

## **Navigational Scatter Rallies - An introduction**

So what is a Scatter? Well, it's not an event where you're meant to get lost! Navigational Scatters differ from other forms of rallying in that there is no set route to be taken, no control points to be visited at a certain time, and thus no (or rather little) risk of getting no result at all. Rather, it's an event where the chief aim is challenge the navigational skills of the navigator, while the driver just has to get the crew to various locations and to the finish safely before the end of the event. This is done by navigation that simply defines a series of points on the map, with a question to be answered at each of the points to prove it has been visited. It is down to each crew to plan their own route from the start to the points that they choose to visit, and on to the finish, hence the term scatter rally.

In the time available, the crew plot onto their map as many points as they can. They then drive to as many as possible, answering the question at each location, and get to the finish. Simple really. In some ways it is similar to a treasure hunt. The fundamental difference being that on a treasure hunt the navigation tends to be easy and the clues you're searching for very devious, while on a Scatter the challenge is in the navigation - generally the clues tend to be fairly simple to find at each location. With other forms of rallying you risk leaving the correct route and dropping out of the event, or grinding to a halt when stumped by a tricky piece of navigation, so this is a perfect way to start.

Essential equipment includes a car, any normal road car will do, with a driver and a navigator, the correct Ordnance Survey map(s) (normally Landranger 1:50,000 scale), a "map romer" to accurately plot grid references, a few HB pencils & good rubber, and a decent bright torch or two. Useful extras include a clipboard to hold the papers, perhaps a piece of corrugated cardboard to rest the map on in your lap while driving, and some Kwells if the navigator is prone to motion sickness. You just might also need some tracing paper, depending on the deviousness of the organisers who sometimes include in the navigation an outline of some roads on a small part of the map marked with the location of one or more points. A piece of greaseproof paper the size of an A4 sheet will generally suffice, and it's better to have it and not need it than to miss out on some otherwise easy points.

Typically, a scatter will start from a pub, with signing on from around 7.30pm for an 8.00pm event. The finish is likely (though not always - read the instructions carefully!) to be the same pub, at around 10.00 - 10.30pm. There may be two finish times shown, arrival at the finish by the first time is best, as there will be a points penalty for each minute late up till the second time given, after which you are "OTL" (Outside Total Lateness or Over Time Limit). Depending on the organisers, this penalty can be very severe, but can sometimes be quite mild, making it worth catching that extra clue on the way and being slightly late. You'll learn to decide which by bitter experience!

At the start time, all crews will be given a set of papers. First, read the instruction leaflet. Then read it again to make sure you didn't miss anything important. There will also be one or more sheets with navigation information and a question and answer sheet. Sometimes rather than answering a question, an organiser might place a label at each location with a number (e.g. a date) or word on a particular theme on it, such as the name of a race circuit bend, or model of a car. (With these you are in no doubt that you're at the correct location.)

The navigation can be as simple as a series of grid references but generally challenges the crew with such things as tulip diagrams, herringbones, following a series of spot heights and/or "grid cuts" (where a road cuts across a map gridline), etc. Grid references can also be encoded with A=1, B=2 etc, or is it A=0, B=1???? Simply experiment with the various permutations till you find one that works, i.e. that doesn't plot in the middle of a field, as most points tend to be at road junctions, where a bridge crosses the road, or where a footpath, bridleway, etc meet the road.

The really good thing about a scatter is that if you don't understand a certain piece of navigation you can simply ignore it! Just plot the points that you can, and go and visit them.

There are likely to be anywhere from 20 - 40 or even more points to choose from. The rules state that to achieve a maximum score you need only visit 75% of the points (and get the correct answer, of course), so the number of points, the size of the area they cover, and the time you have available are balanced to make it very difficult to achieve that maximum. However, even a first-timer can achieve a result, simply by plotting ONE point and visiting it to answer the question correctly. With time and experience, your score is guaranteed to rise. This is what makes Scatters the ideal way for novices to learn the ropes.

Some events allow you to plot in the start venue; others require you to do so in your car. The advantages of plotting in the pub, when you can, are that you have more space to spread out the map and you can more easily ask the organisers for help with tricky navigation. However, in your car, the light is likely to be brighter and there's less distracting noise (especially other crews reading out grid references). As you progress to other forms of road rallying, you will have to plot in the car so doing so is good practice for the future. Your call.

Start by clearly marking the location of the start and, if different, the finish. The driver can then read out the grid references to the navigator to plot onto the map. Some forms of navigation are best looked at directly by the navigator. You'll quickly learn which works best. Mark the points carefully on the map IN PENCIL so that they can be rubbed out afterwards or in case of a mistake, and write the clue number next to the point so that on arrival there you know which question to answer! Allow anywhere from 30 to 50 minutes for plotting then sketch out a route from start to finish via as many points you think you'll have time to visit and still return by the finish time. Look for clusters of nearby points to maximise clues with minimum driving between them, and try to select a route that has some options for a direct short cut to the finish in case you start to run late and need to get back before reaching all your intended points. Organisers tend to be keen to help novice crews so please don't be afraid to ask for help with the navigation. Some will only do this after 20 - 30 mins so that only true novices benefit.

When you're ready to go, remember that all the normal rules of the road still apply. You are likely to meet members of the public pootling around, and other competitors who may be travelling in different directions (it's a Scatter, remember?) so PLEASE drive carefully. When you reach a point, pull over somewhere safe and without obstructing other traffic. Get out of the car carefully too, as mud, puddles, even ice, can offer minor hazards to the unwary. Having a door torn off by a passing car or, worse, being hit by one is generally guaranteed to ruin your evening. A cryptic question like "H", "SV" or "Total Mileage" is likely to require you to write down the numbers and/or letters above and below the H on a Hydrant or Sluice Valve plaque, or to add up the total of all the mileages on a direction sign. Watch out for direction signs that are double sided even when the opposite side just faces into a field! It seems that the sheep have pressed the Highways Agency for this information, so it usually pays to scramble up the bank or into that ditch, and struggle with that hedge just to shine the torch and check. Make sure you write the answer in the correct space on the answer sheet and head off to the next point.

As well as telling the driver which way to go, the navigator should also try to attempt the tiebreak if there is one. This typically has a format of "Make as many words as possible from the letters in....." or perhaps "Name as many..... as possible". If two or more crews end up with the same score, the tiebreak is used to split them. If the other crew(s) with the same score as you haven't bothered to try at all, you only need one to beat them! Sometimes it can pay to take an educated guess at the answer to a clue at a point you haven't visited/couldn't find but beware, as some organisers deduct marks for obvious guesses. Try not to waste too much time searching for a clue as you may be at the wrong location. Normally you will have other points to visit so move on and be lucky at the next one.

While out there, keep an eye on the clock, and ensure that you get to the finish venue by the time specified. On arrival, park sensibly and make sure that you've put your names on the answer sheet before handing it in to the organisers. Grab a well-earned drink and, while waiting for the organisers to mark the sheets and announce the results, start the "If only...." routine with your fellow crews, moaning about the rain, the mud, that clue that NOBODY

could find till some bright spark says "Oh yes, I got that one, no problem. It was at.....", Farmer Palmer on his tractor doing 5mph, and the white van man coming the other way who wouldn't back up! You know the routine. It's also another chance to ask other navigators questions about the navigation used, that they wouldn't have had time to answer while they were plotting. Oh yes, and make sure you ask about other events coming up, as you'll find the bug has bitten and you want to try it again as soon as possible.....

Expect scoring to be 10 points per correct answer, sometimes partial marks are given for a partially correct answer. After a bit of frantic marking, the organisers will eventually announce the results and you'll see how well you've done. It'll normally be better than you thought. The experienced crews are likely to have many more points than you, and you'll wonder just how on earth they managed to get THAT MANY correct answers. Before too long you'll be doing much the same as them.

Good luck out there!

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