June 2009 VHF QSO Party


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Much of the feedback from the participants was extremely positive. The newcomers to VHF contesting were absolutely amazed at the 6 meter grid multiplier over 40 states. Guests and visitors to rovers and portable stations were impressed with the contesting efforts and enthusiasm of the participants.

Make no mistake about it — when it comes to the excitement of contesting and the growth of scores over the past two decades, rovers of every category have been the most controversial and contributory group. The joy of contesting from several coastal or mountaintop locations in the same weekend is enjoyed by a large contingent of score-submitting rovers, as well as the somewhat lesser-documented activities of the “captive” rovers that support a single station.

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The first thing I notice when looking at the scores after ARRL computer checking is the number of logs submitted, in order to gauge the participation compared to previous years. This year saw 1135 logs, which included 47 entries from Canada, 4 from Mexico, 7 DX logs from the Caribbean, Venezuela and Brazil, and a 1-contact log from Kenya. This represents a total increase of 61 logs over last year for a gain of 5 percent. As always, the number of logs submitted seriously underestimates the participation, as we find that K5QE has 1225 QSOs in the log just on 6 meters.

My next gander is at the number of rovers and their category distribution. These categories have experienced the most significant recent rule changes. Classic Rover logs numbered 59, Limited Rover included 37 entries and Unlimited Rovers submitted 6 logs, for a total of 102. Last year we had 95 rover logs, with 61 Classic Rovers, 26 Limited and 8 Unlimited. This may be a limited sampling over only 2 years, but the change in the rules apparently did not discourage rovers and the rules change for participating on the bottom four bands in the Limited Rover category did not have a negative impact on this type of activity.

Single-Operator Low Power entries numbered 693, up 33 from last year. Single-Operator High Power entries numbered 206, up a notch from 200 last June. Single-Operator QRQ entries remained about the same with 33 logs entered versus 35 last year. The Limited Multi-operator category had 56 logs entered, an increase of a whopping 500 percent over 2008’s 11 entries in this category. In the Multi-operator category we saw a drop from 72 entrants to only 44 this year.

Conditions

VHF contest participants usually look forward to some 6 meter EEs and they were not disappointed. Although the total 6 meter band QSO count was down by almost 12,000 or 9 percent, there were still a respectable total of 125,000 6 meter contacts in the submitted logs. Eleven stations had 6 meter grid counts over 200, with K5QE netting 251. Another 30 stations spread over a wide path of the Southeast, Central and Southwestern states submitted 6 meter grid multipliers of over 150.

Two meter numbers were up by 2800 or 10 percent. 222 MHz activity increased over 150.

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From December 2009 QST © ARRL
The Three Generation Rover Team of N3XUD/R. From left: Angel All, KB3STA; Dave All, N3XUD, and Bill All, N3KKM, operating from a mountaintop site in Western Pennsylvania. This was Angel’s first contest since getting her license in April and she helped her family team to a 6th place finish in the Unlimited Rover category.

800 contacts or 13 percent. 432 MHz contacts rose by 1000 or 9 percent. Microwave contact numbers were significantly lower this year. A 25 percent decrease, from 8100 to 6100, is almost entirely attributable to the lack of team or group rover entries that were microwave-equipped.

Many stations reported 2 meter EME QSOs and the top two Multi-operator stations found the multipliers very valuable. The moon was workable for North American stations from 0430 UTC until 1900 UTC Sunday. There was also decent 2 meter E SSB in the early hours of Sunday morning from the southwest toward the east and northeast into KY, TN, SC, NC and GA.

Single-Operator Categories

Maintaining his top spot in Single-Op Low Power (SO-LP) for yet another year, Bob, K2DRH, in IL topped his previous performance with a score of 401,500 and came close to the score of the top entry in Single-Operator High Power. His score is attributable to excellent QSO totals on 6 meters with 200 grid multipliers on that band and a bevy of contacts on the next three bands with rather thin totals on the microwaves through 3 GHz. In 2nd place, Rich, W5SSX, with a six band setup from NTX section, scored 267,000 points. Rich reported, “Great contest and shake down cruise for rebuilt station.” Third place went to Justin, K9MU, in WI, also with a six band station, netting 247,000 points. N3LL and K5RQ, both from WCF, were in 4th and 5th places respectively, both having substantial luck with the 6 meter conditions. Stations placing 2nd through 5th were not in last year’s Top Ten for this category.

In the Single-Operator High Power (SO-HP) category, Dave, K1RZ, made it to the top, moving up from 3rd place last year, scoring 455,600 with his 10 band station from the MDC section. Taking advantage of the 6 meter activity combined with the density of East Coast stations and rovers, he snapped the winning streak of Jeff, K1TEO, from CT who was in 2nd place this time with 373,500. Our 3rd place winner was Jerry, WB9Z, with a score of 288,800, edging out the 4th place scorer. Craig, K9CT, whose total was 286,000, both from IL. Erwin, K8EB, in WI was in 5th place with a 10 band entry from MI. Neither K9CT nor K8EB were in the Top Ten SO-HP standings last year.

The Single-Operator QRP (SO-QRP) entrants are a small but dedicated group of amateurs who make special efforts to get to rarer grids or higher locations with limited power on one to eight bands. Although his score was 53,300, down from the 78,000 of 2008, Chris, KL9A, operating under the call K7MW, claimed 3rd place from MT with 27,700 from 283 QSOs on 6 meters and 98 grid multipliers. Our 4th place winner was Curt, K9AKS, with a score of 24,500, and a five band station in SD. Doug, KF4VT/T9PV, made it into the 5th spot with 251 QSOs in 75 grids from Bermuda, while spending less than 3 hours operating!

Multi-operator Categories

K9NS, with their 666,500 score, won the Limited Multi-operator (LM) category; they had a good balance of contacts and grid multipliers across the bottom four bands. Their eight operators started off with a bang and logged 164 contacts in the first hour. Over 1000 6 meter QSOs in 231 grids propelled their great score. That effort bumped KSTR into 2nd place this year, as his four band team of two ops totaled 402,000, down 30 percent from their 2008 score. The 11 person K8GP crew operating from VA slid back into the LM category this year with a score of 425,700. The effort and cost for the trek to Spruce Knob, WV was a limiting factor. The Wopsonock Mountain seven person group as he has been for many years, with a score of 24,500 and an eight band station in MA. Their eight operators started off with a bang and logged 164 contacts in the first hour. Their eight operators started off with a bang and logged 164 contacts in the first hour.

In 3rd place again, the W3CCX Packrats scored 713,500 with a 12 band effort, complete with a visit from Murphy who brought havoc with the transmit amplifiers for 6 meters, 2 meters, 70 centimeters and 23 centimeters.

The 12 hams at K3YTL were next in line with a 4th place finish and 405,000 points using six bands from their usual FN11 perch. W4NK came in 5th, a newcomer to this year’s Top Ten in the UM category.

Rover Categories

The Limited Rover (RL) category was modified this year to include only the lowest four VHF bands. Of the 37 stations in this category, 17 used those four bands and 15 used bands A, B and D (6 meters, 2 meters and 70 cm). The winner in this category was a hustling Mike, W6YLZ, accompanied by John, N6MU, scoring 104,500 while covering 11 grids. Andy, K04MA, with Dave, AJ4LU, also a four bander, was 2nd with 58,000, covering an aggressive 22 grids across 1300 miles in three states. John, WA0VPJ, took 3rd place with another four band swing through eight grids, amassing 48,000. Steve, AG4V, topped the 4th spot with a 28,000 effort that also included eight...
The top Unlimited Rover (RU) score was reported by David, W6TE with help from John, K6MI. As part of the Southern California pack they activated 10 grids and made 471 QSOs for 101,277. Dustin, K5RNT, and his spouse, Amanda, K5AMW, who chose this category to avoid competition with other Texas rovers in the Classic Rover group. Their six bands, coupled with a 14 grid rove earned them 30,700 for 2nd place. Third place in this category was Eric, K4OVER (don’t you think he has one of the cleverest vanity calls?) who with nine bands across seven CO grids scored 24,003 points. I emphasize Eric’s score down to the last digit as Les, N1LF, from AL had 24,000 points for 4th place, only three points behind! Les covered four grids with 10 bands, making a lot of use of the feedback he got from his questions on the VHF Contesting reflector.

Steve, K4GUN, with his roving partner, now his spouse, K4LIG, placed 5th in RU with 13,000 using four bands across six grids. His soapbox included this note, “If you haven’t been fortunate enough to have yours [spouse] along on a roving adventure, you’re really missing out. It made a so-so rove into another great memory.”

In 6th place was the three generation team of Dave, N3XUD, his dad Billy, N3KKM, and his 11 year old daughter Angel, KB3STA. They garnered 10,200 while traversing four grids. They reported, “Angel pretty much handled the pileups like she had been doing it for a long time.”

So where was the group of California based multiband team rovers? Some participated on a limited basis, but did not submit logs. Their calls appeared in the logs of others who did submit for scoring. Duffey, KK6MC, editorialized in a post on the VHF Contesting reflector (lists.contesting.com/mailman/listinfo/VHFcontesting), “The new rules appeared to curtail the coordinated roving activity from California, as only one...
call from the 15 or so that have participated in that activity over the past few years appears in the logs submitted. It is a shame that there were eight 10 band VHF/UHF stations that appeared to be dormant in this year’s contest. I think that this is a bad sign. With that activity, rover activity would have been at a new high. I hope that some of these stations found their way into fixed, portable, or other rovers.

New Records

Thirteen section records were set in SO-LP, two of them division records. Rich, WS5XD, in the NTX section now holds the West Gulf Gulf high score with 267,000, while Rob, N3LL, in WCF with 204,000, set a Southeastern Division record. Four additional section records in SO-HP were set this June by K9EA in IN, K1RZ from MDC, KB5AAB in MS and WD0T in SD.

Surprise of surprises, WS2N set a record for AR and the Delta Division in the LM category with a score of 271,000. Our own ARRL President Joel, W5ZN, together with our Contest Manager Sean, KX9X, and Membership and Volunteer Programs Manager Dave, NN1N, made this happen. In the Unlimited Multi-operator category, K5QE pushed the envelope in STX with a West Gulf Division record-setting 1.324 million points. Another Unlimited Multi-operator entry, K4AC, set a new NFL record with 58,000.

There are still several ARRL Section records unclaimed in the SO-QRP Category. This year we have three section records, two of them also division records. Curt, K9AKS, set the SD SO-QRP record with 24,500 from a five band setup. Curt is also the “keeper of the records” and has edited the list of section and division winners posted on the ARRL Contest Branch Web site (www.arrl.org/contests). Chris, KL9A, operating as KM7W, posted 27,700 points in MT to claim the Northwestern Division SO-QRP record. Doug, KF4VTT/V9P, set the “International” SO-QRP Portable record with a single band 6 meter effort from Bermuda, logging an 18,000 total.

Club Participation

There were 45 clubs represented, three more than last year. The Society of Midwest Contesters (www.w9smc.com) was the top and only entrant in the Unlimited Club category with 57 entries and a 1.69 million aggregate score. The three main contributors were stations K2DRH, WB9Z and K9CT, whose combined scores made up one million of the total.

Topping the Medium Club listings was the Potomac Valley Radio Club (www.pvrc.org) with 36 entries and 1.82 million total score. Their main contributors included K1RZ, K8GP and W3SO. It is no surprise that the Nacogdoches ARC (www.w5nac.com) with eight entrants scored almost 1.5 million points on the strength of the K5QE Multi-operator station that contributed 88 percent of the total. The Northeast Weak Signal Group (www.newsvhf.com) placed 3rd with 1.38 million points and 24 entries, with K1TEO, W1QK and W1RT/R as their leading scorers.

In the Local Club class, the Mt. Frank Contesters took top honors with 698k; almost all of that was made by the K9NS 1st-place Limited Multiop effort. The Murgas ARC (www.qsnet/k3ytl) was in second with 595,000, including the scores of four stations; two of them, W2FGK and K3YTL, made up 99 percent of that total. The 2nd place club was the Chippewa Valley VHF Contesters (www.cvvhf.org) with four logs and a 428,000 aggregate; K9MU contributed more than half of that total. Chippewa Valley moved up a notch from last year’s 4th spot in this category.

Fun for Everyone

While many of us find amusement assembling and operating a technically demanding radio station, taking lots of gear and antennas on the road or just grabbing a few QSOs when the bands are hopping, VHF, UHF and microwave communications have continued to challenge and inspire. Surplus cell phone base station amplifiers have become more readily available and power for many microwave-equipped stations has increased, allowing for longer distance contacts and more grid multipliers.

We are beginning to see analog TV gear showing up as surplus — a boon to builders and experimenters. It is certainly rewarding to see increasing participation in all divisions of the contest with more youth entering the ranks. The rovers and portable stations have increased the public awareness of the communications capability of Amateur Radio and its significant place in emergency communications. Let’s continue to build the enthusiasm and momentum by stimulating more operators to use those neglected bands often considered too dull or too challenging. Share this article and ask your buddies and club members to join in the fun and participate. An extended contest article with more charts and pictures is available at www.arrl.org/contests.

Next year’s ARRL June VHF QSO Party is scheduled for June 12-14, 2010 and the bands should continue to be hopping. C U there. 73, Rick

JOHN D’AUJOLIO, W1RT

Inside the very clean rover of John, W1RT. John’s vehicle is QRV from 6 meters all the way up to the microwave bands. John, along with partner ON4IV, used this vehicle to cover 10 grids and earned 2nd place in the “classic” Rover category.

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