2012 ARRL September VHF Contest Results

The Magic Band comes to life in September

By Jeff Klein, K1TEO, k1teo@arrl.net

The 2012 September VHF contest can be characterized by activity and conditions on most bands, and some unexpected 6 meter openings for much of the country on both Saturday and Sunday (Sep 8-10). The openings were modest by June contest standards but did include not only E-skip but some DX openings as well. Congratulations to Daniel, CX9AU, who had the highest DX score ever for the September contest!

One unusual aspect of this year’s contest was the large turnover of stations in all categories making the Top Ten lists. 2012 saw at least half of the calls change in each Top Ten and several with six or seven new members. Set your plan now for 2013 to determine how you can add your call to the list and continue to keep the top competitors on their toes.

Band Conditions

Contesters always hope for unusual conditions to make things as interesting as possible. September contests hold the best chance for tropo enhancement of the three major ARRL events during the year.

Tropo conditions during the week before the contest were quite good between the Midwest and East Coast. A cold front moving east late in the week ended the Midwest part of the enhancement. By Friday morning and evening there were excellent conditions up and down the East Coast ahead of the front. As the front moved east Saturday, all hope of good tropo conditions ended. In the southeast there were rain showers, the Pacific Northwest had areas of heavy fog, while in California the weather was quite nice but conditions were poor.

The real story for band conditions in this contest was E-skip across much of the eastern half of the country both days and some TEP as well. The band was open from the Southeast US to the Northeast for a part of Saturday afternoon and evening. Some in the Northeast were able to link the E-skip with TEP to work into South America. Those in the southern part of the US were able to work the TEP directly and many ended up with quite a few South Americans in the log. The events repeated themselves the following day, ending with a strong E-skip opening from Florida to the north with many Florida stations running stations for several hours. Figure 1 gives a general idea of what was being worked during the contest time period.

Single Operator Results

The Single Operator, Low Power category (SOLP) remains the most popular, with entries up a small amount this year to 234. Bob, K2DRH, continues to top this category from his Illinois QTH, once again finishing ahead of Mitch, WB1GQR, who operates from Mt. Equinox in Vermont.

In the Single Operator, High Power (SOHP) category, Jeff, K1TEO, managed to hold off a hard-charging Price, W8ZN, to take the top spot. Jeff was in a better location for the Es this time, which added 50 QSOs and 25 grids to his 6 meter totals. “It was tough this time around” noted Jeff, “as my 903 station got water in the feed line from the heavy rains at the start of the contest, and 3 GHz and 10 GHz were not working very well. Fewer rovers were worked than prior years as well.”

The Single Operator Portable (SOP) category saw the same number of entrants as last year, but a substantial turnover of top participants. While many-time leader Chris, W1MR, turned to have the top score, the second highest scorer was a first-time contester. Nelson, W7LUD, took a logging road to the top of a mountain in CN88 to set up on 50, 144, and 432 SSB. He added 222 and 903 FM to build his score. This was his first time ever on 6 meters and he said “it was so much fun to work weak signal VHF/UHF that I am hooked.” Welcome Nelson and congratulations on the fine second place finish.

Multioperator

Twenty one logs were submitted in the Limited Multioperator (ML) category, with the W3SO team earning a clear win with 171k points. They had high grid totals on all bands although with the poor conditions on 144 MHz and up their totals were down from their typical results. The W2SZ team used their usual portable location on Mt Greylock in Western Massachusetts to dominate the Multioperator category, nearly tripling the score of the next highest team. With conditions less than favorable they recorded solid scores on the bottom four bands but really excelled with the microwaves. They worked 144 grids on 903 MHz and up, more than most of the competitors tallied on all bands.
The K5QE team continues to turn in top notch scores, placing second with 252k. They used E-skip to great effect, tallying the high notch scores, placing second with 252k. They used E-skip to great effect, tallying the high

**Rovers**

Rover entries were down a bit this year to 46. Most of the drop was in the Classic Rover category, which had a total of 25 entries. Rovers have a large impact on scores and many non-rover participants noticed the drop in number of entries. Some of the poor weather in key parts of the country may have had an impact on participation this year. Let’s hope 2013 sees a return to higher levels of activity!

Returning to the top spot in the Classic Rover category was John, W1RT, along with his partner Andy, K1RA. The two debated a number of different routes this year, deciding at the last moment to head east to Cape Cod in the hope of catching some tropo before the massive cold front moved through and eliminated any hope of good tropo conditions. Their plan went awry when

Bruce, W9FZ, must have had a hard time concentrating on the bands during this beautiful sunset in DM84XX. [Bruce Richardson, W9FZ, photo]
significant rig problems curtailed their early efforts. The Unlimited Rover (RL) category saw a slight downturn in submitted logs with a total of 16. K2QQ, once again from New England, submitted again this year in the category grids. He has a lot of fun and enjoys working other grids. He has made it to his home state of Oregon and Washington grids.

**Club Competition**

Club submissions were up slightly this year with a total of 26 competitors. Twenty two of the clubs were in the Medium category while four were in the Local category. About 40 percent of all entries were part of a club score.

In perhaps the closest competition in years, the top two clubs were less than 1000 points apart. The North East Weak Signal Group (NEWS) again took the top spot. The NEWS Group moved up from second a year ago while the PVRC also moved up one position. Last year’s champs, the Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC), had an excellent score this time around as they were almost 300 QSOs higher than the previous year and their score was over 50000 points. They submitted fewer logs this year while the PVRC showed a nice increase in participation.

Among the four entries in the Local Club category, the Murgas ARC took the top spot. They returned to the lead position after a one-year absence in 2011. Last year’s number two and three clubs repeated with the Stoned Monkey VHF ARC and Bristol ARC both doubling the number of entries to help their scores.

**Summary**

Having personally participated in this contest for over 35 years, I always hope that something interesting will happen so it won’t be the “same old same old.” There had been good tropo conditions from my QTH for the weeks leading up to the contest, something that makes a contest a lot of fun for me. Knowing the radical weather change was coming and the WWV reports not showing any signs of an aurora over the weekend, I was bit disappointed starting out the contest. Therefore, what a nice surprise it was to have E-skip on 6 meters and to make it even better have it happen both days! Moral of the story for something unusual to happen. As they say, “You gotta be in it to enjoy it!” Hope to see you this September 14-16!

A special thanks to several operators who made contributions to help out with the content of this contest summary: N3LL and K5GE who were kind enough to send their logs and provide insights on the 6 meter openings from their QTHs; W3PAW, W9FZ, K6MI, KX4R, W7LUD, VE7JH and W9LFU who were kind enough to send their logs and provide insights on the 6 meter openings from their QTHs; and Frankford Radio Club, Roadrunners Microwave Group, Tennessee Contest Group, and Bristol (TN) ARC who provided input on their operation; K1RA for his help with creating maps summarizing the 6 meter openings; K9AKS who were kind enough to send their logs and provide insights on the 6 meter openings from their QTHs; and finally to my good friend Stan, KA1ZE, who helped me find some data for the article. Thanks, guys!

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**Rove to the Extended Article**

Even though 6 meters took center seat for this contest, there were many interesting other aspects. Take a look online (www.arrl.org/contest-results-articles) as Bruce, W9FZ, recounts his Panhandle Mania of One — another unique rover effort, activating low activity grids. He has a lot of fun and makes it for others at the same time. There’s much more to be found in the extended writeup!