

CAC Report- Tasking 2018.2

Tasking 2018.2 - FT8 Contest [Previous name Tasking #2]

Given the proliferation of weak signal digital modes (known as “JT” modes), should the ARRL sponsor a separate contest focusing on these modes? This contest would encompass all non-RTTY digital modes such as FT8, PSK, Olivia etc. The initial tasking should identify the need/desire for the contest and proposed rules. Additionally, some discussion of how the existing RTTY roundup works with digital modes should be factored in.

The PSC requests that the CAC analyze, study, and provide more details on use of FT8 in contests. In particular, two questions should be answered:

1. Should the ARRL RTTY Roundup be the contest to accommodate FT8 and/or all new digital modes?
2. Should the ARRL sponsor a new FT8 digital contest? If so, what rules would you propose?

Task to be completed and returned to PSC by July 1, 2019.

Dennis W1UE
CAC Chairman

The members of the CAC have had an opportunity to talk with contesters all over the country concerning digital contesting. At Dayton, it was the subject of several meetings:

1. RTTY Dinner, Thursday evening
2. RTTY Contesting Forum, presentation by AC0C
3. Contest Forum, “Future of Digital Contesting” by W0YK

As might be expected at this stage of its life, there is hot debate in the general amateur population, and within the contesting community, over whether or not the use of the new digital modes FT4 and FT8 constitute “real ham radio”, or “real ham radio contesting”. The RTTY Dinner, and the RTTY Contesting Forum, displayed the “don’t include Digital contesting with RTTY” (specifically the RTTY Roundup) crowd, while the Contesting Forum presentation by W0YK went over the FT8 Roundup (sponsored by W0YK and AA5AU in December 2018) and presented the new Digital modes as an opportunity to get more amateurs involved in contesting. Through the Dayton presentations and in discussions with digital contesters, there is no consensus within the community as to whether or not the ARRL RTTY Roundup should be the contest to accommodate FT8 and/or all new digital modes. In particular, the RTTY ops are down on the adding the new digital modes; I have been a past top score in the ARRL RTTY Roundup but I am not aware that there has ever been significant non-RTTY digital mode operation in Roundup prior to this year. There have been some proposals to separate the modes in the contest, similar to what is done in the ARRL 10M contest: a RTTY-only competition, an FT8 competition, and a Combined RTTY/FT8 competition.

The biggest value of Digital Contesting seems to be the introduction of new blood into contesting. During the “Future of Digital Contesting” presentation, W0YK stated that, in the 2018 FT8 Roundup Contest held in December, “35% of those that submitted logs were not in Super Check Partial***” (SCP). (For those unfamiliar with the “Super Check Partial File”, see the **).” There were 1253 logs

submitted for that contest, so that means 438 logs were submitted for ops that are not regular contesters. In addition, two ops in the top ten scorers (including the top score) were not in SCP.

For the 2019 RTTY Roundup, I requested a list of stations and the contacts they made on each mode from W9JJ. The call sign of any station that made 60 or more digital contacts was crossed referenced against the SCP. Of those 775 stations, 195 were not in the SCP- about 25% of the stations that chose to participate because of FT8 inclusion were new contesters. An additional fact about this RTTY Roundup- the number of logs submitted went from 1619 in 2018 to 2643 in 2019! Even if you remove the Digital only logs, the number of entries that operated RTTY increased from 1619 to 1702, a 5% increase. If growth in contesting is one of the goals, making more inclusion of the new digital modes is an absolute.

**Super Check Partial File: The Super Check Partial (SCP) File is maintained by Stu K6TU. Logs from active contesters are submitted to him, and he creates a file that, when used in conjunction with the major logging programs, displays call signs that match- or closely match- the call sign that the op typed into the logging program entry window. If a call sign is not in the SCP it is an indication that the op is either not an active contester, or is a new contester, in the contests that are used to build the master log.

So, to sum up the Tasking:

1. Should the ARRL RTTY Roundup be the contest to accommodate FT8 and/or all new digital modes? The CAC polled 7-7-2 (two abstentions) on the issue. (My take on the poll result, is that it mirrors the sentiments of the amateur community in large on the issue).

2. Should the ARRL sponsor a new FT8 digital contest? If so, what rules would you propose? The CAC polled 8-6-2, also two abstentions.

3. Two additional questions arose during our discussions; since both were pertinent to the RTTY Roundup, I chose to poll the CAC on these questions:

a. Item 8 of Tasking 2019.1- Should the ARRL add a QRP Category to ARRL Roundup? Whether or not the decision is made to include FT4/FT8 as permanent RTTY Roundup modes, the CAC polled 13-0-3 to add a QRP category to ARRL Roundup. If FT4/FT8 are going to be permanent modes in Roundup, then adding a QRP category makes even more sense. NOTE: Roundup is currently the only ARRL HF category without a QRP category.

b. If the ARRL includes FT4/FT8 in ARRL RTTY Roundup, should the ARRL separate entries into RTTY Only, FT4/FT8 only, or mixed modes, as is similarly done in ARRL 10M contest? The CAC polled 13-0-3 on this question.

Sample Contest: A sample contest, the “Digital Digs”, is attached to the end of this report. This particular proposal was circulated to CAC members at Dayton, so the fact that the rules are similar to the rules of a recently announced new Digital contest are coincidental.

Dennis Egan W1UE
CAC Chairman

“DIGITAL DIGS”

Duration: 1300Z Saturday to 1259Z Sunday
 Length: 24 Hours long with a 12 hour category
 All stations can operate to their category time limit

Bands: 160, 80, 40, 20, 15, 10m.

Entry Classes:
 SO/QRP (<5W)
 SO/LP (<100W)
 M/S QRP (<5W) (CQWW Style)
 M/S (<100W) (CQWW Style)

Other than SO Unlimited, Operator must physically log each QSO- no Automatic operation
 No Fox/Hound operation. All Entry Classes can use Telnet assistance

SO Unlimited: Only limitation is <100W max. Can do multiple transmitters, more than one signal (on different bands) at the same time, automatic operation permitted, Fox/Hound permitted.

Modes: Only FT4 or FT8. You can do either whenever you wish.

Exchange: 4 digit Grid Square

Scoring:
 QSO Points: Distance based, using same algorithm as Stew Perry without power multiplier

Multipliers worked on each band:
 First two letters of Grid Square, i.e. FN41- multiplier is for “FN”
 Final Score: (Sum of QSO Pts per band) x (Sum of Multipliers) per band)

All stations must use an online scoreboard.
 Can't use non-radio means to schedule contacts, or to verify/pass QSO information.

5 person International teams, comprised of 5 single ops (no MS or SOU ops)
 No more than 3 ops from same DXCC country
 Team score is sum of 5 individual scores

Single Op- uses standard ARRL definition
 Family Rule: Yes

Suggested Frequencies:
 20-15-10M: Khz freq 081, 084, 087, 090 are FT8. Khz freq 137, 140, 143, 146 are FT4.
 40M: 7081, 7084, 7087 are FT8. 7090, 7093, 7096 are FT4.
 80M: 3576, 3579, 3581 are FT8. 3585, 3588, 3591 are FT4.
 160M: 1843, 1846, 1849 are FT8. 1861, 1864, 1867 are FT4.