

Some thoughts on start time allocation in a pre-entry event.

Purpose of this document

I've written this to capture my thoughts about the decisions to be taken when approaching start time allocation, and the way it was done for the Delamere Regional event on 4/11/07. It is absolutely not intended to be prescriptive, nor to teach grandmother to suck eggs. It is more in the nature of rough jottings than any sort of instructions. Please, if you find it at all useful, send me your ideas for improvement. If you want to follow or adapt the way I did it, I'm happy to provide support.

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Two different approaches

There are 2 ways of approaching this job, which have their own pluses and minuses.

1. The Drip-Drip approach.
Allocate start times as you go along, i.e. as you receive entries.
Pluses
 Spreads the workload over time
 Easy to take account of special requirements
Minuses
 Don't know what separation to use in each course & start block
 If using MDOCEntry, must repeatedly download and overwrite entries in order to get hold of the data in OE. Need to be careful how you download.
2. The Big Bang approach.
Allocate all start times together, after pre-entries have closed.
Pluses
 Probably less work in total
 Can optimise separation in each course & start block, because you know how many runners you have got.
 Easy to automate with Excel.
Minuses
 All the work comes at once, possibly very close to the event (depends on when you close pre-entries)
 Have to take account of special requirements by making changes to times after they have been allocated automatically – likely to involve some moving of runners who didn't have special requirements to make space for those who do.

For the Delamere Regional event on 4/11/07 I did a Big Bang, so the rest of these notes talk about how I implemented Big Bang for that event.

Start time allocation for the Delamere Regional 4/11/07

This was done using Excel, as a Big Bang once pre-entries via MDOCEnter had closed.

The main steps were

1. Take entries using MDOCEnter up to the closing date
2. Import entries into OE2003. (More complicated than this, because of the postponement of the original event, cancellations & refunds, and fresh entries, but didn't affect how start times were allocated.)
3. Export from OE2003 to Excel – more below
4. Allocate start times in Excel – more below
5. Import back into OE2003 – more below
6. Accept late entries & allocate their start times direct into OE2003

Export from OE2003 to Excel

In OE,
Entries | Entries | Reports | Entries | Individuals <OK>
Interface | CSV
File specify file location <OK>

This outputs a CSV file of all entries, containing Class but not Course

Allocate start times in Excel

Open the CSV file in Excel
To get the course numbers allocated,
Either do it yourself, class by class
Or use the SetCourse macro, available from RE:

Insert a column (R) for Course, immediately before column (S) for Class No.
Run SetCourse to translate Class No. to Course
Carefully check the result for correctness

Note: SetCourse is a macro written by RE to do this translation. It contains a translation table from Class No. to Course. For every event for which it is used, it is necessary to amend the macro to hold the correct Class No: Course relationships, and possibly to use the right columns in the spreadsheet. If you get it wrong, it will mess things up. It is written so as to be reasonably general, and very easy (for someone who knows Visual Basic) to modify. RE will change it for you if you ask him. If someone knows of a way to get OE2003 to output course number in the competitors spreadsheet & make this macro unnecessary, RE would be delighted to hear from them.

Sort the spreadsheet by Course and then Early/Mid/Late/Any (Text2 at the moment, possibly Text1 next time).

Hide columns so as to leave Name, Start Time, Club, Course, Class description, Early/Mid/Late/Any showing.

For each course

For each of Early/Mid/Late

Decide on your start interval

Type in the first 2 times (as offsets from Event Start Time)

Select and extend the range (note you must have ALL rows in the spreadsheet showing – if you hide ANY rows, this will not work) by dragging the fill handle

Sort the course, including the “Any” start block, by Start Time

Manually slot in the “Any” runners

Sort the course again by Start Time

Now (or after all courses) make manual changes for Special Requirements

Sort again by Start Time

Check it very carefully to make sure you haven’t got 2 people in the same course on the same start time

Sort the entire file by Start Time

Check it – e.g. have you got too much bunching on one time slot?

Save it

Delete the “Course” column

Save it

Close this file (otherwise OE2003 won’t import it)

Import back into OE2003

Re-import into OE2003

Have a good rummage round to make sure it looks alright in OE2003.

Accept late entries

Up to 3 days before the event, still accepted late pre-entries but put them straight into OE2003 and allocated start times when accepting them. So this bit was drip-drip.