let's look at some of the advantages of contesting to those amateurs who will never ever win one, or even come close (most of us). For this, I am deliberately leaving out (for the moment) what are called 'Sprint' and cumulative contests – these are somewhat specialist events, but are included later..

- It's something to do at the weekend when contest activity peaks – if you can't beat them, then joining them is one option!
- During large international contests, the DX will be out in force and desperate for your call – DX for you is also DX for them, and those bonus distance-multiplier points really count.
- Contests create activity on bands where few stations are normally found (the RSGB actually call them 'Activity Contests') – if you think a band or mode is dead or underused, just wait until a contest takes place and see the difference. People who think that VHF/UHF only a local mode, may be surprised at how far 10W SSB will reach provided there is activity on the band.
- Whatever you finally score, the aim is simply to gradually improve your personal best in subsequent contests. This might be by improving your logging skills, gaining a better understanding of propagation, building a better antenna, or moving to a better temporary location
- There will usually be an E-certificate awarded in big contests, no matter where you end up in the final scoreboard.
- There is something about actually taking part in a contest that is both addictive and adrenalin driven. You have to try it, and experience the buzz, to fully appreciate it – which is mainly why this guide has been written.
- More localised contests, especially those organised by the RSGB on the VHF/UHF/SHF bands, can bring another aspect and interest to the hobby, especially if advantage is taken to work portable on high ground (of which West Yorkshire is well provided)

So, what is a Contest? The simple answer is that it's a just race to get as many confirmed contacts as possible, in the time period allowed. The complicated answer will take the next few pages to explain. Basically, it's a test of operating skills, which involves getting the very best out of you, and your station. Each contest usually has a number of layers, or tiers, that allow operators with varying power, experience, time, and skill, to compete amongst others with similar circumstances. It is rarely a single winner takes all situation.

There are basically two kinds of operator in a contest – those that ‘RUN’ (that is, to continually call CQ and ‘own’ the frequency), and others that operate as ‘chasers’, called ‘SEARCH & POUNCE’ (S&P), who scan the bands to pounce on Run stations as fast as they can.

A ‘RUN’ Station is likely to be big enough, experienced enough, and well equipped enough, to hold a frequency for the duration of the contest, against stiff competition from other ‘Run’ stations. ‘Running’ can be exhilarating but also exhausting, so is best left for a time when you have more experience. A Run station will be the target of many S&P operators (who make up the vast majority of contesters). So, being able to pick out one station from several stations all calling at once, or stack them into a holding pattern while you work them, is real skill. This is less true of contests on bands where activity is generally lower, such as the VHF/UHF bands. These contests tend to be far more relaxed affairs, and there is usually plenty of room to either Run, or S&P.

You will also need to keep accurate logs of all the stations you work, often by using dedicated logging software, running on a computer connected to the radio. If you consider that a reasonably good Run station will work at least two to three QSO’s per minute in a big HF contest, you have to be fast on your toes, and fingers, and leave nothing to memory.

Search & Pounce is still exhilarating, but can be managed at your own pace. You pick who to call, when you are ready, and have time to log the contact, then to retune to find another. Scores are naturally a lot lower than if you Run, but as you are mainly competing against yourself, or a small group of others who more or less match your own skills, that is all that matters. A QSO rate of one every two to three minutes is not an unrealistic goal for a beginner operating in S&P mode.

There are a number of things anyone wanting to enter a contest for the first time needs to do before entering, and you may find it helpful (in the long run) to do these in the order set out here.

1. Decide how you will log your contacts and send in the results.

This may seem a bit back to front, but if you get this right and become familiar with the process of generating an electronic entry log, everything else will fall into place.

Most contests (although not all) require a specific type of electronically generated text file template to be used for your entry. This needs to be emailed to the contest organiser, within the time limit set out in the rules of the contest. The text file template is called a ‘Cabrillo’ log file, and it will be structured in a way that allows it to be read and scored by a robotic ‘e-reader’ system.

The Cabrillo file is usually generated for you by one of the free contest logging software packages available on line. For example, N1MM+ for Windows, or MacloggerDX (or RUMlogNG) for Mac OS systems. Downloading and learning how the basic controls work on a contest logging package, is probably the first thing a beginner needs to do, if they want to make the process as easy as possible for themselves. If we take N1MM+ as an example, it is also a first class electronic QSO logging system in its own right, so why not simply try it in place of (or alongside) your current paper log while you learn?

Most contest loggers work best if they have some degree of CAT control over the radio, as this allows some of the more advanced features to work to their best capabilities. CAT control needs only a USB cable from your PC to your radio (assuming it has a USB port), and a few basic setting changes in the radio menu system, to establish communication between the two. Help can be obtained through the club if you are unsure how this works on your specific radio. If CAT control is not used, the program will work just as well without it, but you may need to check, or manually enter the frequency data in the log file.

A Cabrillo log can be viewed and edited with any text file editor, but the formatting of the file (header, labels, columns, or rows) must not be changed. An example of a Cabrillo text file is shown below:

```
G4SDX RSGB CC CW 04 July 2022 - Notepad
File Edit Format View Help
START-OF-LOG: 3.0
LOCATION: DX
CALLSIGN: G4SDX
CLUB: Halifax & District Amateur Radio Society
CONTEST: RSGB-80M-CC
CATEGORY-OPERATOR: SINGLE-OP
CATEGORY-ASSISTED: NON-ASSISTED
CATEGORY-BAND: 80M
CATEGORY-MODE: CW
CATEGORY-POWER: HIGH
CATEGORY-STATION: FIXED
CATEGORY-TRANSMITTER: ONE
CLAIMED-SCORE: 53
OPERATORS: G4SDX
NAME: Max Townend
ADDRESS:
ADDRESS: Hove Edge
ADDRESS-CITY: Brighouse
ADDRESS-STATE-PROVINCE: W YORKS
ADDRESS-POSTALCODE: HD6 2RU
ADDRESS-COUNTRY: England
GRID-LOCATOR: IO93CR
EMAIL: george.townend@btinternet.com
CREATED-BY: N1MM Logger+ 1.0.9600.0
QSO: 3539 CW 2022-07-04 1901 G4SDX 599 001 G4FAD 599 004
QSO: 3539 CW 2022-07-04 1902 G4SDX 599 002 MW2I 599 006
QSO: 3541 CW 2022-07-04 1903 G4SDX 599 003 M0MUI 599 006
QSO: 3542 CW 2022-07-04 1904 G4SDX 599 004 M6O 599 005
QSO: 3548 CW 2022-07-04 1906 G4SDX 599 005 G0KPE 599 011
QSO: 3553 CW 2022-07-04 1907 G4SDX 599 006 G6XX 599 011
QSO: 3522 CW 2022-07-04 1909 G4SDX 599 007 G0ORY 599 014
QSO: 3523 CW 2022-07-04 1911 G4SDX 599 008 G3PHO 599 020
QSO: 3524 CW 2022-07-04 1913 G4SDX 599 009 G3RWF 599 024
```

Not all contests require (or accept) a Cabrillo log file – but those that don't are now increasingly rare. For some RSGB contests (VHF/UHF) there is a web-based log transcription service provided, where you can manually enter each line of the entry log from paper records. This is less of an issue on VHF/UHF contests due to the lower activity levels, but it is an error prone system, and impractical for larger contests on HF. Other contest organisers might offer an Excel spreadsheet to manually record your contacts (Practical Wireless VHF QRP Contest, for example)

A slightly different system is used to generate the contest log when using WSJT-X modes, but this will not be covered in detail in this primer.

2. Read the rules for the contest – Ignore them at your peril

While most contests follow roughly the same format in terms of the exchange of information, it is essential to read the rules provided by the contest organiser very carefully. The best way to pick a contest and access the rules is via one of the 'Contest Calendar' websites. My own preference is the PG7V 'Cqcontest' website, but some prefer the WA7BNM site for its level of detail, or the contests organised and published by the RSGB Contest Committee. The rules tell you everything from the time and date to the frequency limits, operating modes, and exchanges for the contest entry.

3. Understand what is required for the contest exchange

The contest exchange (usually*) consists of a 'perfect' signal report (which is actually redundant information), followed by the key information unique to that contact. This is usually a 'Serial Number' which (for everyone) starts at 001 and increments upwards by one single digit for each new contact. Signal reports are either '59' for voice contacts or '599' for CW/Data contacts. Most contest logging software will insert the perfect signal report for you as you begin a new contact line in the log.

However, it is important to read the contest rules on the exchange – some will require your Locator Square, some your CQ Zone, some your IOTA reference, or even your age. Be sure to know what is being required by the other station.

**Note: Some VHF/UHF contests encourage 'accurate' signal reports, but this is not universally followed*

4. Decide which section or class within the contest you want to enter

Not everyone who takes part in a big contest will want to stay awake for 24 hours, or have the time, (or stamina) to operate for the full duration. Likewise, they may not have the equipment, or power, to compete at the top level with organised contest groups, on all the bands allowed in the contest. This is where the various 'Classes' or 'Sections' of entry can help you. Classes/Sections of entry will usually contain one or more of the following entry options:

- QRP or Low Power/Medium Power operation
- Choice of operation from Fixed or Portable locations
- Multi-Band, Restricted-Bands, or Single-Band entry
- Assisted or Unassisted operation – for example the use of DX clusters for spotting would count as Assisted. However, read the rules carefully on this one, as it can include CW decoding software, used to identify callsigns by means other than skill and purely audible copy.
- Single operator, or multi-operator stations, or limited operating times for those who want it.

VHF/UHF Contest Spectrum

By far the best way into VHF/UHF, or even SHF (microwave) contesting, is to try your hand at one of the RSGB VHF AFS (Affiliated Society) contest series. The easiest is the FMAC (acronym for FM-Activity Contest) since most amateurs with VHF/UHF equipment have FM capability, and have access to omnidirectional vertical polarisation antennas. These cumulative contests are open to members of any RSGB affiliated society (such as HADARS) and typically, with one or two exceptions, run each month throughout the year, on a set recurring weekday evening.

The scoring is a little complex, but is all explained in the rules published by the RSGB VHF Contest Committee. Scores are grouped by Operator and by Club – All scores from every event you enter go towards the cumulative Club score, but only your eight best scores go through to the individual league results.

The analogue mode contest series are as follows:

Series	Frequency Limits	Comments
144MHz FMAC	144.5125 MHz - 144.7875 MHz and 145.200 MHz - 145.400 MHz	12.5KHz FM Deviation, Vertical Polarisation most common.
432MHz FMAC	432.525 MHz . 432.975 MHz and 433.400 MHz . 433.475 MHz	25KHz FM Deviation, Vertical Polarisation most common
144MHz UKAC	Depending on mode – see rules on RSGB Website	All modes: SSB, CW, FM, AM, JT6M, ISCAT and FSK441.
432MHz UKAC	Depending on mode – see rules on RSGB Website	All modes: SSB, CW, FM, AM, JT6M, ISCAT and FSK441.
70MHz UKAC	Depending on mode – see rules on RSGB Website	All modes: SSB, CW, FM, AM, JT6M, ISCAT and FSK441
50MHz UKAC	Depending on mode – see rules on RSGB Website	All modes: SSB, CW, FM, AM, JT6M, ISCAT and FSK441

The dates and times of all the RSGB contests are published on the Contest committee pages of the RSGB main website.

For Digital Mode enthusiasts (Machine Generated Messaging - MGM in RSGB jargon), there are FT8 contests each month on 144MHz and 432MHz.

Series	Frequency Limits	Comments
144MHz UKAC FT8	See MGM Centre of Activity	2 hour and 4 hour operating sessions combined in the same contest.
432MHz UKAC FT8	See MGM Centre of Activity	2 hour and 4 hour operating sessions combined in the same contest.

Logging on VHF/UHF

By far the easiest way to create and enter a VHF contest log, and keep track of your scores, serial numbers, and locator squares, is by using a simple, free-to-download, contest logging package. The RSGB recommend 'Minos' from Sourceforge (the FLDigi people) for VHF/UHF contests, as it is purpose built for UK VHF/UHF contests, and is configured to collect different information from the more usual HF contest loggers, such as N1MM+. You will find that N1MM+ will work just fine for these contests, but requires an additional download for the RSGB VHF/UHF series, which is copied into the 'User Defined Contest' directory. The setup screen for 'Minos' is shown below:

The screenshot shows the 'Details of Contest Entry' window in the Minos software. The window title is 'Details of Contest Entry - C:/Minos/Logs/C210423A.minos'. The interface includes several sections for configuring a contest entry:

- Calendar and Entry:** 'VHF Calendar' and 'uwave Calendar' buttons, an 'Entry' dropdown menu set to '<None>', and an 'Edit' button.
- Station and QTH:** 'Station' dropdown set to '<None>', 'QTH' dropdown set to '<None>', and 'Edit' buttons.
- Contest Information:** 'Contest Name' text field, 'Band' dropdown set to '50 MHz', 'Section' dropdown, and checkboxes for 'Protected' and 'Age Protected'.
- Exchange and Power:** 'Callsign as sent', 'Locator as sent', 'Exchange as sent (Postcode, QTH, etc)', and 'Power' text fields.
- Dates and Modes:** 'Start Date' and 'End Date' dropdowns set to '21/04/2023', 'Start Time' and 'End Time' dropdowns set to '00:00 UTC', 'Main Op' dropdown set to '1', 'Second Op' dropdown, and 'Current Mode' dropdown set to 'USB'.
- Radio and Antenna:** 'Radio Name' and 'Antenna Name' dropdowns, and 'Screen Layout' dropdown set to 'default'.
- Scoring:** Radio buttons for 'Commenced Kilometer' (selected) and 'Point per QSO'. A checkbox for 'RSGB MGM Contest Rules' with the note 'Score between 4 fig loc centres'.
- Bonus Scheme:** A dropdown menu set to 'None'.
- Locator Length:** Checkboxes for 'Allow 4 char Locators' and 'Allow 8 char Locators'.
- Mandatory QSO Fields:** Checkboxes for 'RS(T)', 'Serial', and 'Locator', all of which are checked.
- Multipliers and Exchange:** Checkboxes for 'DXCC Multiplier' and 'Locator Multiplier', and a dropdown for 'No Exchange Required'.
- Antenna Offset:** A text field set to '0'.
- Buttons:** 'OK', 'Entry Details', and 'Cancel' buttons at the bottom.

More on 'The Exchange'

For international contests, there are two main 'Zones' that you may need to know (and keep handy) in the UK. Some contests (such as CQWW) do not require a Serial Number, but ask instead for your 'CQ Zone'. The UK Falls within **CQ Zone 14**.

Alternatively, you may need to know your ITU Zone – This is typically used for IARU Contests such as the IARU HF Championships. The UK is in **ITU Zone 27**.

Islands on the Air (IOTA) have their own numbering system and mainland UK is identified as **EU-005**

For contests where distance is calculated for the points score (usually VHF/UHF), the 6 character 'Maidenhead Locator' or just 'Locator Square' is of vital importance. For example, Brighthouse is within **IO93CR** square. You can find this by using one of the many locator square websites, either by using your postcode, or zooming in on a world map to pinpoint your position (very useful when in open country working portable).

To add to the complication if you are one of the increasingly rare CW operators, these Zone Numbers are sometimes sent as **Cut Numbers** for the sake of speed, for example '9' (----.) is sent as the letter 'N' (-.), the number 0 (-----) is shortened to 'T' (-), Number 1 (-----) is sent as 'A' (-.), Number 2 (..---) as the letter 'U' (.-), etc. While it is unusual to hear the full range of Cut Numbers other than '0' and '9', they are common in contests such as CQWW.

Every contest has its quirks, and some of the more local contests may ask for anything, from your Postcode prefix (for example HD or HX), your Age, the year you were first licensed, and many others – this emphasises the importance of reading the rules and making sure your logging software can accept that information.

The Beginners 'Top Ten' Recommendations For Better Contesting

1. Install and become familiar with a computerised logging programme. Where possible enable CAT command of the radio via a USB connection, and learn how to generate the Cabrillo log file (usually just a mouse click from a menu selection).
2. Practice with your radio in a busy, strong signal environment (listen in on several big contests). Learn how to use your Width, Shift, Notch, and Contour filters (where fitted). Learn how to optimise the noise blanker and/or digital signal processing systems to improve the selectivity and legibility of the signal being received.
3. Learn how to make the best use of the microphone equalisation and gain settings, and use the speech compressor to add punch to your audio without adding distortion, or splatter. Ask for audio quality reports from a local station if possible, and spend a little time fine tuning the audio for maximum legibility, not necessarily audio quality.
4. Use a pair of headphones during the contest – they make a huge difference in difficult or weak signal conditions. As you progress into contesting, consider a headphone/boom mic combination with a foot switch PTT, or a remote button PTT. This allows you to transmit hands-free, in order log and/or use the PC keyboard and mouse more easily.
5. If you are logging manually on paper, keep a cheap digital clock in the shack set to UTC. All contests are logged in UTC no matter which time zone they are operating from. If logging on a PC, double check the accuracy of the system clock before starting the contest – you may lose points if your clock is slow, or fast, at the beginning or end of the contest.

6. Have a paper log sheet prepared in case of computer issues, or simply if that is how you prefer to log your contacts. A simple table made up as a Word document is ideal for this, and can be customised to your own needs. Remember to make the paper log template as easy to use as possible – if you are operating Search & Pounce, you will log the Run station details first, followed by your return report and exchange. A table set out in this order will help you avoid transcription mistakes. Note – The first column of your table should record the time in UTC, and the second column the Frequency of the station worked (to the nearest KHz). The frequency can be important if the contest rules specify frequency limits allowed in the contest, or if they allow working the same station on different bands.
7. Make sure you have all the information required for the exchange clearly visible to you as you operate. This is less of an issue when operating from home, but essential when out portable.
8. Try your hand at a short duration, daytime UK based contest first – the RSGB contest calendar offers many choices for first time testers. Always listen in on several contests before having a go yourself. You will learn a lot about the protocols, exchanges, error correction requests, and much more. Don't just jump in and hope for the best unless you are supremely confident (and maybe not even then!).
9. If you are anxious about submitting your first log as an actual entry (and you really shouldn't be), then you usually have the choice of entering it as a 'Checklog'. A checklog helps the contest adjudicators verify your callsign as a valid contact, for those stations you have made contact with. If you are just dipping your toe in the contest pool, then simply 'giving away a few points' may be an option for you – if you do this without submitting a check log, then remember to work at least ten or more stations in the contest, so your callsign appears independently on as many competitors logs as possible – in this way you are playing fair to the competitors, and will avoid them being penalised for a rejected, or unverifiable contact.
10. Use slow, universally recognised phonetics (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc.) when giving out information, especially your callsign and locator. In difficult conditions, place emphasis on each phonetic (e.g. EXX-RAAY, DELL-TAA, etc.). Sometimes, if you are having difficulty with the other station copying you accurately, try changing the phonetic to help the other station copy your call – to replacing 'Sierra' with something like 'Sugar', or 'Golf' with 'Germany', to help the other station pick you out of the noise.

A Typical SSB or FM Voice Exchange – Start to Finish

You tune on to a station calling 'CQ Contest' (or CQ TEST if using CW). They give their Call as M2G which will immediately seem odd, if you haven't worked a contest before. This is a special short 'Contest Call' granted by Ofcom through a Notice of Variation (NoV) to their own license, or to a club, or contest group. This callsign may only be valid for the exact time duration of the contest, and it is not unusual to hear the same station using their own personal callsign on the frequency, right up to the start time. I will call the station using my own callsign G4SDX.

"CQ Contest M2G, Mike-Two-Golf, Contest"

"Golf-Four-Sierra-Delta-Xray" (Note - only call once and do not waste time repeating his call)

"Golf-Four-Sierra-Delta-Xray, Five Nine - Zero One Two" (012 indicating I am his 12th contact)

"Thank you for Number 12, you are Five Nine – Zero Zero One, QSL?" (001 indicating he is my first contact)

"Roger, Roger, 73 and Good Luck in the Contest – QRZ? this is Mike-Two-Golf"

That is the entirety of a voice contest exchange where only the serial number is required in the exchange. Remember to log your contact carefully with time, frequency (often forgotten in the heat of the moment), callsign, reports and numbers.

Error Correction

The most common error is not copying the exchange correctly, or at all, due to strong QRM. If this happens, the word used is **“AGAIN”**. A typical missed exchange would go something like this:

“Mike-Two-Golf, you are 59, Zero-One-Two, QSL?”

“Sorry, My Number AGAIN, AGAIN please?”

“Mike-Two-Golf, Your Number Zero-One-Two, Zero-One-Two, Number 12, QSL?”

“Roger, Roger, QSL Number 12”

The second most common error is for the Run station to be called simultaneously by two or more stations, and only get a fragment of your callsign. It is standard contest courtesy to listen very carefully if the other station asks for a repeat of a partial call, and **ONLY** reply again if you are sure the fragmented call is yours. This is not foolproof, but avoids obvious conflicts.

Tricks of the Trade

At the beginning of a contest, the strongest ‘Run’ stations will get the most attention first. Often in local UK contests, it will be friends and fellow club members who will be waiting to call in, to give him/her a boost. It can be wise to avoid the obvious first choices and go for one of the weaker stations away from the upper or lower band edges, until the first flush of ‘easy pickings’ has died down.

A lots of S&P stations will try to operate in a very logical manner – they will start at one end of the contest bandwidth, and either work from bottom up, or top down, through the spread of stations on the band. This results in the band edges initially being much busier than the middle. It can pay dividends finding a station somewhere in the middle, and noting the frequency you are starting from. You can then work up or down depending on your choice.

Don’t assume a strong Run station will stay in one place – a good contest station will be watching their QSO rate and will move if it drops below a productive level. Always check the callsign is who you think it is, if you’ve already worked someone on that frequency (a contest logger like N1MM+ will prompt you who’s callsign was there before if you have CAT control enabled).

A strong Run station who suddenly moves frequency, or switches to S&P can leave a convenient hole in the band for you to fill, if you feel brave enough to try Running. This often happens in the last 15 to 20 minutes of a short contest.

Don’t get bogged down trying to bust a pile up in a short duration contest. If you have no luck after two calls, note the frequency and callsign, and move on – you can always come back later when the heat has gone out of the contest.

‘Tail-Ending’ can be a useful tool to crack a pile up, since the Run station will normally only hear noise from three or four overlapping stations all calling together as soon as he drops carrier. Sometimes the strongest station will win, but the smart contester waits a few seconds then drops his or her call in at the tail end – sometimes that last call is the one heard clearly, and the one that gets you the contact. With this trick timing is everything, but it’s just practice, and all is fair in love and war!

Sprint Contests

A 'Sprint' contest is a rather unusual format that aims to level the playing field between powerful 'Run' stations, and the Search and Pounce competitors. In a sprint, a station may call 'CQ contest' on a frequency, until such time as they have a confirmed contact. After successfully completing the exchange, the 'CQ' station must move frequency, which then becomes owned by the station that called them. In this way a spot frequency is passed round many hands during the contest, and it becomes a giant game of 'Tag', with the big stations unable to dominate a fixed frequency.

Cumulative Contests

Cumulative, as the name suggests, are a series of mini-contests where the scores for each round are added together, over a much longer period – six months or a year are common periods for cumulative contests. They are aimed at regular competitors, often 'team' events among dedicated contest groups or clubs.

Cumulative contests are great for club events, as even relatively modest scores from beginners, or those with limited station capability, all count towards the final team score. It is often team spirit that makes all the difference, rather than being an individual 'Top Gun' in the QSO scores.

And Finally....

Like any mode or activity that polarises opinion, the strongest opposition often comes from those who have not tried it, and will not try it on principle. For some, contesting has ruined the hobby and taken over the bands, and there is certainly some truth to that, as with all such things. However, the fault often lies with some of the contest organisers who (unlike the RSGB) do not set band limits for contest activity.

Needless to say, trying to stop contesting is like King Canute trying to turn back the tide – it is with us and here to stay, so it would be reasonable to ask why it creates much interest. To do that means trying it, and experiencing it – just like FT8, or any other mode for that matter!

A simple VHF contest, operated from high ground, is an eye opener as to what is possible with very modest equipment. A worldwide HF DX contest like CQWW, is a window into another world, in terms of what your station can actually do, in what the military describe as a "Target Rich Environment".

Every amateur should have a go at one contest in their life, just for the experience, and perhaps this guide might give you the push to try it. You can be assured of full and continued support through the Club if you do.

For further details and a full glossary of contest terminology, the following site is highly recommended.

[Amateur Radio Contesting FAQ \(qsl.net\)](http://qsl.net)