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foxmikehotel.com/challenge

Portable Operations Challenge

FoxMikeHotel Portable Operations Challenge-User Guide from Ed DD5LP

*“The POC is a challenge for the
contester and non-contester alike.”*

This document is UNASHAMEDLY aimed at the “Non-Contesters” among participants in the P.O.C. I am a member of the P.O.C. steering committee but this is **my personal opinion and advice**. Experienced contesters will have different approaches to operating – which is fine. As long as everyone has fun, I don’t believe in the “all MUST operate in the same way” edict.

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What is the P.O.C.

The *FoxMikeHotel – Portable Operations Challenge* as the name says is a portable operations challenge and its aim is defined as providing as level a playing field as possible between portable and home stations - using the golfing "handicapping" analogy.

I see the P.O.C. as being much more than that though - I call it the *"Thinkers contest"*.

It’s different.

While it has scoring based on distance per watt, how far away a contact is matters but how much power you use to make the contact also matters - something we have taken from VHF contests. It’s no longer JUST a matter of getting the maximum number of contacts in the time available.

As your licence says, you should only use as much power as is needed to make the contact - and you will get more points for doing that!

The fact that we allow the contestant to choose which and how many of the sprints to take part in also is part of the *the "thinking contester"* challenge as he or she will need to consider radio conditions and atmospheric effects like grey line propagation to get the most long-distance contacts. The contester or contesting group have to do their homework before the contest starts We don't require pre-registration for the sprints, simply take part and send in your log.

Still need a challenge?

Do you operate portable or from your home station? As it's easier to operate from your existing home station, the handicapping gives less points for a contact from a home station than from a portable one. (Home to portable also scores more than home to home, but the highest scoring is portable to portable). Going portable has other advantages like a quieter band away from electrical noise but of course it is a logistical exercise and normally temporary portable antennas are a compromise when compared to home station ones.

Now you need to consider which mode or modes to use. We know that longer distance contacts are easier to get when using Digital data modes, then CW and lastly phone. This is handicapped in the scoring giving more points to the phone contacts - which generally will be of a shorter distance than the other two modes. But what if there is a busy band with DX on all modes? Using for example Digital will get the longest distance at the lowest power but (FT8 for example – allowed in 2021 as we have removed the need for a serial number) takes up to a minute per contact in which time one could perhaps make 5 CW contacts or 3 SSB contacts - what is the option that will bring the most points? It depends This is a real challenge.

How many transmitters do you have running at the same time? This year there is no maximum but higher multipliers apply to stations using lower numbers of transmitters (see the 2021 rules document for full details). Consider how many transmitters you would be best running concurrently to maximise your score despite the handicap.

Staffing – we make no change to the handicapping depending upon how many people are operating the one call sign (where legal to do so). A group working portable provides extra support during set-up and pull-down as well as during the contest sprint(s). Why not include some non-licensed people in the group, for them to help with the tasks that don't need a licence and to see what this amateur radio "thing" is all about? Who knows, you may attract some more people into the hobby.

Don't forget the awards that can be won. See the website for details.

A lot of this contest will be about planning ahead of the day and then executing that plan well.

CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC CQ POC

How to do well in the FoxMikeHotel - Portable Operations Challenge?

As the name suggests this is a contest that is angled towards portable operation but home stations can still win it. Whether portable or home based, the following points will help you be competitive:

1. If you can, get out portable, as well as giving you a better chance through the handicapping it will also be more enjoyable, you will hear more and tests your gear out for emergency operations if you ever need it.

2. Choose whether you wish to compete in one, two or all three of the 4-hour "Sprints". Each one is a contest in its own right but the overall "champion" comes from a combination of the scores from all three events. Look at which band(s) you are best equipped for and what time of day is best for that band from a propagation point of view, then chose which sprint (or sprints) you will enter. Your choice will affect how many contacts you can make and how distant they are. Would grey-line operation be possible? Which bands have been performing well in the days before the contest?

3. Use as little power as you can to make a contact!

Maximum distance at the least power on SSB gets the most points, followed by CW and then digital. Make sure you record the power used for the contact, correctly in the log.

4. Use the best antenna that you can, this will help by adding gain on both receive and transmit. Remember a simple dipole might be a better receive antenna when installed well away from populated places, when compared to a tri-bander beam in a town.

5. Scouting for the best site: Put in the time to check for noise sources before the contest. There's little point finding a lovely portable location if when you set up there the bands are wiped out by QRM from some local building or communications installation. Check out multiple locations in the weeks prior to the contest so that should one site not be accessible on the day, you have an alternative. What about weather - is one site open to high winds and rain while another is more sheltered - if working portable it's always good to have alternatives available.

6. Would you like to form a group or team to go out portable? It brings the advantage of support both when putting the station up and during the contest. The group may be a mixture of hams and non-hams – who knows those non-hams may take a liking to what they see while log keeping or brewing the tea! Scoring in the POC is same whether an entry is one person or a group. If you do forma a group (portable or home) please apply all relevant distancing and hygiene rules for COVID - also common-sense actions e.g. don't share headsets. A fresh voice on the microphone or hand on the key can improve the contact rate over the 3 x 4 hours. Splitting operating and logging duties reduces stress.

7. Spotting on the DX clusters. Make sure you have some way of accessing the Internet (not straight forward from some portable sites) so that you can Self-Spot (allowed in the 2021 POC) and look for other stations taking part in the POC. Following SOTA standards, I would include my Maidenhead locator in the sport. I Would also prefix the text with POC to make it obvious what contest I am in, so a Spot might be: Spotter: DD5LP DX: DD5LP/P Freq: 14285 kHz Info: POC IO68 .

CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC

Example exchange in this challenge.

This is for those who don't want yet to operate "contest-style" – just to operate in a way similar to what you are used to and are comfortable with. If you wish to learn the much briefer exchanges used by experienced testers, you will no doubt hear that during this challenge and these operating procedures are documented in contest training information on the web.

For now, let's just have some fun!

FREQUENCIES TO BE USED:

In IARU Region 1 (Europe), the following frequencies are the "preferred" contest parts of the bands where defined – please check your local IARU and national band plans.

80m: CW 3510-3560 SSB 3600-3650, 3700-3775, 3775-3800 (intercontinental).

40m: CW none defined. SSB 7060-7100, 7130-7175, 7175-7200 (intercontinental).

20m: CW 14000-14060 SSB 14125-14300

15m: No preferred frequencies for Contest operation in any mode defined.

10m: No preferred frequencies for Contest operation in any mode defined.

DATA TO BE EXCHANGED:

Information you need to provide to the station you are working:

Your call sign (legal requirement – if portable WITH the perhaps in your country optional /P) plus your 4-character Maidenhead locator.

Information you need to receive and log from the station you are working:

Their call sign including any extension such as /P, /M etc. and their 4-character Maidenhead locator.

One example of a QSO is shown below however this can be shortened or lengthened as long as the required information is exchanged:

- CQ CQ CQ POC this is K4FMH listening.
- (sound of pile-up)
- DD5LP/P
- DD5LP/P go ahead
- K4FMH this is DD5LP/P JN58 – QSL?
- DD5LP/P from K4FMH QSL, 73 from EM42, QRZ POC

If the station worked is not in the POC contest you need to ask for his or her 4-character Maidenhead code, otherwise no points can be allocated for the contact.

CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC

Logistics?

OK, you're interested and want to give it a go at least for one of the sprints. Do you have to enter and send a log in?

Well first of all, good that you are interested. As I said before there's no registration needed, so when you are ready to start taking part set up your rig and off you go. Yes, you could just give out points and not even send in a log, but I would ask you to do so as the more logs we get, even if they only have a few contacts in them, help us make the POC better and fairer for everybody, next year.

Unfortunately, we cannot process paper log sheets or documents of any kind, we do need to have the log (the list of all of your contacts) sent in via email as a file in a standard layout called Cabrillo.

Don't stop reading – you don't have to worry about getting your information all laid out correctly, that is what logging programs on the computer do for you. While experienced testers may use N1MM+ and other programs, for newcomers we have a very friendly and simple contest logging program called VK Contest Logger (VKCL for short). It's the de-facto logging program for Australian contests, although it covers lots of International ones as well and its author, Mike VK3AVV (one of the team preparing the POC) has kindly added in the POC as one of the contests that it supports.

So go to www.mnds.com.au/vkcl/ to download this (free) program and (optionally) if you want the convenience of automatically getting the band in use from your rig and you already have your PC connected to your rig, then also download OmniRig from: dxatlas.com/OmniRig/ (it is also free). Full details on how to install and configure both of these are on their respective sites (it's easy). If you are using the latest version of Windows 10, you will need to set the tick-mark against "run as Administrator" in the properties of VKCL before OmniRig can start. If you don't have your computer and rig connected together this isn't needed – just install VKCL and follow the instructions on how to configure it and you will end up with a program that looks like this:

The information that you will enter during the challenge are just two boxes – Callsign and grid square. All the rest of the information on the screen is just to help you see how things are going. There are lots of useful features in VKCL that you can read up about but you don't HAVE to use them. It's a nice simple program with a built-in help system.

Once the sprint is over VKCL will tell you or if you decide to end early, you can tell the program to create that Cabrillo file that we need you to email to Frank (FMHPOC@gmail.com).

If you are interested, you can look at the file – there is nothing hidden in it and here is an example of what one might look like (this is not real data – check the rules document for the exact format):

```
START-OF-LOG: 3.0
CONTEST: POC
CATEGORY-TRANSMITTER: ONE
CALLSIGN: DD5LP/P

NAME: Ed Durrant

ADDRESS: ABC Strasse 27A
ADDRESS-CITY: Pasting
ADDRESS-POSTALCODE: 86999
ADDRESS-COUNTRY: GERMANY
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GRID-LOCATOR: JN58

EMAIL: dd5lp@arrl.net

SOAPBOX:

CREATED-BY: VK3AVV VK Contest Log (Ver X.XX) on 2021-09-05 04:03
 QSO: 7000 PH 2021-09-05 0139 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3AUQ QF22 20
 QSO: 7000 PH 2021-09-05 0151 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3ZH QF22 70
 QSO: 7000 PH 2021-09-05 0242 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3BNR/P QF22 10
 QSO: 21000 PH 2021-09-05 0245 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3FS QF21 10
 QSO: 14000 PH 2021-09-05 0248 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3MB QF22 10
 QSO: 21000 PH 2021-09-05 0259 DD5LP/P JN58 PD3EM JO21 15
 QSO: 3500 PH 2021-09-05 0312 DD5LP/P JN58 K3LR EN91 15
 QSO: 7000 PH 2021-09-05 0342 DD5LP/P JN58 VK3BNT/P QF22 15
 QSO: 28000 PH 2021-09-05 0345 DD5LP/P JN58 DL5MCC JN58 15
 QSO: 14000 PH 2021-09-05 0355 DD5LP/P JN58 HB9LU JN47 15
 QSO: 7000 PH 2021-09-05 0358 DD5LP/P JN58 KD2GUT FN30 15
 END-OF-LOG:

So that's my guide. Of course, it's not complete. I'm not going to tell you how to do everything – learning as you go is half the fun!

Reference data links on the Internet.

To check you don't operate outside of the Contesting parts of the HF bands:

ITU radio regulations (these apply to ALL radio operators in all countries):

<https://www.itu.int/myitu/-/media/Publications/2020-Publications/PDF---EN---Radio-Regulations-2020.zip>

IARU Band Plans: <https://www.iaru.org/on-the-air/band-plans/>

DARC Band Plans: <https://www.darc.de/der-club/referate/vus/bandplaene/>

RSGB Band Plans: <https://rsgb.org/main/operating/band-plans/>

ARRL Band Plans: <http://www.arrl.org/band-plan>

WIA Band Plans:

<https://www.wia.org.au/members/bandplans/data/documents/Australian%20Band%20Plans%20100404.pdf>

Want to learn more about contesting?

ARRL Contesting guidelines document: http://www.arrl.org/files/file/Contest%20-%20General/HFContestingGuidlines_201411.pdf

Contest and DX operating standards:

DX Code of Conduct: <https://www.iaru-r1.org/on-the-air/spectrum-abuse/dx-code-of-conduct/>

Contesting code of ethics: <https://wwrof.org/contester-code-of-ethics/>

CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC CQ-POC

Errors and Omissions excepted.