

Internet Table-Top Rallying Championship

After an interval of five years the Internet Table-Top Rally Championship is returning in November 2017.

Table-Top Rallies (plotting route cards on paper maps and answering questions about the route) have been around as long as rallying. A national championship was launched in 1987 and older members may remember the Pathfinder, Nelly, Langer Park and Pegasus. You had to plot route cards on OS paper maps and send in your route check answers or maps for marking. In that form, the Championship lasted for 14 years.

The Championship was resurrected in 2003 and took advantage of the internet for publicity and administration. With software written by Ray Crowther, aka 'Crow', entry forms, route cards, route check answers, marking and results were all handled on-line, but competitors still had to buy the appropriate OS map and 'tramline' their route before answering questions such as "How many churches with spires did you pass?" and "How many times did you cross grid line 47?"

Championships ran in this format in 2004/5, 2006, 2008 and 2010. Over the years competitors had reluctantly accepted the necessity to answer questions about which route they had taken. Despite making this task as straightforward as possible, a competitor's perfect plotting could quickly be penalised from "Oh, sh*t, I got the route right but didn't see the bridge symbol on that tiny yellow road!"

A major change occurred for the series in 2012. Ray, who had been developing software for geocaching applications, introduced the ability to mark and edit routes on digital OS maps in a computer's browser. It was a step-change for table-top competitions. Now you just click at strategic points on the roads used and tramlines are automatically drawn to define the route solution.

Not quite right? Then simply drag the tramlines to the another road?

As Ray explained: "You can't mark a route on a digital OS maps because they don't contain the necessary geocoding information. The trick has been to harness the route drawing capabilities of Google maps in the background and overlay them onto an OS image." There are no route checks to answer. Passage controls are hidden from the competitor and when he/she submit their drawn route for marking it is electronically compared with the master route and penalties applied for missed controls.

The 2012 Championship attracted 200 entries, many from overseas, and raised over £3,000 for charity. Gavin Rogers, Peter Smith and Richard Laking filled the podium places. For 2017/8 the nominated charity is the Motor Neurone Disease Association (MNDA), chosen by Ray in the memory of Chris Towers - his long time friend, business partner, rally co-organiser and prolific rally competitor - who died from the disease in July.

There will be four rounds with events in November, December, January and February - winter months when you are stuck inside waiting for the rain to stop or the snow to melt. The best three scores will count towards overall placings. There will be classes for Masters, Experts and Novices. Competitors will have three weeks to solve and plot 12 route cards on each event. The entry fee for all four rounds will be £25, and all entry fees will be donated to the MNDA.

You'll be able to try before you buy; there is a sample route card to play with before the championship starts. Register your interest by emailing Ray at crow@table-top-rallying.org.uk. After being dormant for five years the website is currently being upgraded and updated - Ray will email when this is complete and the entry list opens.