

*How do I?*

*An occasional series*

*This week: Radio Games!      Personal competition*

Amateur Radio offers a wide variety of outlets which hobbyists can explore. Some enjoy the technical challenge of experimenting with circuit designs. Some thrive on the adventure of making radio contacts with distant countries around the world. Others take pleasure in a competitive aspect of Ham Radio called Radio Games, also known as Contesting.

Contesting provides a means where a Ham Operator can gain on-the-air experience and practice radio skills, and also compete with other operators for bragging rights and possibly an award certificate or plaque to put on the wall.

Contests can be a lot of fun. Whether you go out with a club for the annual ARRL Field Day in June, participate in a State QSO Party, or one of the many ARRL or CQ magazine contests, there is bound to be something for you.

The monthly Contest Corral column in **QST** magazine and on the [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org) website is a good place to see which contests are coming up on the schedule. **CQ** magazine and their website [www.cq-amateur-radio.com](http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com) has a similar listing. You will find information about the upcoming contests including dates, times, suggested frequencies, the message exchange, the logging requirements, how scoring calculations will work, how and when to submit your results, and the deadline for doing so.

But unfortunately for most of us, life happens. We have job duties, family responsibilities, chores, and household projects that keep us from playing radio as often or as much as we might wish.

Contesters and their radio stations can be categorized as Big Guns and Little Pistols. Let's assume that most of our readers are in the Little Pistol group. Their ham radio station might generate 100 watts of power output into a simple wire or vertical antenna. If that is what you have to work with at least you are equipped to get on-the-air. That is where the fun begins.

This reminds me of that saying . If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

Realize the limits. Realize what a "Little Pistol" can offer. Work out a game plan that lets you have fun.

How do I do that? Substitute **SKILL** in place of **BRUTE FORCE**.

First of all, even with a nominal 100 watt station, I operate as if I was using a QRP (low power) station. I listen a lot. I try to get the other stations' call sign and their exchange information before I call them. I try to listen long enough to tell me how the other operator works. Some operators seem to answer the loudest station they hear. Some operators seem to answer the last station they hear. A very few operators answer the first station they heard. So I try to time my call so that my transmission falls when they are actually listening. It does me no good to be first when they reply to the last heard. If the pile up is too big I move on. Eventually it will slow down and they will call "CQ Contest". By that time I might be the only other person around and I am more likely to make the contact. Woo Hoo!

Contesting is generally about "BIC". The more time you spend with your butt in the ham radio chair, the better you will do. Sure, that makes sense. But there is just one of me. I find when things are slow and band conditions are poor that instead of endlessly tuning up and down the band, or "running" (calling CQ Contest myself) that I listen from the top of the hour until 15 or 20 minutes after. then come back at the bottom of the hour for 15-20 minutes, then repeat the cycle at the top of the hour. I find that while some dedicated folks are prepared to stay in the chair, many of us cannot be there all the time. I find that activity seems to increase at the top and bottom of the hour. So I can be there and get my other chores done in between. Does it hurt my score - maybe. But not as much as if I didn't participate at all.

Whether it is a contest or I am simply in a mood to play radio, I set goals for myself. My goals are simple. Can I make 5 QSOs in an hour on this band? If I get 5 and the band conditions are good I may go for 10 QSOs in an hour. Or, if the initial band is not real active and I get one QSO, I may try for a "band night" 3 QSOs on 3 bands in one hour. Perhaps I may try for multiple modes. Can I get a Phone contact and two different Digital mode contacts in the hour I have been given to play radio? It is worth a try.

Radio is what you make of it.

Catch ya on the air!