

# Some Thoughts on Mobile Contesting

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I am a huge fan of mobile contesting in QSO parties (or any venue) and I participate in as many as my work schedule permits. I think I may have set some kind of record for mobile contesting from the largest number of states: so far I have operated mobile from CA, NV, WA, TX, IL, IN, OH, MI, PA, FL, NJ, NY, CT, RI, MA, DE and MD. Most of these operations were in state QSO parties, but a few were in the MARAC County Hunter's Contest. (Some of the MARAC guys have probably operated from every state in the Union, but I think it is fair to say that their normal operations are quite different from contest operations.)

My own mobile activities began with the Pennsylvania QSO Party. I have put together a Web page about my PA mobiling experiences over the years. Take a look at [www.japancorporateresearch.com/W1NNMobile.html](http://www.japancorporateresearch.com/W1NNMobile.html). Incidentally, I wrote an article in *NCJ* on my first PAQP experience. It was back when I was K8HVT ("Contesting on Wheels," K8HVT, *NCJ*, January/February 1990). Mobile contesting has come a long way since then, and so have I.

Mobile contesting has become my favorite operating mode. Why? Well, I can think of three reasons. First and foremost, it is the ultimate in operating on a level playing field. All stations are essentially the same (and the rules should make this so, I think) and the winner is the op who has put together a reliable station and who has really thought out all of the factors that go into producing the biggest score/route planning, determining how much time to spend on SSB versus CW, selecting

which bands to operate and when, balancing CQing and S&P and combining all this with operating skill and experience.

The second reason is the high overall QSO rates and the pileups that result when you change counties. Sometimes these can be quite intense, especially late in the contest when you hit a rare county. In the 2005 Florida QSO Party, I was able to work 2080 stations in 20 hours operating by myself. If you like high rate, this is the place to find it! (The K1TO and N4TO team worked over 3,000 stations in that event—this is a higher rate than the best CW ops achieve during the CQWW DX contest!)

A final reason I love this form of operating is the opportunity it affords to see a lot of beautiful parts of our country that

I would otherwise never visit. Largely sticking to the lightly traveled back roads, I have enjoyed the PA countryside in October, the wheat fields of eastern Washington, orange groves in Florida, Spring in the Michigan countryside, Amish country in the Ohio boon-docks, the flat Illinois farm country after the harvest, and many, many other parts of this fabulous land.

A major issue in mobile contesting (at least to me) is the solo category. I prefer to operate by myself (rather than with a driver) but many state QSO parties do not have solo categories, so I find myself having to compete with two-person teams. I have won a couple of these and it does feel good to beat a two-man team, but I believe it is much better to have a separate category for those who do not have drivers or partners. A major reason that I flew to FL last year to operate in the FQP is that they do have a solo category where solo ops compete against each other. The Michigan QSO party also introduced such a category in 2005. I personally have learned how to operate while driving, but I realize that not everyone can (or should) do this. I'd like to see some state QSO party introduce a solo category where operating while driving is not permitted. Perhaps for a 12 hour contest there would be a limit of, say, 10 hours of operating, leaving 2 hours for driving from county to county. This would allow ops who do not feel comfortable operating while driving to get out there and compete in the solo category. Imagine what an interesting event you would have if 30, 40 or more mobiles were competing in a 10 hour contest!



The mobile antennas for W1NN's 2005 Florida QSO Party (FQP) effort.



W1NN operating in the 2005 FQP.



W1NN's mobile set-up in the rental car for the 2005 FQP.

## County Hunter's Contest

The County Hunter's Contest mentioned earlier deserves some comment. It is not so popular among contesters mainly, I think, because it is a very long contest (48 hours) and has never been promoted very much in the contesting community. Before the relatively recent resurrection of some major QSO parties (FL, MI, OH and New England in particular) it was one of the few reasonably well attended mobile events in the annual contest calendar, so I participated several times. I feel it has a lot of potential because it is the only national event where mobiles are encouraged to contact other mobiles and have a real chance of doing so. (It's usually pretty tough for mobiles to contact each other in a state QSO party.)

The County Hunter's Contest has a scoring system that awards 15 points for contacts with mobiles versus only 1 point for contacts with fixed stations. So there is a big incentive for mobiles to work each other and home stations to work mobiles. W9MSE is the guy who owns this contest. He has operated it for many years and has racked up well over 2000 QSOs over the course of a weekend. I think he uses his brother-in-law as a driver and keeps moving the entire weekend.

## Unusual Rules

With so many states having their own parties, there are many opportunities to make these events interesting by adopting unusual rules. Two state QSO parties have a very unique rule that makes their events especially challenging and fun. I am referring to the rules followed by the ILQP and the INQP. They allow mobiles operating on county lines to count one QSO for each county that they are operating in. (Beginning with the 2006 event, the INQP has limited county line operations to a maximum of two counties at one time.) For example, a station sitting on a three-county line in IL works 20 stations before moving on. He is allowed to claim credit for 3 contacts for each of these 20 contacts, or a total of 60 contacts. If he happens to work another station sitting on a 3-county line, he ends up with credit for 9 QSOs for this single contact. If he is smart enough to move this station from band to band or mode to mode, he can amass quite a large number of contacts in a short time.

The possibilities presented by rules like these are endless and require the ops to use some real strategy and not just sit there and call CQ or whiz from county to county in a marathon fashion.

It is even possible for a solo op to win these two events, something that makes them extremely competitive. On the other hand, many other state QSO parties do not permit county line contacts at all. Of course, they are also fun and require a much different strategy. There is much room for making these events even more interesting by incorporating unique rules.

## Pack Up and Go!

Almost by accident I have become something of a specialist in packing up my station in a suitcase, flying off somewhere and operating a QSO party from a rental car. I've done this half a dozen times and it really is not so hard to do. One of these days I will try to put together a short article on how I do this.

More and more contesters have discovered just how much fun mobile contesting can be. I think that interest will continue to increase. Among other things, it is a solution to antenna restrictions and other problems that contesters are increasingly seeing in operating from their homes. Someday, perhaps, we may see major contests like CQWW and Sweepstakes introducing mobile categories.

**NCJ**