

Contesting

Please take part in the HF Contests that are organised by the RSGB. We run an annual cycle of events that aim to cater for a range of interests and amateur station capabilities. Have a read and then choose your first RSGB HF contest.

Our HF Contests (Figure 1) fall into two broad camps:

1. Contests that are primarily between members of clubs or societies that are Affiliated to the RSGB (AFS) and which are designed to be appropriate for bands and modes where reasonable propagation can be achieved throughout the British Isles – with relatively low power and simple antennas.
Most of these club-based contests comprise short events held each month, with more than 450 individuals participating overall, most of whom represent a club, but not all.
2. Contests which aim to exploit bands and modes enabling international contacts. These are for individuals or teams and are mostly held once a year although some are also run as a series. Entrants number more than 350 individuals or groups. International contests, portable contests and FT mode contests are all based on being able to make QSOs outside the British Isles.

This article will describe the character of each contest to help you to choose those which might interest you. Modes and durations are included. For some, we have comments from entrants. The majority of these contests will require contest logging software to create the appropriate files to upload for a contest entry. Most of what you need to know can be found on the RSGB Contest Committee's website [1] which has an excellent calendar giving access to both the rules and the results for each contest.

Club contests

These are events or series where scores may be assigned to a club total. In the series, the number of entrants who can contribute to a club total is unrestricted, but for the single events, the highest four scores for each club are assigned to an 'A' team, the second four to a 'B' team, etc.

The datamodes contests, include RTTY and PSK63, with frequency allocations for

Date (2026)	Time UTC	Contest Name	Results
Sat 3 Jan.	1300-1700	RSGB AFS 80m-40m Contests CW AFS Super League HF Championship	Results
Sun 11 Jan.	1300-1700	RSGB AFS 80m-40m Contests Datamodes AFS Super League HF Championship	Results
Sat 17 Jan.	1300-1700	RSGB AFS 80m-40m Contests Phone AFS Super League HF Championship	Results
Mon 19 Jan.	2000-2200	RSGB FT4 Contest	Results
Mon 2 Feb.	2000-2130	80m CC SSB	Results
Wed 11 Feb.	2000-2130	80m CC DATA	Results
Sat 14 Feb.	2000-2300	1st 1.8MHz Contest HF Championship	Results
Mon 23 Feb.	2000-2200	RSGB FT4 Contest	Results
Thu 26 Feb.	2000-2130	80m CC CW	Results
Mon 2 Mar.	2000-2130	80m CC DATA	Results
Wed 11 Mar.	2000-2130	80m CC CW	Results
Sat 14-Sun 15 Mar.	1000-1000	Commonwealth Contest HF Championship	Results

FIGURE 1: RSGB HF Contest Calendar (part).

the two modes. RSGB members who are not members of a radio club are welcome to participate in all RSGB club contests.

Affiliated Societies 80-40m (CW, datamodes and phone, separate event each mode) 4h

These three are arguably the most fiercely contested events in our calendar. They are run for four hours on weekend afternoons in January. Typically, the action starts on the 40m band then moves to 80m and eventually back to 40m. Winners also make many QSOs with Europeans who are engaged in different contests or none.

Club Calls (1.8MHz Affiliated Societies – Phone and/or CW, one event annually) 3h

The fourth of the annual AFS HF Contests is held in November; this one on Top band is unique as it includes club abbreviations in the exchanges. Extra points are awarded for QSOs with club members, Club HQ stations and a RSGB HQ station. It's a fun outing if you can be QRV on the 160m band.

3.5MHz Club Championship Contests (80m CW, Datamodes & Phone, a series with monthly evening events from February to July – six per mode) 1.5h

These run on a Monday, Wednesday or Thursday with the modes rotating each month. For the phone events, finding a run frequency can be a challenge, but for the other two it's not an issue. Beginners can search and pounce comfortably. QSO rates can be high, with well over 100 QSOs being achievable in 90 minutes.

Mike, G4IZZ: "90 minutes of great fun."

Autumn Series Contests

(80m CW, datamodes and phone, a series with monthly evening events on 80m from September to November – three per mode) 1.5h

These are similar to the 80m Club Championships but are intended to be more appropriate for beginners. Contests in this series have a 'Le Mans' start, where entrants must not transmit during the two minutes immediately before the contest start. This is intended to prevent frequency hogging in advance.

International contests

Islands on the Air (IOTA) Contest

(five bands, phone and/or CW) 12h/24h

The RSGB's flagship contest IOTA attracts in excess of 2,000 entrants. The contest runs for 24 hours during the last weekend in July using CW and/or SSB. Entrants are Island or World stations, with many groups travelling to activate interesting IOTA islands – July often being a great time of year for an island trip. Stations in the British Isles have an advantage as we all represent an island. The Contest exchange includes a serial number and an IOTA island reference for island entries. Even EU005 for the island of Great Britain attracts callers.

Dave, G0CER: "If I could only do one HF contest a year it would be the IOTA contest."

Commonwealth Contest (five bands, CW) 12h/24h

The oldest contest on our calendar. This is the Commonwealth Games of amateur radio with national societies in Australia, Canada, UK, India, New Zealand and South Africa being custodians of the contest.

This CW contest runs for 24 hours on the weekend prior to Commonwealth Day in March each year. The Contest is more of a 'treasure hunt' than a 'rate contest', with each QSO being precious. The opportunities to work Commonwealth DX are huge without competition from high-power non-Commonwealth stations.

Peter, G3LET: "I was able to work all continents with 100W and a random length sloping wire, which I had slung over a tree branch."

UKEI DX CW and SSB contests (five bands) 12h/24h

These two 24-hour contests are organised by



PHOTO 1: G4FNL operating in the Commonwealth Contest.

the UK and Ireland Contest Club in partnership with the RSGB. The contests are a moveable feast but the CW event is usually in the Spring and the SSB event in the Autumn. Both contests have an international flavour but with a focus on the British Isles. The exchange includes an incrementing serial number for all, plus a two-letter district code for UK and EI entries. Both of these are fun outings and are relatively relaxed events.

Mike, MOAGP: *"It's fun to be the DX."*

International Low Power Contest (three bands CW) 6h

Specifically for QRP enthusiasts, this is the only contest on the calendar with a one-hour lunchbreak. Portable and fixed-station sections are available with 5W or 10W power. This is an opportunity to exercise your QRP equipment on the 80, 40 and 20m bands from home or from a portable location.

Colin, G4CWH: *"Simply the best way to spend a British summer Sunday."*

1.8MHz Contests (CW Nov, CW and SSB Feb) 3h

We have two contests on Top band each year, one in February which includes SSB and is concurrent with a Netherlands contest and a second in November that is CW only. Most years there is some DX to be found but the bulk of the QSOs are within the UK and EU. The exchange includes an incrementing serial number for all, plus a two letter district code for UK entries. If you are QRV on the 160m band you will find these entertaining.

Portable contests (field days)

Our two main portable contests are shared with National Societies in IARU Region 1, so there is usually plenty of activity, but we could certainly do with more contribution from RSGB members. Traditionally, the field days have been club activities and, although that is still the case, there are also small groups and individuals who enter.

National Field Day (NFD) (six bands CW) 24h

For portable stations NFD has a combination of logistics, camping and radio operating which is great fun at the beginning of the summer. Many use a simple home-brew doublet antenna and the 100W power limit means that radio equipment can also be simple.

Stew, GW0ETF: *"For the unpredictable you can't beat Field Day – from floods, cows yanking out your feeders, to the back of the makeshift shack blowing out with the wind at 4am..."*

Roger, G3LDI: *"Just finished my 72nd NFD, quite proud of that!"*

SSB Field Day (five bands, phone) 24h

This is an excellent late-summer activity which is very similar to NFD but doesn't include the 160m band and is SSB only. The power limit is higher than NFD and consequently radio installations can be more sophisticated. SSB Field Day is run over a very similar time period to the 24-hour, 144MHz Trophy Contest which allows a range of club interests to be combined into a single camping trip.

FT-Modes Contests

FT4 Contest Series (a series with 12 monthly evening events, five bands) 2h

The FT4 Contest Series is a popular, recent addition to our calendar, with over 360 participants including UK, Isle of Man and Channel Islands and many non-UK entrants in 2025. The multi-band format includes 80, 40, 20, 15 and 10m. It is an opportunity to see what is possible on HF FT4 on a weekday evening, with low power. It is surprising how many stations outside Europe can be worked. The rules include a link to 'Tips and Hints' which explain how you can upload your log without having to use any contesting software – just what you regularly use for FT modes (WSJT-X for example). You don't need to be a regular contest operator to join in – all you need are your regular FT mode operating skills.

Dan, GW5P: *"The monthly RSGB FT4 contests are just like a full-scale contest, condensed down into a short timeframe."*

FT4 International Activity Day (six bands) 12h/24h

If you are one of the large number of radio amateurs on the HF bands who are regularly using FT modes to make QSOs, have you ever considered what you might achieve if you were to operate continuously for 12 or even 24 hours with FT4? How many QSOs might you make and how many entities might you work over that period?

For the Activity Day, your task is to see how many QSOs you can make using FT4 on the six bands: 160, 80, 40, 20, 15 and 10m. As for scoring, QSOs with your own continent are worth one point and those with other continents are worth three points. Your total QSO points are multiplied by the number of DXCC countries you work on each band to give your total score.

The contest has separate sections for 10W and 100W stations. If you want to take the challenge further, there is a section in which automation is permitted and two radios may be used simultaneously.

Contest(s) of the Month – RSGB Autumn Series Contests [2]

Not exactly one contest, nor is it in August, but the Autumn Series is an excellent introduction to HF Contesting with three CW, three SSB and three RTTY/PSK63 events spread between September and November. Start planning now. The first event is an SSB session at 8pm BST on Monday 7 September.

References

- [1] RSGB Contest Committees' website: rsgbcc.org/hf
- [2] Autumn Series Contests: rsgbcc.org/hf/rules/2026/rautumn.shtml

Further reading

RadCom Contesting: rsgb.org/radcom-contesting

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